

Special Issue Reprint

Religion and Politics

Interactions and Boundaries

Edited by
Daniele Santarelli, Lorenza Gianfrancesco and Domizia Weber

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Religion and Politics: Interactions and Boundaries

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Contents

About the Editors	vii
-----------------------------	-----

Daniele Santarelli

Religion and Politics: Interactions, Boundaries, and Paradoxes

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 1438, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16111438	1
--	---

Neil Tarrant

Saving Sanctity: The Roman Inquisition and the Initial Prosecution of Girolamo Cardano

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 1047, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091047	6
--	---

Vittoria Feola

Catholic Martyrs and Canon Law: Reassessing the Meaning of Hagiographic Texts in Philip II's Spain

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 232, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020232	23
---	----

Xin Zhu

Giovanni Botero on Religion and Politics

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 1386, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111386	42
--	----

Daniele Santarelli

Religious Policies and Civil Conflict: "Italian" Perspectives on the French Wars of Religion

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 956, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080956	54
---	----

Clara Stella

In Absentia: Politics of Religious Life in Maria Carafa's Vita by Francesco Maggio (1670)

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 1173, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091173	72
--	----

Simone Lonati

The Heritage of Priests Between Religion, Culture and Politics in an Italian Peripheral Area: The Collections of Romolo Putelli (1880–1939) and Alessandro Sina (1878–1953)

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 1292, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101292	89
--	----

Wael Abu-Uksa

Tolerance before Secularism: Models of Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Arabic

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 1090, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091090	105
--	-----

Cole Brent Cloyd

Bringing Back God: Goldenberg and the Vestigial State in American Religion

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 999, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080999	123
---	-----

Darryl Dejuan Roberts

The Role of Black Christian Beliefs in the Civil Rights Movement: A Paradigm for a Better Understanding of Religious Freedom

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 527, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050527	134
---	-----

Jochen Töpfer

Understanding an Authoritarian Regime: The Varying Relations Between Religion and the State in East German Socialism, 1945–1989

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2024 , 15, 1541, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121541	157
--	-----

Yongtaek Jeong

Transcending the Boundary Between the Religious and the Secular: The Sacralization of the Person in Korea's 1970s Protestant Democratization Movement

Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> 2025 , 16, 756, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060756	176
---	-----

Ting Zhou and Won il Cho

Isomorphic Heterotopias of Martyrdom Spaces and the Overlapping of Memory: A Comparative Study of the Jeoldusan Martyrdom Site and Yanghwajin Cemetery in Seoul

Reprinted from: *Religions* **2025**, *16*, 1086, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091086> **200**

Baldwin Wong

Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism–Exclusivism Debate

Reprinted from: *Religions* **2024**, *15*, 1234, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101234> **220**

James Ndlovu and Tigere Paidamoyo Muringa

No to Third Term! Pastoral Statement by the Church in Zimbabwe as an Indictment on President Mnangagwa’s Bid to Amend the Constitution

Reprinted from: *Religions* **2025**, *16*, 489, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040489> **234**

About the Editors

Daniele Santarelli

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Religion and Politics: Interactions, Boundaries, and Paradoxes

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The aim of this Special Issue *Religion and Politics: Interactions and Boundaries* is to investigate the long and complex relationship between politics and religion from the late Middle Ages to the present day. The sixteenth century, marked by the Reformation and the profound fracture of Christian unity, represents a decisive turning point. In this period, the new confessional realities that emerged from the Protestant Reformation confronted the resistance of the Roman Church and the repressive mechanisms of the inquisitorial systems, particularly in southern Europe. While in many regions dissenting faiths were suppressed, elsewhere the persistence of religious conflict forced jurists, theologians, and political thinkers to reconsider the connection between religious unity and the stability of the State. Practical needs and a growing awareness of individual and collective rights gradually fostered a new consciousness, paving the way for the modern concepts of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience.

Within this broad framework, the essays collected in this Special Issue address different aspects of that evolving dialogue between religion and politics, examining how the boundaries between spiritual and temporal authority have been continuously renegotiated. From the persecutions of heresy in the late medieval and early modern periods to the modern debates on secularization, pluralism, and freedom of belief, the contributions gathered here seek to illuminate the multiple ways in which religious and political phenomena have interacted, overlapped, and reshaped one another across multiple centuries.

1. Faith, Power, and the Perennial Paradox

The relationship between religion and politics is one of the oldest and most enduring subjects of human inquiry but also one of the most paradoxical. From empires that sacralized their rulers to revolutions that secularized belief, from inquisitors who sought orthodoxy to reformers who challenged it, both the alliance and the conflict between faith and power have shaped the world's moral and institutional landscape. As Harold J. Berman argued in *Law and Revolution* (Berman 1983), Western civilization itself emerged from the tension between two jurisdictions—the spiritual and the temporal—whose competition generated the modern concept of legal and moral authority. This Special Issue of *Religions* explores those same tensions across centuries and continents, showing how belief and power, alongside theology and politics, continued to redefine each other from the early modern world to the present day.

This Special Issue was inspired by a historiographical tradition that has profoundly shaped the study of the relationship between religion and power. In particular, it draws on the reflections of Paolo Prodi, for whom the constitutive dualism between political sovereignty and religious legitimacy—analyzed in *Il sovrano pontefice* (Prodi 1982) and in *Una storia della giustizia* (Prodi 2000)—formed the structural grammar of Western modernity. The boundaries between Church and State, law and grace, and conscience and obedience were never stable, and their constant renegotiation produced both institutional innovation and moral anxiety. The work of Wolfgang Reinhard (see, in particular, Reinhard

1999) has been pivotal in demonstrating that the formation of the European state was inseparable from religious structures of legitimation. The work of António Manuel Hespanha (see, in particular, Hespanha 1993, 1997) further showed that early modern sovereignty remained grounded in a theological conception of law, where authority was conceived as a reflection of divine order and the State emerged not against religion, but through it.

Editing this collection has also been a reminder that these dynamics reappear, on a smaller scale, within the academic world. The peer-review process, in its own way, echoes the rites of ecclesiastical discernment: editors mediate like confessors, authors await judgment with a mixture of faith and fear, and reviewers—our modern inquisitors—pronounce verdicts that can feel as binding as papal bulls. Yet this constant negotiation between conviction and institution is what gives scholarship, like religion, its vitality.

2. Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and the Governance of Belief

The first cluster of essays revisits the mechanisms through which early modern Europe sought to govern belief. Neil Tarrant, in *Saving Sanctity: The Roman Inquisition and the Initial Prosecution of Girolamo Cardano*, reconsiders how inquisitorial control could coexist with intellectual inquiry, balancing curiosity and discipline. Xin Zhu, in *Giovanni Botero on Religion and Politics*, reads the Catholic response to Machiavelli as an attempt to moralize the *ragion di stato*, transforming calculation into conscience. Vittoria Feola, in *Catholic Martyrs and Canon Law*, examines the juridical construction of sanctity in Philip II's Spain, revealing how law and theology became indistinguishable. Clara Stella, in *In Absentia: Politics of Religious Life in Maria Carafa's Vita by Francesco Maggio (1670)*, uncovers the political uses of female spirituality in Counter-Reformation Naples, where silence and absence could themselves become instruments of power.

These perspectives—also present in the article by Daniele Santarelli mentioned below—recall the vision outlined by Paolo Prodi in his essay on the Church and society included in the monumental *Storia di Venezia* published by the Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana (Prodi 1994), where Venice's religious institutions embodied a distinctive fusion of sacred and secular sovereignty—a sacralized republic in which the Doge was both a political and spiritual leader. The studies of Gaetano Cozzi regarding these themes remain fundamental (see, in particular, Cozzi 1995) and have provided an important source of inspiration for this Special Issue. Such studies demonstrated that early modern government derived its legitimacy from its claim to represent divine justice, a notion that António Manuel Hespanha elaborated on in *La gracia del derecho* (Hespanha 1993), describing the Baroque state as an order of grace rather than a mere juridical machine. In this light, the boundary between theology and politics appears not as an opposition, but as a structural interdependence—one that would profoundly influence later debates on religious coexistence, tolerance, and the moral foundations of political order.

3. Tolerance, Pluralism, and the Modern Conscience

In the transition from early modern to modern societies, the problem shifted from the enforcement of unity to the management of diversity. Daniele Santarelli, in *Religious Policies and Civil Conflict: "Italian" Perspectives on the French Wars of Religion*, draws on Venetian and Florentine diplomatic correspondence to show how Italian envoys perceived the collapse of religious unity in France as a political trauma that threatened the very grammar of sovereignty. Wael Abu-'Uksa, in *Tolerance before Secularism*, reconstructs the legal and philosophical roots of coexistence in nineteenth-century Arabic thought, challenging the Eurocentric narrative of secular modernity. Baldwin Wong, in *Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior*, argues that faith-based behavior, rather than abstract debate, can enrich civic life by modeling altruism and restraint.

In this context, the French Wars of Religion—forming the historical background of the author’s own study mentioned above—were not merely a national crisis but a laboratory for European political theology, as Cornel Zwielerlein has shown in *Discorso und Lex Dei* (Zwielerlein 2006). The religious conflict generated new conceptual frameworks that redefined the relationship between divine law and secular order, echoing the same anxieties visible in Italian and Iberian thought. From the observations of ambassadors and political actors who experienced events in the very moment of their unfolding, to the reflections of contemporary political and legal thinkers, the sixteenth century demonstrated that the price of religious freedom was political instability—and that stability, in turn, required a theology of authority.

4. Religion, Protest, and Political Imagination

A third group of essays brings the discussion into the modern world, where religion becomes a source of political critique and renewal. Jochen Töpfer, in *Understanding an Authoritarian Regime*, explores the East German experience of controlled coexistence between the Church and the State, where silence could be a form of dissent. Yongtaek Jeong, in *Transcending the Boundary between the Religious and the Secular*, shows how Protestant movements in 1970s Korea transformed human rights into a theological calling. James Ndlovu and Tigere Paidamoyo Muringa, in *No to Third Term!*, analyze the prophetic intervention of Zimbabwean churches against presidential authoritarianism. These cases demonstrate that religion continues to provide moral grammars of protest when politics loses its ethical compass.

5. Memory, Heritage, and the Politics of the Sacred

A last group of essays examines how sacred memory shapes collective identity. Ting Zhou and Won-il Cho, in *Isomorphic Heterotopias of Martyrdom Spaces and the Overlapping of Memory*, study Catholic and Protestant sites of martyrdom in Seoul as heterotopias of coexistence, where rival theologies inhabit the same geography. Simone Lonati, in *The Heritage of Priests between Religion, Culture and Politics in an Italian Peripheral Area*, explores how the legacies of two twentieth-century priests became instruments of both devotion and bureaucratic control. Cole Brent Cloyd, in *Bringing Back God: Goldenberg and the Vestigial State in American Religion*, rethinks the idea of religion as a “vestigial state”, portraying it instead as a dynamic system of symbolic sovereignty. Darryl Dejuan Roberts, in *The Role of Black Christian Beliefs in the Civil Rights Movement*, returns to the moral foundations of activism, showing how theology structured political emancipation.

These works recall Wolfgang Reinhard’s insight that confessionalization was not merely repression but also social organization—a means of creating identity through ritual and memory. The persistence of the sacred in public life, whether in Venice’s civic liturgies or in Seoul’s urban martyria, reveals how power continually appropriates transcendence to define legitimacy.

6. The Paradox Endures

At the intersection of the historiographical traditions outlined above lies the author’s own scholarly trajectory, which provided the main inspiration for the creation of this Special Issue. In *Il papato di Paolo IV nella crisi politico-religiosa del Cinquecento* (Santarelli 2008, 2012) and in the collaborative volume *I giudici della fede* (Al Sabbagh et al. 2017), I explored the political and institutional mechanisms through which ecclesiastical authority sought to translate divine law into governmental practice, tracing the networks and local jurisdictions of the Roman Inquisition. The creation and long-term development of the digital encyclopedia ERETICOPEDIA (www.eticopedia.org, accessed on 15 October 2025) have

likewise aimed to map this intersection between religious dissent, political power, and institutional memory, extending the inquiry to new digital forms of historical dissemination. More recently, my research, in collaboration with Domizia Weber, on witchcraft and inquisitorial culture (Santarelli and Weber 2021, 2022), has revisited the nexus between control, imagination, and the sacred, contributing to a broader reflection on how religious and political systems codify fear, deviance, and moral order.

If a single idea unites the contributions in this Special Issue, it is that religion and politics share not opposition but dependency. Both claim truth; both generate obedience; both require ritual to sustain legitimacy. As Paolo Prodi observed, their separation was never a clean divorce but an ongoing negotiation between two orders that could not exist without one another. The same negotiation underlies our own scholarly practice. Some reviewers defended orthodoxy with the rigor of inquisitors, others argued for reform with evangelical fervor, and between them—through debate, revision, and, occasionally, mutual absolution—the final synthesis emerged.

The paradox endures: faith without power is mute, and power without faith—of any kind—is blind. The essays collected here confirm that the history of religion and politics is the history of their continuous mutual misunderstanding and that this misunderstanding, fertile and unresolved, remains the condition of our moral and intellectual life. And if the modern peer-review process occasionally resembles an *autodafé*, it is at least one whose flames illuminate rather than consume, leaving behind, after revision, a trace of grace.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ERETICOPEDIA *Dizionario di eretici, dissidenti e inquisitori nel mondo mediterraneo*. Edited by Daniele Santarelli. Firenze: Edizioni CLORI, 2013—in progress online: <https://www.eticopedia.org> (accessed on 15 October 2025).

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Article

Saving Sanctity: The Roman Inquisition and the Initial Prosecution of Girolamo Cardano

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Abstract: The impact of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Reform movement on the ecclesiastical censorship of science, philosophy and magic has been an enduring theme in the historiography of early modern Italy. In this paper, I consider how the Church's desire to defend the truth of miracles from Protestant criticisms on the one hand and their efforts to centralise the process of verifying miracles on the other affected the investigation of philosophical works. Taking the case of Girolamo Cardano, whose works were the subject of intensive investigation by the Catholic Church from the 1570s, I examine the issues that censors flagged as points of concern. One recurring theme was the fact that his accounts of the cosmos appeared to offer natural explanations for miracles and the actions of the martyrs. Although the intellectual problems raised by Cardano's work were far from new, I suggest that the events of the sixteenth century raised their salience with Church authorities.

Keywords: Roman inquisition; saints; miracles; Girolamo Cardano; censorship

1. Introduction

In 1570, the Roman Inquisition began to investigate the writings of the physician and philosopher Girolamo Cardano (1501–76) (on Cardano, see Siraisi 1997; Grafton 1999). This process was initiated by a letter that Gaspare Sacco, the Inquisitor of Como, wrote to the Holy Office in Rome, in which he raised concerns about Cardano's 1558 work *De rerum varietate* and, more broadly, about his teachings in the University of Bologna. That Sacco should express these concerns was, perhaps, less surprising, than the fact that, hitherto, Cardano had seemingly escaped the Inquisition's attention. The content of Cardano's teaching had previously been subject to scrutiny and he had left a previous role at the University of Padua under a cloud of suspicion (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1035). Furthermore, his numerous writings contained considerable amounts of material that could be readily construed as unorthodox, and many ecclesiastical censors regarded them as such. As Sacco noted, *De rerum varietate* addressed such matters as astral determinism and divination. Discussion of these subjects had long been a cause for concern within the Church and this continued throughout the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, several of his books, including *De rerum varietate*, had been previously entered into the Indices of Forbidden Books prepared by the University of Paris in 1551 (de Bujanda 1985, p. 500) and those promulgated by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition in 1559 and 1561, respectively (de Bujanda 1984, p. 653; 1995, p. 613). Despite these concerns, his works were included in neither of the first two Roman indices of 1559 and 1564 (de Bujanda 1990; Baldini and Spruit 2009, pp. 1033–41; Valente 2017, pp. 534–37). Once the Roman Inquisition's investigations finally began, however, its censors appeared particularly ill-disposed towards his works and read them with what Jonathan Regier has termed an 'hermeneutics of presumed guilt' (Regier 2019, p. 675).

There are two facts, then, that come immediately to the fore. First, doubts about the orthodoxy of Cardano's works had been circulating for many years. Second, the problems contained in those works seemed self-evident to Roman censors once they began their investigations. Given these facts, we may ask: why did the Roman Inquisition only begin

to investigate Cardano in 1570? Ugo Baldini and Leen Spruit and Michaela Valente have pointed to the fact that Cardano enjoyed the patronage of Cardinals Francesco Alciati, Carlo Borromeo and Giovanni Morone and suggested that they may have offered him a degree of political protection throughout the earlier stages of his career. Baldini and Spruit have further contended that their support may explain why Cardano avoided an earlier inquisitorial investigation (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1035; Valente 2017, p. 535). If we accept this plausible contention, the question then becomes why did this political support fail in Rome in or around 1570?

Part of the explanation for the failure of Cardano's political support lies in the fact that, from 1566, the incumbent pope was Pius V (1566–72). Not only was he a former inquisitor general but he was also a close associate of Gianpietro Carafa (1476–1559). Carafa maintained serious concerns about Morone's orthodoxy because the latter had been closely associated with the *spirituali*, a network of evangelical Catholics who, prior to the first period of Trent (1545–47), had advocated for emphasising faith in the economy of salvation. When acting as inquisitor general, Carafa had used the Inquisition to prevent Morone from ever becoming pope, and when the former ascended the papal throne in 1555, assuming the name Paul IV, he imprisoned his erstwhile adversary in the Castel St Angelo (Firpo 2014; Firpo and Maifreda 2019, ch. 16). During his pontificate, Pius V continued Paul IV's campaign against the remaining *spirituali*, notoriously pursuing Pietro Carnesecchi (1508–67) and ensuring that he was condemned to death. These ongoing trials underline the fact that the suspicions aroused by earlier soteriological disputes remained prominent in the minds of senior ecclesiastics during the 1560s and 1570s (Del Col 2006, pp. 424–41; Black 2009, pp. 123–30). In these circumstances, it was perhaps inevitable that Morone's influence in Rome would have been seriously curtailed. Borromeo, meanwhile, left Rome to take up residence in his archbishopric of Milan soon after Pius's election. For his part, Alciati remained in Rome and kept Borromeo informed of developments within the city (Raponi 1960). Valente has further suggested that Cardano's association with Morone caused censors to scrutinise his philosophical arguments in order to reveal hidden Protestant beliefs. Indeed, she concluded, 'the real problem in Cardano's thought, one that was noticed by different censors, is the uneasy balance between determinism and free will that seems to lean him towards solafideism' (Valente 2017, p. 537).

While Valente was certainly correct that Cardano's account of determinism was central to the Inquisition's investigation of his works, these ideas had no necessary connection to Protestant soteriology. Christians had condemned determinism long before Martin Luther (1483–1564) or John Calvin (1509–1564) were born and both men explicitly rejected deterministic forms of judicial astrology. More fundamentally, though common in the secondary literature, the argument that the Catholic Church conflated astrological determinism with predestination, and especially its Protestant forms, is misplaced (Poppi 1988, pp. 661–67; Gorman 1999; Donato 2023, p. 656). Astrological determinism implied that the stars necessitated human actions and that humans could use knowledge of the stars' movements to predict the future; Catholics and Protestants alike understood that God could foresee human actions, but representatives of neither faith believed that He determined them. Each maintained that original sin had so corrupted human nature that it was impossible for humans to perform unaided actions pleasing in God's eyes, but they nevertheless held that Christians performed those actions freely and remained responsible for any sins that they committed. It was only possible to be saved if God chose to impart his grace, thereby obviating the effects of original sin. He dispensed this gift according to his inscrutable will, predestining those to whom it would be offered: the elect. While Catholics believed that the elect could choose whether to accept this gift, thereby participating in their own salvation, Protestants maintained that those who received His grace could do nothing other than have faith in Him. This remained their only root to salvation.

While accepting that determinism was indeed an important component of Cardano's trial, I suggest that we need to situate the Inquisition's investigation of his work in another context. In his original letter, Sacco indicated that his primary concern was Cardano's philo-

sophical naturalism, which questioned the causes of the actions of the saints and martyrs, undermined belief in demonic magic and disputed the reality of divine intervention in the created order, thereby casting doubt on the truth of miracles. I suggest that this issue, rather than latent concern for philo-Protestant tendencies, drove the investigation of Cardano in the early 1570s. To explore this theme, I intend to build on the work of a number of scholars who have explored the close association between the investigation of heresy and sanctity (Gentilcore 1995; Schutte 2001; Gotor 2002; Bouley 2018). In response to the Protestant rejection of post-biblical miracles, the Tridentine fathers reaffirmed their significance and the related possibility of sainthood. They also emphasised the importance of reasserting official control over cults of saints and the process of saint making. These efforts were reinforced by a further project, initiated by the Tridentine fathers but completed under the auspices of Pius V: the reform of the breviary and the liturgy (Ditchfield 1995, 2007). Collectively, these efforts raised the salience of controlling the boundaries between natural, preternatural and supernatural causation, a task that, by the mid-sixteenth century, the Roman Inquisition had claimed as part of its purview (Gotor 2002; Tarrant 2022). Following the establishment of this new intellectual and theological culture, it became increasingly difficult for philosophers to maintain ideas that threatened to collapse those boundaries.

2. The Roman Inquisition and the First Investigation of Cardano

On 7 May 1570, Gaspare Sacco, the Inquisitor of Como, wrote to Cardinal Scipione Rebiba, the Dean and Vice-Prefect of the Holy Office in Rome. He recalled ‘Some months ago a book was brought to me, composed by Girolamo Cardano, a *Milanese*, who lectures in medicine in Bologna. In this book, entitled *De rerum varietate*, he, Cardano, shows himself to be a misbeliever, rather [than] an unbeliever, and in my judgement he teaches errors, heresies and superstitions’¹ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1042) Sacco then proceeded to list Cardano’s various offences. In book 2, chapter 13 of the work, Cardano described the power of celestial influences, making them so great that he appeared to deny God’s active involvement in the natural order. In other words, he appeared to be attributing miraculous events to astrological influence. Furthermore, he denied the power of demons and called ‘Holy Martyrs mad-men and disturbed by the celestial influences so as to lose their wealth and their life for uncertain things’² (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1042) In later chapters, Cardano seemingly doubled down on these offences by condemning the judges of witches and apostates as ‘impious, unjust and rapacious wolves’ and mocked Augustine. Returning to the theme of miracles, Sacco wrote that Cardano ‘says that miracles are fictions and that most of them are found by means of the testimony of priests, who characteristically lie.’ Further compounding his offences, Cardano also apparently taught divinatory arts, including chiromancy and hydromancy, that had been proscribed at Trent. Rebiba concluded his letter by expressing his hope that the book would be prohibited and its ‘capricious composer’ (*compositore capriccioso*) punished. These measures would, he believed, prevent Cardano from teaching these and other grave errors (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1043).

We do not know the precise details, but Sacco’s letter set in train an investigation into Cardano. Responding to Sacco’s concerns, the Holy Office appears to have written to Antonio Balducci, the Inquisitor of Bologna, asking him to begin an investigation. In a letter dated 27 September, Balducci replied to Rebiba in Rome indicating that he was, as instructed, drawing up an inventory of Cardano’s books, although it is unclear whether he was listing books that the philosopher had written or owned (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1068). Over the coming months, Balducci remained in close contact with the Holy Office. On 7 October, he sent a letter to Rome in which he related that Cardano had been arrested and imprisoned. Four days later, he wrote again, stating that he had resumed his examination of *De rerum varietate* and that he had identified ‘some follies’ (*alcune pazzie*), about which he intended to question Cardano. He also requested that, when it was ready, Rebiba should send him a copy of a ‘nota’ containing the Holy Office’s examination of the text (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1069). By 28 October, Balducci acknowledged receipt

of this document. Baldini and Spruit have plausibly argued that this document was an anonymous *Censura* that was written over the course of the summer of 1570 (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1073, fn. 38). Presumably, it was intended to assist Balducci during his interrogation of Cardano (Baldini and Spruit 2009, pp. 1073–74; for the text of the tribunal of the Holy Office's *Censura*, see pp. 1044–68).

The anonymous *censura*, prepared by examining the 1558 edition of Cardano's text, provides a systematic and detailed account of the *De rerum varietate* (Baldini and Spruit 2009, pp. 1044–68). Cardano's work was composed of seventeen books treating themes such as the structure of the cosmos, the properties of metals, stones and plants, forms of divination and witches and sorcerers. Working through each of the volume's component books in turn, the censor concluded that at least some (books 3–5 and 9–12) contained no errors. He nevertheless found various passages of concern in the remainder and especially in books 1, 2 and 8 and 14–16. Many of the issues raised by the anonymous censor were consistent with those noted by Sacco, but he also identified a number of further problems. In what follows, I shall offer a selection of examples from the anonymous censor's observations, seeking to illustrate rather than definitively chronicle his concerns.

The censure of book 1, 'De universo', opened with the observation that it followed a similar structure to Aristotle's *Physics*. The censor continued that, in chapter 1, Cardano did not offer a clear opinion on whether the cosmos was, as Aristotle had argued, eternal. Instead, Cardano referred the interested reader to another of his works, *De archanis aeternitatis*. 'Although this is not heretical, it seems to be scandalous (*scandalosum*) that doubts of this sort are clearly left unresolved and undetermined, especially at the start of the work'³. Such ambiguity, he remarked, was acceptable in the writings of a pagan or gentile but could not be tolerated in those of a Christian (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1045). Elsewhere in the same chapter, the anonymous censor began to identify similar problems to those mentioned by Sacco when he examined Cardano's discussion of the formation of comets. At this time, comets were widely believed to be transient sublunary phenomena. Cardano suggested that they tended to form at times when the air was thinnest. For this reason, he argued that the appearance of comets was often accompanied by other phenomena that were likewise caused by a thinness of air. These effects included the production of winds and the death of those who were weak, those distracted by cares or those who had over-indulged in fine foods or sex. Cardano further noted that, in such conditions, all who were either old or prone to sickness would also be liable to death and tend to sleep badly. The censor remarked that 'All these things can be granted, because in the *Meteorology* Aristotle and his expositors have uttered the same things, which according to Cardano he accepts. But because Cardano asserts a necessary future, and places necessity in things, this passage, therefore, requires correction'⁴ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1046). The censor made clear that although Cardano argued that he simply maintained the views expressed by the ancients, he believed that this position veered dangerously close to a form of determinism that made illness the necessary consequence of meteorological phenomena. Later in the same chapter, the censor noted a further problem, observing that Cardano 'appears to doubt, albeit occultly, the truth of miracles'⁵ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1046).

Although the censor did not cite any examples of Cardano seemingly denying the veracity of miracles in book 1, chapter 1, he specifically cited an example during his discussion of chapter 9. Here, he complained that Cardano had attempted to offer a natural explanation for an outbreak of head colds, accompanied by coughing that had seized the population of the Province of Insubria for a period of ten days. 'This way of writing' the censor wrote, 'is not pleasing, because in this manner afflictions, pestilence, famine, and associated inconveniences which sometimes proceed from divine justice, could be ascribed to the stars and natural causes'⁶ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1047). Although it was widely accepted in the early modern period that illnesses such as the outbreak of plague could be caused by environmental conditions, the censor's point was that it was necessary also to allow for the possibility of divine intervention in the natural order. By seeking to provide a natural explanation for an apparently wondrous event, Cardano was

threatening to diminish belief in the possibility of direct divine intervention in the created order. This may seem a relatively trivial example, or at least a reasonable point of contention, since contemporaries acknowledged that establishing the true cause of such direct divine interventions was sometimes hard and should be subject to robust investigation. As we shall see, however, Cardano's work contained further examples of his naturalistic philosophy that posed further and more direct challenges to Catholic orthodoxy.

The anonymous censor identified a number of examples of suspect passages in his analysis of book 2. Discussing the content of chapter 13, one of the sections highlighted by Sacco in which Cardano discussed celestial influxes or influences, the censor observed that Cardano 'writes many absurd things' (*plura scribit absurda*) (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1047). Among the specific issues that the censor identified was Cardano's apparent contention that 'it is necessary to refer everything that occurs back to some cause, namely to such influence'⁷ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1047). Such an analysis had clear deterministic implications, which the censor argued Cardano brought to the fore. He noted that 'Cardano in this place, by means of heavenly influence, sets aside the providence of God, he asserts, clearly secretly, that the most holy Christian martyrs suffered for Christ, not indeed from the will, but from the necessary influence of the stars, and also that the apostles, on account of the same influence, abandoned their goods'⁸ (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1047). The censor noted similar themes in book 8, 'De homine', where he complained that Cardano had ascribed the martyrs' ability to withstand torture to natural causes rather than divine assistance (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1050). The censor also noted that, in this book, Cardano ascribed catastrophes that befell individual humans, such as the destruction of houses during an earthquake, cases of drowning caused by floods or the destruction of homes by wind, solely to natural causes. If accepted as true, these propositions implied a reduction in God's active involvement in His creation. Invoking scripture, the censor observed 'Contrary to Cardano, however, if these things are necessarily made by natural causes, how can the story of Job be saved?'⁹ The censor was here referring to Job 1: 13–19, a passage in which, he noted, God had permitted winds to destroy Job's home (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1058).

The censor also identified two further aspects of Cardano's thought as potential causes for concern. The first was the idea that it might be possible to produce privileged information about either past or future events by natural means. This was evident in the censor's comments about book 14, 'De divinatione occultiore'. Here, the censor noted that 'He admits fate, and he does not explain the manner in which it should be accepted. He also states that the Sybyl could predict the future from the influence of the star of Venus herself'. In this passage, there is a clear reference to Cardano's apparent belief in 'fate', but the censor indicated that he believed that Cardano has left this concept largely undefined. His observation that the Sybyl made her predictions by means of astral influences suggests, however, that future events were indeed affected by astral influences. Such a concept would have been on the boundaries of orthodox Catholic belief. Rule IX of the Tridentine index had indicated that it was acceptable for humans to use the stars to predict some categories of future events, but contemporaries debated its precise meaning and especially whether it permitted the use of astrology to predict future human actions (Tarrant 2020). The censor then proceeded to criticise a series of further ideas and practices, including a form of divination using a jug of water, which, he observed, 'appeared exceedingly superstitious', and Cardano's suggestion that he was advised to write both *De varietate* and *De subtilitate* in a dream. In his comments on book 15, 'De divinatione artificiosa', the censor began by once more condemning Cardano's discussion of the art of chiromancy. He described how Cardano named certain parts of the hand and lines upon it and other information useful for performing this art, but he did not explicitly note why this art was of concern other than stating that it was proscribed in the Index (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1061; on chiromancy and the Roman indices see Tarrant 2019).

The censor next addressed another aspect of Cardano's philosophy: his interpretation of the powers ascribed to witches and magicians, which the philosopher discussed

in chapter 80, 'Striges seu lamias & fascinationes'. The censor suggested that Cardano appeared to argue that the powers ascribed to witches should be explained by reference to natural causes. To make his case, Cardano took the example of a certain peasant who was said to practise magical arts. Ascribing the reported phenomena to natural causes, including the effects of black bile, the position of the planets, the airs, the witches' salve and the retention of blood or semen, Cardano systematically debunked the idea that witches achieved their desired effects by preternatural means. Furthermore, echoing Sacco, the censor lamented that Cardano had called inquisitors who prosecuted witches 'rapacious wolves' and charged that they only conducted these investigations because they believed that they could confiscate the property of those they convicted (Baldini and Spruit 2009, p. 1062). According to Cardano, Inquisitors were not simply wrong, but deliberately prosecuting the innocent for financial gain.

This brief overview of the content of the initial censures of Cardano's work has shown that the censors identified three challenges of varying degrees of severity in his work. First, they noted that he offered natural explanations for contested operative arts; both cited the disputed art of chiromancy as an example. Secondly, the censors identified the fact that Cardano was disputing the reality of superstitious magic, that is, the use of operative arts that either explicitly or tacitly invoked demons in order to produce their effects. Related to this argument was Cardano's sceptical approach to the issue of witchcraft. This was a specific category of superstitious practice that was based on a novel cluster of beliefs that developed over the course of the fifteenth century. At the heart of the new concept of witchcraft lay the idea that humans were conspiring with the devil to attack Christian society, and in some iterations the new stereotype of the witch could include the idea that humans gathered at Sabbats to worship the devil (Bailey 2001). Finally, and perhaps most dangerously, Cardano had sought to offer natural explanations for supposed instances of direct divine intervention in the created order, such as miracles and the actions of the saints and martyrs. In sum, the Inquisition's investigations of Girolamo Cardano's works were caused by his philosophical naturalism and the provocative conclusions that he drew from these principles.

3. The Roman Inquisition and Philosophical Naturalism

To understand why the censors were concerned by these issues, it is necessary to trace key aspects of the intellectual and institutional history of the Church. Since the patristic era, Christians had been conscious of the dangers posed by philosophical naturalism and had sought to affirm the boundaries between natural, preternatural and supernatural causation in an effort to safeguard key tenets of the faith (Carleton Paget 2011; Ward 2011). These issues became relatively less important following the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire and an attendant decline in philosophical knowledge. Attempts to arrive at clear definitions of these boundaries became more pressing once more following the intellectual revival of Western Europe that began in the tenth century. They found perhaps their most influential expression in the works of the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), whose writings came to form the basis of Catholic understanding of the created order. In the following section, I will identify the precise theological basis for the censors' condemnations and indicate the challenges created by Cardano's work and the methods that Christians had constructed to deal with them.

In addition to raising specific ideas that appeared to contradict Catholic doctrine, philosophical naturalism raised a broad epistemological challenge. By the dawn of the sixteenth century, it was an accepted principle of Christian thought that a truth established in philosophy could not contradict the truth established by theology. Both censors noted, however, that Cardano believed that it was acceptable for a philosopher to advance accounts of the natural order that appeared to contradict the truth established in theology if that philosopher were merely arguing in the manner of the ancients. This means of presenting philosophical ideas was well known to ecclesiastical authorities. The condemnations issued in 1277 by Steven Tempier, the bishop of Paris, condemning certain ideas

apparently taught at the University of Paris in the 1270s, provide perhaps the most obvious example. In addition to criticising the discussion of specific concepts, including astrological determinism, Tempier lamented the fact that philosophers appeared to maintain that there were two truths (Lerner and Mahdi 1963, pp. 337–54). He was likely referring to the philosophers' claim that they could offer accounts of the natural order that contradicted the truth established in the discipline of theology if they maintained that their conclusions were philosophically necessary but ultimately false (Dales 1984; Martin 2007). Echoing the language used by Tempier, this idea is often unhelpfully referred to as the 'doctrine of double truth' or 'Averroism' (Dales 1984; Martin 2007). The use of this strategy to discuss ideas that appeared to contradict the faith was also opposed by such prominent friars as the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, who developed his synthesis of knowledge in response. He maintained that philosophy was subalternated to theology because the former discipline derived its source material from human observation whereas the starting point of the latter was revealed truth. On this basis, Aquinas concluded that theologians could ultimately determine the truth of any contested philosophical account of the natural order (Tarrant 2022, pp. 56–60).

The so-called Averroist mode of discussing philosophical ideas was largely eradicated in northern Europe by the fourteenth century, but it continued to be widely used in Italian universities. Adhering to this principle allowed philosophers working in these institutions publicly to teach and defend ideas that appeared to contradict the faith. This allowed a strong tradition of philosophical naturalism to thrive on the Italian peninsula. This situation began to change in the later fifteenth century as a result of a programme of reform driven by mendicant friars, especially those from Observant congregations (Mixon 2013; Mixson and Roest 2015). Acting as preachers, confessors and inquisitors, they drove efforts to extirpate heresy and superstition from Catholic society. This led them to make renewed efforts to demarcate clear and correct boundaries between natural, preternatural and supernatural causation and determine the most appropriate means to establish them. During this period, the detailed discussion of superstition provided in the *Summa theologiae*, used in conjunction with the principles of his synthesis of knowledge, provided the key means to evaluate the natural efficacy of contested operative arts (Tarrant 2022, pp. 62–68). On the one hand, this led to an enhanced effort to combat popular superstition; on the other, it led to a renewed effort to tackle philosophical naturalism in the universities of Italy.

The renewed effort to control Averroism in the Italian universities was not only intended to curtail the discussion of specific philosophical ideas but, more importantly, to define the correct methods to establish true knowledge. While the primary cause of concern was the use of 'Averroism' to discuss the immortality of the soul (Grendler 2002, pp. 281–93), some clerics also drew attention to accounts of the natural order that sought to explain reported phenomena without making reference to either preternatural or supernatural causation. During the Fifth Lateran Council, Giles of Viterbo (1472–1532) wrote a *Historia* in which he warned of the danger caused by philosophers rejecting preternatural causation (O'Malley 1968, pp. 42–44). The Lateran fathers also acted to address these concerns by passing the decree *Apostilici regiminis*, which regulated the public teaching of philosophy. It stated that, when lecturing, philosophers should indicate when an account of a particular natural phenomenon deviated from the truth of theology, and that they should, ideally, provide an alternative philosophical explanation that accorded with that truth (Tanner 1990, vol. 1, pp. 605–06; Constant 2002; Tarrant 2022, pp. 131–54). In essence, the decree *Apostilici regiminis* was designed to ensure that university teaching respected the principles enshrined in Aquinas's synthesis of knowledge (Beretta 2005; Tarrant 2022). Philosophers such as Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) nevertheless continued to discuss and publish works of philosophical naturalism that called into question the immortality of the soul and the reality of demonic and angelic interventions in the natural order and, some believed, threatened belief in miracles (Pine 1986, pp. 235–74; Poppi 1988, pp. 653–60; Maclean 2005; Copenhaver 2015, pp. 272–84; Spruit 2017).

The mendicants continued to pursue their ambition to define the boundaries of the natural order and combat superstition throughout the sixteenth century. They were provided with a new means to impose them following the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in 1542. Working through the Roman Inquisition, the mendicants and especially the Dominicans reiterated their understanding of the boundaries of natural causation by defining as heterodox a series of arts, such as chiromancy, that were once of contested orthodoxy. These developments are reflected in documents such as the indices of Forbidden Books published under the auspices of the Inquisition during the 1540s and 1550s that universalised these principles. As Sacco observed, chiromancy was one of several operative arts previously banned in the Tridentine Index of 1564.

While Sacco's observation was quite correct, the prohibitions enshrined in the 1564 Rule IX of the Tridentine index—and in similar prohibitions contained in the 1557 and 1559 indices—built upon concerns that dated back to the patristic era. Church fathers, notably Augustine, had explicitly stated that although practitioners of these arts might believe that they worked by natural means, they were inherently inefficacious and could only produce their effects with the assistance of demons. This analysis was reiterated by Thomas Aquinas, especially in his *Summa theologiae*. His writings subsequently provided the basis for the investigation of magic by local tribunals of the Inquisition in medieval Europe and, in turn, for the centralised Roman Inquisition's later investigation of disputed operative arts (Tarrant 2022, pp. 62–68). They were therefore very likely to have informed Sacco and the anonymous censor's analysis of the forms of prognostication that Cardano characterised as natural. Sacco and the anonymous censor therefore objected to passages of Cardano's work in which he described arts such as chiromancy because they believed that, since they were unable to produce their effects naturally, they must be superstitious. The censors recognised that, by describing such arts, Cardano was jeopardising his own salvation and that of other Christians who might accept his contested understanding of the natural order.

4. Saints and Superstition in Post-Tridentine Italy

Philosophical naturalism had been a persistent concern to the mendicant friars since at least the late thirteenth century. As we have seen, the foundation of the Roman Inquisition provided a new means to define the boundaries of nature by such means as prosecuting philosophers who seemed to violate the principles that they sought to enforce or by censoring their works. Having established this context, we can return to the question 'Why was Cardano's work not investigated earlier?' It may have been the case that, by the 1570s, Cardano no longer enjoyed the political protection of powerful patrons. There are also reasons to believe that the specific ideas that Cardano was putting forward were more likely to come to the censors' attention at this time. Under the leadership of Carafa and during his subsequent pontificate and that of his protégé Michele Ghislieri (Pius V, pp. 1566–72), the Holy Office had undoubtedly become more powerful (Firpo 2005; Prosperi 2009, pp. 135–53). Numerous historians have also noted that, by the 1570s, the Roman Inquisition was investigating magic, both popular and learned, with increased enthusiasm. This latter development has often been explained by the suggestion that, by this time, the Inquisition had successfully eradicated Protestantism and turned its apparatus of censorship onto new targets (Tarrant 2022, pp. 8–10). This is, however, a reductive explanation for a multi-faceted problem. In what follows, I would like to suggest one possible additional cause for both the increased prosecution of magic in the latter half of the sixteenth century and the investigation of Cardano: the need to safeguard sanctity.

To understand the threat posed by Cardano's work, it is necessary to analyse his work in more detail. We have seen that the censors were concerned by his discussion of the operative arts; both singled out chiromancy as a notable example. Consideration of the legitimacy of specific operative arts depended upon defining how the natural world operated, a fact that pointed to a deeper problem within works of philosophical naturalism. Clerics feared that offering natural explanations for contested arts and disputed phenomena

threatened to collapse the boundaries between levels of explanation of the natural order. This was evident in ecclesiastical authorities' attitudes towards the work of Cardano's contemporary, Giambattista Della Porta, who was also placed on trial in the late 1570s (Valente 1999, p. 2017; Tarrant 2013). In his most famous work, *Magia naturalis* (the first edition of which was published in 1558), the Neapolitan philosopher had sought to explain how to produce *mira*, that is, wonders beyond ordinary human comprehension, by manipulating the natural order. He provided recipes that he claimed could enable his readers naturally to perform feats ranging from ripening strawberries out of season to producing a 'witches' salve'. Della Porta presented the latter as a natural unguent that could give the person to whom it had been applied hallucinations, which could, in turn, lead them erroneously to believe they had attended a witches' sabbat. For these reasons, Della Porta argued that the transportation of witches by demons to attend gatherings was, in some—perhaps all—cases, simply a delusion (Eamon 1994, p. 202).

Della Porta was feted through Europe: his work was widely read and translated and aroused the interest of such powerful figures as the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612) (Eamon 1994, p. 222). Despite this widespread acclaim, his 1577 trial underscored the fact that many members of the Church viewed his work with suspicion. The precise reasons for why he was placed on trial remain unknown (Valente 1999; Tarrant 2013). It is, however, clear that at least some contemporaries doubted the truth of his claims that the wonders that he described could be produced by natural means. To take one example, in the early 1570s, the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine criticised Della Porta's work in a treatise on magic appended to his *Lectiones lovanienses*, a series of lectures on Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* delivered at the University of Louvain. In this text, Bellarmine acknowledged the existence of both natural and demonic magic but asserted that, in *Magia naturalis*, Della Porta described a third form of magic that he referred to as 'mixed'. According to Bellarmine, 'mixed magic' involved performing an ostensibly natural art, which, in fact, only produced its effects with the assistance of a demon (Bellarmine forthcoming, p. 393). Bellarmine's comments indicate that he believed that Della Porta's work threatened to collapse the boundaries between natural and preternatural causation. It is likely no coincidence that, by the mid-1570s, Roman censors were drawing attention to Pomponazzi's writings, including *De incantationibus*, a work that ascribed wondrous events solely to natural causes (Baldini and Spruit 2009, pp. 2277–78). Inquisition censors also identified this problem in Cardano's works. In their eyes, he was using an erroneous understanding of the natural order to justify the practice of arts such as chiromancy that were in fact superstitious.

Della Porta and Cardano's work opened a second, related, challenge to ecclesiastical authority. As Augustine cautioned in *De Civitate Dei*, the ambiguous boundaries between natural phenomena, magical effects and miracles could be exploited to challenge the truth of the faith (Augustine 2003, pp. 974–76). By the sixteenth century, intellectuals were openly exploiting these ambiguities. In *Magia naturalis*, Della Porta argued that it was possible to use natural magic to create wonders that the uneducated could mistake for genuine miracles (Della Porta 1560, 1). Although this was not Della Porta's stated intention, his insight implied that a disreputable individual could use magic, whether natural or demonic, to deceive their fellow Catholics into believing that they were witnessing a genuine miracle. Alternatively, they could use their understanding of magic to discredit seemingly genuine miracles by ascribing them to natural causes. Sacco and the anonymous censor both identified the latter threat in Cardano's writings. Each highlighted the fact that, by ascribing events regarded as miraculous to natural causation, notably astral influence, Cardano offered a means to challenge the reality of both past miracles and those that continued to be reported in his own age. While Cardano may have been expressing this idea in a new and vigorous form, it was well known to and had been previously denounced by theologians. To take one example, in his 1495 work *Tractato contra li astrologi*, the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) fiercely opposed philosophical accounts

that appeared to ascribe miracles or martyrs' divine inspiration to the effects of the stars (Savonarola 1495, f. 10r).

While concern for protecting the integrity of miracles was far from new, by the 1560s, this issue had gathered a new salience within the Catholic Church. This situation was partly caused by the need to respond to a challenge posed by Protestant reformers. During the process of explicating their ideas, both Martin Luther and John Calvin intimated that miracles, in the sense of thaumaturgical events, had ceased to occur in the post-Apostolic era (Walker 1988). Although belief in miracles did not completely end within the Protestant tradition, the magisterial reformers' cessationist beliefs (that miracles ceased to occur in the post Apostolic Age) provided a useful means to attack contemporary Catholicism. Since miracles were widely accepted as the distinguishing feature of the saint, a refusal to admit that they had occurred undermined belief in the saints and the legitimacy of the cults that had grown up around them (Ditchfield 2007, pp. 208–9; Del Colle 2011, pp. 240–44). Moreover, most Protestants regarded the cult of saints as idolatrous, that is, as a form of superstition in the technical sense of a practice that involved offering the reverence that was due only to God to something other than Him. This meant that at the core of the Protestant critique of the cult of saints was not simply the belief that such ideas were false but the suspicion that any wonders produced by invoking them were either the product of Catholic credulity, deception or, most alarmingly, accomplished through demonic assistance (Walsham 2005, pp. 276–78; Bouley 2017, 16). In this sense, debates about sanctity and the cult of saints were closely intertwined with contemporary concerns about magic and witchcraft, which were similarly conceived as forms of superstition by Protestants and Catholics alike.

The Protestant assault on sanctity had mixed implications for Catholics. It has been frequently noted in the secondary literature that canonisation was suspended in 1523 and not resumed until 1588. While this was true, Clare Copeland has observed that 'despite the absence of universal canonizations in the period of the Reformation, the saints continued to dominate Catholic lives and identities: existing devotions continued, older saints' cults were revived and new devotions to people thought to be saints sprang up' (Copeland 2013, p. 226). Moreover, non-universal cults of individuals continued to receive papal approval throughout the so-called 'hiatus' in saint making. Between 1524 and 1588, no fewer than fourteen holy men and women were so honoured (Ditchfield 2007, p. 207). Despite the ongoing commitment to the cult of saints, Catholics also recognised the need for reform and in fact had done so since the late medieval period (Walsham 2005, p. 276; Bouley 2017, pp. 13–18). The concerns raised by reformers both Catholic and Protestant and the importance of sanctity to Catholic religious practice notwithstanding, it was addressed in neither of the first two sessions of the Council of Trent. Discussion of these matters in fact began only on the insistence of the French delegation who arrived late to the final period of the Council (1562–63). During the council's 25th session, held on 4 December 1563, the Tridentine fathers produced the decree 'On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images' (Tanner 1990, pp. 774–76; de Boer 2021, pp. 102–9).

This decree addressed a series of concerns about the cult of saints and not simply those raised by Protestants. It opened by stressing the need for 'bishops, and others who sustain the office and charge of teaching' of their obligation to instruct diligently the faithful with regard to the saints. It continued by stating that they were to ensure that Catholics understood that the saints offer prayers on their behalf and that it is 'good and beneficial' to pray to them to obtain benefits from God through Christ. They should also make it known that the Church has condemned, and continues to condemn, both the idea that invoking the saints was false and idolatrous and the false contention that martyrs and relics should not be venerated (Tanner 1990, vol. 2, pp. 774–75). This decree thereby reaffirmed the Catholic Church's teachings in relation to the saints, clearly demarcating their position from those of the Protestant Churches. It also offered a clear warning to Catholics such as Cardano that questioning the truth of the saints and martyrs was unacceptable.

If the foregoing measures were designed to reinforce devotional practices associated with the saints and martyrs and, indirectly, belief in the truth of post-Apostolic miracles, it was also clear that the Tridentine fathers recognised the need for reform. The decree continued by affirming the importance of ensuring that the saints were both represented and venerated in an appropriate manner. It also expressed the Tridentine fathers' earnest desire 'to root out utterly any abuses that may have crept into these holy and saving practices, so that no representations of false doctrine should be set up which give occasion of dangerous error to the unlettered.' The decree thus made it clear that it was essential to ensure that no images conveyed false doctrine, lest they lead the uneducated into error. It therefore instructed that 'All superstition must be removed from invocation of the saints, veneration of relics and use of sacred images; all aiming at base profit must be eliminated; all sensual appeal must be avoided, so that images are not painted or adorned with seductive charm'. Furthermore, the decree added that the faithful were not to use a visit to a shrine as an excuse for drunken revelry. The use of the word superstition was of pivotal importance in this context, for it here referred to inappropriate or misguided religious practice that resulted in giving the reverence due either to God or the saints to demons (Tanner 1990, vol. 2, p. 775; see too de Boer 2021).

The decrees of the 25th session of Trent also reaffirmed established saint-making practices. Since at least the twelfth century, canonisation had been a two-stage procedure. The first stage was the episcopal *processus ordinarius*, while the second, the *processus apostolicus*, was overseen by the papacy. The episcopate was also acknowledged to be responsible for the recognition of non-universal cults (Ditchfield 2007, pp. 207–9). While the Tridentine fathers did nothing to diminish the papacy's right officially to recognise saints, they reiterated the bishops' responsibility to ensure that cults of saints within their dioceses were properly regulated. The decree also invested them with not only the authority but also the duty to oversee the development of any new cults. It required local bishops to ensure that no 'unusual image' was erected in any place, including churches, and that no new miracles were acknowledged or relics recognised without his approval. The bishop should investigate all such cases and consult with theologians and other pious men before reaching any decisions. In sum, the bishop was to take primary responsibility for controlling the development of local cults of saints, with the explicit duty to prevent genuine religious fervour, with its attendant reverence for the miraculous, curdling into superstition (Tanner 1990, vol. 2, p. 776).

During the same period, the Tridentine fathers initiated a further project: the reform of the Roman Breviary. The aim was to reduce the number of saints' days in the liturgical calendar in order to make more room for the recitation of the ferial office. Although the project started at Trent, most of its work was undertaken after the council's closure by a committee overseen by Pius V. The committee's work produced a new Tridentine Breviary, which was published in 1568. The work was prefaced by the papal bull *Quod a nobis*, which declared that it was no longer acceptable to use local editions of the breviary, and, more specifically, the local saints' offices (*officia propria*), if they could not be shown to have an unbroken history of use over a period of two-hundred years. With these measures, the papacy attempted to control the number of feast days and, in effect, prevented local dioceses from observing relatively recent feasts that the central Church had not approved. As Simon Ditchfield has stressed, local authorities continued to negotiate with the papacy about the liturgy, indicating the limitations of any crude top-down model of reform. Partly in response to local petitions, the Roman Breviary went through two further editions during the first sixty years of its existence, a process that led to the incorporation of new cults of saints and the restoration of some of those that had been previously removed (Ditchfield 2007, pp. 201–5).

The Tridentine decree and the ongoing measures to reform the liturgy demonstrate the importance placed on controlling cults of saints in the period leading up to Cardano's trial. It is possible to draw a connection between these interests and inquisitors' well-documented efforts to root out superstition. In a strict theological sense, the validity of local cults of

saints turned on the question of whether the powers of the saint in question genuinely derived from God, were merely a form of deception or whether the individual concerned was co-operating with or possessed by a demon. As the Tridentine fathers had recognised, the unchecked proliferation of local cults and the veneration of fake or deluded saints left Catholicism vulnerable to the charge advanced by Protestants that these cults of saints were, at best, credulous, while, at worst, fraudulent and superstitious. Proper investigation and verification of the miraculous was therefore an important means to buttress these beliefs and practices. Such investigations were not simply directed at an 'external' audience. Cases of alleged false sanctity raised the suspicion that the cults surrounding the putative saint were superstitious and required extirpation (Zarri 1991; Tutino 2021). In this respect, the verification of genuine miracles and the pursuit of superstition were two sides of the same coin. Achieving this end required clerics to be able to reliably assign observed effects to the correct level of causation, whether natural, preternatural or supernatural. The possibility of making such decisions was predicated on the existence of an accepted epistemological framework that made it possible to arrive at such determinations.

5. Disciplining Expertise

How do these considerations help us to understand Cardano's trial, and perhaps also that of Della Porta? At the most general level, they provide an interpretative context for these investigations. This was a period in which central ecclesiastical authorities were asserting the need for clerics at all levels to exert a greater control over the interpretation of the created order in order to eradicate superstition and protect sanctity. This shared effort was conducted by differing authorities in the Church. The Council of Trent had sought to empower and encourage the local episcopate (O'Malley 2013). Leading reform at a diocesan level, bishops were expected *inter alia* to examine local cults of saints and play a central role in the work of censorship. For its part, in the years after the conclusion of the Council of Trent, the Inquisition continued to assert its authority not only in the sphere of book censorship but also in the pursuit of superstition, including, as we have seen, cases of false sanctity (Fragno 1997; Frajese 2008, pp. 39–220; Gotor 2002). By taking such steps as refusing to acknowledge the authority of the Tridentine Index, which, in principle, replaced the Inquisitorial Index of 1559, the Inquisition asserted its independence and authority to determine the boundaries of orthodoxy. This included attempts to arrogate to itself the authority to determine the appropriate boundaries between natural, preternatural and supernatural causation and establish the appropriate criteria to do so (Fragno 2001, pp. 18–19; Tarrant 2019, p. 191).

By the later sixteenth century, the Roman Inquisition had also begun to exert its authority over new areas, including saint making and the regulation of local cults of saints. The Tridentine decrees had left local bishops responsible for regulating local cults of saints and overseeing the first stage of the canonisation process. Many local bishops nevertheless chose to consult with Rome about specific questions concerning local practice. In 1588, Sixtus V established the Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies to govern the process of canonisation and determine questions about local practices, an innovation that formed part of a wider effort to strengthen the central authority of the papacy. The Inquisition nevertheless started to intervene in these areas, albeit in a less formal manner, when, from around 1580, its local officials began to investigate cases of false sanctity (Del Col 2006, pp. 659–66). The rationale for their intervention was, because cases of false sanctity could involve superstitious religious practice, the investigation of new cults of saints should be considered to fall under their jurisdiction.

The Roman Inquisition's interventions in these areas raised important questions about the relative authority of the papacy and the episcopate. These tensions were exposed during the deliberations of the *Congregazione de Beati*, an ad hoc committee convened in the 1590s by Clement VIII to consider the legitimacy of cults of those who had recently died with the odour of sanctity, the so-called *beati moderni*. During these meetings, influential figures such as the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine defended the Tridentine settlement while

others such as Franciso Peña—an auditor of the Rota, consultor to the Index and editor of Nicholas Eymerich’s inquisitorial handbook *Directorium inquisitorum*—disagreed. Peña explicitly argued that Inquisition officials, rather than bishops, should be responsible for determining whether a locally revered individual did indeed enjoy the odour of sanctity or was tainted by the smack of heresy. Surprised by the vehemence of the debate within the *Congregazione de beati*, Clement VIII prohibited further discussion of these questions in 1603. The Roman Inquisition’s efforts to expand its authority nevertheless persisted into the seventeenth century. In 1625, for example, the Roman Inquisition issued a decree that superseded the work of both the *Congregazione de Beati* and bypassed the Congregation of Rites to determine the appropriate procedures for regulating local cults that also redefined the procedures of saint-making (Gotor 2002, pp. 107–202; Ditchfield 2007, pp. 207–16; Ditchfield 2024).

The Roman Inquisition’s efforts to assert its institutional authority in the sphere of saint-making and the regulation of local cults of saints was, I suggest, paralleled by an attempt to exert its epistemological authority in this area. Specifically, the members of this institution enacted measures to regulate the use of external medico-philosophical expertise and the criteria that could be used to investigate the boundaries of the created order. As numerous historians have demonstrated, since at least the thirteenth century, physicians and university professors had been employed by ecclesiastical institutions to comment on issues pertaining to the definition of the boundaries of the natural order (Park 1994; Ziegler 1999). This continued to be the case in the post-Tridentine period. The Tribunal of the Rota and the Congregation of Rites, for example, both made use of such expert knowledge to determine whether saints’ bodies could provide physical evidence of sanctity (Gentilcore 1995; Vidal 2007; Pomata 2007; Bouley 2016, 2017). By contrast, the Roman Inquisition rarely, if ever, employed medical expertise to serve such purposes (Bouley 2018). Evidence from Venice suggests, however, that local tribunals of the Inquisition often consulted physicians to determine whether cases of unexplained illness were natural or in fact caused by preternatural maleficient magic (Seitz 2009). It is also notable that the Congregation of the Index convened expert panels of university professors to consider the content of medical and philosophical texts when preparing its ill-fated *Index expurgatorio*. The aim was to use expert knowledge to advise on which passages of texts should be removed in order to allow for their continued circulation (Marcus 2020, pp. 96–130).

While institutions such as the Congregations of the Rota and Rites and the Holy Office considered expert opinion useful, they observed a strict social and epistemological hierarchy in the relationship between ecclesiastical and medico-philosophical authority. Physicians were consulted to comment on cases when required and they were expected to provide testimony in accordance with their expertise, that is, to assist in the process of demarcating natural phenomena from those that potentially were not. This evidence made it possible to identify whether an individual might be a candidate for sanctity or the potential victim or perpetrator of superstitious magic. In these cases, the expert’s role was not to make a definitive pronouncement, whether in cases of sanctity or magic, but to assist in the process of arriving at such a determination by assembling a potential body of evidence for consideration. The final decisions in such cases were always made by an ecclesiastical authority, whether that was an inquisitor or a member of the Tribunal of the Rota (Gentilcore 1995, pp. 132–33; Seitz 2009). Such an arrangement was consistent with the epistemic relationship established in the Thomist synthesis between philosophical and theological knowledge. Philosophers could provide expert analysis of empirical evidence that could make a significant contribution to efforts to determine disputed cases of sanctity or magic, but it was ultimately the preserve of theologians to determine the truth of the matter.

This insight may help us to interpret the censors’ reaction to Cardano’s work. He not only justified the practice of operative arts proscribed by the Roman Inquisition but also appeared to suggest that the miracles ascribed to saints and recognised by the Church might be false and that the acts of martyrs were not divinely inspired. As a physician

and philosopher, he was considered to be an expert on nature whose opinion could be used to assess putative miracles. Sceptical opinions were welcomed by those investigating miracles. Indeed, from 1631, this attitude was personified by the figure of the *promotor fidei*, otherwise known as the ‘devil’s advocate’, an official of the Congregation of Rites charged with the task of challenging the reliability of evidence in canonisation trials (Vidal 2007, pp. 489–95; Bouley 2017, pp. 35–37). Yet, Cardano’s naturalistic arguments went further than mere scepticism: they directly challenged the cosmology that underpinned the Roman Inquisition’s definition of the boundaries of nature. His analyses of phenomena observed within the created order therefore threatened to undermine the credibility of the decisions reached by this institution, whether in relation to the saints or practitioners of magic. The censors explicitly recognised this point when they complained that Cardano accused inquisitors of being ‘rapacious wolves’ who falsely condemned witches and heretics for their own financial gain. This statement was not only insulting but it also threatened inquisitors on a political level because it directly challenged the legitimacy of their investigations.

More significantly, Cardano’s position constituted a violation of the received socio-epistemological order in a manner that paralleled the offence later caused by Galileo Galilei. In each of these cases, lay philosophers were challenging the Thomist synthesis of knowledge that asserted philosophy’s subalternation to theology. While Galileo used his natural knowledge to arrogate to himself the right to interpret scripture, in works such as *De rerum varietate*, Cardano used philosophy to make knowledge claims that contradicted truths about the natural order established in the higher discipline of theology (Blackwell 1991; Beretta 2005). Specifically, he used his understanding of the cosmos to undermine the credibility of verdicts reached by clerics about the status of saints, martyrs, witches and magicians. This was a form of disciplinary trespass that threatened not only the verdicts reached in individual cases but also endangered the whole edifice of knowledge that sustained orthodox belief in preternatural and supernatural causation that underpinned these trials. In these circumstances, it was considered necessary to prevent him from circulating these opinions not only because they were innately dangerous but because they could influence the views of other potential philosophical and medical experts.

6. Conclusions

The first investigations of Cardano’s work, which, in turn, led to his trial for heresy, were triggered by concerns about the implications of his philosophical naturalism. Censors lodged objections to his apparent defence of principles of astrological determinism and of specific operative arts, but these issues pointed to two more significant problems. First, Cardano’s works threatened to collapse the boundaries between categories of causation established by the Roman Inquisition. Cardano’s trial was therefore not simply about restraining the actions of one individual—although this is clearly part of the problem—but also about the real-world ramifications of knowledge that threatened to undermine a core aspect of Catholic religious practice. Secondly, in setting forth his ideas, Cardano challenged both the epistemic authority and the political power of the Inquisition. By using philosophical knowledge to challenge the reality of magic and miracles, Cardano contravened the synthesis of knowledge erected by the mendicants and especially the Dominicans, which was, in turn, enshrined in the principles guiding the practice of teaching articulated in the decree *Apostilici regiminis*. Cardano’s trial was thus important because it illustrated the Inquisition’s efforts to restrain the power of individual intellectuals who challenged not only the epistemic foundations of the Roman Inquisition’s processes but also the integrity and authority of its officials.

These events occurred during a period when the Roman Inquisition was beginning to expand its power. Cardano’s trial occurred immediately prior to a period in which we know that the Roman Inquisition was taking increased interest in sanctity and how it could be accurately distinguished from cases of superstition and false sanctity. Its members wanted to ensure that the right decisions were made in the correct way by the most appropriate authority. This involved not only reasserting the epistemological order discussed above

but also attempting to ensure that the Roman Inquisition, rather than other institutions within the curia, played the leading role in making these decisions. Placed in this context, it appears as an early intimation of the direction in which the Inquisition's investigations would travel. We might want to consider the trial of Cardano and indeed that of Della Porta as the first stages in the Inquisition's efforts to expand its authority in the field of saint making and the regulation of the cult of saints that would ultimately culminate in its battles with the Congregation of the Rites during the seventeenth century.

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Notes

- ¹ Gia alquanti mesi mi fu portato un libro composto da un Girolamo Cardano milanese qual legge medicina in Bologna. nel q[ua]l libro intitolato de Varietate rerum esso Cardano se mostra mal credente anzi incredulo et insegna errori. heresie et molte supersitionj al giudico mio. (Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own).
- ² chiama li s[an]ti martiri pazzi et agitati da celesti influsi a peder la robba e la Vita per cose incerte.
- ³ Hoc licet non sit haereticum, scandalosum tamen videtur esse videlicet dubia huiusmodi insoluta et praesertim in principio operis.
- ⁴ Haec omnia admicti possunt, quia ab Aristotele et expositoribus eius in metheorologicis eadem da[ntur], à quibus ut censeo Cardano accepit. At quia Cardano asserit necessario futura, ac necessitatem ponit in rebus, ideo locus iste est corrigendus.
- ⁵ videtur licet occultè dubitare de veritate miraculum.
- ⁶ Iste modus scribendi non aridet, quia sic aegritudines, pestem, famem, et incommoda cuncta quae quandoque à Divina Iustitia processerunt, possent ad astra, et naturalem causam referri.
- ⁷ Dicit quod necesse est omnia quae eveniunt in aliquam referre causam, videlicet in talem influxum.
- ⁸ Cardanus hoc in loco propter influxum caelestem aufert providentiam Dei, asserit, videlicet occultè sanctissimos christi martires passos fuisse pro Christo, non quidem ex prohaeresi, sed necessario ex influxu coelestium.
- ⁹ At contra Cardanum si ista necessario fiunt a causa naturali, qu[omodo]o salvari poterit historia Iob.

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Article

Catholic Martyrs and Canon Law: Reassessing the Meaning of Hagiographic Texts in Philip II's Spain

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Abstract: This essay is about the uses of martyrdom works in Spain and among Elizabethan English Catholics with special reference to their beatification cause by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. There are two related points in this essay. First, Spanish martyrdom was more about fighting the Turks than fighting the Protestant English; secondly, hagiographic texts were more about submitting evidence to Rome for classification as a martyr than overthrowing the English government. We need to consider these two issues together if we are to better understand that the story of Spanish Catholic martyrs is really not about a larger narrative of Catholics v. Protestants, especially English Protestants. I argue, first, that late sixteenth-century European works about martyrdom reflected competing definitions of the experience. This diversity cannot be summarised in Protestant vs. Catholic definitions of martyrdom, as has been argued so far. I will show that, within Catholicism, there were two main definitions of martyrdom: first, that which focused on Christian martyrs in relation to other faiths, especially Islam; and, secondly, that which focused on Catholic martyrs in relation to Protestant heretics. I will use Spanish evidence about the former and English and Italian evidence about the latter. Further, I will demonstrate that, within Counterreformation Catholicism, Canon law definitions and beatification procedures impacted the production and uses of martyrdom works both in Spain as well as among English Catholics who were implicated in the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* during Philip II's reign. Secondly, I argue that the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were tried for treason died for their faith or, indeed, for treason, has been missing the point. I will show, first, that it is reasonable to state they died as martyrs according to Canon law and for treason according to common law; secondly, that most Catholic works about their martyrdom have been wrongly regarded as either hagiographical or aimed at keeping the old faith alive among exiles. New research about the Elizabethan Catholic martyrs conducted in previously ignored Roman archives reveals the importance of martyrdom literature for legal reasons. This essay begins to fill the gap about some of the legal uses of martyrdom literature which the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints needs in order to instruct and rule on beatification causes.

Keywords: martyrdom; Spain; Elizabethan England; saints; hagiography

1. Introduction

This essay¹ is about the uses of martyrdom works in Spain and among Elizabethan English Catholics, with special reference to their beatification cause by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.² It argues, first, that late-sixteenth century European works about martyrdom reflected competing definitions of the experience. This diversity cannot be summarised in Protestant vs. Catholic definitions of martyrdom, as has been argued so far.

I will show that, within Catholicism, there were two main definitions of martyrdom, one which focused on Christian martyrs in relation to other faiths, especially Islam, and another one which focused on Catholic martyrs in relation to Protestant heretics, as it stemmed from Canon law. I will use Spanish evidence about the former and English and Italian evidence about the latter. Further, I will demonstrate that, within Counterreformation Catholicism, Canon law definitions and beatification procedures impacted on the production and uses of martyrdom works both in Spain as well as in among English Catholics who were implicated in the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* during Philip II's reign. Secondly, this essay argues that the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were tried for treason died for their faith or, indeed, for treason, has been missing the point. I will show, first, that it is reasonable to state they died as martyrs according to Canon law and for treason according to common law; secondly, that most Catholic works about their martyrdom have been wrongly regarded as either hagiographical or aimed at keeping the old faith alive among exiles. This is because historians have failed to appreciate some of the legal uses of martyrdom literature which the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints needs in order to instruct and rule on beatification causes. The Catholic legal mindset has been misunderstood for lack of research about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs' cause in Roman archives. This essay begins to fill this gap.

It is divided into two parts. In the first one I consider a number of works about martyrdom during Philip II's reign. They reflect Spain's main preoccupation with its primary role as a defender of Christianity, while showing both the popular and the legal definitions of martyrdom stemming from Canon law.³ In the second part, I develop the latter point with reference to Elizabethan Catholic martyrs. Using a range of little studied sources from Roman and Spanish archives, including that of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, I show that treason and martyrdom should be regarded as two equally valid ways of describing the cause of their deaths as each one of them reflects a particular legal system. I conclude by arguing that more needs to be done for the contextualisation of martyrdom works if we are to get to grips with a part of early modern hagiographical literature that was in fact produced for legal reasons rather than for edification.

2. Martyrdom in Spanish Context: Christianity Before Catholicism

A. *El Greco's reason vs. victims of Turkish odium fidei.*

In 1580 a Venetian subject from Candia called Domínikos Theotokópoulos (1541–1614) obtained his first commission from King Philip II of Spain. He was to paint an altar piece about Saint Mauritius' martyrdom for the new El Escorial palace. It was the Greek artist's opportunity to enter royal service, thereby securing patronage in what was going to be his last elective country of residence after a stint of a few years in Venice. There he had learned to paint in the Italian Renaissance manner, dropping his former Byzantine style. Yet, El Greco, as he would become universally known, never stopped thinking like a Greek.

In 1582, rather satisfied with his opus, the painter showed a magnificent altar piece to the Spanish King. There stood a group of Greek-speaking legionaries from Tebe, calmly talking with one another. Their armour is simple, yet it strikes the viewer with its typically Italian Renaissance colours. The legionary on the right is wearing a dagger which El Greco depicted in its finest details, making it look like a photo to our modern eye. The composure of the legionaries gives them gravity and dignity. Here is a group of men making an informed choice in a rational way. They are talking about the decision to die for their faith, choosing martyrdom as free men in charge of their destiny. In the far-left corner of the painting one can spot Saint Mauritius having been beheaded; there is no blood anywhere to be seen. The beheading image is far smaller than that of the legionaries' conversation. To El Greco's Greek mind, the point which he clearly and powerfully wished to get across to his

viewers was that martyrdom was a rational choice which showed man's inherent rational nature. As Aristotle widely repeated throughout his works, such as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, man is a rational animal through his ability to speak, through his logos (Keil and Kreft 2019). In St. John's Gospel, which reads like the most Greek of the Gospels, it is stated 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. To El Greco, martyrdom could only be a rational choice which underlined and magnified man's rational nature.

Philip rejected his work and ordered it be put away in a side alley. There ended El Greco's dream of a courtly career. He settled in Toledo for good, where he proceeded to paint the many masterpieces for which he is still remembered today. We do not know whether Philip had refrained from spelling out exactly what he wanted to his potentially new court painter, or whether El Greco did not understand Philip's request because, as a foreigner, he had yet to grasp the Spanish way of being Catholic. Either way, their misunderstanding stemmed from El Greco and Philip II's different definitions of martyrdom, which, in turn, impacted on the prospective uses of the painting in point. We must reconstruct the context. El Escorial was still being built. In 1580, the Spanish King had commissioned the painting about Saint Mauritius's martyrdom to honour his ally, the Duke of Savoy, who had died that year. The Duke of Savoy had successfully led the Spanish fleet in their common fight against the Turks at the battle of Lepanto (1571) (Marías Franco, pp. 32–35). Philip was after a work about martyrdom which foreign dignitaries coming to El Escorial one day would immediately recognise as a celebration of Philip's foreign policy against the worst enemies of both Spain as well as of Christianity, namely, the Turks. To that end, for that use, martyrdom had to be painted as a bloodshed, because Christian martyrs such as Saint Mauritius had died in odium fidei, for their faith. The emphasis had to be, first, on Christianity's enemies and, secondly, on Christian martyrs' way of dying, because it highlighted the evil nature of Islam. This is why Philip had commissioned a painting that would honour a hero from the Lepanto victory against the Turks. For all its beauty and grace, El Greco's artwork was completely missing the point. Philip wanted his visitors at El Escorial to be visually reminded of the importance of the existential fight of Christianity against Islam and of the heroic role of the Catholic powers in the struggle, along with Philip's own leading role as supreme commander of the Christian alliance.

Instead of El Greco's Martyrdom of Saint Mauritius, Philip II eventually got Romolo Cincinnato's eponymous painting. The scene is crammed with soldiers and martyred corpses, with a distant Christ judging from above (Fernando Marías Franco 2024). It is situated in one of the several like-decorated chapels in El Escorial. Today's viewers pass by without paying too much attention as it does not elicit the same powerfully emotional response that it must have provoked at the time, when the Mediterranean saw daily raids of Turkish-sponsored ships, killing, raping, and enslaving Christians from Cadiz in Spain to Ischia in the Spanish Vice kingdom of Naples. While Cincinnato's artistic merit may not be as great as that of El Greco's other painting, the former's helps us to define Philip II's ideas about Christianity through martyrdom and the ways in which he considered his own role in relation to contemporary religious affairs.

First, Philip wished to have an altar piece magnifying the notion of martyrdom as violent death in odium fidei. According to Canon law, this happens when the martyr dies for not rejecting the True Faith. Cincinnato's painting met the specification perfectly, with its abundant bloodshed and pathos. Clearly, the Spanish King was expecting a work that would stress the martyr's bodily painful sacrifice of life on earth for the True Faith to gain life in paradise. Secondly, and directly depending on it, Philip regarded himself as the protector of contemporary Christian martyrs. By and large, by Christian martyrs we must understand those Christians who were captured and slaughtered by Ottoman

Turks. Philip II considered Muslim Ottomans as the main enemies of Christianity, and always regarded the fight against them as of paramount importance for his dominions as well as for Europe at large. Philip's understanding of Christianity was the True Faith as opposed to its archenemy, Islam. In this sense, Philip II embodied Carl Schmitt's theory of the "Freund-Feind Denken" (Voigt 2011).⁴

The recent works of Alessandro Vanoli and Gennaro Varriale have highlighted the importance of the Ottoman Empire as the alter ego of the Spanish Monarchy. They have convincingly argued that one should consider Spanish history since the time of the Reconquista in the long run until at least Philip III's expulsion of the moriscos in 1616 after the war of the Alpujarras in order to gain an accurate perspective on the role of the Turks in Spanish foreign affairs.⁵ If we adopt their perspective, as I believe one should, then the uses of martyrdom works under Philip II will become more intelligible. In his archaeological analysis of Al-Mansur's pavilion in Marrakech, Antonio Almagro has pointed out that Philip II's library in El Escorial included a section about martyrdom works, within which one finds those relating to Christians who were martyred by the Turks in the 1580s.⁶ Javier Marcos Rivas, Lucía de Medrano, as well as Carlos Carnicer have unearthed a wealth of intelligence sources about Philip II's foreign policy, which clearly show the centrality of the Turkish danger in the sovereign's mind.⁷ Philip's ideas about martyrdom were shaped by the Muslim threat embodied in the Ottoman Empire and its pirates across the Mediterranean. When he thought about martyrs, he conjured up images of Christians being ripped apart by Muslims.

Philip II differed from his father, the emperor Charles V, who had regarded himself primarily as a defender of the Catholic faith against Protestants. Indeed, it was Charles who dug up and enacted medieval legislation about treason in the Low Countries, turning his Flemish Protestant subjects into traitors because they refused to follow their sovereign's faith policy Duke (1982). Philip, on the other hand, always considered himself first and foremost as the King of Castile. As Henry Kamen perceptively wrote, Philip was culturally far more Spanish than his Flemish-educated father Henry Kamen (1997), and for an early modern Spaniard, the defence of Christianity against Islam was fundamental, more so than the protection of Roman Catholicism from heresy. Besides, Roman Catholicism was embodied in Popes whose political claims of papal supremacy kept clashing with Philip's ecclesiastical policies (not to mention the fact that the sack of Rome in 1527 was carried out by Protestant soldiers on behalf of the so-called Catholic Charles V).⁸

On the other hand, English-language historiography has downplayed the importance of the Ottomans in Spanish foreign policy under Philip II in order to artificially overemphasize the centrality of Anglo-Spanish relations. Geoffrey Parker's works on Philip II may be spot on as far as the sly sovereign's personality is concerned, but by insisting on his fixation with heresy, it somewhat artificially conflates the fight for Christianity against Islam with the cause of Counterreformation Catholicism. Thus, Philip's own order of priorities gets turned upside down.⁹ Robert Tombs' *The English & their History* has likewise Philip II with an unrecorded number of Popes and French leaders among the Catholic powers preying on Elizabeth I's throne. His underlying assumption is that their political alliance was cemented by their shared Catholic faith. This kind of oversimplification is good for the general reader but detrimental to scholarship, because, by omitting Philip's main worry about Christianity's fight against the Turks, it leaves one with a partial impression of his worldview.¹⁰ Similarly, Robert Goodwin's *Spain*, while remaining one of the most compelling tales about its Golden Age, devotes one whole chapter to the Armada episode and only a few pages to Lepanto.¹¹ Military historians would usually have it the other way round (Hess 1972; Grant 1999; MacDougall 2017). By contrast, Goodwin insists on the religious reasons for Sir Francis Drake's colonial incursions against Spanish dominions in America, namely,

to root out ‘the poisonous infection of Popery’, whereas he has little to no consideration for the thousands of Christians being slaughtered and enslaved by the Turks around the Mediterranean, for whom Philip’s Spain was the biggest hope of survival (Goodwin 2015, p. 216; Grant 2024; Loades 2009). Those were the martyrs that Philip had in mind when commissioning a painting about Saint Mauritius’ martyrdom, through which he meant to project an image of himself as the protector of Christians against their persecutors.

In fact, works of art and literature about martyrdom which were produced in Spain during Philip’s reign bear unequivocal testimony to the Spaniards’ fear of the Turks and their massive disinterest, for example, for the fate of English Catholics in Protestant England, and this, despite the active lobbying of English Catholic exiles residing in Spain, some of whom were even active at Philip’s court. If we are to get to grips with notions and uses of martyrdom works in Philip II’s Spain, therefore, we ought to turn to books and manuscripts about martyrdom which circulated in Philip II’s Spain.

B. *Spanish manuscript and printed works about martyrdom: dying for Christianity and Spain.*

Philip II’s Spain had a very low literacy rate, so when one considers manuscript and printed works from the Golden Age one really should bear in mind that they reflected the views of a minority of Spanish people and probably influenced even fewer ones. By the end of the eighteenth century only 20% of the Spanish population could read and write. Statistics about Philip II’s reign give us an even lower rough estimate. By contrast, literacy rates in Elizabethan England were at least twice as high as in Spain and they kept rising throughout the early modern period (Serafín de Tapia 1993–1994; Tyrel C. Eskelson 2021). These low Spanish literacy rates force us to understand martyrdom as a scholarly topic of a quintessentially elite nature when it comes to Spain. This is in stark contrast with the wide reach among Christopher Hill’s ‘middling sorts’ of John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* in Elizabethan England, where most people had the opportunity to read about Protestants who were burnt at the stake under “Bloody Mary”, or knew somebody who could read it out for them (Loades 1999; Evenden and Freeman 2004; Freeman 2000). There is no Spanish equivalent to Foxe’s martyrdom work; there was no Spanish bestseller in martyrdom literature of any kind.

Yet, Philip II’s Spain was the heir of the long Reconquista process, during which the idea of dying for one’s Christian faith against Muslims had come to pervade society. In her autobiography, published in Spanish at the end of the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa de Ávila recalled her favourite game from when she was a child and used to play with her elder brother, Rodrigo: the two would escape into the land of the Moors in order to die as martyrs.¹² One wonders how many little Spaniards shared the same childhood memory with Saint Teresa. The likelihood is that many did. Martyrdom, in early modern Spain, retained above all the Reconquista meaning of dying for Christianity against Islam. Even if Spanish written works about martyrdom could be read by fewer people, proportionally speaking, than those who could read martyrdom literature in English, I believe that martyrdom was just as widely felt a topic in Spain as in England. The difference, though, was in the perspective. Martyrdom in Spain retained its Reconquista emphasis on the fight for Christianity, whereas martyrdom in England acquired two different meanings depending on whether one was Protestant or Catholic. Spain remained overall rather sheltered from reformed ideas.¹³ Martyrdom, therefore, kept focusing on the main enemy from outside Christianity and not on the enemies within it.

The *Verdadera relació sobre vn martyrio que dieron los Turcos enemigos de nuestra sancta fee catholica en Cōstantinopla a vn deuoto Frayle de la orden de sant Francisco* was published anonymously in Cordoba in 1577.¹⁴ While non-specialists of Spanish history tend to entertain romantic, little realistic views about Moorish Al Ándalus, it might be useful to remember that Cordoba returned to Christian rule as early as in 1236 after King Ferdinand

III of Castile's successful siege.¹⁵ Since then, and particularly since the much later fall of Granada in 1492, the city was progressively repopled by Castilian and Extremaduran families in order to demographically strengthen the Christian population. Orders such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans gained power. Archives in Cordoba and Granada contain large collections of tracts reflecting their dynamic social presence and influence.¹⁶ We should see this publication about the martyrdom of a Franciscan friar at the hands of the Turks in this context. The work reflects Spanish fears of the Turks, who are seen as those who put Christians through martyrdom.

Indeed, the same theme was so pervasive that it trickled through an Easter play, the *Obra nuevamente compuesta por Frãscisco Gonçalez de Figueroa, . . . sacada de vna verdadera relacion, dandose cuenta la vida, y el martyrio de vna santa muger española, y fue, que la quemaron viua en la ciudad de Hierusalẽ, en el monte Caluario, donde fue crucificado nuestro Señor Iesu Christo, y esto hizieron los Turcos* (Valencia?: Juan Navarro?, 1580, Figueroa 1580). Here, the martyr is a Spanish woman who was burnt at the stake by the Turks in Jerusalem on Mount Calvary on a Palm Sunday. It claims to be based on a true, contemporary story. Since the presence of contemporary issues in theatre plays is usually an indication of their wide importance in society, then Spanish preoccupation with martyrdom at the hands of the Turks was clearly strong. It continued to be so well into the second decade of the seventeenth century, when the moriscos staged their last major armed rebellion before their expulsion in 1616 after their defeat at the battle of the Alpujarras, the mountain range outside Granada. New Spanish martyrs met their death at the hands of the Turkish-sponsored moriscos, as reflected in a manuscript by António de Gouveia, *Discurso glorioso de tres martires españoles. Discurso sobre el martirio de los padres fray Nicolás Melo y fray Guillermo de San Agustín*. This is an epic poem about martyrdom; it is set during the Alpujarras rebellion and it contains several learned references to classical martyrdom authors, such as Tertullian and Cyprian.¹⁷

Indeed, one of the main martyrdom themes in the Spanish publication market of the second half of the sixteenth century was that of the Cordoba martyrs, a group of ninth-century Christians who chose to die for their faith because they rejected Islam. *The Traslado del proceso de la invención y hallazgo de los huesos, mármol y sepulcro de los Santos Mártires Fausto, Januario, Marcial, Zoislo, Acisclo y los demás que están en la Iglesia de San Pedro de Córdoba. . .* is a manuscript, dated 1599, kept today in the National Library, Madrid.¹⁸ It reflects the ongoing importance of fighting for Christianity as a token of Spanish national identity and national unity. This kind of argument from antiquity was, of course, not proper to Spanish rhetorics; rather, it was a feature of antiquarian works all over Western Europe. Arguments from antiquity used the rhetorical ploy of the uninterrupted presence of a particular trait in order to demonstrate that, since time immemorial, that very trait helped to define one's national identity.¹⁹ Ambrosio de Morales's *Carta sobre los santos mártires*, another manuscript kept in Madrid, dated 5 November 1578, made the same point, albeit with reference to the recent discovery (which will be shown to be a hoax in modern times) in Granada of a set of relics of a Christian martyr from the time of Al Ándalus.²⁰ The same de Morales, together with Pedro Ponce de León, had published in Alcalá de Henares, in 1574, the *Diui Eulogii Cordubensis martyris. . . Opera*.²¹

Patriotic antiquaries like de Morales and prelates alike scrambled to use the genre of martyrdom literature to rhetorically argue in favour of the uninterrupted presence of Christianity as far deep into former Moorish lands as Granada. The Emirate of Granada had been the last bit of Muslim land on Spanish soil to resist against the Christian reconquistadores, so those martyrs' relics were regarded as powerful evidence of the unabated Christian soul of each inch of Spanish soil throughout its Christian history. Only, this time, the so-called books from the Sacromonte (from the name of the monastery in which those relics were found) were made up by moriscos. They were meant to demonstrate that San

Cecilio, an Arab who had converted to Christianity and had died as a martyr in Granada, should be taken as living proof that even moriscos can become trustworthy Christians, as reflected in their having their own martyr.²² The importance of the Christian faith as a marker of Spanish national identity was so strong that martyrs featured prominently in the *Historia eclesiastica* published in Cuenca by the Dominican friar Juan de Marieta in 1596.²³ The author had a special abridged edition to present Philip II with.²⁴

The link between Christianity and Spanish national identity became synonymous with the relationship between dying as a martyr for Christ and dying for Spain. While this usually meant dying against the Turks, the religious-politic-chivalric story *Verísima relación del riguroso y acervo martirio que la Reina Inglesa dio a los soldados de nuestra nación española del ejército del Principe Cardenal, y de como la serenísima Virgen les manifesto el martirio que habían de pasar juntamente con el con el convertimiento de seis judios que recibieron el mismo martirio muriendo en palados: en 17 de Mayo de 1596 años: con un Romance al cabo* had an entirely different story to tell: Spanish martyrs dying for Christ and Spain against Elizabeth I of England.²⁵ This is the only Spanish work that I have been able to locate in Spain which explicitly assimilates Spaniards fighting against Protestants as martyrs. However, it would be wrong to stress the Protestant adjective of Elizabethan England. The whole patriotic vein of the *Verísima relación* emphasises the foreignness of England against Spain, not Protestantism vs. Catholicism. Indeed, Spanish-language historians have stressed the importance of the Spanish defeat at the siege of Cadiz far more than the much-acclaimed English victory over the Armada. Cadiz is in Spain. The Armada lost far from Spain. It was invisible more than invincible. Cadiz represented a sort of 9/11 for Philip II's Spain, a wakeup call of Spanish fragility on Spanish soil. In a manuscript memoir by Bernardino de Escalante, a Jesuit and self-declared advisor of Philip II, for whom it was written in 1586, eleven folios are dedicated to the heroism of the Spaniards during the siege of Cadiz and more follow about the need for Spain to fortify its borders. Escalante insists on the need to fortify Barcelona, Navarra, Aragon, Valencia, and Guipuzcoa. His message was that, since Drake's raid, Philip must realise that Spanish coasts were under the double threat of the Turks and of the English. Moreover, Escalante insinuates that Castilian sovereignty over the Spanish territories was partial, hence the need to send many more Castilian troops all over the kingdom.²⁶

The only other instances in which we find works about martyrdom in relation to England and, in general to a country other than Spain, are those which were originally produced by Elizabethan English Catholics, and were aimed at either the English Catholic community living in Spain or at some potential Spanish patron from the Anglo-Spanish nobility, like the Dukes of Feria, for the cause of restoring Catholicism in England, as Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez has magisterially shown in his monograph.²⁷ There is no such work written by a Spanish author or meant specifically for Spanish readers. This is because the Spanish reading public was interested in those works about martyrdom that showed its link, first, with Spain's century-old fight against Islam and, secondly, with Spanish identity. In a country which was very little touched by the spread of the Reformation in comparison with neighbouring France and, above all, with Northern Europeans such as England, the Empire, or the Low Countries, Spain remained Catholic. Its main enemy, therefore, remained the Turk. Consequently, readers were after martyrdom works detailing the martyrdom of Spanish people for Christianity over Islam rather than for Catholicism over heresies. In the next section we are going to consider the uses of martyrdom works among those Elizabethan England Catholics who were engaged in both the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and the English Mission during Philip II's reign. Thus, this article will complement Domínguez' analysis with the help of unedited sources from the Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in the Vatican.

3. The Uses of Martyrdom Works Among Elizabethan English Catholics

A. *Treason vs. martyrdom in the Impresa d'Inghilterra and the English Mission during the reign of Philip II.*

In the same year as El Greco's Martyrdom of Saint Mauritius was discarded in favour of Romolo Cincinnato's bloody ominous painting for the Spanish court, another martyrdom scene saw the light in the Jesuit-run English College, Rome. Niccolò Circignani, also known as il Pomarancio, executed an intriguing variation on a quintessentially English theme. His Saint George slaying the dragon represented George Gilbert (1555–83), an English Catholic who had recently been executed for treason in London (Gangale 2020, pp. 85–151). In the painting, therefore, an Elizabethan English Catholic martyr thus came to embody the most patriotic of English saints. Yet, Gilbert was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason against the queen. How patriotic could a traitor be? Before we answer the question, let us note the importance of national identity in relation to martyrdom. The painter made the point that truly patriotic English people were Catholic martyrs and, by extension, Catholics. This was a clear response to the rising patriotic discourse in Elizabethan England which was linking Protestantism to Englishness.

Circignani placed his painting together with a series of frescoes whose theme was, indeed, Elizabethan Catholic martyrdom. Two years later, engravings of the whole series of frescoes were printed in Rome and copies were sent abroad, specifically for circulation in Philip II's Spain.²⁸ Within Spain, a rare edition saw the light about the plight of Elizabethan English Catholics who were being martyred in London, being falsely accused of treason. The *Relacion de algunos martyrios que de nuevo han hecho los hereges en Inglaterra y de otras cosas tocantes a nuestra santa y catolica religion* was originally written in English by the Jesuit Joseph Creswell and translated into Spanish by his fellow Jesuit Robert Person in 1590 (Creswell 1590). It represents the tiny minority of martyrdom works about Elizabethan English Catholics which were printed in Philip II's Spain.

Circignani's painting about the martyrdom of Saint George and Person's Spanish translation of Creswell's relation about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs were propaganda means of the same two-branch enterprise, namely, the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and the English Mission. First, I will recall the immediate historical context for both martyrdom works; next, I will discuss the historiographical debate about whether Elizabethan English Catholics who were caught and executed, actually died for treason, as Protestant historians have been arguing, or in odium fidei, as more and more Catholic historians would have it. I will show that this is a case of question mal posée through the analysis of evidence about English martyrs' beatification causes.

Let me start from Person's translation. The historical context was that of the beginning of peace talks between Spain and England after the defeat of 1588. The radical fringe of the Company of Jesus that was based in the English Colleges in Rome, Rheims, Douai, and Valladolid did not look forward to peace talks, because they would inevitably mean the acceptance of the status quo, namely, the fact that England was and would remain Protestant. In the words of Sir William Cecil to diplomat Châteaumartin, who was about to meet with Philip II to negotiate a peace treaty in December 1590: 'And if you find that they [Philip II and his council] let you speak your mind freely, without danger for yourself, you might say that the world believes that Almighty God showed His power against the King's designs in the route of such his mighty fleet as it had not yet been seen in history by granting victory to the English, who did not lose one single ship and not a single Englishman has been captured'.²⁹ Given the circumstances, Spain should give up on the *Impresa d'Inghilterra*.

While Philip considered the Turks as the main enemies of the Christian faith, he also grew into his role of protector of English Catholics. Indeed, as he pointed out in his secret instructions to don Guerau de Espés, his new ambassador to London, in June 1568, the latter was supposed to help the remaining English Catholic nobility, particularly those who gravitated around the English relatives of the Duchess of Feria. Furthermore, de Espés should watch out and protect one father David, a Jesuit, who had lived in Rome for a few years before moving back to London on the business of helping English Catholics. Of course, de Espés was to act in such a way as to not let Queen Elizabeth rightly complain about it. Moreover, Philip insisted that the new Spanish ambassador should act as the intermediary between the English and the Papal courts.³⁰ In other words, Philip had been trying to cut out for himself the role of protector of English Catholics since the 1560s and, perhaps more importantly, official voice of the Papal interests in England.

The detailed and evolving plan for the restoration of Catholicism in England, called *Impresa d'Inghilterra* (in Italian, usually, because it was conceived in Rome and English Jesuits there wrote about it in Italian) is contained in a manuscript volume which is kept today in the Archive of the Society of Jesus, Rome.³¹ It contains a sixteenth-century copy of the speech of Francis Yaxley to Philip II, dated October 1565, as well as evidence of Philip's secretary, Juan de Idiáquez, writing to various English Jesuits in Rome with instructions about the aims and methods of the *Impresa*.

At first, the *Impresa* was understood by Philip II as a means to influence English affairs through assistance to the Catholic nobility. Regime change was not an immediate goal for Philip soon after Elizabeth's accession to the throne. After all, the Spanish King had saved the English Princess's life when Mary's Council condemned her to death. As Luís Cabrera de Córdoba put it: "El Consejo condenó a muerte a Isabel, mas el rey no quiso se executase [...] Los franceses burlados, decían la guardaba don Filipe [sic] por razón política en contra dellos, por que en María Estuart no se juntasen tantos reinos para el peligro de los estados de Flandes".³² Philip was already in Spain when that happened, and from Madrid he clearly regarded France as Spain's most dangerous enemy in Europe. Philip did not wish to have a relative of the French Crown—Mary Stuart—on both the Scottish and the English thrones; at least, he did not well into the 1570s.

The *Impresa d'Inghilterra*, however, was never Philip's own and sole brainchild. A radical, warmongering, minority group of English Jesuits hatched it, presented it to Philip, and enacted it in ways that it is not always possible to say for certain whether Philip agreed with them or not. The famous plots to kill Elizabeth in the 1570s—Ridolfi, Babington, and Parry—were certainly connected with Philip.³³ However, there does not seem to be any evidence that single Jesuits who went to England on purpose to kill their queen acted on Philip's behalf. On the contrary, there is evidence that the Anglo-Spanish Duchess of Feria, who was an ardent supporter of Jesuits' plots, complained about Philip's unwillingness to support the *Impresa d'Inghilterra*, which she clearly meant as a papal-Jesuit plan.³⁴

The *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and the English Mission were not the same projects. The official purpose of the English Mission was to provide priests for Catholics in England and to convert Protestants back to Catholicism. The unofficial one was to pursue the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* by killing Elizabeth, hoping for popular support from within as well as for a military intervention from Spain via Flanders. There is no clear evidence that all those young seminarists who were sent over to England as missionaries were tasked with killing the queen or, if they did, whether they agreed to do so. Here is the problem with the historiographical debate about whether those Catholics charged with treason died as traitors or martyrs.

Gerard Kilroy's *Edmund Campion. A scholarly Life*, is, as the title states, a properly academic work about the most famous of the Elizabethan martyrs, the Jesuit and former Oxford don, Edmund Campion (Kilroy 2015). Here we have a well-argued book about the first Jesuit who secretly entered England to evangelize and provide religious services to the Catholic minority there. Campion was the first on the English Mission, that is, not on the *Impresa*. Campion was captured, tortured, and sentenced to death for treason despite insisting on his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth. Kilroy states: 'If the Queen herself were ready not only to release Campion but to make him an Archbishop [...] if he conformed, the trial for treason was a charade' (Kilroy 2015, p. 328).

Except, that for all his loyalty, Campion never recanted his acceptance of papal supremacy. That in itself constituted treason according to English law, because it clearly meant that if the Pope had ordered armed war against the Queen, or simply, as he had indeed ordered, to kill her at the first occasion, Campion would have followed the Pope's orders, thereby forgetting about his professed loyalty. If not Campion himself, then one of the two other Jesuits would, who died for treason with him in 1581. Or one of the four more English priests would, who had illegally entered England in June 1580 and had explicitly asked Pope Gregory XIII, in a letter dated 12 December 1580 from London, about whether killing Elizabeth would imply hell for their souls: the Pope had clearly answered that, on the contrary, murdering the English Queen would take their souls to heaven.³⁵ Moreover, the Pope's opinion was well known at the Spanish court, too, because the Papal Nuncio to Madrid, Cardinal Filippo Sega, had brought with him a paper from Rome to inform Philip II about it.³⁶

It is very hard to understand on what grounds Kilroy, as well as all the other Catholic historians who have published about Campion–Sherwin–Briant and the Cottam's treason execution, or martyrdoms, should insist on denying that they had anything to do with the *Impresa d'Inghilterra*, that is, the armed branch of the English Mission. In the ARSI there is a letter from Edmund Campion to Robert Person in which the former aggressively states that "the *Impresa* is from God and may not be stopped" and that he was there in London "to root out heretical errors".³⁷ It does not sound consistent with loyalty to Queen Elizabeth. Furthermore, Kilroy has stated 'Alexander Briant's execution, like his prolonged and degrading torture, was an affront to English common law and all civilized values' (Kilroy 2015, p. 342). Kilroy goes on to say that Briant's deposition did not contain any lies. Yet, the Jesuit swore never to have been in the English Colleges in Rome and Rheims, whereas in fact he had studied in both (Kilroy 2015, p. 342). Lying under oath would be regarded badly even according to today's far more lenient standards. Additionally, more to the point, how can it be that a 400-page scholarly work, with an impressive bibliography of both primary as well as secondary sources, should not mention any manuscripts in the Roman Jesuit Archive or any papers pertaining to Gregory XIII's English foreign policy? John Vidmar's protestation that 'The injustice of the omission of Catholic authors from the Reformation debate becomes evident when one studies the Catholic histories themselves' really does not seem justified so far (Vidmar 2005). Since Alexandra Walsham's works have put Catholicism's English firmly back onto the scholarly map, we do know that it is possible to write about it without hagiographical overtones.

Since Lord Burghley's publication of his pamphlet justifying the executions of Catholics on treason charges until today's Peter Marshall's *Heretics and Believers*, there has been a wide consensus: they died as traitors. On the other hand, English Catholics have responded by adopting a variety of rhetorical strategies that scholars have analysed in fine detail.³⁸ At first sight, the historiography of English Catholic martyrdom in the years 1558–1598 is plagued by a number of ideological as well as methodological flaws which characterise works that are best described as hagiographical. While it is not at

all surprising that martyrdom, which is first and foremost a religious notion, should be the object of hagiographical studies, it does strike that so many works about Elizabethan Catholic martyrs should still be based on partial evidence, often on editions of original texts in modern translations, and with little to no regard for basic quantitative analysis of hard data. For example, let us consider Giuseppe Gangale's *George Gilbert (1555–1583). L'angelo dei martiri inglesi* (Gangale 2020).

He visited the English College and has reproduced and commented on a number of paintings about the Elizabethan English martyrs which adorn, so to speak, its walls. Yet, he does not even attempt at drawing comparisons between the iconography of martyrdom in the English College, Rome and, say, that in El Escorial. Yet, they are perfectly contemporary, as we have already established. When one devotes almost half of one's book to the iconography of martyrdom, as Gangale does through the paintings about Gilbert and other English martyrs in the English College, readers will expect some context about contemporary art about martyrdom, as, indeed, Eamon Duffy has provided about the very same paintings in his *Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition* (Duffy 2012). Instead, not a word. Lack of contextualisation is not a sign of deficient scholarship; rather, it is a conscious feature of militant martyrdom literature. By focussing almost entirely on biographical details, these kind of martyrdom works are supposed to increase reader's pathos while reading about the martyr's unwavering faith in death.

Let us now consider Giuliana Vittoria Fantuz's *Inghilterra di sangue. I Quaranta martiri Inglesi e Gallesi da Enrico VIII a Carlo II* (Fantuz 2022). Here we stand on firmer ground when arguing that this book may indeed represent one of, if not the Roman Curia's official views on the matter today. Mons. Robert Byrne, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, and Mons. Francesco Moraglia, the Patriarch of Venice, have written its prefaces. Maurizio Giammusso, from the Pontifical Foundation "Help to the Suffering Church", and Philip Whitmore, then Rector of the Venerable English College, have written its concluding remarks. *Inghilterra di sangue* does not even bother with footnotes, even though it places the biographies of the forty English and Welsh martyrs firmly within the story of the English Reformation. Except that it does so on the basis of a bibliography made up of seven books, the only recent, English-language one of them about English martyrs being Malcolm Pullan's entirely hagiographical *Lives and Times of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales*, and not, for example, R. Malcolm Smuts' *Political Culture, the State, and the Problem of Religious War*, with its argument about the English Mission as a threat for its perceived potential capacity to mobilise more moderate, loyal English Catholic subjects (Malcolm Smuts 2023). Yet, the value of Fantuz's work does not lie in what scholars can easily find in other scholarly works; rather, it stems from what it tells us about today's Church's position with regards to the persecutions of Catholics worldwide. In Fantuz's book, the story of the forty martyrs of England and Wales serves the purpose of alerting contemporary readers about the continuous presence of Catholic martyrs, for instance in countries where radicals from other religions commit atrocities against Christians. Much in the same way as their early modern forebearers, the point here is to remind Catholics to keep the memory alive of those who have died in odium fidei.

There is a methodological problem that needs to be tackled here, namely, Catholic historians' habit of using hagiographical martyrdom works in an unqualified way to make points about matters of facts. To avoid Catholic martyrdom sources altogether, on the other hand, may not be the right answer either. Instead, one needs to assess the context of its production and intended uses. As far as works about Catholic martyrs are concerned, what has been missing from the picture is a clear understanding of the beatification and canonization process in the Vatican because most works about Elizabethan English Catholic martyrs were produced soon after the person's death in order to produce evidence for their

future beatification cause. Protestants do not have a central authority with the power to officially recognise whether one died as a martyr or not. When Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* came out, as with today's scholarship, no-one questions whether those people died a horrific death at the stake for their own religious beliefs. In common parlance, among Christians of all denominations, a martyr, in general, is someone like those sixteenth-century people who died on the stake for their faith. When it comes to the Catholic Church, however, one needs to define a martyr legally. This is when things become more complicated. The Catholic Church's definitions of martyrdom are legal and normative, stemming as they do from Canon law. In order for somebody to be recognised as a martyr, there must be a cause, an evaluation process, and a judgement. The whole process may take centuries. Let us look at it more closely before considering the very cause of the Elizabethan martyrs.

B. *The Roman beatification cause of the English martyrs.*

Cincinnato's Saint Mauritius and Circignani's Saint George (Gilbert) reflect the same notion of the value of martyrdom as the supreme exemplary gesture for a true Catholic. In contemporary theological terms, which continue to stand today as far as Canon law is concerned, martyrdom displays Catholics' heroic virtue and charity. For someone's death to be considered as martyrdom, two elements are necessary. First, the martyr must die for faith, thereby showing supreme charity. Secondly, the person who is responsible for his death must do it in odium fidei, that is to say, out of hate for the Catholic faith. According to Pope Gregory XIII's new rules about martyrdom assessment, the kind of death per se was not sufficient to declare one a martyr; rather, the above-mentioned two elements must be both present in evidence which the Congregation of Rites will check on request from an ecclesiastical authority, such as a bishop. If evidence that is prepared and submitted to the Congregation of Rites met all the criteria, then the person or the persons in the martyrdom cause would be recognised as martyrs. To be a martyr is not the same as to be a saint. In order for a martyr to be further recognised as a saint, evidence of one miracle must be brought to the Congregation of Rites, whose physicians would assess it to the best of their ability. From the point of view of the Catholic Church, therefore, martyrs are not made by the Church; rather, the Church recognises martyrdom after a Church authority has put together a martyrdom cause and the Congregation of Rites has vetted it. Sainthood may come about as the step after martyrdom. A second causa, or trial, is necessary for a martyr to be recognised as saint through the canonization process. Canonization, therefore, has more to do with the relation of 'science' to faith, because the Roman Catholic Church, since the second half of the sixteenth century, has been relying on medical experts in order to assess whether occurrences which postulants for canonization wish to be considered as miracles, usually healings, can indeed be called thus because expert physicians cannot explain them according to the best medical knowledge of their time.³⁹

Bearing the Roman Church legal framework about martyrdom in mind, we can now see Circignani's frescoes for what they were: evidence of a martyrs' cult and memory in view of the beginning of their martyrdom status recognition process. Officially, for the Catholic Church, as of 1582, the Elizabethan Catholics who had been executed for treason were not martyrs yet. Outside of an extremely tiny circle of English people, nobody had ever heard of them and certainly did not pray to them for intercession. They were officially recognised as martyrs and saints between 1929 and 1970. The story of their canonization as martyrs and, for some of them, as saints needs to be told on the basis of the Vatican papers before we move on to the historiographical issue of their status as traitors or martyrs.

Most evidence about the Elizabethan martyrs can be seen in the Vatican Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. What cannot be seen has to do with the latest canonizations, such as the physician's report about the miracle whereby the renowned Jesuit Edmund Campion (1540–81) was recognised as a saint in 1970: since people may

still be alive today who have known the physician in point, as is customary with recent archival material, it is not possible to consult it yet.⁴⁰ That kind of evidence has to do with Campion's canonization, though not with his recognition as a martyr (hence as venerable, beatus) for which I have been able to see most of the available papers in the Vatican.

Evidence about Elizabethan alleged martyrs is kept together with that about other individuals who, since Thomas More and John Fisher, were executed for treason—according to English law—or in odium fidei, according to the argument for their declaration as martyrs. Pope Gregory XIII himself confirmed the existence of the cult of said English martyrs as early as 1579 through a *Decretum Westmonasterien. Confirmationis Cultus Beatorum Martyrum Ioannis Cardinalis Fisher, Thomae More et sociorum in odium fidei ab anno 1535 ad 1583 in Anglia interemptorum. "Anglia Sanctorum insula ac Deiparae Virginis dos olim appellata, quemadmodum a primis usque Ecclesiae saeculis plurimorum Martyrum passionibus illustrata fuerat, ita etiam cum diro schismate a Romanae Sedis obedientia et communione saeculo XVI avulsa est, eorum testimonio non earuit, qui pro huius Sedis dignitate et orthodoxae Fidei veritate vitas suas cum sanguine ponere non dubitarunt* (Gregorius XIII Constit. Quoniam divinae bonitati, Kalendis Maii 1579).⁴¹ This huge volume actually contains evidence of about roughly 600 people between 1535 and 1689.

In 1640, the Head of the Benedictines in England began collecting and collating all the documents he could lay his hands on about English Catholic (alleged) martyrs. The name of this Benedictine is not reported in the papers, so one can only speculate about his identity at this stage. In 1642, a Flemish Benedictine, Jan van Bruch, sought and obtained permission from Pope Urban VIII to initiate the causa. In 1644, van Bruch died. The Civil Wars were in full swing, so the cause remained dormant until, in 1880, the English Jesuits asked to reopen it. By then Catholic emancipation had come about and the newly-restored Diocese of Westminster took it upon itself to prepare the dossier to send to Rome.

The dossier which I have seen contains printed documents because it is the Dicastero's practice to have Vatican typographers print the handwritten material which Archdioceses sent over to Rome in order to instruct a cause. It means that the papers which were originally written in whatever form in England are not the ones in this folder; rather, they bear a Roman imprint. I do not have the original manuscripts because the folders in the Dicastero Archive contain their Roman reprints. I have asked where the originals might be but the Archivist, Dr Simona Durante, did not know. Moreover, quite a lot of material has been translated into Italian. Some documents were badly translated, others were badly transcribed. For instance, the infamous Elizabethan torturer Topcliffe has been consistently transcribed as Jopcliffe. This suggests that the transcriptions took place in Rome, where Vatican officials were unfamiliar with Elizabethan names.⁴²

One significant problem with the documents which Vatican officials used to assess whether those men and women were true martyrs is the evidence they have trusted: each piece is hagiographical in style. No evidence contrary to the cause of martyrdom appears in this folder. Nowadays, the Dicastero has a policy of expressly asking to supply evidence for and against causae. Back in 1880, this does not seem to have been the case.

What is striking is the lack of theology in the arguments about martyrdom. The only feature that the compilers—and translators/transcribers—cared about was papal supremacy, nothing else. For example, 'they died for the one and only reason of refusing to recognise Henry [VIII] as Head of the Church'.⁴³ Sentences like this recur throughout the thousands of pages constituting the cause file.

More important still is the flat denial of the alleged martyrs having ever had anything to do with plots against English sovereigns: "These Acts of the time of Henry VIII were abolished when he died and it was not until the 27th year of Elizabeth's reign that an Act of Parliament established the death penalty for being a Catholic priest and for having

sheltered one. Before this Act was passed, her lawyers [Elizabeth I's] made up plots in Rome and Rheims against the person of the Queen and against the State which served as pretexts to send many glorious martyrs to death. Besides it was well known that those were only pretexts. Camden the Protestant historian of Elizabeth's reign assures us that the Queen herself did not believe that most priests who were being sent to death were guilty of treason. His words are: 'Plerosque tamen ex misellis illis Sacerdotibus exitii in patriam conflandi conscios fuisse non credidit Camden Annali 327. Edizione del 1615)'''.⁴⁴ Further, with reference to Edmund Campion's trial: "On folio 179 verso of the interrogation number 15 [unspecified subject] answered that nobody believed that Campion was involved in a plot against Elizabeth".⁴⁵ Rather than showing evidence, the whole dossier is full of repetitions, such as 'they were martyrs for their religion and the Holy See'.⁴⁶ Even when commenting the notorious Guy Fawkes' trial, the compiler hypocritically states: "These Servants of God were accused of plots organised in Rome and Rheims. But all trustworthy historians have defined these plots as false. I believe that no priest or any of these Servants of God were in any way implicated in the powder plot. All the Catholic historians absolve them from any connivance in that plot".⁴⁷ Despite the fact that the Jesuit Henry Garnett admitted to know of Guy Fawkes' plans to blow up Parliament but decided not to alert anybody on the grounds that he had learnt about it in confession, 'he could not tell civil authorities', the implication being that his religious beliefs trumped his allegiance to civil authorities. This is a good example of treason; yet, the English martyrdom dossier compilers presented as evidence of death in odium fidei, specifically denying that it could be characterised as treason.⁴⁸ Titus Oates' plot, which scholars today agree was indeed a Protestant fabrication, gets treated in the same way as Elizabethan plots to kill Elizabeth, which, instead, did take place for sure. Oates' plot is dismissed as nonsense: "Oates' plot is generally regarded as sheer fabrication and commonly it is believed that it was Lord Shaftesbury's idea, one of the Crown's ministers, in order to prevent the Catholic Duke of York, later King James II, from succeeding to the throne. I believe that these Servants of God suffered for the cause of the Catholic religion".⁴⁹

These quotes sound like they have been taken from hagiographical works. They are, however, the very statements which sufficed for Vatican officials to recognise 40 people out of the proposed 600 as martyrs, that is, beati, venerable people. Clearly, the English (and Welsh) martyrs' dossier did not need to be persuasive in the same way as we would expect it. Instead, it needed to contain an accumulation of works about martyrdom in which the cause of the alleged martyrs was spelt out. The sources cited are all hagiographical works on martyrdom that were based on hearsay. There is no scholarly argument, no demonstration. Repetita juvant; it seems as though repeating that English Catholics who died for treason actually died in odium fidei was enough for the Church to elevate 40 people to the official status of martyrs.

4. Conclusions

The Duke of Alba saw the pointlessness of the Impresa clearly and spoke his mind freely in a letter to Philip II, dated as early as 23 February 1570: 'even though English Catholics ask for help, I have heard that they do not want it as much as would reduce them as subjects of a foreign prince'.⁵⁰ The implication was that even if a Catholic entity intervened, their patriotism would turn into loyalty for the Protestant Elizabeth, because their sense of national identity mattered to them more than the Catholic faith and certainly vastly more than loyalty to the Pope, who was indeed a foreign prince. Philip II was the other foreign prince under whom no Englishman would have wished to become subject. The Spanish King had committed 20.000 escudos to the overturn of Elizabeth in 1578, as we can read in a letter from the Secretaría de Estado for the Nuncio Filippo Sega and, therefore,

for Gregory XIII, dated 23 April 1578.⁵¹ Yet, after the 1588 defeat, Philip was more than willing to talk peace with Elizabeth. The cause of the English Catholics was politically dead as far as Spain was concerned. Philip had learnt the hard way that he should have trusted the judgment of a military man who was active on the military ground rather than believing Catholic propaganda, such as Escalante's vague statement "Se saue por muy cierto que de secreto Todos son Catholicos" with reference to Elizabethan English Catholics: "it is known that everybody is Catholic".⁵² In fact, if one should single out one conclusion to draw from the messy evidence surrounding the *Impresa d'Inghilterra* and its forty recognised Catholic martyrs, it is its minuscule size. We are dealing with the history of a tiny minority that tried to subvert the English State through high-profile financed terror plots.

There are two related points in this essay. First, Spanish martyrdom was more about fighting the Turks than fighting the Protestant English; secondly, hagiographic texts were more about submitting evidence to Rome for classification as a martyr than overthrowing the English government. We need to consider these two issues together if we are to better understand that the story of Spanish Catholic martyrs is really not about a larger narrative of Catholics v. Protestants, especially English Protestants. The evidence that has been reassessed shows that, while the English martyrs were justly tried for treason according to the letter of the English Common Law, this does not have any bearing on their martyr status according to Canon Law. We ought to keep our judgements separate according to the legal framework in point. This article, therefore, is a reminder that some of the uses of martyrdom literature have to do with Canon Law procedures, so when we chose to use certain sources, we should bear that in mind.

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Notes

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- ² When an individual is beatified, the Catholic Church declares him or her venerable. The individual is not a saint but people can venerate him or her and ask for his or her intercession through prayers. Only one miracle is needed for a person to be recognised as such. Instead, two miracles are needed for someone to be recognised as a saint. https://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/avvenimenti/canonizzazioni-beatificazioni_nota-procedura_it.html as viewed on 20 November 2024.
- ³ I say "primarily" because Philip II's Spain was also the defender of the Catholic faith against Protestant heresies. Yet, he always ranked the Turk as his number one enemy. Sixteenth-century Spain stemmed from the long Reconquista process, during which Spain as a State did not exist. The Reconquista started soon after the arrival of the first of four different waves of Muslim peoples who invaded the originally Visigothic and Christian kingdoms that had replaced the Roman province of Hispania. Muslims toppled the Christian King Roderick at Guadalete in 710. The Reconquista ended in 1492 with the fall of the Muslim Emirate of Granada. During those centuries Christian and Muslim lords engaged in constant wars against one another; sometimes Muslims became allied of Christians and vice versa. Yet, Christianity became a unifying force, if only for rhetorical justification in some cases, thus providing the backbone of the budding sense of Spanish national identity which came to permeate the newly formed State of Spain that came out of the dynastic union of Aragon and Castile in 1469. Indeed, even in common parlance today, to do things the Spanish or the regular, normal way, is *hacerlo cristiano*, to do it in a Christian way. While it would be beside the scope of this article to delve deep into the thorny issue of the historiographical debate about the Reconquista, this brief summary is to stress the centrality of Christianity in Spanish national identity since before Philip II came to the throne. Spanish-language historiography, no matter what side one takes in the debate, is unanimous in ascribing Christianity, and the fight for its survival against Islam, a far higher place than the defence of Roman Catholicism in Philip II's priorities. See, for instance, Henry Kamen,

- “La política religiosa de Felipe II”, *AHIg* 7 (1998), pp. 1–33; M.J. Rodríguez Salgado, *Felipe II, el paladín de la cristiandad y la paz con el turco* (Valladolid: Colección “Síntesis”, XI Cátedra Felipe II Universidad de Valladolid, 2004) and its bibliographies. For a balanced historiographical approach to the Reconquista, see footnote 6 and the historiography cited by Cesare Vanoli and Gennaro Varriale.
- ⁴ Fulco Lanchester, “Le costanti culturali della presenza di Carl Schmitt in Italia. Note sulle ragioni di un’intervista”, *Carl-Schmitt-Studien*, 1. Jg. 2017, H. 1, S. 224–233. Lanchester’s bibliography about Carl Schmitt’s *Freund-Feind Denken* is vast, and leads to further reading about this classic of modern constitutional and political thought.
- ⁵ Gennaro Varriale’s *Arrivano li turchi. Guerra navale e spionaggio nel Mediterraneo (1532–1582)*, (Genoa: Città del Silenzio: 2014) remains the best work detailing Spain’s actual struggle against the Ottomans whereas Alessandro Vanoli’s *La Reconquista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022), especially chapters 3 and 11, is a useful guide about the centrality of the Turks in Spanish foreign policy since well before the accession of Philip II to the throne until well into the seventeenth century. Their bibliographies are essential research tools about the Turco-Hispano special relation.
- ⁶ <https://arqarqt.revistas.csic.es/index.php/arqarqt/article/view/161/173>, as viewed on 14 November 2024.
- ⁷ *Espías. Servicios secretos y escritura cifrada en la Monarquía Hispánica*. Textos: Javier Marcos Rivas, Lucía de Medrano, anonymous investigador Departamento de Difusión del AGS, Simancas: Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2018, pp. 30–95; Javier Marcos, Carlos Carnicer, *Felipe II Rey de espías. Los servicios secretos del imperio español* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2005), chapter 5: the ebook version can only be read on the Tagus e-reader and has no page or image numbers.
- ⁸ We can get a sense of Philip’s tense relations with the Papacy thanks to the documents edited by José Ignacio Tallechea Idígoras, *El Papado y Felipe II*, 2 vols (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2004–2006) and specifically his bad relationship with Gregory XIII thanks to Ángel Fernandez Collado, *Gregorio XIII y Felipe II en la nunciatura de Felipe Segá (1577–1581). Aspectos políticos, jurisdiccional y de reforma* (Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso, 1991). On Charles V’s difficult relationship with the Papacy, see, for instance, Levin (2005, pp. 43–66). JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv2n7gvc.6>. Accessed 15 November 2024.
- ⁹ Emblematic of this tendency is G. Parker (2014).
- ¹⁰ Robert Tombs (2023). For instance, Tombs nonchalantly states: ‘The Pope duly urged Philip of Spain to invade England’, p. 183, letting the reader believe that Philip just obliged. While the Pope’s ask is true, there is also far more evidence about Philip’s resistance to the Pope’s call for almost twenty years, as reflected in Philip’s correspondence about English affairs now fully available through <https://bibliotecavirtual.defensa.gob.es/BVMDefensa/i18n/consulta/registro.cmd?id=59626> as viewed on 15 November 2024.
- ¹¹ Robert Goodwin (2015), the chapter on the Armada is on pp. 233–49; the passages about Lepanto are on pp. 192–96, and it is told in the context of a long section on Miguel de Cervantes’ service as a soldier and spy.
- ¹² This episode of Saint Teresa’s life is so well known that several paintings exist about it, such as <https://carmelitasalba.org/portfolio-items/santa-teresa-en-tierra-de-moros/> as viewed on 14 November 2024.
- ¹³ As Werner Thomas has demonstrated in his definitive study of the subject, Protestantism in Spain appeared in Valladolid and Seville in 1558, only to be crushed by the 1560s. Sixteenth-century Spain focused on the internal enemies (Jews and Moriscos) as well as the external ones, the Turks and their North-African Muslim allies. Werner Thomas, *La represión del protestantismo en España 1517–1648*, and, *ibid.*, *La Inquisición en España en tiempos de Reforma y Contrarreforma* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001). Moreover, in her the latest work on the Spanish Inquisition, Mercedes Tamboury Redondo has shown that the Spanish Inquisition was run as a hub of spies working for the safety of the realms, whose enemies were overwhelmingly Moriscos and politically-driven people whereas Lutherans rarely preoccupied la Suprema, as the Tribunal was called then: Mercedes Tamboury Redondo (2024).
- ¹⁴ Verdadera relación sobre vn martyrio que dieron los Turcos enemigos de nuestra sancta fee catholica en Cōstantinopla a vn deuoto Frayle de la orden de sant Francisco llamado Fray Gonçalo Lobo: con vn milagro que nuestra señora de Monserrate hizo con vn clérigo de missa, natural de Caçalla que es en el Andaluzia: el qual yendo a Oran a rescatar a vn hermano suyo que estaua captiuo en Buxia, fue captiuo y vendido a vn renegado, llamado Alycaysi (Cordoba: Juan Bautista, 1577).
- ¹⁵ An example of pseudo-scholarship about the groundless claim that Al Ándalus was a kind of eldorado for toleration see [https://news.yale.edu/sites/default/files/d6_files/imce/Culture in the Time of Tolerance_ Al-Andalus as a Model for Our T.pdf](https://news.yale.edu/sites/default/files/d6_files/imce/Culture%20in%20the%20Time%20of%20Tolerance_%20Al-Andalus%20as%20a%20Model%20for%20Our%20T.pdf), as viewed on 15 November 2024. For an empirically-ground, less politicised and more balanced approach to the rule of Islam by the sword in southern Spain I refer to Vanoli, *La Reconquista*, passim, and its extensive bibliography on the topic.
- ¹⁶ <https://www.cultura.gob.es/cultura/archivos/recursos-profesionales/guias.html> as viewed on 20 December 2024.
- ¹⁷ Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España (hereafter referred to as BNE), António de Gouveia, *Discurso glorioso de tres martires españoles. Discurso sobre el martirio de los padres fray Nicolás Melo y fray Guillermo de San Agustín*. It is available online: <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000008319&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- ¹⁸ BNE, MS.941, available online at <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000174299&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024). On the Cordoba martyrs, Christian Baxter Wolf (1988).

- 19 I have analysed this phenomenon in Vittoria Feola, Elias Ashmole and the Uses of Antiquity (Paris: Blanchard, 2012), especially chapters 2 and 5.
- 20 BNE, MS.2526, available online at <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000048802&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- 21 Diui Eulogii Cordubensis martyris ... Opera/studio et diligentia ... Petri Pocii Leonis a Corduba Episcopi Placentini ...; eiusdem Sanctissimi martyris vita per Aluarum Cordubensem scripta; cum aliis nonnullis sanctorum martyrum Cordubensium monumentis; Omnia Ambrosii Moralis ... scholiis illustrata, eiusque cura & diligentia excussa ... (Alcalá de Henares, 1574). The fortune of the Cordoba martyrs story continued into the seventeenth century, as well; Sentencia con que se calificaron las Reliquias de doze Martyres, que fueron quemados vivos en el Monte Santo de Granada, por la Predicacion y Defensa de Nuestra Santa Fe Catolica: precedieron antes quatro Años de averiguaciones juridicas, cuyp Processo fuè el mas solemne, y mas riguroso que se ha hecho jamàs (s.l., 1600?); Arzobispo Pedro de Castro, De los libros y Sanctos Martyres que se hallaron en el Monte Sacro Illipulitano cerca de la Ciudad de Granada, y en la Torre Turpiana (Sevilla, no date but it has to be between 1610 and 1623 when de Castro held the archbishopric).
- 22 Miguel José Hagerty, *Los libros plumbeos del Sacromonte* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2007). Not everyone was ready to believe this moriscos' hoax, however, as reflected in the sixteenth-century BNE MS.12975/15, Memorial sobre la prudencia con que se ha de proceder en el reconocimiento de las reliquias de mártires halladas en Granada.
- 23 Historia eclesiastica de todos los santos, de España primera, segunda, tercera y quarta parte ...: donde se cuenta[n] muy particularmente todas las vidas, martyrios y milagros de los santos y santas propios que en esta nuestra España ha auido, assi de martires, pontifices confesores como no pontifices, y religiosos de todas ordenes, y los concilios que ha auido desde el tiempo de los Apostoles hasta agora .../compuesto por ... fray Iuan de Marieta de la Orden de santo Domingo ... (En Cuenca: en casa de Pedro del valley. ... a costa de Christiano Bernabe, 1596).
- 24 Relacion que Fray Iuan de Marieta de la orden de Santo Domingo, natural de la Ciudad de Victoria, da a su Magestad el Rey don Philippe segundo deste nombre: de todos los santos y santas, Martyres, Confesores y virgines, que ha auido en España desde el apostol Santiago, hasta estos tiempos presentes (Cuenca, no date but most likely 1596).
- 25 Anonymous, *Verísima relación del riguroso y acervo martirio que la Reina Inglesa dio a los soldados de nuestra nación española del ejército del Principe Cardenal, y de como la serenísima Virgen les manifesto el martirio que habían de pasar juntamente con el con el convertimiento de seis judios que recibieron el mismo martirio muriendo en palados: en 17 de Mayo de 1596 años: con un Romance al cabo* (Impresso en Alcala: a la puerta de los martires, 1596?).
- 26 BNE, MS.20526, *Discurso De Bernardino descaltante [sic] De Cossas Tocantes a Inglaterra y a los estados de flandes. 1586*. The arguments about fortifications after the shock of Cadiz are on ff. 79r-90v; on imperfect sovereignty, on ff. 91r-109r.
- 27 Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez, *Radicals in Exile: English Catholic Books during the Reign of Philip II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- 28 Ecclesiae Anglicanae trophaea siue Sanctor[um] martyrum qui pro Christo Catholicaeq[ue] fidei veritate asserenda antiquo recentioriq[ue] persecutionum tempore mortem in Anglia subierunt passiones Romae in Collegio Anglico per Nicolaum Circinianum depictae/nuper autem per Io. Bap. de Cauallerijs aeneis typis repraesentatae (Romae: ex officina Bartholomaei Grassi, 1584). The editor was Giovan Battista de' Cavalieri. A digital copy is available here: Digit: <https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000167692&page=1> (accessed 23 November 2024).
- 29 Kew, National Archives, hereafter referred to as NA, S.P. 78, vol. 22, ff. 201–202. The original is in French: 'Et si uous trouuez qu'on uous permette de parler franchement, sans péril à vous-mesme, uous pourrez dire que le monde estime que Dieu tout Puissant mostroit son puissance contre les desseings du Roy en la route de telle puissante Armée nauale qu'on n'aye veue semblable en cet âge et par l'heureux succès de l'armée angloyse, laquelle au combat avec la sienne ne perditt aucune Nauire, ny n'eust aucune Ame pris prisonnier.' This and all subsequent translations in the article are mine.
- 30 Archivo General de Simancas, hereafter referred to as AGS, E-Inglatera, Leg. 820, ff. 17–21.
- 31 Rome, Archive of the Society of Jesus (hereafter referred to as ARSI), MS. Anglia 30, ff. 79r-101r. In the same volume there is a sixteenth-century copy of the speech by Francis Yaxley to Philip II, October 1565, ff. 70r-72v, and evidence that Philip's main secretary, Juan de Idiáquez, entertained epistolary relations with the earliest Jesuits heading for London as early as 1565. The first Jesuit to arrive, and the beginning of the Impresa, therefore, must be antedated to 1565. The Jesuit Edmund Campion was not the first Jesuit to enter the kingdom in 1580. An updated bibliography on the Impresa d'Inghilterra can be found in footnote 40.
- 32 José Martínez Millán (1988). This episode, so often looked over in English-language historiography keen on portraying Philip II as Elizabeth's archenemy, has been fully analysed in M. J. Rodríguez Salgado, "Paz ruidosa, guerra sorda. Las relaciones de Felipe II e Inglaterra", in Luis A. Ribot García (1999).
- 33 *La batalla del Mar Océano: corpus documental de las hostilidades entre España e Inglaterra (1568–1604)*, Jorge Calvar Gross, José Ignacio González-Aller Hierro, Marcelino de Dueñas Fontán, M^a del Campo Mérida Valverde, 5 vols. (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa Secretaría General Técnica, Turner, 1988–2015).
- 34 ARSI, MS. Anglia 30, 2 vols., I vol., f. 141r-v, letter from the Duchess of Feria to the Pope Gregory XIII dated from Madrid, 25 September 1595.

- 35 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter referred to as ASV), Nunciatura di Spagna 25, f. 431. It was Humphrey Ely, former President of St John's College, Oxford, then a seminary priest at the English Colleges of DouaisDouai and Rheims, to ask the question to the Pope. In June 1580 he illegally entered England with three priests, Edward Rishton, Thomas Cottam, and John Hart. Cottam is among the forty English and Welsh martyrs. If not Campion himself, or Briant, one cannot help but wonder whether Cottam might have been the (only?) English priest ready to kill Elizabeth, as he, too, was found guilty of treason, and executed accordingly.
- 36 ASV, Nunciatura di Spagna, 27, f. 131.
- 37 ARSI, MS. Anglia 30, f. 124r-v.
- 38 I refer to the discussion and bibliography in: (eds) (2019). 10 Traitors Respond: English Catholic Polemical Strategies against Accusations of Treason at the End of the Sixteenth Century 250. In *Treason*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Available From: Brill https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004400696_012 [Accessed 18 November 2024]. Moreover I refer to Alice Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame: Notre dame University Press, 2012); John F. Drabble (1982); Gabriel Glickmann's review "Early Modern England: Persecution, Martyrdom: And Toleration?", *The Historical Journal* (2008) 51/1, pp. 251–67.
- 39 Simona Durante (2023). This precious essay contains much valuable information and bibliography about the matter in point. I am extremely grateful to Dr Durante for her generous assistance and clear explanations about martyrdom and canonization procedures from Gregory XIII until the present day, as well as for her help in interpreting evidence about the Elizabethan martyrs which is kept in the Archive of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints (hereafter referred to as ACS).
- 40 <https://www.causesanti.va/it/documenti.html> as viewed on 12 October 2024.
- 41 ACS, Fondo A-J, fascicolo b4/0 a.
- 42 Ibid., see for example p. 135, 139, 141, and so on.
- 43 Ibid., p. 236.
- 44 Ibid., p. 236. "Questi atti 'Enrico ottavo furono aboliti allorché egli morì e non fu che nel 27. di Elisabetta che un atto del Parlamento diede il potere d'infliggere la morte per causa di Sacerdozio, e per aver ricettato un prete. Prima che fosse passato ques'atto, i di Lei giureconsulti inventarono cospirazioni a Roma e Reims contro la persona della Regina, e contro lo stato che servirono come pretesto per mettere a morte molti gloriosi martiri. Era peraltro ben inteso che questi non erano che pretesti. Camden lo storico protestante del regno d'Elisabetta ci assicura che la Regina stessa non credea che la maggior parte dei preti ch'erano messi a morte fossero rei di tradimento. Le parole di Lui sono queste: Plerosque tamen ex misellis illis Sacerdotibus exitii in patriam conflandi conscios fuisse non credidit Camden Annali 327. Edizione del 1615)".
- 45 Ibid., p. 242. "Ad 15 interrog.fol. 179 terg. Respondit" che nessuno credeva che Campion fosse coinvolto in una congiura contro Elisabetta".
- 46 Ibid., pp. 244–45.
- 47 Ibid., p. 248. "Questi Servi di Dio erano accusati di congiure tramate a Roma od a Rheims. Ma tutti gli storici degni di fede hanno caratterizzato queste congiure come false. Io sono d'avviso che nessuno sacerdote; né alcuni di questi Servi di Dio siano stati in alcuna guisa involti nella congiura della polveriera. Tutti gli storici cattolici li assolvono da ogni complicità in questa congiura".
- 48 Ibid., p. 175.
- 49 Ibid., p. 248. "Il complotto di Oates è generalmente riguardato come pura invenzione e comunemente si crede che fosse un trovato di Lord Shaftesbury uno de' ministri della corona, onde impedire la successione del cattolico Duca di York poscia Giacomo secondo. Io credo che questi servi di Dio soffrirono per la causa della Religione cattolica".
- 50 AGS, E-Flandes, Leg. s. l. The Duke of Alba's letter is dated 'De Bruselas á veinte y tres de hebrero, mil quinientos setenta'. The passage translated above reads in the original Spanish: 'si bine los católicos de Inglaterra piden socorro, yo he entendido que ellos no lo querrian tan grande que se pusieren en peligro de ser reducidos a sujecion de príncipe extranjero'.
- 51 AGS, Secretaría de Estado, Legajo 932, n. 1.
- 52 BNE, MS.20526, f. 15r.

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Article

Giovanni Botero on Religion and Politics

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Abstract: Giovanni Botero's political thought is significantly influenced by Machiavelli, yet it possesses its own distinctive features, particularly in its religious perspective. In contrast to Machiavelli's condemnation of Catholicism, Botero argues that Catholicism, far from weakening individuals, could instill in them the courage to defy death and foster military virtues through the promise of eternal life. While Botero agrees with Machiavelli that religion plays a central role in politics, he asserts that Catholicism is more effective than other sects as it is better suited to maintaining social order and disciplining the human conscience. However, he refutes the idea that religion should serve merely as an instrument of domination. Instead, he suggests that it should be the foundation of the state and the purpose of governance. Furthermore, he maintains that religion and the state are interdependent, functioning together to ensure the maintenance and strengthening of both.

Keywords: Giovanni Botero; Machiavelli; religion; politics; reason of state

1. Introduction

Giovanni Botero (1544–1617) is the most significant Italian political thinker of the Renaissance after Machiavelli. Although Botero's thought is strongly shaped by Machiavelli's ideas, it also exhibits distinctive characteristics, especially in his perspective on religion. He lived during the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, and as a devout Catholic, religion plays a central role in his thought. As Luigi Firpo observes, "the most evident aspect of Botero, the central nucleus of his personality is undoubtedly his sincere and profound religiosity, his devoted and convinced adherence to the ideas of the Counter-Reformation, and the cult of Christian virtues as the cornerstones of moral life" (Firpo 1948, p. 15). In contrast, Machiavelli was not a devout Christian, and some scholars have even characterized him as an atheist or pagan (Berlin 1972; Hulliung 1983; Parel 1992). The significant difference in their religious beliefs also accounts for the contrasting attitudes they hold towards religion.

What, then, is Botero's stance on Machiavelli's perspective on religion? What distinguished his viewpoint? How does he perceive the relationship between religion and politics? These questions have not been extensively explored by scholars (Bireley 1990; Suppa 1992; Vasoli 1992; Malcolm 2007; Descendre 2009; Figorilli 2021; Zancarini 2021). In particular, there has been a notable lack of scholarly attention paid to Botero's discussion of religion in *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana*. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing Botero's perspective on religion throughout a close reading of his three most relevant works: *De regia sapientia*, *Della ragion di Stato*, and *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana*. Botero's position on religion becomes evident through his critique and engagement with Machiavelli's ideas. While condemning Machiavelli's devaluation of the Roman Catholic Church, Botero defends the political role of Catholicism, yet he rejects the idea that it should be reduced to a mere instrument of domination. Rather, he advocates that Catholicism should serve as the foundation of the state and the purpose of governance. This study will clarify Botero's religious perspective, illuminate the complexities of his relationship with Machiavelli, and enhance the understanding of the concept of reason of state that underpins his political philosophy.

2. Refuting Machiavelli's View of Religion

While Machiavelli was not regarded as an atheist or pagan in Florence, he was nevertheless considered an anti-clerical (Zancarini 2021, p. 243). In his *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*, Machiavelli offers a scathing critique of Catholicism, identifying it as a significant contributor to the corruption and moral decline he observed in modern society, as well as the idleness and cowardice he perceived in modern man. In *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*, Book II, Chapter 2, he compares ancient Roman religion and Catholicism, noting that “our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honor of the world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, were more ferocious in their actions” (Machiavelli 1996, p. 131). As explained by Machiavelli, ancient Roman religion placed a premium on earthly glory, ascribing the supreme good to qualities such as mental fortitude, physical strength, and all other things capable of making men very strong. Catholicism, however, celebrates the humble, penitent, and prayerful individual, placing the supreme good in humility, ascetic practices, and contempt for earthly things, which render the modern man weak. Francesco Guicciardini, Machiavelli's contemporary, offers a comparable evaluation of Catholicism in his *Ricordi*: “It was said truly that too much religion spoils the world, because it makes the mind effeminate, involves men in thousands of errors, and diverts them from many generous and virile enterprises” (Guicciardini 1965, p. 104). Machiavelli attributes the significant divergences between ancient Roman religion and Catholicism to different interpretations of religion: the ancient Romans interpreted religion in the sense of virtue, while the moderns tend to perceive religion according to ease and idleness (Machiavelli 1996, p. 132). The prevalence of idleness and ease in modern city-states leads to a decline in virtues, particularly courage and masculinity, which are closely aligned with military values. It also contributes to social discord and corruption within states. In contrast, the practice of war and peacetime military training in the Roman Republic served to shape and reinforce virtues, preventing their erosion by indolence (Machiavelli 1996, p. 153).

Many Christian thinkers, particularly anti-Machiavellian writers, disagreed with Machiavelli's claims about Christianity, asserting that Catholicism was not only compatible with politics but could significantly contribute to political success (Bireley 1990, p. 3). Among the most prominent of these figures was Giovanni Botero. In 1583, Botero published his first political work, *De regia sapientia*, which belongs to the tradition of the *specula principum* (mirrors for princes). It was written for Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, and dedicated to Carlo Emanuele I, Duke of Savoy. In *De regia sapientia*, Botero made his first attempt to address the relationship between the state and religion (Catholicism) and offered his first explicit quotation from Machiavelli. In Book I, Chapter 7, “In Nicolaum Machiavellum digressio”, he presents a detailed refutation of Machiavelli's assertion, “Quoniam supra demonstratum est à Deo Opti. Max. bella, victoriasq[ue] pendere, minuenda hoc loco est Nicolai Macchiavelli opinio. is enim non ineptè minus, quam falsè, asserere ausus est, Christi domini nostri lege homines ad rem bellicam, militaremque virtutem ineptos efficere”. (“Since it has been demonstrated above that wars and victories depend on the Most Good and Great God, the opinion of Niccolò Machiavelli must be diminished here. For he dared to assert, not only inappropriately but also falsely, that the law of Christ our Lord renders men unfit for military and warlike virtues”. (Botero 1583, p. 12)

From Botero's perspective, Catholic law does not instill cowardice in individuals but rather fosters courage. Catholicism prohibits unjust wars, and in any just war, the Catholics face the battle with an indomitable spirit, daring to risk death bravely and resolutely, because those who die in a just war will receive the glory of God's promise of eternal life. This promise extends beyond the limits of mortality, offering an absolute and complete happiness, which serves as a profound motivation for military virtue, surpassing the virtues of the pagan and ancient heroes celebrated by Machiavelli. For Catholics, death is not the end but the gateway to eternal life, the beginning of a new existence. This disdain for death demonstrates that Catholicism does not render men weak; rather, it is a “school of military virtue and war fortitude” (Vasoli 1992, p. 47). According to Botero, no doctrine

offers such a robust defense against the fear of death as the Catholic belief in eternal life and the immortality of the soul. The authentic Catholic warrior, unafraid of the present and contemplating the future, can courageously confront any peril, including death itself.

In *Della ragion di Stato*, published in Rome six years later, Botero reiterates this stance. In Book IX, Chapter 8, “Del far ricorso a Dio” (“Of Recourse to God”), he rejects the criticisms of Catholicism from a military perspective, arguing that Catholicism strengthens military virtue. He summarizes the positive effects of recourse to God in three ways: “Questo ricorso che si fa a Dio produce molti buoni effetti: l’uno si è che ci acquista la divina protezione, e si *Deus pro nobis quis contra nos?* L’altro, che ci dà confidenza e quasi certezza della vittoria, il che ravviva e rinfranca mirabilmente gli animi. Il terzo è che ci assicura quasi della felicità dell’altra vita, il che anco rende incredibilmente arditi gli esserciti, perché non è cosa che più conforti e più desti lo spirito dell’uomo ne’ pericoli della vita, et in ogni fazione militare, dove ha tanta parte la morte, che la speranza della vita celeste”. (“This recourse to God produces many good effects. One is that it acquires divine protection, and if God is with us, who can be against us? The second is that it gives us confidence and near certainty of victory which revives and reanimates the spirits wonderfully. Thirdly it nearly assures the happiness of the next life which also renders the armies incredibly bold because there is nothing that more comforts and more rouses man’s spirit in danger of life and in every military action where death has such a large part than the hope of a heavenly life”). (Botero 2016, pp. 229–30; 2017, p. 167). Botero supports his arguments with a series of authoritative examples drawn from ancient history (particularly Roman history), the Bible, and contemporary events.

It is evident that Botero’s critique of Machiavelli is primarily directed at his attack on the Roman Church and Catholicism, rather than at Machiavelli’s emphasis on military virtue or his affirmation of the politico-military function of religion. Botero’s objective is to challenge Machiavelli’s assertion that Catholicism is the primary cause of Italy’s military weakness and territorial losses, while justifying the alliance between Catholicism and the state. As evidenced in *Della ragion di Stato*, Botero’s selected dedicatee, Lord Wolfgang Theodore, held a dual role as both prince and archbishop of Salzburg, Austria. Wolfgang is portrayed as an exemplar of a prince–archbishop, possessing extensive knowledge of state affairs and able to govern his people and maintain his realm through justice, piety, and reputation. This image of the prince–archbishop can be interpreted as a symbol of the alliance between politics and religion.

3. Political Function of Religion

In *De regia sapientia*, Botero does not deny the importance of religion to the state; rather, he emphasizes the politico-military function of Catholicism. The Catholic wisdom of governance he presents aims to make Catholicism the greatest force in maintaining the state, as he states, “regna pietate fundantur, atque conservantur” (“the kingdom is founded and maintained by piety”) (Botero 1583, “Sententiae Insignes”). Catholicism not only provides support for rule but also serves as the real strength of the state, particularly in terms of military power, ensuring its continuity. Consequently, *De regia sapientia* can be seen as a rebuttal to Machiavelli’s views, while inheriting two of his fundamental ideas: the affirmation of the significance of military virtue (as discussed in the previous section) and the recognition of religion’s political function (Descendre 2014a, p. 199). Regarding the latter, Machiavelli provides a summary of this view in Chapter 11 of Book I of *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*, stating, “whoever considers well the Roman histories sees how much religion served to command armies, to animate the plebs, to keep men good, to bring shame to the wicked” (Machiavelli 1996, pp. 34–35). He views the ancient Roman religion as a valuable asset for rulers and virtuous men in governing the state and its people.

Botero elucidates the political function of religion more specifically in *Della ragion di Stato*. In Book II, Chapter 15, “Della religione” (“Of Religion”), he emphasizes, “la religione è quasi madre d’ogni virtù, rende i sudditi obbedienti al suo prencipe, coraggiosi nell’imprese, arditi ne’ pericoli, larghi ne’ bisogni, pronti in ogni necessità della repubblica,

conciosia che sanno che, servendo il prencipe, fanno servizio a Dio, di cui egli tiene il luogo". ("Religion is as it were the mother of every virtue. It renders subjects obedient to their prince, courageous in campaigns, bold in times of danger, generous in times of scarcity, alert to every necessity of the republic because they know that in serving their prince they render service to God whose place he holds".) (Botero 2016, p. 89; 2017, p. 64). Religion shapes human virtue and plays a key role in ensuring the obedience of subjects, civic affairs, and military endeavors. In the opening passages of Book II, Chapter 16, entitled "Modi di propagar la religione" ("On the Means to Propagate Religion"), he writes, "È di tanta forza la religione ne' governi" ("Religion is of such power for government") (Botero 2016, p. 89; 2017, p. 64). Botero asserts that religion is the source of the state's power and provides a solid foundation for politics by fostering an ethic of order and obedience that prioritizes legitimate authority above any other considerations (Suppa 1992, p. 80).

As previously discussed, the religion in question is not the ancient Roman religion that Machiavelli held in high regard, but Catholicism. For Botero, Catholicism is distinct in that its political function is more pronounced than that of other denominations (especially Protestantism) and secular law of the time, as evidenced by the following:

"Ma tra tutte le leggi non ve n'è alcuna più favorevole a' precipi che la cristiana, perché questa sottomette loro non solamente i corpi e le facultà de' sudditi, dove conviene, ma gli animi ancora e le coscienze, e lega non solamente le mani ma gli affetti ancora et i pensieri, e vuole che si obedisca a' precipi discoli non che a' moderati e che si patisca ogni cosa per non perturbar la pace". ("But of all the laws none is more favorable to princes than the Christian because it submits to them not only the bodies and faculties of subjects where this is appropriate but the souls and consciences as well, and it binds not only the hands but even the affections and thoughts, and it prescribes that obedience be given to wicked princes as well as to ordinary ones and that everything be endured in order not to disturb the peace".) (Botero 2016, p. 90; 2017, p. 65)

By explicitly outlining the distinctive way in which Catholicism serves political power, it is demonstrated that Catholicism is more effective for governance than other religious sects. Catholicism has a considerable advantage over both Protestantism and secular law, particularly in its ability to control individual conscience through sacraments, such as confession (Descendre 2009, p. 111). Catholicism's role as a force for controlling the spirit and conscience of individuals is tied to its inherent tenets of peace and obedience, which the prince can effectively use. According to Botero, this is exemplified by the early Catholics of antiquity, who, despite persecution, did not rebel against the Roman Empire (although this was not entirely the case), as well as the Catholics persecuted in various European countries at the time—Scotland, England, France, Flanders, and Germany—who also did little to resist. Botero further comments: "But Luther, Calvin, and the others, distancing themselves from evangelical truth, sow everywhere weeds and revolutions in the states and the overthrow of kingdoms". (Botero 2017, p. 65). While Botero recognized the capacity of Catholicism to ensure political stability, he sharply criticized Protestantism for fomenting social unrest and revolutions.

Regarding the prince, Botero contends that the ruler should maintain devout Catholic faith, as he asserts in *Della ragion di Stato*, Book II, Chapter 15, "Della Religione":

"Deve dunque il prencipe di tutto cuore umiliarsi innanzi la Divina Maestà, e da lei riconoscere il regno e l'obediencia de' popoli e quanto egli è collocato in più sublime grado sopra gli altri, tanto deve abbassarsi maggiormente nel cospetto di Dio, non metter mano a negozio, non tentar impresa, non cosa nissuna ch'egli non sia sicuro esser conforme alla legge di Dio". ("Therefore the prince ought to humble himself with his whole heart before the Divine Majesty and acknowledge that the kingdom and the obedience of his subjects come from him; and the more that he is placed in a higher rank over others, so much the more ought he abase himself in the presence of God, nor set his hand to any negotiation, nor undertake

any campaign or anything else which he is not certain to be conformed to the law of God".) (Botero 2016, p. 86; 2017, p. 62)

The authority of the prince and the obedience of the people are both derived from God. Therefore, the prince is expected to exemplify piety and humility while adhering to God's laws. Religion can only fulfill its political function effectively if the prince remains genuinely devout—a subject that will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

While both Botero and Machiavelli acknowledge the political role of religion, they diverge in their understanding of how religion exerts its political influence: Machiavelli emphasizes the use of fear of God (divine punishment) to restrain the people, whereas Botero places greater importance on the obligations of conscience. The concept of "conscienza" (conscience) is central in *Della ragion di Stato*, as evidenced by its appearance in the dedication and throughout numerous chapters of this work. In contrast, it is a relatively rare theme in Machiavelli's political writings. For Botero, conscience is understood in a moral and Christian sense. It is the faculty that, in conjunction with reason, sets human beings apart from animals. Conscience is portrayed as a divine gift that cannot be disregarded in matters of such significance as the governance of state affairs (Figorilli 2021, pp. 374–75). Botero criticizes Machiavelli's political theory for ignoring the role of conscience, stating that "il Machiavelli fonda la ragione di Stato nella poca conscienza" ("Machiavelli based reason of state on little respect for conscience") (Botero 2016, p. 3; 2017, p. 1), thus severing politics from morality. However, Botero's critique of Machiavelli is largely strategic. While he attacks Machiavelli's perceived immorality, Machiavelli does not wholly reject morality. Concepts such as justice and the common good play prominent roles in his work (Parel 1990; Viroli 2004; Benner 2009; Hanasz 2010; Quagliani 2011; Descendre 2014c). At that time, Machiavelli's and Jean Bodin's ideas, along with those of the *politiques*—especially Bodin's theory of sovereignty—had significantly influenced Catholicism. To counter these influences and justify Catholicism's political function, the Holy See urgently required an anti-sovereignty Catholic political theory. It was within this context that Botero's *Della ragion di Stato* was conceived. He aimed to engage with Machiavelli's thought in order to challenge Bodin's theory of sovereignty (Descendre 2009, p. 87). Superficially, Botero appeared to criticize Machiavellian immorality, but in reality, he sought to appropriate Machiavelli's political realism to establish a Catholic-based theory of reason of state, reasserting the close relationship between Catholicism and the state, as well as between religion and politics. The relationship between Botero and Machiavelli is, therefore, complex: Botero explicitly condemned Machiavelli, while at the same adopting his vocabulary and political insights to a certain degree. The core of Botero's reason of state was his attempt to reconcile the interests of the Church with those of the state. On the one hand, he sought to compel the state to submit to the Church's authority to some extent; on the other hand, he permitted the state to retain the necessary tools for effective governance (Descendre 2014b, p. 44).

As previously stated, according to Botero, Catholicism has its superiority, particularly because it submits to princes the souls and consciences of subjects, employing various instruments of conscience management, such as the sacrament of Penance, to regulate the consciences of its subjects and thereby restrain their sentiments, thoughts, and actions. In Chapter 16 of Book II of *Della ragion di Stato*, Botero also states, "il che è indizio della verità della Fede cattolica che rende i sudditi obediendi al prencipe e lega loro la conscienza e li fa desiderosi di pace e nemici di romore e di scandali". ("it shows the truth of the Catholic faith that renders these subjects obedient to their prince and binds their conscience to them, makes them desirous of peace and enemies of rumors and scandals".) (Botero 2016, p. 90; 2017, p. 65). The Catholic Church serves to connect people to God through their conscience, thereby instilling in them a hatred of turmoil and a love of peace. In Book V, Chapter 1, "De' sudditi d'acquisto, come s'abbino a trattare" ("Of Acquired Subjects, How they Ought to be Treated"), Botero presents a policy for a prince to adopt toward newly acquired subjects after conquering a territory. He asserts that the most effective approach is to naturalize the conquered subjects, emphasizing the pivotal role of religion in regulating the conscience: "i

religiosi tengono in mano le coscienze de' popoli, i letterati gl'ingegni, et i giudicii degli uni e degli altri sono di grandissima autorità presso tutti: quelli per la santità, questi per la dottrina, quelli per la riverenza, questi per la riputazione, onde quel che costoro fanno o dicono è stimato bene e prudentemente fatto e detto, e per ciò degno di esser abbracciato e seguito". ("The religious hold in their hand the consciences of the people, the literati the understanding, and the judgments of the one and the other have the greatest authority with all, the former for their sanctity, the latter for their teaching, the former for the reverence they inspire, the latter for the reputation they have acquired, so that whatever they say or do is considered to have been well and prudently said or done, and so worthy of being embraced and followed".) (Botero 2016, p. 124; 2017, p. 93). Consequently, he underscores the need for patronage of religion and the humanities, as clergy and humanists serve as influential authorities who can shape the conscience and intellect of individuals. Securing the support of these authorities can facilitate the adherence of broader populations.

Furthermore, the distinctive aspect of Botero's politico-religious perspective is the introduction of the "consiglio di coscienza": "sarebbe necessario che il prencipe non mettesse cosa nissuna in deliberazione nel consiglio di Stato che non fosse prima ventillata in un consiglio di coscienza nel quale intervenissero dottori eccellenti in teologia et in ragione canonica, perché altramente caricherà la coscienza sua e farà delle cose che bisognerà poi disfare, se non vorrà dannare l'anima sua, e dei successori". ("it would be necessary that the king never bring to the council anything for deliberation that was not first vetted in a council of conscience to which outstanding doctors of theology and canon law belonged. Otherwise he will burden his conscience and do things that he will later have to undo if he does not want to damn his soul and the souls of his successors".) (Botero 2016, p. 87; 2017, p. 63). Botero posits that a council of conscience should be constituted by the prince, comprising a committee of ecclesiastics (especially experts in theology and canon law). Any significant decision made by the state would be subject to the precautionary opinion of the council of conscience. It is noteworthy that the Jesuits (Botero is a former Jesuit) are experts in the practice of the judgement of conscience, and this practice is now introduced into the core of the state's decision-making apparatus with the objective of providing preliminary evaluations of the issues discussed by the council of state, thereby guiding political decisions (Figorilli 2021, p. 376).

4. Religion: Tool or Purpose of Governance?

In his later years, Botero authored a treatise on Venice, entitled *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana* (1605), which includes a section called "Della religione di Venetia" ("Of the religion of Venice"). Before discussing the religion in Venice, he deliberately addresses the function of religion in the state in a general sense, offering significant insight into his perspective on the relationship between religion and politics. Botero asserts, "siamo giunti alla religione fondamento importante de gli stati: e senza il cui appoggio tutti gli altri hanno poca forza, e fermezza". ("we have arrived at religion, the important foundation of states: and without whose support all the others have little strength and firmness".) (Botero 1605, p. 98v). He explicitly emphasizes the foundational role of religion in the state, which he also discusses in Chapter 16 of Book II of *Della ragion di Stato*, where he posits: "Religion is of such power for government that without it every other foundation of the state wobbles". (Botero 2017, p. 64). Religion is not merely a tool for the prince but a fundamental pillar of the state (Descendre 2009, pp. 110–11). However, in *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana*, he advances this idea further, arguing that religion is not only the foundation of the state but also its purpose.

In "Della religione di Venetia", Botero proceeds to state: "alcuni (come è il Machiavelli, e i politici) non ragionano della religione se non come di una maschera della tirannia: altri vogliono, che la religione ad un Principe indubitatamente ogni prosperità, anche terrena arrechi". ("some (like Machiavelli and *politiques*) do not think of religion except as a mask of tyranny: others want, that religion undoubtedly brings to a Prince every prosperity,

even earthly"). (Botero 1605, p. 99r). He then enumerates two additional perspectives on religion, which he subsequently refutes in the following passages.

Botero begins by refuting the second argument from a theological standpoint. He asserts that religion is not a means of achieving earthly happiness and that Christ does not promise believers any form of earthly guidance as a reward for adhering to God's law. "Il che ci insegna S. Iustino martire: e ci dimostra, senza altro, il testo dell'Evangelio, ove Christo ci protesta, che il suo regno non è di questo mondo: e che s'egli patì, dobbiamo apparecchiarsi à patire ancor noi; ove c'insegna à disprezzar le facoltà à vilipendere gl'honori, e le grandezze terrene, e à metter ogni nostra speranza, e pensiero nel regno de' Cieli". ("This is what St. Justin Martyr teaches us, and is demonstrated to us, undoubtedly, by the text of the Gospel, where Christ protests to us that his kingdom is not of this world: and that if he suffered, we must prepare ourselves to suffer too; where he teaches us to despise our faculties, to vilify earthly honors and greatness, and to place all our hope and thought in the kingdom of Heaven"). (Botero 1605, p. 99r). Catholicism eschews the pursuit of earthly glory and directs its adherents towards a spiritual understanding of heaven and eternal life. God's justice and power are manifested through the dispensation of eternal rewards and punishments.

If religion is not efficacious in the present world, what benefit can it and true piety bring to the prince? In Botero's view, religion serves two functions for princes: the salvation of their souls and the maintenance of obedience among subjects. In response to this question, he proceeds to refute the first perspective, namely that religion is merely a mask for tyranny.

Regarding the first aspect, Botero posits, "in prima gli reca la salute dell'anima. Perche il primo capo della ragion di stato, che à un savio Prencipe conviene si è quel, che dice Christo, *Quid prodest homini si universum mundum lucretur, animæ verò suæ detri mentum patiatur?*" ("Firstly it brings him the salvation of the soul. Because the first principle of the reason of state, which befits a wise Prince, is that which Christ says, What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul?") (Botero 1605, p. 99v). Furthermore, he asserts that it is futile to amass an empire greater than that of Alexander the Great or the Romans if the prince forfeits his own soul. With regard to the second aspect, namely the maintenance of obedience among subjects, it has already been mentioned in the previous section: "Appresso se la religione è di qualche rilievo per il reggimento de' popoli, (come ella di grandissimo rilievo è) la Christiana ha in ciò quel vantaggio, à paragone di tutte le sette, e le legge humane, che ha in vero all'incontro del falso. Imperoche se niuna ragunanza d'huomini, benche barbari, e fieri, benche malvagi, e scelerati, si può senza qualche ombra, e sembianza almeno di religione, lungo tempo conservare, di che importanza crediamo, che sia per la conservatione delle Republiche, e de' regni, l'autorità, e la forza della religione vera, e santa?" ("Furthermore, if religion is of any importance for the government of the people (as it is of the greatest importance), Christianity has in this respect that advantage, in comparison with all sects and human laws, which it has in truth in opposition to the false. For if no assembly of men, however barbarous and fierce, however wicked and depraved, can be preserved for long without some shadow or at least the semblance of religion, of what importance do we believe the authority and strength of true and holy religion to be for the preservation of republics and kingdoms?") (Botero 1605, pp. 99v–100r). Botero underscores the crucial political role of religion, particularly Catholicism, in any state and any collective entity, including the worst form. Furthermore, he adds:

"Hor di che forza sarà per contener, i sudditi in ufficio, e in ubidienza per unirli, e per tenerli soggetti in tuo servitio, quella legge, che lega non solo le mani, ma gl'affetti, che frena gl'animi, che temprà i desideri, che regola i pensieri a' popoli? che li sottomette affatto al tuo Imperio, che commanda loro, che si prestino obbedienti, e trattabili non solamente a i Prencipi ragionevoli, e moderati, ma ancora a gl'impertinenti e a' discoli non tanto per paura di pena, quanto per obbligo di coscienza?" ("Now of what force will that law be to keep subjects in

office and in obedience, to unite them, and to keep them subject to your service, which binds not only the hands, but constrains the affections, restrains the minds, tempers the desires, and regulates the thoughts of the people? It subjects them entirely to your domination, commands them to lend themselves obediently and tractably not only to reasonable and moderate princes, but also to the impertinent and the unruly, not so much through fear of punishment, as through obligation of conscience?" (Botero 1605, p. 100r)

This passage is analogous to the aforementioned quotation from *Della ragion di Stato*, Book II, Chapter 16. Both passages illustrate that Catholicism serves an essential political function by instilling a sense of discipline in individuals, encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, and conscientious aspects, which enables them to obey the prince. Additionally, Botero provides the example of an Indian prince who, despite subscribing to idolatry, recognizes the significant role of Catholicism and participates in Catholic baptismal ceremonies. When questioned about his motivation, he responds that he does so because he understands that "la legge Christiana, che è tutta rivolta al Cielo, e indirizzata alla vita, eterna, rendeva i sudditi affatto ubidienti a' Principi nelle cose terrene". ("the Christian law, which is entirely directed towards Heaven and towards eternal life, made subjects completely obedient to Princes in earthly things".) (Botero 1605, p. 102r). Despite the fact that this Indian prince is not himself a Catholic, he nevertheless affirms the political efficacy of the religion.

Given the significant political role that religion (in this case, Catholicism) plays, it is pertinent to inquire whether it serves as a mask for tyranny or as an *instrumentum regni*. In Machiavelli's thought, religion is largely politicized or instrumentalized; as he himself put it, religion is the best means of politics (Machiavelli 1996, p. 43), in other words, an instrument of domination that allows prudent and virtuous leaders to achieve great and even extraordinary things in the name of God. Ernst Cassirer's argument in *The Myth of the State* has some merit: religion is no longer an end in itself, but has become an instrument of the political rulers, a powerful weapon in all political struggles (Cassirer 1946, p. 138). In a sense, with Botero, religion also becomes an instrument of domination, as Maria Cristina Figorilli has observed: "the primary purpose of the new 'reason of State' set forth by Botero is to provide the sovereigns of the new and modern state apparatuses with the skills and techniques necessary to govern stably, neutralizing and preventing seditions, revolts, conspiracies, in short, any attempt to disturb the public peace by 'making novelties'. And from this point of view, religion also becomes a formidable *instrumentum regni* that ensures the survival of the State, protecting it from mutations and upheavals" (Figorilli 2021, p. 383). Nevertheless, Botero's affirmation of the political function of religion does not reduce it to an instrument of domination. He points out further in his *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana*:

"Non si ha però la religione da prendere (come fa la maggior parte di Politici) per mezzo col quale si assicurino, e si stabiliscino li stati, ma per fine, e per mira alla quale il governo, e li stati medesimi si indirizzino, imperio, che il fine di ogni Repubblica, e d'ogni civile ragunanza si è la vita felice, e beata, e di tutti quelli contenti, e beni ripiena, e colma, che si possano da noi mentre in questa fatichevole, e travagliata vita soggiorniamo conseguire?" ("But is religion not to be taken (as most *politiques* do) as a means by which states are secured and established, but as an end and a goal to which the government and the states themselves are directed, because the aim of every republic and of every civil assembly is the happy and blessed life, filled and replete with all those satisfactions and goods that we can achieve while we sojourn in this laborious and troubled life?" (Botero 1605, pp. 100r–100v)

This statement explicitly indicates that Catholicism should not be perceived as a mere instrument, which is the view of Machiavelli and most of the *politiques* that Botero condemns. He holds that Catholicism should be regarded as an end. However, Jean-Claude Zancarini points out that Botero's distinction between his own perspective and theirs in this instance

is primarily rhetorical rather than substantive (Zancarini 2021, p. 245). Nevertheless, there is a substantive distinction between Botero's assertion and theirs: although Botero believes that religion has a powerful political function, he cautions against regarding it as merely a tool of domination and proposes that it should also be viewed as an end of the state. The question thus arises as to how the assertion that religion should be regarded as an end is to be understood and in what ways it is manifested. According to Botero's explanation below, the pursuit of the happiness of the people is considered an end of the state and of governance; however, this happiness is not understood as worldly pleasure and fulfillment, but rather as divine happiness—the peace and contentment of the soul given by God. This is because “tutti li sodisfacimenti dell'animo, eccetto quello, che dall'unirsi con Dio, e dal dipendere affatto da lui procede, sono come cibi senza virtù” (“all satisfactions of the soul, except that which proceeds from union with God and from total dependence on him, are like foods without virtue”) (Botero 1605, p. 100v).

In the following passage, Botero provides further clarification: “la via d'avvicinarsi à Dio, è di partecipare delle sue infinite perfettioni non è la falsa, ma la vera religione, e questa presa non per mezo, ma per fine de gli stati, e del governo loro, non più tosto tu la prenderai per mezo ch'ella non sia più vera, e reale ma finta, e ingannevole religione”. (“the way to approach God, and to participate in his infinite perfections is not the false, but the true religion, and this taken not as a means, but as an end of states, and of their government, you will not sooner take it as a means than it is no longer true and real, but a false and deceptive religion”.) (Botero 1605, p. 101r). The use of religion only as a means results in the loss of its intrinsic truth and purity, leading to its transformation into a false and deceptive religion. Accordingly, from the prince's perspective, treating religion as an end in itself means truly believing in Catholicism rather than pretending to be pious.

Similarly, in *Della ragion di Stato*, Botero underscores the significance of princes' genuine adherence to Catholicism, rather than merely feigning piety, which is precisely what both Aristotle and Machiavelli counsel tyrants or new princes to do. Regarding the maintenance of piety, Botero offers a counterpoint to Aristotle's position, articulated in Book V, Chapter 11 of the *Politics*. In this passage, Aristotle asserts, “a tyrant should always be seen to be outstandingly serious where matters concerning the gods are concerned” in order to retain his authority (Aristotle 2017, p. 298). However, it seems more probable that Botero is refuting Machiavelli. In *Il Principe*, Machiavelli observes, “by appearing to have them, they are useful, as it is to appear merciful, faithful, humane, honest, and religious, and to be so; but to remain with a spirit built so that, if you need not to be those things, you are able and know how to change to the contrary. This has to be understood: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion” (Machiavelli 1998, p. 70). The new prince must appear pious but not necessarily remain pious. However, Botero argues that it is more beneficial for the prince to be pious than to feign piety. For example, in Chapter 15 of Book II of *Della ragion di Stato*, he remarks, “egli è difficile che chi non è veramente religioso sia stimato tale, poiché non è cosa che manco duri che la simulazione”. (“it is difficult that he who is not truly religious be considered so because there is nothing that lasts less than simulation”) (Botero 2016, p. 86; 2017, p. 62). In Chapter 16, he states, “E prima conviene ch'egli schivi gli estremi che sono la simulazione e la superstizione, quella perché (come ho già detto) non può durare e, scoperta, discredita affatto il simulatore, questa perché porta seco disprezzo”. (“And it is necessary first that he avoid the extremes which are simulation and superstition, the former because, as I have said, it cannot last and, once discovered, entirely discredits the simulator, the latter because it causes contempt”). (Botero 2016, p. 91; 2017, p. 65). It is evident that a disguise is not a durable strategy, and once it is exposed, it inevitably leads to the discrediting of the pretender. This is particularly true in the case of a prince who pretends to be pious, as such an act can result in a loss of prestige and even power. In other words, a prince can lead more effectively and enduringly only by projecting sincere religious faith.

In summary, on the one hand, Botero does not concur with the assertion that Catholicism is merely an instrument of governance; however, he acknowledges the political function or instrumental value of religion, which is powerful in this regard and indispensable for the governance of the state. On the other hand, he is unequivocal in asserting that Catholicism serves as the foundation of the state and the purpose of governance. While Catholicism does not promise worldly, material happiness, it can bring peace and fulfillment to the souls, connecting people's souls to God, keeping them united, rendering them less greedy and less concerned with worldly affairs, and making them desirous of peace and enemies of rumors and scandals, thus reducing domestic unrest, which is mainly caused by human greed, and maintaining peace and stability in the country. Consequently, it is believed that princes should adhere to the Catholic faith themselves and endeavor to ensure that their subjects do so as well. Additionally, they should seek to minimize instances of heresy and facilitate conversions to Catholicism. As Botero reveals in his dedication of the first part of *Le Relazioni universali*, the goal set by the circumstances at the time is precisely “la conversione degli infedeli, e la riduzione degli heretici” (“the conversion of infidels and the reduction of heresies”) (Botero 1591, n. III). In the second book of *Della ragion di Stato*, Chapter 16, he reiterates, “essendo tanta l'importanza della religione per lo felice governo e per la quiete de gli Stati, deve il prencipe favorirla e con ogni suo studio dilatarla”. (“because of the great importance of religion for the successful government and peace of the states, the prince ought to favor it and make efforts for its expansion”). (Botero 2016, pp. 90–91; 2017, p. 65). Promoting the dissemination of Catholicism is one of the missions of the Catholic princes.

5. Conclusions

It is important to note that while Botero asserts that the prince should adhere to the tenets of Catholicism and make it the foundation of the state, this does not imply that he expects the prince to strictly adhere to Catholic moral norms in governance. Indeed, he posits that princes may employ means that violate moral and religious norms in domestic and foreign affairs, not only when the state faces significant internal or external threats, but also in the routine maintenance and strengthening of the state (though major matters are subject to review by the council of conscience). This is particularly evident in his *Della ragion di Stato*.

For example, in Chapter 7, “Of Secrecy”, of the second book of *Della ragion di Stato*, he emphasizes that those who deal with matters of peace and war (especially princes) should cultivate the arts of concealment and disguise, similar to Machiavelli's statement in Chapter 18 of *Il Principe* that “it is necessary to know well how to color this nature, and to be a great pretender and dissembler” (Machiavelli 1998, p. 70). In Book II, Chapter 11, “Of the Ways to Preserve Reputation”, Botero also makes the point that many princes, despite their lack of strength, manage to maintain their authority and reputation by concealing their weaknesses and incompetence rather than by seeking to enhance their capabilities. In Book IX, Chapter 22, “Of Stratagems”, he posits that the use of stratagems and ruses is not only justifiable but also brings great honor to generals, who should therefore make good use of them. It is noteworthy that, in order to maintain peace and stability in the country, it may be necessary to take more drastic measures to prevent or stop riots, revolutions, and rebellions, even in less urgent circumstances. As evidenced in Book IV, Chapter 1, “On the Way to Avoid Rumbings and Rebellions”, Botero states that the mere provision of diversions and amusements to the populace is insufficient for the prevention of riots and rebellions; additional measures are required to prevent the populace from revolting and disturbing the public peace and the majesty of the prince. In particular, it is essential to deny them the opportunity and means to revolt. Furthermore, in Book V, Chapter 4, “How they Have to be Discouraged”, Chapter 6, “How to Weaken the Power”, Chapter 7, “How to Weaken their Union”, and Chapter 8, “How to Take Away the Means of Uniting with Other Peoples”, he explicitly indicates that to preserve peace and maintain the obedience of the subjects, and to prevent rebellion even when they possess the courage to do so, three methods can be

employed: by humbling their spirits, weakening their strength, and preventing them from uniting. Moreover, in Book V, Chapter 9, “Of the Means to Calm Troubles Once they have Arisen”, he proposes that when disturbances have already occurred, the source of these disturbances should be compelled, and the root of the problem should be addressed as soon as possible, which necessitates the clandestine and expeditious elimination of the leaders.

It is evident that, despite his vehement criticism of Machiavelli in several works and his portrayal of himself as an anti-Machiavellian, Botero ultimately espouses a form of Machiavelli’s realism. This entails the recognition that, in the long run and from a global perspective, adherence to moral and religious norms in significant matters is essential and advantageous. However, in the short term and from a local perspective, there is no discernible benefit in rigidly aligning with these norms. In other words, there are instances where immoral actions are undertaken in conjunction with the moral and religious planning of Botero as a whole (Malcolm 2007, p. 99).

From our analyses of *De regia sapientia* to *Della ragion di Stato* and then to *Relatione della Repubblica venetiana*, Botero’s religious perspective becomes progressively evident and pronounced. He denounces the impious Machiavelli, yet he is unable to entirely disassociate himself from the influence of Machiavelli’s political discourse and ideas. Instead, he integrates and adjusts his own religious ideas with them. To phrase it otherwise, while denouncing the immorality and impiety of Machiavellianism, Botero seeks to construct a realist political theory that does not defy Catholic authority. This requires the creation of a robust state ruled by a Catholic prince, an alliance between religion and the state, the establishment of religion as the foundation of the state, and the mutual assistance of the state and religion in achieving a common goal: to convert more people to Catholicism, render the subjects more obedient, and simultaneously reinforce the state’s military and other strengths. This enables the country and Catholicism to better maintain themselves and grow further in the context of challenging international circumstances, including religious conflicts and the Reformation. This is particularly evident in his theory of the reason of state, or, more accurately, the reason of state is at the core of Botero’s politico-religious thought. In contrast to Machiavelli, who views the reason of state as a political exception—namely, the prince’s transgression of traditional morality in pressing circumstances for the sake of the state—Botero presents it as a new norm and normality, or, as Michel Foucault termed it, “le type de rationalité” (“the type of rationality”) (Foucault 2004, p. 243): the reason of state represents the totality of knowledge necessary for the governance of the state; whether in times of war or peace, almost any means of governing that does not deny the supremacy of Catholic authority could be used to maintain and strengthen the state and Catholicism. As Botero articulates explicitly in an essay entitled “Della Neutralità” (“On Neutrality”) in his *Aggiunte alla sua Ragion di Stato* (1598), “ragion di Stato è poco altro, che ragion d’interesse” (“reason of state is little else than reason of interest”) (Botero 1598, p. 68). Indeed, the essence of the reason of state is interest, which encompasses both state interest and religious interest. For Catholic states, since religion is the foundation and purpose of the state, the core interest of the state is consistent with the fundamental interest of religion.

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Article

Religious Policies and Civil Conflict: “Italian” Perspectives on the French Wars of Religion

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Abstract: This paper investigates the complex relations between the Italian states, particularly Venice and Florence, and France at the beginning (c. 1560–1565) of the French Wars of Religion (c. 1560–1598). Focusing on the early years of the conflict, it highlights the “Italian” perception of France’s politico-religious upheavals and their profound implications for governance and state stability. Drawing on diplomatic correspondence and political reflections, the analysis reveals contrasting approaches among Venetian ambassadors: in particular, Giovanni Michiel advocated conciliatory policies to avert civil war, while Michele Suriano favored uncompromising anti-heresy measures. Niccolò Tornabuoni, serving as the Florentine ambassador in France, evolved from moderate criticism to a rigidly anti-Protestant position, mirroring Cosimo de’ Medici’s shift toward Counter-Reformation policies. This study situates these early reflections within the broader context of Venice’s internal tensions, marked by the diffusion of Reformation ideas and anti-papal currents, and Florence’s strategic alignment with Spain. It also underscores the role of these conflicts in shaping the politico-diplomatic strategies and reinforcing the perceived necessity of religious uniformity as a safeguard against political and social destabilization. The final part is directly linked to the sources and arguments as it contextualizes the diplomatic responses of Venetian and Florentine envoys within the broader political–religious transformations of the period.

Keywords: French Wars of Religion; Venetian diplomacy; Florentine politics; religious conflict; state stability and religious uniformity; Italian perceptions of France; 16th-century European diplomacy

1. Introduction

This paper presents some insights and reflections on the relationships between the Italian states, particularly Venice and Florence, and France during the period of the religious wars that devastated the “Most Christian Kingdom” for nearly forty years (c. 1560–1598), as well as the “Italian” perception of these conflicts. This perception played a crucial role in shaping significant domestic and foreign policy decisions within the Italian states and was the subject of careful reflection by contemporary political thinkers, who contributed to the widespread belief that religious uniformity was a cornerstone of state stability. Particular attention is given to the early years of the French politico-religious conflict (the first half of the 1560s). The starting point is the diplomatic correspondence produced by envoys of the Italian states, a type of source which, by virtue of its immediacy and institutional nature, offers a privileged vantage point for examining the orientations and decision-making processes of rulers and other key political actors. The distinctive value of these materials lies precisely in their capacity to capture the formulation and articulation of political

strategies at the very moment of their negotiation and implementation. Their hybrid character—situated at the intersection of information gathering, rhetorical construction, and political mediation—renders them particularly suitable for investigating a decisive phase in the history of the Mediterranean and of early modern Europe.

Methodologically, this approach also aligns with recent historiographical developments concerning the circulation of political knowledge and the infrastructures of communication in early modern diplomacy. Scholars such as Filippo de Vivo (see, in particular, De Vivo 2018; see also De Vivo 2011) have made important contributions to this topic, his work having significantly advanced our understanding of the interplay between archival practices, intelligence gathering, and the elaboration of political strategies. The relatively concise nature of this paper reflects the intention of providing an introduction to the key themes of continuity and change in “Italian” diplomatic perspectives during the early years of the French Wars of Religion. The expression “Wars of Religion” is used here in its conventional historiographical sense, while acknowledging the ongoing scholarly debate on the nature of these conflicts. Some scholars prefer the term “French Civil Wars” to emphasize political and dynastic factors over confessional divisions. The choice of terminology in this article reflects the dual nature of the conflict as perceived by Italian observers—religious in origin yet deeply embedded in questions of political legitimacy and governance.

This approach, while aimed at offering clarity and synthesis, also requires methodological caution, particularly when engaging with complex source material and historiographical traditions. Negotiating the complex interplay between contemporary diplomatic sources and historiographical interpretation necessitates a critical awareness of the risks of over-interpretation, in which modern analyses may impose retrospective coherence or theoretical frameworks that are insufficiently anchored in the sources themselves. These risks—further addressed in the concluding section—are especially evident in certain historiographical works that, in the pursuit of originality, privilege speculative constructions over empirical grounding or rely disproportionately on isolated documents to sustain ambitious and often exaggerated claims.

This paper’s primary focus is on the Italian perspective, and its methodology reflects this priority. The focus of this article is not on providing a comprehensive historiographical overview but on foregrounding the Italian perspective, particularly through Venetian and Florentine diplomatic correspondence. This situates this article within the field of transnational perspectives on the French Wars of Religion. Given its focus, this study necessarily foregrounds Italian diplomatic sources, which offer a privileged lens through which to interpret the perceptions, rhetorical strategies, and ideological filters employed by contemporary observers. All quotations from Italian diplomatic documents are presented in their original language for reasons of accuracy and interpretation; English translations are provided to ensure accessibility. Moreover, the interpretive framework adopted here draws on insights from both diplomatic history and the history of political thought. It aims to link the analysis of textual sources with broader historiographical considerations concerning early modern governance, confessional conflict, and the mechanisms through which political and religious authority were negotiated across borders. By emphasizing how Italian diplomats articulated their judgments through ideological filters shaped by both personal beliefs and state loyalties, the analysis positions itself at the intersection of rhetorical strategy and political necessity. The final part of this paper focuses on the broader political environment in which Venetian and Florentine diplomacy operated, highlighting the significant political–religious transformations of the period. Its function is to provide a wider perspective, showing, in particular, how the papacy’s shifting attitudes influenced “Italian” diplomatic priorities.

The following questions underpin this study: how did the ideological and political filters employed by Italian diplomats affect the representation and understanding of the French religious crisis, and what do these filters reveal about broader European perceptions of confessional conflict?

2. France in the Mirror: A Before and an After

In order to more precisely define the interpretive approach of the present analysis, it is worth beginning with an examination of earlier modes of perceiving and representing the political and religious identity of the French kingdom as they emerged throughout the sixteenth century. Far from being incidental, such perceptions—articulated with remarkable lucidity and often with rhetorical sophistication by Italian diplomats, envoys, and curial observers—constitute an essential preliminary framework for understanding the ideological filters through which later events were interpreted. These early appraisals not only reflect a cultural grammar specific to the Italian political imagination but also anticipate, in significant ways, the dialectical oppositions that would come to shape the theological and political language of the Counter-Reformation. The emphasis on obedience, the sacralization of monarchy, and the presumed link between national character and confessional allegiance are all categories that precede and condition the diplomatic reactions to the outbreak of civil and religious violence in France. The explosion of the French political–religious conflict marks a clear shift in the “Italian” diplomatic gaze—an event that defines a before and an after: a fracture separating the initial, confident admiration of a cohesive monarchy from the subsequent, anxious search for principles capable of reconciling political stability with confessional upheaval. The dramatic escalation of events gave rise to a growing sense of disorientation and analytical urgency, as diplomats and political observers found themselves compelled to reassess their interpretive frameworks in light of a kingdom increasingly destabilized by doctrinal fragmentation and civil unrest. This transformation laid the groundwork for more nuanced and layered reflections on the nexus between religious identity and political legitimacy, in which the imperative to safeguard the stability of the state became an overriding concern amid the intensifying pressures of confessional division.

In his “Relazione di Francia” of 1547, the Venetian ambassador Marino Cavalli¹ painted a portrait *à part entière* of the French kingdom, meticulously emphasizing its great wealth of resources and revenues, while also highlighting the extremely obedient nature of the French people and their complete submission to the absolute power of the king: “Molti regni sono più fertili e più ricchi di quello, come Ungaria ed Italia; molti più grandi e potenti, come Spagna e Germania; ma niuno tanto unito né tanto obbediente come Francia” (“Many kingdoms are more fertile and richer than this one, such as Hungary and Italy; many are larger and more powerful, such as Spain and Germany; but none is as united or as obedient as France”). Despite liberty being the most precious good in the world, the French, according to the ambassador, proved themselves unworthy of it, preferring “unione ed obbedienza” and entrusting all their freedom into the hands of the king. “Ed è andata tanto innanzi questa cosa—the ambassador added somewhat sarcastically,—che ora pur qualch’uno, che ha più spirito degli altri, dice, che siccome prima li suoi re si chiamavano *reges Francorum*, ora si possono dimandar *reges servorum*” (“And this matter has advanced so much that now, even someone with more spirit than others says that, just as their kings were once called *reges Francorum*, they can now be called *reges servorum*”) (Cavalli 1839, p. 232).

Given the French people’s reputation for obedience—described by Giovanni Michiel², Venetian ambassador at the time of the Amboise conspiracy in March 1560, as “non solo straordinaria, ma singolare, non veduta in altro re né principe cristiano” (“not

merely extraordinary but unique, unparalleled in any other king or Christian prince”) (Michiel 1853, p. 419)—neither Venetian nor Florentine observers could have foreseen that this kingdom might descend into the disorder and chaos that marked the decades of the religious wars. Nor could they have imagined that a confession hostile to the one professed by the king could achieve such remarkable success.

The relations between Venice and France during these tumultuous years are particularly interesting when viewed against the backdrop of Venice’s unique situation. The Venetian Republic was experiencing the widespread diffusion of Reformation ideas and radical heresies across its territory alongside the rise of increasingly anti-papal political orientations within its patriciate³. These orientations eventually coalesced into the party of the *Giovani*, thoroughly studied by Gaetano Cozzi (see, in particular, Cozzi 1995), and were intertwined with the traditional sacral exaltation of Venetian institutions, which fostered a natural competition with Rome. In the Venetian context, even in the mid-16th century, a tradition of state–church identity and regarding state justice as God’s justice persisted, which, in some respects, can be considered of Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine origin: a certain sacredness continued to permeate political institutions. The Doge, an emblematic case, besides being a political leader, was regarded, in the consciences of individuals, as a religious leader and rival to the Pope⁴. Opposing these anti-Roman tendencies, however, was a minority “papista” faction, which nevertheless managed to exert some influence on the Venetian political scene.

This broader context helps illuminate how the diplomatic reception and interpretation of the French religious crisis by Italian observers reveal not only pragmatic concerns related to the maintenance of public order and the preservation of dynastic legitimacy but also deeper anxieties linked to the instability of political and confessional boundaries. The lexical choices and conceptual categories mobilized in Venetian and Florentine diplomatic correspondence—often rich in metaphor and ideological nuance—prefigure what would later become the dominant language of Catholic political thought during the mature phase of the Counter-Reformation. In this sense, these sources should not be viewed merely as passive reflections of external events but rather as active contributions to the formation of a transregional discourse on authority, orthodoxy, and the dangers of religious pluralism. The correspondents’ emphasis on loyalty, obedience, and the unity of faith and sovereignty offers a privileged window into the evolving political theology of the period. Their reflections function, in many respects, as a mirror of broader European anxieties—concerns that revolved around the potential disintegration of social cohesion in the face of confessional fragmentation, civil conflict, and the increasingly urgent quest for new and sustainable equilibria between power, faith, and legitimacy.

3. “Italian” Diplomacy and the “Explosion” of the French Conflict

Within this context, it is particularly illuminating to examine how Venetian diplomats and rulers reflected on the French situation, comparing their perceptions with those of diplomats and rulers from other Italian states, especially Florence, given the Medici family’s close ties to the French kingdom. The degree of “sympathy” or “antipathy” they might have felt towards the Huguenots, the intransigent Catholics, or figures such as Queen Mother Catherine de’ Medici and Chancellor Michel de l’Hospital—who, while remaining faithful to Catholicism, advocated for a conciliatory approach—offers valuable insights into Venetian perceptions of, and reactions to, the religious and political turmoil in France⁵.

An examination of the diplomatic correspondence and “Relazioni” of the three ambassadors who served in France between the Amboise conspiracy (March 1560) and the First War of Religion (March/April 1562–March 1563)—Giovanni Michiel, Michele Suriano, and Marcantonio Barbaro—reveals the significant influence of each ambassador’s ideo-

logical orientation on their interpretation of events. Notably, there is a clear divergence in perspective between Giovanni Michiel, ordinary ambassador from December 1557 to November 1560 (and, not by chance, given his acquired experience and earned trust, sent back to France as ambassador extraordinary in 1572, 1575, and 1578 during highly delicate moments—he was also a witness to the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre), who strongly favored a conciliatory solution, and Michele Suriano⁶, ambassador from November 1560 to November 1561, who aligned himself with the intransigent Catholic faction. Acting as a mediator between these two approaches, with a tendency toward greater pragmatism, was the position of Marcantonio Barbaro, who succeeded Suriano and served as ambassador in France until June 1564⁷.

The evolution of relations between Florence and France during this same period is also of considerable interest. It is well known that, during the 1540s and 1550s, Duke Cosimo de’ Medici pursued an anti-papal policy and was suspected of heretical leanings—evident in his protection of numerous heretics, including Pietro Carnesecchi, and in the controversial frescoes by Pontormo in San Lorenzo. However, by the early 1560s, particularly from 1562 onward, Cosimo embarked on a dramatic realignment toward the Counter-Reformation⁸. It is essential to assess how this shift in Cosimo’s stance impacted the ambassador who represented Florence during this dramatic early period of the French Wars of Religion, Niccolò Tornabuoni⁹.

A comparative analysis of the evolution of Venetian and Florentine relations with France and their respective dynamics with Spain would also be illuminating. Venetian relations with Spain became increasingly strained under Philip II, exacerbated by the strengthening of the Rome–Spain alliance in the name of the Counter-Reformation—developments that foreshadowed the direct confrontation of the Interdict conflict, which set Venice in opposition to Rome between 1606 and 1607. In contrast, Florence maintained a strong alignment with Spain. However, whereas this alliance had previously been with Emperor Charles V, who was often at odds with the papacy and a protector of *Spirituali* and *alumbados*, it now involved his son, Philip II, the “champion” of the Counter-Reformation in Europe. Cosimo’s shift toward embracing the Counter-Reformation mirrored Spain’s political–religious transformation, marked by the triumph of the Inquisition and the Counter-Reformation beginning in the late 1550s.

Diplomatic correspondence from this period serves as a crucial source for a more comprehensive understanding of these events. Until the Amboise conspiracy, French religious conflicts were often downplayed by diplomats, who reacted to the conspiracy with astonishment and surprise. This correspondence thus documents how the issue erupted unexpectedly and provides nuanced analyses that help to identify its underlying causes. Moreover, it offers invaluable insights into the orientations and decisions of the principal actors on the French political stage—and beyond. Particularly significant are the ambassadors’ accounts of their conversations with key court dignitaries and other political players, especially when the ambassador succeeded in establishing a rapport of trust and mutual understanding with his interlocutors.

Giovanni Cappello¹⁰, Venetian ambassador to France from 1551 to 1554, noted in his *Relazione* of 1554 that King Henri II’s “regola principale” had been “tener la guerra lontana dalla Francia, non risparmiando a spesa né ad altra cosa, giudicando che ogni minimo danno sia grande avendolo in casa, ed ogni altro sia minore avendolo lontano” (“to keep war away from France, sparing no expense or effort, believing that even the smallest harm is great when it is within the country, and that any other harm is lesser when it is far away” (Cappello 1840, p. 282)). This observation highlights the monarch’s strategic focus on preventing conflicts within the French borders, preserving internal order and social cohesion as fundamental conditions for the stability of the realm and the effective

exercise of royal authority in a period marked by intense geopolitical pressure and growing religious tensions. Rather than indicating a straightforward preference for external over internal engagements, Henri II's approach suggests a calculated effort to externalize conflict as a means of forestalling its potentially destabilizing repercussions within the kingdom. In this sense, the recourse to foreign war may be interpreted not as a distraction from domestic priorities but as a mechanism for containing them.

An examination of Venetian correspondence and *Relazioni* reveals the explosive nature of the conflict: until 1559, there were no significant references to France's religious problems, let alone to the possibility that such issues could politically destabilize the kingdom. The Amboise conspiracy both surprised and alarmed Ambassador Michiel, as well as the prominent figures at court. This event reinforced among diplomats (and their rulers) the conviction that religious unity was inseparably linked to the stability of the state. Michiel observed that it was "cosa ordinaria, confermata con tanti esempi [. . .] che con la mutazione della religione, avvenga di necessaria conseguenza la mutazione degli stati" ("ordinary matter, confirmed by so many examples [. . .] that with the change of religion, the change of states necessarily follows") (Michiel 1853, p. 428).

While the three ambassadors—Michiel, Suriano, and Barbaro—agreed on the fundamental link between religious unity and state stability, their perspectives on the French political and religious situation diverged significantly, shaped by their ideological convictions and personal backgrounds.

Giovanni Michiel, who seems to have taken a very moderate Catholic position, was openly supportive of a conciliatory policy between Catholics and Protestants. He praised Queen Catherine de' Medici for her clear opposition to the policies of the Guise family and the more intransigent Catholics. Michiel foresaw two possible scenarios: either an "Interim" or the use of force, "con metter senza rispetto la mano nel sangue nobile" ("to lay a hand disrespectfully upon noble blood"), which would result in an open civil war, "una guerra civile aperta" (Ibid.), a possibility that would have simultaneously led to the ruin of both the kingdom and the religion. He seemed to insinuate between the lines that the "Interim", publicly desired and requested by the Huguenots "non ad altro fine che per aver delle chiese da poter predicare, leggere, ed esercitar i riti della loro dottrina, senza biasmo o pericolo" ("with no other aim than to have churches where they could preach, read, and perform the rites of their doctrine, without reproach or danger") (Ibid., pp. 427–28), was the best solution.

Michiel justified his favorable stance toward religious tolerance with practical considerations, arguing that it was the best means of avoiding "una guerra civile aperta". It is possible that his views reflected a widely held sentiment at court at the time, where tolerance and conciliation were seen as necessary to avert catastrophe. However, it remains less clear whether Michiel was at all influenced by Protestant or *Spirituali* ideas.

His opinion was partially shared by Florentine ambassador Niccolò Tornabuoni, who also acknowledged the practical advantages of such an approach. Nonetheless, Tornabuoni added a caveat, expressing skepticism about the long-term viability of confessional coexistence: "Ma poichè il male è tanto moltiplicato, il minore che si possa eleggere è di dare abilità a ciascuno che viva come gli pare, senza ingiuriare nessuno, il che non può durare" ("But since the evil has multiplied so greatly, the least harmful choice is to allow everyone to live as they see fit, without harming anyone, which cannot last")¹¹.

The perspective of Ambassador Suriano stands in stark contrast to that of his predecessor, Michiel. Suriano not only criticized the proponents of the Reformation but also those who supported a conciliatory policy, whom he essentially equated with heretics. In both his correspondence from France and the *Relazione* delivered to the Venetian Senate

upon his return, Suriano devoted considerable attention to the Lutheran origins of heresy, demonstrating a fervent anti-heretical religious zeal¹².

Ambassador Barbaro, for his part, expressed views similar to those of his predecessor Suriano regarding the necessity of punishing heretics but was notably less intransigent and more “diplomatic” in his approach. He displayed a lesser degree of aversion toward heresy, treating it primarily as a political issue rather than a strictly theological one. Barbaro consistently advocated for a moderate approach in diplomatic negotiations and discussions, contrasting his conduct with that of the Spanish ambassador, Thomas Perrenot de Chantonnay, and adopting a more pragmatic and less ideologically rigid stance compared to Suriano (see Barbaro 1860; Layard 1891).

In the broader analysis of ambassadorial perspectives, a few additional considerations may help to clarify certain nuances of the diplomatic attitudes explored. While a comprehensive event-by-event narrative falls outside the intended scope, it is useful to briefly mention some key episodes that exemplify the general climate in which diplomatic actors operated, including episodes that have been rightly emphasized by reviewers as essential to contextualizing the Italian ambassadors’ reports.

In particular, the Estates General of Orléans (December 1560–January 1561) and the colloquy of Poissy (September–October 1561) marked crucial attempts at institutional and theological mediation, which generated considerable interest and concern among foreign observers. Equally significant were the January Edict of 1562, which extended limited toleration to Protestants, and the massacre of Wassy (1 March 1562), which occurred shortly afterward and is generally regarded as the event that triggered the first war of religion. These episodes, emblematic of both hope and rupture, illustrate the intensity of the French crisis and the fragility of the balance that royal authority sought to maintain. While the failure of Poissy revealed the limits of theological reconciliation, the violence at Wassy brutally exposed the volatility of confessional coexistence and the risks of a wavering political line.

Moreover, the rapid succession of royal edicts—each attempting, with varying degrees of ambiguity, to mediate between opposing factions—conveyed to many observers a sense of confusion or hesitation at the heart of the monarchy. This succession of measures, issued with increasing urgency between 1560 and 1562, contributed to an atmosphere of institutional fragility that did not escape the notice of Italian diplomats accustomed to more centralized religious policies. Their perceptions were shaped not only by the events themselves but also by the broader impression of a kingdom losing control over the religious narrative and, consequently, over the instruments of governance.

Suriano, who served as Venetian ambassador to France during a particularly sensitive period (late 1560 to late 1561), witnessed some of these events directly. His correspondence reveals a consistent skepticism toward conciliatory measures. For instance, his reaction to the April 1561 edict forbidding mutual insults between Catholics and Protestants betrays an underlying anxiety about the weakening of royal authority. Suriano noted that such measures, while well-intentioned, risked undermining obedience to the crown precisely because they lacked effective implementation. This comment reveals a broader concern: that the proliferation of edicts without enforcement contributed to the erosion of political order and that attempts to mediate between confessions inevitably favored instability. In his view, the authority of the state was inseparable from religious unity, and wavering in doctrine translated into wavering in governance.

A similar concern emerges in the tone of his *Relazione* to the Venetian Senate, where Suriano draws a direct connection between the multiplication of religious opinions and the decline of monarchical control. Unlike Michiel, who entertained the possibility of religious compromise as a means of avoiding civil war, Suriano viewed tolerance not as a political

necessity but as a form of dangerous weakness. He interpreted the conciliatory efforts of Catherine de' Medici and Michel de l'Hospital as signs of moral and political equivocation, which ultimately emboldened heretical factions. His reports frequently juxtapose the moderation of the French crown with the perceived firmness of Philip II of Spain, implicitly suggesting the superiority of repression over dialogue.

Regarding Niccolò Tornabuoni, while his correspondence as Florentine ambassador does not offer the same frequency or richness as that of his Venetian counterparts, we may note that it nonetheless displays a gradual hardening of tone between 1560 and 1565. Early in his mission, Tornabuoni observed the religious tensions with a certain detachment, occasionally criticizing both the intransigence of the Guise faction and the passivity of the crown. However, as the civil war progressed and Cosimo de' Medici's political strategy shifted in favor of the Spanish–Imperial and Counter-Reformation bloc, Tornabuoni's tone became markedly more severe. In several dispatches, he hinted at his disapproval of Catherine de' Medici's religious leniency, using language that, while formally respectful, echoed the suspicions of heresy that were circulating in certain Catholic circles. His reports gradually moved from cautious moderation to open condemnation of attempts at confessional compromise¹³.

These evolutions underscore the complexity of diplomatic reporting as a genre: ambassadors did not merely observe events but interpreted them through ideological filters shaped by both personal beliefs and political loyalties. They also suggest that, even within a relatively narrow chronological framework, positions could shift significantly in response to broader geopolitical realignments. It is also evident that diplomatic correspondence served not only as a source of information but also as a tool for persuasion, aimed at influencing the policies of the sending state through a particular reading of events abroad.

The examples cited here are not exhaustive but aim to show how selected moments in the ambassadors' correspondence reinforce the central argument of this article: that the "Italian" diplomatic perspective on the French Wars of Religion was shaped less by theological reasoning than by pragmatic concerns about political stability and the perceived dangers of religious pluralism. In this sense, the Venetian and Florentine diplomats, despite their varying temperaments and allegiances, often arrived at a similar conclusion: that tolerance might be admirable in principle but was dangerous in practice. This convergence helps explain why, over the course of the 1560s, the Italian states increasingly moved toward the imposition of religious uniformity as a condition for internal cohesion and external credibility. While often framed as a pragmatic necessity, the ideal of religious uniformity was not without internal contradictions. Italian diplomats appear to accept it as axiomatic, yet their correspondence occasionally reveals ambivalence about the means required to enforce it—a tension that merits further comparative investigation.

Despite the divergences, which occasionally shaped their narratives and judgments of events, the ambassadors' correspondence nonetheless provides valuable insights into the orientations and reasoning behind the decisions of the principal actors on the French political stage during these tumultuous years. For instance, this correspondence reveals that, from the very onset of the conflict, the division between moderate and intransigent Catholics was already pronounced. It sheds light on the conciliatory stance of Catherine de' Medici and other key court figures, particularly Michel de l'Hospital, whose position was grounded not only in practical considerations but also in Neoplatonic ideals. These ideals were incomprehensible to more rigid Catholics, such as Suriano, who hastily equated them with Protestant heresy.

4. Religious Conflict and the Diplomacy of Stabilization

With the outbreak of the religious wars, conflict penetrated the very heart of France. This was a civil war that, in the eyes of foreign observers, shattered the image of a kingdom previously perceived as grounded in extraordinary unity and a spirit of obedience. In this context, the unifying authority of the monarch was increasingly eroded, giving way to the influence of various grandees and faction leaders. Foreign observers were profoundly struck by the dramatic nature of this conflict, which in turn fueled political reflection and debate across Europe, as highlighted by an important study by Cornel Zwierlein published in 2006 under the title *Discurso und Lex Dei*, which analyzed the emergence of new conceptual paradigms in the 16th century, focusing on the perception of the French Wars of Religion in Piedmont-Savoy and Germany. The author examined the role of divine law (*Lex Dei*) and political discourse in redefining the relationship between secular and religious authority, highlighting how the French conflicts influenced both Italian reflections on political stability and German doctrinal interpretations. The combined analysis of diplomatic and theological sources allows the author to demonstrate how these wars accelerated the development of new models of state sovereignty and the governance of religious diversity, contributing to the rise of modern political thought¹⁴.

Moving beyond specific aspects, the broader “lessons” drawn by Venetian, Florentine, and other rulers from the French experience were of great significance. These lessons influenced their domestic and foreign policy choices, offering critical reflections on governance and stability amidst religious conflict.

The diplomatic perception of the French conflict effectively “justifies” the repression and suppression of religious dissent within one’s own borders—a dynamic observed not only in Venice but also in other Italian states. The Tuscan case is particularly noteworthy. During the 1540s and 1550s, Duke Cosimo de’ Medici pursued a decidedly anti-papal policy and was even suspected of heresy. However, beginning in the 1560s, and especially from 1562 onward, Cosimo initiated a sudden and striking rapprochement with the Counter-Reformation, marking a dramatic shift in his political and religious orientation (see again Firpo 1997, 2021; Firpo and Biferali 2016, pp. 156–230). The correspondence of the Florentine ambassador to France, Niccolò Tornabuoni, bishop of Sansepolcro, whose long-lasting mission spanned from 1560 to 1565 (see Canestrini 1865, pp. 423–513), succeeding his uncle Alfonso Tornabuoni—also bishop of Sansepolcro and ambassador from September 1559 to June 1560 and a witness to the Amboise conspiracy (see Canestrini 1865, pp. 406–22; see also Arrighi 2019, (DBI))—illustrates a significant evolution in his stance. Initially (1560–1561), Tornabuoni expressed moderate criticism of France’s religious difficulties, occasionally taking a polemical stance against the Guise family and other intransigent Catholics. However, over time, his tone became increasingly uncompromising and anti-heretical. He even directed veiled accusations of heresy toward Catherine de’ Medici, criticizing her conciliatory policies. Tornabuoni’s shifting perspective was further complicated by the strained relationship between Catherine and Duke Cosimo de’ Medici. Despite their familial ties, tensions arose due to Cosimo’s alignment with pro-Spanish policies, which contrasted with Catherine’s more independent and conciliatory approach. This diplomatic tension did not merely reflect diverging foreign policy agendas but also underscored the deeper ideological and confessional fault lines that shaped the political identities of both courts. Tornabuoni’s evolving language—initially cautious and at times ambivalent, then progressively sharper and doctrinally aligned—offers valuable insight into the ways in which personal loyalties, dynastic calculations, and religious allegiances intersected within the broader framework of Catholic monarchic diplomacy. His reports must be read not only as instruments of information but also as vehicles of political posi-

tioning, subtly modulated according to the shifting equilibrium between Rome, France, and Spain.

This general dynamic is clearly reflected in several letters sent by Niccolò Tornabuoni as the situation progressively deteriorated and France was engulfed in the chaos of religious conflict. In the correspondence from October 1561, Tornabuoni recorded in vivid terms that the evil was spreading throughout the entire kingdom (*"Il male cresce per tutto il regno"*), a remark that encapsulates the growing alarm within Catholic circles regarding the unchecked progress of religious dissent. Tornabuoni also conveys increasing suspicion toward Catherine de' Medici, reporting that many at court attributed the spread of heresy to her decision to grant safe conduct to Protestant leaders, ostensibly to preserve political stability: *"Pare che non siano pochi coloro che pensano come i protestanti, e dicesi tutta la colpa essere della Regina, la quale per governare, acconsenti alla domanda di Navarra, e che a costoro si desse salvacondotto"* (*"It seems that quite a few share the Protestants' views, and it is said that all the blame lies with the Queen, who, in order to govern, agreed to Navarre's request that these people be granted safe conduct"*) (Canestrini 1865, p. 465). His tone, though formally deferential, aligns with the intensifying hostility found in Catholic diplomatic discourse at the time. In the correspondence from May 1562, Tornabuoni reports on the critical situation in Orléans, where the city had come under the control of Protestant forces. He describes the desecration of Catholic churches, the mistreatment of clergy, and the repurposing of sacred spaces for military use, actions allegedly tolerated—if not directly encouraged—by Admiral Coligny and François d'Andelot. Similar acts of violence and desecration were occurring across various provinces. In Toulouse, Huguenots and their ministers were reportedly massacred in large numbers, while unrest in cities like Rouen and growing fear among Protestants in Paris further illustrated the escalating chaos of the civil war. These events are presented as emblematic of the collapse of religious and social order under Protestant influence (Ibid., pp. 475–80).

In July 1562, Tornabuoni explicitly mentions the expectation of further military support from the Duke of Savoy and the King of Spain. In a report dated 17 July 1562, he recounts an audience granted by Catherine de' Medici, during which he conveyed, on behalf of Duke Cosimo de' Medici, offers of assistance for the preservation of both religion and the monarchy. However, the queen expressed hope that the conflict might still be settled peacefully. Moreover, she seemed to prefer monetary assistance over troops, fearing the political consequences of bringing too many foreign forces into the kingdom (Ibid., p. 492).

These descriptions frame the French Wars of Religion not merely as a domestic crisis, but as a European confessional battleground—one that required not only coordinated Catholic military intervention but also the strategic mobilization of diplomatic and financial resources across allied Catholic powers. In Tornabuoni's reports, France emerges as both a warning and a rallying point: a realm whose internal disorder calls for external solidarity, but whose sovereign remains cautious about the risks of overdependence on foreign force.

In April 1563, shortly after the assassination of François de Lorraine, Duke of Guise (died on 24 February 1563 after six days of agony following a fatal attack carried out by the Huguenot assassin Jean de Poltrot de Méré), and the signing of the Edict of Amboise (19 March 1563), Tornabuoni reported that the situation on the ground remained highly unstable. Huguenot ministers were assassinated in the very places where they attempted to preach, and religious refugees were often turned away or even killed upon their return home. In his words, *"Si dubita che la pace non abbi a durare lungamente, perchè nessuna provincia o città obbedisce all'editto. Ai cacciati non si permette il ritorno; i tornati s'insultano, ed è per tutto gran confusione, e non pochi ammazzamenti"* (*"One doubts that the peace will last for long, as no province or city is complying with the edict. Those who*

were expelled are not allowed to return; those who do return are subjected to insults, and there is widespread confusion and no small number of killings”) (Ibid., p. 504).

Peace, in this depiction, appears largely illusory, and the social order irreparably compromised—an image that implicitly legitimized the Tuscan state’s alignment with the Counter-Reformation and its repression of dissent within its own borders.

In 1565, Niccolò Tornabuoni was recalled to Tuscany and formally replaced as Florentine ambassador to France by Giovanni Maria Petrucci, who assumed his duties at the French court following the conclusion of his predecessor’s long and eventful diplomatic mission. In a letter addressed to Cosimo I, the French king, Charles IX, expressed high appreciation for the conduct of Niccolò Tornabuoni, whom he referred to as bishop of Sansepolcro: “(. . .) me contentant grandement des honnestes deportemens dont ledit évesque a usé pendant qu’il a séjourné auprès de moy (. . .)” (“being greatly satisfied with the honorable conduct shown by the said bishop during his time at my court”) (Ibid., p. 513).

This conclusion to Tornabuoni’s mission underscores the central role of the Florentine diplomatic presence at the French court and confirms that his correspondence, even in its final months, remains a key source for understanding the diplomatic reading of the French confessional conflict.

The analysis provided by Venetian diplomats, for its part, presents an image of a previously well-ordered and disciplined world descending into disorder and chaos due to religious fragmentation. This perspective is particularly significant in understanding why the Republic of Venice, despite strong anti-papal and anti-Roman sentiments within its ruling class and its general aversion to the Habsburgs, ultimately opted for Catholic religious uniformity. While religious divisions had already disrupted the German territories, the events unfolding in France appeared even more destabilizing.

The consequences of the Battle of Mühlberg (24 April 1547) had significantly weakened the German Protestants, making diplomatic interaction with them more difficult. This defeat also undermined the diplomatic leverage of those Protestant princes who had lobbied Venice to not persecute adherents of the Reformation within its territories. Between the mid-1540s and the 1560s—encompassing Giovanni della Casa’s nunciature (1544–1550) and Pietro Manelfi’s denunciation (1551) and, in the later years, coinciding with France’s descent into the abyss of the religious wars and the definitive triumph of the inquisitorial and intransigent faction in Spain—Venice shifted from a policy of moderate tolerance to increasingly stringent repression.

France, at least until the rise of the *politique* Henri IV, lost its status as a reliable diplomatic partner. This role would only be restored at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, within the context of the conflicts between Rome and Venice that culminated in the Interdict crisis (1606–1607). Significantly, however, when a Franco-Venetian alliance against Spain and Rome was proposed, Venetian ambassador Pietro Duodo, in 1598, invoked Venice’s long-standing neutrality—a principle he also credited as a cornerstone of the Republic’s successful maritime expansion¹⁵. Long before the turn of the century, however, the eruption of religious violence in France had already confirmed to Venetian rulers the validity of their chosen course: the best antidote to an open civil war was not, as both the Venetian ambassador Michiel and the Florentine ambassador Tornabuoni had argued, a policy of tolerance, but rather the imposition of religious uniformity.

Due to the political instability caused by the religious conflict, France ceased to be both a reliable partner and a potential ally—even for the papacy. The political crisis of the “Most Christian Kingdom” was exacerbated by the military debacle at the Battle of St. Quentin (10 August 1557) and the death of King Henri II (10 July 1559). Within the context of the Italian Wars, France had often acted as an ally of the papacy in its opposition to Spain. However, the French monarchy had shown little interest in religious matters. As

Alain Tallon has emphasized, France's participation in the early sessions of the Council of Trent was negligible—a shortsightedness that French dignitaries would come to bitterly repent from the late 1550s onward (see Tallon 1997).

5. Italian States, France, Spain, and the Counter-Reformation Paradigm: Conclusions

The notion that the Kingdom of France was inherently united and obedient, and therefore immune to the risk of severe political instability stemming from the spread of heresy, was widely held among contemporary political observers. This view is evident in the assessments of Venetian ambassadors prior to the outbreak of the religious wars. Even earlier, however, Niccolò Machiavelli, a keen observer of French political realities, had emphasized this idea in his *Ritratto di cose di Francia* (1510) (Machiavelli 1971).

These characteristics made France an ideal ally for the Papacy's ambitions in Italy. The final time that France allied with the Papacy within the context of the Italian Wars was during the pontificate of Paul IV (1555–1559), who had been born Gian Pietro Carafa. While the events discussed so far pertain directly to the years following 1560, a final retrospective glance at the pontificate of Paul IV is essential, as it provides an indispensable backdrop for understanding the ideological framework within which many Italian diplomats operated. The disastrous war waged by this pope against Charles V and Philip II, lasting from September 1556 to September 1557, formed only a minor part of the broader European military conflict between the Imperial and French forces that culminated in the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in April 1559. The treaty, profoundly unfavorable to France, proved quite durable as a result of the difficulties into which the Wars of Religion plunged the country¹⁶.

Paul IV's military conflict with the Habsburgs deserves greater attention as a potentially pivotal moment in events. Nurturing the grandiose illusion that he could “conquer” the Kingdom of Naples—his homeland by birth and aristocratic heritage—and expel the Habsburgs once and for all, he succeeded in convincing the French to intervene on his side against Charles V and Philip II, thereby breaking the recently concluded and advantageous truce of Vaucelles (February 1556). In January 1557, a military expedition led by François de Lorraine, Duke of Guise, was dispatched to support the pope. Guise would later play a central role in the first French War of Religion (1562–1563), which he helped to ignite with the massacre of the Huguenots at Wassy on 1 March 1562, and in which he would ultimately meet his death, assassinated while besieging Orléans in February 1563. In contrast, the Republic of Venice (despite heavy papal pressure) and the Duchy of Florence—whose pro-Spanish Duke Cosimo de' Medici drew Paul IV's ire—wisely remained neutral¹⁷.

Nevertheless, various more or less recent studies addressing Gian Pietro Carafa, Pope Paul IV—a complex and controversial figure in the sixteenth-century church (as Alberto Aubert demonstrated in his work on the assessment of Carafa by Counter-Reformation historians, first published in 1990, some defended him as a ‘saint’, while others declared him an unworthy pontiff¹⁸)—have neglected his political vision (intimately tied, it must be said, to his religious convictions) and instead focused on his far more well-known activities suppressing heresy.

Andrea Vanni's studies, starting with his book on Gian Pietro Carafa, Gaetano Thiene, and the origins of the Theatines, published in 2010 (Vanni 2010; see also Vanni 2018), propose the problematic thesis that the Theatine order co-founded by Carafa in 1524 represented a sort of proto-Inquisition. These studies seem somewhat limited, offering only a few new insights and appearing to overly interpret sources while paying insufficient attention to the most significant phases of Carafa's career. Giampiero Brunelli, by contrast, in a volume published in 2011 (Brunelli 2011), adopts an institutional approach to analyze the brief but significant experiment of the “Sacro Consiglio”, highlighting the originality

of Paul IV's reformist policies. His work, rigorous and thorough, stands out for its clarity and depth.

A biography of Marcello Cervini by Chiara Quaranta, published in 2010 (Quaranta 2010), provides a useful model for investigating the religious context of the sixteenth century, delving into the future pope's role in both reform and the Inquisition. In her 2020 volume titled *Living under the Evil Pope*, Martina Mampieri (Mampieri 2019) offers a valuable edition and analysis of the manuscript chronicle by Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan, shedding light on the Jewish perspective on Paul IV's pontificate. However, the book loses focus with an excessively broad reconstruction of the papacy, relying significantly on Ludwig von Pastor's dated account of Paul IV's papacy in his monumental *History of the Popes* (Pastor 1924) and overlooking more recent and innovative contributions.

Paul IV regarded Emperor Charles V as a dangerous adversary for several reasons: his dominance in Italy, his ability to challenge papal authority, and his role as a staunch defender of Catholic orthodoxy, which often conflicted with the political and territorial interests of the papacy¹⁹. The emperor had consistently asserted the supremacy of imperial authority over that of the popes but had failed to effectively combat the spread of Protestantism in Germany and sought to use the Council of Trent as a tool for reconciling Catholics and Protestants. Paul IV despised Charles V and his young son Philip II, king of Spain, on a personal level and held deep contempt for the Spanish rulers and people as a whole, considering them “eretici, scismatici e maledetti da Dio”, “feccia del mondo”, “nemici de Dio, marrani, seme di giudei”, “mistura di giudei, mori e luterani” (“Heretics, schismatics, and cursed by God,” “scum of the earth,” “enemies of God, Marranos, seed of Jews,” “a mixture of Jews, Moors, and Lutherans”)²⁰. In the 1550s, the anti-Inquisition faction in Spain remained strong, and the ideas of Italian *Spirituali*—the influential curial faction opposed to the “intransigents” led by Gian Pietro Carafa—had been brought to Spain through the Neapolitan teachings of Juan de Valdés.

On the uncertainties surrounding the orientations of Spanish and Italian elites during the tumultuous central decades of the sixteenth century, a substantial body of well-documented scholarship exists, with particularly notable contributions from Massimo Firpo and José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras²¹. Nonetheless, certain works have proved not to be immune to the risk of over-interpretation, as exemplified by Elena Bonora's 2014 monograph, *Aspettando l'imperatore* (Bonora 2014; English translation: Bonora 2022). The study seeks to reconstruct the historical-political context of the Italian peninsula between 1534 and 1549 and thus concludes well before the pivotal developments of the late 1550s, which merit particular emphasis in the broader historiographical discourse. The analysis relies almost exclusively on a single, albeit significant, primary source: the correspondence of Cardinal Benedetto Accolti, a prominent figure within the anti-papal faction. A more methodologically sound approach might have been to frame the research as a focused biographical study of Cardinal Accolti rather than an overly ambitious attempt at a comprehensive synthesis. The reliance on Accolti's correspondence as the principal source risks yielding a one-sided interpretation, shaped by the cardinal's personal priorities, biases, and subjective perceptions of the political landscape.

However, the Spanish Inquisition ultimately triumphed over internal opposition between 1557 and 1559, crushing the Protestant communities of Seville and Valladolid and arresting (in 1559) Archbishop Bartolomé Carranza, the key figure in the anti-Inquisition movement in Spain²². It was at this juncture that Paul IV recognized Philip II as a far more effective defender of Catholicism than the King of France. The son of the “imperatore eretico” (“heretical emperor”) gradually transformed in the pope's eyes from a “giovane mal guidato” (poorly guided young man) to the “figliolo prodigo” (prodigal son) of the pope and the Holy See (see again Santarelli 2008, p. 17).

This marked, in early modern Mediterranean Europe, the beginning of the Counter-Reformation era, one whose defining event was the papacy of Pius V (1566–1572), born Michele Ghislieri. Once Paul IV's favored disciple, he would later unite Spain and Venice in the Holy League that defeated the Turks at Lepanto on 7 October 1571. Notably absent from this alliance was France, which at that time was experimenting with new forms of tolerance and conciliation following the conclusion of the Third War of Religion (August 1568–August 1570). These attempts tragically collapsed with the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (23–24 August 1572), an event that would undoubtedly have been celebrated by Pius V (had he still been alive—he died on 1 May 1572) with the same enthusiasm as he did the Battle of Lepanto. Indeed, his correspondence with the King of France had been a constant exhortation to massacre the Protestants (see Lemaître 1994, pp. 258–61, in particular p. 260).

Meanwhile, in the Italian context, the Roman Inquisition expanded its widespread network of tribunals, managed by judges of the faith who were increasingly better organized and trained²³.

Between late 1557 and early 1558, a shift in Roman propaganda became increasingly evident: a growing positivity toward the Spanish and criticism of the French, who were now portrayed as unstable and unreliable, directly challenging the long-standing myth of their "*obedience*". In January 1558, Cardinal Pietro Bertano remarked to Antonio Milledonne, secretary to the Venetian ambassador in Rome, Bernardo Navagero: "Il papa non vorria altro che persuader al mondo che Filippo habbi fatto ogni cosa per la pace et che sia mancato dal re di Franza per poter poi con qualche color voltarsi contra come ha voglia" ("The pope desires nothing more than to convince the world that Philip has done everything for peace and that the fault lies with the King of France, so that he may later, under some pretext, turn against them as he wishes"). Bertano further delved into the temperament and psychology of the French, adding, "Dolendosi Sua Santità dei francesi, li ho detto che bisogna haver una gran pacientia con loro, perché sono facili a levar l'obidientia alla Chiesa, il che è conosciuto fino dalli soi nemici" ("His Holiness was complaining about the French, so I told him that one must have great patience with them, because they are quick to withdraw obedience to the Church, a fact known even by their enemies"). Bertano also recalled a conversation with Charles V during the papacy of Julius III (1550–1555), when he served as nuncio to the emperor. In that conversation, Charles V made the following observation: "Vi dico che francesi sono pazzi et che se sono molestati dal papa daranno volta et se alieneranno dalla Chiesa né vi torneranno più" ("I tell you that the French are mad, and if they are provoked by the pope, they will turn away and alienate themselves from the Church, and they will not return to it again")²⁴. This statement, almost a "prophecy" from the "heretical emperor" (as Paul IV was wont to call Charles V), foreshadowed the reality that his son, Philip II, would come to embody for Rome: the sole authority capable of safeguarding the interests and very survival of the Church against the rising challenges posed by Lutheran and Calvinist Churches.

This dramatic perception of change, grounded in both political calculation and long-standing confessional anxieties, illustrates how diplomatic discourse could absorb and reproduce broader ideological and social frameworks. Positioned at the intersection of religious doctrine, political allegiance, and rhetorical strategy, diplomatic correspondence serves as a valuable lens through which to interpret the cultural and political representations of the time. Although this study has necessarily focused on a limited number of voices and contexts, we hope to have contributed—as recent historiography on transnational religious diplomacy in early modern Europe continues to expand—to a broader reappraisal of the role played by "Italian" diplomacy in shaping Catholic responses to confessional fragmentation. In doing so, we ultimately argue that the Italian diplomatic gaze—shaped

more by political pragmatism than by theological engagement—provides a crucial lens to reinterpret the French Wars of Religion not only as a domestic civil conflict but as a transnational crisis of legitimacy, governance, and confessional order. From this perspective, the Italian case—too often relegated to the margins of dominant European narratives—may instead be seen as a privileged observatory of the shifting dynamics between monarchy, ecclesiastical authority, and the pressures of religious pluralism. In this way, we have also sought to illustrate a Southern European perspective that has often been marginalized in a field of study still largely shaped by Anglo-French paradigms.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> . 1960–2020. 100 volumes. Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, online: https://www.treccani.it/biografico (accessed on 25 November 2024).
ERETICOPEDIA	<i>Dizionario di eretici, dissidenti e inquisitori nel mondo mediterraneo</i> . Edited by Daniele Santarelli. Firenze: Edizioni CLORI, 2013—in progress online: https://www.eticopedia.org (accessed on 25 November 2024).

Notes

- ¹ For a concise academic biography of Marino Cavalli, see Olivieri (1979) (DBI). For a precise dating of his “Relazione di Francia”, as well as those of the ambassadors who succeeded him and are cited in this paper, see Antonibon (1939, pp. 49–53).
- ² For a concise academic biography of Giovanni Michiel, see Benzoni (2010) (DBI).
- ³ For a summary of the spread of the Protestant Reformation and heresies in the Republic of Venice during the central decades of the 16th century, one can consult Santarelli (2007). On this topic, Martin’s (1993) study remains particularly significant, albeit somewhat dated.
- ⁴ On these aspects, see Prodi (1994), in particular pp. 305–10.
- ⁵ For a better analysis of the historical context and a deeper insight into the correspondence of Venetian ambassadors mentioned in this paper see Santarelli (2010a) and references contained therein. Among the recent works related to the politics of Catherine de’ Medici, Gellard (2014) and Crouzet (2015) stand out.
- ⁶ For a concise academic biography of Michele Suriano, see Trebbi (2019) (DBI).
- ⁷ For a concise academic biography of Marcantonio Barbaro see Gaeta (1964) (DBI).
- ⁸ See Firpo (1997); see also Firpo and Biferali (2016, pp. 156–230) and Firpo (2021) (a recent English translation of Firpo (1997)).
- ⁹ Excerpts from his correspondence, as well as that of his uncle Alfonso Tornabuoni, who preceded him as Florentine ambassador to France, are published in Canestrini (1865).
- ¹⁰ For a concise academic biography of Giovanni Cappello, see Ventura (1975) (DBI).
- ¹¹ Niccolò Tornabuoni to Cosimo de’ Medici, duca di Firenze, Paris, 14 October 1561, in Canestrini (1865), p. 466.
- ¹² See Suriano (1853). See also his correspondence (as well as that of his successor Barbaro) in Layard (1891).
- ¹³ See below, Section 4, for a better contextualization of this evolution in the Florentine diplomatic posture, of which Niccolò Tornabuoni’s correspondence serves as a revealing litmus test.
- ¹⁴ See Zwierlein (2006). See also Valeri (2013). On the broader topic of relations between Italy and France (particularly in the cultural sphere) during the sixteenth century, see the recent book edited by Alonge et al. (2023).
- ¹⁵ See Descendre (2010); see also Descendre (2011). For a specific study on the relations between the Republic of Venice and the Kingdom of France at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, see Di Biase (2014). For a more general analysis of the role and activities of Venetian ambassadors in the 16th century, see Alonge (2019).

- 16 For an in-depth contextualization of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis within the historical and politico-diplomatic landscape of the period, refer to Haan (2010).
- 17 For a discussion of Paul IV's war against Charles V and Philip II in light of these dynamics, see Santarelli (2008), in particular pp. 41–134.
- 18 See Aubert (1990); see also Aubert (1999) (which is a revised edition of Aubert 1990). See also the entry on Paul IV in ERETICOPEDIA (<https://www.eticopedia.org/paolo-iv>; accessed on 25 November 2024).
- 19 Regarding the relations between Paul IV, Charles V, and his son Philip II, King of Spain, refer to Santarelli (2008), in particular pp. 119–34 and pp. 213–31; see also Santarelli (2010b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). For a concise overview of these dynamics, see also the entries on Charles V and Philip II in ERETICOPEDIA (<https://www.eticopedia.org/carlo-v> and <https://www.eticopedia.org/filippo-ii>; accessed on 25 November 2024).
- 20 Paul IV used such expressions to refer to the Imperial and Spanish parties and their rulers in his conversations with the Venetian ambassador. See Santarelli (2008), especially p. 218.
- 21 See primarily Tellechea Idígoras (2003–2008) and Firpo (2015).
- 22 Refer again mainly to Tellechea Idígoras (2003–2008).
- 23 See Al Sabbagh et al. (2017) and the bibliography provided therein. An online expansion of the work, and a useful tool for delving deeper into many topics mentioned in this paper, is the section “Repertorio degli inquisitori e delle sedi inquisitoriali” in ERETICOPEDIA: <https://www.eticopedia.org/repertorio-inquisitori> (accessed on 25 November 2024).
- 24 See the dispatch from Bernardo Navagero in Rome to the Chiefs of the Council of Ten dated 15 January 1558, published in Santarelli (2011a, pp. 253–56). Pietro Bertano served as Apostolic Nuncio to the Emperor from 1548 to 1550 (at the end of Paul III's papacy and the beginning of Julius III's) and again from 1551 to 1552 (sent by Julius III). For a concise academic biography of Bertano, see Rill (1967) (DBI). See also the entry in ERETICOPEDIA (<https://www.eticopedia.org/pietro-bertano>; accessed on 25 November 2024).

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Article

In Absentia: Politics of Religious Life in Maria Carafa's Vita by Francesco Maggio (1670)

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Abstract: This essay examines the interplay between politics and religion through the lens of correspondence between the future Pope Paul IV and his sister Maria Carafa, largely published in 1670 in Francesco Maria Maggio's *Life of the Venerable Maria Carafa*. The analysis reveals how Carafa strategically used this epistolary relationship to shape his public image and religious–political agenda. The letters serve as a carefully crafted narrative tool. Carafa's portrayal of himself as a leader seeking spiritual guidance from his saintly sister can be interpreted as a calculated political move to legitimize his religious authority and reform initiatives. This correspondence thus becomes a nexus where personal piety and public policy intersect. Maria Carafa's writings, reconstructed in absentia, offer a perspective on the religious–political landscape of the time. Her role as both sister and spiritual mother to the future pope challenges traditional gender hierarchies within the Church, while also serving Carafa's narrative of divine guidance for his actions.

Keywords: Theatines; letters; Naples; La Sapienza; Gaetano Thiene; enclosure; counter reformation

1. Introduction

I had understood from several parts your grave infirmity, and then your convalescence, and lately I have understood it through your letters of the twenty-second of this, which have been most pleasing to me. And for the Glory of God [...] I will confess to you the weakness of my soul. So, I had thought you dead when I saw no letters from anyone, nor could I understand the truth of your sight from any quarter. [...] And therefore I comfort you, dearest Sister, with the thought that if the Lord has given you life this time, perhaps it was because your bread is not yet baked in such a way that the Lord can eat it. And therefore, he grants you this delay, so that you may strive with greater diligence to adorn your lamp ('lampana') [...] so that [...] we may find ourselves prepared [...] to long for the coming of the Bridegroom. (Maggio 1670, p. 31)

So wrote Gian Pietro Carafa from Rome on 29 April 1525 to his sister, enclosing with the letter "ten rules of St Augustine, translated into the vernacular, and reprinted, for your spiritual Daughters". This short passage is taken from the oldest letter among the two hundred transcribed by Francesco Maria Maggio in the voluminous seventeenth-century *Vita della venerabile Maria Carafa*, who died in the odour of sanctity in 1552. Over a period of twenty-two years, her brother Gian Pietro Carafa addressed the prioress of La Sapienza monastery as sister, mother, confidante and, above all, as his spiritual daughter and "new creature in Christ" called "to walk" in His footsteps, founding the first reformed monastery

“in the holy newness of Christian life, not according to the lukewarmness of those miserable times, but according to the will of God” (Maggio 1670, p. 63).

This essay examines the interplay between politics and religion through the lens of the private correspondence between Gian Pietro Carafa (1476–1559), elected Paolo IV in 1555, and his older sister Maria Carafa¹ (1468–1552), largely published in 1670 in the *Vita della venerabile Maria Carafa* by Francesco Maria Maggio (1612–1686), biographer, historian and a member of the Theatine Order of Clerics Regular. This initial analysis reveals how, several years later, Maggio strategically used this epistolary relationship to spread a particular perspective which consolidated and integrated the Theatine story with a female counterpart; revive the original spiritual significance of cloistering as a fundamental element in the development of the female monastic experience; and recover the fame and works of the late Pope, Paul IV.²

Maria Carafa’s life—born in 1468 and dying aged over 80—takes place in the arc of that evolution of female leadership first outlined by Gabriella Zarri who highlights that, between the 1430s and 1460s, female religious life progressively abandoned expressions of ardent prophetism and the figure of the spiritual mother was recognised as having “particular charisms in order to reach perfection”, while “the exercise of charity and virtues became the way to work in religion” (Zarri 1994, pp. 198, 218). The time of the living saints, spiritual mothers and preachers came to an end with the death of Chiara Bugni in 1514, that of Clarissa Camilla Battista da Varano in 1524, and that of the Augustinian Laura Mignani in 1525: all were strongly involved in the process of theological renewal of the Church (Zarri 2009).

The year of Maria Carafa’s death coincides instead with a turning point in Church history: the condemnation of the doctrine of Fra Battista da Crema and the persecution of the adherents to the doctrines of Battista da Crema, including Paola Antonia Negri, condemned to enclosure in the monastery of St. Clare (Zarri 2009; Firpo 2014). Gian Pietro Carafa sought to implement an emerging vision of the Order that regulated cloistered life, obedience and the structures of vocation. The correspondence and communication through trusted messengers with his sister serve as a preliminary test for the principles outlined in the Tridentine decree *De regularibus et monialibus*, part of Session 25 of the Council of Trent, that would later mandate the reinstatement of enclosure in all female monasteries and require tertiaries living in communities to take solemn vows.³ It is indeed significant that, unlike the examples given above, in the hagiography dedicated to her by Francesco Maria Maggio in 1670, her voice unfolds in an absent dialogue: the silence of Maria Carafa’s voice is, instead, the ground on which her brother’s voice and reflections emerge and expand, leaving no room for the elaboration of a theological pathway constructed through sharing but rather substituting one that was learned.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this essay intends to outline some ways to understand certain aspects of Maria Carafa’s profile and the functions of her figure in religious politics around the time of the Council, specifically via the tool of literary and textual analysis. It emerges, for example, how the language of spiritual motherhood as attributed to her by Carafa and Thiene—and progressively diluted in Marinoni’s letters—reveals the distance from the truly salvific, prophetic and mystical value of the correspondence that took place years earlier, in Thiene’s case, with Laura Mignani. Gaetano Thiene and Giovanni Marinoni are two other prominent figures in the life of Maria Carafa: both are linked to the Theatine experience and were committed to the realisation of those ideals of clergy reform and the care and control of souls that were destined to soon become one of the pillars of the Counter-Reformation Church. Both were involved in the spiritual direction of La Sapienza monastery in Naples, of which Maria Carafa was prioress. The beatification of the two men duly came to fruition, while that of Maria did not. At the same

time, the essay engages in dialogue with the more aristocratic aspect, and true agency, of the prioress who in fact directs and continues to modify the monastery assigned to her, negotiating its physical boundaries and her authorial agency.

2. Reading Maggio's *Vita della Venerabil Madre D. Maria Carafa*

The Clerics Regular, known as Theatines, were founded at the request of Pope Clement VII.⁴ On 24 June 1524, the Pope issued two apostolic briefs, both titled *Exponi nobis*. With the first, he authorized Gian Pietro Carafa to establish a new form of religious life within the Catholic Church. With the second, he granted Carafa, along with Gaetano Thiene, Bonifacio de' Colli and Paolo Consiglieri, permission to officially found the order on 14 September 1524, in St. Peter's Basilica.

The first female experience linked to the directives of the Clerics Regular revolves around Maria Carafa.

The *Vita*, which remains the primary source for attempting to give a certain three-dimensionality to the profile of Maria Carafa, reintroduces, however, the problem that Andrea Vanni had already noted and made clear in his historical reappropriation of the figure of Gaetano Thiene, with respect to the apologetics of the order to which Thiene belonged (Vanni 2016, pp. 9–16). Furthermore, the hagiography is presented as a text motivated and constructed according to the needs of the time, such as the decisive and consistent expansion in Northern and Central Italy of female orders, such as the female followers of the Jesuits.⁵ Last but not least, it is necessary to consider the representative value, even in its absence, of Maria Carafa's voice and compare it with a period in which colleges and conservatories became the most prevalent and popular types of quasi-monastic female institutions in post-Tridentine Italy (Arlati 2024, p. 52). These institutions attracted the female members of the highest levels of the aristocracy, and from a historiographical point of view, they serve to dismantle deep-rooted convictions about the developments of post-Tridentine religious life linked to the figure and centralizing action of Carlo Borromeo (Arlati 2024, pp. 56–57).

According to Maggio's account, Maria Domitilla Carafa, born into a noble Neapolitan family, daughter of Antonio Carafa and Vittoria Camponeschi, ran away from home on Christmas Eve 1490 with her brother Gian Pietro, both intending to take religious vows. She found refuge in the Dominican monastery of San Sebastiano in Naples, where at the age of 22, renouncing a wealthy marriage to Camillo Pandone, she took the veil and remained there for thirty-eight years. In 1528, due to the siege by French troops under Lautrec, she moved with her sisters to the safer convent of Santa Maria Donna Romita, where she made her profession. After two years, through the papal brief that Bonifacio de' Colli had obtained, on 25 June 1530 she moved definitively from Donna Romita to the monastery of La Sapienza, having with her, according to Maggio, only her breviary and a few nuns who had followed her. Maria Carafa introduced the Rule of the Dominicans of Regular Observance and became its prioress. The former convent had belonged to the Carafa family for generations, as it stood in the building that Oliviero Carafa had bought to establish a shelter for poor students called Sapienza. It had been bequeathed by Lucrezia Dentice to her niece Sancia Carafa, a nun in the monastery of Donna Romita, and it was she who urged her relative Maria Carafa to take over the monastery, changing it from Franciscan to Dominican.

As anticipated, the main sources on the life of the prioress derive from Theatine historiography, in particular, her *Vita*, compiled, edited and printed in Naples in 1670 by Francesco Maria Maggio, and commissioned by the Prioress of the time, Angelica Caterina Carafa. The front title of the book makes clear that the latter was also responsible for at least some of the text, as indicated by the co-authorship. The hagiography is dedicated to

Anna Fernandez of Cordova, the second wife of the Viceroy of Naples, Pietro of Aragon: the viceroy's wife is held to be the model of a Catholic queen who was "very noble" ("chiarissima") in blood and spirit, a symbol of Prudence and promoter of works of piety (Maggio 1670, a2r). Since the foundress must, as the prioress writes, "come out [...] into the light, and expose herself to the eyes of all", Anna Fernandez Cordova is the ideal dedicatee to welcome her (Maggio 1670, b2v).

The voluminous biography is then accompanied by a further dedication to the Virgin, guardian of the garden of the virgins of La Sapienza, and to Maria Carafa herself, whose life is held up as an example for her community: a "mirror of", "norm for" and "spur to" (Maggio 1670, b2v). Maggio defers to Prioress Angelica Caterina and the sisters for "censorship and correction", proposing the same role of biographer–hagiographer that he assumed in drafting the biography of Orsola Benincasa. After a work that, according to the author, took years of research, in presenting the life of the foundress, he begs:

Your Reverences from the heart, to read it, re-read it, and correct it all: changing, deleting, or tearing up everything (or very little if that should be the case) that their wise opinion does not like: so that, just as the Work recognises its origin in their commandment, and its material from their many reports and writings, so also it receives its end and perfection from their censure. (Maggio 1670, c1v)

While the sisters of the community must have played an important role in the drafting of the *Vita*, they were also involved in a larger project of reconstruction and artistic decoration of the monastery, whose façade they rebuilt in 1614 and for which they commissioned sculptures and paintings that recalled the visionary experience of the foundress and reinforced their charisma as chosen brides of Christ.⁶ One hundred years after her death there was, therefore, renewed interest regarding Maria Carafa, both among the community of the Monastery of La Sapienza and in the larger order to which it belonged. The Theatine order was involved in those years in the foundation of collegiate (not cloistered) communities, in northern Italy, for example the Collegio di S. Maria del Presepio in Bologna.⁷ They were also involved with the Collegio delle Celibate in Ravenna, founded in 1661 by Giovanna Zambeletti (Masini 1666, p. 142; Guidicini 1980, p. 257; Modesti 2005, pp. 55–56; Arlati 2024, p. 56, n. 148). In particular, given the proximity of the two establishments, that of Zambeletti represented an attractive alternative for women who did not want to follow the path and the rules approved by Archbishop Fabio Guinigi (1674–1691) (Belloni and Orselli 1755, pp. 27–28; Bassi Angelini 2000, p. 74).

The *Vita*, edited by Maggio, cannot, therefore, be separated from the experiences of renewed religious life that were occurring in Northern Italy. The renewed prestige and primacy of the monastery and its nuns and the life of the foundress and the posthumous miracles came together. As the historian Chavarria writes, "once the authorisation for the publication of Maggio's biography had been obtained in 1669" the nuns' testimonies "would have been indispensable in supporting the beatification of Sister Maria", which, however, never came to fruition (Novi Chavarria 2001, p. 160).

Returning to Vanni's considerations of Theatine spirituality and the difficulties of confronting seventeenth-century profiles based in apologetics, Maria Carafa's hagiographical *Vita* aligns with various interpretative axes. Firstly, the reconstruction of the Theatine past, which begins with the path of emancipation and liberation from the heavy legacy of the founder-Pope, reinstating the figure of Gaetano Thiene as the spiritual fulcrum of Theatine identity. A crucial moment in this process was the publication of the hagiography of Gaetano da Thiene in 1612, a work on which the canon for the latter's beatification process was built, including "endorsements of important figures" (Vanni 2016, p. 154). Thiene's beatification took place in 1629 and his canonisation in 1671, a year after the publication of

Maria Carafa's *Vita*. The latter was to take advantage of the success of Thiene's beatification and, therefore, construct a parallel female profile for the order of Theatine Regular Clerics.

Secondly, the *Vita* links the identity of the Theatines to a regular and noble model with respect, as we have mentioned, to the proliferation of colleges and congregations and to the parallel attention that the cult of Saint Francesca Romana, promoted by the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine, was absorbing as a "point of reference" for the new non-cloistered congregations (Arlati 2024, p. 33). The seventeenth century saw the publication of several hagiographies dedicated to Francesca Romana by Jesuits such as André Valladier, Giulio Orsini and Virgilio Cepari. In these works, the saint was presented as an ideal example for women of the aristocracy "who wanted to reconcile their wealthy social status with the attainment of perfection" (Arlati 2024, p. 33). Devotion to Francesca Romana also spread among various communities of religious women linked to the Jesuit order, including the Collegio delle dame di Hall in Tyrol and the colleges founded during the century in Castiglione delle Stiviere and Panicale (Arlati 2024, p. 189).

The traditional model of Maria Carafa is compared with several other symbols of the various orders that were being consolidated, and the female followers of the Jesuit order proposed a model in stark contrast to the Theatine one, the latter based on the observance of strict enclosure. In fact, according to the overall vision proposed by Arlati, southern Italy remained a stronghold with respect to the model of community life proposed by the Jesuits, a territory in which, despite the presence of *bizzocche* and figures linked to local prophetism, "more traditional forms of religious living (monasteries, convents, retreats, etc.)" seemed to prevail, in part due to "the limited penetration of demands of the Borromean reform" (Arlati 2024, p. 189).

In his dedication to the nuns, Francesco Maria Maggio expounds his methodical and painstaking approach, very likely based on the direction taken by seventeenth-century hagiographic composition in the Bollandian style: he relies mainly on the *Vite* of Paul IV edited by Tufo, Silos and Caracciolo, the triad of Theatine historiography. He also cites a manuscript of some twenty pages on the life of Maria Carafa, the *Registro* of the Monastery of La Sapienza, various *Ragguagli* and the volumes of *Faraggini* from the Archives of San Paolo.⁸

However, the letters of Maria Carafa's brother, Paul IV, stand out in the hagiographical schema: as Maggio writes, he "diligently gleaned her virtues from many of her brother's letters, which I found in the archives of San Paolo de' Santi Apostoli and S. Maria della Sapienza", and the letters were therefore collected not from "a single archive, but from several, and industriously sought out by us and all collected and faithfully transcribed, with the toil and sweat of days neither few nor short" (Maggio 1670, cc. a1v–a1r). The letters are clearly the most valuable element because with them, he writes, he managed to "shed light on obscure things, bringing to light many things that were not known before, confirming the true and refuting the false, using a pure and simple style throughout the work" (Maggio 1670, c. c1r). A specialist in the subject, Maggio also aims to redeem Gian Pietro Carafa from the *damnatio memoriae*, offering the public a fraternal, intimate and private voice, also characterised by the caring tones that emerge in the correspondence with his sister, especially in the recollection of their shared childhood.

The hagiographer assembles and reconstructs a picture of little Maria's childhood, spent in full accordance with the heroic Catherinian model, including fasting, reading, devotional practices and rejection of marriage. Obstructed by her parents, according to the *Vita*, the decision to found the Monastery of La Sapienza was forced upon her and not taken directly by her. In this she follows the other hagiographic *topos* of reticence, not so much to the divine call as to embarking on a path of religious leadership. According to the story, Abbess Ciancia Carafa forced her niece to accept the task of becoming in turn foundress of

the establishment, and this choice was also supported by Gian Pietro, who thus persuaded his elder sister to undertake the “new enterprise” (“nuova impresa”) (Maggio 1670, p. 233).

In this regard, there is also a letter from the prioress of San Sebastiano, Sister Geronima d’Alagno to Maria Carafa, from ms. 89 of the National Library in Naples, in the S. Martino collection and reproduced among the selection edited by Monti in 1923. The nun, speaking on behalf of the convent, communicated to her:

the affection of everyone, that there was great weeping, so much so that it was necessary for that Holy Father to comfort us, because we hoped to have you for ourselves, because certainly by your great goodness you are cordially loved by all! But because it has pleased Our Lord to give you this charge, to do so much laudable good and to grow our religion, in this respect all have rejoiced.

This is followed by the Prioress’s blessing, which emphasises the heroic nature of the task to which Maria Carafa has been called to respond:

My mother, I beseech my Lord Jesus Christ, who is supreme wisdom, to give you help, and advice, and favour [...] for the love of God, who places burdens on those who please him, and exalts the humble, this was necessary, for which you [...] have given yourselves to humility, and God has willed to employ your humility, and give you great merit.

Maria Carafa is part of the history of the first generation of Theatines: those who joined the order, which was founded primarily, in the words of Andrea Vanni, to “examine and select ordinands and decide between the worthy and the unworthy”, having first and foremost to set an example as upright religious believers (Vanni 2010, p. 176). As reconstructed by Vanni, who highlighted, among other things, the split between the first- and second-generation Theatines, the first group had to dress *more antiquo*, profess solemn vows, live in common and follow the Rule, drafted around 1527. Their ascetic and eremitic appearance made them different and singular in the eyes of their contemporaries: Sanudo described them as the “hermits from Rome” who “were sequestered from the world” and even Ignatius of Loyola was perplexed and critical of these new figures, perceived as excessively rigorous.

Invited to flee the world and embrace the solitude of the hermit life, the men also had to maintain a moral lifestyle, profess poverty and live in community, abandoning worldly occupations and even charitable activities in order to focus on their own perfection and that of others.⁹ The Theatine apologetic interpretation of Maria Carafa’s *Vita* thus unfolds as the progressive implementation of the future Pope’s desire to see in the Theatines the most authentic embodiment of Christian virtues. The female reform envisaged by her brother was to implement a withdrawal from the world: this is what happened, not without resistance, in La Sapienza Monastery and what would happen elsewhere from 1563 onwards.

As mentioned, the nuns of La Sapienza were the first to experiment within their community with the experience of enclosure, having adopted it a good twenty years before the Council. This, however, did not prevent them, as evidenced by contributions from art and architectural historians, from engaging in the internal and external renovation of the monastery. The fame and model of Maria Carafa constituted a unique experience and, precisely because she was Gian Pietro Carafa’s sister, the attention of the first wave of Theatines converged on Maria Carafa, trying to shape and mould her through constant contact. This resulted in more than two hundred letters from her brother, at least twenty from Gaetano Thiene, and many from Bonifacio de’ Colli and Giovanni Marinoni.

She is visibly manifested and revealed to passersby in a high-relief coat of arms, still visible on the façade of the church, created in the seventeenth-century, confirming her role

as foundress and exemplary woman, which sits alongside Gian Pietro Carafa's coat of arms. In the hagiography, however, Maria Carafa's voice emerges, in absentia, through her brother's words. Moreover, the literary structure and the choices of Maggio also reflect the experience that the devotees must have had at the Monastery of La Sapienza. Indeed, the singing of the nuns must have echoed from above, from the newly built choir that hid them from the view of the devotees in the beautiful, raised choir that they had built in that period, while opening themselves to contemplation, looking up at the ceiling of the choir vault, which represents one of the Marian visions of their foundress.

To reconstruct Maria Carafa's voice in absentia, it is therefore essential to move away from apologetic intent and focus on differences between her hagiographic character, as portrayed by Maggio, and her apparent personality, as revealed in the letters from her brother. Her brother, while expressing himself in intimate tones, especially in the first group of letters he sent her, is not slow to show his dissatisfaction with certain choices and her adherence to the rules. Thus, the first lacuna is found here in these letters, which demonstrate how Maria Carafa found herself facing a real dilemma between the Neapolitan conception of a religious life, often unchosen and reserved for the nobility, which transferred comforts from the court to the cloister, and the need for a reform that included a cloistered, passionate and committed observance.

Looking at the purchase records and other sources at La Sapienza, we see that Maria Carafa found herself at the centre of a centrifugal movement. While the monastery was closing itself off from the world, Maria Carafa expanded it, increasing its spatial extent, embellishing it and decorating it. This is indeed the direction taken by the research of Helen Hills regarding the convent's external renovations and extensions and that of Aislinn Loconte focused on the interior decoration—both faithfully follow the foundress' visions.

The figure that emerges is, therefore, more varied than the devout and extremely humble one described by Giuseppe Silos, Domenico Maria Marchese and Francesco Maria Maggio. Indeed, the success of the monastery, which became an important hub for the Neapolitan nobility and its Carafa branch, lay in its foundress's skill in investing and managing the nuns' donations and dowries. This is not why the young women approached her: indeed, to date, there has been insufficient emphasis and exploration of the similarities in attitude between the two siblings in the intelligent combination of business, prayer and election that constituted a formula that served as a powerful invitation for nobles to take the veil in the new role of being Brides of Christ. The Theatines, on the other hand, were the order that continued, unlike the Barnabites, for example, to accept only noble girls, albeit with the proviso of requiring proof of the true vocation of the new arrivals. Certainly, as Zarri states, "the age that was about to open did not allow nuns any task other than contemplation", although the post-council clericalization provided a significant boost to female religious education, within which women, too, could assert and legitimize a certain margin of action in society (Zarri 1990, p. 127).¹⁰ The model of Maria Carafa is not the norm, so much as an exception: through her, her brother gives ideal form to a model of holiness that was already Counter-Reformational before Trent, one that excluded the prophetic word and instead included, with controlled circumspection, the Marian visionary experience communicated to her brother or to other protagonists of the Order, and which would be an important link between her and the first Theatine cohort.

The project of reconstructing the correspondence between the two siblings thus allows us, on the one hand, to get closer to the private voice of Paul IV, which revives childhood memories—the death of his mother and his "smarmy" ("vezzoso") and "annoying" ("fastidioso") childhood character. Above all it is a voice that relies on and finds solace in writing to, and receiving letters from, his sister, suggesting a long tradition of exchange

between the male and the female (Maggio 1670, p. 11). This is the intimate face of a Pope that Theatine historiography will take on the task of redeeming.

For the *Vita*, a two-pronged analysis must be undertaken, in part already outlined: first, the strategies adopted by the narrative framework constructed by Maggio, with the dedication to the noblewomen, the interweaving of the letters and the hagiographic content that emerges from the correspondence interspersed throughout his extensive work. Second, one must distinguish the levels of this correspondence, currently in absentia: this means the models according to which it is organised, from primarily biblical and patristic examples to the fully sixteenth-century ones adopted by Carafa in the expression of his own voice and selected by Maggio. Of no less importance is Gian Pietro Carafa's and the other Theatines' attitude towards women: referred to as spiritual mothers, they live a circumscribed and imposed motherhood, free of any prophetic intent and praised for their virtues of obedience, fidelity and chastity, which are expressed precisely in accepting the rules of the spiritual fathers imposed on them, in being an example for the other sisters and in being responsible for a female community that was to be an example of a new and renewed Counter-Reformation religiosity ante litteram.

3. The Correspondence with the Spiritual Fathers: Carafa, Thiene and Marinoni

As Maria Carafa's hagiographer writes, and as is evident from the number of her brother's anthologized letters, "there was a constant correspondence between them: and thus both communicated about their own thoughts and experiences; and from each other they received advice as if from heaven" (Maggio 1670, pp. 29–30).

The reciprocal communication between Gian Pietro Carafa and his sister Maria is evident from the hundreds of letters written by the brother, spanning the period from 1525 to 1552. They were sent primarily from Venice and Rome through family members, prominent spiritual figures from the newly formed group of Clerics Regular and authors such as Giovanni Berardino Fusciano, a poet and Carafa's confidant.¹¹ The spiritual fathers and confessors of the monastery of La Sapienza were first Gaetano da Thiene and later Giovanni Marinoni who, with other Theatines, also oversaw the celebration of the Mass. From Gian Pietro Carafa's letter of 13 July 1538 to Maria, we learn, however, that the Clerics Regular could no longer provide divine services, due to new commitments, and Fusciano was instructed to procure two new chaplains (Maggio 1670, p. 147). It is a substantial body of letters, mainly preserved in Vat. Lat. 10652 and in other codices and folios scattered between Rome and Naples. It lacked a critical edition beyond the attention of Francesco Maria Maggio, whose apologetic purpose cannot be separated from his careful organization and interpretation of the sources.¹² Giovanni Maria Monti partially filled this gap as part of a larger project to edit Pope Carafa's correspondence, selecting a sample of letters between the brother and sister and publishing them in 1923.

Monti had already emphasised the importance of these letters in understanding the figure of Carafa and his correspondence, which remains, to this day, a project to be completed, not least because of the wide geographic spread of his letters, which, between originals and copies, ranges across Europe. According to the current state of research, only one reply from his sister can be linked directly to one of his letters, preserved as a copy in the Barberino Latin manuscript 5697 and ignored in the *Vita*.

This essay, more interpretative than purely philological in nature, links the interest in women's writing with the meanings of its representation. For this reason, its focus will be on the in absentia dimension of the recipient, a dimension that in many ways mirrors both the reception of the writing and the narrative of Maria Carafa's life itself. Her face is perceived as elusive and impenetrable, but this does not reflect the real agency of the

prioress of La Sapienza. While the future Pope's correspondence with his elder sister undoubtedly forms the core and structural foundation of the *Vita* edited by Maggio, the striking absence of Maria Carafa's own letters and voice is profoundly felt by the reader. It is as though the multiple layers of the veil she wore for over two decades, concealing not just her body but also her face, even before enclosure was officially mandated, have rendered her voice tangibly obscured in the narrative and hagiographic depiction. Her voice is portrayed as sacred precisely because it is spiritually present but physically absent. Rather than thinking of this as a real absence, one might think of it as a literary artifice that recalls and celebrates La Sapienza monastery as the first place where a new form of religious life was practiced. This is also the approach of Maggio's *Sermons* on Maria Carafa, insisting on the choice and meaning of the veil as an element of original Christian synthesis resolutely promoted by the Pope's sister (Maggio 1676).

Certainly, the future Pope saw in the implementation of the reform, which became stricter over the years, the possibility of enhancing the image of his own family, in keeping with its rigour and long tradition of faith. From the beginning, the life of the Monastery had a reformist purpose, centred on three fundamental principles: strictly communal living, perfect seclusion (with the adoption of a veil over the face and grilles in the parlour, protected by iron plates) and absolute poverty. Gian Pietro's directions were collected, at his sister's request, in a letter of the year following the foundation, dated 17 February 1531: the duty of gratitude for the benefit of the "call to Holy Religion" and the commitment to be a "new creature in Christ", but not by walking

in the holy newness of Christian life [...] according to the lukewarmness ("tiepi-dezza") of these miserable times, but according to the will of God, revealed to you through his chosen Bride and holy Catholic Church, venerable Virgin and our Mother. (Maggio 1670, p. 63)

The ascetic principles that Carafa suggests in a few pages are based on a spirit of faith and prayer, principles guiding an interior life that must be "suspicious" of everything "which to the world seems beautiful and good and holy and honourable and great" (Maggio 1670, p. 64 et seq). There follow the criteria that will govern the internal life of La Sapienza, according to "true Christian simplicity", as opposed to "lukewarm" Monasteries.

Carafa insisted on the importance of simplicity in various aspects of monastic life: the sacred offices were to be "devoutly said, without song or sound, but with gravity and modesty", with the sole exception of the use of a "single bell that serves only among them". Simplicity should also permeate daily communal living, clothing and even relations with relatives, from whom no financial support should be received, which instead had to be given over entirely to charity.

Regarding admissions to the monastery, Carafa emphasised that candidates for religious life must show signs of a true vocation, characterised by "spiritual fervour" and the feeling of a

continuing inspiration from God by whom they are called to the contempt of the world and to mortification and self-denial and particularly feel drawn to follow true poverty and lowly status, rather than the reputation of rich monasteries. (Maggio 1670, p. 69)

Furthermore, the character and free will of the aspiring nuns were to be taken into consideration. As far as the confessor is concerned, he must be irreproachable, not young, must not live in the monastery and must be able to choose, rephrasing Deuteronomy 17:8, "*inter lepram et lepram*", that is between one plague and another, and thus show the ability to make subtle and accurate distinctions in situations that might appear similar on the surface but which require deeper analysis to be understood correctly.

Gian Pietro Carafa's voice at various points echoes the emphasis, imagery and clarity of Catherine of Siena's letters, both in terms of the lexical choices that have become canonical in the vocabulary of expectation in preparation for the coming of the Bridegroom, and in the carefully crafted balance between the languages of affection, politics and diplomacy. The correspondence with his sister clearly shows how blurred the boundaries are between the family and the diplomatic spheres and between private emotion and public artifice, especially when compared with Maria Carafa's only currently accessible response.

In that single available letter, a copy without the sender's own signature, signed simply "unworthy servant Sister M. A. Carafa" ("Indegna serva Sore M. A. Carafa"), she rejoices in her brother's health, gives news of the sisters and thanks him for having sent a young man to help the monastery and for having made him renew his obedience because "the fathers have taken a certain care of him and of all those who serve the monastery" ("li padri nde anno pigliato un cerrto penciero de isso e de tucti quilli che serveno lo Monasterio"). She says he has received letters from Venice from another member of the Carafa family, namely Beatrice, and begs him "from now on, read all the letters that come to her, and I beg you to quickly console us about them" ("da ora innanci tucte le lictere che veneno ad essa le legite et io ve prego che presto de esse nce consololate"). She concludes with an apology for not being able to send the requested *corporali* (altar linens), a fleeting but important indication of the clear division that was being drawn between male duties and those of the female, those latter being duties of praying, embroidering and materially supporting the Theatine brothers.

This letter is certainly written in a halting Italian, full of Neapolitan inflections, in which, however, Gian Pietro rejoices, emphasising how happy he was to hear "her voice" in the immediacy of the writing that conveyed a spirituality born from the heart, free from the use of *belles lettres*. Furthermore, her brother praises the very simplicity of the "silly writing" for which his sister apologised: "how could you not know", says her brother, "that the candour of that sincere and sacred breast of my sweetest mother, is dearer to me than Ciceronian eloquence" (Maggio 1670, pp. 211–12). Pietro Carafa prizes the prioress's sincerity and purity of soul much more than elaborate and rhetorically sophisticated language.

At another point, lamenting his sister's infirmity, he states that it is "no less serious [...] for being the cause of depriving me of the consolation, which I have of reading, and re-reading your, as you say foolish, but as I feel, holy and wise, and truly Christian letters" adding the note that he would have the deficiency remedied "by one of these daughters, provided they write your words, for I shall know them, if they are yours" (Maggio 1670, p. 215).

If Pietro Carafa emphasises and encourages humility in writing as a Christian virtue and the modesty of the addressee, on the other hand, he demonstrates a degree of supervision that he will never relinquish over his sister—he will be able to recognise, in fact, whether the letters that Maria Carafa sends are from her own hand or from someone else's—showing that he values spiritual correspondence but not an excessive attention of ornamentation and form, and a control of the content that must reflect an obedient voice.

Based on this, one may question the boundary between the need to read, spiritual enjoyment and the realisation of a tight supervision and discipline that Carafa exercised through letters. It also seems improbable that the memory of such an important persona as the foundress of La Sapienza monastery would be commemorated by an insignificant, submissive letter, which perhaps, precisely for this reason, was considered perfectly passable and preservable.

Indeed, in the progression of letters selected by Maggio for the hagiography, a certain difference in tone can be seen, enough to suggest a trend in the relationship between the

two siblings: praise of the sister is punctuated by moments of reproach, followed by the affirmation of the Theatine rule until we return to a dialogue between equals, where Carafa repositions himself as the spiritual “son” of his sister-mother.

The brother’s tone, therefore, is varied and the moments of conflict are interesting, reflecting a different portrait from the exclusively pious, solitary and cloistered one that emerges from the compendium of, for example, the *Sagro Diario Domenicano* of Marchese (1668, pp. 21–30). In fact, the breaches relate to the management of the monastery and the resolute desire to expand it, so much so that the tone of some letters reproaches her, as in that of 16 December 1531:

that you no longer raise such a question, nor have others raise it with me: because at your request some letters have been written to me, in which I have seen little of the light of God and little Christian truth [...] because all the letters were full of nothing other than your poverty, and the need to build the Monastery, and the need to receive many daughters so that they might bring money to spend on the building. (Maggio 1670, p. 82)

Pietro Carafa reproaches his sister for focusing too much on material rather than spiritual matters, including the practical needs of the monastery and the acceptance of novices for financial reasons. The requests of the prioress were, in fact, related to the handling and growth of the community for financial reasons, and the exchange sheds light on the tension between the practical running of a monastery—and its corruption as it increases contact with the outside world—and spiritual ideals.

Although Carafa did not forbid his sister from possessing some real estate and a long list of privileges, a delicate issue (beyond the beautification of the place) arose at La Sapienza—which, in the meantime, had taken in four of the family’s nieces—when enclosure was violated by Beatrice Carafa, who had entered La Sapienza accompanied by a small retinue. After attempting mediation through his sister and Fusciano, he sent Gaetano Thiene and Giovanni Marinoni to Naples, giving rise to the first Theatine cadre in the city (Vanni 2010, pp. 182–87).

Beatrice Carafa was a real thorn in the side of the future Pope. In a letter dated 29 March 1533, he says that he had been warned that Beatrice “lived as a secular woman” at La Sapienza and “not as a nun”, having brought her daughter and, as mentioned earlier, an entourage with her. He wrote about her on several occasions and, addressing his elder sister, warned that “she came to bring you back into the world”, reminding the prioress that she had left “San Sebastiano to establish a reformed monastery in poverty and a stricter life” and not “to establish a *fondaco* and an open house for secular women”. Carafa goes on to regret having to reverse roles, from an obedient son to the temporary role of spiritual father: “but I beg and exhort you [...] bear with patience this little chapter that I have written to you, because you deserve it. And I am your obedient son, and I want to be so: but in these necessities I must act as your spiritual father” (Maggio 1670, pp. 101, 109, 111; Boccadamo 2011, pp. 156–57).

Maria Carafa is entrusted, therefore, with the custody of her brother Gian Piero’s memories, emotions, frustrations and inspiration in being the realisation of his highest spiritual desires (charity, purity and obedience), but also the one who is not spared tones of reproach and admonishment. In the letters to his sister—and this is in fact the cornerstone of the *Vita* as constructed and assembled by Maggio—Gian Pietro Carafa illustrates the spiritual significance of the female reform, in a clear break with the female protagonism among the Waldensians and followers of Ochino, and not least those of the Oratory of Divine Love. The cloistered project was intended to involve body and soul, person and building, to instil the desire for communal collaboration in a higher spiritual project for the benefit of Christian society, which did not have its *raison d’être* in prophecy and divine

mediation (and therefore politics), as much as in mysticism and detachment from the world. And yet enclosure, practised in La Sapienza even before its official diffusion and implementation in the reformed monasteries, was experienced with resistance even by the foundress herself, who was intent on counterbalancing the reform, as we have seen, with requests to enlarge the monastery. Indeed, the latter then became a centre of the nepotistic politics of Gian Pietro Carafa.

The exchange of letters between Thiene and Maria Carafa unfolded in a very different tone and manner from the earlier fascination with the central figures of the prophecy of the Oratory of Divine Love.¹³ The release of the *Vita*, which includes ten letters from Thiene, came at a crucial time for the Order: the culmination of the protracted and contentious proceedings that began with the beatification of Gaetano Thiene by Pope Urban VIII on 8 October 1629, and ended with his canonization by Pope Clement on 12th April 1671 (Vanni 2016, pp. 158–74).

In 1533, Gaetano Thiene was assigned to Naples, where he took up residence at the church of Santa Maria della Misericordia, located outside Porta San Gennaro, and at the same time assumed the spiritual direction of the local monastery. By this point in his life, he had already experienced significant encounters with Battista da Crema, Caterina Freschi and the Divine Love movement, as well as a particularly significant experience with Laura Mignani, considered a living saint. Beginning in 1524, Thiene, together with Carafa, Bonifacio Colli and Paolo Consiglieri, had dedicated himself to the foundation of the Company of Clerics Regular. This experience had contributed to a significant shift in Thiene's direction from his previous inclinations toward a restless spirituality, which had previously exposed him to the risk of embracing potentially unorthodox theological positions. In this context, Carafa, acting as an authoritative intermediary, was appointed to deal with the question of Battista da Crema and to examine the alleged irregularities found at La Sapienza.

During the period characterised by the presence of Juan de Valdés and Bernardino Ochino, the content of his words to Maria Carafa stands out with relevance. It is an exhortation to obedience and submission, presented as the principles that firmly preserve the faith and the path that leads to salvation. Thiene, in fact, envisions scenarios of grave doctrinal instability for which the sisters must prepare, metaphorically described as the tottering of columns and the tumbling of mountains into the depths of the sea, warning them to remain vigilant to temptation ("My daughter, sisters, mothers, be humble, do not trust yourselves at all, and be daughters of the Virgin Mary in believing nothing of others") (Andreu 1954, p. 97). Thiene, therefore, exhorts them to distrust both their own judgements and the doctrinal innovations of others, inviting them to place themselves under the maternal protection of the Virgin, emblem of prudence, humility and exaltation through faith.

The epistolary corpus of Gaetano Thiene is primarily aimed at the spiritual direction of the monastery but, as highlighted by Boccadamo, his intervention was limited to "recommend[ing] unity in the monastery and diversification of functions in the annulment of individual wills in Christ" (Boccadamo 2011, p. 157). In addition to Carafa's spiritual teachings, Maggio asserts that Maria Carafa transcribed Thiene's advice in a *Memoriale degli ottimi Consigli del P.D. Gaetano a istanza nostra della Sapienza* on 6 March 1540 (Maggio 1670, pp. 167–68). Indeed, he stated that Maria wrote with her own hand on a sheet ("la scrisse di sua mano in un foglio"). In Thiene's view, the Monastery and the Congregation must be one body while having diverse members. Each member, however, must perform their office according to the principle by which "the foot must not be an arm nor the head, nor must the head be an arm or a foot". In addition, "one must never depend on nor hope in any person except Christ" and "one must think that if there were no self-will, there would

be neither hell nor purgatory in which one must remain until one's self-will is purged, and it is to be considered that Christ and His most holy Mother have taught us all this in deed". He concludes by stating that "up to here is noted by Sister Maria's hand".

Thiene's words, transcribed by Sister Maria, reflect various aspects of the reformed Catholic doctrine being implemented at La Sapienza. The analogy of the monastery as a body with different members recalls Pauline ecclesiology (1 Corinthians 12:12–27), emphasizing unity in diversity within the religious community. The insistence on exclusive dependence on Christ, not on other people, underscores a Christocentric inflection that should be read in the context of the contrast with Bernardino Ochino's doctrine and other forms of divergent spirituality that Carafa opposed. The reflection on self-will as a source of "purgatory" and "hell" aligns with the ascetic tradition and the doctrine of mortification that are central to monastic thought and in close union with the virtue of obedience for the functioning of a solid and renewed community structure.

In addition, the letters offer an insight into the daily life of the monastery and its protagonists. Among the recipients most frequently mentioned in the greetings, in addition to the young Caterina Carafa, are prominent figures such as Madama Aloisa and her relative, Madama Cassandra, identifiable with the celebrated Cassandra Marchese, the object of praise from the poet Jacopo Sannazaro, who undertook the religious life by entering La Sapienza Monastery in 1542, taking the name of Sister Elisabetta two years later. Another example is the letter dated 28 July 1542, addressed to the prioress and concerning Caterina Carafa, a young novice who entered the monastery in 1543 at the age of eight following the premature death of her father Ferrante. The text begins with a brief exhortation to Sister Maria, urging her to entrust herself unconditionally to the Divine Will. The focus then shifts to the young Caterina, with the intention of offering her comfort and encouragement amidst the family difficulties she was facing. Thiene exhorts the young woman to persevere, pointing to the sanctifying grace emanating from the Cross as a source of inspiration, and proposes to her the Marian model of perseverance at the feet of her crucified Son. The values emphasised in the letter include: the combination of robust humility and humble strength; the rejection of pride and worldly vanity; and ardent zeal for the salvation of souls.

Thiene, as spiritual director, reiterates how, through prayers and tears, the Bride of Christ can enjoy a sublime spiritual motherhood, the fruits of which will be fully revealed only in the heavenly dimension. These elements are presented as the benefits resulting from the holy acceptance of pain, as outlined in letter 31 of the collection.

Thiene was thus charged with the recruitment and evaluation of the spiritual discernment of new girls at La Sapienza, as shown by the episode involving two young Venetian women, Cecilia de Marinis and Barbara. In the spring of 1545, Thiene, at the time Provost of San Paolo Maggiore in Naples, undertook a journey to Venice to attend the Chapter of the Order. En route, he stopped off in Rome, where he was a guest of Carafa for three days. She entrusted him with meeting and evaluating the spirituality of the two Venetian women. Both women took their vows in 1547, and Sister Cecilia was subsequently elected prioress for three terms, in 1558, 1561 and 1564.

In letter 38, Thiene addresses the theme of spiritual motherhood as opposed to carnal motherhood. The occasion for this reflection is provided by two significant events: the taking of the veil by two new candidates in La Sapienza Monastery and the issuing of a Papal Brief that officially conferred on the prioress the relevant rights and powers over the community. In this context, Thiene addresses a message to Sister Maria, offering an elaborate meditation on the nature of motherhood. The future saint uses the metaphor of maternity to illustrate the process of spiritual growth and religious devotion. In the letter, he draws a contrast between carnal and spiritual motherhood, emphasising the merits and

joys of the latter. Thiene encourages the recipient to maintain a posture of strength and constancy in the face of difficulties, inviting her to consider such challenges as precious opportunities for spiritual growth. In this way, he transforms the concept of motherhood into a powerful rhetorical and spiritual tool, using it to inspire and guide the nuns on a path of faith and dedication far removed from the practice of prophecy.

Giovanni Marinoni joined the Theatine Orders of Clerics Regular in December 1528. In 1533, he accompanied Gaetano Thiene on a mission to expand the work of the Theatines in the Kingdom of Naples. The two devoted themselves to the development of the congregation, rigorously selecting novices and engaging in the reform of women's monasteries. Their collaboration was so close that it is often difficult to distinguish the responsibilities and actions of one from the other. In relation to La Sapienza, both were instructed by Pietro Carafa to "dedicate all their efforts to freeing that monastery from its servitude to secular people".

Marinoni was spiritual director of La Sapienza monastery from 1539 to 1562, except for the four years from 1543 to 1547, becoming the nuns' confessor in 1540 (Paschini 1926, p. 128). In the ten letters he addressed to Maria Carafa, beginning 26 November 1540 and passed down to us by Maria Maggio,¹⁴ the tone oscillates between reproach, encouragement and congratulations regarding the observance of religious reform among the nuns.

Surely Marinoni did not much appreciate this "serious and troublesome burden", the monastery's failure to meet his *desiderata*.¹⁵ In a letter of 26 November 1540, Marinoni reproaches the sisters, showing his frustration openly:

And I find myself in this bitterness and torment of conscience because I see that no emendation follows. You say words to me and then you do not follow up with deeds and you have no compassion either for my soul, or for your souls, or for the Passion of Christ Our Lord, or for his Precious Blood shed for you. Now no more words: let us come to deeds. (Maggio 1670, pp. 284–87; see also Andreu 1954, p. 79)

In the other letters, spiritual development and the path of reform to follow are connected to a path of self-renewal, cultivation of a spirit of prayer and a love for a life of silence, retreat and work. Above all, Marinoni focuses on obedience, penitence and the humble submission of the nuns, providing guidelines with which to measure and examine their consciences. Marinoni then regularly sends summaries and reflections to the nuns. In a letter of 1548, he acknowledges the importance of studying and meditating:

Through study, I have found the great merit of nuns who are voluntarily cloistered for the love of Christ and the harm caused by those who do the opposite. I am sending you what I have written that you may have it read to the nuns, so that they may be more compliant and more fervent in serving Christ and may pray to the Lord for me. (Maggio 1670, p. 296)

Marinoni's letter of 30 November 1555 confirms that Maria Carafa had written to him, as she did previously to her brother and Thiene. In this letter, for example, he had heard of her fragile health via her words "I have received a letter from you from which I have received consolation, understanding that by the grace of the Lord you have finally been well at peace, and that the infirm are well" (Maggio 1670, pp. 357–60). In the letters, Marinoni also communicates the state of difficulty in which he feels he is operating, comparing himself to holy martyrs, who are strong and "humble, quiet and patient in tribulation!", and finally recommends his own desires to the nuns:

But I cannot be, nor do I want to be, nor must I be, disobedient to Christ (who was obedient until death), to his Vicar, and to our Mother Holy Church, especially in these times of heretics, who do not want the obedience of the Church. And

I desire to live and die under holy obedience in the bosom of my Mother Holy Church. And for this reason, as I have said, I find myself in great affliction and I commend my poor soul strictly to your prayers; that you pray and make the Lord pray for me, a miserable sinner, and the vilest worm of the earth, that the Lord will not abandon me.

From these brief letters, a comparison can be drawn between Gaetano Thiene and Giovanni Marinoni, both pivotal figures in the Theatine Order, regarding their approach and role regarding Maria Carafa and the nuns. Thiene was renowned for his overarching vision of reform, often employing lofty metaphors such as spiritual motherhood in his guidance. In contrast, Marinoni adopted a more practical approach, reflected in his direct communicative style that emphasised the practical aspects of obedience. This difference can be attributed in part to Marinoni's more long-term role in Naples, which allowed for a closer relationship with the nuns.

The two figures complemented each other in their approaches, mirroring their distinct personalities and roles within the order. Thiene provided the vision and charisma necessary for inspiring reform, while Marinoni acted as the practical executor, implementing those reforms on the ground. Their divergent styles of spiritual guidance ultimately worked in tandem to shape the direction of the Theatine Order and its influence on the sisters under Maria Carafa's leadership.

4. Conclusions

In this preliminary analysis of Maria Carafa's figure, as portrayed in Maggio's hagiographical work, we see that she is depicted as a mirror of virtue for her brother, a reflection through which Maggio presents both to the reader. The female presence is in any case not ancillary but should be read in a much broader context that can no longer consider reform movements without their implementers, starting from the fact that, in this historical period, men and women stood side by side, were inspired by (more or less) orthodox doctrines and expressed themselves through the medium of the letter. Her "spiritual sons", though they call themselves such, do not entrust their spiritual evolution into the hands of their spiritual mother. The language that permeates the maternal metaphor is markedly different from, for example, the construction of the letters to Laura Mignani, a mother who nurses a child in need of, and longing for, spiritual nourishment with knowledge. In a young Gaetano Thiene's desires, spiritual motherhood represented the demand for an unconditional and all-encompassing relationship: "If ever there is any good fruit in me, I want you to share in it as much as I do, and moreover, you will have a great reward from the most abundant Lord" (Cistellini 1948, p. 232). Certainly, Mignani could also avail herself of a different, broad cultural circle that pushed for communication and discernment of the Biblical word and that was based on an interactive relationship between her and her followers.

In the history of these movements intellectual and historical importance has been, and continues to be, given to several somewhat subversive and eccentric figures—Domenica Narducci (who died a year before Maria Carafa), Vittoria Colonna and Paola Antonia Negri—because of their familiarity with writing, the Biblical text and the prophetic voice. The same critical work has only just started for the actresses and performers of Catholic orthodoxy.

Consider specifically the case of Maria Carafa, whose role has been reconsidered by historians and art historians, starting from the critical reconstruction of her voice inside and outside the hagiographic context, in search of the gaps that exist between being a papal project and having her own character. The biography sheds light on the natural passage of transmigration from the Catherinian biographical exemplum to an imposed Theatine spirit of obedience, according to a path that leads from a divine call in childhood to the desire to follow Christ in a humble but composed *imitatio*, which substitutes the call and

interlocution with a mystical vision and the exemplification of an external obedience that is also exemplary for her fellow nuns.

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Notes

- ¹ In addition to Maggio (1670), on Maria Carafa see Marchese (1668, pp. 21–30); Monti (1923, pp. 177–205); Andreu (1954, pp. XI, XXII–XXXIV, 71–77, 80–81, 84–88, 90, 92–96, 104–6, 110–22); Cruciani Troncarelli (1976), *ad indicem*; Visceglia (2023, p. 133). Monti collects in the appendix some of the letters sent to Maria by Carafa, some already published in other sources on the Pope like Maggio, and some taken from the original epistolary composed of 49 letters (April 1525–November 1551) contained in the ms. Vaticano Latino 10652 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome). See note 12 and, for a detailed description of this manuscript, see Codices (1920, pp. 599–600).
- ² On the monastery of La Sapienza see Colombo (1901, pp. 183–88); Novi Chavarria (2001, pp. 58–59, 155–61); Hills (2004, pp. 97–98); Boccadamo (2011, pp. 152–60).
- ³ See Creytens (1965, vol. 1, pp. 45–83); Miele (2001, pp. 99–100); on Carafa’s advices to his sister see Boccadamo (1990, p. 112).
- ⁴ For the history of the Order of the Clerics Regular see, among the main texts: Del Tufo (1609); Del Tufo (1616); Silos (1650–1666); Paschini (1926); Andreu (1974, pp. 8–54); Campanelli 1987. The most recent and comprehensive monograph on the order is by Vanni (2010, pp. 75–122); and the essays in D’Alessandro (2011–2012).
- ⁵ See the recent research by Arlati (2024).
- ⁶ For the work on the façade, documented between 1638 and 1641, see Loconte (2012, pp. 210–11, n. 17).
- ⁷ Founded in 1614 by the noblewoman Camilla Orsi, widow of Camillo Ghisleri, to welcome widowed women, and unmarried virgins, who wished neither to marry nor to be cloistered.
- ⁸ The archive of San Paolo Maggiore, after its suppression in the nineteenth century, was divided up among various bodies of the Italian state. Most of it was to be included in the San Martino archive of the National Library in Naples (Padiglione 1876).
- ⁹ Vanni highlights and insists on the movement’s pre-inquisitorial activity but see Daniele Santarelli’s critical note on the matter: Daniele Santarelli, ‘Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini della Controriforma, tra nuovi ordini religiosi, progetti di rinnovamento istituzionale, concilio e Inquisizione’ (<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00655715v4/document>, last access on 1 September 2025).
- ¹⁰ See also Elonora Cappuccilli’s critical view on Zarri’s statement in Cappuccilli (2022).
- ¹¹ On the relationship between Giovanni Berardino Fusciano and Carafa see Vanni (2016, p. 110); Fusciano (2007, pp. 7–25).
- ¹² The Pope’s letters are taken from Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 10652 (BAV, Vat. Lat. 10652, available online at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.10652, last access on 1 September 2025).
- ¹³ The epistolary, as reconstructed by Andreu, contains 22 letters addressed to Maria Carafa, 10 of which were included by Maggio in her Vita, and others preserved as relics and transcribed in the documentation for Thiene’s canonization.
- ¹⁴ These, too, were to be found in La Sapienza archive, which passed to the State Archives in Naples, *Fondo Monasteri soppressi*, which later largely burned down.
- ¹⁵ See Marinoni’s letter to Maria Carafa of 26th of April 1540 (Maggio 1670, pp. 284–87) and in Andreu (1954, pp. 78–79).

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Article

The Heritage of Priests Between Religion, Culture and Politics in an Italian Peripheral Area: The Collections of Romolo Putelli (1880–1939) and Alessandro Sina (1878–1953)

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Abstract: Romolo Putelli and Alessandro Sina were two politically active priests in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century. Their work, as well as their heritage, is culturally and socially representative of a peripheral area of Northern Italy, the Valcamonica. However, the two figures stood out by supporting two different political factions during the fascist period, generating alternative ways to acquire or donate their assets. By examining the archival documentation and bibliographical materials in their collections, this article aims to understand the processes, individuals involved, and the role of priests in assembling collections that remain accessible today. To accomplish this goal, it is essential to trace the biographical profiles of Romolo Putelli and Alessandro Sina, emphasising their prominent traits, as well as reconstructing the bureaucratic stages of the donations and acquisitions by identifying those aspects—whether socio-political, religious, or cultural—that would have significantly influenced the course of events. In doing so, this article aims to highlight how political–religious interference and public interest influence the development of a bibliographic cluster.

Keywords: Romolo Putelli; Alessandro Sina; Valcamonica; fascism and resistance; ecclesiastical Heritage; bibliographical collections

1. Introduction

The figure of the socially and politically active erudite ecclesiastic spread across Italy from the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, these individuals gained prominence within both religious and academic spheres. As custodians of archives, documentation, and libraries, they enjoyed considerable freedom in their research activities, whether professional or self-taught. Particularly in less populated peripheral areas, they stood out as trustworthy collectors of historical knowledge. Alessandro Sina and Romolo Putelli were well-known and enjoyed a significant reputation in their native area, Valcamonica. This region, situated in northern Italy between Brescia and Bergamo, is notoriously rich in its archaeological heritage and geological features. Its history features paths and trails that have connected Italy to France on one side and Austria on the other since modern times, turning the valley into a centre of political and economic interest.

Sina and Putelli lived concurrently in Valcamonica, and were connected by a bond of friendship, as well as by shared professional and research interests. They remain among the most significant scholars of Valcamonica. In support of their decades-long research, they amassed a significant bibliographical patrimony, which, however, underwent a completely different donation/acquisition process upon their death. The reasons for this notable

difference may lie in their political beliefs: on the one hand, Putelli supported fascism; on the other, Sina fought for the Italian Resistance. Furthermore, Putelli's life was marked by contrasts, frequently placing him at the heart of social and cultural attention in Valcamonica. A further aspect of the issue is connected to the Second World War, a time of great chaos even in the smallest towns of Italy.

This article aims to reconstruct the key stages of the inheritance formation of the two priests and to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind the developments that followed their acquisitions or donations. The research will therefore follow the essential phases of the last century. Still, it will also examine how much of this heritage—and under what conditions—has been transmitted to the present day. To support this research, several consultations were conducted in archives and libraries linked to the two priests, their scientific work and their assets. To these Institutes, which will be referred to together with their materials in footnotes, I extend my sincere thanks for their assistance.

This article will be divided into two main sections dedicated to Putelli and Sina and their inheritance. The final paragraph, however, attempts to relate the events and thereby highlight their differences in political and cultural terms. Special consideration will be given to Romolo Putelli's donation, given its troubled history.

2. The Eclectic Nature of Romolo Putelli's Life Encompassing Priesthood, Studies, and Public Offices

Romolo Putelli was born in Breno on 3 March 1880 to Giovanni Putelli and Francesca Valgolio.¹ He was born into a family with a modest social background, and although he was an only child, his parental network was extensive. Putelli initially studied at the seminary in Brescia and later at the Apollinare University of Rome. He obtained his degree in Dogmatic Theology in 1904. In August that year, he was ordained as a priest in the town of Alatri, situated approximately sixty miles from Rome. For several years, he served as deputy director and professor at the episcopal gymnasium, as well as a pastoral minister.² At the end of this experience outside Valcamonica, Romolo Putelli returned to Breno to study the history and civilisation of the Valley.³

Upon his return, Putelli re-established connections with the social and cultural elites not only within the valley but also across the entire province of Brescia, seeking to forge new relationships with prominent figures of national importance.⁴ His successful networking enabled him to undertake various roles. He was appointed a partner of the *Ateneo* of Brescia, a member of the Historical Society for Lombardy, Venice and Piedmont, as well as Royal Bibliographic Inspector for Valcamonica. Moreover, these roles allowed him to work on important projects such as the reorganisation of the Episcopal Archives of Brescia and Mantua. This increased Putelli's public visibility and gradually took him away from performing his religious duties.

Among the public offices held by Romolo Putelli, those most connected to the development of his bibliographic heritage were the roles of General Secretary of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*,⁵ Director of the magazine *Illustrazione Camuna*⁶ and Director of the *Museo Camuno*. However, this museum had not yet been established.

With these titles, though with some complaints of political and clerical interference,⁷ Putelli's private sphere was increasingly influenced by his presence in the public domain. This affected the development of his private collection, perceptions of his status, and the transmission of his future inheritance.

The bond that Putelli created with the *Museo Camuno*—which has been in operation for over a decade since its opening in 1923—was undoubtedly the closest and most enduring he maintained. He used his own house to exhibit the museum collections, thereby utilising

his private property to display objects belonging to the museum of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*.

Furthermore, Putelli diminished the influence of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*, which used the magazine *Illustrazione Camuna* to solicit support and donations from citizens. Although he acted as a facilitator in securing contributions, his reputation enabled him to sideline the authority of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica* and ultimately become the owner of the museum collections.

The roles he held within the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*, along with his administrative and decision-making power over the museum, tacitly transformed the entire public patrimony into a private one.

To study the transmission process of Putelli's inheritance up to the present day, one must consider multiple factors. These include assets and artefacts that Putelli owned or acquired clandestinely, as well as the acquisition of collections through a network of private donations from across the region. Putelli's collections included early modern books, manuscripts, parchments, archaeological finds, paintings, ancient coins and local handicrafts.⁸

3. Romolo Putelli's Public and Private Museum from Its Opening to Its Donation to the Fascist Government

Due to a phase of organisation and arrangement of the collections,⁹ the *Museo Camuno* first opened on 10 June 1923.¹⁰ The museum was developed into six thematic sections, each representing a significant portion of the collected artefacts. The sections were: Ancient art, Reproductions of Ancient Art, Modern Art, History, Ethnography and Natural Sciences.¹¹ However, considering the modest size of the museum and the number of collected items, some materials were never displayed and remained in Putelli's private ownership. They were either stacked or in crates.¹² Reports on the preservation of collections and the museum were often contradictory. While highlighting the number of visitors to the *Museo Camuno*,¹³ reports, nonetheless, remarked upon a certain lack of interest from the community of Valcamonica¹⁴ and the precarious condition of the museum halls.¹⁵ Similarly, the inventories and the list of collected items seem to be contradictory and unrealistic. Specifically, Putelli provided exaggerated descriptions of the museum. In doing so, Putelli achieved his goal of self-visibility, aware that his role as director of the *Museo Camuno* was subject to public scrutiny. He was also eager to please both the Valcamonica community and scholars more generally.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that at that time, namely the 1920s and 1930s, Italy was under a fascist regime. Thus, Putelli, who came from a family of fascist sympathisers,¹⁶ thought to ingratiate himself with the political establishment by offering his expertise and even the museum collections to the fascist party. Between 1923 and 1926, Putelli made his first donation to the party. The unsuccessful outcome of this operation was due to some bureaucratic shortcomings.¹⁷ The most significant donation attempt was made on 28 April 1937.¹⁸ As in earlier cases, Putelli acted unilaterally and presented the museum collections as his property. This position marked a turning point in the history of the *Museo Camuno* and its collections, shaping its future and the preservation of its collections. The bureaucratic process of donation was not a straightforward operation, initially due to practical issues with property identification and the involvement of relevant offices. Space does not permit an exhaustive analysis of all the museum material. Here, I will focus my attention on some key events and, more specifically, on the museum's bibliographic collections of incunabula and early modern printed editions, which have not been sufficiently addressed in contemporary scholarship.¹⁹

The donation of 1937 is described in detail in a letter that Putelli addressed to Benito Mussolini. In this letter, the priest expressed several demands, among which was that the collections remain united, that the museum be regarded as an institution of national importance, that it stays in Breno—or in Brescia—and that he be appointed its guardian and resident for life. If the museum were to remain in Breno, Putelli even promised to gift one hundred thousand *lire* to refurbish the rooms allocated to the museum and its collections.²⁰ The conditions suggested by the priest were undoubtedly favourable to accepting the offer, and the process continued silently until December of that year, when the Superintendence of Medieval and Modern Art of Lombardy established that a designated inspector visit Breno.²¹

As the archival documentation on this case shows, the offices of the Superintendence of Medieval and Modern Art of Lombardy were not fully aware of the type of material Putelli was willing to donate. Following the first examination by an appointed inspector,²² Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Putelli wrote a series of letters to him.²³ In these letters, Putelli explained the contents kept in his house-museum. Such materials included several paintings from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, sculptures, archaeological finds, ancient coins, furniture, and other handicrafts, forty-five incunabula, three hundred and fifty sixteenth-century books, and ten illuminated scrolls. In addition to the objects on display, a large amount of bibliographical material was stored in crates, whose value Putelli presumably overestimated.²⁴ Despite the heterogeneity of the collections and the need for intervention by other institutions such as the Bibliographic Superintendence for incunabula and manuscripts, the donation could be accepted, provided that the less relevant part of the material was excluded from the donation.²⁵

More than a year after the official donation proposal was made, the situation remained unresolved. The complex bureaucracy of the government and the need for on-site inspections in a peripheral and mountainous area that was difficult to access led Putelli to urge relevant offices to deal with the donation.²⁶ He did so in an attempt to engage with national cultural circuits and challenge the local political interference of the Municipality and, possibly, the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*.²⁷ In fact, in several instances, Romolo Putelli disagreed with the Municipality's proposals for the arrangement of "his" museum,²⁸ requiring a more decisive intervention by the fascist government, as the proposed donation would become of national importance.²⁹ In a letter dated 11th November 1938, Putelli expressed his frustration at waiting to transfer his properties to more elite circles.³⁰ From this document, Putelli's non-conciliatory personality emerged. He strategically used certain information to pressure the superintendent, including private offers to his collection and the inadequate treatment that the Municipality was allegedly reserving for him.³¹ On this occasion, Putelli allowed himself to be carried away by the magnitude of the events, adding that he had spent more than three hundred thousand *lire* to preserve the museum collections over the course of twenty years of work, thus omitting all mention of community donations. Putelli aimed to present himself as a diligent worker so patriotic towards his country and its leaders that he would be willing to forgo wealth. The narrative he attempted to convey was that of a devout individual crushed by circumstances unworthy of him, and consequently unbecoming of the fascist Italian State represented by his donated heritage. And this strategy worked, because Putelli was offered premises under construction and compensation until the new arrangement was ready.³²

At the beginning of 1939, the Superintendence of Medieval and Modern Art, representing the Ministry of National Education, was ready to formalise the act of donation, excluding, at least for the moment, a few problems that had not yet been fully resolved, such as the heterogeneity of the heritage.³³ Fatally, the official act was delayed and on 10 May 1939 Romolo Putelli died.³⁴ This event further complicated the bureaucratic process.

4. From the Second World War and Beyond: The Fate of the Collections After Putelli's Death

With Putelli's death, the museum was closed, and the rooms and collections were sealed.³⁵ The process related to the donation could continue,³⁶ provided that the ownership of the property was verified³⁷, that an objective value of the items was determined, and that the heirs³⁸ of Putelli were involved³⁹ so that the will of the deceased priest could be carried out.

Pending the official donation to the State, the entire collection was transferred to the premises of the old barracks, which belonged to the Municipality of Breno.⁴⁰ This was the first of numerous transfers that Putelli's collections suffered. This resulted in the loss of bibliographic material, including some incunabula (Panazza 1994, p. VIII).

Due to the limited interest and value identified by the inspectors, it was necessary to select material for disposal before the donation. For this occasion, the Bibliographic Superintendence was finally involved.⁴¹ The bibliographical inspector appointed after one year was Paolo Nalli, who, due to logistical reasons, found difficult to reach the locality of Breno for almost another year.⁴² Putelli's long-standing practice and the conditions for preserving his heritage, which, as discussed, came from the *Museo Camuno* (an institution representing the culture, society, and history of Valcamonica), did not go unnoticed in the socio-cultural circles of Breno. This was the case of Araldo Bertolini, who in 1948 became the new president of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*. Having received partially incorrect information, Bertolini made himself available to purchase a series of paintings that had been discarded from the donation.⁴³ The Superintendence of Art Galleries in Lombardy promptly responded to him, emphasising that Putelli's collections would form the core of a local museum owned by the State and based in Breno, and that only after the examination by the bibliographic inspector would the items of secondary importance be discarded.⁴⁴ More than four years after the donation proposal, this document attests to the organisational confusion and circulating information regarding Putelli's collections.

On 19 September 1941, the report of the bibliographic inspector was completed. It highlighted a severe disorder, poor conservation, and hypothetical manipulation of the material. The small number of significant items—contrary to Putelli's claims—prompted the intervention of an expert from the State Archive of Brescia. The inclusion of an additional public institution further delayed the process. The visit of the director of the State Archive of Brescia was brief and concluded with a proposal to transfer the archival collections to the State Archive of Brescia.⁴⁵

Putelli's heirs gave consent for the deposit of archival materials to be transferred to the State Archive of Brescia.⁴⁶ However, they demanded that the provenance from Putelli's inheritance be acknowledged. Nonetheless, the bibliographic collection was partially discarded and partially donated to a local library.⁴⁷ Additionally, part of Putelli's inheritance was to be allocated to the local museum, except for some pieces of furniture that were donated to the Municipality of Breno. Despite these decisions not being in line with Putelli's will, the relevant governmental bodies did not hesitate to carry out their plans.⁴⁸

Just when the complex practice of donation appeared to be concluding, the escalation of the Second World War and the subsequent fall of the fascist government caused the entire matter to be forgotten. It was only in the post-war period that a small group of intellectuals began to show interest in Putelli's inheritance again.⁴⁹ Given the precarious conditions in which the collections were kept during the War, in 1947, they were moved to some rooms in Villa Ronchi, the seat of the Municipality of Breno (Panazza 1994, pp. VIII–IX). Thanks to a collaboration between the reconstituted *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica* and the Municipality of Breno, a committee was established to review the findings, organise the

material, and prepare a comprehensive inventory report (Panazza 1994, p. XI). Traces of this inventory and a subsequent certificate dated 1956 were lost. However, in July 2024, I was able to find a document related to a section of this documentation. It is an inventory of the bibliographic material collected, which lists five hundred and sixty-four scrolls from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—catalogued by Alessandro Sina—and thousands of more recent items, twenty-one incunabula—or deemed such by the cataloguer—two hundred and ninety-one sixteenth-century books, and a further one hundred and forty-six early modern printed sources.⁵⁰ These figures, at least concerning the bibliographical part of Putelli's inheritance, slightly differ from the numbers listed in the previous paragraph.

One of the most interesting archival documents on Putelli and the museum is a hitherto unknown letter from Superintendent Teresa Rogledi Manni, in which she stated that she was not aware of the donation process and had not been informed about the developments of the affair.⁵¹

Putelli's donation was not completed on time due to a long series of unforeseen bureaucratic obstacles, which, combined with the fall of the fascist government and the end of interference from the political bodies responsible for cultural heritage, created a blank slate in the immediate post-war period. During this time, the superintendents and the Municipality of Breno reorganised themselves to find the most suitable solution. The only issue that remained unresolved was the verification of property ownership. Putelli was never asked whether the collections belonged to him, although he did act and collect historical material at his own house for the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*. As a result, the *Associazione* was no longer regarded, and the collections became the property of the Municipality of Breno.

The entire collection reformed the *Museo Camuno*, which reopened to the public on 10 August 1958 at the premises of the Municipality of Breno.⁵² Putelli's bibliographical material was merged into the early modern collections held at the Civic Library of Breno. This arrangement has indeed caused a problem for scholars trying to separate the two collections today. Despite the limited space and the loss of some materials, work on the new museum location only began in 2006. The inauguration of the current headquarters of the *Museo Camuno* took place on 7 March 2009, at the Palace of Culture in Breno.⁵³ Subsequently, on 24 September 2012, the archival and library collections were relocated to a different department within the museum to ensure that they were placed in the best possible condition and preserved over time.⁵⁴ Today, the *Museo Camuno* stands as a significant local historical landmark, although the bibliographic collections have yet to receive the scholarly attention they merit.⁵⁵

It took over twenty years (1937–1958) to normalise the situation concerning Romolo Putelli's inheritance. The engagement of the fascist party and the illegality of the priest's donation solely resulted in the deterioration of the collections, as well as the loss and destruction of some of its significant items. Putelli's wishes were honoured for as long as he was alive. Following his death, attempts were made to find a compromise between heirs and governmental institutions. However, it is noteworthy that Putelli's religious sphere never overlapped with the political one, showing that his role as a priest was merely a job throughout a lifetime devoted to enhancing his reputation and self-visibility.

5. The Memory of Priest Alessandro Sina

Alessandro Sina was born in Zone on 7 March 1878 to Defendente and Lucia Salvalai. He studied at the seminary in Brescia, where he was ordained a priest on 1 June 1901. His priestly activity was closely connected to Valcamonica. He served as a coadjutor for three years in Prestine; for two years he served as a spiritual treasurer in Lovenò, and then for five years as a parish priest in Lovenò-Grumello. Between 1911 and 1915, he

was a coadjutor at Beata in Piancamuno. Afterwards, he served as a parish priest in Qualino for fifteen years and, from 1930, he was coadjutor and rector of St. Mary in Esine.⁵⁶ Moreover, he distinguished himself as a notable scholar⁵⁷ and was appointed to the board of directors of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*, partner of the *Ateneo* of Brescia, a member of the Historical Society for Lombardy, and an honorary inspector for the Monuments of Valcamonica.⁵⁸ He was also awarded the Medal of Merit in 1919 for assistance to the military families.⁵⁹ The friendships with notable individuals such as Paolo Guerrini and Romolo Putelli enabled Sina to contribute to and publish in numerous magazines. These included *Brixia Sacra*, *La Valcamonica* and *Illustrazione Camuna*. Sina also authored some of the most significant studies on the religious history of Valcamonica.⁶⁰

Among the activities that most distinguished Sina was politics. Before the rise of fascism, he was involved in the *Movimento Cattolico Camuno* and the *Lega Cattolica*, also becoming secretary of the *Lega Camuna* for the defence of trade unions and workers. Although he held religious roles of relative importance, Sina devoted his life to studying and serving the community, both politically and socially. However, it was during the era of fascism that Sina solidified his political stance. Like other priests, he emphasised hospitality and care, as well as assistance to the *Fiamme Verdi* of Tito Speri, a partisan unit, thereby making a noteworthy contribution to the Resistance.⁶¹

As an expert transcriber and reader of manuscripts, as well as a member of a commission purposefully established to fulfil this task, Sina spent his final years working on the reorganisation of the archival and library collections of the *Museo Camuno*.⁶² He died in Esine on 27 February 1953, mourned by the entire community.⁶³ He did not leave a will regarding his book collection, which he had amassed over decades of diligent study.

6. Was the Memory of Alessandro Sina More Important than His Assets?

At his death, Sina did not leave any testamentary disposition. His collection of bibliographic materials,⁶⁴ accumulated over decades of scientific activity, was inherited by his niece, Lucia Panighetti Sina. Within a few months, several options for the destination of Sina's assets were presented to the heir. The public interest in acquiring the priest's inheritance was unexpectedly high. The interest in acquiring this scholarly collection was linked to the memory of the individual who assembled these items, namely Alessandro Sina. The news of the negotiations' offers and counteroffers was also discussed in local media outlets, establishing a significant and stable presence. In November 1953, it appeared in the *Giornale di Brescia*, the leading newspaper of the city of Brescia and its province. The parties involved were diverse and originated from both the public and private sectors of Valcamonica and Brescia; resolving the conflict required the intervention of the bibliographic superintendent Teresa Rogledi Manni.

Part of the documents generated during the negotiations concerning the acquisition of Sina's assets was published in one of the numerous conference proceedings commemorating his memory.⁶⁵ However, the new sources discovered through research at the Archival and Bibliographic Superintendence of Lombardy enable a more coherent reconstruction of the story, which is discussed both in private correspondence between the parties and publicly in the *Giornale di Brescia*.

In November 1953, this newspaper published an article,⁶⁶ confirming the acquisition of Sina's collections by the *Accademia Tadini* in Lovere.⁶⁷ This was done through the involvement of Director Gino Scalzi, a friend of Sina, with the purpose of establishing a comprehensive academic library.

The article criticised this decision, noting that Sina's inheritance had attracted the attention of other potential buyers, such as the Municipality of Breno, the *Associazione*

Pro Valle Camonica, and some private individuals in the valley. The following day, Ugo Baroncelli, the Director of the *Queriniana* Library in Brescia, published a comment on the news, expressing regret on behalf of the entire province for losing the assets and memory of a prominent Brescian scholar and priest.⁶⁸ He also called for politicians and superintendents to intervene to prevent the matter from reaching a conclusion. Moreover, Baroncelli contacted the bibliographic superintendent for Lombardy, informing her of the newspaper articles and notifying her that in Valcamonica the acquisition of Sina's inheritance by the Municipality of Breno was believed to have been finalised.⁶⁹ The superintendent was inclined to plead the case, requesting that the collections be kept in Breno.⁷⁰

With the superintendent's support, Baroncelli became involved in the matter to explore all possibilities. From personal interviews with the heir, he discovered that some members of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camuna* and scholars from the valley had acted like «birds of prey», forging municipal documents to obtain at least part of Sina's inheritance. It was for this precise reason that the heir chose to decline further negotiations with the public authorities of Breno. As an alternative to the *Accademia Tadini*, the heir would have regarded the acquisition of the inheritance by the *Queriniana* Library as a more suitable Brescian institution for the conservation of bibliographic material.⁷¹ The actions of Ugo Baroncelli were immediately followed by a telegram from Superintendent Teresa Rogledi Manni to Sina's heir, requesting that negotiations with the *Accademia Tadini* be suspended.⁷²

The official offer from the *Queriniana* Library was sent to the Superintendent on 16th November 1953, including a summary of the events of the preceding days.⁷³ Baroncelli mobilised, with the support of the citizens of Valcamonica, the Mayor of Breno and the Assessor for Public Education of Esine, against the loss of Sina's inheritance. Baroncelli never regarded the *Accademia Tadini* as dishonest and unprofessional. For this reason, he also suggested a joint purchase: all the assets would be transferred to the deposits of the *Queriniana*, except for the most important units, which would be allocated to the academy. Under this proposal, the bibliographic supervisor organised a meeting with all involved parties—the heir, superintendent, *Accademia Tadini*, *Queriniana* Library, Municipality of Breno—on 24 November 1953.⁷⁴

The days leading up to the meeting on 24 November were chaotic and marked by circulating information that was only partly reliable. On 19 November, Oberto Ameraldi, a municipal councillor of Esine, formally communicated to the superintendent that in October, the successful bid was submitted by the Municipality of Breno instead of the *Accademia Tadini*, whose intermediaries did not operate with complete transparency.⁷⁵ A conflict of interest clearly influenced the dissemination of this information, as Ameraldi was a distant heir to part of Sina's collections—specifically, the documentary collection of the Jansenist Guadagnini from Esine.⁷⁶ Indeed, Ameraldi attempted to retain part of Sina's inheritance. On 24 November, an article was published in the *Giornale di Brescia* that spread the information about Ameraldi.⁷⁷ It criticised the hidden interests behind the auction among public bodies, as well as the heir, who, according to sources, would have increased economic demand due to the involvement of parties beyond the Municipality of Breno. Finally, this article recognised the *Queriniana* Library as a guardian of Sina's heritage and memory.

Regarding the meeting on 24 November, I have found no documents about it. However, other sources indicate that the Municipality of Breno, as already evident, was excluded from the competition in favour of the *Queriniana* Library.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the *Accademia Tadini* would not have abandoned the agreement already established with the heir on 4 November; however, it would nonetheless consider Baroncelli's proposal with a somewhat critical attitude towards the situation.⁷⁹ An excerpt from the previously mentioned article provides insight into the conclusions of the affair (D. V. 1973, p. 95). This highlights a

contract dated 28 November 1953, in which the Municipality of Brescia, represented by the *Queriniana* Library, purchased the entire collection of Sina, incorporating it into its holdings.

Less than a month later, the controversy over the acquisition of Sina's collection resumed in the *Giornale di Brescia*.⁸⁰ Araldo Bertolini harshly criticised the decision to move the inheritance to the city, arguing that the cultural loss for the valley would have occurred anyway. The response to the accusations against Baroncelli was promptly included in the same article, which included a further hostile reply to Bertolini by Enrico Tarsia (D. V. 1973, pp. 91–92). Sina's heir subsequently discussed the criticisms of Bertolini (D. V. 1973, p. 94). According to the heir, the senseless dispute driven by personal interests of figures like Araldo Bertolini has tarnished the memory of Alessandro Sina and his work, and has turned his heritage and the associated bureaucratic practice into the «tale of the village». Extended exposure to public opinion would result in an ongoing wave of criticism directed towards individuals who did not receive the outcomes they desired from the situation.

Noting that the *Queriniana* Library had received Sina's inheritance, it remains unclear the extent of this patrimony and its economic value. Analysis of the receipt registers of the *Queriniana* Library from April 1951 to February 1967, shows the presence of a flow of receipts named «*Acquisto Biblioteca Sina*», «*Biblioteca Sina*», «*Fondo Sina*».⁸¹ These were concerned with the acquisition of approximately two hundred and sixty printed editions, mostly contemporaneous with the priest, including some items from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.⁸² The material is mainly related to Sina's studies, especially ecclesiastical history. Although the most significant component of Sina's collection was the documentary/manuscript section, it remains unclear what his librarian nucleus is, because the number of identified items is limited. Indeed, some works cited as part of the inheritance acquisition are missing from the registers and the online catalogue.

The purchase of Sina's collections was a topic of heated debate among local political offices, the community and public opinion. The media coverage that characterised November 1953 influenced the events, hastening decisions that caused discontent for some of the parties involved. Much of the resonance is linked to Sina's memory and the necessity to keep his commemoration in the province of Brescia. Although Sina did not leave a will, his heir played a vital role in identifying the risks to the deceased's inheritance and devising a solution that would theoretically safeguard the collections.

7. Common Characteristics but Different Resonance, Historical Contexts and Political Influence

The events surrounding Putelli's and Sina's collections capture a social, cultural, and political snapshot of Italy before and after the Second World War. The connection between valuable items amassed over decades of work and public and private interests is inseparable. Furthermore, the story of the two priests' inheritance illustrates how a peripheral region like Valcamonica is rich in events and stories related to those discussed throughout this article. However, despite their numerous similarities, the evident differences in their administration, treatment, and perception of the two priests' collections are unmistakable.

As discussed, the administration of the donation process, initially undertaken by Putelli and subsequently by his heirs and public officials, was intricate. The heterogeneity of the collections and Putelli's will—whose declaration of the estate as private property was not transparent—clashed with Italy's complex political situation and wartime disruptions. Although the abandonment of the material led to deterioration and dispersion, what is surprising is that, at the end of the conflict, Putelli's collection did not receive the recognition it deserved, considering the amount of valuable material it contained. On the contrary, the inheritance was received quite casually and tacitly, without actually clarifying all the public aspects of the acquisition in the 1950s. After many decades, a definitive

arrangement for Putelli's collection was finally established. Although it currently stands as a flagship of Valcamonica and Breno, the preserved material continues to mend the turbulent public-institutional process.

In contrast, Sina did not draft a will, likely due to his perception of his assets as resources for scholarly endeavours rather than as superficial ornaments, as was the case with Putelli. Although Sina's inheritance did not include incunabula or illuminated scrolls, the media and political battle that emerged in the post-war period to claim Sina's belongings and memory was undoubtedly more significant and impactful than that related to Putelli's collections. Although Sina's collections are housed in one of Brescia's most important public institutions, the *Queriniana* Library, part of the priest's bibliographical legacy is now fragmented and dispersed across the institute's extensive and diverse collections. Compared to Putelli's collections—conserved under the name *Raccolta Putelli*—Sina's are more difficult to view in their entirety.

A reflection on the differing perceptions and treatment of the two collections can arise from the political stance of the two priests. While Sina was widely remembered and the subject of periodic conferences in his honour, academic interest in Putelli's legacy only emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century. The neglect in which Putelli was left during the early post-war decades—characterised by a process of cultural erasure of fascism—affects his bibliographical collections, which nonetheless deserve greater attention. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that if Putelli's collections had been regarded not as his political legacy but as an asset of Valcamonica and Brescia, they would not have suffered such a significant loss of rare items, including incunabula and sixteenth-century printed editions. Sadly, politics and religion could not be separated in the lives of influential local figures such as priests Alessandro Sina and Romolo Putelli.

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Notes

- ¹ Town par excellence of the Valcamonica located in the centre of the valley and on the main road that connected the norther area to the territories of Lake Iseo. For an in-depth look at Breno in the decades of the birth of Romolo Putelli, see (Canevali 1929).
- ² The contemporary historian Angelo Giorgi is one of the greatest experts on the biography of Romolo Putelli. I suggest: (Giorgi 2000).
- ³ Few years after Putelli's death, Alessandro Sina provided a biographical report of his life through the publication of an obituary. The article is particularly detailed and highlights their personal connection. In fact, in addition to the desire of studying the Valcamonica, Sina added that Putelli came back to motherland because he was eager to take care of his family. (Sina 1943, pp. 49–52).
Regarding the year in which Putelli returned to Breno, the sources are less clear, and it is assumed that he had returned to Valcamonica already in the early 1907. He would have been the 265th member of the newly founded *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*. Although he was not one of the founders, the inscription appears to be rather early, considering that there were over 1.000 members in February 1907. (*Bollettino Ufficiale dell'Associazione Pro Valle Camonica* 1907; Bertolini 1958, p. 4; Panazza 1994, pp. V–XIV).
- ⁴ Giovanni Marro was a figure strongly linked to Putelli. He was one of the most important scholars of rock art in Valcamonica, and the relationship with the priest helped him to continue his research. Some traces can be found in: (Marro 1930, 1934). Although we do not have any evidence of their meeting, it is presumably to think that Romolo Putelli tried to get in touch with

Gabriele D'Annunzio, who received as gift Putelli's most important publication. The edition was: (Putelli 1915). News about the success of this work in: (Signaroli 2015, pp. I–VIII).

5 Starting in 1902, some eminent figures of Breno had been expressing the need for a historical and cultural valorisation of Valcamonica. This feeling led, for example, the collector Fortunato Canevali to offer his own medal to the Municipality of Breno. (Giorgi 2000, pp. 5–6)

In 1903, some local notaries took the first steps towards the creation of a museum that represented the entire Valcamonica and preserved the historical heritage. (Panazza 1994, p. VII)

From these events, on 20 November 1904 the *Pro Valle Camonica* was officially born. The formal purpose of the association was the economic and social promotion of Valcamonica, with an interest in encouraging tourism and the conservation and enhancement of the local historical heritage. The association mobilized itself by promoting public works, road and hydroelectric plants. In addition, it regularly published an Official Bulletin, later replaced by the *Illustrazione Camuna* and by the *Illustrazione Camuna e Sebina*.

6 The foundation of *Illustrazione Camuna* dates to 1908, when Putelli was nominated General Secretary of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*. Born with the aim of replacing the Official Bulletin of the association, this instrument of communication proved to be particularly dynamic and suitable for a wide audience and a diverse variety of topics. The role of director allowed Putelli to use the periodical also for the achievement of personal goals, such as the consolidation of his social relations. The published articles were selected, reviewed and written—in several cases also under pseudonyms—by the director himself. They were intended both to provide a daily service to the community and to promote tourism in the valley. However, there was no lack of historical scientific publications, often accompanied by sought-after photographs. In these terms, the communication between the public institution and the communities of the valley was in the arbitrary hands of the priest, thus strengthening his position.

For a general in-depth look at the topics covered in the *Illustrazione Camuna*, I suggest another time the obituary written by Alessandro Sina. (Sina 1943, pp. 50–51)

7 In this way Angelo Giorgi commented it in (Giorgi 2000, p. 11).

8 It is very interesting to understand the criteria used by Putelli for selecting and accumulating objects of cultural value. In recent years I have explored the topic in depth through various research and part of it is being published. In order not to distract attention from the thread of this article, I point out just the salient features.

Nowadays there is no complete inventory of Romolo Putelli's assets, as the goods conserved in the *Raccolta Putelli* have different provenances. The *Raccolta Putelli* can be considered as a patchwork of Putelli's assets and other collections added in recent decades. From a cultural point of view, the bibliographic collection collected by the priest is decidedly significant. Of this, twenty incunabula, three hundred editions from the XVI century and as many hundreds of early modern editions can still be observed. Unlike what will be seen in the case of Alessandro Sina, the bibliographic apparatus accumulated by Putelli had more of a collecting value. This collection of early modern books is representative of the religious culture of Valcamonica instead of Putelli's. From the examination of these early modern books, numerous manuscript traces from local owners emerged, characterized by their heterogeneous social background. These provenance notes demonstrate the existence of an early modern book's circulation, based on a network of lay people and religious.

Editions of value and historical-cultural interest stand out such as the works of Tommaso De Vio, Denis le Chartreux, Tommaso d'Aquino, Publius Ovidius Naso, Ioannes Chrisostomus, Marcus Tullius Cicero, Aristoteles, Luis de Granada, Christoph Hegendorff. In the collection there were also a *Flagellum Daemonorum* (1593)—a manual against exorcisms of significant collectible value—and a *Viaggio da Venezia al sancto sepulchro* from Niccolò da Poggibonsi (1500 or 1516) which unfortunately had been lost in the last decades of XX century.

The eclectic figure of Romolo Putelli distanced himself from the classic prototype of a scholar priest. His centrality in political-social dynamics conditioned his relationship with cultural goods, converting them on the one hand as a collecting pride, and on the other as a useful tool to draw on for unpublished publications and writings. In fact, the studies of Putelli were much more linked to the archival material taken from religious bodies and lay donors in Valcamonica and throughout the province of Brescia. Among the priest's publications, those relating to local studies stand out as the result of his relationship with early modern parchments. These, produced and preserved above all by the religious bodies of Valcamonica, offered a complete vision of the economic, legal, religious and social aspects of the valley in modern times.

To conclude, Romolo Putelli's accumulation practices do not seem influenced by personal interests but rather by the impulsiveness and the opportunities offered by the market and his social circle.

9 A fire in Putelli's house damaged numerous collections, including almost all the parchments, various manuscripts, early modern books, magazines, prints, photographs and postcards; as well as several paintings, letters, notes, diaries and transcriptions. The tragedy was also discussed by local news. I suggest: (Putelli 1919, pp. 150–51, 1929).

10 The topic is most carefully observed in (*Illustrazione Camuna* 1923, VI, p. 8).

11 For further information, I suggest (*Illustrazione Camuna* 1910, VII, pp. 5–7).

- 12 20 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107; 22 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 13 Several secondary sources talk about this issue (Lonati 1929, p. 7; Bononiae 1924, pp. 188–90; P. B. 1929, p. 39; Illustrazione Camuna e Sebina 1931, VI, pp. 10–13).
- 14 The topic is most carefully observed in (Illustrazione Camuna 1924, V, pp. 1–2).
- 15 Secondary source of particular interest for a less subjective view: (*Di una Collezione Mal Nota* 1931, p. 5).
- 16 In 1928, Putelli's father taught young *Balilla*—a cultural and ideological institution spread throughout the Peninsula that educated children through the ideals of fascism—in Breno. 22 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 17 28 aprile 1937, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 18 See note 17.
- 19 Regarding the art collection: (Giorgi 2009, pp. 89–94; Piazza 2013). Among the few publications on Putelli's book collection I would like to point out again: (Franzoni 1988).
- 20 See note 18 above.
- 21 27 dicembre 1937, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 22 20 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 23 22 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107; 24 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 24 About twelve thousand units were reported. 22 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107
- 25 27 gennaio 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 26 16 agosto 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 27 The Municipality of Breno, in the person of the Podestà Erminio Valverti, accepted the ministerial provisions that required, in case the entire heritage had remained in Breno, the organisation of suitable properties for the museum at their own expense. 6 giugno 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
Breno's political institutions—like so many others in Italy at the time—whether or not they were supporters of the fascist political rule, were not able to refuse what the government bodies demanded.
- 28 Romolo Putelli asked for a larger new residence that could accommodate him and the museum collections with greater dignity. The priest was in favour of the acquisition of an old possession of the Cattaneo family, one of the most important dynasties of Breno and the valley. The Municipality counteroffered with the properties of the old hospital, an option not to the liking of the priest. 16 agosto 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107; 18 ottobre 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 29 On several occasions Romolo Putelli pointed out and reiterated that the museum would have been considered an institution of national importance under the supervision of the fascist government, while the Municipality had the responsibility and the honour of being just a renter, and, as such, that it had to be subjected to instructions from the guardian and the real owner of the collections. 16 agosto 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107; 11 novembre 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 30 11 novembre 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 31 Since the Municipality would have offered Putelli «not a wider and statelier placement, but the massing and relegation in the house of evicted», the priest would have been open to the transfer of the entire museum to Brescia or—with a gesture of revenge—to Darfo, an important town in Valcamonica. *Ibidem*. The threat of a transfer of the collections away from Breno, social and cultural pole of the Associazione Pro Valle Camonica and among the most important towns in the valley, was a tool often used by Romolo Putelli to emphasize the privilege of disposing such an important and significant (private) museum assets. Illustrazione Camuna 1924, V, pp. 1–2.
- 32 17 dicembre 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107; 19 dicembre 1938, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 33 16 febbraio 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 34 A moving obituary written by Stefano Regazzoli enhances the life of the priest Romolo Putelli between political dedication and ecclesiastical activity. (Regazzoli 1939, pp. 21–24).
- 35 12 maggio 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 36 27 maggio 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 37 Among the material required by the Brescian Finance Department to confirm ownership of the assets were the historical cadastral certificates, the transfer documents and/or the peaceful possession of the collections. 16 dicembre 1940, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
- 38 The heirs were the cousins Teresa Magnolini and Giovanni Antonio Magnolini.

Giugno 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 (Giorgi 2000, p. 27) 1 ottobre 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 3 novembre 1939, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 23 dicembre 1940, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 22 agosto 1941, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 3 settembre 1941, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 Not respecting, in this way, the will of Romolo Putelli to keep the collections together. 12 gennaio 1941 [sic.], Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 16 febbraio 1942, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 12 aprile 1942, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 5 agosto 1942, Mantova, Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici, Breno Raccolta Putelli fascicolo b. 8/107.
 Among them the mentioned Araldo Bertolini and Alessandro Sina. (Panazza 1994, p. VIII)
 s. d., Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Collezione di arte Putelli fascicolo B. 7/1.
 17 novembre 1956, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Collezione di arte Putelli fascicolo B. 7/1.
 This is what Gaetano Panazza, a reliable source for the period, reported. (Panazza 1994, p. XII).
 Among the easily accessible sources on the topic, see: (Cominelli 2009).
 This also evidenced by the personal correspondence between the Superintendence of Library Goods in Lombardy and the then curator of *Raccolta Putelli* Simone Signaroli.
 For a brief and recent in-depth look at the collection of books by Romolo Putelli, the *Raccolta Putelli*, I would like to point out that two articles are being published in collaboration with the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*.
 The activity of the priest Alessandro Sina has been the subject of several conferences. (AA. VV. 1973, p. 5).
 Antonio Cistellini argued that the priest was self-taught in methods of historical research and that over the years he perfected so much his scientific production to be considered among the most important ecclesiastical scholars of Brescia, at the same level of his friend Paolo Guerrini. *Ivi*, pp. 11–14.
 For a more heterogeneous biographical analysis, please note: (AA. VV. 1996).
 An in-depth analysis on the topic can be observed in (AA. VV. 1973, p. 5).
 Enrico Tarsia, as well as for Romolo Putelli, also dealt with the life of Alessandro Sina, producing significant articles. (Tarsia 1978, pp. 322–32).
 A section entirely dedicated to the topic is present in: (AA. VV. 1973, pp. 59–64).
 Thirty-five annotations on loose sheets were found in the *Raccolta Putelli* attesting to a first phase of reordering of the early modern books collection. Their author is probably Alessandro Sina. In addition, two notes refer to units which have disappeared since the 1950s, namely: *L'opere di Vergilio, cioè la Bucolica, Georgica, et Eneida. Nuouamente da diuersi eccellentissimi autori tradotte in uersi sciolti* (In Venetia: appresso Paulo Ugolino, 1593); *Epistole heroiche. Poesie del Bruni Librie due* (Roma, Guglielmo Facciotti, 1627).
 This is what Paolo Guerrini reported in: (Guerrini 1953, p. 2).
 Unlike that of Romolo Putelli, Alessandro Sina's bibliographic collection reflects its owner. The material accumulated by the priest is congruent with his interests as a scholar of local ecclesiastical history.
 Among the editions still preserved today there are numerous books written by his close friends, such as Paolo Guerrini and Romolo Putelli, and a wide selection of religious authors, including San Bernardino, Pio XII, Sant' Attanasio, San Giustino, San Gregorio and Santa Caterina da Siena. Then, large editions published in several volumes are represented by products such as the *Storia Ecclesiastica* (1931) from Eusebio di Cesareo and new editions by Giuseppe Flavio. Moreover, there is no shortage of local studies such as the *Umanisti del secolo XVI a Lonato* (1928), the *Il Convento domenicano di S. Maria della Grazia di Orzinuovi* (1934), the *Capitoli e Regole per il buon governo della Comunità di Volpino* (1750) and the *Ordine d S. Francesco in Valcamonica* (1884) by Costantino Mutinelli. Finally, there is the bestsellers from Gabriele Rosa *La storia sul bacino del lago d'Iseo* (1892), a must have for local ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical scholars. The list of books owned by Alessandro Sina demonstrates a significant link between the priest and his readings, tools of cultural and religious growth. His books, mainly contemporary with the priest, had a utilitarian value—as demonstrated by the presence, for example, of Giovanni Ciccolini's edition on the *Archivi Parrocchiali del Trentino* (1932). In addition, the topics of interest were not limited to religion, as demonstrated by the presence of the editions as the *Operai artigiani agricoltori in Italia dal secolo VI al XVI* (1946) and various architectural texts—ecclesiastical and otherwise. To conclude, Alessandro Sina's readings do not stand out for their refinement but rather for their practicality. It is simple to imagine that Alessandro Sina was the first owner and reader of his books, and that some of the copies were given to him by the authors themselves.
 (D. V. 1973, pp. 85–96).
 In addition to the two conferences which I have already mentioned in previous footnotes, I would also like to point out: (AA. VV. 1979).

- ⁶⁶ (D. V. 1973, p. 88) *Perché la biblioteca Sina deve restare in Valcamonica*, «Giornale di Brescia», 6 novembre 1953, in 6 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁶⁷ Town in the province of Bergamo, very close to the brescian localities of the Valcamonica.
- ⁶⁸ (D. V. 1973, pp. 88–89) *Difendere l'integrità della Biblioteca Sina*, «Giornale di Brescia», 7 novembre 1953, in 7 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁶⁹ 9 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2. The news of this acquisition was returned to him by Araldo Bertolini, figure already mentioned in this paper as director of the *Associazione Pro Valle Camonica*.
- ⁷⁰ 10 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷¹ 11 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2. In the document, written by Ugo Baroncelli for the Assessor to Public Education, it is possible to note some information regarding the size of the patrimony. The sender reported the presence of a few thousand printed volumes and pamphlets, thirty large packages with folders, documents and notes divided by town and family, other packages with newspaper clippings, various manuscripts, texts by Émile Amann and Auguste Dumas, by Hartmann Grisar, Pietro Balan, Fedele Savio, Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Adolphe Thiers, Louis Duchesne, Giuseppe Ricciotti and Ludwig von Pastor, as well as a number of sixteenth century printed editions of the *Giunta* in poorly condition. Finally, in the same document it was stated the amount of the value offered by the *Accademia Tadini*, equal to four hundred thousand *lire*.
- ⁷² 11 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷³ 16 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷⁴ 18 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷⁵ 19 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷⁶ Giovanni Battista Guadagnini (1723–1807). He denied the exclusive divine origin to the institution of popes and bishops and the temporal impact on the reform of the Church. He was finally a supporter of the French Revolution. Guido Gregorio Fagioli Vercellone, *Guadagnini Giovanni Battista*, in «Dizionario biografico degli italiani», LX, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana 2003.
- ⁷⁷ (D. V. 1973, pp. 89–90) *Rimanga in terra bresciana la Biblioteca Sina di Esine*, «Giornale di Brescia», 24 novembre 1953, in 24 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁷⁸ See note 74 above.
- ⁷⁹ 20 novembre 1953, Milano, Soprintendenza Archivistica e Bibliografica per la Lombardia, Breno-Biblioteca Sina fascicolo B. 7/2.
- ⁸⁰ *Registro degli Ingressi*, Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, aprile 1951 / marzo 1957; *Registro degli Ingressi*, Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, aprile 1957 / luglio 1962; *Registro degli Ingressi*, Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, agosto 1962 / febbraio 1967.
- ⁸¹ See note 80 above.
- ⁸² Stands out a *Statuta Civitatis Novariae* (Novariae: in aedibus Francisci Sesalli, 1633) that not only is not present in the online catalogue of the *Queriniana* Library, but also in that of the Italian National Library System. In general, there is not enough correspondence with what has been found in the documents, what has been read in the registers and what has been identified in the online catalogues. As far as it has been possible to note, most of the books from the assets of Alessandro Sina were published after 1830, watershed date in Italy between books considered early modern and postmodern instead.

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Article

Tolerance before Secularism: Models of Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Arabic

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Abstract: By analyzing temporal language, this study investigates the intellectual origins and the conceptual history of three concepts of tolerance that emerged in the Arabic context towards the end of the 19th century. The first is a philosophical concept that has evolved within the philosophical-rational tradition and has connections to the Enlightenment and liberalism. The second is a theological concept that advocates for a harmonious interpretation of all monotheistic religions based on the assumption that all monotheistic scriptures are true. The third is a legal Islamic concept that aims to preserve the traditional imperial and hierarchical Islamic system while addressing contemporary concerns related to citizenship and political affiliation. Tolerance is frequently examined within the research framework on secularity and secularism. Before secularism emerged as a holistic doctrine in Arabic (*almāniyya*), discussions surrounding tolerance were closely linked to societal and political principles, including civil equality, freedom of conscience, and the neutrality of religion in the public domain.

Keywords: tolerance in Arabic; tasahul; nahda; tolerance in Islam; toleration

1. Introduction

The concept of tolerance has regained attention in academic and public spheres due to significant events that have shaped the history of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the West, discussions have developed in the context of the crisis of liberal democracy. Central issues, such as waves of refugees from Africa and the Middle East and the rise of populist right-wing ideologies, created a new environment in which liberal democracy is being challenged by both the promises of human rights and the desire to preserve national and religious symbols (Vormann and Lammert 2019, pp. 1–18).

In the Middle East, the crisis of democracy is evident through various positions and events, the most prominent of which is the failure of the massive demonstrations known as the “Arab Spring” to establish a stable democratic regime. In this crisis, two main trends stood out in the region, where religious politics played a central role: the success of Islamist parties in places where elections were held and a noticeable strengthening of religious identity and religion in several spheres. In the post-“Arab Spring”, Islam is being used as a source of political power by both the opposition Islamist parties and the Arab regimes. The efforts of the modern Arab territorial state in the twentieth century to limit the social influence of religion eventually led to its nationalization and its shape as a code of public morality (Cesari 2014, pp. 110–12). The retreat of the idea of private religion or the increase in religiosity occurred in all the Middle Eastern countries in several areas, including in the lifestyle, the symbols of collective identity, national and international politics, and the perception of conflicts, including the Israeli-Arab conflict. This process impacted groups with a delicate social status, such as religious minorities, women, and political actors aligned with the liberal and leftist forces. In this context, the discussion about tolerance becomes most relevant (Cesari 2014, pp. 237–63; Fischer 2012, pp. 10–15).

In social sciences, tolerance is commonly analyzed in two contexts. The first is the historical–normative aspect in which tolerance is perceived as a central principle of liberal

democracy and a normative basis for any discourse on pluralism and diversity. It is widely agreed that the intellectual content of the liberal concept of tolerance was crystalized in two significant events: the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century. These events created a new meaning of tolerance based on several principles, the most important of which is the principle of individual autonomy. In the shadow of the historical context that accompanied Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially the European wars of religion, this principle became a basic idea by which the religious conflicts of Europe were dealt with. Based on this principle, tolerance means accepting the assumption that autonomy is a desirable and positive value. In that sense, the term contains a dual meaning, suggesting that the individual is expected to endure an intolerable situation or an opinion they disagree with. In a social context, their non-active resistance is perceived as a positive and desirable value. Later, this idea became part of a doctrine that referred to areas that concern society and the state (Seligman 1995, pp. 1–14; Laursen and Nederman 2011, pp. 236–37).

In addition to its historical aspect, tolerance is commonly analyzed in the context of studies on secularity and secularism. Tolerance is perceived as a fundamental component of the broader thesis of secularism. According to claims that dominated scholarship for most of the twentieth century, the spread of modernization would reduce the role of religion in individuals' lives, primarily through its privatization and, consequently, the spread of secularism. In recent decades, these claims have been challenged by what is commonly known as post-secularism, a collection of theories that focus on the persistence of religion or its deprivatization. In this context, the relatively early work of José Casanova emphasized the return of religion into the public sphere and the shortcomings of the thesis of secularism. He argued that the privatization of religion is not necessary for the success of the modernity process as long as it happened within a democratic context in which religion could contribute to the evolvement of civil society or liberal values (Casanova 1994, pp. 3–66). The exclusion of the concept of tolerance of Enlightenment from the border arguments on democratization and modernity was expanded in later works. Challenging the notion that defines religion solely as a collection of beliefs, Talal Asad criticizes the manifestation of tolerance in the legal–political realm. He uses the example of India to argue that a secular state does not guarantee tolerance and social peace. Despite having a democratic, liberal, and secular constitution, the national identity of India and the predominant representation of Hinduism have marginalized other groups, labeling them as minorities (Asad 2003, pp. 1–17). Charles Taylor explored the significance of the Enlightenment idea of tolerance in his monumental book, *A Secular Age*. He argued that while tolerance is a product of the Western experience, it is still relevant and can be embraced by non-Western societies. The Enlightenment's formation of tolerance was used as a common denominator for peaceful coexistence among diverse religious groups. Taylor criticizes the previous thesis on secularism and argues that the triumph of secularism is evident in challenging religion as a social authority. According to him, religion becomes one of the many sources of social behavior and ethics. Following previous research, this conclusion emphasizes the importance of focusing on religiosity as an analytical category (Taylor 2007).

Stemming from the common post-secular assumption of an unnecessary association between tolerance and secularism, Humeira Iqtidar emphasizes the impact of the Enlightenment and colonialism on establishing a distinct and universal category of religion. Rather than the privatization of or a decrease in, Iqtidar argues that secularization should be seen as a significant transformation in how religion is perceived: "Secularization is, then, best understood as a qualitative shift in how religious thought and practice are imagined within society rather than as the quantitative change (less religion, less public religiosity, etc.) that influential social and political theory had posited" (Iqtidar 2016, pp. 5–11; Iqtidar and Sarkar 2018, p. 5).

This article aims to contribute to both levels of discussion in scholarship: the historical and the theoretical. From a historical perspective, it will explore three models of tolerance

that emerged in the Arabic context during the nineteenth century, prior to the advent of secularism as a comprehensive socio-political doctrine and lifestyle, commonly referred to as *'almāniyya*.¹ In essence, this study will investigate the period during which forms of secularity evolved into social and political principles, preceding their maturation into a fully articulated and distinct political concept.

To put this argument in a broader conceptual framework, the historical analysis will focus on what Reinhart Koselleck refers to as the *Sattelzeit* (saddle period). This heuristic term denotes a transformative era characterized by significant semantic shifts in the political and social vocabulary of modernity. During this period, there were considerable instabilities in meaning, as terms lost their premodern connotations and were either abandoned or reinterpreted multiple times until they received their conventional modern form. The inherently unstable nature and distinctive characteristics of the *Sattelzeit* are evident in its connections to both preceding and subsequent periods, suggesting a continuity with both the prior and following epochs (Motzkin 2005, pp. 145–58).

To contextualize the discourse within the political and social rhetoric of the nineteenth century, various forms of secularity emerged, framed by concepts such as “civil” and “civilization” (*madanī* and *tamaddun*). It is important to note that these terms were not necessarily positioned in opposition to religious influences. The notion of secularity reached its most nuanced interpretations with the evolution of the term *'almāniyya*, which transitioned from a focus on ecclesiastical matters to encompass political considerations, thereby signifying a viewpoint that excludes religion as a foundation for political organization. In its broadest and most integrative application, *'almāniyya* came to represent a political regime, secular legal frameworks, educational systems, intellectual orientations, and a comprehensive lifestyle. In the early years of the twentieth century, *'almāniyya* evolved into what Koselleck terms a “collective singular”, which synthesizes a multitude of experiences into a singular concept.²

This research intends to adopt a conceptual framework and examine the temporal language utilized by nineteenth-century intellectuals in primary sources. The objective is to explore philosophical components such as civil equality and political neutrality prior to their linkage with secularism and, subsequently, with nationalism and democracy. In pursuing this analysis, I will contend that prior to the establishment of secularism, different forms of secularity displayed a variety of distinct and inconsistent characteristics.

While the primary emphasis of this research is on conceptual history, the case study will serve to elucidate some observations regarding the theoretical discourse surrounding secularism. By employing a conceptual approach and analyzing the temporal language used by nineteenth-century intellectuals in primary texts, this research aims to investigate philosophical components such as civil equality and political neutrality prior to their association with secularism and, subsequently, nationalism and democracy. By doing so, I will argue that before secularism, forms of secularity embedded multiple and incoherent characteristics.

If we focus on the linguistic aspect of tolerance, the Arabic language created two primary signifiers. The term *tasāmuḥ* means forgiveness, leniency, turning a blind eye, and *tasāmaḥ* means to behave with forgiveness (Ibn Manzur 2004b, pp. 249–50). The second term is *tasāḥul*, which means leniency, indulgence, and kindness (Ibn Manzur 2004a, pp. 288–89). The prominent nineteenth-century Syrian–Lebanese philologist and journalist Butrus al-Bustani argues that the terms *tasāmuḥ* and *tasāḥul* can be synonymous (al-Bustani 1998, p. 425). During the Nahda period in the mid-nineteenth century, scholars developed a growing fascination with the notion of tolerance. The interest in the concept began when new forms of political and social unity arose, encompassing ideas such as patriotism and the aspiration to create new social and civic frameworks marked by the term civilization (*tamaddun*).

The upcoming sections will examine three concepts of tolerance:³ a philosophical concept that has evolved within the philosophical–rational tradition, Enlightenment, and liberalism. A theological concept that suggests all Monotheistic scriptures are true and

promotes a harmonious interpretation of all monotheistic religions. The last is a legal Islamic concept that seeks to reshape and maintain the traditional imperial and hierarchical Islamic system while addressing contemporary concerns regarding citizenship and political affiliation.

2. The Philosophical Concept

The philosophical concept of tolerance is based on discussions about human nature, natural law, and universal concepts where reason is regarded as the primary source of knowledge. Despite the decisive influence of the French Enlightenment on this concept, its ideational infrastructure was formed in many works written by philosophers in antiquity, in the context of the Arabic Islamic culture of the Middle Ages, and in modern times.

The philosophical concept of tolerance developed in Arabic around the mid-nineteenth century. Between the Crimean War (1854–1856) and the First World War (1914–1918), the Ottoman Empire was increasingly influenced by modern ideas, attracting the attention of politicians and journalists. During this period, the Ottoman Empire formed alliances with Britain and France, and European influence became more pronounced among the Ottoman elite, particularly in Mediterranean coastal cities. The British occupied Egypt and Sudan, while France strengthened its control over North Africa. Notions such as self-determination fueled the popular calls for national independence in the eastern European regions of the Ottoman Empire, leading to the independence of territories like Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The modern ideological discourse, inspired by major events like the French and American revolutions, evolved in Arabic and Turkish. The Ottoman response to the political challenges from Europe was expressed through the need for reform and renewal (*tajdīd*). This response took two forms: a philosophical approach influenced by the rise of rationalism (and later positivism) and a legal Islamic approach advocating for Islamic revival. Ottoman statesmen embraced the first approach with the Tanzimat movement, which culminated in the establishment of the first Ottoman parliament in 1876 (Hourani 1983, pp. 67–102).

The Tanzimat reforms led to substantial modifications in political discourse and expectations. Additionally, the new discourse was influenced by changes from below, which were reflected in the rise of new social forces. The new class, which appeared as merchants, journalists, and bureaucrats, created a diverse knowledge infrastructure that was not exclusively based on religious learning. Globally, this era was characterized by extensive colonization and the creation of worldwide connections facilitated by technological advancements like the telegraph and steam engine, which the Ottoman Empire adopted during the mid-nineteenth century.⁴

In this context, two terms have moved to the center of political controversy among public intellectuals. The first term, *tasāmuḥ*, was used by (Ahmad) Faris al-Shidyaq, a prominent journalist and philologist who converted from Christianity to Islam. In 1867, al-Shidyaq translated the English word “liberal party” into “supporters of tolerance”, “*mu-tasāmiḥīn*” (al-Shidyaq 1877, pp. 118–19, 130). Similarly, Adib Ishaq, a Christian intellectual born in Damascus, wrote in 1874 about the supporters of tolerance and called them “*mu-tasāhilīn*” (supporters of tolerance) (Ishaq 1978, pp. 378–84). In both cases, the linguistic use of *tasāmuḥ* and *tasāhul* shifted from being an adjective to being a noun, shifting from a use that indicates social characteristics to a use that indicates a category of political and ideological affiliation. In both cases, tolerance became a central concept around which a complex set of ideas was woven.

The early theorization of the philosophical concept of tolerance came to light with the publication of Butrus al-Bustani’s series of articles between September 1860 and April 1861. This publication contained a vision for the end of the civil war (*ḥarb ahliyya, fitna*) that emerged on a religious background in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in the summer of 1860. Al-Bustani envisioned rebuilding the Syrian society on a basis that would prevent the recurrence of acts of violence. The main concerns of the publications were the present and the future, not the past.⁵

These articles present several groundbreaking ideas. One notable departure from the traditional Islamic concept of *ahl al-dhimma*, which established a hierarchical relationship between Islam and other monotheist religions, al-Bustani presents an egalitarian concept of tolerance. According to him, the act of harming Christians is considered a violation of their human rights (*ḥuqūq insāniyya*), which forms the foundation of their civil rights (*ḥuqūq madaniyya*), rather than being based on the legal status of their religious affiliation (al-Bustani 1990, p. 15). This view is not only incompatible with the traditional religious view but also offers an alternative that is influenced by the philosophy of social contracts that flourished in the shadow of the eighteenth-century French and European Enlightenment.

The fact that there is a philosophical concept of universal morality, which is used as a measure to assess the validity of religions, shows that natural law is a prominent theme in his work. According to al-Bustani, if religions fail to meet these moral standards, they “do not deserve to be called a religion” (al-Bustani 1990, p. 20). The origins of these ideas are not only philosophical. Al-Bustani, a Protestant Christian himself, believed that by returning to the original principles of Christianity, the religion could be saved from the corruption it has faced over time. In this context, there is a strong correlation between the purity level in religion, truth, and universal morality. The purer a religion is, the more authentic it becomes, and the greater its impact on the advancement and growth of civilization (*tamaddun*). According to this interpretation, recognizing the religions of Syria within a universal moral code is necessary for rebuilding social life and respecting religious differences. This recognition prevents the mistreatment and disdain (*iḥtiqār*) of individuals with different faiths.⁶ The guiding value for the concept of tolerance in his text stems from a belief in natural law and egalitarianism in the context of homeland (*waṭan*). This concept is connected to the vision of a common identity, solidarity (*ulfa*), and a belief in a shared future for all the members of the group.

Al-Bustani argues that a society cannot become egalitarian (*tasāwī*) in a religiously fanatical environment. This belief forms the foundation of his revolutionary idea of society. He asserts that fanaticism arises from social divisions and is used by certain groups to maintain their privileges. He contends that the Syrian legal and social structure is built on the combination of religious and civil matters (*mazj al-umūr al-dīniyya bi-l-umūr al-madaniyya*), which has fueled the hatred responsible for destroying Syrian society. According to him, religion should only concern the relationship between the believer and God, while civil affairs should be limited to the interactions between individuals and their fellow citizens, as well as between individuals and their government. He suggests that social norms and political affiliations (*nasāba siyāsiyya*) should be based on these civil principles (al-Bustani 1990, pp. 49–57).

Al-Bustani’s revolutionary concept lies in his connection between the privatization of religion and the individualization of the public sphere. Freedom of religion is not only a religious matter but a public matter and is a basis for social peace and civil equality. Needless to say, this approach undermines prevailing religious norms in Christian–Maronite tradition and Muslim religious law, according to which the issue of religious affiliation is subject to the supervision of the community. In this early period, the demand for the separation of religion from the state was not absolute, and the separation between the religious and the political did not penetrate political concepts such as sovereignty. Thus, from a political point of view, al-Bustani believed that the ruler receives legitimacy from God (al-Bustani 1990, p. 56). In this sense, al-Bustani was a social revolutionary and a political conservative.

In al-Bustani’s writings, this philosophical perspective on the law, society, and the state was used to promote tolerance and advocate for eliminating inherent privileges (*imtiyāzāt*). It is also a basis for an optimistic view of the future manifested in the vision for a new era (*aṣr jadīd*) of progress and prosperity. This almost eschatological promise creates a worldview of binary contrasts: science, light, love of the motherland, civilization, progress, freedom, equality, and tolerance are presented as an ideological worldview that contradicts

a negative view consisting of ideas such as darkness, fanaticism (*ta'aṣub*), barbaric tribalism, savagery, and regression (*ta'akhur*) (al-Bustani 1990, pp. 22–26, 31, 48, 60).

Osama Makdisi, who has written extensively on the issue of sectarianism, proposes the research term “ecumenical framework” to describe the attempts to conceive a shared and inclusive inter-religious political solidarity in which religion plays a central role. In his opinion, the ecumenical framework created a new concept of belonging and social organization that is opposed and even alternative to sectarianism. He refers to al-Bustani’s vision as “the first coherent indigenous Arab vision of what ecumenical equality between Muslim and non-Muslim might look like in the shadow of a reforming Ottoman state” (Makdisi 2019, p. 20). Makdisi acknowledges that the intellectual sources of that framework were eclectic, “Ottoman, European and Arab”, but his discussion barely refers to those conceptual sources.

Al-Bustani’s intellectual sources can be diverse. Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine emphasized in their historical interpretation the connection between al-Bustani’s ideas and the political context of the Ottoman reforms. In their opinion, al-Bustani’s ideas were, to a large extent, an expression of the spirit of reforms of the Ottoman Empire as expressed by the special envoy of the empire to Syria, Fuad Pasha, who came to deal with the crisis created after the massacre and to prevent international intervention, especially French. In contrast to the prevailing universal discourse, al-Bustani’s interpretation of the Christian crisis in relation to civil and human rights, there were voices that aimed to safeguard the “rights of Christians”. These voices were backed by French statesmen who threatened to intervene directly (al-Bustani 2019, pp. 21–22). The general discourse on rights at that time was influenced by the global discourse that became central to the Arabic intellectual discourse of the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷

Different interpretations of tolerance can be found in various humanistic traditions in Arab history, such as the philosophical Aristotelian tradition. Al-Farabi, for instance, presented a pluralistic perspective on the potential of different religions to attain the philosophical religion or its metaphysical concept, known as “the principles of beings”. According to al-Farabi, religion is an imitation of philosophy, so the differences between religions are not essential, and one’s religious affiliation does not necessarily determine moral standards. Al-Farabi argued that imposing unity could lead to conflicts, and therefore, Muslims should embrace the principle of diversity, including in matters of religion, as a guiding principle (Orwin 2017, pp. 11–13, 201–3). Alongside common principles with the thought of al-Bustani, such as the supremacy of reason as a guiding principle and the existence of universal morality, al-Farabi was the one who introduced the early theorization of the concept *madani* (Abu-Uksa 2022, pp. 389–418). Despite the common features, there was no systematic doctrine on tolerance in medieval Arab philosophy, and it is unclear to what extent al-Bustani was familiar with these philosophical sources.

John Locke’s “A Letter Concerning Toleration”, written in Latin in 1685 and published in 1689, introduced the concept of separating religion from the state. This idea aimed to promote social peace and establish a constitutional framework for civil coexistence, ultimately bringing an end to religious conflicts. Locke advocated for separating religious rituals from civil law and used the term “tolerance” to refer to the non-interference of individuals’ faith by those who disagree with them. He argued that tolerance is compatible with both religion and reason. According to Locke, the state’s role should not involve the redemption of souls or the definition of religious doctrine; instead, it should focus on safeguarding the rights of citizens (Locke 2010, p. 10). He believed in a complete separation between the state and the church, with the latter’s role limited to serving God (Locke 2010, pp. 6–12). Locke also viewed tolerance as a means to achieve civil peace, prosperity, and a harmonious society. He criticized social privileges, which he considers a source of intolerance and inequality.⁸

It is likely that al-Bustani did not directly encounter these ideas from Locke’s works but instead learned about them through Voltaire’s later writings. The latter was known to contemporary Arabic-speaking scholars, including in translations to Arabic. In addition,

some of the terms al-Bustani used were not part of Locke's jargon. A distinct concept is the concept of civilization (*tamaddun*), a fundamental concept in Voltaire's works that became common in the French language only in the eighteenth century (Woolf 1989, pp. 96–120).

Voltaire wrote about "tolerance" about eighty years after Locke. In 1763, he wrote his *Traité sur la Tolérance*, wherein he criticized the execution of Jean Calas, a Protestant merchant accused of killing his son because the latter wanted to convert to Catholicism. Voltaire saw this case as a manifestation of societal intolerance. He argued that intolerance stems from norms and laws that create an unequal social existence, unfairly judging individuals based on their religious beliefs. The similarities between Voltaire's views on civil and religious matters and al-Bustani's are significant. Voltaire supports the concept of natural law and natural rights, which he summarizes with the command derived from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Voltaire 1764, p. 48). In matters of religion, Voltaire claims that true Christianity calls for tolerance, while intolerance is foreign to true religion (Voltaire 1764, p. 142). Voltaire also has a universal and autonomous view of morality. Thus, he claims that "philosophy is the sister of religion", and through it, it is possible to overcome false beliefs (Voltaire 1764, p. 22). Al-Bustani and Voltaire are similar in their use of binary contrasts to construct arguments. Voltaire believes that reason promotes tolerance, humanity, freedom, and civilization, while ignorance leads to fanaticism, prejudice, injustice, violence, and barbarism. He also proposes that fanaticism is not just a societal problem but also has a geographical aspect, as its social influences primarily arise in the periphery, while urban areas tend to foster influences that promote tolerance (Voltaire 1764, p. 1–41). In his argument, Voltaire attempted to justify the Peace of Westphalia's agreements, which essentially acknowledged the state's authority over its territory as a legal matter, setting the principle of *uti possidetis juris* (the principle which sanctifies state's borders) (Voltaire 1764, p. 42). Despite the similarity with al-Bustani, there are also several differences that can stem from differences in context and time. Voltaire does not demand in his letter, like al-Bustani, the cancelation of the privileges of the members of the majority religion compared to other religious minorities. Yet, he defends the principle of full civil rights. It is important to note that Voltaire's writings predate the French Revolution and the substantial revolutionary measures implemented to challenge the confessional character of the French state (Voltaire 1764, pp. 29–41).

A few years after the publication of al-Bustani, the concept of *tasāhul* as having a contradictory meaning to *ta'āsub*, becomes very common. The two prominent Muslim reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh wrote critically in 1884 that the meanings of the term *ta'āsub* "preoccupy the people in the various countries, especially in the East, and it was chewed up by many in gatherings and assemblies... until very few expressions did not include, end with, or contain it in their meaning" (al-Afghani 2002, p. 131). During these years, the term *tasāhul* gained prominence, and other scholars made contributions to its meaning. Adib Ishaq, entitled a speech he gave around 1874 by "*al-Ta'āsub wa-l-tasāhul*" (fanaticism and tolerance). Ishaq was a public intellectual originally from Damascus and carried with him the memory of the massacre in the Christian neighborhood of Bab Tuma in the summer of 1860. For him, as for other Syrian–Lebanese Christian intellectuals, the discussion about tolerance had a fundamental and existential meaning. In his speech, Ishaq emphasizes the connection between the concept and a perspective on science and religion associated with progress. He argues that both science and religion are continuously evolving, and as a result, individuals should be open-minded and accepting of diverse and unconventional opinions. Accepting differences is a crucial stance for the advancement of humanity. Ishaq takes the concept further than al-Bustani's socio-political understanding by presenting a historical and sociological analysis of the emergence of *ta'āsub*. He proposes that *ta'āsub* arises from a combination of social forces and a desire for control and influence. This combination establishes a custom and tradition (*āda*, *taqlid*) of prejudice that safeguards the advantages and interests of the particular group that practices it. As a result, prejudice becomes a widely held belief among the general population. Ishaq condemns the religious conflicts that are often given a positive religious

connotation, such as referring to massacres (*madhābiḥ*) as “holy war” (*jihād*) (Ishaq 1978, pp. 378–84).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse of tolerance developed significantly and was used to criticize the role of the clergy in society and to criticize colonial and international politics. Amin al-Rihani, a Syrian–Lebanese Maronite intellectual who immigrated to the United States, gave a speech in February 1901 to the Maronite Youth Organization in the United States entitled “*al-Tasāhul al-Dīnī*” (religious tolerance). In his speech, he argues that the public should pay attention to the role of the clergy and their involvement in society. The religious and political elite’s manipulation of religion has caused division and weakness in Syrian society. Additionally, he offers a critical analysis of the Ottoman government’s concept of tolerance, arguing that it has negative consequences. He asserts that the state’s tolerance towards Christians is manipulated to exert power over them and guarantee their compliance with both religious and political institutions.

According to al-Rihani, tolerance extends beyond social matters and applies to international relations. He condemns European colonialism, referring to it as “international fanaticism” based on the idea of patronizing weaker nations. He contrasts this with the internal relations among Europeans, which he sees as being built on mutual respect. Colonialism, including the wars associated with Christianity, is seen as a manifestation of intolerance that aims to impose religion on “barbarian groups” (al-Rihani 2012, pp. 237–39). He ends his speech with the slogan, “Tolerance is the basis of modern civilization” (al-Rihani 2012, pp. 240–46). This form of tolerance became fundamental for all ideologies of progress expressed in Arabic towards the end of the nineteenth century. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi convincingly argued that this discourse was also adopted in those years by socialist thinkers (Khuri-Makdisi 2010, pp. 42–43).

The most systematic doctrine regarding tolerance emerges from the work of Farah Antun, a Christian intellectual from Tripoli who immigrated to Egypt and was one of the early socialists (Reid 1975; Hourani 1983, pp. 245–59). Antun divides *taʾaṣub* into two types: *al-taʾaṣub al-jinsī*, national fanaticism, and *al-taʾaṣub al-dīnī*, religious fanaticism. The first, if it becomes extreme, can be harmful and oppressive to internal diversity, but it can also be beneficial when directed against an external group. On the other hand, religious fanaticism can be destructive to the nation’s unity because it is directed inward: “There is no nation in the world that all adheres to the faith of one religion” (Antun 1906, pp. 185–91).

Antun presents the most systematic theorization of the concept of *tasāhul* as part of his famous polemic with Muhammad Abduh. Following al-Rihani’s claims and under the title “The meaning of the *tasāhul* which is the basis of modern civilization”, Antun continues the claim of his predecessors and argues that a government founded on religion cannot be tolerant because it cannot maintain equality among its citizens. This type of government will treat its citizens in two ways: through varying levels of pressure to encourage them to change their religion or through treating religious minorities condescendingly until they are forced to join the state’s official religion. In an indirect criticism of the Islamic legal concept that prevailed in the region throughout Islamic history, he claims that a religious regime creates a hierarchy in society between groups that enjoy privileges versus others that are perceived as inferior. This practice led to trampling human rights (*al-ḥaqq al-insānī*) and denying the attribute of *tasāhul* (Antun 1988, p. 147).⁹

In addition to the arguments already presented, Antun challenges the notion that a reformed religion can bring about civil peace. Criticizing this approach, he argues that a religious regime can contain a certain degree of tolerance, but this tolerance will not be honest because it cannot accept absolute freedom of belief, including for atheists. Consequently, such a regime would fail to uphold human rights. Antun argues that genuine tolerance can only exist in a system that prioritizes civil law (*al-sharʿ al-madani*) over religious law (*al-sharʿ al-dīnī*) and where religion remains neutral (*ḥiyāda*) and detached from political competition (Antun 1988, pp. 151–59).

Antun provides a sincere analysis of the Islamic legal concept of tolerance as it evolved over time in the Islamic empires. According to him, initially, tolerance was primarily

extended to members of the Islamic community and less so to those who did not follow the Islamic faith. The latter group was expected to submit to the authority of Islam. Antun believes that this legal approach led to the subjugation of nations and the deprivation of their freedom. Similarly, he argues that jihad wars go against the principle of human solidarity (Antun 1988, pp. 241–42). An example of the failure of reformed religion to establish an egalitarian society he finds in the reformism teachings of Muhammad ‘Abduh, which ignores the Eastern Christians and leaves them disadvantaged as outsiders within the group. In his opinion, Christianity is presented in ‘Abduh’s work in “contempt”; therefore, “all Eastern Christians are not interested in hearing about religious reformism at this time, neither in Christianity nor Islam” (Antun 1988, pp. 286, 325–26).

3. The Theological Concept

The development of the philosophical notion of tolerance posed a significant challenge to orthodox religious beliefs in all monotheistic religions. Religious scholars responded to this concept in various ways, with some focusing on the transformative connection it established between the privatization of religion and the principle of equality. This gave rise to conservative criticism based on the belief that the philosophical concept marginalized God in public life. The emergence of conservative, theological, and legal reactions had local and global dimensions. At the local level, starting in the late 1870s, the empire moved away from its civil-oriented approach of the reform period and instead emphasized political and religious unity. During this period, the Islamic religious community (*umma*) concept started to acquire a geopolitical dimension, influenced by the emergence of nationalism and racial ideologies. Pan-Islamism became the official ideology of the empire, and the concept of the Caliphate regained widespread acceptance (Aydin 2017, pp. 65–98). This was primarily a response to the continued weakness of the Ottoman Empire in coping with growing financial difficulties and the European powers’ encroachment on its territories (Hourani 1983, pp. 103–29).

In a historical context influenced by the dominance of universalist ideologies and the presence of religious and sectarian divisions, Khristufurus Jibara, a Greek Orthodox clergyman who attained the esteemed rank of Archimandrite, lived and wrote. Jibara, born in Damascus in 1835, personally saw the tragic incident of the massacre that specifically targeted the Christian community. This event led to the death of his teacher and sibling (Jibara 1894, p. 700). During his life, he enjoyed the global atmosphere created in the second half of the nineteenth century by moving, experiencing, and living in many cultural centers, including Damascus, Beirut, Moscow, New York, Boston, and Cairo. Later in his career, he actively participated in the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. This momentous event brought together approximately three hundred clergymen from diverse nations, encompassing representatives from religions originating in India, China, and Japan, as well as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The purpose of the gathering was to promote human brotherhood and to find common ground between the different religions (Barrows 1893, pp. vii–ix). Furthermore, the participants expressed a desire to formulate a religious response to the philosophical challenges of certain contemporary ideologies that undermine religion. As stated in one of the conference’s publications, their objective was “to unite all Religion against all irreligion” (Kitagawa 1993, p. 175). It was a period that witnessed the rise of anti-religious currents of thought such as materialism, Darwinism, and positivism.

Jibara developed a political theology in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, which formed the basis for his advocacy of tolerance. He believed that all monotheistic holy books were divinely inspired and, therefore, inherently true. Drawing from this theological premise, Jibara proposed a new interpretation of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, emphasizing continuity and harmony. His aim was to challenge positivist philosophies and establish a social and political framework that would foster a tolerant and egalitarian coexistence among different religions in Syria and the Ottoman Empire.

His ideas regarding tolerance appeared in the seventies of the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, he translated a book by Vladimir Guettée, a French historian and former Latin priest who embraced Orthodox Christianity. In this publication, Guettée disapproves of Christians who endorse the concept of a civil state (*dawla madaniyya*) (Jibara 1869, p. 11).¹⁰ The idea of a state founded on the theological principles of a true religion continued to preoccupy Jibara until the end of his life. In 1877, he wrote a letter addressed to the American Presbyterian Mission in Beirut containing twenty questions in which he questioned the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity. In those years, he notes a tendency towards the Puritan approach of the Protestants in understanding Christianity, according to which they “interpreted the Bible according to the Bible” (Jibara 1895, appendix 3). The concept of going back to the basics (*aṣāla*), which was prevalent among Protestants and their critique of traditional Catholic and Orthodox churches, influenced Jibara and became a significant element of the Islamic reformist movement. The emphasis on understanding Christianity through scripture established a firm conviction regarding the separation between the original religion (pure, primitive Christianity) and tradition (the historical heritage of the Church) to which foreign ideas and customs adhered (Jibara 1895, pp. 3–4).

Jibara perceives a connection between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, rooted in the belief in the unity of God. This belief is influenced by Arianism, which predates the establishment of the Trinity in Christianity (at the First Council of Nicaea in 325), and Unitarian Protestant churches that view God as a singular being and Jesus as a prophet rather than part of a Trinity. He perceived the belief in the Trinity as an obstacle to the cohesive interpretation of the scriptures in the three religions and believed that reforming the monotheistic religions could lead to reconciliation. Jibara expressed his political theology in a published text that discussed religious interpretation, as well as ideas about the state and society (Abu-ʿUksa 2021, pp. 362–64).

In his 1895 treatise “Unity in Faith and Harmony in Religion in the Torah, the New Testament and the Qurʾan”, Jibara presents a Puritan perspective to critique traditional monotheistic religions. He argues that the texts of these religions contain the same truth but have been distorted by their traditions. Jibara focuses on specific verses from the New Testament and the Qurʾan that are at the center of doctrinal disputes between Christianity and Islam. Jibara’s novel religious doctrine is founded upon three principal arguments. The first argument pertains to the Islamic assertion that both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament have undergone corruption. In this context, he contends that there are no historical sources predating Islam that substantiate this claim. He presents a second argument asserting the veracity of the crucifixion of Jesus, a fundamental tenet of Christian doctrine that is rejected by Muslims. He employs an allegorical interpretation of a verse from the Qurʾan, which states, “They [the Jews] killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of ʿIsa [Jesus] was put over another man [and they killed that man]” (Q 4.157). Muslims often utilize this verse to counter the Christian perspective on the crucifixion. In his allegorical interpretation, he contends that Jews did not kill the true Jesus (the esoteric, spiritual Jesus) but only called for his trial. The true reason for the Crucifixion was Jesus himself, who followed God’s will by sacrificing his body for the sins of the world. The third argument is related to Qurʾanic verses such as: “Surely, in disbelief are they who say that Allah is the Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary). Say (O Muhammad): ‘Who then has the least power against Allah, if He were to destroy the Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary), his mother, and all those who are on earth together?’” (Q 5.17). This verse highlights a purported inconsistency between Christian and Islamic teachings, as it refutes the notion of Jesus as the son of God. To harmonize these two theological perspectives, Jibara posits that the expression “the son of God”, as found in the Gospels, signifies one who is in the closest proximity to God. Using a Unitarian argument, he depicts supporters of the Christian Trinity doctrine using Qurʾanic terms like *shirk* (polytheism) and *ḍalāl* (deception). Jibara’s work is unique in that it combines the holy scriptures of these religions and uses them as a theological basis, asserting that the Qurʾan is necessary for a correct understanding

of the gospel. He calls his doctrine *al-madhhab al-qayyim*, “the straight path” (Jibara 1894, pp. 699–700).

The concept of tolerance he presented is based on the ancient idea of equality among believers who share a belief in one God and belong to the same homeland. According to his concept, *ghulūw*, the exaggeration of religion, is a source of intolerance and a reason for the weakness of society and cultural deterioration. While Jibara’s political views align with the foundational principles of pan-Islam, they differ in that he proposes a solution for integrating non-Muslims. Specifically, he advocates for including Christianity and Judaism within a state founded on monotheistic principles. Jibara contends that a reformed religion does not require the philosophical concept of tolerance, as true religion inherently embodies principles of tolerance. He presents religious unity as a means to achieve social harmony and as a pathway to religious redemption and progress. His governance model resembles the caliphate model, in which the ruler serves as the leader of the religious community and the head of state (Jibara 1894, pp. 46–55).

Jibara faced numerous opponents, including Christian scholars who championed progress, Christian clerics, and Muslim clerics. Against the first group, Jibara claimed that *tasāhul*, which is based on the idea of separating religion from the state and creating a society based on egalitarian citizenship (*al-jamāa al-madaniyya*) is not compatible with religion. He even argued that *tasāhul* has replaced religion as the foundation of social and political existence. He refers to the views of the proponents of *tasāhul* using words like heresy. In his opinion, since religious ties are the strongest and deepest, harmonizing religions is the right approach to achieving tolerance and social peace (Jibara 1901, pp. 366–67). Prominent intellectuals who support the idea of *tasāhul*, such as the editors of the *al-Muqtataf* journal, Ya’qub Sarruf, and Faris Nimr, as well as others such as Amin al-Rihani and Farah Antun, used his demonizing terminology to demonstrate the intolerance arising from his religious teachings. Antun stated that his teachings have the potential to generate never-ending debates about religious convictions, which renders them unproductive for society (al-Rihani 1901, pp. 541–43; Antun 1901, pp. 103–6). In his final years, Jibara faced the threat of expulsion from the Greek Orthodox Church and encountered opposition to being buried in an Orthodox Christian cemetery. However, his ideas were supported by some Muslim reformists. During his final days, he received financial assistance from Muhammad ‘Abduh. After his death, Rashid Rida praised him as a believer in monotheism and expressed confidence in the salvation of his soul (Rida 1901, pp. 479–80). As far as can be determined, the influence of Jibara’s ideas on later generations was limited compared to the broader influence of the philosophical and legal Islamic concepts.

4. The Islamic Legal Concept

The Islamic legal concept, similar to the theological concept, was formulated in opposition to the philosophical universalist concept. The theological and Islamic legal concepts are conservative responses to the philosophical concept. However, unlike the theological concept, the development of the Islamic legal concept aimed to renew and uphold the longstanding tradition of social and political relations in the Muslim empires, which was rooted in the Qur’anic idea of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*).

The philosophical concept faced opposition from Muslim clerics. This group aimed to uphold the imperial order and hierarchical value system nurtured throughout Muslim history within Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam). The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims was traditionally governed by legal contracts that determined their social status and the level of tolerance towards them. Milka Levy-Rubin, who studied the contracts that formed the foundation of this tradition, argued that the nature of these contracts changed due to the evolving relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the early years of Islamic rule, Muslim rulers were content with agreements that entailed surrender and the payment of the *jizya* tax. In return, these agreements allowed the communities to continue under Islamic rule while recognizing their right to maintain their religious traditions. With the increasing presence of Muslims and their settlement in these

areas, the document known as the Shurut Umar (“Pact of Umar”) was written around the year 800 to replace the various contracts that had established these relations (Levy-Rubin 2011, pp. 113–14). The main purpose of this document is to maintain the dominance of shari’a in the public sphere. It is worth noting that this model of tolerance existed in the cultures of the region that preceded Islam, including the Byzantine Empire. There, too, subjects who did not belong to the ruler’s religion were subjected to rules that enforced their inferior status in exchange for protection and limited autonomy in religious matters (Levy-Rubin 2011, pp. 113–14; Friedmann 2003, pp. 37–39).

In the context of the Ottoman Empire, certain religious groups and denominations that differed from the Sultan’s religion were acknowledged and granted a restricted level of self-governance. This autonomy was primarily expressed through administering their religious affairs and appointing a prominent religious figure to represent their interests in Istanbul (Masters 2004; Tyler 2008, pp. 119–25). Karen Barkey argues that the social and religious inclusion model during this period exhibited three primary characteristics: segregation, inequality, and protection. These attributes were evident in the practices and norms that upheld the dominance of Islamic values and facilitated social separation through regulations governing public behavior. For instance, Christians and Jews were restricted to riding donkeys and mules, while Muslims were permitted to ride horses and camels. Additionally, non-Muslims were subjected to dress codes, restrictions on the height of their houses compared to those of Muslims, limitations on displaying religious symbols in public, and the prohibition of using bells. In exchange for adhering to these regulations, individuals belonging to these religious groups received protection (Barkey 2008, pp. 16, 119; Friedmann 2003, pp. 13–53). Despite the religious and legal nature of the concept, these regulations were not always upheld. Sometimes, they were revised, and, in other cases, they were disregarded. The implementation of these regulations was also influenced by various factors, such as personal relationships driven by self-interest, the policies of rulers, and proximity to urban centers where legal and religious norms were more familiar compared to rural areas, where social, familial, and tribal connections held more significant influence. These norms were associated with the comprehensive concept of *siyāsa shar’iyya*, which advocated for the subordination of legal and political practices within the political entity to *shari’a* (Barkey 2005, p. 9; Tyler 2008, p. 122). A significant turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire came with the reforms, particularly with the decree of 1856, which explicitly acknowledged civil equality for non-Muslims. This step was a significant effort towards establishing a society based on recognizing the principles of individuality and civil tolerance. This policy changed under Abdul Hamid II, who adopted a conservative stance (Maoz 1968, p. 27; Hurewitz 1972, pp. 149–53).

The concept of tolerance that emerged within Islamic law during the nineteenth century aimed primarily at maintaining the hierarchical structure of the *dhimma* system and refining it rather than dismantling it. In this sense, it can be seen as a reformist ideology that sought to foster a more harmonious and inclusive relationship with non-Muslims. One of the earliest responses to the philosophical concept of tolerance came from the Egyptian scholar Rifa’a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi. In a text published in 1869, al-Tahtawi defends, on the one hand, the principle of tolerance and points out its importance, and on the other hand, requests to preserve the “*ahd*”, the pact or commitment with the non-Muslims. His dual approach is reflected in his attitude to concepts. In line with the supporters of the philosophical concept, he claims that the kings’ fanaticism (*ta’asub*) is an undesirable quality, as is their coercive interference in religious matters. Imposing authority can result in hypocrisy (*nifāq*) and suppression of freedom of choice. However, contrary to the philosophical concept, religious fanaticism can be desirable and even positive if its goal is the defense of religion. In this sense, jihad wars are desirable if their purpose is religious (strengthening religion and supporting it), not material (al-Tahtawi 1973, pp. 556–57).

The attitude towards tolerance is also reflected in al-Tahtawi’s selective approach in choosing his religious sources regarding inter-religious relations in an Islamic society. He cites a *fatwā* (a legal ruling in Islamic law) from the fourteenth-century scholar Siraj al-Din

Umar al-Hanafi, who claims that non-Muslims should be treated within the framework of *mu'āmalat* (laws that govern relationships between individuals) in the same way that Muslims are treated. However, it is forbidden for a non-Muslim to build their house higher than the house of a Muslim if it causes damage, such as blocking light. Al-Tahtawi cites other legal scholars who allow the inclusion of dhimmis in the military under specific circumstances, such as when they need them or after their loyalty has been ensured. If this occurs, the ruler must handle them cautiously by segregating them within the army. In contrast to his more lenient stance on *mu'āmalāt*, al-Tahtawi asserts that it is prohibited to support the beliefs of non-Muslims or engage in religious activity with them (*muwālā*). According to the same principle, the rights to the religious and normative distinction of the dhimmis are derived from Islamic law, not their natural rights. Al-Tahtawi claims that every Muslim should adhere to the agreement (*ahd*), as it is a sacred commitment (al-Tahtawi 1973, p. 556).

Like tolerance, so is the character of the community. The image of the community that al-Tahtawi outlines does not consist of faceless citizens but of Muslims, Christians, and Jews who have a common denominator (the homeland) but also fundamental differences that stem from their religious affiliation. This feature challenges the creation of autonomous individuals with the right to choose their lifestyle. In such a context, religion, belief, and lifestyle are not a private matter, as the philosophical concept of tolerance suggests, but rather a religious and collective one.

The approach to maintaining the *ahd* tradition received support from Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh. In 1884, they published a critical essay on the philosophical concept of tolerance. They argued that the critics of *ta'āshub* imitated European thinkers and were misled by false claims. In their opinion, the goal of this group's claims is to weaken the morale of the Muslim community so that it becomes easy prey for colonialism. Like Jibara, Afghani and 'Abduh designate the group that criticizes religious fanaticism "*mutazandiqa*" and "*mufsidīn*" (holding the views of heresy and corruption) (al-Afghani 2002, pp. 131–39).

In contrast to the negative perception of *ta'āshub*, al-Afghani and Abduh argue that this concept has multiple meanings. Following al-Tahtawi, they distinguish between positive and desirable religious feelings and extreme and negative ones. The first meaning is necessary for maintaining social life and building civilization. Thus, the religious feeling of Islam was the force that lifted the Arabs from a state of savagery and propelled them to high levels of civilization (*madaniyya*). Additionally, compared to instances of extreme fanaticism in Christianity, such as the Crusades and the Inquisition, Islam has not exhibited the same level of fanaticism that has resulted in the murder and elimination of entire groups. Compared to the Christian case, throughout history, Muslims have upheld the "right of patronage" (*haq al-dhimma*) and given different religions their rights. According to their perspective, the allegations of religious discrimination against individuals of various faiths within the context of Islam are false claims. Since the inception of Islam, Muslims have not hindered individuals of different religious beliefs from progressing in various fields based on their abilities (al-Afghani 2002, pp. 131–39).

'Abduh expands on the ideas presented in the article and develops them into a more coherent doctrine. In his debate with Farah Antun in 1902–1903, he argued against separating religious authority from civil authority. According to him, this approach does not promote tolerance because even if the government mandates separation, the ruler cannot detach himself from his religion. "What good does separation if the king's religion compels him to oppose science?" (Abduh 1993, pp. 293–94). Furthermore, according to 'Abduh, there is no form of theocracy in Islam because there is no middleman between the individual and God. The role of the clergy is restricted to providing advice and guidance (Abduh 1993, p. 304). In this sense, the assertion that the division between religious and civil authority is necessary for tolerance and freedom is not applicable within the Islamic framework, as the Qur'an permits unrestricted freedom of opinion and belief (Abduh 1993, p. 264). He finds the proof of his arguments in the history of Islam, where groups considered "*zanādiqa*"

(infidels) survived and still live with Muslims. Furthermore, he argues that politics, rather than religion, is what has caused civil wars within Islam (Abduh 1993, pp. 265–67, 275).

There are various sources for the argument that the logic behind the philosophical concept of tolerance does not apply to the religion of Islam. Alongside many stances that developed in the Islamic context and supported the argument for a special relationship between religion and state in Islam, a source for this claim can also be found in the Enlightenment tradition. Locke also believed that the separation of civil and religious authority was unique to the Christian case. In contrast to the Christian theocratic case, Locke presented a distinct perspective on the Jewish state and Judaism as a religion governed by religious law. He asserted that in the Jewish state that was theoretically established by Moses, religious law and civil law were identical, thereby making religious law legally binding. In this context, Locke connected the granting of civil rights to religious conversion and justified the expulsion of non-Jewish groups from Canaan based on the prohibition of idolatry in the law. Given that Islam is a religion that adheres to religious laws, it is likely that Locke held a similar perspective on Islam.

Furthermore, ‘Abduh developed a political notion that draws from the *siyāsa shar‘iyya* and aligns with the reasoning presented by Locke. According to ‘Abduh’s view, the ruler (the sultan or caliph) who is committed to implementing Islamic law is a civil ruler. The new theorization that ‘Abduh makes between the religious and the civil is a new connection that seeks to renew the traditional doctrine of *siyāsa shar‘iyya* and employ it to challenge the philosophical concept. In the same spirit, ‘Abduh claims apologetically that the jihad wars did not take place to impose religion but rather to defend Muslims against aggression. Furthermore, the payment of jizya protected the existence of non-Muslim groups under Islamic rule (Abduh 1993, pp. 307–11).

Nilüfer Göle emphasized the importance of identity politics in interpreting the position of Islamists in general toward social and political issues. The discussion surrounding identity plays a significant role in shaping the arguments against the philosophical concept of tolerance. From this perspective, supporters of the Islamic legal concept have two objectives: to redirect attention away from the West as a dominant force and to break down the hierarchical relationship between Islam and the West in the narrative of global history. This focus on the marginalized status of Islam with the Western center and examining identity-related questions resembles contemporary movements like feminism. Just as feminism challenges the universal concept of “man”, ‘Abduh rejects assimilation into the universal categories and emphasizes the importance of Islamic distinctiveness (Göle 1998, pp. 53–70).¹¹ In addition to considering identity politics, it is essential to acknowledge the differences these reformists bring that stem from their holistic understanding of the Islamic legal traditions as a source for establishing a concept of justice, lifestyle, and path to salvation.

5. Epilog

Gabriel Motzkin argued that “periods of transition are in practice conceived more in terms of continuity with either the preceding period or the subsequent period” (Motzkin 2005, pp. 145–58). Retrospectively, *tasāhul*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *tamaddun* are more of a case of continuity with the past. This terminology and the partial content of secularity it represented seem, for the political lexicon of the twentieth century, outdated, vague, and hence require interpretation. The unique terminology of tolerance as a political principle was transformed and reshaped in the twentieth century by the term *‘almāniyya*, which represents a case of discontinuity with the past. This distinctiveness justifies the unique nature of the *Sattelzeit* as a period of transition that is connected to the previous and subsequent periods.

In contrast to the prevalent understanding of secularism and secularity as a coherent concept, historical conceptual analysis reveals their varying characteristics, non-monolithic nature, and the diverse motivations that underpin them. Before tolerance became associated and integrated with modern ideologies such as secularism, democracy, and nationalism,

discussions about tolerance were linked to social and political values such as civil equality, freedom of conscience, the neutrality of religion in the public sphere, and optimism about the future. These discussions were influenced by various factors that were not always directly related to religious and ethnic relations in the Ottoman Empire. The discussion on tolerance emerged in response to the universal aspects of the Enlightenment, the desire to promote particular worldviews and concepts of justice, and the changing expectations of religious minorities who sought integration and voiced their opposition to feeling alienated. It also arose as a response to the hierarchical social and religious orders and the ambition to cultivate a modern subject who is free from traditional limitations. The competition, debates, and ideological conflicts surrounding the understanding of tolerance reflect a historical narrative characterized by disagreements between those advocating for an egalitarian society and a free civil space where individuals can exist autonomously and those influenced by hierarchical political and religious traditions. The changes in societal expectations influenced perceptions of religion and proposed new forms of religiosity.

The development of the three concepts of tolerance occurred within the framework of the Arabic *Sattelzeit*, yet they exhibit both synchronic and diachronic influences. The philosophical aspect draws from Enlightenment thought as well as from medieval Arabic rationalist traditions. The theological dimension is shaped by the principle of equality among believers, while the legal aspect represents the renewal and reformulation of medieval Islamic legal traditions alongside inherited practices of hierarchical tolerance. The interaction among these three concepts is reflected in the contested interpretations of the term “civil” (*madani*), which was used as a marker of the Arabic *Sattelzeit*.¹² Advocates of the philosophical concept of tolerance sought to address the equality and integration of non-Muslims through a universal approach based on civil rights. In the theological concept, this issue is addressed by proposing a change in belief and doctrine (religious reform). On the other hand, the Islamic legal concept disregards this issue and emphasizes the significance of the Muslim subjects and their history in the global historical narrative. It is evident that factors such as religious affiliation, educational background, and geography influenced opinions. The philosophical concept was supported by Christians and Syrians, while the Islamic legal concept included Muslim clerics from various regions. In all cases, there was a competition to define the meaning of “civil”. The first group defined it by excluding the religious (*dini*), whereas in theological and Islamic legal concepts, “civil” is considered part of religion. In line with this reasoning, these methods established different models of the public sphere, citizenship, and political culture. The early twentieth-century use of *‘almāniyya* as equivalent to secularism was an attempt to give this conceptual contestation a particular ideological interpretation that excluded the Islamic–legal and –theological interpretations. The term *‘almāniyya* has transformed into a collective singular, providing Arabic speakers with a new way to imagine all aspects of life free from the constraints of religion, encapsulated in a single word.

The revolutionary aspect of the philosophical concept lies in the connection established between tolerance, civil equality, and the privatization of religion. This concept ensures that civil equality, social tolerance, and individual freedom are upheld through rational and utilitarian relationships that exclude religion through the process of privatization. On the other hand, supporters of the legal Islamic concept do not acknowledge the existence of inequality with non-Muslims, intolerance, or suppression of freedom. Unlike the other two concepts, the theological and the philosophical, the idea of equality with non-believers does not appeal to the adherents of the legal concept. However, both the theological and Islamic legal concepts share similarities. They both view the separation of religion from law and the principle of rights as a threat to religion and society. They also believe that the concept of tolerance and freedom of belief undermines the sacred bonds of the community. This last subject is seen as essential not only for social peace but also for religious salvation. The tolerance that emerges from these ideas is not rooted in individualism but rather in the sense of belonging to a specific group.

The concepts that were explored in the article were not the only concepts of tolerance that developed in the nineteenth century. The three investigated concepts are merely prototypes of the forms of tolerance that developed within the ideological context of the twentieth century.

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Notes

- ¹ The Arabic equivalent to the term secularism is written as *‘almāniyya* (derived from *‘ālam*, world) or *ilmāniyya*, (derived from *ilm*, science). Although the transformation of the term took place in the background of the rise of positivism, I will use *‘almāniyya*, the earlier version of the term.
- ² For early examples in Arabic for the use of *‘almāniyya*, see the use of the phrases “secular schools” (*madāris ‘almāniyya*) and “secular state” (*dawla ‘almāniyya*) (Cheikho 1910, pp. 620–26; al-Zin 1911, p. 158; Al-Rabita 1911, p. 165; Shamali 1939, p. 39). For more details about Koselleck’s use of “collective singulars”, see Kaposov (2011, pp. 39–64) and Koselleck (2002, pp. 218–35).
- ³ To expand on the social history of tolerance, see Barkey (2008, pp. 109–53).
- ⁴ For a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of social changes and technological advancements on the notions of space and time, see Davison (1990, pp. 133–65), Khuri-Makdisi (2010, pp. 35–93), Wishnitzer (2015, pp. 45–65), Barak (2013, pp. 21–52), Zachs (2005, pp. 39–85) and Ami Ayalon (2016, pp. 18–32).
- ⁵ For a historical analysis of this event, see Makdisi (2002, pp. 601–17), Sheehi (2009, pp. 15–45) and al-Bustani (2019, pp. 13–22).
- ⁶ Al-Bustani’s approach has a deep religious dimension embedded in Protestant theological thought, which emphasizes the centrality of individualism. It is difficult to separate this approach from its heritage of Enlightenment (al-Bustani 1990, pp. 38, 68).
- ⁷ Orit Bashkin demonstrated the global nature of the *nahda* through research that exposes the concerns of Arabic-speaking intellectuals on topics related to the relationship between minority and majority in European politics. She argues that these intellectuals wrote against racism, which they perceived as a destructive phenomenon to society. See Bashkin (2021, pp. 404–12).
- ⁸ For the limits of Locks concept of tolerance concerning Catholics and atheists, see Locke (2010, pp. viii–xxxii) and Loconte (2014, pp. 1–11).
- ⁹ For the English translation of Antun’s text, see Antun (2013, pp. 159–72).
- ¹⁰ For the transformation of the concept of *dawla madaniyya* in 20th-century Egypt, see Lavie (2018, pp. 1–54).
- ¹¹ For an extended discussion of Afghani and ‘Abduh’s work as a critique of modernity, see Kundos (2018).
- ¹² The Arabic *Sattelzeit* is roughly stretched from 1820s to 1914. For discussion about the beginning of this period, see Abu-‘Uksa (2016, pp. 50–155).

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Article

Bringing Back God: Goldenberg and the Vestigial State in American Religion

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Abstract: Naomi Goldenberg’s model of religion as a “vestigial state” is an excellent interrogation of how religion interacts with the state. To Goldenberg, religions traditionally functioned in the same manner as nation-states before being conquered and delineated as semi-autonomous institutions under the larger secular apparatus. However, I argue in this paper that Goldenberg’s “vestigial state” fails to account for the dynamism that religions have in their relationships to the state. I propose seeing religions as “alternative authorities”, which can be subordinate, cooperative, or hostile to the secular state. These perspectives as an alternative authority are seen best in the evolution of American fundamentalism and Christian nationalism, whose adherents have historically distinguished themselves from the state while simultaneously engaging in the effort to reshape it. In looking at how these movements develop, we understand that religions are constantly evolving in how to achieve and maintain power.

Keywords: Christian nationalism; fundamentalism; secularism; American Christianity; vestigial state

1. Introduction

Scholars in the past century have fiercely debated the dynamics of religion in our rapidly changing world. Perhaps nothing has captivated the scholarly attention or influenced our public perceptions of religion more so than the issue of secularization. While there are plenty aspects of secularization worth dissecting, the most important factor discussed for this paper is the relationship between religion and the nation-state. While often understood to be distinct entities, distilled into categories of “religious” and “secular”, Naomi Goldenberg’s concept of the “vestigial state” collapses that distinction and highlights the ways that religious institutions have traditionally functioned in a similar manner to the nation-state.

While Goldenberg’s model is useful in moving beyond these flawed categories, her presentation of the weakened, conquered vestigial state fails to recognize how religious institutions might have radically different relationships to the nation-state. Rather than being purely subservient vestigial states, I argue that religions behave as ever-evolving “alternative authorities”. By analyzing the developments of fundamentalist and Christian nationalist movements in the United States, we can see the ways that religions can engage with the nation-state, developing simultaneous relationships of coexistence, collaboration, and competition.

I will primarily be using a variety of secondary resources produced by scholars of Christian nationalism and fundamentalism, in large part because my focus is on the larger theoretical concerns of Goldenberg’s model and how we might modify it in the context of religious malleability. Although my focus is on American Christianity in a very generalized sense, there is no doubt that my model of “alternative authorities” could certainly apply to different traditions, time periods, and approaches. My goal, ultimately, is to build upon Goldenberg’s theoretical contributions and provide a practical and flexible framework that can account for the wide range of interactions between religions and the state.

2. Goldenberg's Vestigial State and Old Models of Religion

To fully recognize the dynamics of alternative authorities, we must understand Goldenberg's model of the vestigial state. Goldenberg, at the core of her argument, is providing a new perspective on the relationship between the religious and secular. That very relationship has been interrogated by scholars of various different approaches and disciplines, with many thinkers positing that modernity has decentered religious authority from being the sole voice dictating the governance of the polity. Hoping to end the wars of religion and religious persecution, the Treaty of Westphalia had birthed a system where the "secular" nation-state took the reins from the religious authority. Because of this decoupling of religion from authority, a distinction and separation of the immanent, public, secular realm from the transcendent, private, religious realm had been conceived. Soon, national identity became the superior social marker, with religious identity being a purely individual distinction. Religious affiliations and the beliefs of individuals are chosen and changeable and should also not interfere with these "worldly", secular affairs (Cesari 2022, pp. 4–5).

While that model of distinction has been largely accepted and popularized, it fails to recognize how the religious and "secular" politics have always been woven together. Drawing from critical scholars of religion, most notably William Cavanaugh, Naomi Goldenberg illustrated that the bifurcation of the "secular state" and "religion" is fundamentally misguided. Goldenberg asserted that rather than being two separate entities, religion functions as a "vestigial state". As a vestigial state, Goldenberg argued, these things known as religions are the surviving entities of formerly sovereign powers. According to Goldenberg, the concept of religion appears and evolves from periods of conquest, where "the conquered people might be allowed to continue with their cultures and institutions in attenuated and monitored forms. Prior governmental arrangements are granted limited recognition and circumscribed power. The now marginalized group can live on practicing. . . as the notion of 'religion'" (Goldenberg 2022, p. 75).

While vestigial and non-vestigial states function in a similar manner, they differ in their justifications. For non-vestigial state, they might ground their actions on ideals of "freedom, equality, justice" or as "the proper homelands of an idealized race or ethnicity" (Goldenberg 2013, pp. 40–41). Meanwhile, religions often cite divine chosenness as their primary motivator. This is not to say they are completely unlike in their justifications, since governments often cite religion in their effort to validate the government and elevate their sovereignty. For example, the phrase "One nation, under God" being inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance (Goldenberg 2015, pp. 283–84).

Additionally, as mentioned previously, there is a power imbalance between these varieties of states. Though the religion is separated off from the larger structures of political governance, Goldenberg argued that these vestigial institutions will take any opportunities ceded to them by the state. Goldenberg pointed to laws and customs regarding the family, since these are usually understood to be "proper" spheres for religious institutions, who then tend to set many of the rules and policies in a national context. Because of this power that is wielded by religions, however, conflict with the state can arise (Goldenberg 2015, pp. 282–83). Should a vestigial state—or a movement attached to it—step out of line and then turn to violence, it is often seen as an illegitimate or inauthentic form of religion. In essence, it becomes separated from the category of religion and becomes an inappropriate political movement (Goldenberg 2022, p. 74).

Goldenberg's work is extremely valuable, and she opens the door to seeing religious institutions in a new way. Goldenberg, in particular, highlighted how using the model of vestigial states allows us to see religion as an avenue to perpetuate male domination. Goldenberg argued that this model of religion accounts for issues such as gender, since these "vestigial states" are primarily platformed on a nostalgia and support for masculine, hegemonic government. Often, religion comes into conflict with the current—usually more progressive—state regarding their perspective on issues of gender and sexuality. In these clashes, vestigial states can successfully argue for their sexist practices. However, more

egalitarian elements and factions of these traditions, usually informed by “women in liberal Western democracies”, can also push for reform (Goldenberg 2013, p. 44).

Various scholars have taken up Goldenberg’s model and applied them to new case studies such as the obfuscation of gender-based violence behind the “specialness of religion” (McPhillips and Goldenberg 2020, p. 39), the Catholic Church’s shift towards sexual morality to maintain a privileged space within the larger neoliberal state (Pump 2020, p. 177), and how white supremacy is buttressed by vestigial, religious imagery (Newton 2019, p. 308). All of these perspectives and arguments are insightful for our field, particularly because these authors take up Goldenberg’s challenge to apply contextualized experiences in order to truly highlight the dynamics of the vestigial state. In whatever way we use it, Goldenberg’s theory can radically alter the ways that we can engage in religious studies since it challenges some of our basic assumptions and understandings of what “religion” is and how we conceive of it, especially in the modern context.

However, I would argue that Goldenberg’s model is incomplete, particularly in how it frames religion as something that survived the past and persists in the present. While Goldenberg readily acknowledged that “vestigial” falls short in truly encapsulating the pasts and possibilities of these institutions (Goldenberg 2022, p. 74), there is a deeper problem in framing these traditions as ancillary institutions who are always diminished by the now-dominant nation-state. Religions are a constantly changing force, and their relationship to the nation-state is much more complex than initially suspected.

I am not saying that we should wholly dismiss Goldenberg’s argument; it is far too useful and powerful, but I argue for reframing religion as an “alternative authority” rather than a vestigial state. As an alternative authority, religious traditions can have multiple relationships to power and the nation-state, particularly in the modern age. This might mean that the religion is/becomes the primary institution of power, works in direct partnership with the nation-state, or is relegated to a subordinate role much in the same way that Goldenberg described. In arguing for religions as an alternative authority, which functions in a similar way to the nation-state but often conceives of itself in relatively distinct terms, I am arguing for the dynamism that Goldenberg wishes to portray. Religions as an alternative authority illustrates that there are very different paths in the future for how the nation-state can be structured and conceived. While certain religious institutions are content (or unable to challenge) with their status as a subordinate alternative authority, another might be constantly utilizing its status as a “ancient” or superior alternative authority to subvert that power structure and assert its primacy.

That plasticity is illustrated best by contemporary Christian nationalism and fundamentalism in the United States. Where Goldenberg portrayed religious institutions as a conquered and thus weakened entity, Christian nationalist and fundamentalist movements willingly use the rhetoric of subjugation and separation as a means of mobilizing their political ambitions. Rather than a dormant, vestigial state, fundamentalism and Christian nationalism provide us an avenue to see religion as an active alternative authority that seeks to reshape the state.

3. Old School Revival: Defining Fundamentalism and Christian Nationalism

But first, it is imperative to define what I mean by fundamentalism and Christian nationalism. While fundamentalist and Christian nationalist movements are not unique to United States, their roots are within a stream of conservative, American Protestantism (and American Christianity in general). While situating these movements in the United States, we see how these phenomena challenge Goldenberg’s model and use their status as alternative authorities to empower their claims to power.

Fundamentalism and Christian nationalism are often used interchangeably, but they are not completely identical. While both movements have continued to build off each other in the larger sphere of conservative Christianity, they are distinct movements that arise out of different contexts. In other words, while plenty of Christian nationalists have been fundamentalists, not all fundamentalists are Christian nationalists, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, seeing the ways that the stories of fundamentalism and Christian nationalism are woven together is crucial to understanding the shifts in American religion and politics in the past century. More importantly, these changes illustrate how religion functions as an alternative authority with various different relations to the nation-state.

“Fundamentalism” as a category is perhaps the more contentious and complex of the two, since there are nuances and contexts that contribute to different forms of fundamentalism. For this paper, fundamentalism is primarily located within its original American, evangelical Protestant context. In the 1910s, the first self-identified “fundamentalists” were a consortium of Protestants who wrote and preached against the effects of modernism and liberal theology on core doctrinal positions such as Jesus’ virgin birth and the inerrancy of the Bible. Soon, fundamentalist–modernist battles split churches and communities across the country, though the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial seemed to be the death blow of the fundamentalists. Publicly defeated, most Americans believed that the fundamentalists retreated into obscurity, resorting to building separatist institutions and insulating themselves from the pressures from the modern world (Atherstone and Jones 2023, pp. 5–6). They could not have been further from the truth, and fundamentalists still maintain a public presence over a century later.

Since it first came on the scene, scholars and practitioners have fiercely debated what fundamentalism entails. For the most part, “fundamentalism” has been a shorthand for a backwards and intolerant kind of religiosity (Atherstone and Jones 2023, p. 13). However, that overwhelmingly pejorative perspective fails to recognize the ways that fundamentalist movements have been able to survive—and, at times, thrive—for over a century. More than an extremist, anti-modern reactionary movement, the fundamentalist effort to return American society to the basics is built upon political and technological innovation.

While being a much more recent target of scholarly attention, Christian nationalism similarly posits a problem with the changes in society. Christian nationalism, as described by Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead, is best understood as a perspective where the United States “has and always should be a distinctly ‘Christian’ . . . from top to bottom—in its self-identity, interpretations of its own history, sacred symbols, cherished values, and public policies—and it aims to keep it that way” (Whitehead and Perry 2020, p. 10). This sense of national Christian identity has frequently been expressed through nativist, racist, and cisheteropatriarchal policies. Simply put, being a good American has meant being a good Christian, both of which are often contrasted with Black, Asian, Indigenous, Jewish, Muslim, and Queer populations (Gorski 2023, p. 24).

Much like fundamentalism, Christian nationalism has shifted according to the times, often expanding who it includes in the movement. While traditionally associated with evangelical and Charismatic Protestants, Christian nationalists today include mainline Protestants and once vilified groups such as Catholics, Latter-day Saints, and Jews, among other non-Christian groups (Gorski and Perry 2022, p. 49). Uniting all these groups is a concern for the feeling that the Christian culture of the United States is being threatened by supposedly anti-Christian secularists. In response to these transgressions, Christian nationalists have built alliances and developed new strategies in the hopes of winning the war for the soul of the nation.

Despite the shared hostility towards this changing America, neither tradition has given up on reaching outwards. There exists two seemingly contradictory aspects of fundamentalism and Christian nationalism: a hostility towards modernism or secularism, but also an acceptance of new opportunities to engage the culture. While the methods may change, fundamentalists and Christian nationalists have constantly worked towards a “traditional” American society. This combination of old and new is seen best in formation of the Religious Right and its influence on conservative Christianity in America.

4. 1910s–1950s: Fundamental Beginnings and National Growth

While fundamentalist movements originated as a rough coalition of traditionalists in a variety of Protestant denominations decades before the Scopes Monkey Trial, they were largely removed from American politics. That changed in the aftermath of the First World War, with disillusioned Christians of the early 1920s being concerned with supposedly anti-Christian issues such as the teaching of evolution in public schools. Modernism and liberalism, these fundamentalists claimed, had undermined the biblical values of American society. They were particularly outspoken against anything considered too secular, communist, or Catholic. However, aside from issues such as Prohibition—which related to their anti-Catholicism—coalitions of fundamentalists, evangelicals, and Protestants at large were few and far between (Williams 2023, p. 573).

Fundamentalists continued to be split along political boundaries in the 1930s, with Northern fundamentalists being hostile towards the New Deal, arguing that it would lead to a socialist, anti-Christian state. Their Southern counterparts, however, were much more receptive to government aid (Williams 2023, p. 573). Despite their general agreement that modernism liberalism and socialism was a direct threat to Bible-believing, Christian society, there was no systematic approach to politics (Marsden 2022, p. 262).

However, explicitly conspiratorial rhetoric around plots to destroy American Christianity would become prominent at this time. More so, it would set a standard for future generations. Texts such as Arno C. Gaebelein's *The Conflict of the Ages* present an interconnected web of socialists, secret societies, Catholics, and Jews collaborating in the destruction of America and its righteous Protestantism. Gaeblein focused on Jews in particular, in large part thanks to the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Marsden 2022, pp. 263–64). This conspiratorial, Manichean mindset, propagated through books, pamphlets, magazines, and radio programs, represented a distinct turn in both fundamentalism and conservative Protestantism at large. It is this turn towards embracing the “paranoid style” that is pivotal to seeing the future developments of the Christian right. Reflecting their already millenarian and dispensationalist beliefs, these breeds of Protestantism applied a similar battle of good versus evil to their political motivations. Simply put, fundamentalists and conservative Protestants began to think that every part of history—political and religious—as a conspiracy, “set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is... an all-out crusade” (Hofstadter 2020, p. 525). Embracing conspiracies did not discourage political engagement, but only galvanized it. Demons, devils, communists, and Catholics alike needed to be combatted at every level of society.

The 1940s and 1950s saw the continual effort of fundamentalists reach out to a wider audience and engage with other conservative Protestants—usually evangelicals—who were similarly concerned about Catholic and Communist influence on the American government. It would also be where this coalition became seriously entrenched within American politics and the Republican Party in particular. The foundation of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 brought together Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and even the once-maligned Charismatics, in service of advancing conservative Protestantism across the country (Butler 2021, pp. 36–38). Evangelicals such as Billy Graham (who formerly identified as a fundamentalist) counseled the mainliner president Dwight D. Eisenhower, often promoting policies that visibly amplified Christian ideals. This is seen best in the adoption of “One Nation Under God” as the national motto and the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. All this was adopted to contrast with the godless atheism of the Soviets. This civil, conservative, Protestant religiosity was often disseminated by *Christianity Today*, a publication founded by Graham (Williams 2023, p. 574).

But conservative Protestants did not restrict themselves to just print materials. Rather, fundamentalists and conservatives readily took advantage of new technologies for religious proselytization and political organization. By 1949, there were thousands of evangelical radio programs being broadcasted in the country, with figures such as Graham, Oral Roberts, and Charles Edward Fuller becoming household names. These programs survived

by building a consistent stream of listeners, with conservative and evangelical broadcasters hoping to be unchallenged on national airwaves. However, the passing of the 1934 Communications Act led to the expansion of mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish radio programs. Feeling excluded and attacked, evangelical and fundamentalist organizers formed the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) lobbying group. Backed by influential organizations such as the NAE, the NRB was effective not just in advancing conservative Protestant radio programs, but also in establishing a foundation for the future of conservative broadcasting (Howard and Zahay 2023, pp. 644–45).

5. 1960s–1970s: New Opponents, Allies, and Avenues

This ever-expanding coalition of conservative Protestants continued to make inroads headed into the 1960s. While still largely divided politically, this movement became particularly attached to the Republican party with the nomination of the Catholic John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election. Conservative Protestants across the board—evangelicals, fundamentalists, charismatics, and even conservative mainliners—united to combat this Catholic takeover. Graham himself even worked alongside the Nixon campaign. In particular, the vast media network created by these conservative Protestants was used to warn voters against what was thought to be a transgression against God (Williams 2023, p. 574).

That conservative coalition was not built to last, however, and some of the more moderate White evangelicals such as Graham no longer self-identified as fundamentalists. Because of their unwillingness to work with mainline Protestants, there emerged a stricter separatist stream of fundamentalists composed of figures such as Bob Jones Sr., Carl McIntire, and Billy James Hargis. This division was also exasperated by the Civil Rights Movement, with moderate evangelicals like Graham supporting integration. That, however, was still a reluctant acceptance, as can be seen when Graham wrote that some “extremists were going too fast” in advancing integration (Butler 2021, p. 52). For the hardline fundamentalists and a significant number of White evangelicals, integration was as dire a threat to the nation as the communists and Catholics. Plenty of these fundamentalists and conservative Protestants argued that activists like Martin Luther King Jr. represented a “lawlessness” that threatened American values (Williams 2023, p. 575).

Interestingly, concerns around racial purity began to reunite a diverse group of Christians. A substantial number of evangelicals, fundamentalists, mainliners, and charismatics in both the North and South argued that segregation should be maintained both politically and theologically, with a growing number of White Catholics agreeing. These Catholics, who were often descended from European immigrants, decided to forsake much of their distinctive ethnic identities in favor of the White American (Jones 2020, p. 70). While not totally immune from anti-Catholic sentiment, Catholic communities embrace of Whiteness helped ingratiate themselves among the crop of conservative Protestants.

Alongside new collaborators, these conservative Christians continued to take advantage of new technologies. Having built a powerful precedent with radio, television was the next logical step. As soon as the Federal Communication Committee allowed them in 1960, conservative Christians began buying up slots at an astronomical rate. Thanks to its accessibility and marketability, television fueled the growth of televangelists, some of which were already existing radio personalities. Figures such as Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson became some of the most prolific conservative Christian voices of the era, in large part thanks to their usage of televangelism. By the 1970s, conservatives knew that they could utilize this diverse body of television personalities into forming a solid voting bloc (Howard and Zahay 2023, pp. 646–47).

At the same time in the early to mid-1970s, Republican politicians continued to work alongside more moderate conservative Christians such as Graham. With their help, and a policy focused on anti-communism and the racial dog whistle of “social order”, Republican incumbent Richard Nixon was able to recapture the presidency in 1972. However, Watergate would turn many conservative Christians away from blind loyalty towards the Republican

party. Many of these conservatives urged voters to consider a candidate's morality and quality of character more than his party affiliation (Williams 2023, p. 575).

That concern for moral fiber extended not just to politicians but the nation as a whole. In particular, concerns around sexual purity and abortion became the tentpole issues for the consolidation of conservative Christians. Both moderate and fundamentalist conservatives launched campaigns advocating for a return to the heteronormative, nuclear family. Any kind of domestic or sexual deviancy was understood to be not just a personal failure but was indicative of social rot. It is at this point you see a true partnership formed between conservative Protestants and Catholics, primarily in opposing abortion after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. But this strong, ecumenical partnership was also concerned with what Francis Schaeffer called "secular humanism", which included everything that could be considered secular, modernist, or liberal (Williams 2023, pp. 576–77).

6. 1980s–1990s: The Religious Right and a New Standard

With a powerful coalition from across the denominational spectrum, conservative Christians across the country hoped to turn the U.S. back to its godly roots. With the born-again, evangelical Jimmy Carter elected president in 1976, that seemed to be the case. However, disappointment after disappointment by Carter and other Christian politicians shifted how they thought about political allies; rather than a candidate's moral character or personal piety, the most important thing was that these candidates would fight for the laws that these conservative Christians wanted. If they were to say the save the soul of the nation from the evils of abortion, race mixing, feminism, communism, and homosexuality, the only way forward was to radically change the laws of the state (Williams 2023, p. 577).

Political action committees and lobbying groups such as the Moral Majority, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Christian Voice put significant pressure on conservative politicians to support their goals of bringing back God in public schools, outlawing abortion, combatting international communism, and supporting Israel. The movement quickly threw their support behind Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. Frequently appearing conservative Christian events, endorsing their rhetoric, and dominating the White evangelical vote, Reagan would set the standard for all of the future Republican presidential candidates (Williams 2023, p. 578).

With the turn towards policy positions over personal morality, conservative Christians became one of the strongest voting constituencies, and one that was frequently favored by the Republican party. With the Republican party attached, conservative Christians pushed for policies to promote their mostly White private schools and the cisheteronormative nuclear family (Williams 2023, pp. 578–79). However, abortion remained the biggest issue for the religious right by the late 1980s. With several generations of evangelicals, charismatics, fundamentalists, Catholics, and a variety of other Christian conservatives motivated by ideas of social justice and spiritual warfare, many of these anti-abortion activists moved to ideas of civil disobedience. While firmly attached to the Republican party, some on the religious right felt it necessary to take matters into their own hands and run for office. This is seen best in Pat Robertson's 1980 presidential campaign. While unsuccessful in gaining a majority of the evangelical vote, the results revealed that conservative Christians were willing to engage in politics and reshape the nation according to their beliefs (Williams 2023, pp. 580–81).

Robertson's campaign also presented a turn towards religious freedom as a core issue of the religious right. With some of their policy proposals being less palatable to most Americans, the "moral majority" shifted and framed itself as a persecuted minority. Despite having a solid voting bloc and significant political clout, conservative Christians asserted that they were a minority that needed First Amendment protections from the larger culture. Throughout the 1990s, right-wing Christians mobilized for the Republican party from the local and state level, all the way to Congress in the effort of "protecting" their rights. With organizations like the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council, and Focus on the

Family helping mobilize voters around issues such as anti-gay legislation, the Republican party took up these positions as well (Williams 2023, p. 582).

Despite their influence, many on the Christian right became increasingly frustrated with various political failures—neither abortion nor homosexuality had been outlawed despite their efforts—and rebuked the traditional strategies. Instead, they advocated for forming conservative enclaves distinct from their secular neighbors. While not embraced whole hog, this turn to “Reconstructionism” helped advance the Christian homeschooling movement and the “traditional” patriarchal family. Even at its most banal, the Christian right simultaneously separated and expanded itself with mediums such as Christian radio, music, and education (Williams 2023, p. 583).

7. 2000s–Present: Big Lies and a Big Movement

The Christian right carried on into the new millennia with vigor, though this time it became more decentralized. That decentralization is in large part thanks to the internet. With the internet came various online forums that helped establish communities for those interested in right-wing Christianity. Importantly, the internet facilitated members of these communities to easily regulate their membership, with members of these message boards or other social media platforms to ban or block detractors. Without having to worry about physical proximity or dissenting voices, membership became easily strengthened and maintained (Howard and Zahay 2023, p. 652). In addition, various conservative Christian influencers created content that reinforced conservative beliefs or conspiratorial narratives. Social media, in particular, helped blur distinctions between layperson and authority, as well as individual and institution; with the internet, everybody could become an expert and a leader (Howard and Zahay 2023, pp. 653–54).

Despite their decentralization and dispersal of authority, the Christian right still had major institutional support. While right-wing Christian organizations still certainly had sway, the Republican party had become the primary avenue for conservative Christian political action. The Christian right supported the wars in the Iraq and Afghanistan, viewing Islamism as the next Manichean battleground, much like communism had been for prior generations. Beyond the Middle East, conservative Christians and the Republican party focused on two issues above all: queer rights and abortion. These issues—once again perceived as issues around religious freedom—put them in frequent conflict with the larger American society, and the Obama administration in particular. With the 2014 *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* and 2015 *Obgerfell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decisions, the former a narrow victory and the latter a loss, Christian conservatives felt it was more important than ever to reshape the laws through the courts and legislation (Williams 2023, pp. 584–85). Feeling that they were threatened by “persecution”, these White Christian conservatives embraced a seemingly radical candidate (Gorski and Perry 2022, p. 113).

That effort to control the state and avoid victimization led to the overwhelming support of Donald Trump. Trump, who was supported in 2016 and 2020 by a majority of all White Christians (Smith 2024), once again showed there was a partnership that focused on the political ambitions rather than personal morality. While Trump received some pushback from his Christian allies, the majority were clearly willing to support Trump through thick and thin. That political partnership can be seen best in the conspiratorial narrative of the Big Lie. Believing that Democrats and a handful of Republicans were conspiring to steal the 2020 election from Trump, supporters argued that drastic measures needed to be taken. With January 6, there was a significant turn towards violence that had largely been unseen by conservative Christians. Coating themselves in paraphernalia that mixed support for Trump alongside Christian imagery, plenty of rioters advocated for violence against government officials, all under the pretense that it was pushing back against a dastardly conspiracy to steal the election. This was not a fringe event as well, with adherents of Christian nationalism asserting that these “patriots” were justified in trying to “take back” the country for God and Trump (Gorski and Perry 2022, pp. 98–101).

Christian nationalists continue to push for taking over the state and attacking their opponents, particularly with the 2024 election on the horizon. With an ever-expanding base of supporters, thanks in large part to the internet and grassroots activism, conservative Christians and Christian nationalists are making significant headway. Organizations such as Turning Point USA and its founder, Charlie Kirk, are leading the charge by encouraging college-aged Americans to become ardent conservatives that want to see the “Church return to its rightful place”. With Moms for Liberty, Christian nationalists are encouraging engaging in politics at the local, state, and federal level. But this is also a movement with significant institutional support, including a conservative Supreme Court and a sympathetic speaker of the house in Mike Johnson. And this is to say nothing about the various extremist streams of Christian nationalism perpetuated by figures such as Nick Fuentes, who have been crucial to radicalizing young Americans with a brand of extremely bigoted and hostile breed of Christian nationalism. Feeding off of new conspiracies, particularly that queer folk are “groomers” dead set on exploiting children (Gallagher and Squirrell 2023), Christian nationalists are a powerful force that could very well change the fate of the United States. Influenced by fundamentalists and Christian conservatives of the past, our current generation of Christian nationalists are continuing a long trend of presenting itself as a superior, alternative authority. A century after the fundamentalists protested teaching evolution in public schools, Christian nationalists are working to make sure such a transgression of their authority never happens again.

8. Conclusions: Reimagining Religion as an Alternative Authority

In the development of fundamentalism and contemporary Christian nationalism, we see movements that are dedicated to changing the very relationship that churches have with the state. While not always unified around issues, these contemporary Christians illustrate a desire to make the alternative authority the dominant model for the state. While January 6 illustrated that the attempts to control the state apparatus can be violent, the entirety of the movement reflects an effort to empower itself through legislative efforts and civil engagement. In other words, this is not a “conquest” that Goldenberg described, but a takeover of the state by an alternative authority. To do so, fundamentalists and Christian nationalists have been willing to use modern methods and new technologies, all the while appealing to a mystified past. Religions, as an alternative authority, are not dormant, but constantly strategizing and working to maintain themselves. Despite their status as a smaller, sometimes despised, alternative authority, these movements illustrate a dynamism towards politics and society at large.

It is this dynamism that shows the fault lines in Goldenberg’s usage of the “vestigial state”. Despite the rhetoric of Christian nationalists who would say that this is going back to the “good old days” where religion informed the laws of the land, this is not a remnant of some conquered state; these are modern movements that have a real dissatisfaction with the way the state and society functions. Because of their place in modern history, we cannot reduce fundamentalism nor Christian nationalism to something from that past that is hoping to reclaim what was lost. While they might appeal to the past, these are movements that are constantly in conversation with the nation-state, which has been both cooperative and antagonistic. With their varied positions on the secular nation-state, either embracing it or rejecting all in the effort of reshaping it, we must see that religious movements like fundamentalism and Christian nationalism are not a “vestigial” hanger-on but evolve alongside and in response to society as an alternative authority.

Goldenberg’s model, as I mentioned before, is extremely useful for blurring the line between religious and secular. However, we should not dismiss the ways that these movements uphold that distinction themselves, often to strengthen their claims of authority. By using the imagery of a righteous, persecuted community—often with a conspiratorial edge to it—under a harsh, secular state, these movements have developed a perspective that galvanizes supporters. These groups are criticizing the religious/secular distinction because that wall of separation should not exist, either with the church as the primary

authority over the state or the two in direct cooperation. Religion need not be fully subservient nor wholly in power, and the history of the fundamentalist and Christian nationalist movements reflects a very real tension in how to assert their authority.

Once again, Goldenberg's model of the vestigial state is pivotal to collapsing the faulty distinction between the "religious" and the "secular", primarily because both see religion as an organized method of maintaining boundaries and hierarchies. However, the problem of "vestigial" looms large. Goldenberg herself recognized the difficulty in illustrating these authorities as "vestigial", but the core problem is seeing religion as something that is old and conquered. Fundamentalism and Christian nationalism illustrate that, in the modern nation-state, religions function as alternative authorities that are constantly changing in response to the state. More so, as we see with contemporary Christian nationalism, these alternative authorities have a real impact on the nation-state. To understand how religion works in the modern context, we must see how it frames its authority in comparison to the nation-state, whether it is subservient to, coexisting with, or dominating that state. Ultimately, religion is not some leftover vestigial state but a constantly evolving alternative authority.

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Article

The Role of Black Christian Beliefs in the Civil Rights Movement: A Paradigm for a Better Understanding of Religious Freedom

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Abstract: This paper builds upon and extends Christian and legal scholarship on the civil rights movement by illuminating a climate of religious freedom that served as a catalyst for and was integral to the success of the spirited activism of the civil rights movement. To date, scholars have not extensively considered how the expansion of religious freedom in church and state jurisprudence both directly and indirectly created a climate that contributed to the success of the CRM, and how advancements in civil rights impacted the broader revolution occurring in constitutional rights. The climate of religious freedom included court support for evangelizing in residentially exclusive areas, exemptions for conscientious opposers from participating in oath swearing and other ceremonies, and exemptions from other general laws that unduly inhibited the free exercise of religious rights.

Keywords: free exercise clause; establishment clause; religious freedom; liberty of conscience; black church; Jehovah's Witnesses; sit-ins; protest act; Martin Luther King, Jr.; civil disobedience; anarchy; First Amendment; Fourteenth Amendment; nonviolence

"The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."

—Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Knock At Midnight"

"The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as, surely, they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

—Abraham Lincoln—First Inaugural Address

1. Introduction

The vital role of Christian beliefs in the strategic leadership of the civil rights movement (hereinafter the CRM) has been well documented and vigorously contested (Baldwin 2003, p. 15; Raboteau 2004, pp. 4–16; Paris 1985, p. 67; Cone 1969). What, at times, are underappreciated are the ways in which the CRM interacted and was interrelated with the broader church–state movement. This research examines how the courts have succeeded and failed to safeguard and buffer the church from the domineering and repressive influences of the state (Carter 1993).¹ Here, I advance a view of church–state interactions that defends the rights of racial minorities and has an analog in legal protections for racial minorities. Like religious minorities who seek legal support from majoritarian laws that restrict their rights, racial minorities similarly seek legal relief from anti-democratic majoritarian laws.

Despite misconceptions, religiously grounded formal leaders and grassroots leaders did not adhere to the view that religion has a solely spiritual role to play in the larger

society. Instead, many believed that religious beliefs, especially those espoused by Black Christians, provided symbols, principles, and an alternative vision that could advance the cause of freedom and equality. Finally, it was precisely this climate of religious freedom that catalyzed the vocal religious minority to put their faith in action in order to expand religious liberties (Grohsgal 2011, p. 99).²

2. The Role of Christian Faith in the Civil Rights Movement

The ongoing work of faith-based leaders to protest and agitate for the extension of rights to racially vilified minorities has been widely discussed (Paris 1985). Some scholars have documented the ways in which the black church inspired traditions of protest well before the emergence of the CRM (Tracy 1986). Others have discussed how religious principles animated early protest strategies, while other forces later shaped and helped energize the movement.³

Even considering the success of Christian-based nonviolent tactics and strategies, the success of other religious groups who used nonviolent tactics and the courts to expand religious rights provided fertile soil for the CRM, which used spirit-filled protests in the streets to expand civil rights (Marsh 2005; Tracy 1986).⁴ This work examines the period of 1930–1960, when religious minorities like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, etc., received relief from the courts in the face of local laws and policies aimed at restricting their religious liberties.

By resisting undemocratic and religiously discriminatory laws, prayer-filled foot soldiers were forcing America to live out the true meaning of its democratic and constitutional principles. Despite a common misconception, movement agitators were not just committed to resisting unjust laws, they were also willing to face the consequences of their actions out of respect for the rule of law (Baldwin 2002, pp. 85–86). They put their faith in a higher power, a Just Judge who would lead them in their quest for social justice, liberty, and freedom for all (Dunbar 2009, pp. 211–12). In the following section, I propose a model of church–state relations that protects the rights of religious minorities while respecting state sovereignty.

2.1. The Tyranny of Faith Position

A well-established position on church–state relations contends that religion is fundamentally dogmatic, contentious, and polarizing. Disciples of this viewpoint argue that religious beliefs can strain public reasoning, as religious people are less open to compromise, persuasion, and questioning their own presuppositions (Rorty and Zabala 2001, pp. 29–42). The idea is that those who are inclined to lay down principles and viewpoints as incontrovertibly true are less inclined to participate in public deliberations with those who hold competing views to promote the common good.

During the CRM, concerns about the polarizing impact of religious views surfaced in the so-called “protest decisions”, where certain judges were quick to tell spirit-filled protestors that, no matter how morally righteous their cause, all are required to conform to the rule of law (*Walker v. City of Birmingham*, 388 US 307, 321 (1967)). More recently, these concerns have surfaced in controversies over posting the Ten Commandments in a courthouse and the display of religious symbols on public land, where the mere presence of religious symbols in a prime public space sparks controversy (*Stone v. Graham*, 449 US 39, 42–43 (1980); *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 US 677 (2005)). Proponents of this position contend that a wall of separation should be maintained between church and state to protect non-Christians from the tyranny of religion (*Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 US 1, 16 (1947)).

This principle was expressed by pioneers of religious liberty including Thomas Jefferson, who did not seek total separation of Church and State, but was concerned about protecting the state from religion in the interest of preserving the freedom of individual conscience and the right of nonreligious minorities from being dominated and persecuted by religious majorities on account of their views. Jefferson’s view was the counterargu-

ment to Roger Williams' position that an important purpose of the first amendment is to protect the church from the state. This included protecting the sanctity of individual conscience, religious free choice and the views of religious minorities who are vulnerable to the establishment of religious majorities that are prejudicial to their interests. Nevertheless, separationism has been applied in a way that seems hostile to the religious because those who drafted the Constitution did not expect the "wall of separation" to be a wall of steel, callously applied against the religious in the name of protecting the state from the church. As John Witte noted, despite these repeated efforts to restrict religious liberty, curtail free exercise rights, and support the state coercion of religion, separationism did not accomplish its stated goals (Witte 2006, pp. 30–34). Post-*Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), while certain cases expanded religious liberty, others weakened it by empowering atheists and the nonreligious with veto power to limit public expression and the free exercise rights of religious persons (411 US 192 (1971)).

The circumstances that led to the adoption of the Religion Clauses substantiate the importance of safeguarding religious freedom and preventing state establishment. Accounts of discussions relating to the framers of the Bill of Rights raised issues about religious establishment, primarily as it related to government aid for religion. One strong view is that the Establishment Clause was only meant to prohibit government aid that provided preferential treatment for one or some faiths over others. This view supports "non-preferential aid for religion" (*Wallace v. Jeffre*, 472 US 38, 106 (1985)). When ratified in 1791, the Bill of Rights was exclusively applied to the federal government. This meant that states were unburdened by religion clauses. States that had preexisting religious establishments were permitted to keep them intact. Eventually, states relinquished their religious establishments, with Massachusetts being the last state to follow suit in 1833. It was not until over a century later that the Supreme Court ruled that the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment after the Civil War resulted in the First Amendment being applicable to the states (Rogers 2019, p. 25). It was not until this action that both federal and state establishments were prohibited from diluting individual liberty.

Based upon the records of discussions by the drafters and ratifiers of the Fourteenth Amendment, there were strong concerns about the violation of disestablishment clause principles by southern states, especially those states that restricted slaves' and churches' religious freedoms and quashed prophetic leadership that resisted slavery. Slaves were forbidden from selecting their own clergy and they could not engage in public worship without the approval and presence of whites. By 1860, this led, according to Professor Kurt Lash, to the South's creation of "the most comprehensive religious establishment to exist on American soil since Massachusetts Bay" (Rogers 2019, p. 29). In addition, according to Gedicks, "one may reasonably conclude that slave-state action to promote proslavery Christianity violated both free exercise and anti-establishment norms and that the concern of the members of the Reconstruction Congresses to eliminate this practice reflected an intention to apply both [Religion Clause] norms to the states" (Rogers 2019, p. 29).

Interestingly, if separationist concerns dominated, the black church would remove itself from the public sphere and divorce Gospel preaching from social activism, to the detriment of religious freedom and civil rights for all. This was the case during slavery, when state-sponsored religion tried to co-opt a model of prophetic black church activism that challenged the institution of slavery. The motivation for these separationist concerns was three-fold: a failure to see a link between the Gospel message and a commitment to human freedom; a fear that religious involvement in politics would encroach upon the freedom of the nonreligious minority to speak freely; and a mistaken view that an attempt by some to secure civil rights by force trumped the goals of the majority to use nonviolent means and methods to protect civil rights. These underlying justifications for secularization theories may overlook the historical evidence of twentieth-century legal history that shows the great benefits that religious activism brings to all of society, especially during those historical moments when America fails to live up to its stated ideals and constitutional principles.

As this paper will show, a religious, legal, and moral confluence made the CRM possible. The model of church–state interaction that the civil rights movement embodied was precisely the kind of church–state interaction that supporters of the First Amendment envisioned when they pushed for religious freedom and religious pluralism during a period in American history when religious minorities were stigmatized for their beliefs.

2.2. Religion as a Force of Good

Alternatively, the position that casts religion as a force of good primarily envisions religion as fundamentally and chiefly the pathway to peace, equality, and freedom (Carter 1993, p. 80). A prominent proponent of this view during the CRM was the African American mystic Howard Thurman. He maintained that the Christian ethic of love, grounded in forgiveness and pointing toward reconciliation (Thurman 1976, p. 100), offers transformative possibilities for the whole of society (King 1963, pp. 49–57).

This perspective argues that excluding religion from politics, based on concerns about coercion, dogmatism, and incivility, misunderstands an underlying source of opposition to religious public involvement. By priming the moral conscience, religion, at its best, helps all people to work toward the common betterment of society. This is what made the spirit-filled CRM so threatening. Religion was used to unite, reconcile, and challenge discriminatory state laws at a time when America was largely divided along racial and economic lines, and many were working to keep society that way. Consequently, religion should be welcomed in the public space since, as the CRM reminds us, the church, i.e., religion, can potentially overcome barriers and restore fractured relationships. This perspective concedes that certain religious views might polarize the electorate, and also that religious believers sometimes embrace a fanaticism that makes them closed to civil discourse. Nevertheless, the experience of the CRM shows that religion can be a uniquely positive force in society.

This author proposes a model of religious involvement that integrates insights from both positions. The first position too quickly vilifies religion, while the unification position too unrealistically valorizes religion and makes it vulnerable to becoming the dependent handmaiden of the state. The first position proposes that religion has nothing uniquely distinctive to contribute to the good of society, while the second view downplays the relentless attempts by government officials and agents to neutralize religious views and traditions that challenge the imbalance of power and unjust policies. While it is incontrovertible that religion can be used to discriminate, marginalize, and dehumanize, this does not mean that religion itself has no socially redeeming value or utility for the good of society (Wolterstorff 1996).

2.3. Religion as Creative and Justly Threatening

In this work, I argue for a third alternative to the two schools of thought highlighted above on the role of religion in public life. Religion can and often does offer a radical critique of the socio-political order by appealing to sacred principles and offering alternative visions for achieving a more just society. I propose a view of separationism designed to protect religious minorities (and even the nonreligious) from the tyranny of religious majorities, one that has a parallel in laws protecting racial minorities from the tyranny of racial majorities (Grohsgal 2011, p. 329).⁵ A distinctive contribution of this work is how paying attention to church–state relations during the CRM extends our understanding of church–state legal scholarship more broadly, and how greater attention to little-explored areas of church–state legal scholarship might deepen and expand our understanding of the motivations, goals, impacts, and success of the CRM in particular. This work goes a step further than previous research by this author, by arguing that the role of the courts in protecting religious freedom is an indispensable part of the heritage of the CRM.

Despite attempts by dominant Anglo-Saxon traditions to privatize religion, many black Christians rejected this view and instead embraced a reading of the scriptures that called for a robust engagement of religion in advancing the cause of cultural improvement and constitutional expansion. Religion need not be dogmatic or destructively threatening,

but, rather, creative and justly threatening. The CRM shows how a religious movement can contribute robustly to the public good, whereby prophetic ministers and believers who were committed to democratic principles built diverse coalitions with persons driven by religious and secular ideals in a highly contentious environment (Marsh 2005, pp. 2–3).⁶ The CRM also shows how religious and moral principles can inspire people to work toward a better society for all—both believers and skeptics in church and state alike.

In the next section, I will examine how the legal climate of religious freedom led to the emergence of the CRM, sparked by Supreme Court cases that protected the free exercise of religion—even of culturally vilified minorities in the day (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Jews, and others)—helped to foster the success of the prayer-filled witness of the movement.⁷ While scholars have examined the role of traditions of black protest, grassroots leadership, the personality of Martin Luther King Jr., and the impact of the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision on the CRM, they have not focused on the importance of America’s commitment to religious freedom and robust church–state involvement in the mid-twentieth century as important catalysts for the efficacy, reach, and legacy of the movement. The religious freedom that First Amendment victories afforded enabled this movement to pursue its civil rights agenda, without unduly bracketing its religious convictions (Carter 1993).⁸

3. Religious Freedom Expanded through Free Exercise Cases and Important Principles

A foundational understanding of the intention of the principal drafters of the Constitution is the view that religious freedom is integral to the development of “a more perfect union”. (Warren 2003, pp. 669–70) Enshrined in the First Amendment is the protection of religious freedom, religious disestablishment, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the rights of assembly and petition (Warren 2003, pp. 669–70). The Court has consistently championed the view that free exercise protects the religious from state policies that seek to compel or penalize religious beliefs (*Reynolds v. United States*, 98 US 145, 164 (1878)). While individuals are free to think and believe without constraint, individuals are not free to express all aspects of their faith without constraint. (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 US 296, 303–4 (1940)). On the contrary, the Establishment Clause states that “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion”. At least three approaches have characterized legal scholarship in this area: strict separation, neutrality, and accommodation (Chemerinsky 2002, pp. 1149–55). These two clauses, taken together, support the vital role that religious expression can play in expanding constitutional protections and contributing to the betterment of society (Eisgruber and Sager 1994, pp. 1248–49).

Religious freedoms were safeguarded in a series of Supreme Court cases leading up to the CRM that helped to expand religious rights—by upholding the principles of religious pluralism, religious equality, freedom of conscience and exercise, the separation of church and state, and the disestablishment of religion (Witte 2000, pp. 41–63). This section will show how these broad principles provided strong protection for religious conduct and clarified the vital role that diverse religious groups play in all areas of society. The early cases provided exclusions from general laws for claimants and offered comprehensive principles to protect religious rights (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 US 296 (1940)).

The dominant legal principles concerned the impact of free exercise protections on state rights and property rights, as well as the importance of safeguarding freedom of conscience and freedom of worship. Important secondary principles that emerged during this era concerned religious discrimination, respect for the judicial process, and reasonable accommodations. While the Court championed protecting the religious beliefs and activities of all people, it was honest about the challenges of protecting religious pluralism in an increasingly diverse society, with many people holding beliefs “alien to the majority” (*Cantwell*, 310; *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 US 398, 411 (1963) (Douglas, J., concurring)).

The Court vigorously protected the right to believe and worship according to the tenets of one’s faith (*Braunfeld, v. Brown*, 366 US 599, 603 (1961)). At the same time, the Court’s concerns about the impact of unfettered religious pluralism on law and order

and national unity often undermined its ability to apply the Free Exercise Clause and Establishment Clause consistently. That is, the boundaries of religious freedom became less permeable, as concerns about maintaining national unity and law and order gained precedence in judicial reasoning (Braunfeld, 603; *Gallagher v. Crown Kosher Supermarket*, 366 US 617 (1961)). Nevertheless, these early First Amendment decisions established a climate of religious freedom—by protecting religious dissent, privileging free exercise rights over property rights, constraining states' rights, and safeguarding free speech—that paved the way for the explosive rights revolution during the CRM.

3.1. Freedom of Religion

The principle of religious freedom is an important legal precept, with roots in the early American experiment that was magnified in early cases (Witte 2000, p. 41). This legal principle affirms personal choice regarding the exercise of religious expression (Witte 2000, p. 155). It rejects any form of coercion, governmental interference, and laws that prohibit the free expression of religion (Witte 2000, pp. 155–60).

Commencing in the early 1930s, the Jehovah's Witnesses surfaced as fierce champions of religious freedom as they turned to the courts to defy discriminatory laws that were often enacted to maintain the white-mainline-Protestant status quo, which was threatened by their nontraditional methods of religious expression (Witte 2000, p. 146). Undeterred by efforts to limit their religious expression, the Witnesses petitioned the courts in a landmark case that reached the Supreme Court in 1940. The principle of religious freedom was introduced by the Court in *Cantwell*, along with a heightened scrutiny test that the Court applied under the Free Exercise Clause (Witte 2000, p. 137). The case concerned an avowed Jehovah's Witness, Mr. Cantwell, who engaged in religious solicitation in a residential community. In particular, the plaintiff played a phonograph that was construed by two listeners as being extremely critical of the Catholic faith. Consequently, Cantwell was charged with breaching the peace and soliciting without a license (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 US 296, 303–4 (1940)). He eventually appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Court provided a strong defense of religious expression, based upon the principle of religious freedom. The majority reasoned that the regulation of religious behavior is allowed, as long as the state meets the burden of showing that laws are "general and nondiscriminatory" and are applied for the benefit of an important or significant public interest, including public safety and security. However, the state burden was not satisfied in a case where a Jehovah's Witness was arrested solely for playing a phonograph and by imposing licensing requirements on members of this faith tradition and not on others. Here, the state law required that one who wanted to engage in religious solicitation should apply to the secretary of the public welfare council for a certificate. The secretary had the sole discretion to determine whether a matter was religious. The Court reasoned that this kind of "censorship of religion" and prior restraint on religious expression denies the petitioner the religious liberty protected by the First Amendment (*Cantwell*, 305, 1940). Furthermore, the Court ruled that the principle of free religious expression means that the freedom to peacefully worship is constitutionally protected. However, religious expression can be subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. The Court expanded upon these metrics in subsequent cases.

The Court's decision in the *Cantwell* case was important to the expansion of free exercise law. The Court ruled that the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, applied to the states through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, subjected the states to the same restrictions on inhibiting religious expression as belong to Congress. Although the state is free to act to protect the public interest, the Court found that there was no evidence of "assault or threatening of bodily harm, no truculent bearing, no intentional discourtesy, no personal abuse" to warrant the restraint on religious freedom (*Cantwell*, 305). Mr. Cantwell's sole purpose was to convince listeners to buy religious materials and support "true religion".

Furthermore, *Cantwell*'s importance in elevating the principle of religious freedom regards the Court's role in helping to temper the belief–action distinction, which the Court had previously used to limit religious liberty protections given to historically maligned religious minorities (Fricke 2009, p. 137; Gedicks 2005, pp. 1200–1). From 1879 to 1939, the Court reasoned that the Free Exercise Clause protects religious beliefs, not religious expression (*Reynolds v. United States*, 98 US 145 (1879); Greenawalt 2009, p. 29). In *Cantwell*, the Court ruled that the constitution protects freedom of conscience and the freedom to choose one's form of religious expression. While the freedom to act is not absolute, it is still constitutionally protected:

The constitutional inhibition of legislation on the subject of religion has a double aspect. On the one hand, it forestalls compulsion by law of the acceptance of any creed or the practice of any form of worship. Freedom of conscience and freedom to adhere to such religious organization or form of worship as the individual may choose cannot be restricted by law. On the other hand, it safeguards the free exercise of the chosen form of religion. Thus, the Amendment embraces two concepts, freedom to believe and freedom to act. The first is absolute but, in the nature of things, the second cannot be. Conduct remains subject to regulation for the protection of society. (Witte 2000, pp. 146–47)

In addition to tempering the freedom to believe/act distinction, *Cantwell* softened the free speech and free exercise distinction (Lupa and Tuttle 2009, p. 131). This meant that it was not unusual for a religious petitioner to file both free exercise and free speech claims, as “these liberties are, in the long view, essential to enlightened public opinion and right conduct on the part of the citizens of a democracy” (*Cantwell*, 310). Even highly offensive or politicized views are constitutionally protected because the freedom to believe and act are essential rights that are vital to the functioning, well-being, and development of a democratic society.

3.2. Liberty of Conscience: A Violation of States' Rights or a Reasonable Accommodation

The motif of religious freedom was critical to the Court's First Amendment decisions. Liberty of conscience was another legal principle that was applied haphazardly (Witte 2000, p. 158). In a decision rendered soon after *Cantwell*, *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* (1940), the Court denied a requested exception by Jehovah's Witnesses parents who believed that their children's school compulsory flag-salute policy was unconstitutional (310 US 586 (1940)). Their children were conscientiously opposed to saluting the flag based on their religious beliefs, which regarded this as a form of idolatry, and they were expelled from school.

Although the Court agreed that schools are not free to compel students to engage in practices that violate their beliefs, it refused to apply the same logic to this case. While affirming the principle of liberty of conscience, the Court reasoned that this principle does not mean that people have a right to obtain an exemption from neutral laws of general applicability that are enforced for the purpose of advancing national unity.

The Court woodenly interpreted the requested exemption as springing from a desire to obtain a special benefit. Petitioner's objection to saluting the flag was in defense of liberty of conscience. Contrary to the Court's ruling, the exemption requested by Mr. Cantwell fell squarely within the zone of liberty protected by the Court in *Cantwell*.

The Court, however, reversed its ruling in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* (where the majority declined the family's argument that the First Amendment safeguarded their children's right to be exempted from participating in compulsory flag salutes) with *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* in 1943, when the children of Jehovah's Witnesses were also expelled from school for not complying with the school's daily flag salute exercises (310 US 586 (1940); *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 US 624 (1943)).

The court reasoned that the First Amendment protects people's right to resist policies to which they are conscientiously opposed. This decision had ramifications for religious

individuals and institutions that had turned to the courts during the CRM to resist discriminatory laws that violated God's universal law. Among others, this principle was championed by Martin Luther King, Jr., a primary leader of the CRM, who argued that protecting the LOC is congruent with God's higher law: "The Christian owes his ultimate allegiance to God, and if any earthly institution conflicts with God's will, it is your duty to take a stand against it" (King 2000, p. 84).

3.3. *Property Rights vs. Freedom of Religious Expression*

In *Marsh v. Alabama*, the majority extended protections for free religious expression, even in the case of private property owners who opened their property for public use (326 US 501 (1946)). The case concerns a company town in Chickasaw that was owned and operated by the Gulf Shipbuilding Corporation. The corporation posted an anti-solicitation sign that included the following statement: "This Is Private Property, and Without Written Permission, No Street or House Vendor, Agent, or Solicitation of Any Kind Will Be Permitted". Notice was served on the plaintiff that she could not distribute materials without a permit and that the defendant would not give her one. The plaintiff refused to leave the sidewalks because the policy violated her First Amendment rights.

The Supreme Court ruled that policies that restrict the free-flowing channels of communication on property that is opened for public use cannot withstand constitutional challenge, whether or not a municipality or corporation owns the town. The Court reasoned that "[T]he more the owner, for his advantage, opens up his property for public use, the more his rights are curtailed by the statutory and constitutional rights of those who use his space" (Marsh, 506). The Court also addressed the implications of its ruling for the Commerce Clause: "[w]hether a corporation or a municipality owns or possesses the town, the public in either case has an identical interest in the functioning of the community in such a manner that the channels of communication remain free" (507). The Marsh holding stands for the proposition that whether an open public space is owned by a governmental body or by a corporation, constitutional rights cannot be abrogated.

The next section, which examines the impact of the climate of religious freedom on the success of the CRM, explores how the movement's legal strategists turned to Marsh for a legal precedent to support their argument that the rights of private property owners who opened their business as a public space should not enable them to maintain segregated facilities that denied blacks the equal protection of the law because free press, religious liberty, and other constitutional rights are all interrelated (Cantwell, 509; Greenberg 1994, p. 277). Although restaurant owners alleged that sit-in protestors were trespassing on private property, the Court reasoned that the public interest in protecting First Amendment rights in a public space outweighed the rights of property owners to restrict constitutional rights regarding the full enjoyment and use of their property.

3.4. *Reasonable Accommodation vs. Respect for Judicial Process*

Nevertheless, in *Poulos*, the Supreme Court limited its holding in Marsh by ruling that constitutionally protected liberties are not immune from regulation for the purpose of public welfare and safety (*Poulos v. State of New Hampshire*, 345 US 395 (1953)). The plaintiff, a Jehovah's Witness, requested a license to conduct religious services in a public park while agreeing to pay all required fees and abide by all stated regulations. When the license was denied, the Jehovah's Witnesses conducted services before they were arrested. In response to the plaintiff's assertion that the law violated their First Amendment rights, the Court reasoned that "[t]here is thus no restriction in its application with respect to time or place. It is not limited to ways which might be regarded as inconsistent with the maintenance of public order, or as involving disorderly conduct, the molestation of the inhabitants, or the misuse or littering of the streets" (408). The Court also demonstrated its impatience with lawbreaking, even for the purpose of violating an unjust law out of a sense of religious duty:

One would not be justified in ignoring the familiar red traffic light because he thought it his religious duty to disobey the municipal command or sought by that means to direct public attention to an announcement of his opinions.’ (quoting *Cox v. State of New Hampshire*, 312 US 569, 574 (1941)). If a municipality has authority to control the use of its public streets for parades or processions, as it undoubtedly has, it cannot be denied authority to give consideration, without unfair discrimination, to time, place, and manner in relation to the other proper uses of the streets. (Cox 408)

Thus, the Court reasoned that a municipality has the authority to use time, place, and manner regulations to control speech on its public street without violating constitutional rights. Without evidence of discrimination, an individual or an institution cannot decide to speak, even when motivated by religious duty, without a license without pursuing remedial state procedures: “Delay is unfortunate but the expense and annoyance of litigation is a price citizens must pay for life in an orderly society where the rights of the First Amendment have a real and abiding meaning” (Cox 409).

Section four will elaborate on the boundaries of the Supreme Court’s tolerance for civil disobedience in the context of protest cases. In particular, the limits of the Court’s patience were tested in the Birmingham, Alabama campaign for civil rights when movement strategists conducted Easter marches in defiance of an injunction (*Walker v. City of Birmingham*, 388 US 307 (1967)). The Court reasoned that, despite the religious character of the protests and the arbitrary actions of state officials in denying the request to march on public streets, the protestors were not free to disregard the judicial process. To be sure, these cases reveal the extent of the Court’s commitment to protect First Amendment rights while demonstrating its impatience with discriminatory laws and acts of civil disobedience.

3.5. Sunday Blue Laws: State Establishments or Reasonable Accommodations?

As discussed previously, the *Cantwell* case and its progeny provided constitutional protections for certain religious minorities, while reinforcing restrictions on First Amendment rights under heightened and intermediate scrutiny. However, while some religious minorities enjoyed greater First Amendment protections, others found the Supreme Court unresponsive to their grievances. This bias was apparent in the Court’s treatment of at least one religious minority, Jews and Sabbath Day observers.

In a sequence of Sabbath Day cases, the Court was reluctant to provide exemptions from laws restricting the petitioners’ First Amendment rights (Laband and Heinbuch 1987, p. 39). *McGowan v. Maryland* (1961) involved apparel and furniture storeowners who complained that Sunday blue laws, which did not permit sales on Sunday, violated their constitutional rights (366 US 420). The Court ruled that “Sunday blue laws” forbidding nonessential and unnecessary commercial sales on Sunday did not violate the establishment or Equal Protection Clause because “Sunday blue laws” had demonstrated sufficient “secular justifications” to satisfy constitutional standards (*McGowan*, 420). The Court held that a Jewish apparel and furniture merchant’s free exercise rights were not violated since the legislature had a reasonable basis for the regulation, even though it affected certain groups differently from others (*McGowan*, 425). The Court reasoned that the prohibition on Sunday sales did not infringe constitutional rights because it was based upon grounds that were rationally related to the State’s objective of securing Sunday rest for “the purpose of providing a Sunday atmosphere of recreation, cheerfulness, repose and enjoyment” (*McGowan*, 448). As a consequence, the Court reasoned the statute did not have the effect of infringing free expression because it applied to store hours, not to religious conduct (*McGowan*, 429).

In addition, the Court conveyed its impatience with Sabbath Day observers in *Braunfeld v. Brown* (1961), when it held that Sunday blue laws were not tantamount to an establishment of religion (366 US 599). The petitioners Abraham Braunfeld and Pennsylvania merchants, all Orthodox Jews, challenged a state law disallowing business on Sunday because the law discriminated against them by giving Christian merchants the unfair

advantage of remaining open for an additional day. The Court rejected the petitioners' argument and reasoned that even though the law amounted to an "inconvenience" and an "economic disadvantage", when other avenues existed for them to engage "in some other commercial activity which does not call for either Saturday or Sunday labor", this meant that the law did not rise to the level of "abhorrence and religious prosecution" that abridged constitutional rights (Braunfeld, 605–6, 1961).

The prohibition on Sunday sales did not infringe conditional rights, even when the business owner's primary customer base was Sabbath Day observers. *Gallagher* involved a Kosher store owner who mainly sold merchandise to Jewish customers. The store owner was convicted for operating his business on Sundays, although the Orthodox Jewish religion required its followers to eat kosher food and forbade them from shopping on the Sabbath (*Gallagher v. Crown Kosher Supermarket*, 366 US 617 (1961)). The conviction was upheld, according to the Court, because the regulation was not a restriction of religious activity (*Two Guys from Harrison-Allentown v. McGinley*, 366 U.S. 582, 591 (1961)).

The Court's early Sabbath Day decisions provide a stunning demonstration of the failure of the Court to consistently apply First Amendment principles when laws violate the constitutional rights of certain despised religious minorities. Practicing the Sabbath is not an ancillary religious activity; it is a core religious tradition that relates to all other aspects of a person's faith. For religious believers who practice religion as a way of life, traditions cannot be taken off like garments and discarded, because each commandment or practice contributes to the whole of a well-functioning, ordered, and faithful religious life.

In addition, if the Court had granted Sabbath Day observers an exclusion to operate their businesses on Sunday, that would not have interfered with the state's ability to enforce Sunday blue laws since the law already provided exclusions to other groups based upon acceptable classifications (Laband and Heinbuch 1987, p. 41). The targeting of Sabbath Day observers served to reinforce stereotypes and spread the animus traditionally aimed at religious minorities like Jews who have faced a history of discrimination. The First Amendment prohibits this form of religious discrimination by the state.

Finally, the Court's rulings in this area were an explicit acknowledgment that minority religions would not have the power to successfully challenge laws designed to establish majority religion as the state's favored religion (Piar 2006, pp. 1009–10). In America's constitutional scheme, religious establishments are unconstitutional because establishing any religion as the state religion subjects despised minority religions to the kind of religious intolerance and discrimination that is prohibited by the constitution. Paradoxically, the kind of religious discrimination allowed in these cases undermined the climate of religious freedom encouraged in other First Amendment cases and contradicted America's history of championing the rights of religious minorities abroad (i.e., Jewish observers during the Holocaust).

Ironically, the *Torcaso* decision, which protected the liberty of conscience rights of an atheist, was issued in the same month that the court ruled on the four Sabbath Day cases. This was the promise and tragedy of the *Cantwell* regime. The Court's ruling did not have the ripple effect of expanding First Amendment protections to all disfavored religious minorities, even while protecting the rights of nonreligious persons. In *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the Court invoked the principle that a state cannot force individuals to "profess a belief or disbelief in any religion" and added that a state could not require a party who is conscientiously opposed to declaring his belief in God to do so before commissioning him for public office (367 US 488 (1961)).

Because of a constitutional history of strong opposition to test oaths, the Court reasoned that, when the Constitution was adopted, the framers intended to outlaw test oaths as stated in Article VI (United States Constitution, Art. 6). Any law that requires individuals to profess is an unconstitutional burden upon an individual's free choice and religious liberty.

3.6. The Sherbert Revolution and the Expansion of Religious Freedom

The holding in *Sherbert* signaled a renewed effort by the Supreme Court to provide a more balanced approach to free exercise jurisprudence while protecting the rights of religious minorities. In *Sherbert v. Verner* (1963), the pinnacle of free exercise jurisprudence, the Court reasoned that the free exercise clause permitted exemptions, even from general laws and regulations that burdened the exercise of one's "sincere" and true faith (*Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 US 398 (1963)). The plaintiff, Adell Sherbert, a textile worker and Sabbath Day observer, refused to work on the Sabbath and was fired by her South Carolina employer and denied unemployment compensation benefits because she was unavailable for work.

In the most compelling defense of religious freedom since *Cantwell*, the Supreme Court reversed the lower court's decision denying petitioners unemployment benefits. The denial of benefit, according to the Court, forced the plaintiff to "choose between following the precepts of her religion and forfeiting benefits, on the one hand, and abandoning one of the precepts of her religion in order to accept work, on the other hand" (*Sherbert*, 404). In essence, her employer's action had the effect of placing an unconstitutional burden upon the free exercise of Sherbert's religion "as a fine imposed against appellant for her Saturday worship" (*Sherbert*, 404).

Ironically, although the ruling extended unemployment benefits to Sabbatarians, the holding was limited to unemployment eligibility requirements in South Carolina; the Court had rejected other claims for exemption from generally applicable laws, demonstrating the majority's unwillingness to extend the holding in *Sherbert* beyond the facts of the case (Sullivan 1992, p. 195). To be sure, the *Sherbert* holding was important because, for the first time since *Cantwell*, it afforded heightened protection to the beliefs of religious minorities, clearing the way for other religious minorities, especially those who played a central role in the CRM, to turn to the courts to advance the cause of social uplift and constitutional improvement (Grohsgal 2011, p. 99; see also Smith 2011, pp. 2040–41; Pepper 1986, pp. 314–15; Nacheff 1982, pp. 846–47).

In its decisions leading up to *Sherbert*, the Court had already expanded legal protections for religious freedom in a mix of cases covering proselytism, public education, government benefits, property rights, and test oaths. While the Court affirmed First Amendment constitutional principles in theory, it did not apply these principles consistently, especially in the case of despised religious minorities like Jews. In contrast, the *Sherbert* case challenged the federal, state, and local government's ability to discriminate against or deny religious exemption to citizens. This ruling, despite its limited application, was another critical factor that helped to create a climate of religious freedom that inspired other religious minorities to defend their constitutional rights (Magid and Prenkert 2005, pp. 207–8).

4. Impact of First Amendment Religion Clause Victories on the Revolution for Civil Rights

Following *Cantwell* and *Sherbert*, religious minorities enjoyed greater constitutional protections due, in large part, to the successful litigation strategies of groups like the Witnesses (Witte 2000, p. 146). The CRM, as a religiously inspired movement that championed the cause of racial justice, benefited from a broader climate of religious freedom (Grohsgal 2011, p. 352).

In this section, I will show how a view of church–state relations that is designed to protect religious minorities has an analog in the movement to protect racial minorities. Interestingly, a free exercise case involving a Jehovah's Witness provided legal justification for the NAACP's litigation strategy, demonstrating the important role this religious minority's tactics played in setting the climate of religious freedom that inspired a movement to protect the rights of racial minorities using similar nonviolent tactics. According to attorney Jack Greenberg, *Marsh v. Alabama* was important to the NAACP's defense strategy. In this important case, referenced in the previous section, the Supreme Court reversed the trespass convictions of Jehovah's Witnesses for soliciting in a company town (Greenberg

1994, pp. 275–76). Even though Chickasaw was a private town, the Court ruled that it was not exempt from the state action doctrine. Emboldened by the Court's ruling, civil rights attorneys planned to take a case to the Supreme Court involving nonviolent protestors and a trespass violation on private property similar in size to Chickasaw. Next, they planned to represent protestors charged with violating trespass laws in similar businesses, which they planned to win based on precedent. Ultimately, they hoped to achieve a legal victory in a case including "a dime store or a corner store" (Greenberg 1994, pp. 276–77).

This legal strategy was employed by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to defend CRM activists based upon the precedent of *Marsh*, to protect racial minorities in the same way that Marsh helped to protect religious minorities. The proposition that the "fundamental concept of liberty embodied in the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause embraces the liberties guaranteed by the First Amendment" was shared by legal strategists for Jehovah's Witnesses and CRM activists (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 US 296, 307–08 (1940)) (see Note 7). Furthermore, legal strategists believed that the liberties protected by the Fourteenth Amendment encompassed the liberties enshrined in the First Amendment.

In summary, legal practitioners hoped that the elusive goal of racial justice and liberty could be achieved when exceptional lawyers used legally transferable concepts to catalyze nonviolent social movements that were designed to advance the cause of constitutional improvement. The Witnesses stood out as pioneers in linking the religion clause to the movement to expand minority rights. This linkage fertilized the soil for the eventual expansion of civil rights in the form of racial equality through religious civil disobedience. Although the Witnesses did not actively participate in the CRM, the group contributed to the changing landscape in religious and civil rights protections by successfully fighting for freedom of worship, speaking the truth in the face of opposition, publicly connecting their activities with others seeking to expand civil liberties, exhausting the appellate process, and employing civil disobedience to expand rights.

The CRM fought to dismantle segregation in public accommodations while the Court expanded First Amendment rights to disfavored religious minorities. A survey of the movement's litigation efforts demonstrates that the religion clauses were not at the front and center of its litigation strategy. First, some believed that efforts to achieve racial equality through nonviolent spirited protest undermined attempts to achieve democratic reform through the courts. Second, the Free Exercise Clause was traditionally used by religious minorities to request exemptions from laws that interfered with religious practices, but there was no legal precedent for religious minorities exercising their free exercise rights to advance the cause of racial equality (Wilkins 1994; Marshall 2001, p. 510).⁹

In a culture that historically denied blacks a full range of rights and privileges, the role of religion is to provide a zone of liberty where oppressed groups can regroup, retool, and reimagine a society where liberty and justice for all can be achieved. More specifically, CRM protestors were pressing society to embrace a new vision of religious equality, liberty, and human dignity for all (Marshall 2001, pp. 124–25). Although a climate of religious freedom fertilized the soil of the CRM, there was no legal precedent for protecting this diverse view of racial equality and liberty for all. Filling this gap became the unfinished business of the CRM.

Protestors in, for the most part, sit-ins and other peaceful demonstrations were devoted to the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, and this solidarity greatly contributed to the success of the litigation strategies.¹⁰ Even though the goal was to expose the evils of dehumanization, with the goal of helping others to respect the dignity and worth of all people, peaceful protestors believed that nonviolent direct action was the most effective means of achieving racial equality and justice.

For this reason, nonviolent direct action was not merely a "strategy or device", even though many characterized it as such. Instead, nonviolent direct action was a philosophy of life inspired by Judeo-Christian beliefs, Hindu religion, and democratic principles. According to Martin Luther King, Jr., nonviolence became "a way of life with love and redemption as its center" (King 1963, p. 6). For many activists in the CRM, nonviolent

resistance was a way of life, rooted in the tenets of their faith, and something as critical to one's faith as proselytizing is for Jehovah's Witnesses, because resistance to social evil is central to the mission of Christianity (Carson 1998, p. 95; Lawson and Payne 1998, p. 141; Luke 4:18–19 and Matthew 25:31–40, NIV).

4.1. The Emergence of Prayer-Filled Sit-In Movements

The protest cases that surfaced around 1960 were a powerful demonstration of the power of nonviolent direct protest to work in tandem with litigation strategies to achieve constitutional reform.¹¹ The first phase of protest cases emerged after Oklahoma sit-ins that inspired young people to stage sit-ins on Canal Street in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Canal Street protests were led by members of the NAACP Youth Council and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and commenced with demonstrations at the lunch counter of Woolworth's in Greensboro on the first day of the protest. Sit-ins typically followed a particular order: protestors sought service in segregated facilities and they were denied service and were asked to leave (Bell 2008, p. 545); they maintained their commitment to nonviolence in the face of violent threats by white bystanders and police officers (Bell 2008, p. 545). The Greensboro sit-ins achieved national coverage and inspired other nonviolent protests in the South (Robnett 2000, p. 98).

The formal leadership of the CRM was led by a number of Christian and civil rights groups that were committed to the cause of racial equality and constitutional improvement while employing religiously inspired nonviolent strategies and litigation tactics. The Congress of Racial Equality was founded in 1942 and was characterized as part of the "Big Six" civil rights organizations (including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the National Urban League). CORE was firmly committed to the principles of nonviolence as practiced by Gandhi and Jesus Christ, with the goal of achieving racial equality in the South. James Farmer Jr., one of CORE's first leaders and the honorary chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, was a graduate of Howard University Divinity School and was trained by the prominent mystic theologian, Howard Thurman. The day before the first Woolworth's sit-in, Reverend A.L. Davis hosted a CORE nonviolent direct action training workshop at his church. These and other opportunities to host training sessions by church leaders helped ensure that certain churches played an active role as participants, financiers, and organizers of the movement, and reminded protestors to maintain their commitment to the religious and moral principles of nonviolence (King 1991, p. 46; Harding 1991, pp. 35–37; Paris 1985, pp. 398–404).

4.2. Protecting Free Speech and Maintaining Law and Order

Throughout protest cases, the Supreme Court acknowledged the protestors' commitment to principles of nonviolent civil disobedience when granting relief for peaceful and nonviolent action. In *Lombard v. State of Louisiana* (1963), three black college students and one white college student entered the McCrory Five and Ten Cent Store in New Orleans, sat down at the counter, and asked to be served. The Court held that the petitioners' conduct did not rise to the level of criminal mischief because they were "orderly" and did not pose a clear or present threat of violence through their demonstrations (*Lombard v. State of Louisiana*, 374 US 267, 277–78 (1963)).

In *Edwards v. South Carolina* (1963), protestors exercised their First Amendment rights through nonviolent methods (*Edwards v. South Carolina*, 372 US 229, 235 (1963)). They reasoned that the conduct of delivering a sermon, singing patriotic and religious songs, and clapping one's hands and feet are protected speech acts and "basic constitutional rights in their most pristine and classic form" (*Edwards*, 235 (1963)). The Court further reasoned that when minority viewpoints are rejected by members of the majority so as to arouse hostility, violence, and unrest, nonviolent responses are a reasonable consequence of protecting free speech in our democratic government.

Like the Free Exercise context, in protest cases, the Court defended free speech as a basic constitutional right. Religious and political free speech are entitled to First Amendment protection, and even hecklers are not free to violate a person's free speech rights. This view was illuminated in the Court's holding in *Cox v. State of Louisiana* (374 US 536, 547–48 (1965)). The controversy centered around a boycott that took place at segregated restaurants in Baton Rouge, Louisiana as part of a broader protest movement against racial segregation. Twenty-three black college students were arrested for picketing stores that maintained segregated lunch counters; the protests were directed by the local chapter of CORE and led by an ordained Congregational minister, the Reverend Mr. B. Elton Cox, who also served as a Field Secretary of CORE (Cox, 523–39). In the days leading up to the protest, Cox and others participated in a "direct nonviolent clinic" sponsored by CORE and St. Mark's church.

Rev. Cox guided about 2000 students peacefully down to the courthouse, where the marchers peacefully sang freedom songs and hymns and, in response, the inmates joined in the singalong. The courthouse grounds were flooded with angelic sounds that transformed the government complex into a tent revival meeting in the segregated South. Appreciative of the nonviolent religious character of the protests, the Court ruled in *Cox* that unsettling, annoying, or inconvenient speech is insulated from censorship and punishment. Even though students cheered, clapped, and sang, the Court reasoned that there was no clear and present danger of a substantive evil that permitted the abridgment of constitutional rights (*City of Sumter v. Lewis*, 241 S.C. 364 (1962); *State v. Edwards*, 239 S.C. 339, 344 (1961)). Ironically, although the Court acknowledged the religious and nonviolent character of the protest, it declined to address the larger constitutional issue as to whether the state enforcement of segregation in private establishments amounted to the kind of state action that ran afoul of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

4.3. Mere Presence or Worship Do Not Amount to a Breach of the Peace

Additionally, the Supreme Court held that the mere presence of persons or of religious worship did not amount to a breach of the peace (*Garner v. State of Louisiana*, 368 US 157 (1961)). In *Taylor v. Louisiana* (1962), the majority reasoned that the defendants' conduct was not a breach of the peace when petitioners calmly, orderly, and politely entered a bus station waiting room for whites only and requested to purchase tickets in the white-only section as interstate passengers (*Taylor v. State of Louisiana*, 370 US 154 (1962) (per curiam); *Peterson v. City of Greenville*, 373 US 244 (1963)). The fact that the petitioners stayed on the property after requests to leave did not amount to a breach of peace by the petitioners (*Bowie v. City of Columbia*, 378 US 347, 355 (1964)).

The majority assumed a similar judicial posture in *Barr v. Columbia* (1964), one of five sit-in cases decided by the Court on 22 June 1964. In this case, petitioners refused to exit a library after repeated requests to leave. The Court ruled that "we are reluctant to assume that the breach-of-peace statute covers petitioners' conduct here," where protestors maintained peaceful conduct throughout the protest (*Barr v. City of Columbia*, 378 US 146, 150 (1964)). Furthermore, where a breach of the peace will not be established because conduct is calm, mild-mannered, and decorous, "[t]here was no violation of the statute which petitioners are accused of breaching; no disorder, no intent to provoke a breach of the peace, and no circumstances indicating that a breach might be occasioned by petitioners' actions" (*Brown v. State of Louisiana*, 383 US 131, 141 (1966)). The Court did not address the question of whether private actions of segregation that were protected by state courts amounted to the kind of state action that violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Webster 2001, pp. 373–407).

The Court was less tolerant of protestors who resorted to violence to protect constitutional rights. In *People of State of Michigan v. Bernard*, petitioners staged a protest in front of City Hall in Ann Arbor, Michigan, protesting police brutality against blacks. The protest was peaceful and was at the point of dispersing when a fireman collided with the picket line and was hit on the head by one of the picketers. Additional firemen arrived on the

scene and started fighting with some of the picketers, and the police arrested a number of protestors for disturbing the peace. The Court reasoned that protestors who resist arrest when officers are seeking to maintain the peace are not engaging in constitutionally protected conduct. Where there is the threat of imminent violence, officers do not breach constitutional rights by preserving the peace.

Each of these cases—*Lombard*, *Edwards*, *Taylor*, *Bowie*, and *Cox*—defined the boundaries of protected versus unprotected speech while affirming the right of persons to nonviolently and peacefully protest. These decisions are also a response to a change in the national climate: nonviolent protests increased in number, momentum was gained to end segregation, and the Court responded to national pressure to achieve racial justice through nonviolent means, as long as the protestors took the moral high ground through nonviolence.

4.4. Gradually Chipping Away at the Wall of Segregation

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment provides that neither the state nor a government body may deny persons the equal protection of its governing laws. In essence, the government must treat every individual in the same manner as other individuals in similar circumstances and conditions. In this series of cases, the Supreme Court dodged the constitutional challenge because the majority did not believe that the Equal Protection Clause covered public accommodations based on the legislative history and debates leading to the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. On the contrary, a small but very vocal minority in the Court argued that the Fourteenth Amendment safeguards the rights of all Americans to be treated as equal citizens, especially with respect to public accommodations. Friends of the Court have argued that the tendency of government officials to use their authority to restrict freedom of expression led to ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment to prohibit official abuses (*Walker v. Birmingham*, 388 US 307 (1967)). The Court reiterated the Constitution's protection of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right of persons to assemble peaceably, and the right to petition the government for the redress of grievances. These freedoms may not be abridged unless there is a "clear and present danger of a serious substantive evil" (*Edwards v. South Carolina*, 372 US 229, 235–37 (1963)).

In the case of the CRM, the Court ruled that "delivering a religious harangue, singing loudly patriotic and religious songs, clapping feet and hands" are all foundational First Amendment rights (*Edwards*, 237, 1963). These rights are free from infringement, especially when the minority advocates a position that clashes with the majority. According to the Court, censorship would "lead to the standardization of ideas either by legislatures, courts, or dominant political or community groups" (*Cox v. State of Louisiana*, 374 US 536, 547, 552 (1965)).

As in religious clause cases, the Court reasoned that the freedom to act is not unlimited (*Cox*, 556, 1965). First Amendment rights can be constrained by a state acting in its interests for the protection of public health and safety, where "[t]he rights of free speech and assembly, while fundamental in our democratic society, still do not mean that everyone with opinions or beliefs to express may address a group at any public place and at any time" (*Cox*, 556, 1965). The preservation of democratic rights requires that we maintain public order to avoid the perils of anarchy (*Cox*, 556, 1965).

4.5. Prior Restraint on Free Speech Is No Excuse to Break the Law

In addition, even when free speech entails demonstrations, marching, and parading on public streets and sidewalks, the fact that speech is nonviolent does not excuse one from following the law. In *Walker*, wherein petitioners were arrested for defying an injunction preventing a march on the Friday before Easter in Birmingham, the Supreme Court ruled that a prior restraint on free speech does not exempt petitioners from following the law and pursuing alternative channels of redress (*Walker v. City of Birmingham*, 388 US 307 (1967)).

A repeated concern of the Court was that, despite the methods used by the opposition, protestors must be subject to the judicial process, even in the face of arbitrary procedures

and discriminatory laws. In *Walker v. Birmingham* (1967), city commissioner Bull O'Connor, a strong proponent of segregation, denied two requests for a permit to allow protestors to march in Birmingham. The plaintiffs defied an ex parte injunction issued in the wake of the Good Friday march by going ahead with their demonstration (Walker, 311, 1967). The *Walker* decision reveals the limits of judicial support for nonviolent protests when they violate court orders. The majority sustained the contempt convictions of Martin Luther King Jr. and others for violating an injunction prohibiting the Birmingham marches planned for Good Friday and Easter Sunday (Walker, 307, 1967). The Court declined to address concerns regarding the validity of the injunction or the statute at issue, although the same Birmingham statute was later nullified in *Shuttlesworth v. City of Birmingham* (394 US 147 (1969)). Rather, the Court emphasized the need to maintain respect for the law:

The rule of law that Alabama followed in this case reflects a belief that in the fair administration of justice, no man can be judge in his own case, however exalted his station, however righteous his motives, and irrespective of his race, color, politics, or religion. This Court cannot hold that the petitioners were constitutionally free to ignore all the procedures of the law and carry their battle to the streets. One may sympathize with the petitioners' impatient commitment to their cause. But respect for judicial process is a small price to pay for the civilizing hand of law, which alone can give abiding meaning to constitutional freedom. (Walker, 320–21, 1967)

The Court, here, makes explicit its view that violations of judicial orders would not be permitted, whether the actor was motivated by a desire to promote racial reform and conform to divine law, to protect the right of the individual to communicate his ideas first and suffer the consequences later, or to oppose procedures that impair the free exercise of religious freedoms (Walker, 318–19, 1967). The Court privileged respect for the judicial process, even though many participated in protests out of their love for democracy and fidelity to God's moral law.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and Reverend Ralph Abernathy confirmed that their acts of civil disobedience were expressions of their religious beliefs. Rev. Shuttlesworth attacked the injunction as "a flagrant denial of our constitutional privileges" and vowed that the injunction would not stop the progress of the movement: "[A]n injunction nor anything else will stop the Negro from obtaining citizenship in his march for freedom" (Walker, 349, 1967). Rev. King provided a more elaborate critique of the injunction on religious and political grounds. He surmised that protestors had "anchored our faith and hope in the righteousness of the Constitution and the moral laws of the universe" (Walker, 349, 1967). They believed that their faith in God and America's constitutional principles backed their right to peacefully assemble, protest unjust laws, and achieve equal protection by the law.

Furthermore, King rebuked charges that the protests were motivated by blatant disrespect for the rule of law. The march, according to King, was held "not out of any disrespect for the law" or was rooted in attempts to "evade or defy the law or engage in chaotic anarchy". Instead, nonviolent protests demonstrated "the highest respect for the law", a theme that King returned to in his letter from Birmingham Jail. Stated another way, their "great love for the Constitution of the U.S.", coupled with their "desire to purify the judicial system of the State of Alabama", inspired them to protest, being cognizant of the rightness of their cause and the consequences of their decision.

In dissent, Justice Brennan criticized the majority's overriding concern with public order:

We cannot permit fears of 'riots' and 'civil disobedience' generated by slogans like 'Black Power' to divert our attention from what is here at stake—not violence or the right of the State to control its streets and sidewalks, but the insulation from attack of ex parte order and legislation upon which they are based, even when patently impermissible prior restraints on the exercise of the First Amendment rights.

Justice Brennan critiqued the majority for being more preoccupied with fears of riots, civil disobedience, and Black Power while ignoring the crucial constitutional issue at stake. Not only did the majority conflate threats of ‘Black Power’ with civil disobedience, when it was clear that the protests were motivated by religious scruples, it also permitted a prior restraint on First Amendment rights to stand, even though such actions were condemned by the Court as far back as *Cantwell*.

The rights to picket and parade are methods of expression that are protected by the First Amendment and must not be infringed by ex parte orders where petitioners did not have a fair opportunity to be heard in Court before they were restrained. Brennan reasoned that since these demonstrations involved the use of public grounds, they could be policed as to the time, manner, and location. However, the state was prohibited by the First Amendment from barring protests on public grounds for the purpose of petitioning the government for a redress of grievances (Walker, 334–35, 1967). Moreover, where a “permit has been arbitrarily denied”, one should not have to go down “the long and expensive route of this court to obtain remedy” before making a speech, delivering a sermon, picketing, parading, or assembling. More specifically, if a person must exhaust all judicial remedies before speaking, protesting, or parading, the occasion necessitating immediate protest would have passed and the protest would have become “futile or pointless” (Walker, 336, 1967).

This preoccupation with timing, which is particularly relevant in the case of protests, was critical to the Birmingham protests, which were designed to take place during the Easter season to awaken the moral conscience of the nation regarding the undemocratic and inhumane character of racial segregation. The injunction was designed to disrupt their demonstrations before they could gain mass support for their movement to dismantle segregation (Walker, 70–71, 1967). Given the fact that the plaintiffs were ministers who represented religious organizations, the injunction was calculated to ban demonstrations on a religious holiday, namely, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, ceremonies of “special sacramental significance” on which “church-oriented organizations” hoped to draw national attention to their demonstrations (Walker, 349, 1967). The fact that the protest activity was nonviolent and religiously motivated did not shield it from attack; the protestor must exhaust all legal remedies before engaging in demonstrations, even if the point of demonstrating would have been lost with delayed timing.

4.6. Civil and Voting Rights Victories

Despite the victories of *Brown*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Birmingham Campaign, the March on Washington, and the Supreme Court protection of protestors’ free speech rights, the civil and voting rights of millions of African Americans in the South were threatened. The Selma to Montgomery March in 1965 helped to achieve a significant victory for the CRM. Selma emerged as an ideal staging ground for the next phase of the CRM’s efforts to secure voting rights, in part because of the police force’s fierce support of segregation. Sheriff Clark had a reputation as one who “could be counted on to provide vivid proof of the violent sentiments that formed white supremacy’s core”. The other reason that Selma provided fertile soil for the expansion of the voting rights movement is because the organizers were focused on securing voting rights, and they were disciplined in utilizing nonviolent disobedience to achieve that objective.

The police brutality reached its climax on Bloody Sunday on 7 March 1965, when police officers violently and brutally attacked marchers as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge en route to Montgomery. The nation was outraged, and support for racial reform bloomed as television screens broadcasted images of children sprayed by water hoses, bitten by dogs, and beaten with sticks. The death of two white volunteers from the North was also deeply disturbing and included a Unitarian minister from Boston and a mother of five from Detroit (Branch 1989, pp. 779–80; Fairclough 2001, pp. 229–43; Klarman 2004).

The week after Bloody Sunday, a massive wave of supporters flooded Selma in support of renewed calls for peaceful protests. Hundreds of ministers traveled to Selma to march

across the Edmund Pettus Bridge again in support of voting rights. In a landmark address, President Johnson vowed his support for historic voting rights legislation before a joint session of Congress to help the nation “overcome this crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice”. In the spirit of protestors whose peaceful protests shook the foundation of the segregated South, President Johnson stated that America “shall overcome” (Johnson 1965, pp. 291, 294).

As a consequence of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the demise of institutionalized discrimination in public accommodations was in clear view (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Public Law 88–352, § 602, U. S. Statutes at Large 78 (1964), 241, 252–53). Given this historic achievement, the Court was called upon to determine whether peaceful attempts to be served on an equal basis were shielded from criminal prosecution. The Court spoke in *Hamm v. Rock Hill* (1964), where the majority held that the Civil Rights Act abates conduct that occurred before its enactment, as well as “still-pending convictions” (*Hamm v. City of Rock Hill*, 379 US 306 (1964)).

Elsewhere, the Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act “forbids discrimination in places of public accommodation and removes peaceful attempts to be served on an equal basis from the category of punishable activities.” (Cox, 318–19) Thus, because the Act transformed a crime (peaceful attempts to be served on an equal footing with whites) into a right, the Court reasoned that the act decriminalized peaceful attempts to be treated and served equally. Despite an instance by the dissent in *Hamm* that the Court should not provide a blanket sanction of nonviolent civil disobedience, the Court in Cox was clear in distinguishing protected nonviolent disobedience from “riotous conduct” that conflicts with “properly drawn statutes and ordinances designed to promote law and order, protect the community against disorder, regulate traffic, safeguard legitimate interests in private and public property, or protect the administration of justice and other essential governmental functions” (Cox, 574, 1965).

5. Summary and Conclusions

The preceding research and case studies demonstrate how principles that guided the Supreme Court’s First Amendment religious freedom jurisprudence from the 1930s and through the 1960s created a climate of religious freedom that supported the CRM in beneficial ways. Namely, the Jehovah’s Witnesses resisted laws mandating the flag salute because their faith mandated that such cultural practices violated their religious beliefs. In nonviolently practicing their faith in the face of discriminatory laws, this religious minority helped to lay the foundation for other religious minorities who engaged in civil disobedience and pursued litigation to expand civil rights. However, while Jehovah’s Witnesses benefited from constitutional protection, other religious minorities like Sabbath Day observers were treated unfairly. Even though the Sherbert revolution promised to expand First Amendment rights to despised religious minorities, it fell well short of its stated goal because the decision was limited to the facts of the case, and others who were denied benefits and rights based upon their disfavored religious views could not rely on the holding in Sherbert.

A survey of the principles and tactics of the CRM reveals how free exercise and civil rights are two sides of the same coin. The view that God’s law is higher than the law of the state is a central tenet of the nonviolent civil disobedience powerfully expressed in the CRM. However, a belief in the supremacy of God’s law was not tantamount to disrespect for the rule of law, as protestors engaged in protest out of respect for God’s higher law and constitutional principles. Because groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses proselytized their faith, solicited support for their cause, appealed to divine law to justify civil disobedience, and finally prevailed, they helped to establish a climate of religious freedom. This climate prepared the way for civil rights protestors over a decade later, who used the gains of the religious rights movement to build a foundation that catalyzed a constitutional revolution that benefited racial minorities.

A pervasive concern was that nonviolent protests threatened to erode the social fabric of America. However, what many observers, including the courts, failed to acknowledge was that the protests were a painful reminder that the social fabric was both frayed and torn into pieces, and that nonviolent protests were concerted attempts to make right everything that was wrong with American society. We saw the limits of the courts' patience, even with nonviolent protests, when petitioners defied injunctions that violated constitutionally protected activity. The Court was more worried about protestors following the law and pursuing all legal alternatives, even when doing so meant that the purpose of their protests would have lost its relevance. The Constitution protects the rights of even despised religious and racial minorities to use nonviolent means to obtain redress for grievances, and this right must not be abridged by prior restraints on constitutional rights. It was this goal of promoting the common good and supporting the cause of racial harmony that inspired protestors to use nonviolent methods to overturn laws that promoted racial division and threatened the public good.

Furthermore, the Court affirmed the right of individuals to speak their minds without compulsion. This theme resurfaced in protest cases during the CRM where protestors sought to modify the law by shaping public opinion about segregation. The fullest expression of individual freedom, according to the Court, is when an individual has the right to differ on things that "touch the heart of the existing order". Freedom of religion also prohibited officials from proscribing what should be orthodox in politics, nationalism, or religion. Like the Sabbath Day observers and Jehovah's Witnesses, the CRM protestors believed that the laws of God were more exacting than the obligations imposed by the state. The state could not force CRM protestors to confess their faith in a tradition or practice that violated their own religious beliefs.

Another theme emerging from cases under the Religion Clauses that was revisited in protest cases during the CRM was that private property rights do not supersede constitutional rights. Once spaces were opened to the public, an assertion of private ownership rights could not trump the need to protect the constitutional rights of patrons. The *Marsh v. Alabama* (1946) case extended religious expression beyond state-run towns and municipalities to cover private towns that are infused with the public interest (*Marsh v. Alabama*, 326 US 501 (1946)). The more the owner opens up his or her business or property for use by the general public, the more his or her (property) rights become circumscribed by the constitutional rights of those who use them. The corporation, state, and officers cannot enforce statutes that restrict the constitutional rights of those who use a property that has been opened for public use. This holding became a key part of the legal strategy of the CRM, which argued that once restaurants and other establishments were open to the public, service could not be provided to certain groups while being denied to others, based upon the Equal Protection Clause.

However, these cases also point to the limits of First Amendment cases in protecting religious conduct from state infringement. While the Court held that the right to believe is absolute, it was not prepared to provide constitutional protection to engage in acts of civil disobedience, even to protect a religious belief or expand civil rights. This trend emerged regarding nonviolent protests, where the Court provided relief based on individual cases but refused to rule that nonviolent protestors had a constitutional right to engage in acts of civil disobedience. Even if an official acted arbitrarily or capriciously to deny a constitutional right, any inconvenience, delay, or cost was not deemed a sufficient justification to break the law, whatever the cause. The Court was overly concerned in these cases that if it allowed one person to disregard laws or procedures, others would do the same and anarchy would replace the rule of law. Similar concerns over state action and governmental powers resurfaced in protest cases during the CRM. It was not until the passing of the Civil Rights Act that peaceful attempts to be served were removed from the category of punishable activities.

In summary, in the period leading up to the CRM, a climate of religious freedom was encouraged by First Amendment cases that protected religious liberty, safeguarded the

freedom to believe and worship minority faiths, placed limits on government regulatory powers, prohibited religious discrimination, and challenged prior restraints on religious freedom. These court rulings reminded protestors that religious and, very often, political speech enjoyed the highest constitutional protection; they affirmed the right of groups to follow the dictates of their faith, even if the higher law conflicted with the laws of the state. This climate of religious freedom provided an important catalyst for civil rights activists who were compelled to resist discriminatory laws that violated constitutional principles and the moral laws that governed their faith.

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Notes

- ¹ This article is based upon the author's dissertation research, which extended and integrated existing scholarship on the CRM and church and state scholarship by examining the connections between First Amendment religion clause decisions and the advancement of civil rights during the CRM. This paper seeks to extend this thesis by arguing that it is impossible to appreciate the success of the CRM without appreciating the impact of First Amendment legal victories. Failure to do so secularizes the movement and downplays its distinctive religious underpinnings and goals.
- ² This work builds on the thesis of Grohsgal, who argues that even though scholarship has deepened our understanding of the various dissensions of the CRM, to date, scholars have failed to relate the aims of the CRM to other movements to expand religious protections through the First Amendment religion clauses (99). She also contends that most legal scholars fail to appreciate the connections between the tactics used by Jehovah's Witnesses and the methods of civil rights activists. For this reason, she contends that CRM scholarship would be enhanced by "extending the frame of reference", both chronologically and politically, to "include other groups whose struggles helped to define Constitutional rights".
- ³ My view of the role of religious discourse, primarily in the early stages of the CRM, is consistent with Charles Marsh's view that "there were many SNCC activists whose moral energies were driven by secular ideals, as there were those who considered the faith of black people altogether quaint. Nevertheless, student-based organizations like SNCC and COFO, as well as the larger movement itself, were initially anchored in the language, imagery, and energies of the church, in search of a 'circle of trust, a band of sisters and brothers gathered around the possibilities of agapeic love, the beloved community'" pp. 2–3. In addition, Anthony Pinn calls attention to the pivotal role that the church played initially in promoting the goals and shaping the direction of the CRM. By participating in the CRM, black churches and leaders believed that they were carrying out the mandate of the Gospel. Pinn shows how the black church supported the struggle by providing volunteers, meeting places, and financial resources. The church also participated in direct action, distributed materials, and provided the movement with religious and theological underpinnings (13). Other scholars have argued that the role of black religion in the public realm has always been contested, with various religious leaders and church members offering shifting political positions, methods, goals, and strategies at different historical moments in the CRM, including an emphasis on economic empowerment, political activism, Christian unity, social reform, etc. (Best 2006, pp. 197–200). Lerone Martin supports the thesis of the competing positions of black liberation advanced during the CRM by arguing that black religion and politics "has always been disputed ground, expressing and pursuing a range of religious and political options, some of which prove to buttress black freedom struggles, others that hinder them, as well as all points in between" (5).
- ⁴ My view of the role of religious discourse in the civil rights movement is consistent with Marsh's view, which acknowledges the spiritual roots of the CRM; however, I look at how nonviolent protest interacted with the church, politics, and the law to advance cultural and constitutional rights.
- ⁵ Carter claims that the purpose of religion is not merely to understand oneself or to make sense of the rest of the world "but to act, and to act at times without regard to what others consider the settled facts". This makes religion a destabilizing and transformative force. *Culture of Disbelief*, 41.
- ⁶ This thesis embraces the view that the civil rights movement builds on and extends the "rights revolution", which included such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, who helped to advance the cause of constitutional improvement. Weinryb Grohsgal, *ibid.*, 329.
- ⁷ Marsh argues that "there were many SNCC activists whose moral energies were driven by secular ideals, as there were those who considered the faith of black people altogether quaint. Nevertheless, student-based organizations like SNCC and COFO, as

well as the larger movement itself, were initially anchored in the language, imagery, and energies of the church, in search of a ‘circle of trust, a band of sisters and brothers gathered around the possibilities of agapeic love, the beloved community’”. Ibid., 3.

⁸ This research builds upon and goes beyond Grohsgal’s work by examining free exercise cases from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s, covering the litigation tactics of a broad range of religious groups, not just the Witnesses. This work shows how the CRM was inspired by religious principles similar to those of the Witnesses, who had different goals. What movement activists were trying to achieve was not the freedom to worship but the freedom to live out their faith in ways that offered a more inclusive vision of democracy and freedom for all.

⁹ This author is not arguing that the climate of religious freedom was the sole factor that contributed to the success of the CRM, merely that it is an important and, heretofore, largely unnoticed factor. I certainly agree with others that important factors that enhanced the success of the civil rights movement include black civil religion, black protest traditions, civil rights litigation, slave religion, labor movement advances, American democratic theory, etc. For an article that traces the first wave of the expansion of religious freedom to the abolitionist critique of slavery, see (Lash 1994), in which the author claims that while the Original Free Exercise Clause “was intended to prohibit nothing more than laws that targeted religion qua religion, the abolitionists challenged the adequacy of that protection: by demanding “a broader interpretation of the original Bill of Rights, one that emphasized the rights of the individual over the prerogatives of state majorities”.

¹⁰ It is important to note here that while NAACP litigation strategists were inspired by the First Amendment advances of groups like the Witnesses, not all civil rights activists and black church members who participated in the protest were aware of the expansion of minority religious rights in the wake of Supreme Court decisions. I argue that the activity of the Jehovah’s Witnesses fertilized the soil for civil rights activists and Black Christians to offer a broader vision of church–state relations that eventually led to an unprecedented expansion of constitutional rights.

¹¹ Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP during the CRM, expresses clearly the goals of the movement: “What the NAACP wanted, what I wanted, was to include Negro Americans in the nation’s life, not to exclude them. America was our land as much as it was any American’s—every square inch of every city and town and village” (Wilkins 1994, p. 319). Thurgood Marshall, interview by Ed Erwin, printed as “The Reminiscences of Thurgood Marshall”, in *Thurgood Marshall: His Speeches, Writings, Arguments, Opinions, and Reminiscences*, ed. Mark Tushnet (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001) (see Marshall 2001). Although Justice Thurgood Marshall was publicly critical of the activists’ “disregard for the law”, he was emphatic about the central role of black churches in the struggle: “Eighty percent of the branches of the NAACP when I went there were run by ministers, in churches. Ninety-eight percent of the meetings were held in Negro churches. The Negro church support was beautiful, from one end of the country to the other.” He went on to say that “[T]here were some bad ones [churches]. But I don’t think there would have been an NAACP without the church.” Ibid., 510.

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Article

Understanding an Authoritarian Regime: The Varying Relations Between Religion and the State in East German Socialism, 1945–1989

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Abstract: The relations between religion and the state in the socialist-governed states of Eastern Europe in 1945–1989 are generally framed using the term “persecution of religion”. On the other hand, significant differences existed in the region, from limited freedom of religion in Yugoslavia to a prohibition of religious practice in Albania. From the side of religion, these relations were significantly formed by the attitudes and activities of religious leaders. Which options were adopted by key religious actors in a political environment hostile to religion? What is to be learned about religion in authoritarian systems? This qualitative study draws on the case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), governed in 1949–1989 by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. We studied professional biographies of prominent religious dignitaries and a comprehensive volume of files from the Ministry for State Security of the GDR in order to conceptualize their attitudes and activities according to a two-dimensional classification (towards the state and towards society), which enabled an overview of the range of their options, and identified the types of religious dignitaries in authoritarian systems. This analysis revealed that a variety of attitudes and activities of religious leaders existed in the GDR.

Keywords: religion and state; socialism; GDR in 1949–1989; religious leaders; classification

1. Introduction

The relations between religion and the state during the socialist period in Eastern Europe in 1945–1990 are generally framed using the key terms “separation of spheres”, “observation and containment of religion”, and “persecution of religious activity and personnel”. On the one hand, manifold similarities in the legislation, treatment, and organizational exclusion of traditional religion existed between the particular socialist-governed states in the region, while on the other hand, there were significant differences in their internal configurations which directly affected the specific development of the relations of religion and the state in these countries—in terms of its structure, contents, and possibilities of certain arrangements.

After the period of open persecution of religious communities, traditions, and their representatives during and directly after the Second World War, the region experienced a spectrum of treatment of religious communities by particular socialist regimes: Yugoslavia, in connection to its foreign policy in the Non-Aligned Movement, gradually granted limited freedom to traditional churches and religious communities; Bulgaria executed a Soviet-influenced infiltration and total control; and Enver Hoxha’s regime in Albania upheld total suppression, including a formal prohibition of traditional religion (according to the constitution of 1976 of “(…) organizations with a fascist, anti-democratic, religious and anti-social character” (Presidiumi e Kuvendit Popullor të Republikës Popullore Socialiste të Shqipërisë 1976, Art. 55)) and even of individual religious practice.

In their distant and often hostile construction of their relations to traditional religious communities, these repressive regimes were formally influenced by socialist doctrine and (despite their formal structures) were characterized at the actor level by (a) general

personal mistrust of the higher personnel of the party and the state apparatus in religion; (b) a relatively low level of education among the members of these groups on religious matters (due to the socialist doctrine of “states of peasants and workers”); (c) focus on a complete separation of religion, politics, and the state; and (d) the general positioning of religious communities, representatives, and adherents as oppositional forces or even state enemies, regardless of their actual attitudes towards the regimes (as “[...] even assimilated conformists [...] could be defined as noncompliant by a totalitarian regime” (Ramet 2020, p. 266)).

These characteristics also applied to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), governed between 1949 and 1989/90 by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (“Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands”—SED). Here, religious communities and religious dignitaries were generally classified as “(.) representatives of the clerical-militaristic system (.)” (BArch, MfS, HA XX, no. 26927, 1959, p. 13) of capitalist West Germany, as leading officers of the main institution for observing churches and religious communities, the Ministry for State Security (“Ministerium für Staatssicherheit”—MfS) of the government of the GDR, noted in their secret files in 1959. A general derogative tone of mistrust is to be found in these documents, speaking of “old foxes” and “idle priests”, in agents’ perceptions and descriptions of religious leaders—revealing an ideological and distrustful style typical of the time period and perspective.

By focusing on the case of the GDR using a qualitative and actor-oriented approach, we are able to identify various forms of attitudes, actions, and reactions of religious leaders towards the state and towards the new societal realities besides the general dichotomies—which significantly formed the relations between religion and the state. In fact, we can observe a variety of attitudes of religious leaders and different models of church–state relations which developed during the existence of the GDR. Following a qualitative approach and applying a two-dimensional research design (of relations to the state and to society), we conceptualize a model of types of religious leaders in socialism which offers a sight into the variety of relations of religion and the state in this specific governing system, as well as in authoritarian regimes in general.

The relations between religion and the state can be described and analyzed according to the structural settings (and formal restrictions) or from the perspective of key actors who are working within the structure(s) and influence development and change—here, of religious authorities on the one side and of their counterparts in the socialist state apparatus (officially and informally) dealing with religious matters on the other. The members of the second group were officials of the state departments responsible for communication with religious communities and also employees, agents, and officers of the extensive state security apparatus. In the socialist system of the GDR, this was the domain of the Ministry for State Security (MfS), whose ministers Wilhelm Zaisser (in office during 1950–1953), Ernst Wollweber (1953–1957), and Erich Mielke (1957–1989) openly spoke out against traditional religion. In between these two main groups, the “unofficial contributor” (“Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter”—IM) was positioned, an informant who worked in the sphere of religion and reported to the MfS secretly. Hence, the current article will work with an actor-related approach and will first describe the variety in the relations between religion and the state in East German Socialism in 1945–89 from the perspectives of the key actors involved. Secondly, out of this qualitative description, a model for the classification of religious leaders in authoritarian regimes will be developed.

Since the SED, its ideology, and the socialist state were dominant in every sphere of life of the people of East Germany in 1946–1989, every individual and collective behavior was interpreted as a political issue by the state authorities, and nonconformity and other forms of noncompliance were punished. Subsequently, leaders of churches and religious communities had to newly adjust their roles, societal positions, and social behavior according to the two dimensions (see Figure 1) of (a) the intensity of their involvement in society and (b) the intensity of their involvement in cooperation and non-cooperation with the

socialist state, its activities, and its promotion of the official ideology (often including the cult of the particular leader).

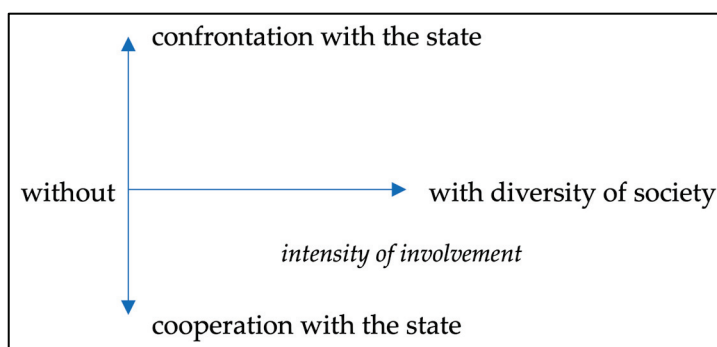


Figure 1. Religious organizations and leaders: intensity of involvement in state and society.

The key areas into which churches and religious communities were embedded, had to act within, or were interrelated with during socialist rule were (a) their own organizational and confessional areas; (b) the religious field in general; (c) the societal environment, a society of diverse individuals which was under the pressures of conformity and socialist collectivization; and (d) the extensively regulating socialist party-state. Accordingly, the main dimensions in focus when evaluating the relations between religion and the state in the current study are the position of religious dignitaries towards the state and towards society (see Figure 1).

2. Materials and Methods

Applying an actor-oriented approach to the relations between religion and the state in socialism means investigating the relations of religious leaders with the state authorities. Hence, the main factors influencing the configuration from this perspective are firstly, general historical path dependencies; secondly, individual preconditions (their own abilities, biographies, interests, families, and social networks); and thirdly, the formal and informal codes of conduct of their respective religious organizations. Fourthly, the general conditions at the time (in terms of the political system and the socio-economic development of society) had an influence, as well as a fifth factor, the “filter” of the actual circumstances at the location of a specific local community. The interplay of these factors mentioned forms the way specific relations between religion, politics, and the state are developed from an actor-oriented approach.

Qualification of the two dimensions of (a) involvement in society and (b) cooperation/confrontation with the state by the religious leadership (see Figure 1) enables us to identify differences in the relations between religion and the state beyond formal regulations. The embeddedness of the religious leadership into their own church or religious community is an important precondition since the strong bonds here raise their confidence in addressing the political issues or political restrictions religious communities face (Malina and Hersh 2021, pp. 720–21) and the acceptance of societal outreach and presence—hence, this influences the forms of cooperation, abstention, or confrontation in a democratically (ibid.) or authoritarian (e.g., socialist)-governed state. Dependent on their own will and the hierarchy of their community, their embeddedness can be developed in parallel and widely within the whole society or with an emphasis on the circles of (a) small in-house groups, in socialism often organized in the parsonage of the priests for discretion; (b) distinct subgroups of one’s own community, like in groups of young people or musicians (with their diversity dependent on their size); or (c) the generally accepting religious authority itself at the level of the local community or diocese. Furthermore, if there is a nation-wide hierarchy, a religious leader can create embeddedness (d) at the national level, like in a bishops’ conference. The two traditional church structures in East Germany, the territorially organized Evangelical churches and the Roman-Catholic Church, additionally had common

administrative structures with (e) West Germany, thus creating a common social sphere across borders.

The first analytical dimension of the intensity of involvement in society can be measured by the range and diversity of the personal networks of the religious leadership. Significant social forces in Germany in the 1950s to 1970s (despite state-initiated groups and churches) were the millions of displaced Germans from Central and East Europe, the youth, and representatives of arts and sciences in general (intellectuals, musicians, and literary figures). Additionally, it is possible that contact was developed with the most marginalized (and officially non-existent) groups in a conservative socialist regime, such as with homosexuals, alcohol and drug addicts, and people living in nonconformity with the formal and informal rules in other ways.

As the buildup of arms developed in both German states during the Cold War in the 1970s, peace initiative groups appeared outside of the structures and doctrine of the state which challenged the narrative of the communist party of it being a force of peace itself. The diversity of society further developed with the appearance of independent initiatives concerned with environmental matters, as pollution of the air, ground, and water was a major problem in every socialist regime on the continent. In the late 1980s, movements for democratization became visible in larger cities in the GDR that called for a positioning of the churches towards their demands. All of these movements were characterized by nonconformity to the state and to the party, by their local-oriented activity, and a certain idea of society beyond the dichotomic types of rigid, conservative socialism on the one side and Western-style capitalism on the other (even in the year of change in 1989, “[...] the initiatives on democratization emphasize that they do not envisage capitalism” (see BArch, MfS, BV Rst, Abt. XX, no. 37, 1989, p. 37)). This was the specific diversity of the societal environment of religious leaders in East Germany in 1945–1990, to which they had to form relations to—none, specific ones, or relations of a broad range.

The second analytical dimension, positioning towards the state, is measured by the intensity of involvement in confrontation or in cooperation with the state and its activities (see Figure 1). On the side of confrontation, the classification of Sabrina P. Ramet differentiates intensity as starting from resistance (at the highest level) and declining over the categories of open opposition, dissent, and nonconformity (Ramet 2020, p. 10). With no intensity on either side of confrontation or cooperation, there is the possibility of the category of abstention from involvement in relations with the state, which can take the form of passive nonconformity (as the Catholic Church officially performed) or indifference (see Table 1). On the side of acceptance of the socialist state and its activities, there are two main categories of conformity (further differentiated into passive and active conformity) and cooperation, which can be instrumental or ideological at the highest level. These activities can occur at the local, regional, or national level depending on the rank and influence of a particular religious leader.

Furthermore, the state was involved in approaching the group of religious authorities through its security apparatus (often working in secret); through juridification of the area of religion and politics (and introducing a milieu of specialized lawyers as a tool of control); and, specifically for East Germany, through a financial program by the socialist state supporting the building of churches in the latter decades of the regime. These characteristics and their intensity are evaluated by frequency and the contents discussed here.

The form of the personal contacts of a particular religious leader indicates their specific positioning within the two dimensions of involvement in society and the state.

The first materials for analysis were drawn from secondary sources: professional publications about the biographies of religious leaders who were active in the German Democratic Republic. Secondly, formerly secret files of the Ministry for State Security (“Ministerium für Staatssicherheit”—MfS) of the government of the GDR for the period 1950–1989 were analyzed, which are restricted from public access but open for scientific analysis (Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv—Bundesarchiv 2024). Yet the files of the MfS have received little attention in analytical and comparative research on the sociology of religion.

Due to the extensive character of the MfS, as was expressed by its vast networks of spies and informants, these files are sociologically informative, as they document a comprehensive description of the activities and contacts of the key religious leaders in East Germany in 1950–1989 since this group, as a potential source of opposition, was of major concern to the communist party SED and therefore to state institutions. For the current study, about 16,000 pages of MfS files containing observation reports about religious dignitaries in the GDR were analyzed (see, for example, Appendix A, Figure A1) according to an open approach.

Table 1. Religion in the socialist state and society.

<i>individual activity ...</i>		<i>without other societal groups</i>	<i>with parts/milieu of society</i>	<i>with diversity society</i>
<u>against state</u>	- resistance - opposition - dissent - act. nonconformity		‘milieu-oriented, nonconformist church leader’ [Dibelius: conservative]	‘pluralist-orient., individually act. church leader’ [Zahn: actively nonconform]
<u>without state</u>	- passive¹ noncon - formity - indifference			
<u>acceptance</u>	- passive - conformity - active		(‘milieu-oriented conformist’ [Mitz., Leich early])	
<u>/</u>				
<u>support of state²</u>	- instrumental - cooperation - ideological	‘isolated cooperator’ [Mitzenheim]	‘milieu-oriented cooperator’ [Leich]	
	- instrumental - collaboration - ideological	(‘isolated, state-loyal collaborator’ ³)	(‘milieu-orient. Collaborator’; [Braecklein])	

3. Religion and the State in East Germany, 1945–1990

3.1. An Overview of the Protestant Churches, the Roman-Catholic Church, and Their Relations to the State in 1945–1990

In the democratic period in Germany between the two world wars, the territorial German Protestant churches and the Roman-Catholic Church enjoyed freedom of self-organization, and their personnel were widely engaged in politics. An indicator was the Catholic German Centre Party (“Deutsche Zentrumspartei”—DZP), which was able to fill the position of the Reich Chancellor (“Reichskanzler”) four times between 1917 and 1932. The German Protestant churches also saw numerous of its personnel become active in politics or support political movements—with a dominant block drifting towards the nationalization of German Protestant Christianity.

With the final takeover of political rule of the National-Socialist Party (NSDAP) in January 1933, members of the Protestant churches split along the divide of cooperation or opposition: the vast majority of adherents and clerics followed the “nationalized” version of Christianity supported by the new rulers, the “German Christs” (“Deutsche Christen”—DC), while a minority formed the “Confessing Church” (“Bekennende Kirche”—BK), whose representatives opposed the regime, faced harsh persecution, and therefore were forced to work underground.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the Allies were responsible for the persecution of war crimes committed by the Germans. After the cleansing of the two church structures from open collaborators of the NSDAP, the churches had to reorganize according to the new political environment. This meant that the division between the West Allies (USA, the UK, and France) and the Soviet Union forced the churches to introduce separated organizational structures for the East of Germany on the one side and for the West of Germany on the other.

As a first reaction, both churches were reluctant to introduce new structures since that measure would have meant official recognition of a German socialist state in creation, the

GDR (founded in 1949). In the Eastern part of Germany, churches faced tight suppression by the state after 1945 due to the strong influence of the Soviet Union in the late Stalinist period, which was prolonged here beyond 1953 by the head of state and the communist party, Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973). During his reign in the period 1950–1971, his policy included intimidation of religious dignitaries and strong symbolic acts like blasting 46 historically important church buildings in major cities of the GDR (e.g., St.-Ulrich-and-Levin in Magdeburg, with a history of 900 years (Köppe 2010)). Suppression was focused on the two major church structures as visible symbols of an alternative value system and therefore potential oppositional forces—and a quasi-religious cult of communist ideology and leader was implemented (see the 1953 propaganda film *Builder of Socialism*—Walter Ulbricht).

In 1945, due to the historically grown federal system in Germany, there was not one single Protestant church but a structure of several parallel territorial Protestant churches (“Evangelische Landeskirchen”) in existence, which based their theology and tradition on the Evangelical tradition of Martin Luther and other reformists and did not overlap in their territories. On the territory of the newly formed GDR, there were eight single Evangelical country churches in existence in 1945 (Anhalt, Berlin-Brandenburg, Görlitz, Greifswald, Mecklenburg, Sachsen [a church for the church province and a regional church], and Thüringen), each headed by a bishop or a “president of the country church” (“Landeskirchenpräsident”). Following pressure from the state in the late 1940s, the eight Evangelical country churches on the territory of the GDR organized themselves into the “Eastern Church Conference” (“Kirchliche Ostkonferenz”) from 1945 to 1969.

The Roman-Catholic Church was more centrally organized and less prepared for a separation of structures since most of the territory in East Germany was covered by dioceses with seats of the bishop in West Germany (like Paderborn and Würzburg). Subsequently, the government of the GDR demanded that new Roman-Catholic dioceses be founded on its territory, as well as a body governing them, which was rejected by the German bishops, as well as the Vatican in the late 1940s. Instead, the organizational parts located in the new socialist state first obtained the ranking of “Episcopal Commissariats” (numbering seven), while later during the 1970s, some were elevated to “Episcopal Offices” (e.g., Erfurt-Meiningen, Magdeburg) or “Apostolic Administrations” (e.g., Görlitz, Schwerin), a category below that of a bishopric (numbering six units after 1973).

The relations between the Roman-Catholic Church and the state were profoundly shaped by the Vatican and locally managed by Konrad Graf von Preysing (1880–1950), the bishop of Berlin in 1935–1950, who resided in the American sector of the city from 1945 onwards. He became a priest in Munich in 1917, bishop of the diocese of Eichstätt in 1932, and bishop of the capital in 1935 and was appointed as a cardinal by the Vatican in 1946. In the years following 1933, he was one of the clerics within the Roman-Catholic Church who preferred distance from the Nazi state. After the Second World War, he took a critical line against the GDR, declaring a ban on political statements by his clerics and contact of the church with state officials in the Soviet zone in an official decree in 1947 (Schäfer 2009). This decree served as a guideline for the vast majority of church representatives until 1989, as formerly confidential reports of the Ministry for State Security reflect.⁴

After a short period of relaxation of relations following the death of Stalin in March 1953, new conflict grew only a year later over influence over the youth, and pressure was exerted by the state. The regime introduced a socialist “Youth Consecration” ceremony in concurrence with the Christian ritual of “Konfirmation” at the age of 14, to which the churches answered with a practice of exclusion (those who participated in the first ceremony were not allowed to partake in the Christian ritual). The state put further restrictions on the churches by declaring a ban on selected religious dignitaries West Germany entering the country in 1957.

With a new generation of leaders in the Evangelical churches in East Germany, this community employed features of cooperation with the state and founded the Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (“Bund Evangelischer Kirchen in der DDR”—BEK) in 1969 as the official body solely representing the Evangelical-Lutheran church structure

in the GDR. A symbol for this generation was Albrecht Friedrich Schönherr (1911–2009), administrator of the Berlin-Brandenburg bishopric from 1967, appointed as a bishop in 1972, and head of the Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) in 1969–1981. Although every single one of the eight bishops of the BEK had equal status, Schönherr, as the bishop of the largest bishopric and the head of the union, exerted his dominant influence on the opinion-making of the highest body of the Evangelical churches in the GDR. In accordance, he played a key role in formulating the new approach of the Evangelical churches towards the state in the 1970s, which was framed by the slogan “Church in Socialism” (Neubert 2009e)—meaning neither support for nor opposition to the state but rather an arrangement of ensconcement and accommodation of the Evangelical churches of the BEK within the German socialist state. A peak of this development was the meeting of a delegation of the BEK led by Albrecht Schönherr with the head of state Erich Honecker on 6 March 1978, which was followed by moderate treatment of the Protestant churches by the state and the promise of greater autonomy for the BEK churches in exchange for their abstinence from confrontation with the state and the ideology of the SED (ibid.). In the 1980s, the activities of bishop Schönherr led to “overt dissent” (Ramet 2020, p. 266) among the clergy, as well as among the laity, of the Evangelical-Lutheran churches in the GDR on whether relations with the socialist regime should take that form of cooperation.

The developments in focus reveal wide differentiation beyond the assumption of distinct separation and simple hostility between religion and the state in socialist regimes and furthermore induce further study of the variations in these relations in authoritarian regimes, drawing from the case of the relations between the church and state in the socialist GDR from 1945 to 1989.

3.2. Case Studies: Religious Leaders in Socialism

The current article is concerned with the traditional Evangelical country churches in East Germany in 1945–1989, which covered most people with a Christian faith on the territory of the GDR and were organized as regional independent churches, each headed by a bishop or a church president. As the umbrella church organization for the whole of Germany served—and still serves—the alliance “Evangelical Church in Germany” (EKD). The biographies and attitudes of three bishops and two priests in these Evangelical country churches in the GDR are presented here as examples of the types of positions towards the state and society that existed, following different configurations and intensities according to the two main dimensions (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

3.2.1. Bishop Otto Dibelius (1880–1967)

Otto Dibelius was one of the most prominent representatives and religious authority figures of the traditional Evangelical churches in Germany before 1945 already and became bishop of the Evangelical Country Church Berlin-Brandenburg in 1945. He headed a bishopric directly connected to vibrant political issues since it covered the capital Berlin and its special position during the Cold War, divided into a communist Eastern part and a democratically governed Western part.

Born in Berlin, Otto Dibelius studied theology (1899–1904) in his hometown and became priest of his church in 1906, administering communities in Berlin and Danzig until 1925. After the First World War, he experienced a career within the church administration; became a member of the racist, nationalist, and monarchist political party, the DNVP (“Deutschnationale Volkspartei”) (Neubert 2009a); and was a publicist of these topics mentioned, connecting them with the orientation of his church. As an author, he enjoyed a high level of public attention (Bormann and Gailus 2024). In 1925, he was appointed as “General-Superintendent der Kurmark” of his church, a senior position in the administration of the bishopric of the wider region surrounding Berlin.

Some historians claim that Otto Dibelius preferred a position of independence of the Evangelical churches from the state during the short democratic period in Germany in 1919–1933 (Bormann and Gailus 2024), while on 21 March 1933, he held a public sermon

in the important city of Potsdam near Berlin praising the new national-socialist regime of Germany. During the following spring and summer, he changed his mind and began to oppose it (Neubert 2009a).

The NS state, putting high pressure on churches to cooperate or face prosecution of their personnel, actuated the early retirement of Dibelius in June 1933. Subsequently, Dibelius started to engage in church structures opposing the regime (“Bruderrat der Beken-nenden Kirche”), activities to which the regime reacted with prosecution and imprisonment. Immediately after the Second World War, he was part of a group of prominent Evangelical church leaders who formulated the “Stuttgarter Schuldbekenntnis” in October 1945 (Wölbern 2024), a declaration of guilt of the churches over the establishment of the totalitarian NS regime in Germany in 1933–1945. In 1945, he became head of the Evangelical Country Church Berlin-Brandenburg, and declared himself holding the title of a bishop, a title previously not existing within the church.

As the head of the most prominent Evangelical church of the newly formed state, Otto Dibelius also became head of the Conference of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR in 1945–1966 (“Ostkirchenkonferenz”) and of the Council of Evangelical Churches in 1949 (“Rat der EKD”), the highest body of Evangelical churches covering both parts of Germany. From 1945 onwards, he was a member of the West German conservative party CDU and aimed for strong Christian influence on the development of both German states, preferring the model of the church (“for all Germans”—“Volkskirche”) and church–state relations as they were exercised in 1918–1933 (Wölbern 2024). Before and after 1945, he visited several countries with prominent national churches like Sweden, Switzerland, and England and met US President Harry S. Truman in 1948 (*ibid.*).

His Christian–political engagement led him to arrange negotiations with the government of the GDR over the status of the eight Evangelical country churches on its territory, until his activity was stopped in 1957 by a ban on his entry into the country. Until his retirement in 1966, he was a prominent critic of the government and privately described it as totalitarian and not legitimate (Neubert 2009a). Consequently, the state worked against his private life and public reputation until his death in 1967. In sum, his dissent and sometimes opposition to the state were accompanied by attempted engagement in society, with which he aimed at a church for the people but in fact addressed a certain milieu, the profoundly shrinking share of population of the GDR that supported his strong Christian–conservative attitudes.

3.2.2. Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim (1891–1977)

Moritz Mitzenheim studied Protestant theology in Leipzig, Berlin, Jena, and Heidelberg in 1911–1914 and served as a priest after 1916 in various locations in Thuringia, mainly in Eisenach in 1929–1945 (von Hintzenstern 1994). Mitzenheim did not follow the mainstream Protestant movement of the nationalized version of Christianity (“Deutsche Christen”) after 1933 but became a member of the opposition within the church (“Bekenntnisgemeinschaft”) in 1936, taking a leading position in 1943 (within the “Bekennende Kirche”) (Neubert 2009d). He became bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia in December 1945.

Moritz Mitzenheim did not straightly follow the path of his colleague, bishop Otto Dibelius, of public dissent to the regime. In the first few years after the Second World War, he visited political prisoners in Thuringia and defended his church and its young communities from state interference. During the 1950s, he became a promoter of good relations between his church and the state and therefore a preferred negotiating partner of the socialist government of the GDR (*ibid.*). As a member of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), he had a significant role in negotiations with the government, which, due to his influence, led to a mutual communiqué on 21 July 1958 (von Hintzenstern 1994). This agreement paved the way for continuous dialogue.

Mitzenheim reasoned his position according to a “Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine” (*ibid.*), where Christians had to serve “god and the government”—a theological interpre-

tation, which, as well as his factual cooperation, was criticized by other leaders of the Evangelical churches (e.g., Otto Dibelius). Up until his retirement in 1970, he informally established the “Thuringian Way”, which represented a state-loyal church policy in contrast to that of the majority of the Evangelical churches in the state (Neubert 2009d). Due to his loyalty and engagement, he was able to travel to religious leaders in Eastern Europe and India (1961), officially met the head of state, the committed Stalinist Walter Ulbricht, in August 1964, and received several medals of the state of the highest rank (1961: “Vaterländischer Verdienstorden”; 1966: “Stern der Völkerfreundschaft”). All in all, the relations between religion and the state took a different form from his perspective than in the cases discussed before (of Konrad Graf von Preysing and Otto Dibelius).

A qualitative assessment of the specific attitudes of single religious leaders towards the state has to include a wide set of factors. Significant ones are to be found in the files of the MfS documenting the results of the secret observation of bishop Mitzenheim, which are preserved for the years 1948 to 1962, most certainly the time frame of the adjustment of his attitudes towards the state. At the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, these files recorded three main social activities which were considered oppositional behavior by the regime: his engagement for political prisoners of the new regime, advocacy for Evangelical youth organizations, and open concern over the insufficient recruitment of new religious personnel to the church (since only a few students enrolled to study Evangelical theology after the Second World War, although there was a high demand for new priests) (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12256/92, 1952, pp. 70–85).

In the first period, the MfS recorded his rather oppositional point of view towards the state and his Christian-conservative vision for society, as they regarded him to be the “(.) strongest spiritual cornerstone of the Evangelical Church”, who “(.) wants to withdraw church offices from pastors who are progressive” (ibid., p. 52) and advised that “(.) men should work just among men, since they’re distracted by young ladies” (ibid., pp. 8–10), in 1950. He also advocated “(.) always for the unity of Germany” (ibid., p. 48) and for the independence of Protestant youth (ibid., pp. 3–29) and spoke against “(.) the machine people of the GDR (.)” (ibid., p. 31), which was evaluated by the MfS as “(.) opposing attitudes (.)” (ibid., p. 30) “(.) not compatible with the state order” (ibid., p. 52).

The ministry tried to break him out of the circle of Evangelical bishops but did not trust Mitzenheim in the early period of the GDR, as he was labeled an “old fox” (ibid., p. 1) and a “crafty brother”, who for them had a “double face” (ibid., p. 43). As a result, he was not only observed but also interrogated by Soviet officers in January 1951, showing no trust in the occupying power and “(.) aborting further negotiations and discussions” (ibid., p. 42) with them. After failed attempts to recruit him as an informant (“Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter”—IM), the Ministry of State Security (MfS) successfully gained said access to Senior Church Councilor Gerhard Lotz (1911–1981), the juridical deputy of bishop Moritz Mitzenheim in the church in Thuringia, who appeared in their reports as loyal to the state already by 1950 (ibid., p. 64) and as an “unofficial contributor” (IM) for the MfS after 1955 (Neubert 2009d).

In the early period from 1948 to 1952, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia itself was in movement since the proportions of state-loyal clerics and those opposing the state significantly changed here: a considerable number of the latter who did not agree with the politics of the state (and spoke against it) emigrated to West Germany, creating a majority of clerics in the church rather loyal to East German socialism, as the MfS noted in 1952 (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12256/92, 1952, p. 14). In the following years, an additional field of controversy emerged, over whose interpretation of peace (that of the church or state) should be translated to society, which was seen as a “fight about peace” (ibid., p. 39) by MfS officials. Hence, in February 1952, the ministry asked for the participation of Protestant priests in state-organized events like regional and local “Peace Committees”, which was rejected by Mitzenheim, who stated that the church “is no mood element at political events” (ibid., p. 40), adding references to church-organized events on the topic.

The year 1953 was marked by Stalin's death in March and a national uprising in June in the GDR against the high norms of work, which quickly expanded into protests throughout the country against economic, political, and social conditions in general. The aftermath of these events materialized in a tight and arbitrary security regime by the state. Non-political civil society organizations which organized fairs in villages were considered "(...) criminal organizations" (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12257/92, 1953, p. 7); Christian youth organizations were controlled even more strictly, as a focal point of public life exposed to public defamation (ibid., pp. 59–103); and the brother of bishop Mitzenheim was imprisoned because of his views on the state (ibid., p. 33). The eight Evangelical churches of the GDR were forced by the state to declare their position on the uprising of 1953. In a situation of high political pressure, Moritz Mitzenheim expressed his viewpoint towards the socialist state and the events of 1953 with the statement "We can talk about democracy and socialism, but never about atheism" (ibid., p. 92).

Three years later, in 1956, bishop Mitzenheim described his main task as "*to protect the church from attacks by the pagans*" (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12249/92, 1956, p. 5), which was still considered "(...) dangerous agitation and incitement" (ibid., p. 20) against the state, and the MfS again failed to recruit him (ibid., p. 11). Nevertheless, in order to achieve his goals of protecting the church and particularly its youth organizations, the reports describe that he began to regularly approach state institutions for requests and did ask for contact with state officials ("[...] considers that it his duty to visit the respective state representative out of respect for the state"; ibid., p. 23).

Accordingly, Mitzenheim decided on a moderate position towards the state based on his assumption that the main controversy about the collective organization of the youth left the church out of favor: among young people, a socialist youth consecration became the vast majority, opting against church membership, as they were excluded by the church (ibid., p. 106). Now, Mitzenheim discouraged members of his church from leaving the country (ibid., p. 24) amid a wave of emigration after 1953, did not denounce priests in public who participated in state-organized peace events (ibid., p. 78), and worked on an agreement between the Evangelical churches and the state, which was rejected in 1956 by the majority of the Evangelical bishops in the GDR because of its state-loyal position (ibid., p. 72). In February 1956, he secretly met the MfS informant "Hermann" (alias name) for a long conversation, in which he explained his isolation within the circle of Evangelical bishops in the GDR (ibid.) and later spoke disparagingly about bishop Otto Dibelius (ibid., p. 61). Additionally, he expressed his rejection of materialism (ibid., p. 122)—"(...) this is how he justified his loyal attitude to the GDR" (ibid., p. 128)—according to the authors of the files. This was indeed a remarkable statement in a state with an ideology based on materialism.

During the year 1956, superintendent (administrator of the church district of Weimar in Thuringia) Ingo Braecklein (1906–2001) entered the inner circle of bishop Mitzenheim (ibid., p. 128), who became his successor as the bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia in 1970, continued the special "Thuringian Way" form of cooperation with the state, and was registered within the files of the MfS as an "unofficial contributor" (IM alias "Ingo") from 1959 onwards (Sitter and Neubert 2009).

Increasingly, the files recorded the efforts of bishop Moritz Mitzenheim to uphold the position of a consensus towards the demands of the state. In June 1959, he expressed that "Freedom of religion and conscience prevail in the GDR"; in October, he thanked "(...) those who build the state" and confirmed that "Christians agree with the GDR government's desire for peace" (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12650/92, 1961, pp. 4–5). These political statements were evaluated positively by the ministry, and Mitzenheim was now regarded as a "(...) loyal pastor (...)" (ibid.) seeking a balance between the church and the state. This was confirmed by the observation that "(...) the NATO majority has removed Mitzenheim from the EKD" (ibid., p. 7), which meant that the circle of Evangelical bishops of the EKD in East and West Germany who were critical towards the GDR isolated him within the highest body of all traditional German Evangelical churches.

Despite strong indicators of his increased degree of loyalty to the state, the files additionally document ambivalence and mistrust in these relations from the side of the MfS: a few ambitious informants reported an oppositional position (“Mitzenheim often incites against the state”; *ibid.*, p. 9), and some were confused about his theological knowledge due to a lack of expertise (Mitzenheim was referred to as “(...) theologically not strong (...)” (*ibid.*, p. 9) and also an “(...) educated theologian (...)” (*ibid.*, p. 17)).

The following files document the success of the MfS in further disintegrating the circle of bishops of the Evangelical churches in the GDR involving Mitzenheim. As an example, in a meeting between the State Secretary for Church Affairs of the Government of GDR, Hans Seigewasser, and Moritz Mitzenheim in May 1962 on the request of the latter, Mitzenheim informed Seigewasser about the current developments within the group of Evangelical bishops. Appearing with his administrative deputies Ingo Braecklein and Gerhard Lotz—who were both registered as informants (IMs) of the MfS at that time (Sitter and Neubert 2009; Neubert 2009c)—he spoke about differences and conflicts on that level within the church, especially about his confrontation with bishop Krummacher and bishop Dibelius, and again about his growing isolation among the bishops (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 12250/92, 1962, pp. 1 and 56). For 1962, the files report opposing factions among and within the Evangelical churches in the GDR involving all levels of clerics, as well as the laity, over the issue of relations to the state (*ibid.*, pp. 23–63).

Mitzenheim asked state secretary Hans Seigewasser to support him in the form of high-ranking politicians publicly demonstrating the importance of the aforementioned communiqué of 1958 (Evangelical churches–state), which he co-authored (*ibid.*, p. 25). In sum, on the one hand, his loyalty to the state was remarkable for a religious leader in a socialist-governed state in Eastern Europe at that time, as he was once said to “(...) believe in the honesty of the state officials” (*ibid.*, p. 64), while, on the other hand, ambivalence characterized his relation to the state, with his resignation registered in 1960 on his cooperation with the state (*ibid.*, p. 22), and to his own church (“He is still committed in rejecting attempts by reactionary church forces to disrupt the situation” (*ibid.*, p. 67)).

During his time in office, opposition to Mitzenheim also grew within his church in Thuringia. Among one of these groups was the priest Werner Leich, who rejected the cooperative attitude of Mitzenheim in the 1960s, was against a socialist development and the secular youth consecration, and tried to build up opposition to Mitzenheim within church committees (BArch, MfS, AIM, no. 3206/91, 1979, p. 44).

3.2.3. Bishop Werner Leich (1927–2022)

Actively against emancipatory approaches in the university, Werner Leich studied Protestant theology in Marburg and Heidelberg in 1947–1951, became pastor in Wurzbach (Thuringia) in 1954, and became superintendent (administrative head) of the Lobenstein church district in Thuringia in 1969 (Neubert 2009b). Pursuing a steady career in the church (Vice President of the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia in 1967–1978, a member of the leadership of several governing bodies of the church), he was elected as bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia in December 1977 and assumed office in May 1978 as the successor of Ingo Braecklein (see above).

Accordingly, he engaged in nation-wide Evangelical church structures and became leading bishop of the Eastern Region of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELK DDR) in 1983–1986 and finally Chairman of the Conference of Evangelical Church Leaders of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) in 1986–90 (*ibid.*), representing the highest-ranking Evangelical bishop in the state of the GDR at a time of great change.

Although he met the head of state Erich Honecker on 3 March 1988 and the new head of state Egon Krenz on 19 October 1989, he cultivated an image of ending the course of close cooperation with the state, seeking a higher degree of political independence of the church than his predecessors (Mitzenheim and Braecklein) pursued, and calling for reforms in the GDR (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, his church in Thuringia did not address civil

society movements in the second half of the 1980s and therefore faced several occupations of church buildings—in particular due to its lack of official statements on independent movements for democracy (BArch, MfS, BV Swn, KD Perleberg, no. 10364, 1989, p. 26). Also, so-called round tables initiated by civil society movements to initiate a peaceful democratization of the state involved the church in Thuringia later than those in other regions (first 18 April 1990).

He preserved his conservative interpretation of Lutheran theology beyond his retirement in 1992, as in 2011, he authored an open letter by former bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran churches of Germany against the ordination of priests who live in same-sex partnerships (Berger et al. 2011).

Documentation of the activities of Werner Leich in the files of the Ministry for State Security began in the 1960s due to his opposition to the cooperative attitude of the then-bishop Moritz Mitzenheim, which Leich rejected in terms of the areas of common socialist and church development, and concessions regarding a socialist youth consecration. Hence, he tried to build up opposition to Mitzenheim while working on a network supporting his career within the church, interpreted by the MfS as him having “(...) gathered negative priests around him” (BArch, MfS, AIM, no. 3206/91, 1979 p. 44).

During his time as a priest, he was open to various groups of society and met young people, as well as craftsmen, intellectuals, and farmers, as was noted by the MfS with suspicion (*ibid.*, p. 42). His activities were diverse, as he also developed the habit of volunteering as a lifeguard on the Baltic Sea during the summer (*ibid.*, p. 36) and maintained connections to his former fellow students at university (*ibid.*, p. 30). These relations to various parts of society were accompanied by compromises between his conservative theology and (worldly) personal issues—in public, he spoke out against abortion, as reasoned by his interpretation of Evangelical Christian theology, while on the other hand, he favored abortion in the circle of his family. Hence, the MfS regarded him as “(...) not firm in his attitudes” (*ibid.*, p. 38).

As Werner Leich became superintendent in 1969 and a member of several governing bodies of the church in the 1970s, the MfS began to observe him as an individual case from 1972 onwards through its district administration in Gera. As the usual procedure for those intended to work as future informants, the district administration made detailed inquiries about Leich before making contact and, of course, used operational means for this purpose. In January 1974, the district administration approached him and made personal contact with Leich through the (fake) cover story of being involved in search measures for stolen church art objects. Leich later reported this conversation to his bishop, Ingo Braecklein, who at that time was an unofficial collaborator (IM) with the MfS. When the MfS approached him further using the cover story (e.g., February 1974), he invited a synod member to the conversation because “(...) he had the impression that the conversations were becoming regular. In principle, he had nothing against it, but only wanted to negotiate in the presence of a witness” (*ibid.*, p. 26). Subsequently, the MfS’s district administration stopped personal contact, completed its observation procedure in 1978, and sent the material to the respective department for religious issues (HA XX/4) at the headquarters in Berlin (*ibid.*, p. 27).

The MfS failed to recruit Werner Leich as an IM before 1978, but interest grew when he was elected as bishop of the Evangelical Church in Thuringia at the end of 1977. Accordingly, the ministry headquarters in Berlin opened a file for its purposes, referring to his case as belonging to the category of “person who was intended to be an IM” (“IM-Vorlauf”) and a person to contact, and even gave him code names (*ibid.*, pp. 16 and 30).

In March 1978, employees of the MfS headquarters in Berlin visited Leich in Eisenach, an appointment arranged in advance. Leich had been instructed by his predecessors on how to handle contact with the state apparatus, as they pointed out that the Ministry for State Security played a major role, according to his words recorded in the files. He concluded that the MfS had made a great contribution to creating good relations between the state and the church in Thuringia “(...) by eliminating disruptive factors. Bishop Mitzenheim had already been grateful for this experience” (*ibid.*, p. 32).

The meeting was followed by further conversations, mostly in Leich's office in Eisenach, as he generally attached great importance to these taking place on church premises and not in neutral locations or places belonging to the Ministry for State Security. His open management of these relations to the ministry was twofold: First, towards the MfS, as he stated to its representatives that he "(...) informed the church leadership and the bishops' convention about the existing contact. He sees this as a necessary measure to maintain trust" (ibid., p. 79). And, as he said, Leich also regularly kept the regional church authorities informed about his meetings with the MfS and their contents.

At a convention of church authorities, Leich presented a summary of guidelines on how to proceed with contact with state security authorities. The three guiding principles were (a) not to conduct discussions alone, (b) to meet on church premises and not in third places, and (c) to report these meetings to the regional church council (ibid., p. 182). On the other hand, this was half-hearted transparency, as he did not investigate leaks and suspected informants within his church further and demanded that no investigations of any kind be carried out. He reasoned this position according to the assumption that "This would definitely lead to mistrust and discord among the clergy. Such contacts simply exist and one must accept them" (ibid.).

However, there is no evidence in the files of informal cooperation of Werner Leich with the MfS. Leich had several discussions with its deputies from 1978 onwards, about which he kept the church leadership and the bishops' convention informed. These discussions were conducted until 1988, close to the end of the socialist regime in East Germany (BArch, MfS, AP, no. 11252/92, 1988, pp. 10–11). Although he cultivated a specific form of relations with the state and the MfS, the ministry noted in the files that it was successful in "(...) securing the Thuringian Way" (BArch, MfS, AIM, no. 3206/91, 1979, p. 16) when it described its special relations to the highest representative of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Thuringia.

3.2.4. Parish Priests Karl-Heinrich Zahn of Saxdorf (1939–2021) and Günter Meinhardt of Elsterwerda (1932–2022)

Karl-Heinrich Zahn received his high school diploma in 1957 in Thuringia and studied protestant theology in Halle/Saale from 1957 to 1962. From 1967, he was responsible for the parish in Saxdorf and the surrounding area (Schuster 2021), located today in the southwest of the State of Brandenburg. It is documented that right from the beginning of his work as a priest in Saxdorf, he was observed by the MfS: "In the old rectory building, he initially lived in the attic, while the Stasi lived downstairs" (Schmollack 2014). He began to organize non-political live music events in 1976 with music styles that were not traditional in the church (like Jazz), which attracted a wider audience of people beyond his local church community. Additional to those public acts of nonconformity (from the point of view of church and state officials) in the conservative East German province, he secretly lived in a homosexual relationship from 1967. His partner commuted between his hometown and Saxdorf—due to the rigid socialist housing regulations, he was only allowed to live there from 1980 onwards (ibid.). Against the will and public announcement of prominent Evangelical bishops (Berger et al. 2011), priest Zahn married his partner in 2005 (Schmollack 2014).

The case of Karl-Heinrich Zahn was prominent within the MfS and documented and observed not only at the district but also at the regional level (by the Cottbus office). He came to the attention of the MfS because in the 1980s, there was, in general, "(...) not much going on in the church district" (BArch, MfS, BV Cbs, AKG, no. 8777, 1987, p. 3), and most of the pastors did "(...) stick to a comfortable life" (ibid., p. 4) of conformity, as reported in their files. They further noted that "(...) only Pastor Zahn from Saxdorf offers alternative services with rock, puppet shows, pantomime" (ibid., p. 3), which, in its public nonconformity to the socialist-conservative point of view of the leadership of the district office of the ministry, was suspicious in itself. Hence, he was regarded as an "(...) advocate of the radical church movement" (ibid., p. 4). Also, his superiors within the

church tried to influence him in order to minimize his non-traditional activities, although without success (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, as priest Karl-Heinrich Zahn was actively engaged in issues of concern to wider parts of society beyond his church community, like local and regional environmental problems, universal ideas of pacifism, alternative ways of life, and tree planting campaigns, he obtained a considerable record at the MfS. Despite this level of attention, informants of the ministry also tried to downplay his impact on the locals, as they evaluated that he “(…) has no influence because the public is ‘not ready’ for his ideas” (*ibid.*). All in all, the statements, as well as the actions, of priest Zahn illustrate that he was a priest oriented towards ideals like pluralism and diversity—largely in opposition to church leaders and the state’s enforced doctrine—and also dealt with topics large parts of the population were not familiar with (yet).

Günter Meinhardt studied Protestant theology in Halle, Magdeburg, and Erfurt until 1959, was ordained in the same year, and became a priest in small villages in 1961–1968 (Parey and Kolochau) located in the southwest of the State of Brandenburg today. In 1968, he became responsible for a parish in the small nearby town of Elsterwerda, in which he served as a priest until 1996 (Verein für Pfarrerinnen 2007, p. 32). There is little record of priest Günter Meinhardt, apart from the remaining files of the MfS from the regional Cottbus headquarters, despite the fact that here, the majority of files were destroyed after the events of November 1989 by local officers (statement Bundesarchiv, BStU).

Since the MfS had a special focus on representatives of the two main churches and there was a low rate of activity of church representatives in the region of Cottbus (BArch, MfS, BV Cbs, AKG, no. 8777, 1987, pp. 3–4), the Protestant priest Günter Meinhardt from Elsterwerda came into its focus because he organized “(…) only discussion groups in his apartment” (*ibid.*, p. 5). This rather closed format of meeting created suspicion; additionally, the attendees of the events spoke about topics like environmental protection, peace, abortion, art, and culture on these occasions. Meinhardt was regarded as a multiplier of ideas and attitudes since he had also been a delegate at a non-state, independently organized ecological meeting in Magdeburg before (*ibid.*, p. 6). The contents covered in his discussion circles, like in the case of priest Karl-Heinrich Zahn, touched wider parts of society and topics beyond church issues (which were narrowly defined by their church and the state) and attracted intellectuals.

In sum, both priests fostered alternative ideas aside from the official state ideology; built, through their courage, small, narrow spaces in society; and found a local foothold among people reflecting their situation in the socialist regime of the GDR. As intellectuals as well as church representatives were perceived as a constant threat to the leaders of the regime, the MfS noted the sociologically significant point “(…) that people have come together who have charisma (..) even beyond Elsterwerda” (*ibid.*). Hence, the merging of both circles received special focus from the state security, a connection assumed to be a general threat and also a threat at the national level: it was constantly investigated if forces of the church had “(…) contacts with academic circles or other negative groups” (BArch, MfS, HA XX/4, no. 487, part 2, 1988, p. 19).

As the authoritarian system of the GDR was rigid towards representatives of churches, the latter, such as the nonconformist priests Zahn and Meinhardt, did not work explicitly against the state. The MfS also noted that from these rather uncommon church personnel, “No politically negative actions are to be expected” (BArch, MfS, BV Cbs, AKG, no. 8777, 1987, p. 6). Furthermore, the files recorded that for members of this particular group, “(…) efforts are being made to get along with state authorities” (*ibid.*, p. 7), read from the position of the ministry as a satisfying degree of political conformity.

Since church–state communication was not fully blocked from the side of the priests of the traditional Evangelical churches in the GDR, the MfS tried to make contact with members of the group through political channels at the location of their work. Here, the MfS tried to approach Evangelical religious dignitaries through the local representatives of the conservative Christian bloc party (a party under control of the SED) CDU-DDR. In

1987, the CDU-DDR received as an objective from the ministry winning over at least one dignitary per district as a party member (*ibid.*), which was a long-standing goal, yet never achieved. Priests mainly withdrew from political engagement. Additionally, the mayors of villages and towns were encouraged to approach priests to obtain information from them for the MfS. From the point of view of the Ministry of State Security, an improvement in the situation with the help of the mayors failed until 1987 because “(...) many mayors are afraid of a dialogue with the priests, since they [the priests] partly have intellectual superiority” (*ibid.*, p. 7).

4. Results

The Ministry for State Security (MfS) of the GDR, due to its extensive networks of agents and informants, was to be found throughout all layers of society and levels of party- and state-organized associations, as well as other independent, socially relevant groups in the state, like the Roman-Catholic Church and Evangelical churches. This fact indicates the importance these churches still had in society, including that attributed to them by the regime as the only independent major social forces left in the state (Enquete-Kommission 1994, p. 63).

Under the restrictive conditions of the secular authoritarian regime of the GDR in 1945–89, religious leaders had several options on how to act. They could either oppose it openly (and provoke sharp persecution), form a kind of dissent, or show nonconformity in an active or passive way (see Table 1). In terms of the second position, there was the option of withdrawing from political affairs, a method the Roman-Catholic Church opted for by following the decree of cardinal Konrad Graf von Preysing in 1947. The third general position was that of acceptance and support of the political regime, which can be further differentiated into passive and active conformity, at a more intense level of instrumental and ideological cooperation (see Table 1). Since the positions of churches on certain (societal and individual) issues were significantly defined by the attitudes of their distinct personnel, no uniform position of the Evangelical churches on the GDR in 1945–89 can be identified—exactly around the cleavage between nonconformity to and cooperation with the state, “overt dissent” (Ramet 2020, p. 266) broke out within Evangelical churches in the GDR not only in the 1980s but during the entire existence of the state.

Despite them being interspersed with informants, increasing involvement in official political and non-official social affairs of members and representatives of the Evangelical churches in East Germany could be observed during the 1980s. Whereas at its higher levels, conformity to and cooperation with the state were on the agenda during this period (for bishops and also special church jurists), at lower levels, mainly the absence of societal and political positioning was the dominant guideline in its daily work—but for some courageous priests, additionally, values of independence and plurality prevailed, which were defined as political by the regime. The activities of the latter also attracted increasing attention among influential social milieus like intellectuals and opened up (at first small) spaces of free speech and collective independent thinking.

The MfS exemplarily noted for the Herzberg district of its regional headquarters in Cottbus, which until then had a rather low profile within the MfS due to the low amount of activity there, that in 1985, the church’s activities were increasing, as was the number of church visitors (BArch, MfS, BV Cbs, AKG, no. 7439, 1985, pp. 1–2). The internal analysis of the MfS of the reasons for this unexpected development was formulated within a key sentence, of value for sociological classification: “(...) the successes were achieved through the increased activities of the pastors in individual work” (*ibid.*, p. 3). The uncontrolled meeting of church intellectuals with pluralist values, academic circles, and “(...) other negative groups” (BArch, MfS, HA XX/4, no. 487, part 2, 1988, p. 19) formed a civil society at the local level and unwillingly posed a threat to regime officials and their conservative collectivist ideology. This fact reflects Sabrina Ramet’s conclusion that “Indeed, nonconformity and dissent can in some circumstances be more powerful means to bring about change than either opposition or resistance” (Ramet 2020, p. 267).

Since the Evangelical churches in the GDR, due to their vital role in political development, are perceived as decisive elements in the overthrow of the socialist regime of the GDR and the democratization of the state today, we conclude that independent environmental, peace, and democratization movements in the 1980s also faced resistance by high-ranking leaders of the Evangelical churches at first, while a few courageous pastors with pluralist values at the local level created space for individual diversity. This included strong democratic values but, on the other side, was not connected to economic matters (as indicated by the narratives of the transition given today): several secret reports of the MfS for 1989, with an example from Rostock, a larger city by the Baltic Sea, given here, documented that “(...) the initiatives on democratization emphasize that they do not envisage capitalism” (BArch, MfS, BV Rst, Abt. XX, no. 37, 1989, p. 37). Despite a growing number of courageous, pluralist-oriented pastors during the 1980s, they were always in a slight minority within the Evangelical priesthood until 1989.

Religious dignitaries were crucial to forming the specific, qualitative structure of church–state relations in the GDR; hence, comparison and typification of their behavior on this issue reveal a spectrum of choices and created relations. Therefore, the current qualitative study focused on indicative examples of key religious leaders of the Evangelical churches in the GDR (see Table 1). After the introduction, which shortly mentioned the general passive nonconformity of the Roman-Catholic Church following the decree of cardinal Konrad Graf von Preysing in 1947, we first described the attitudes of Bishop Otto Dibelius in the 1940s and 1950s. He was a church leader of the older generation who shared Christian-conservative views about the church and the nation, combined them, and thereby did not reflect that his position was an approach that became increasingly milieu-oriented during his time in office as a bishop and was found among a sharply decreasing share of the population in the GDR. He chose a path of open opposition to the state and, as a reaction, was soon ousted by the regime in 1957. We describe this type as a “milieu-oriented (Dibelius: conservative) nonconformist church leader” in opposition (see Table 1).

Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim of the Evangelical Church of Thuringia (1945–1970) was a colleague of Otto Dibelius during the 1950s, as both met regularly at the “Eastern Church Conference” of Evangelical churches in the GDR from 1945 onwards. Mitzenheim was loyal to the church at first and open to diverse societal contact until the regime was able to “enclose” him in the 1950s by placing two informants (IMs) close to him, who also influenced his decisions. As a result, he transitioned to more conformist and later cooperative behavior towards the state but therefore became more isolated within the circle of Evangelical church leaders and among wider society. Due to his further engagement for the interests of his Evangelical church in Thuringia, as well as his skepticism and fickleness towards further cooperation with the state (which he was involved in nevertheless), the type he represents is described using the term “isolated, cooperative church leader”.

From 1970 to 1978, Ingo Braecklein was bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thuringia, was registered as “IM Ingo” in the files of the MfS already from 1956 onwards, and was in contact with the MfS until 1987 (Sitter and Neubert 2009). Whereas the activities of Braecklein characterize the type of a “milieu-oriented collaborator” (see Table 1), his successor, bishop Werner Leich, publicly ended the course of close cooperation with the state and proclaimed greater independence of the church. Werner Leich shared a conservative interpretation of Lutheran theology and was rather reluctant to position himself in relation to the state-independent democratic movement or civil society. Nevertheless, since he (transparently) went to meetings with the MfS, for the latter (and the SED state), the specific “Thuringian Way” was preserved, although he was not an informant (IM) working with them secretly. Hence, this type of religious leader can be described as a “milieu-oriented cooperator”.

The parish priests Karl-Heinrich Zahn of Saxdorf and Günter Meinhardt of Elsterwerda tended to the other side of the spectrum, where nonconformity was expressed in the type of a pluralist-oriented, but individually acting, courageous church leader. Here, within civil society in the late GDR, gatherings of locally anchored, diverse people formed, leaving

space for the exchange of often controversial attitudes and uncommon ideas. These were the “cells” where the demands of repressed movements for democracy could be expressed in the late 1980s and spread among wider parts of society—a development characterized by Ramet in the summarizing phrase “(...) nonconformity is precisely the spirit of democracy” (Ramet 2020, p. 268).

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Appendix A

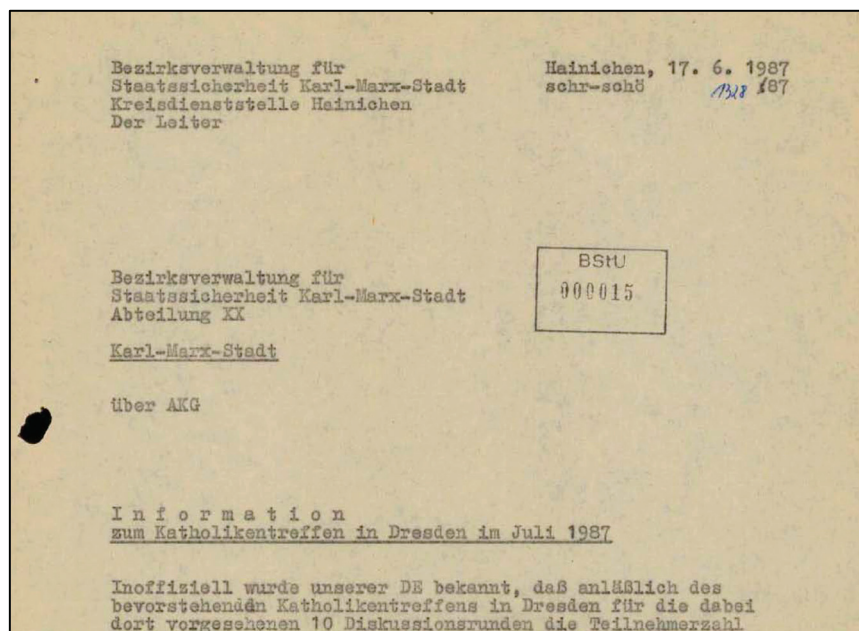


Figure A1. “Information on the meeting of Catholics in Dresden in July 1987”; Part of an original page of a formerly secret file of the district headquarters Karl-Marx-Stadt of the Ministry for State Security (MfS) of the GDR recording issues from the observation of religious leaders in the district of Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1987 (BArch, MfS, BV KMSt, KD Ha, no. 28, 1988, p. 8).

Notes

- ¹ “(...) a high predictability of the Catholic Church’s behavior towards the state.” (BArch, MfS, HA XX/4, no. 1528, 1987, p. 223). For the 1980s, the majority of the files covered here document that “(...) the Catholic Church shows no activities” (for example, for 1984; BArch, MfS, BV KMSt, KD Ha, no. 28, 1988, p. 385; these terms were also applied in BArch, MfS, BV Mgb, Abt. XX, no. 1446, 1985, p. 6; BArch, MfS, BV KMSt, KD Ha, no. 28, 1988, p. 224), which indicated to analysts of the ministry that the state was accepted widely among church members (e.g., BArch, MfS, HA XX/4, no. 916, 1986, p. 28), while, at the same time, they regarded a pastoral letter as an “(...) attack on the state order” (BArch, MfS, BV KMSt, KD Ha, no. 28, 1988, p. 393), revealing a general “mistrustful fickleness” among members of the MfS.
- ² A classification of acceptance and support of the state can be drawn according to the file categories of the MfS, which employed a spectrum from denied contact, unintended contact, voluntary contact, person of information (“Auskunftsperson”), to “unofficial collaborator” (a secret informant; IM).
- ³ “The parish community criticizes the priest’s coat of red paint.” (BArch, MfS, BV KMSt, KD Ha, no. 28, 1988, p. 65).

⁴ See note 3.

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Article

Transcending the Boundary Between the Religious and the Secular: The Sacralization of the Person in Korea's 1970s Protestant Democratization Movement

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Abstract: This study examines how South Korea's 1970s Protestant democratization movement embodied Hans Joas's concept of the "sacralization of the person" during the authoritarian Yushin regime. Challenging binary narratives of human rights origins as exclusively secular or religious, the research analyzes how Korean Protestant activists created institutions, rituals, and theological frameworks that infused human dignity with sacred character. The study demonstrates how religious actors effectively bridged religious and secular boundaries in human rights advocacy through historical analysis of the National Council of Churches in Korea's Human Rights Committee, Thursday Prayer Meetings, and the development of Minjung theology. The findings reveal a distinctive process of sacralization that evolved from individual to collective understandings of human dignity, culminating in the radical Minjung Messiah theory. This case study illustrates how Joas's affirmative genealogy operates in non-Western contexts, showing that sacralization emerges through dynamic interactions between religious conviction, historical events, and cultural transformation rather than through abstract reasoning alone. The Korean experience demonstrates that universal human rights gain moral force when diverse traditions collaborate to uphold human dignity across ideological divides.

Keywords: sacralization of the person; human rights; affirmative genealogy; democratization movement; Minjung Messiah theory; collective sacredness; value generalization

1. Introduction: The Origins of Human Rights and Sacralization Theory

Contemporary scholarship on the genealogy of human rights presents a complex intellectual landscape characterized by multiple competing narratives and disciplinary approaches. As Hans Joas, a prominent German social theorist and sociologist internationally recognized for his influential work on the relationship between religion and human rights, observes, the historiography of human rights encompasses "one of the most sterile debates" concerning whether human rights should be traced to religious or secular-humanist origins, yet this binary framing itself represents a problematic oversimplification (Joas 2015, p. 25; 2013; Joas and Moyn 2015). Similarly, Samuel Moyn, a prominent scholar in the history of human rights and international law, emphasizes that any genealogical approach to human rights must acknowledge the multiplicity of historical trajectories, cultural interpretations, and political investments that have shaped our understanding of these concepts over time (Joas and Moyn 2015, p. 10; Moyn 2010; 2014). Within this rich scholarly ecosystem, however, when we consider specifically the relationship between religion and human rights—the focus of this study—certain persistent tensions emerge between religious and secular interpretative frameworks, without necessarily reducing the broader genealogical complexity to these poles alone.

On one side of this particular tension stands the Enlightenment or humanist account, which locates the birth of human rights in the Age of Reason and the affirmation of the rational, autonomous individual. Proponents of this view argue that the idea of universal rights emerged as part of the secular natural-rights tradition and was codified during the great democratic revolutions of the late 18th century. The French Revolution of 1789, for example, toppled old regimes of the throne and altar in the name of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, enshrining the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as a charter of inalienable individual rights grounded in reason and natural law (George Mason University and American Social History Project 2025). Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire (1694–1778), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) championed the idea that all individuals possess inherent dignity and reason, which entitles them to equal rights and freedom of conscience independent of any religious sanction. In this narrative, human rights are a secular achievement: the triumph of critical reason over superstition and hierarchy, with modern liberal institutions owing their lineage to Enlightenment humanism and its faith in universal rational principles.

Opposing this approach is the religious genealogy of human rights, which roots the notion of inviolable dignity in Judeo-Christian theology and the long moral arc of Christendom. This perspective contends that the very concept of each person as *imago Dei*—made in the image of God—bequeathed a cultural ethos in which human life is sacred, providing the essential wellspring for modern rights. Thinkers in this camp point to medieval canon lawyers, Renaissance humanists, and early modern theologians who spoke of natural rights grounded in divine order, well before the Enlightenment. They note that key ideas of equality and liberty can be found in Christian teaching (for instance, the spiritual equality of souls, the Golden Rule, or the critique of tyranny by reformers) and argue that modern human rights ultimately blossomed from these theological seeds. One influential version of this argument, echoing the work of legal historian Georg Jellinek, holds that the first declarations of rights were an outgrowth of battles for religious liberty within Christian Europe (Kuruvilla 2021).

Of course, these two approaches do not exhaust the genealogical possibilities, nor do they represent unified camps. As Joas points out, within seemingly unified traditions, there exists tremendous diversity: even within Christian perspectives on human rights, there are profound variations ranging from personalist conceptions to more communitarian frameworks; similarly, secular approaches span from utilitarian calculations to Kantian deontology (Joas 2015, pp. 27–28). Moreover, Moyn correctly observes that many other factors beyond this religion–secular divide—including economic contexts, imperialism and decolonization, political mobilizations, and changing scales of governance—have profoundly shaped how human rights have been conceived and institutionalized throughout history (Joas and Moyn 2015, pp. 11–12). A truly comprehensive genealogy must account for these multiple historical trajectories, cultural interpretations, and political commitments rather than reducing complex historical processes to binary oppositions. This study therefore acknowledges the limitations of any simplified framework while focusing specifically on the productive tension between religious and secular understandings of human dignity in a non-Western context.

Despite this acknowledged complexity in scholarly discourse, these dichotomous explanations of human rights origins are frequently presented as opposing perspectives in both academic and public debates, creating a persistent conceptual tension that requires critical examination. Scholars supporting the secular Enlightenment view (e.g., Michael Ignatieff, Samuel Moyn) argue that religious interpretations limit the secular universality of human rights (Ignatieff 2001; Moyn 2014), while proponents of the religious perspective (e.g., John Witte Jr., Nicholas Wolterstorff) counter that without the Judeo-Christian

tradition, the concept of human rights loses its fundamental moral foundation (Witte 1993; Wolterstorff 2008, 2009). This dichotomy tends to overlook the diverse cultural sources of human rights discourse and reinforces a Eurocentric perspective. Notably, rich intellectual resources concerning human dignity and social justice can be found in non-Judeo-Christian traditions of East Asia, such as Buddhism and Confucianism.¹

Into this debate steps Joas, whose work seeks to move beyond the simple binary of “Enlightenment vs. Christianity” by offering a more integrated genealogy.² In *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights*, Joas proposes what he calls an “affirmative genealogy” of human rights—an innovative methodological approach that bridges the gap between historical narration and normative justification (Joas 2013, p. 3; Wolfsteller 2014, p. 107). Unlike Nietzsche’s destructive genealogical method, which assumes that understanding the contingent origins of values undermines their validity, Joas argues that recognizing the historical processes through which human rights emerged can actually strengthen our commitment to them (Dorfman 2015, pp. 361–62). This approach stands in contrast to both purely philosophical justifications that ignore history and solely historical accounts that avoid questions of legitimacy.

Central to Joas’s thesis is the concept of the “sacralization of the person”—a process through which every human being came to be viewed as sacred over time. Joas traces this development through key historical moments, such as the abolition of torture in European countries during the 18th century and the American abolitionist movement, demonstrating how experiences of violence could be transformed into positive value commitments supporting universal human dignity. Rather than viewing human rights as either the inevitable product of secular Enlightenment reasoning or as directly derived from religious traditions, Joas shows how both religious and secular elements contributed to their emergence through complex processes of cultural transformation and “value generalization” (*Wertgeneralisierung*). Specifically, value generalization is the process of making a value more universal by communicating different and conflicting values in a thoughtful way (Joas 2013, pp. 173–91).

Joas’s intervention reframes the question of origins: rather than crediting either secular reason or religious doctrine alone, he investigates how certain values and experiences became universalized as sacred, yielding the modern commitment to human rights (Kuruvilla 2021). Building on Joas’s insight, the present study turns to a concrete historical arena where the interplay of religious conviction and human rights ideals can be clearly observed: South Korea’s democratization movement in the 1970s, under the authoritarian Yushin regime of President Chung-hee Park (1917–1979).³ This period offers a vivid case of how Protestant and Catholic activism helped catalyze a nascent human rights discourse in a non-Western context. In the 1970s, as political repression and martial law curtailed freedoms in South Korea, it was often church leaders and faith-inspired lay activists who emerged as the champions of democracy and human dignity (Shin et al. 2007, pp. 33–39).

Figures such as Cardinal Sou-hwan Kim (1922–2009), Protestant pastors like Ik-hwan Moon (1918–1994), and countless Catholic nuns and Protestant student organizers took great personal risks to speak out against torture, censorship, and the denial of basic liberties. They did so in explicitly moral terms, invoking the inviolable rights of the human person—language resonant both with Christian teaching and international human rights norms. For example, Christian groups formed human rights committees (the Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice, the Protestant National Council of Churches’ Human Rights Committee, etc.) to document abuses and demand justice (Park et al. 2024; Jeong et al. 2024). They organized prayer meetings and public vigils that doubled as protests for the sacred value of human life against the depredations of state power.

In doing so, these Korean religious actors were effectively sacralizing the principle of human rights in their own cultural context—translating the idea of universal dignity into the lived experience of their communities. Their efforts blurred the line between the sacred and the secular: prayer rallies invoked God’s love for the oppressed even as they pressed for secular legal reforms; church networks provided shelter to dissidents and also disseminated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in local translations. This convergence of faith and rights in 1970s Korea illustrates Joas’s thesis on a global stage: it was precisely through religious language and institutions that a broader universalist vision—that every person’s freedom mattered—gained traction under a repressive regime. In effect, Korean Christians helped instill an “aura of sacredness” around the suffering individual, emboldening a wider social movement for democracy and human rights.

By examining this South Korean case, this study intervenes in the human-rights-origins debate with an empirical example of sacralization in action. Particular religious communities can ignite moral universalism without reducing it to a purely secular enlightenment script or a sectarian agenda. The Yushin-era activism of churches in Korea demonstrates that the legacy of human rights is neither Western nor Christian in any exclusive sense—it is a living tradition continually renewed at the intersection of religious conscience and secular advocacy.

In the sections that follow, I will analyze how Protestant and Catholic actors in Korea drew upon their spiritual commitments to galvanize resistance and how their witness in turn contributed to a more universal language of rights and justice in Korean society. This inquiry builds on Hans Joas’s framework, using it to understand a specific historical milieu in which the sacredness of the person became a rallying cry. By doing this, it hopes to add to the larger academic discussion on the history of human rights by showing that there is a lot more to the story than just the Enlightenment and the start of Christianity. There is a complicated history of cultural change going on, and sacred and profane urges have always been mixed together to protect people’s dignity (Joas 2013, p. 31; 2021, p. 270). The hope is that such a perspective clarifies historical debates and underscores a practical truth: the universality of human rights is strengthened, not threatened, when we recognize the plurality of its sources and the necessity of their ongoing engagement in our world today.

2. The Sacralization of the Person: Hans Joas’s Affirmative Genealogy of Human Rights

Joas’s theory focuses on the concept of the “sacralization of the person”, which suggests that human rights emerged from cultural and moral transformations in Western and global culture over the past few centuries. This process was driven by historical experiences, such as the abolition of judicial torture and slavery, which mobilized secular and religious arguments to repudiate practices that desecrated human dignity (Joas 2013, pp. 37–68). These reforms, championed by Enlightenment philosophes and Quaker or Evangelical Christians, gradually instilled the idea that certain harms to the person were intolerable because they had become inviolable (Joas 2013, p. 87).

While Joas’s theory of sacralization offers valuable insights, it is primarily grounded in the historical experiences of Western Europe and North America, which presents certain limitations. In light of this, the present study examines how Joas’s theory is transformed and expanded when applied to non-Western societies such as Korea. The process of human sacralization that emerged in South Korea’s 1970s democratization movement unfolded in a compressed and radical manner, unlike the gradual process observed in the West. Moreover, Christian language and concepts combined with Korea’s traditional thought and min-jung movements to form a distinctive discourse of sacralization. This demonstrates that the sacralization of human rights is not simply a transplantation of Western models but

rather a process that is reinterpreted and recreated within each society's unique cultural and historical specificities.

Joas also talks about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the apex of this process of sacralization. It was a "value generalization" in which different religious groups (Christian, humanist, and others) came together after the horrors of World War II to make sure that everyone has the same rights and dignity (Joas 2013, p. 174). Crucially, Joas insists that this evolution was not inevitable or linear; it was not the unfolding of a preset Enlightenment teleology of progress, nor the smooth realization of an age-old Christian ideal (Joas 2013, p. 60; 2021, p. 232). Rather, it was a fraught, dialectical development in which religious and secular motivations interacted, sometimes clashed, and eventually produced a new moral consensus (Joas 2013, p. 25). As Joas puts it, neither a one-sided secular thesis nor a one-sided Christian thesis alone can explain the historical dynamics by which human rights emerged—Only a complementary interplay between Enlightenment ideas and Christian praxis (among other factors) captures the full picture (Joas 2013, p. 140).

Joas's critique of the Enlightenment-only view is pointed. He challenges the "charisma of reason" narrative—the notion that human rights arose simply from the spread of rational enlightenment and the casting off of religion (Joas 2013, pp. 9–36). In particular, he critiques Max Weber's idea of the "charisma of reason" by arguing that this view overly simplifies the historical reality of human rights' emergence. Joas's critique of the "charisma of reason" narrative is indeed multifaceted and historically grounded. He systematically dismantles the conventional secular-humanist understanding of human rights as the exclusive product of Enlightenment rationalism. At the heart of his critique is a rejection of Weber's conceptualization of human rights as "extreme rationalist fanaticism" (Joas 2013, p. 28). Joas points out that Weber perceived human rights as the "last form that charisma has adopted in its fateful historical course", suggesting an inevitable secularization process where rational principles replaced religious ones (Joas 2013, p. 29). But Joas argues this framework misunderstands the actual historical genesis of human rights declarations.

Joas's historical analysis reveals that the American Declarations of Rights were shaped by both Protestant religious convictions and Enlightenment rationalism, rather than solely by anti-religious Enlightenment thinking. He argues that in eighteenth-century America, Americans "learned their Enlightenment from the pulpit", highlighting the inseparable nature of spiritual and Enlightenment influences (Joas 2013, p. 25). Joas also finds fault with the mischaracterization of the French Revolution as fundamentally anti-religious. He shows that the Declaration of the Rights of Man was drafted during the Revolution's early phase when religious sentiment was still strong, not during its later anti-clerical period. The declaration itself invokes "the presence and auspices of the Supreme Being" and describes rights as "sacred" (Joas 2013, p. 16).

By examining the actual historical evidence, Joas concludes that human rights arose neither exclusively from secular rationalism nor solely from religious traditions but from their productive interaction. By reframing the genesis of human rights not as the charismatic triumph of reason but as the sacralization of the person and universal human dignity, Joas seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges both the secular and religious currents that converged to shape modern human rights. So, instead of seeing human rights as a "charismatization of reason", he says we should see them as a "charismatization of human personhood"—a process of making all people holy, not just those who can reason (Joas 2013, pp. 32–33). This more complex genealogy allows Joas to avoid Weber's tragic framework, where religious forces create a regime that ultimately undermines them and simplistic religious triumphalism. Instead, he opens space for understanding how religious and Enlightenment values could work together in articulating and institutionalizing the universal dignity of individuals.

On a methodological level, Joas describes his approach as an “affirmative genealogy” (Joas 2009, pp. 15–24; 2013, pp. 97–139). Unlike purely debunking histories that might reduce human rights to accidental byproducts or instruments of power, he seeks a genealogy that can explain human rights’ moral power while affirming their validity (Szücs 2024, p. 160). This affirmative genealogy has invited both interest and criticism. Philosophers such as Otfried Höffe have cautioned that Joas, as a sociologist, ventures into normative territory by suggesting that understanding the sacred origins of human rights also helps justify their universal claim. Höffe worries that bridging description and validation in this way risks an “unauthorized intervention” into philosophy (Szücs 2024, p. 161). Defenders of Joas, however, see his work as a healthy corrective to overly rationalist or providential accounts: it reminds us that the commitment to human rights is ultimately a moral choice, sustained by cultural values and narratives, not a self-evident truth that reason or religion can secure alone (Szücs 2024, pp. 175–78).

As theologian Robert Gascoigne observes, secular humanists and Christians today often find themselves “happily...developed into a shared commitment” to defending human rights despite their divergent metaphysical beliefs (Gascoigne 2015a). For a Christian to claim exclusive credit for human rights, or a secularist to deny any religious contribution, would be, Gascoigne argues, “arrogant and unwarranted”, given that both traditions at their best converge on the sacredness of the person and the ethic of compassion (Gascoigne 2015a). Joas’s work underlines this very point: by understanding human rights as arising from a culturally transformative process of sacralization, we appreciate that moral universalism has diverse wellsprings and allies. It is not the patrimony of the Enlightenment alone, nor the exclusive legacy of Christianity—it is a creative synthesis that took shape over time, and that requires ongoing cultivation.

Gascoigne further elaborates that the concept of the sacredness of the person inherently challenges a strict secular–religious dichotomy. He draws on the idea of secularization as differentiation, where the political sphere becomes independent of religious authority, yet the concept of sacredness permeates the broader ethical culture (Gascoigne 2015b, pp. 180–81). This perspective does not suggest the expulsion of religion from the public sphere, but rather the existence of sacred values within a secular framework. Thus, the sacredness of the person, while rooted in religious traditions, also transcends them and becomes a shared moral resource in liberal secular societies. Unlike a purely secular view that says human rights are only the result of rational action or legal agreement, Gascoigne, following Joas, says that everyone’s recognition of human dignity came about through a process of sacralization. This process was not solely religious, nor purely secular; instead, it was a cultural transformation influenced by diverse historical experiences, including the abolition of slavery and responses to the atrocities of the World Wars (Gascoigne 2015b, p. 190). The concept of the sacredness of the person, therefore, signifies more than just moral obligation; it represents a deep cultural commitment to viewing each individual as inviolable.

By emphasizing the intersection of the sacred and the profane, or in his own words, “the religious and the ethical”, Gascoigne challenges the notion that human rights must either be wholly secular or exclusively religious. Instead, he advocates for an inclusive moral framework where both traditions mutually enrich the understanding of human dignity (Gascoigne 2015b, pp. 191–92). This perspective aligns with Joas’s critique of reductionist narratives that either entirely secularize human rights or monopolize them within religious doctrines. In this light, human rights advocacy becomes a collaborative moral endeavor that unites diverse ethical traditions rather than isolating them. This synthesis not only affirms the dignity of the human person but also challenges modern societies to recognize the ongoing need to nurture and protect this sense of sacredness in the face of

ideological and political threats. By fostering an ethos that respects the sacredness of individuals, both religious and secular movements can find common ground in advocating for universal human rights, thereby moving beyond divisive foundational debates to a more practical and inclusive solidarity.

3. The Sacralization of the Person in South Korea's Democracy Movement: The Protestant Contribution

Having established Joas's theoretical framework in the previous section, we now turn to a concrete historical context that vividly demonstrates how this process unfolded: South Korea's Yushin era or the Fourth Republic of Korea (1972–1979), which was a one-person presidential system designed to allow the president, who held all three powers of administration, legislation, and judicial power, to rule for life. Under dictator Chung-hee Park's authoritarian regime, Protestant churches emerged as crucial sites where abstract human rights principles gained moral authority and became imbued with an "aura of sacredness". Given that the main protagonists of the democratization movement within religious circles in 1970s Korea were Christianity, specifically Protestantism and Catholicism, "the democratization movement in religious circles during the Yushin regime era, which was the darkest period of Korean democracy where democracy was thoroughly annihilated in modern Korean history, predominantly appeared as a "Christian' phenomenon" (Cho 2008, p. 19; Kang 2009, p. 408).

What makes the Korean case particularly illuminating is how rapidly the process of sacralization unfolded within a compressed timeframe, contrasting with the gradual evolution observed in Europe. In Korea, Christian actors mobilized religious language and practices to promote universal human dignity during a time of national crisis, offering insights into how sacralization processes transcend cultural boundaries and adapt to specific historical circumstances.

3.1. Institutional Embodiment of Sacralization: The NCKK Human Rights Committee

In South Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) emerged as a critical institutional vehicle through which the acceleration of sacralization occurred (Kang 2009, p. 368).⁴ The path toward establishing human rights as a sacred value began taking institutional form in 1973, when the NCKK Research Committee noted the global ecumenical movement's growing shift from development issues to human rights concerns. This awareness prompted the formation of a consultation that eventually led to the creation of the NCKK Human Rights Committee in 1974—the first non-governmental human rights organization in Korea (NCKK Human Rights Committee 2005, p. 25).

Chung-hee Park's authoritarian Yushin regime (1972–1979) completely discarded the liberal democratic tendencies maintained since the founding constitution and severely violated citizens' human rights. Resistance movements emerged in response, with the global church community supporting the NCKK's human rights activism. As progressive Protestant Christians began resisting the Yushin regime, many were detained and arrested by the government, prompting the NCKK to establish a human rights committee to protect "freedom of mission" (Son 2014, p. vi).

The timing was important: the Human Rights Committee was set up on 4 May 1974, at a crucial time when immediate action was needed for Pastor Hyung-kyu Park and others who were jailed during the '1973 Namsan Easter incident' in June 1973,⁵ and to decide how the church should respond to the *Mincheonghakryeon* (KDYL: Korean Democratic Youth League) incident,⁶ which involved many Christian university students (NCKK Human Rights Committee 2005, pp. 84–85).

As evident in the “Human Rights Declaration” first announced by the Council on Human Rights Issues in November 1973, which became the catalyst for establishing the Human Rights Committee: “Human rights are values on earth given by God. God, who created humans in His image (Genesis 1:27), is liberating them from all bonds and creating a society free from human rights violations. Following His work, the church believes that establishing human rights is a mission on earth (Luke 4:18) and is convinced that the church’s mission for this era lies in establishing human rights, which are the basis for individual survival and the foundation for social development” (NCKK Human Rights Committee 2005, pp. 59–60). This religious perspective gave human rights a powerful importance, making individual dignity sacred by connecting it to divine creation.

Based on the “Human Rights Declaration”, the NCKK Human Rights Committee established a systematic approach to addressing rights violations, identifying six key areas of focus: (1) research on human rights issues and freedom of mission, (2) fact-finding investigations, (3) awareness-raising activities for human rights protection, (4) promoting solidarity with domestic human rights advocacy efforts, particularly for prisoners and disaster victims (including atomic bomb survivors), (5) developing relationships with international human rights activities, focusing on Korean miners in Germany, Korean residents in Japan, and atomic bomb victims, and (6) organizing Human Rights Week events. Additionally, the committee planned to support the salary of staff at the Korean Church Women United’s Human Rights Committee, suggesting it aimed to serve as a headquarters for Protestant human rights movements. The vast majority of funding for these activities and support came from WCC financial contributions (Hwang 2024, p. 119). This comprehensive framework extended well beyond narrow religious interests, embracing a universal vision of human dignity that mirrored Joas’s concept of value generalization. The committee’s work seamlessly integrated international human rights norms with Christian theological concepts, creating a moral vocabulary that could resonate both with believers and secular activists.

3.2. *Ritual Practices and the Generation of the Sacred*

The sacralization of human rights in 1970s Korea was not only articulated through theological statements but actively generated through religious rituals that transformed abstract principles into lived moral experiences. The Thursday Prayer Meeting, initiated in July 1974 by families of those imprisoned in the KDYL incident, exemplifies how religious ritual became a vehicle for sacralizing human rights under the Yushin regime (Jeong 2024b, p. 455).

The KDYL incident dealt a severe blow to Protestant social movements, paralyzing the Korean Student Christian Federation (KSCF), one of the main pillars of Protestant activism, and subsequently making prisoner support a central focus of Protestant social movements. From July 1974, families of the imprisoned formed a council and began holding regular Thursday prayer meetings, which became the starting point for the “Thursday Prayer Meetings” that would serve as a key platform for Protestant democratization movements thereafter (Hwang 2024, p. 125). These Thursday Prayer Meetings (which were held on Fridays from 1976 to 1979) hold significant historical importance in Korea’s democratization movement as “spaces where anyone could participate in discussions about democracy and where different views could be mutually adjusted—spaces of empathy and communication as well as concrete action”, essentially serving as “the longest-running political and resistance public sphere” (Ko 2021, p. 67).

For instance, the fact that the People’s Revolutionary Party (in Korean, “Inhyeok-dang”) case was first exposed through these Thursday Prayer Meetings illustrates the function they served in the development of Korea’s religious human rights movement. Under Emergency Measure No. 4, enacted on 3 April 1974, those connected to the KDYL were

unjustly sentenced to life imprisonment and even death in military courts on charges of violating the presidential emergency measure and conspiracy to rebellion. The Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) fabricated claims that the KDYL was controlled by a communist organization called the “People’s Revolutionary Party Reconstruction Committee” and falsely accused them of attempting to overthrow the government. The Yushin regime concluded that this committee, allegedly operating under North Korean orders, had manipulated the KDYL to overthrow the government and establish a communist state. As a result, eight individuals associated with this committee who had received final verdicts from the Supreme Court were executed at dawn on 9 April 1975. Like the first People’s Revolutionary Party case in 1964, there was no evidence of organizational formation, and the case was fabricated through forced confessions (Jeong 2024b, p. 458).

While the KDYL incident garnered widespread public attention, few beyond their families showed concern for those implicated in the People’s Revolutionary Party case. In this context, George E. Ogle, an American Methodist minister who had come to Korea as a United Methodist Church missionary in 1954 and had actively implemented educational programs based on workers’ rights and labor law while developing the Korean Urban Industrial Mission for 20 years, delivered a sermon at the Thursday Prayer Meeting on 10 October 1974. He spoke about how the human rights of those involved in the People’s Revolutionary Party case were being violated, receiving harsh sentences without evidence, and called for prayers on their behalf. As the fabricated nature of the case and the use of torture came to light through these prayer meetings, Reverend Ogle was forcibly deported on 14 December 1974 for his statements (Ogle 2007, pp. 37–70).

While the National Prayer Breakfast, held during the same period at Seoul’s most luxurious hotel, openly supported the Chung-hee Park government and the Yushin regime, the Thursday Prayer Meetings were prayer gatherings for the victims of Park’s regime and political prayer meetings for those who resisted the military dictatorship (H.-S. Kim 2017, pp. 176–81). Most importantly, these prayer meetings were historically significant because they allowed families of detainees to share news about their loved ones and for churches and families to express their opinions (Kang 2009, p. 139). These prayer meetings functioned simultaneously as spiritual gatherings and political protests, transforming personal suffering into collective moral claims. Participants would gather to pray for imprisoned loved ones while also reading testimonies of torture, documenting rights violations, and articulating a vision of human dignity that transcended the regime’s oppressive nationalism. Through these weekly rituals, the suffering of political prisoners was elevated from mere private tragedy to sacred witness, and the demand for their freedom became not just a political position but a moral imperative. The prayer meetings thus served as what Durkheim might identify as collective effervescence—moments when the sacred is generated and experienced through communal ritual.

This ritual dimension of sacralization extended beyond formal prayer meetings to include public declarations, vigils, and worship services that incorporated human rights themes. These practices created spaces where participants could experience what Joas describes as the affective dimension of sacralization—the emotional and existential commitment to human dignity that transcends rational calculation.

3.3. *Theological Articulations of Human Sacredness*

The theological articulation of human rights in the Korean Protestant democracy movement’s contexts did not simply appropriate secular human rights discourse but actively transformed it. A representative example of these changes is the “Theological Statement of Korean Christians”, which was publicly announced on 18 November 1974, under

the names of 66 individuals, and is considered “one of the most critical documents Christians made to protest against Park’s regime” (J. Kim 2022, p. 392).⁷

The historical context of this statement includes the political climate under Park’s regime and the role of Christians in opposing it. In 1974, during Emergency Measure No. 4, while a military court was giving harsh sentences to students involved in the KDYL incident, including the death penalty and life in prison, Protestant groups felt it was important to support and justify the various statements made by church leaders up to that time, like the “1973 Korean Christian Manifesto”. In particular, on 9 November 1974, at a “Prayer Meeting for the Prime Minister” hosted by the Korean Christian Businessmen’s Committee, Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil cited Romans 13:1–7 to claim that “the church must obey the government, and the government is recognized by God”, thereby denying the legitimacy of Christians’ political participation at the national level (M.-b. Kim 2010, p. 155).

This incident led to a strong call to theologically reexamine issues such as “state and religion”, “human rights”, and “church mission”, and to philosophically justify the church’s participation in the democratization movement. Sixty-six Protestant leaders issued the “Theological Statement of Korean Christians” due to this theological necessity. Like the “1973 Korean Christian Manifesto” announced in May 1973, this Statement also occupied an important position in the theological justification of the democratization movement. However, unlike the former, which was written secretly abroad by a small anonymous group, this declaration was distinctive in that it was publicly announced with the joint signatures of many theologians, pastors, Christian professors, and others who had given their consent domestically.

Examining the content of the Statement, it first explains who the subjects issuing this Statement are (“We are members of the worldwide Christian community who believe that Christ is the savior of world history. At the same time, we are Christians and theologians who, as Korean citizens, recognize our mission to proclaim the gospel of Christ in this country, establish justice, and establish God’s order”), and why they are issuing such a Statement (“Christ did not come to the institutional church but came right into the midst of this world, this history. The history of salvation encompasses all things human... Therefore, our concern is not with whose hands the regime is in, but with its institutions and policies”). The Statement then immediately raises issues with the reality of Korean democracy under the Yushin regime from three aspects: (1) “Is power exercised with awareness of its limits and for justice?”; (2) “Are basic human rights, which belong to God, guaranteed?”; (3) “Is the freedom of religious practice guaranteed?” (NCKK Human Rights Committee 1987, p. 404).

In answering these questions, the Statement states that “since the establishment of the current regime, through garrison decrees, declarations of emergency, constitutional amendments, and finally presidential emergency measures, power has been moving in the direction of absolutization” and that “by identifying the state with the government, criticism of government policies by the press or acts of criticism have come to be treated as anti-state crimes under the pretext of national security”. Furthermore, it claims that the Chung-hee Park regime “extremely violates human rights” by “controlling the press, surveilling campuses, and suppressing peaceful demonstrations with force”, and is “increasingly infringing upon the freedoms of faith and mission” (NCKK Human Rights Committee 1987, p. 404). In particular, the Statement directly raises the issue of human rights violations resulting from the Yushin regime’s economic high-growth policy as follows, making it “the first authentic, explicit, and theological ‘Korean Christian Declaration of Human Rights’” (J.-H. Kim 2007, p. 52): “So, when the poor get poorer due to power’s improper intervention

and the economic structure's flaws, to the point where their right to live is infringed upon, this is a violation of God's human rights" (NCCCK Human Rights Committee 1987, p. 406).

The "Theological Statement of Korean Christians" emphasizes the importance of human rights based on the spirit of the Bible, directed not only toward the Yushin regime but also toward the mainstream Korean church, which was acquiescing to the Yushin regime and remained silent about the horrific reality of human rights abuses. "Institutions and laws are recognized only insofar as they serve human rights. Institutions and laws exist for people, not the other way around. In this sense, Jesus said, 'Man was not made for the Sabbath law. The Sabbath was made for man. Man is the lord of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27–28). This is the first declaration of human rights against oppressive institutions and laws" (NCCCK Human Rights Committee 1987, p. 406).

When Protestant leaders like Ahn Byung-Mu said that "human rights come from God before the state", that "human rights need protection from powerful groups that might violate them", and that "everyone is equal" (Ahn 1989, p. 185), they were creating a unique idea of sacredness that opposed both the absolute power of the state and the idea of individual rights as completely separate. The person was seen as sacred not as an independent individual, but as someone made in God's image and part of communities that share responsibility for one another. The person was sacred not as an autonomous, self-sufficient individual, but as a being created in God's image and embedded in communities of mutual responsibility. This theological framing allowed Protestant activists to critique both the authoritarian state and unrestrained capitalism as violations of human dignity.

This theological framing positioned Christian leaders not merely as advocates for abstract rights but as witnesses to a sacred order that the Yushin regime had violated. Indeed, the "Theological Statement of Korean Christians" redefines the scope of the church's missionary activities as political and social activities in modern society and firmly declares that such activities will continue without submission to state power's oppression: "The fact that today's Korean Christians carry out mission as political and social action is not because they do not know that the kingdom of God comes as God's gift and not by human power, nor because they think that the political and social actions of the church can create a decisive ideal society at once. We must continue our missionary work because we see our model of life and action in the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles, the witnesses and martyrs in Christian history, and, above all, in Jesus Christ's missionary activities. This is because we stand firmly in the hope of the coming of God's kingdom and resurrection" (NCCCK Human Rights Committee 1987, pp. 406–7).

This willingness to sacrifice for human rights—to treat them as values worth dying for—exemplifies what Joas identifies as the hallmark of sacralization: the elevation of certain values beyond utilitarian calculation. Thus, Joas's "theory of values" that forms the methodological foundation for analyzing the process of sacralization of personhood provides an important clue to clarifying the longstanding issue in the history of South Korea's democratization movement: "Why did only some Christian churches participate in the democratization movement under military dictatorship or dependent authoritarian state systems?" (Kang 2009, p. 409).

In his subsequent works, In-Cheol Kang, a prominent Korean sociologist of religion who raised this question, explained four major factors that enabled only a minority of Protestants and Catholics to participate continuously and passionately in the democratization movement during the Chung-hee Park regime.

First were the dynamics of hostility and confrontation between religion and politics, or church and state, where external conflict (with state power) temporarily strengthened internal unity (solidarity within the church). Those who actively participated in the democratization movement, whether Protestant or Catholic, were certainly a minority within

their churches. However, solidarity with and a sense of indebtedness toward that minority who stood at the forefront of the democratization movement and suffered the most severe oppression from the state gradually penetrated the entire Protestant and Catholic communities, ultimately generating stronger internal cohesion and a spirit of resistance within the churches. Second, both Protestantism and Catholicism had international networks and support systems spanning the globe. In particular, after World War II, the WCC was organized and played a significant role as the center of the ecumenical movement and as a global network, and the Protestant democratization movement in 1970s Korea also developed as a transnational movement extending beyond Korea to North America, Europe, Japan, and elsewhere through these international networks.

Third, a professionally well-organized Protestant activist community formed around the NCKK. The NCKK Human Rights Committee mentioned earlier was the central organization of this professional activist community, and the Thursday Prayer Meetings were its main activity space. Finally, the internal homogeneity and emotional bonds among clergy stemming from the unified training structure of small denominations enabled the leadership of a resistant minority (Kang 2013, pp. 261–93).

While this analysis provides sociologically convincing answers, it fails to explain the profound ethical and religious transformation that occurred in the form of genuine conversion among social actors (whether pastors or male and female laypersons) who committed themselves to the democratization and minjung movements even at the risk of their lives. Here, Joas's theory of values offers important implications because it illuminates the intense orientation toward values—that is, experiences of self-transcendence characteristic of religious life and values which, according to Joas, are “discursive articulations of experiences that produce a commitment to something that is subjectively evident and affectually intense” (Joas 2015, p. 30).

Joas distinguishes value from simple norms or preferences as a powerful internal driving force of human action (Joas 2000, pp. 4–17). In his theory, values are formed through emotional yet reflective experiences of “intensely feeling that something is precious, being drawn to it, and yearning for it” (Shin 2018, p. 17). This process of value generation occurs through the dynamic interaction of “self-transcendence” (*Selbsttranszendenz*) and “self-formation” (*Selbstbildung*) (Joas 2000, pp. 116–17).⁸

Particularly noteworthy is what Joas calls the paradox of values. Values do not arise from our conscious choices or logical persuasion but rather emerge from “extraordinary experiences where existing self and social relationships collapse and new elements deeply enter the center of life” (Shin 2018, p. 17)—that is, in the process of the emergence of events (Jeong 2023, 2025). So, when values are created during these events, people experience a mix of being passive and actively wanting to be involved. The main reason Korean Protestantism got involved in the democratization and human rights movements of the 1970s was that they were caught up in political and religious events while also actively supporting universal values like human rights, democracy, freedom, equality, justice, and liberation.

Korean Protestant leaders demonstrated how moral universalism could arise from religiously driven social engagement by linking the sacredness of the person with the struggle for democracy. The result was a transformative process where the language of human rights took on a sacral character, advocating for a political transformation grounded in the belief that every human life is inviolably sacred. This process laid the groundwork for the “Minjung” (民衆) movement,⁹ which reconceptualized the sacred as both personal and communal, framing the oppressed masses as bearers of divine dignity and historical agency. The next section will examine how this religiously rooted sacralization process evolved into a distinctive theological framework that challenged both Western individualism and authoritarian nationalism.

4. From Individual to Collective Sacredness: The Minjung Theology and the Democratization Movement

The previous section demonstrated how the Protestant democratization movement in 1970s South Korea sacralized the concept of the individual person through theological frameworks, prayer meetings, and human rights activism. This section builds on that analysis by looking at how the process of making the individual sacred changed from focusing on personal dignity to recognizing the importance of the collective through the growth of Minjung theology (in Korean, Minjungshinhak). Emerging in the mid-1970s as a distinctive Korean theological perspective, Minjung theology reconceptualized the sacred as residing not merely in individuals but in the collective experience of the oppressed masses.

Through this theological innovation, Korean Protestant activists advanced a more contextual understanding of human dignity that addressed both political repression and economic exploitation under the Yushin regime. By positioning the marginalized as subjects of divine history rather than mere objects of compassion, Minjung theology offered a radical reinterpretation of the sacred that challenged both Western individualism and authoritarian nationalism. This section explores how this theological framework deepened the sacralization process in Korean society while simultaneously broadening its scope to encompass socioeconomic justice alongside political rights.

It is crucial to understand that “minjung” is more than just a theological concept or academic category. As historian Namhee Lee convincingly demonstrates in her seminal work *The Making of Minjung*, the term represents “a product of the complex interplay of structural preconditions, Korea’s repressive military regimes and its concomitant rapid industrialization, and the minjung movement’s own ‘political culture’” (Lee 2007, p. 1). In other words, minjung emerged through “discursive contestations in a field of political, cultural, and symbolic forces” (Lee 2007, p. 2).

Consequently, Minjung theology should be interpreted as a historically unique theological project that developed within Korean ecumenical social missions and the Protestant democratization movement of the 1970s and 80s (Jeong 2023). This movement constituted one of several attempts across different sectors—including academia, arts, and religion—to actualize the concept of “minjung” as both a symbolic framework and a political reality. In this context, the sacralization process undertaken by Minjung theologians operated as a distinct religious response to modernization, one that challenged the dominant secularization narrative by infusing collective political struggle with sacred significance.

4.1. The Tae-il Jeon Event and the Minjung Movement of the 1970s

As Kim Chang-Rak pointed out, Minjung theology is a “contextual theology” (in Korean, Hyeonjang-sinhak) that emerged in connection with the Korean minjung movement of the 1970s. According to him, “‘Contextual theology’ is a term used in opposition to the so-called ‘lectern theology’ (in Korean, Gangdan-sinhak) formed through studying theological doctrines in ivory towers. Therefore, to properly understand and evaluate Minjung theology, one must particularly grasp the minjung movement of the 1970s” (C.-R. Kim 1987, p. 70). As emphasized by all first-generation Minjung theologians, the decisive moment that led to the emergence of Minjung theology as an indigenous and contextual political theological discourse in Korea in the 1970s was the self-immolation incident of Tae-il Jeon, known as “the death of a young worker” (Choi 2023, pp. 21–23).

Generally, Minjung theology takes as its starting point the epistemological shift triggered by the Tae-il Jeon incident, which reflects not only the horrific human rights violations that Minjung theologians themselves experienced under the developmental dictatorship, but also the shocking recognition of the destructive consequences of compressed modernization and the broader context of minjung alienation that was maximized in Ko-

rea's political and economic situation. For example, Byung-mu Ahn, one of the pioneers of Minjung theology, declared in a postscript to his magazine "presence" (*Dasein*) immediately after the Tae-il Jeon event that Jeon's self-immolation "exposed the shame of this society that flaunts highways and high-rise buildings as symbols of modernization, pierced through the dried-up hearts of this selfish society to open springs of sympathy and indignation, moved sensitive students, and his alarm bell struck with his body is echoing from heart to heart" (Ahn 1970, p. 47).

Thus, the Tae-il Jeon event was the origin of the theological imagination of the first-generation Minjung theology and was deeply rooted in the lives of Minjung theologians as an event that became the reference point for reflection. Therefore, the Tae-il Jeon event was close to an "original experience" for Minjung theologians in the birth of Minjung theology. Of course, merely keeping the shocking memory of the Tae-il Jeon event could not have made the birth of Minjung theology possible. Without something that constantly stimulated them to understand the Tae-il Jeon event as a "minjung event" and a reenactment of the "Jesus-event", the birth of Minjung theology might have been forever impossible. It was because a series of events that continuously reminded Minjung theologians of the shock they received from the Tae-il Jeon event and stimulated them to continuously reflect on the meaning of that event unfolded before their eyes that Minjung theology could be born.

Naturally, these events were the labor movement that began to explode starting with the Tae-il Jeon event and the anti-dictatorship democratization movement that expanded more widely after the establishment of the Yushin regime. Through these movements, Minjung theologians repeatedly recalled the Tae-il Jeon event, which had remained an epistemological shock experience for them, and began to seriously think about and explore the meaning of that event. Thus, they came to understand the Tae-il Jeon event as a representative event exposing the suffering of the minjung that had been concealed and forgotten in Korea's modernization process, and as a contemporary reenactment of the Galilean Jesus/Minjung event raised by Jesus and his supporters, the *ochlos*.

In short, for Byung-mu Ahn and Nam-dong Suh, what bridged the gap between the Tae-il Jeon event and the March 1st Independence Movement worship service was the Korean minjung movement that began with the Tae-il Jeon event. Therefore, Minjung theology of the 1970s can be described as a critical theological movement that developed by taking the Tae-il Jeon event of 13 November 1970 as an original experience of the minjung event, and by taking the experiences of the contemporary minjung, especially their experiences of suffering and transcendence, as the standpoint for church critique and social critique. Then, what specific events did a group of theologians experience after the Tae-il Jeon event that led them to become Minjung theologians?

4.2. From Minjung Events to Minjung Theology

Generally, Minjung theology is considered to have originated with two articles published in 1975 in the Korean theological journal *Christian Thought*. The first was Nam-dong Suh's "Jesus, Church History, and the Korean Church", published in February, and the second was Byung-mu Ahn's "Nation, Minjung, and Church", published in April. Suh's later article, "Theology of 'Minjung': A Response to Professor Hyung-hyo Kim's Criticism", published in the same April issue, aimed to address Kim's critique called "On Truth in a Confused Era" and helped strengthen the ideas behind Minjung theology. It is significant that Suh's article, titled "Theology of 'Minjung'" (in Korean, "Minjungui Sinhak"), marked the first academic use of the term "Minjung theology" as a conceptual keyword. Thus, Suh himself confidently asserted that he was the one who made Minjung the central theme of

theology, organized it, and argued that it should be the center of all theological discourse (Suh 1983, p. 174).

In his 1975 article “Theology of ‘Minjung’”, Suh describes the origin of Minjung theology by identifying five significant “Minjung events” that took place between February and March of 1975 (Suh 1983, pp. 30–31). The first event was the February 12th national referendum on the Yushin regime, followed by statements from the NCCK and the National Council for Democratic Restoration denouncing the vote as illegal. In response, President Park made a Special Presidential Statement to ease tensions, telling the Minister of Justice to “release all detained persons who broke Emergency Decree No. 1 and No. 4, except for those involved in the People’s Revolutionary Party case and those who broke the Anti-Communist Law” (Jeong 2024a, p. 443). This “February 15 measure” led to the release of many pro-democracy figures who had been imprisoned, thereby establishing a starting point for the formalization of Minjung theology.

Second, on February 21st, those released through the February 15th measure formed the Preparatory Committee for the Association of Democratic Restoration Detainees at the Christian Building at 6 PM, with approximately 200 participants, including those who had violated Emergency Decrees 1 and 4, families of the detained, and released students. They issued a declaration stating, “We stand here solemnly, believing in the power of the minjung (people) who have fought against the dictatorial regime”, demanding the abolition of the Yushin Constitution, guaranteeing workers’ and farmers’ rights, and the dissolution of the KCIA (S.-j. Kim 1996, pp. 222–23). They also pledged to continue their struggle until all those detained under the Emergency Decrees were released. Suh noted that this was the first of many political statements to openly support “the will of the minjung”, making it a key minjung event.

Third, on March 1st, the Christian Professors’ Association hosted a worship service at Saemoonan Church to welcome two professors, Dong-gil Kim and Chan-gook Kim, who had been released through the February 15th measure. It was at this event that Byung-mu Ahn delivered his sermon/lecture titled “Nation, Minjung, Church” (Ahn [1975] 2013, pp. 91–97). This lecture manuscript can be considered a systematic anti-government theological critique with a relatively structured theological framework. What is particularly noteworthy here is that Ahn developed his argument by overlapping the term “minjung” (which was recognized and commonly used within the democratization movement forces resisting the dictatorial regime as both the bearer of social contradictions and the subject of transformation) with “*ochlos*” (crowds, masses, and multitude) from Mark’s Gospel, distinguishing it from “*laos*” (which can be translated as “nation”) in Luke’s Gospel. Suh considered Ahn’s clear difference between nation and minjung, which relates to the *laos/ochlos* terms in the Synoptic Gospels, as an important part of developing Minjung theology.

According to Byung-mu Ahn, under the military dictatorship, the Korean society had a nation but no minjung. In other words, what actually exists is the minjung, while the nation is merely a relative concept formed in relation to external entities. But those in power always stressed the nation, and the minjung, who made up the nation, had to sacrifice themselves in the name of serving it. Ahn believes that the idea of a nation that ignores the minjung’s needs and survival is a false ideology. When the nation hides the minjung, both vanish.

Fourth, the renowned German theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926–2024), who was enjoying worldwide fame at that time through his book *Theology of Hope* (*Theologie der Hoffnung*), visited Korea and delivered a lecture at Yonsei University on March 6th titled “Hope in the Struggles of the Minjung”. The main points of his lecture were as follows: Jesus did not identify himself with any religious or ethnic group but with the poor and oppressed minjung. He was not a heroic liberator for the minjung but rather enabled the minjung

themselves to seize their liberation. Therefore, while a “church for the minjung” (a church that passionately supports and represents the minjung from outside) is better than the current church that has been indifferent to the minjung, the true church is the “church of the minjung” (a church where the minjung actively participate as subjects within the church). In other words, the minjung are not objects of pastoral care or mission; rather, hope lies in recognizing that the minjung are the masters of their own church and history (S.-j. Kim 1996, p. 223). Moltmann’s lecture provided deep inspiration and stimulation to Korean theologians who were participating in the democratization movement and attempting to theologize the minjung events of the time.

The fifth minjung event was the declaration, “We Proclaim the Gospel Movement for Democracy and Livelihood”, issued by the Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice on 10 March 1975. This declaration was significant for two reasons: it came from the largest and most powerful organization involved in the democratization movement, and it contained theologically advanced content that strongly affirmed minjung consciousness. The word “minjung” appeared 24 times in this short declaration, which stated that “true democracy can only be built through democracy in which the minjung participates as the subject” and that “the movement for the restoration of democracy must be combined with the struggle for the rights of the minjung” (Jeong 2024a, pp. 446–47).

Nam-dong Suh summarized the implications of this declaration in the history of the democratization and minjung movements in two ways. The Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice, the largest and most powerful organization in the democratization movement, issued it first. Second, it contained “advanced content” that was theologically more progressive than any other declaration or statement presented until then, regardless of whether it came from Protestant or Catholic sources. From Suh’s perspective, earlier declarations and statements like the “1973 Korean Christian Manifesto” and the “Theological Statement of Korean Christians” (1974) did not mention the term “minjung” or express a shared identity for minjung, but this declaration strongly emphasized minjung awareness.

Therefore, this declaration clearly shows that minjung-oriented faith in the Christian democratization movement was not limited to Protestantism, and it was published around the same time that the systematic minjung theological research by Byung-mu Ahn and Nam-dong Suh first emerged. And as this declaration is significantly quoted and evaluated in Suh’s writing, it can be considered a key text that provided the foundation for Minjung theology (J.-n. Kim 2005, p. 57). Suh’s account shows that Minjung theology did not come from universities but from a series of events in the 1970s that changed Korean society, especially political events that pushed for democratization by highlighting the need to restore the rights of the minjung.

This historical analysis reveals a critical theoretical point: the minjung did not exist before minjung events but came into existence through them, creating a contested common ground for exposing structural evils and asserting human, civil, and labor rights. In French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s terms, the minjung has no existence as a real part of the society before the wrong—that is, the minjung event—that its name exposes (Rancière 1999, p. 39). All declarations that found the legitimacy of democratization demands in the assertion of the minjung’s rights were repetitions of the undeclared declarations made during the Tae-il Jeon event (November 1970) and the “Gwangju Grand Housing Complex event” (August 1971).¹⁰ They were events of “re-presentation” that created the minjung through these repetitive declarations. Minjung theology is part of this minjung project, attempting to theologize such events of re-presentation in a more sophisticated manner.

4.3. *The Messianic Role of Minjung in the Context of Sacralization of Minjung Events*

Nam-dong Suh published “Theology of Minjung” in 1979, which had a title similar to that of his 1975 work “Theology of ‘Minjung’”, which we examined earlier. This article focuses on the “confluence of two stories”, which can be considered the core concept of his systematic formulation of Minjung theology. In this article, he was the first Minjung theologian to clearly present the subject and task of Minjung theology. According to him, “the subject matter of Minjung theology is not Jesus but the Minjung” (Suh 1979, p. 84; 1981b, p. 160). This revolutionary approach positioned Minjung rather than Jesus as the primary subject of theological inquiry. Suh argued that Korean history witnessed a convergence of two parallel traditions—Christian minjung tradition and Korean minjung tradition—both characterized by oppressed people transforming from historical objects to subjects. In both traditions, Suh identified a process of humanization in which the minjung gradually overcame external conditions through their own power and became self-determining agents of their destiny.

Challenging Western theological paradigms that positioned Jesus Christ as the exclusive agent of salvation, Suh reinterpreted biblical and church history to demonstrate how the minjung were God’s original covenant partners who had been alienated by ruling powers but were now reclaiming their rightful role in divine justice. Through historical analysis spanning from Exodus to the crucifixion and from eschatological thinker of the medieval period Joachim of Fiore’s “third era of the Holy Spirit” to Thomas Müntzer’s peasant revolution, Suh argued that the minjung, who had been objects of God’s salvation, were increasingly becoming the subjects of salvation history (Suh 1979, pp. 86–93; 1981b, pp. 162–67; 1983, pp. 55–63).

From the perspective of collective sacredness, Suh’s most radical innovation was his concept of the “messianic role of minjung”, which maximized the agency of ordinary people. By reconceptualizing sin as a label imposed by the powerful and focusing instead on “Han” (恨, collective resentment born of injustice) as the authentic language of the oppressed, Suh attributed redemptive qualities to suffering masses. Suh believed that instead of seeing sin as something defined by those in power, we should understand “Han” as the true voice of the oppressed. Unlike traditional stories of salvation that keep the person needing help separate from the one who helps, Suh claimed that Han itself could bring about forgiveness—when the oppressed dealt with and moved past their Han, they showed their ability to save others. The minjung then become “priests of Han”, not just freeing themselves but also changing the social systems that create suffering (Suh 1981a, pp. 51–66; 1983, pp. 37–44).¹¹

To illustrate this messianic quality, Suh offered radical reinterpretations of biblical parables. In the Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:25–37), for instance, he claimed the wounded man, not the Samaritan, plays the “Christ role” by providing an opportunity for compassionate action. Similarly, interpreting “The Judgment of the Nations” (Matthew 25:31–46), Suh argued that when we show solidarity with “one of the least of these”, we receive “the grace of redemption by welcoming the Messiah”. Through reciprocal relationships, Christ saves us, and we save him, creating a mutual salvation dynamic (Suh 1983, pp. 107–8). As Suh summarized, “The Messiah approaches us incarnated as the suffering neighbor. In this sense, Minjung is the Messiah” (Suh 1983, p. 217).

It is at this point that the so-called “Minjung Messiah theory” or “Minjung Messianism” emerges—a theological perspective that has attracted the most criticism both domestically and internationally toward Minjung theology (Kim and Kim 2023). The reason why the Minjung Messiah theory remains both central to Minjung theology and simultaneously its most controversial aspect is that it implies a theological understanding fundamentally different from traditional Christian soteriology: namely, that the minjung themselves are

the Messiah (Choi 2022, p. 323). This contains a subtle tension between interpreting it to mean “the minjung are the Messiah” versus “the minjung play a messianic role”, but it is considered the essential core of Minjung theology precisely because it acknowledges the possibility of self-salvation by the minjung, which also makes it the most contentious issue (Choi 2022, pp. 323–24).

A representative example is the debate between German theologians, including Moltmann, and Korean Minjung theologians. While Moltmann expressed understanding and respect for the historical Korean context in which Minjung theology emerged with its “identification of Jesus with the minjung”, he did not fully accept Minjung Messianism. He posed the critical question: “If the minjung is to redeem the world, like the suffering servant of God, who then redeems the minjung?” (Moltmann 2000, p. 259). This question was posed from the theological position that the minjung are objects of salvation. The dialogue based on this concern continued between German theologians and Korean minjung theologians (Wagner 1988, pp. 183–95; Ahn 1988, pp. 196–207).

It is difficult to resume this ongoing debate here, nor is that my intention. However, I want to emphasize that Suh’s proposal of Minjung Messiah theory is grounded in the horizon of “minjung events”, as we have examined above. The real intention of the Minjung Messiah theory is not that “minjung as beings are messianic beings” but that “minjung events are messianic events”. In other words, while the minjung themselves are undoubtedly imperfect beings at both individual and collective levels, these imperfect beings possess a desire to survive, and through the interactions driven by this desire, events occur that transform the participants and resolve their problems. Therefore, this “transformation and resolution” constitutes a “liberation event”, and this “liberation event” is simultaneously a “salvation event”. Moreover, by viewing events from the perspective of social transformation and overcoming suffering, issues of power and domination are encompassed within them, thereby making these “events” into “minjung events”. In this sense, “minjung events” inevitably become “messianic events”, and this is the core meaning of Minjung Messiah theory (Hwang et al. 1998, pp. 383–86).

It is in this context that minjung theology understands the minjung as both “bearers of suffering” and “subjects of salvation” simultaneously. Nam-dong Suh argued that in the Good Samaritan parable, the man who fell victim to robbers plays the messianic role by giving the Samaritan an opportunity to become fully human (since becoming fully human is salvation) (Suh 1983, pp. 116–17). Byung-mu Ahn takes this further, suggesting that since the messianic event is a relational event, the Samaritan also plays a messianic role by rescuing the wounded man from a state of near-death dehumanization (Ahn 2019, pp. 99–100). Each saves the other. In this way, Minjung theology’s Minjung Messiah theory argues that the messianic event of Jesus in the Gospels was not an event directed by Jesus alone but occurred through the relationship between Jesus and the minjung. Minjung theology critiques Western messianic thought based on “subject-object dualism” and views salvation as occurring through relationships between the minjung and Jesus.

In light of Joas’ theory of the “sacralization of the person”, the Minjung Messiah theory within Minjung Theology can be interpreted as an assertion of the sacred dignity inherent in the collective suffering and transformative agency of the minjung. While Joas articulates the process through which human rights and universal dignity emerged from the sacralization of the individual, Minjung Messiah theory embodies a collective sacralization rooted in historical and social struggles. By framing the minjung as both the bearers of suffering and the agents of liberation, Minjung Theology resonates with Joas’ affirmation that sacralization is not exclusively religious but a mode of experience characterized by subjective self-evidence and affective intensity. Thus, the Minjung Messiah theory challenges the Western individual-centric notion of human dignity, instead proposing a communal and

relational paradigm that aligns with the sacralization process as the collective realization of transformative justice.

This intersection between Minjung theology's Minjung Messiah theory and Joas's theory of the sacralization of the person reveals an expansion from individual sacredness to collective sacredness. While Joas argues that sacralization involves the gradual establishment of individual inviolability through historical experiences, Nam-dong Suh and Byung-mu Ahn's Minjung Messianism demonstrates how this sacralization is realized in a collective and relational dimension. As Gascoigne points out, the concept of sacredness, though rooted in religious traditions, transcends them to become a shared ethical resource in secular societies (Gascoigne 2015b, pp. 180–81). In this sense, Minjung Messianism represents a communal realization of sacred dignity, resonating with Joas's concept of value generalization. Joas's understanding of sacralization as a "cultural transformation" is particularly relevant when considering the Korean minjung's struggles under military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, where the reconceptualization of the minjung not merely as objects of salvation but as subjects of salvation illustrates the formation of universal values through "experiences of self-transcendence". Suh's concept of the "confluence of two stories" ultimately represents a uniquely Korean expression of Joas's value generalization, where the Christian minjung tradition and the Korean minjung tradition converge to generate new universal values.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of South Korea's 1970s Protestant democratization movement through Hans Joas's theory of the sacralization of the person reveals a powerful case study that transcends the binary opposition between religious and secular narratives of human rights origins. As demonstrated through institutional bodies like the NCKK Human Rights Committee, ritual practices such as the Thursday Prayer Meetings, and theological innovations culminating in Minjung theology, Korean Protestant activists enacted a process of sacralization that made human dignity universally compelling across religious and secular divides. This synthesis was not a mere replication of Western Enlightenment or Christian narratives but a contextual reimagining of dignity that fused biblical imagery (e.g., *imago Dei*) with collective resistance to state violence. The Korean example shows how Joas's "affirmative genealogy" operates in a non-Western context, revealing sacralization as a dynamic process that emerges through the intersection of religious conviction, historical events, and cultural transformation rather than through abstract philosophical reasoning alone.

The evolution from individual to collective sacredness through Minjung theology's Messianic framework offers a particularly significant contribution to understanding how sacralization processes unfold in contexts of authoritarian oppression. By reconceptualizing the minjung as both bearers of suffering and subjects of salvation, figures like Nam-dong Suh and Byung-mu Ahn expanded the scope of human sacredness beyond Western individualism to encompass communal dignity and relational redemption. This shift challenged Western individualism by positing that human dignity is realized not in isolation but through shared struggles against structural injustice. The Minjung Messiah concept, though contentious, underscored the transformative power of collective suffering (Han) and solidarity, positioning marginalized communities as bearers of redemptive agency. Such theological innovations aligned with Joas's emphasis on "the successful transformation of experiences of violence into a universalist commitment to values"—such as the shock of the Tae-il Jeon self-immolation—as catalysts for sacralization (Joas 2013, p. 70). The Korean case thus demonstrates how sacralization can emerge through collective experiences of resistance against injustice, generating a distinctive moral vocabulary that syn-

thesizes religious and secular elements while remaining grounded in concrete historical struggles for human rights and democracy.

This study challenges reductionist narratives of human rights origins by highlighting the Korean movement's dual contribution: it reaffirms the role of religious actors in democratization while complicating the assumption that sacralization is a uniquely Western or linear process. The 1970s Korean democratization movement illustrates how the boundary between the sacred and the profane or the religious and the secular dissolves in moments of moral urgency, as religious actors employ their spiritual resources to articulate universal claims about human dignity that transcend sectarian boundaries. The Korean experience reveals that the sacredness of the person is not a fixed doctrine but "an emotional commitment to values and practices" shaped by resistance to oppression (Joas 2013, p. 57). It also invites scholars to reconsider the global dimensions of human rights history, where non-Western contexts like South Korea's Yushin era offer critical insights into how universal ideals are localized and revitalized. This expanded genealogy suggests that the ongoing defense of human rights globally requires not the triumph of either secular or religious frameworks in isolation, but rather their creative engagement in responding to contemporary threats to human dignity through processes of sacralization that can speak across ideological divides. By bridging theology, sociology, and political history, this analysis affirms Joas's vision of human rights as a shared project—one that thrives when diverse traditions collaborate to uphold the sacredness of human life in all its forms.

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Notes

- ¹ For example, Korean *Donghak's* (東學) principle of "*Innaecheon*" (人乃天, "humans are heaven") emphasizes the inherent divinity within all humans, while the Confucian tradition of "*Susin-Jega-Chiguk-Pyeongcheonha*" (修身齊家治國平天下, "Cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the state, and bring peace to the world") emphasizes human perfectibility and ethical responsibility. These non-Western intellectual traditions have made unique contributions to the process of "sacralization" of human rights, yet they have not been sufficiently acknowledged in the existing Western-centric human rights discourse. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who brought this point to my attention.
- ² Gascoigne (2015b, p. 182) contrasts the perspectives of two scholars with opposing views on human sacredness and human rights advocacy in his paper. According to him, Michael Ignatieff argues that human rights advocacy should exclude language about sources and foundations, suggesting that the concept of "sacredness" makes no contribution to human rights protection and may even appear idolatrous, alienating religious communities. In contrast, Hans Joas pursues an "affirmative genealogy" of the sacredness of the person, conceptualizing it as a shared ethical value that has been disseminated through "values generalization" in democratic political culture.
- ³ On 17 October 1972, President Chung-hee Park announced a special presidential declaration that included unconstitutional martial law, the dissolution of the National Assembly, and the suspension of the constitution. In this declaration, President Park announced four emergency measures, and through a national referendum on these, he amended the Constitution of the Third Republic on 27 December 1972. The constitution established at this time is called the Yushin Constitution, and the period during which the Yushin Constitution was in effect is referred to as the Yushin regime.
- ⁴ The NCKK represents the ecumenical type of social engagement within the progressive camp, operating as the Korean counterpart to the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC, which encompasses numerous denominations and churches worldwide (excluding the Roman Catholic Church), has been central to the ecumenical movement promoting church unity and cooperation. Its subdivision "Life and Work" has particularly emphasized church social participation, providing theological founda-

tions for social engagement on an ecumenical level. Korean churches first sent representatives to the WCC's founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, and since then, the NCCCK has maintained an organic relationship with the WCC, leading church unity efforts and, from the 1960s through the 1980s, participating in democratization and human rights movements. Many people view this social engagement as a distinguishing feature that sets ecumenical Protestantism apart from evangelical Protestantism in Korea (M.-b. Kim 2009, pp. 330–31).

- 5 On 22 April 1973, Pastor Hyung-kyu Park led an anti-government demonstration during an Easter service at Namsan Outdoor Music Hall, distributing flyers with messages like “The revival of democracy is the liberation of the people.” The Chung-hee Park government labeled this as a “preliminary rebellion conspiracy”, arresting Pastor Park, Evangelist Ho-kyung Kwon, and others on July 6 and sentencing them to two years imprisonment on September 25. This incident marked the first significant emergence of Christian participation in the anti-Yushin movement. Pastor Park later became a symbolic figure of the democratization movement alongside other prominent activists (Hwang 2024, pp. 113–15).
- 6 The *Mincheonghakryeon* (KDYL) incident of April 1974 involved a government crackdown against students planning nationwide anti-dictatorship demonstrations. The Park regime fabricated charges of attempting to overthrow the government, investigating 1024 individuals and detaining approximately 180 people. Many Christian students were implicated, including 26 members of the Korean Student Christian Federation. This watershed moment in the student movement accelerated the establishment of the NCCCK Human Rights Committee in May 1974. In 2009, the court ultimately declared a verdict of not guilty for this incident (NCCCK Human Rights Committee 2005, pp. 85–86; Hwang 2024, pp. 121–28).
- 7 According to the recollection of Kwang-sun Suh, who was one of the signatories of this Statement, “The theologians who drafted this document were the political theologians of the time, such as Professors Nam-dong Suh, Byung-mu Ahn, and Young-hak Hyun, who are known as the towering figures of Korean Minjung theology.” Additionally, many scholars who were not pastors, including Myung-sik Noh, Hong-ryol So, Jung-ok Yoon, Moon-young Lee, Woo-jung Lee, Hyo-jae Lee, Eui-sook Jung, Yo-han Cho, and Wan-sang Han, also participated as signatories (Suh 2016, pp. 285–86).
- 8 Joas defines self-transcendence as “experiences in which a person transcends herself, but not, at least not immediately, in the sense of moral achievements but rather of being pulled beyond the boundaries of one’s self, being captivated by something outside of myself, a relaxation of or liberation from one’s fixation on oneself” (Joas 2008, p. 7). Interestingly, Joas’s conception of self-transcendence shares many similarities with Minjung theologian Byung-Mu Ahn’s argument about “minjung’s ability of self-transcendence” (Ahn 2019, p. 20). For a detailed explanation of the concept of self-transcendence, which forms the core of Ahn’s ‘minjung event’ theory, see Jeong 2023, pp. 246–56.
- 9 The Korean term “minjung”, corresponding to “people” in English and “*das Volk*” in German, began to be used from the early 1970s as a specialized term in social movements referring to the political subjects of resistance—encompassing farmers, common people, masses, and workers—in the context of Korea’s anti-dictatorship democratization movement. Along with the emergence of these minjung-based movements, minjung-oriented academic discourses such as Minjung theology, Minjung literature, Minjung historiography, Minjung economics, and Minjung sociology were formed to support the minjung movements of that time. For the formation of the minjung concept and the development process of minjung movements, see Lee (2007).
- 10 This refers to the protests and riots carried out by tens of thousands of residents in the development area of Gwangju County, Gyeonggi Province (now Seongnam City), from 10 August to 12 August 1971. During the process of forcibly relocating residents from shantytowns in Seoul to what is now Seongnam’s Sujeong and Jungwon districts, a riot broke out as the residents resisted the unilateral and violent administrative actions of the government and the Seoul Metropolitan Government. In the course of dismantling public authority, the residents occupied the city, leading to the outbreak of the riot.
- 11 The concept of “Han” demands further contextualization due to its cultural and theological significance in Minjung theology. Han is a uniquely Korean term denoting a deep, often inexpressible accumulation of grief, resentment, and injustice experienced both personally and collectively. It encapsulates the inner affective world of the oppressed, a psychic and political wound that cannot be easily translated or resolved (Suh 2018, p. 22). As Nam-dong Suh articulates, Han is not merely an emotion but a “language-beyond-language”—a voice of the voiceless that resists articulation within dominant moral frameworks like ‘sin’ and “repentance” imposed by the powerful. Rather than being reduced to guilt or transgression, Han embodies the existential protest of the minjung against structural violence. This is why Minjung theology, according to Suh, begins with an “ethic of response” to this silenced cry. Theologically, the healing of Han is not just personal but redemptive, as those who process and transcend their Han can become agents of liberation and forgiveness, enacting priestly roles in transforming unjust social systems. Hence, Han emerges not as an isolated cultural concept but as the culmination of a theological anthropology that centers the sacredness of suffering persons in the history of Korean struggles for justice.

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Article

Isomorphic Heterotopias of Martyrdom Spaces and the Overlapping of Memory: A Comparative Study of the Jeoldusan Martyrdom Site and Yanghwajin Cemetery in Seoul

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Abstract: This study examines two proximate yet theologically and spatially disparate religious spaces in Seoul: the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine (Korean: 절두산 순교 성지; hereafter "Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine") and the Yanghwajin Protestant Cemetery (Korean: 양화진 묘원; hereafter "Yanghwajin Cemetery"). We propose the concept of isomorphic heterotopias and discuss the logic of intersecting memories. Drawing on Foucault's concept of heterotopia and cultural memory theory, the study finds that the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine, through architectural enclosure, the exhibition of relics, and pilgrimage rituals, foregrounds the vertical redemption of martyrs' flesh and faith, reinforcing ecclesiastical discourse and collective salvation narratives. In contrast, at Yanghwajin Cemetery, through dispersed tombstone layouts, egalitarian epitaph inscriptions, and public commemorative activities, the study finds that the site presents the dialectic of the martyr spirit within a secular spiritual space and individual testimonies. Despite their spatial heterogeneity, their geographic proximity generates a dialogical memory field: the vertical sacrality of the shrine is refracted through the cemetery's horizontality, while the cemetery's public spirit resonates with the shrine's liturgical framework. This dialogical memory field, shaped by shared physical environments and common public narrative platforms—generates a long-term coexistence without convergence, producing a spatial relationship of "non-integrative entanglement" born of antagonism. At the same time, these sites are not isolated spatial fragments; rather, through urban governance, they are woven into the same memory politics network, forming an "isomorphic heterotopia." Through politically inflected discursive narratives, both sites facilitate multidirectional flows of memory, preserving their respective "canons" while re-contextualizing each other within the same urban memory network. In doing so, they engage in an ongoing process of mutual rereading and co-construction, producing a re-contextualization of spatial memory and shaping a "composite historical sensibility" that, in turn, contributes to the city's character.

Keywords: religious space; heterotopia; urban memory politics; space production; Martyrs' Shrine

1. Introduction

For believers, space is not homogeneous; they can experience interruptions in space and enter into such interruptions (Eliade 1956, p. 1). As Lefebvre observes, the social essence of space is constituted by the integration of physical, psychological, and social dimensions (Lefebvre 1991, p. 404). However, contemporary spatial theory has not confined

this concept to geometric coordinates or the physical domain. In successive processes of “rematerialization” in cultural geography, it has often been marginalized (Jackson 2000, pp. 9–14). Similar to the politics of space or the notion of “third space,” space becomes a psychological concept, floating above the physical surface. From a cultural perspective, as Lefebvre responds, apart from outer space, all relations are spatial and relational—that is, social in nature.

The essence of religion is social. Religious expression emerges through believers’ mobility, printed texts, everyday life, rituals, performances—whether performative or terrorizing—and even acts of death (Knott 2005, pp. 153–84). In van der Leeuw 1933 proposed in *The Essence and Manifestations of Religion* that sacred objects share homologous relations. Houses, temples, dwellings, pilgrimage sites, the human body, hearths, altars, sanctuaries, shrines, and the heart are related via metonymic associations. He established key terminology for the scholarly discussion of a “poetics of the sacred”. Furthermore, he recognized that a sacred place’s power “lies in its occupation and possession,” insofar as it houses sacred items, proprietors, and officiants while excluding others. Although Chidester and Linenthal note that religious scholars often focus on van der Leeuw’s phenomenological classification of sacred places and his poetics of the sacred, they also argue that he laid the groundwork for subsequent discussions on the construction and politics of these sites (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, pp. 8–10). Van der Leeuw revealed the political contestation of sacred places, and Chidester and Linenthal further highlight the power dynamics inherent in spatial occupation.

This theoretical perspective inspires the present study: if one takes death as an anchor to examine differentiated religious spaces, how do differing doctrines that sacralize death relate to religious politics? How do sacred spaces coexist under different doctrinal frameworks in the same city? How do they form intersecting memories that clash and collaborate? How does this confrontation and symbiosis play out within identical geographic boundaries? In cultural memory studies, space is the carrier of collective memory (Halbwachs 1950, pp. 12–13). The material elements of ritual space can transform abstract memory into perceivable spatial practices (Halbwachs 1950, pp. 12–13). Different faith communities may generate intertextual or intersecting memory fields in relation to the same space (Rothberg 2009, pp. 227–91). Studies on memory of Korean martyrdom spaces have revealed the impact of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist values on the reception of martyrdom culture (Finch 2009, pp. 95–118), and from a theodicy perspective have explored how the history of Christian suffering has been received and reinterpreted in Korea, shaping memory through theological–social interactions. Moreover, the audiovisual representation of religious sites deepens believers’ spatial “self” and facilitates the experiential generation of collective memory (Roberts 2023, p. 52). These studies offer methodological references for understanding memory mechanisms in religious spaces. Comparative studies of cemeteries and martyrdom sites—for instance, the cultural memory examination of Catholic and Protestant cemeteries in Montreal—have found that Catholic and Protestant traditions exhibit cultural differences in views on death and commemorative practices (e.g., Montreal’s nineteenth-century Catholic cemeteries often employed religious monuments for moral education, whereas Protestant cemeteries emphasized individual identity (Watkins 2002, pp. 52–62). Field research on early modern Western European Protestant and Catholic memorial symbols likewise indicates that different denominations, despite their distinct theological logics regarding death symbols and commemorative practices (Mytum 2009, pp. 160–82), may present intertextual or contrasting meanings within the same community context.

In 1866, the Joseon dynasty, concerned that Catholicism might undermine the state order and citing its perceived links with Western powers, launched a severe persecution

of Catholics. A number of martyrs were executed at Jeoldusan and their bodies were cast into the Han River. To commemorate the centenary of the 1866 Byeong-in persecution, the Catholic Church in Korea established the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine in Seoul. Situated only about one hundred meters away across the terrain is the Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery. Compared to Jeoldusan, Yanghwajin held even greater strategic significance. Dating back to 1754, the site was historically associated with royal executions, and by 1894 it had already acquired a reputation as a place where the spiritual and temporal realms could not easily converge.

Yanghwajin's transformation into a missionary burial ground in 1890 was the product of specific historical circumstances. Following the establishment of diplomatic ties between missionaries and the royal court in 1884—marked by the founding of Korea's first Western-style hospital, Gwanghyewon—missionary John W. Heron succumbed to dysentery in 1890. The question of his burial arose at a time when anti-Christian sentiment in Joseon was still pronounced, and missionary work relied heavily on Western-led medical, educational, and charitable activities to permeate the Confucian social order, seeking indirect means of evangelization within the larger societal framework. In the same period, Joseon had signed a treaty of amity and commerce with Britain, which included a provision for the free construction of foreign cemeteries within treaty ports. With British assistance, Heron was buried at Yanghwajin, thus establishing the site as the principal burial ground for foreign missionaries—a role it has retained ever since. The lives and deaths of these missionaries, interred in this space, stand as enduring witnesses to Korea's modern historical transformations.

Today, the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine and the Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery are increasingly embedded within the logic of Seoul's contemporary public sphere. Statistics indicate that Yanghwajin receives approximately 30,000 Korean visitors and around 500 foreign visitors annually (Mason 2012), while the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine records more than 300,000 annual entries—including both pilgrims and general visitors—each year (Kim 2022, para. 1). These figures not only underscore the enduring public visibility of both sites but also point to their transformation from exclusive religious enclaves into integral components of Seoul's cultural and commemorative landscape.

As outlined above, the Catholic Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine and the Protestant Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery form a comparative pair by virtue of their geographical proximity. Research reveals that the two sites display markedly different spatial configurations and mnemonic narratives. The Catholic shrine integrates a museum, a reliquary of martyrs' remains, a pilgrimage church, and saintly statuary, thereby reinforcing a highly vertical monopoly on the sanctification of death. In contrast, the Protestant cemetery embodies a more austere atmosphere, conveying theological meaning through individual epitaphs and modest carvings. These sites not only exhibit substantial divergence in their material forms and symbolic systems, but also engage in a complex mode of interaction within the contemporary urban public sphere. Despite their fundamental heterogeneity, their spatial proximity renders each a latent context for the other.

Drawing on Foucault's notion of the "juxtaposition of incompatible spaces," this spatial dyad may be conceptualized as heterotopias in juxtaposition, while simultaneously constituting an intertextual site of "overlapping memory." Specifically, this study aims to address (1) how sectarian theological differences between Catholic and Protestant death spaces are projected into material practice and spatial production, thereby generating distinct symbolic systems; (2) through comparative analysis, how these systems—in terms of spatial design, public use, and institutional governance—produce a "non-integrative entanglement" structure that both influences and preserves their respective differences; and (3) how both sites are institutionally incorporated into the same memory-politics network,

forming an “isomorphic heterotopia.” Finally, it examines how this juxtaposition engenders overlapping memory.

The study concludes that the heterogeneity between Catholic and Protestant death spaces is fundamentally the result of sectarian theological differences projected into material practices. Their spatial proximity fosters an overlapping mortuary memory that reflects the complex symbiosis of polyphonic historical narratives in the contemporary city. The intertextual relationship between Catholic material symbols and ritual practices emerges as a key mechanism in the production of heterotopia; through the cross-site visibility of the two spaces, their respective symbols and rituals are naturally placed in potential contrastive contexts by public visitation, thereby enabling implicit interdenominational dialog and mutual reference. However, this visibility—shaped by shared physical environments and common public narrative platforms—generates a long-term coexistence without convergence, producing a spatial relationship of “non-integrative entanglement” born of antagonism. In other words, Jeoldusan’s vertical sacrality is diluted into a “contested tradition” by Yanghwajin’s public accessibility, while Yanghwajin’s secularized narrative gains a “sacred frame of reference” through the presence of Jeoldusan.

At the same time, these sites are not isolated spatial fragments; rather, through urban governance, they are woven into the same memory-politics network, forming an “isomorphic heterotopia.” Through politically inflected discursive narratives, both sites facilitate multidirectional flows of memory, preserving their respective “canons” while re-contextualizing each other within the same urban memory network. In doing so, they engage in an ongoing process of mutual rereading and co-construction, producing a re-contextualization of spatial memory and shaping a “composite historical sensibility” that, in turn, contributes to the city’s character.

2. Spatial Analysis of the Catholic Jeoldusan Martyrs’ Shrine

The overall form of the Jeoldusan Martyrs’ Shrine is a sloping, three-dimensional structure. The Martyrs’ Church is situated at the summit of Chamto bong (diagram label 2), arranged to face toward the hilltop and creating an ascending pilgrimage experience. Architecturally, the principal building is a three-level box structure. The ground level is open, the upper levels feature balconies and a double-column cloister, and a towering bell tower borrows from the Korean traditional “갓” (high-crowned hat) shape. The spire resembles the instrument of execution, with a circular opening at its apex symbolizing the path of faith. Inside, the church has a trapezoidal floor plan that narrows toward the altar end, naturally focusing the visual attention on the sanctuary. At the ceiling, a circular oculus decorated with stained glass guides natural light onto the altar, signifying divine revelation. The main doors are inlaid with beams symbolizing the Ascension, and the door knock combines traditional Korean door-ring motifs with the martyrdom symbol of a noose (“목칼”), its interior relief carved with the Korean “mugunghwa” (Jung 2012, pp. 71–86) motif. The interior walls feature relief scenes depicting the persecution endured by the martyrs, allowing worshippers to viscerally experience the historical memory of suffering.

The martyrdom space at Jeoldusan can be seen in Figure 1. The relic chamber for the martyrs (label 4) is located beneath the church in the same building. Within the church complex is also a museum space finished predominantly in white and gold, creating a solemn atmosphere for venerating the martyrs’ relics. Adjacent to the church is the Martyrs’ Memorial Hall (label 3), whose exterior adopts a palace-like colonnade style with a three-tiered structure: ground-level piloti, second-floor balcony, and third-floor eaves with gourd-string-style curved rooflines. Exposed columns and beams combined with the double-column cloister evoke a restrained yet exalted architectural language. Inside

the Memorial Hall are displays of books, church archives, folk ceramics, and works reflecting the spirit of martyrdom, including oil paintings and relief sculptures such as *Glory* and *Mother of the Martyr* and the *Red Robe*. *Glory* reenacts scenes of persecution during the Byeong-in Persecution, while *Mother of the Martyr* and the *Red Robe* uses relief to convey the Catholic martyr spirit and the Virgin's compassion.



Figure 1. Author's drawing based on official site guide map, Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine, photographed by the author, September 2021. Annotations correspond to numbered elements in the sketch: 1. Yanghwajin Park; 2. Martyrs' Church (Chamtobong summit); 3. Martyrs' Memorial Hall; 4. Interpretation and Exhibition Hall (including relic chamber beneath the church); 5. Memorial Statue for Martyrs ("Victory Grandmother"); 6. Sculpture: Jesus Bestowing the Palm of Victory on the Martyrs; 7. Martyrdom Museum; 8. Sacred Path (Stairway/Ramp); 9. Grotto of the Virgin; 10/15. Father Kim Dae-geon Plaza; 11. Statue of the Virgin Mary; 12. Walking Trail; 13. Restrooms; 14. Family Portrait of the First Martyr in the Shrine; 16. Hangang Citizen Park; 17. Way of the Cross (Outdoor Fourteen Stations); 18. Camp Area.

From the exterior approach, sacred icon paintings are erected at the entrance to Jeoldusan, serving as visual signposts inviting entry into the shrine. Along the path, sculptures with motifs such as the Bible, the cross, nooses, and execution instruments function as guiding elements. A pair of wooden sculptures—on the left symbolizing the executioner's "knife" and on the right symbolizing an angel's "feather"—are intertwined by a grapevine, symbolizing the "fruit of discourse." Linked to these is Father Kim Dae-geon Plaza, laid out in the form of a cross and serving as the central communal space of the entire shrine. Extending from this plaza is the Way of the Cross, composed of 14 scenes of suffering (label 17). As Chŏng discusses in his catechetical writings on the Fall of Adam, Christ's Passion, and Resurrection (Rausch 2016, pp. 70–71), Jeoldusan's spatial arrangement reenacts the cycle of fall, suffering, and resurrection.

In September 2018, when Seoul became the first Asian city approved by the Vatican as an international pilgrimage destination, Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine became an important station on international pilgrimage routes. According to information published by the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul's Martyrs' Promotion Committee, Pilgrimage Route

No. 3—also known as the “Path of Solidarity”—is intended to encourage all pilgrims to emulate and practice the faith of the martyrs. This route connects Jeoldusan Martyrs’ Shrine with other well-known martyrdom sites such as Sanamtō, Danggogae, and others (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul Martyrs’ Promotion Committee 2025b). At each station, multimedia guides and “Footprints of the Martyrs” video projections preserve the visual imprints of successive generations of martyrs in real space. Route No. 4 was established to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the first Korean priest, Father Andrew Kim. His martyrdom route is also one of the Vatican-approved international pilgrimage routes, known as the “Catholic Seoul Pilgrimage Path.” Pilgrims commemorate his martyr spirit by journeying from the Uipodocheong site to the four martyrdom sites outside Seosomun, including Danggogae Martyrs’ Shrine, Saenamtu Martyrs’ Shrine, and Jeoldusan Martyrs’ Shrine (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul Martyrs’ Promotion Committee 2025c).

Beyond measuring the martyr spirit by foot, Jeoldusan Shrine regularly holds remembrance Masses for the martyrs and visual pilgrimage activities. On the 12th of every month, when the priest reads passages such as John 12:24, screens simultaneously display the martyrs’ portraits and biographical summaries. During the Eucharistic celebration, martyr-themed insignia and fabric decorations flank the altar, creating a solemn atmosphere. At the conclusion of Mass, worshippers proceed along the central aisle to the martyrs’ monument, light candles, and pray silently, integrating “seeing—memory—commitment” into a dual visual and bodily pilgrimage experience (Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul Martyrs’ Promotion Committee 2025a). On major feast days, special Masses are held to reinforce collective memory, for example, on the 200th anniversary of Father Kim Dae-geon’s birth in 2021, the day in 2018 when Vatican envoy Archbishop Rino Fisichella announced Seoul’s designation as an international pilgrimage site, and the annual Martyrs’ Memorial Day (September 20). Events such as “Martyr Portrait Exhibitions,” “Readings of Martyrdom Literature,” and “Dramatic Performances” engage the faithful through visual art and oral history, fostering sensory and emotional connections.

As Christian philosopher Leibniz’s theodicy suggests—“the defense of divine justice in the face of evil,” explaining suffering in terms of ultimate justice after death (Rausch 2016, pp. 70–71) ritual practices at Jeoldusan reenact eschatological justice, pointing toward the martyrs’ share in divine justice. As James A. Walsh writes, “He who knows the value of a soul counts not the cost of saving it.” (Walsh 1933, p. 10).

Building on this theological framework. In the modern Korean context, the mythologization of “Jeoldusan’s witness of blood” reinforces the moral authority of the Church, embedding the shared suffering as collective identity through risking one’s life for faith. Viewed against Korea’s modern history of persecution, believers hold that martyrdom ensures missionary success—a notion influenced by the early Church. Martyrdom strengthens believers’ spirit of suffering and sacrifice and distinguishes Catholicism from other religions. Simultaneously, the emergence of native Korean martyrs propelled the indigenization of Catholicism, offering opportunities for apostates to reintegrate. In a limited and intermittent way, persecution also contributed to the spread of Christianity.

3. Case B: Analysis of Yanghwajin Cemetery (Protestant)

From the urban locational perspective, Yanghwajin Cemetery now occupies the north-east side of the former Yanghwajin ferry site in Mapo District, Seoul. The terrain is flat, and the overall plan is rectangular, divided into a grid by intersecting north–south and east–west pathways. The main entrance is situated on the central south axis, which extends along the north–south axis from the main entrance (Figure 2, label 2) to a secondary entrance at the northern end, forming a visual and ritual procession route. Secondary north–south paths intersect with east–west service lanes, subdividing the site into nine

functional sectors. Within each sector, tombstones are arranged compactly, forming discrete grid blocks. This layout reflects the Protestant ideal of equality among all individuals and aligns with the ordered production of urban public space. Observers proceeding north along the main axis follow not only a geographical direction but also a narrative progression, from early missionaries to post-war burials and onward to the infant section, completing a spatial sequence layered with historical temporality. By 2005, Yanghwajin had been in existence for 115 years and contained 877 graves; after 2005, no new monuments have been permitted. The burial ground covers approximately 13,224 square meters and includes 417 individuals from 15 countries, among them 145 missionaries from six different nations (Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery 2022). According to Jeong Ae-ju's 2015 statistics, Yanghwajin inter 114 missionaries, 28 missionary children, and 17 non-religious individuals (Jeong 2015). Among these burials, 60 epitaph records are clearly documented (see Appendix A). These epitaphs form the core corpus for this study.



Figure 2. Author's drawing based on the official guide map from Yanghwajin Cemetery official website (accessed 15 August 2025, <https://yanghwajin.net/guide/smart.php>).

The diagram is a bird's-eye view oriented with north at the top and south at the bottom. The number 2 indicates the main entrance (출발, "departure") at the southern end; a secondary entrance is located at the northern terminus of the central axis. Internal paths are arranged in a grid pattern. Other numbered labels correspond to grave sites and are not relevant to the present study.

Analysis of epitaph content in Yanghwajin Cemetery indicates that approximately 70% quote from the New Testament, focusing on Jesus Christ's teachings and redemption, believers' faith life, and church relations—emphasizing justification by faith, Christ's exemplary role, and the believer's mission in the New Testament age. Quotations from the Old Testament constitute only about 10%, emphasizing attributes of God and the ultimate covenant promises concerning believers' blessed state. The remaining 20% comprises summaries of personal character or deeds without scriptural quotations. The epitaphs are constructed around three genealogies—Scripture, ministry, and virtue—directly reflecting the Protestant doctrine of "faith, action, and witness." Over 60% of Yanghwajin's tombstones feature a cross atop (Latin or Celtic style), crafted in various materials, visually echoing the

scriptural quotations in epitaphs and forming sacred visual markers. Where epitaphs lack scriptural quotations, English lettering and descriptions of service deeds emphasize individual identity and social contributions, situating religion and secular publicness within the same commemorative field. The semantic traces of hope after death and doctrines of death and eternal life reflected in the epitaph texts aim to reassure individuals' fear of death and, at the collective level, to construct a transgenerational, cross-cultural representation of the faith community. In the next chapter, the Presbyterian Church of Korea's centennial memorial committee official publication, *PCK World*, emphasizes that the management mechanism employing a multifaith imaginative complex originates from this rationale.

From the standpoint of national narrative, since the early twentieth century, mainstream Korean Christian media have framed neglect of the cemetery as a moral and religious crisis. For example, Kim Sung-Soon noted in the *Korean Christian Weekly*, "Although Yanghwajin is a sacred site of great significance to Korean Christianity, it now lies neglected—overgrown with weeds and its tombstones left in disrepair" (Kim 2001). During Chuseok, not a single flower was placed, elevating "cemetery neglect" to the level of "desecration of the pioneering martyrs' spirit," thereby exerting moral pressure within church circles and public opinion. Such critical discourse amplifies the perceived "secularization" crisis of the site while implicitly suggesting that only by re-envisioning the cemetery from a "sacred" perspective can religious reverence for the martyrs be restored. In the early 2000s, the Presbyterian Church of Korea's official publication *PCK World* issued multiple editorials and academic commentaries continuing the tone of "neglect" and "erasure of the predecessors' value." It first emphasized the will of the church community, calling for multifaith joint management to transcend denominational territoriality. It stated that Yanghwajin is not merely a foreigners' cemetery but shared heritage of pioneers of Korean Christian mission, advocating joint stewardship by the five major denominations to surpass secular and denominational divides. It repeatedly stressed its status as a "Holy Landmark" (Presbyterian Church of Korea 2003), excising the cemetery from secular contexts of urban park or foreigners' burial ground and integrating it into the canonical narrative of Korean church history. The catalysis by media and national narratives indirectly influenced municipal decision-makers, elevating public discussion of this religious space into a broader social issue.

4. Comparative Analysis

Through the spatial analysis of Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine, the Catholic theological imperative of "vertical redemption" and ecclesiocentric claims become evident. In the overlay of physical space and symbolic ritual practice, participants are incorporated into a theological narrative of suffering and resurrection. The design of the church's relic display chamber transforms martyrs' remains into the symbol of a reliquary, stripping away the bloodiness and mundanity of death while retaining the sanctified body. This ensures that the spatial narrative consistently serves the Church's moral authority. Fundamentally, Jeoldusan's monopoly on sacrality depends on Vatican authentication and unfolds on that basis. After Seoul obtained the symbolic capital of a global Catholic pilgrimage site in 2018, attracting transnational believers through pilgrimage feeds back into the local Church, forming a cycle of "sacred production capital." In this chain, secular power is relegated to a collaborative role without authority to intervene in the core sacred narrative, gradually externalized. The entire physical space of Jeoldusan Shrine metaphorically embodies the fundamental logic of Catholic theology: collective redemption and ecclesiocentrism. As Tertullian famously stated, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church" (Tertullian [1885] 1999, ch. 50, sec. 13). The trinity of martyrs' relics, the Way of the Cross, and the Mass ritual transforms individual death into the source of the Church's communal life. This confirms

Eliade's core proposition that sacred space establishes its ontological status through rupture from the profane (Eliade 1956).

The spatial production mechanism of Yanghwajin Cemetery exhibits a sacred logic entirely distinct from Jeoldusan. The cemetery's layout enacts a homogeneous narrative, and the open interpretability of epitaph texts realizes a dynamic negotiation between the sacred and the secular. From the national narrative timeline discussed above, the moral critique of neglect in Presbyterian publications during the 2000s reconstructed the cemetery from a forgotten foreigners' burial ground into a Korean Christian sacred site. Municipal intervention in the public sphere incorporated the cemetery into Han River cultural-belt planning, diluting the space's religious exclusivity and rendering it a site where secular behaviors and commemorative rituals coexist. As Massey articulates in her concept of "power geometry," sacredness is not preexisting but is dynamically generated through negotiated practices among multiple actors. Unlike the Catholic logic of monopolizing sacrality, Yanghwajin's spatiality arises from Protestant emphases on individual witness and secular vocation. Calvin argues in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "The daily work of believers is all holy service". This theological view rejects confining sacredness to specific ritual spaces, emphasizing "life as pilgrimage." Accordingly, Yanghwajin Cemetery's grid-like layout, by spatially homogenizing and eliminating hierarchical differences, materializes the Protestant priesthood-of-all-believers ideal. As Waltersdorf observes, unlike Catholicism, Protestant space decentralizes and weakens institutional sacral authority, allowing individuals to engage directly with the sacred. Yanghwajin's grid layout embodies this idea materially: sacrality is no longer monopolized in a specific ritual center but is diffused throughout the cemetery's egalitarian narrative.

At present, the Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine and the Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery are becoming increasingly embedded within the logic of Seoul's public sphere. Since the 2010s, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has sought to incorporate religious commemorative spaces into an overarching plan for the "restructuring of urban memory." Both Yanghwajin and Jeoldusan have been included in the Pilgrimage Heritage Route and designated as core components of Mapo District's "Modern Historical and Cultural Belt". They were, respectively, inscribed as municipal cultural properties in 1997 (as part of the Yanghwajin Ferry and Jandu Peak Historic Site) and in 2015. This institutional recognition demonstrates that the public perception of these religious spaces as historical landmarks, along with their social functions, has attained a notable degree of stability.

However, this contemporary "publicness" does not stem from a unified historical memory. As noted above, the interlacing of spatial proximities and heterogeneous narratives has shaped public recognition of their educational, scenic, and spiritual values. This mode of reception, as Michel De Certeau (1984) observes, constitutes a "tactic of space appropriation" in which the public, through personal memory and embodied experience, rewrites commemorative spaces originally embedded within the framework of state narratives—thereby moving beyond the constraints of strictly canonical religious discourse. This pathway of engagement exemplifies the theoretical proposition advanced in this study as "non-integrative entanglement," whereby, within the urban context, the two sites are neither fully homogeneous nor entirely exclusive. Instead, they constitute the empirical foundation of heterotopia through structural diversity.

As shown in Table 1, the distinctions between Catholicism and Protestantism—ranging from theological principles to spatial configurations and ritual practices—form the structural foundation for what this study defines as "non-integrative interweaving."

Table 1. Core differences between Catholicism and Protestantism in theology and spatial practice.

	Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine	Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery
Theological Principles	Theology of martyrdom; Church as the sole mediator of salvation; emphasis on veneration of relics and collective liturgy	<i>Sola Scriptura</i> , “priesthood of all believers”; individual’s direct relationship with God; rejection of relic veneration
Spatial Configuration	Vertical, centralized layout; altar–relics–pilgrimage route aligned along a unified sacred axis	Horizontal, decentralized layout; grid arrangement of flat gravestones without a central architectural focus
Material Symbols	Martyrs’ relic chamber, Stations of the Cross reliefs, saint statues, stained-glass windows—highly symbolic elements	Gravestones, epitaphs, modest carvings focusing on personal narratives and biblical quotations
Ritual Practices	Institutionalized and highly collective (Mass, pilgrimage, annual commemorations)	Individualized and non-liturgical (family visits, personal prayer, small gatherings)
Public Function	Reinforces doctrinal unity and communal identity; high politico-religious tension	Emphasizes education, historical memory, and civilizational enlightenment; highly accessible to the public
Temporal Experience	Oriented toward the “eternal” sacred time-space; emphasis on transcendence and tradition	Oriented toward “historical” secular time-space; emphasis on historical education and personal testimony
Relation in the Urban Context	Constitutes a “vertical redemption” narrative	Constitutes a “horizontal hope” narrative

The comparative spatial forms at Chöltusan Martyrs’ Shrine and the Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery reflect distinct theological orientations embedded in material practice. Catholic martyrdom theology is expressed through a vertical sacred hierarchy—elevated structures, relic chambers, and collective liturgies—while Protestant memorial culture emphasizes horizontal organization, modest monumentalism, and individualized commemoration. These orientations translate belief into spatial syntax, shaping the visitor’s experience and the symbolic orders sustained within each site.

The rationale for conceptualizing this relationship as a form of non-integrative entanglement lies in the fact that Catholicism and Protestantism fundamentally embody two irreconcilable systems of memory. As the preceding spatial analysis has shown, the spatial logic of Catholic martyrdom theology reinforces a highly exclusive alignment of ritual and doctrine, while the Protestant cemetery—established from the outset with an emphasis on education and enlightenment—foregrounds publicity and pedagogical values. These divergent orientations generate a symbolic rupture, lacking a shared grammar of integration, and thus lay the foundation for symbolic incommensurability.

Much like their physical proximity, the two sites are situated adjacently along the narrative timeline—1866 for Jeoldusan and 1890 for Yanghwajin—yet they remain in political–ethical opposition. The former is often inscribed within an anti-oppression narrative, while the latter points toward contested histories of the Japanese colonial period. This non-contemporaneity of memory (Chakrabarty 2000), when interwoven, nonetheless resists synthesis, providing the structural basis for their entanglement without fusion.

Moreover, the cultural mechanisms of modern urban space have endowed this “confrontation” with both visibility and continuity. Within heritage policies such as the Pilgrimage Heritage Route and the Hangang Historical Belt, an institutionalized appearance

of pluralistic coexistence is constructed, wherein the two sites are passively drawn into each other's systems of meaning through urban planning, political discourse, and public narratives. Yet, as argued here, such "plural coexistence" remains confined to the level of institutional space. Given the fundamentally different symbolic grammars and doctrinal value hierarchies of the two memory systems, their co-presence instead accentuates points of incompatibility. This ensures that difference continues to manifest and that confrontation becomes stabilized as a persistent spatial relationship.

5. Logic of Generating Isomorphic Heterotopias and Intersecting Memories

Heterotopias are a core metaphor in Foucault's triadic dialectic of power-knowledge-space; in his 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces," Foucault describes them as counter-sites embodied in real places, spaces that function by juxtaposing what is otherwise incompatible, thus subverting the logic of everyday space (Foucault 1986). Heterotopias are real sites inscribed within social systems, reflecting, protesting, and inverting other spaces (Zhang 2016, pp. 126–32). Religion is essentially social, and in its circulation, believers and religious culture create new spaces—so-called diasporic or dispersed spaces that are both real and imagined, physical and social in their spatial attributes. Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine and Yanghwajin Cemetery can be understood as religious dispersed spaces whose multi-denominational juxtaposition forms a model of denominationally heterogeneous intersecting memories. As Foucault notes, heterotopias can juxtapose "multiple spaces that are, in themselves, incompatible" within a single real site; the juxtaposition of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin thus forms an "Isomorphic Heterotopia."

Papal and notable visits have further solidified Jeoldusan's sacral status: Pope John Paul II visited in 1984 and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) visited in 1985, each affirming its spiritual significance. In 1997, the Korean government designated Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine as a national historic site, reflecting state-level recognition of the martyrdom value. In contrast, Yanghwajin Cemetery experienced a different trajectory: under Park Chung-hee's 1961 decree prohibiting foreigners from owning land, Yanghwajin Cemetery became temporarily ownerless and was only designated as a park by the Seoul municipal government in 1965. Such state-level adjudications establish external boundaries for the legitimacy of these heterotopian fields. The contrast between neglect and flourishing of these religious spaces also reflects differences in national and religious identity constructions. Catholic martyr narratives are frequently incorporated into modern national history discourses, whereas the Protestant foreign missionaries' cemetery has more often relied on spontaneous dissemination of its value through church organizations and media. This distinction exemplifies the divide between grand narrative and individualistic narrative. Local government cultural planning, national heritage designation, and media discourse together form an institutionalized mechanism for negotiating memory, incorporating the sacred-secular significance of heterotopias into broader urban and national narrative networks. In concrete historical contexts, whether heterotopias can be juxtaposed, and how they are accepted or rejected by society, is determined not only by internal religious or cultural logic but also by legal and planning policies at the state or municipal level. This aligns with research in urban heritage protection, which shows that urban planning and cultural heritage policies often determine whether a space can bear and publicly present a particular collective memory, thereby affecting its mnemonic tension and the generation of social meaning (Chiodelli and Moroni 2017, pp. 62–70).

Within Lefebvre's spatial triad framework, heterotopias represent the spatialization of perceived space in physical form: different denominations project their own logics of redemption or hope onto the imagined spatial level, so that in practiced space believers ex-

perience distinct embodied trajectories. Hence, geographic proximity coupled with functional heterogeneity is a primary generative condition for heterotopias. The intertextual relationship between symbols and rituals is the key mechanism generating semantic depth within a heterotopia. The materialized symbols of martyrdom at Jeoldusan—such as the Stations of the Cross reliefs, stained-glass windows, and the reliquary—construct a visible text of the Catholic narrative of vertical redemption, corresponding to the Protestant cemetery’s Euro-American-style forest of headstones that conveys a textual vision of horizontal hope and personal testimony. Together, these elements form the visual grammar of the respective spaces. Religious rituals—such as Catholic Mass and pilgrimage, or Protestant personal prayer and commemorative gatherings—breathe dynamic life into these symbols. The symbolic meaning of the signs is only made manifest through the enactment of ritual, while the ritual’s own symbolic force depends on the symbols as its material carriers and contextual framework (Turner 1969; Geertz 1973).

This intertextuality is not only highly coupled within the internal structures of each denomination—producing two distinct narrative formations of “vertical redemption” and “horizontal hope,” one closed and the other open-ended—but also, within the cross-site visibility of the two spaces, naturally places their symbols and rituals into a latent comparative frame for visiting publics. This process facilitates an implicit interdenominational dialog and mutual referencing. In this way, heterotopia acquires its layered semantic density not only through the reciprocal referencing of material symbols and ritual practices, but also through its continual reproduction and re-contextualization within public perception and the city’s memory network (Lefebvre 1991; Foucault 1986). For example, contrasting the Protestant “priesthood of all believers” ideal against the collective ritual of martyrdom yields a rich comparative interpretation. Such intertextual interaction aligns with Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory: in this interplay, the memory narratives of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin not only extend themselves internally but are continuously enriched and reinterpreted through mutual reference, forming deep “intersecting memories.” Just as Rosenberg traces how Holocaust memory and colonial memory interpenetrate—breaking zero-sum frames—this constitutes the formation of intersecting memories, wherein memory symbols and texts produce a palimpsestic effect across physical and discursive spaces. This intertextuality indicates that culturally embedded memory fields are always in the process of rewriting (Rothberg 2009, pp. 227–91).

Catholic martyrs, through their sacrifice for the faith, forged a localized spiritual axis that bears intense politico-religious tension within narratives of national identity and resistance. The Yanghwajin Foreign Missionary Cemetery, by contrast, differs fundamentally: as indicated by its very name, it was intended to highlight both the national origins of the missionaries and their role as educators. Its historical trajectory follows the pathway of civilizational enlightenment—the eastward transmission of Western learning—modernity. Each space thus maintains its own canon.

In this light, Catholicism radiates inward, embedding faith into the spatial fabric to produce a highly religious narrative, whereas the Protestant cemetery, from its inception, was imbued with the meaning of an external civilizational influence projected onto the Joseon dynasty. This divergence produces both a tension of memory and a conflict in the symbolic hierarchy between the two sites. Yet both are situated along the banks of the Han River, where pilgrimage and visitation form an intertextual network of physical routes. Such spatial juxtaposition compels both the public and scholars to narratively interpret them as “two facets of a single historical moment”, thereby activating a mechanism of mutual re-reading.

Although both spaces take “death” as the thematic core for constructing urban memory, their semantic emphases diverge. Under the umbrella term “Seoul Faith Heritage,”

the intertextuality between suffering and dedication converges upon a shared conclusion: the religious spaces along the Han River constitute an ethical space of the city.

Placed within a broader historical context, the martyrdom events—rooted in the conflicts between the Qing Empire and the West—together with the narratives of missionaries from the late Joseon period through the era of Japanese colonial rule, jointly fill the temporal and spatial dimensions of Seoul’s modern transition, forming a narrative framework of mutual embeddedness. The memory narratives of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin not only extend themselves but are also continually enriched and re-read through mutual reference, generating a deep-layered overlapping memory. As Rothberg argues in his analysis of the mutual permeation between Holocaust memory and colonial memory, the dismantling of a zero-sum framework is itself constitutive of multidirectional memory. Situated within both physical and discursive spaces, the mnemonic symbols and texts here produce a “palimpsest” effect, whereby the embedded cultural memory field is perpetually in the process of rewriting (Rothberg 2009, pp. 227–91).

Political discourse likewise serves as a crucial pivot shaping memory flows, influencing the formation and direction of multidirectional memory. Cultural memory scholarship indicates that cultural memory is a form of collective emotional attachment (Tang et al. 2025, p. 261). It not only circulates within the group but also enters broader social domains through public discourse; political discourse can thrust certain memory issues into the public eye or marginalize them. In the case of religious spaces, when attention focuses on heritage issues, it can trigger governmental or municipal planning interventions; policy intervention, in turn, alters site practices and generates new trajectories of collective memory narratives. Such multidirectional overlap occurs not only among different denominations or believer communities but also, through state discourse practices, forms cross-subject memory interactions. Yanghwajin Cemetery exemplifies this dynamic.

Maurice Halbwachs argues that each collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework, with different groups inscribing social relations and historical experiences through their spatial strategies; spatial durability enables continuity of memory. Religious groups, through settings such as altars and statues, repeatedly enact rituals that serve as carriers of faith memory, and the permanence of religious space metaphorically enshrines the invariance of belief, uniting collective memory with “sacred time” (Halbwachs 1950, pp. 12–13). Building on Halbwachs, Jan Assmann discusses the relationship among religion, culture, and memory, noting that memory, like language, is both a social and individual phenomenon and possesses a cultural dimension: on the one hand, through surface phenomena such as codices, religious rituals, festivals, and canonical texts; on the other hand, through suppression and resurrection of the past, it forms a persuasive view of past life (Assmann 2006). Accordingly, “intersecting memories” can be understood as interactive memory fields formed by two religious communities toward the same space. Assmann holds that the material elements of ritual space transform abstract memory into perceivable spatial practices, enabling religious groups to construct a “continuity of faith” in the physical environment—whether through Christian symbols signifying divine rebirth or the Late Egyptian ritual of reassembling scattered limbs as a symbol of unified regeneration of the land (Assmann 2006, pp. 161–63). Such rituals, through embodied actions and spatial aggregation, anchor politically unified memory in physical practice. As Nietzsche observes, “Only things that continue to hurt remain in memory,” making repetitive construction a key to public memory.

Based on Halbwachs and Assmann’s discussions of cultural and collective memory carriers, this study regards the symbols, spaces, and institutions of Catholicism and Protestantism as key elements embedded in collective memory. Previously detailed symbol forms and material referents need not be restated here. In short, the interplay of symbols,

spaces, and institutions in different denominational fields both preserves each tradition's memory canon and renders them mutually visible. Catholic scholars, when reviewing modern Seoul's religious upheavals, often mention both foreign missionaries' "social service and dedication" and local martyrs' sacrifices side by side in academic discourse, rather than in opposition; similarly, Protestant communities, while emphasizing individual witness, also draw on the martyr spirit to explore faith purity. This multidirectional projection forms a polyphonic field of urban religious memory, making the memories of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin "visible" to one another and jointly participating in reshaping Seoul's religious tradition within historiography and public discourse, rather than through simple exclusion or marginalization. A review of academic studies on Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin reveals that comparative juxtaposition is common, and this study follows suit. Such scholarly dynamics also generalize intersecting memories at the ideological level. This symbol-narrative-based re-interpretation transcends initial denominational frameworks; in urban public discourse, these sites serve as footnotes to each other, enriching mnemonic content and reflecting memory's multidirectionality and nonlinearity. As times change and issues such as human rights, social justice, and interreligious dialog become focal, sacred sites absorb more interreligious reflections on suffering. In this context, memory fields are re-defined, drawing on original memory symbols while injecting new value judgments. In this process, the memory fields of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin generate new intersection points when confronting modern social issues, thus participating in the generation of intersecting memories. Viewed in its entirety—or indeed from the very inception of this study—the central question has been what kind of overlapping memory are these two sites co-constructing? The author contends that it is a "composite sense of history that shapes the character of the city", for the origins of the city and the starting point of its modernity are never characterized by singularity. The spatial configuration of memory itself constitutes the physical imprint of historical contestation and negotiation. The heterogeneous "entanglement" of spaces does not culminate in consensus, but rather in an urban spiritual structure capable of accommodating difference, preserving conflict, and generating semantic heterogeneity. As Andreas Huyssen aptly observes, the core mechanism of contemporary urban spatial memory lies in "the juxtaposition and rewriting of heterogeneous times within concrete space" (Huyssen 2003).

6. Conclusions

This study's concept of religious Isomorphic Heterotopias aims to encapsulate the dual nature of religious space generation: simultaneously exclusive and autonomous, yet shaped collaboratively by multiple forces such as denominations, government, and national discourse (Soja 2005, pp. 25–30). As Soja argues, the "Third space" continually expands to encompass the "Other," prompting ongoing negotiation and reconstruction of power structures and cultural identities. The notion of Isomorphic Heterotopias reveals how religious spaces in an urban context become entwined with public life and state power. This resonates with Lefebvre's view of social space production—that space is shaped by social processes—and with Foucault's insight of heterotopias as "counter-sites" that juxtapose incompatible elements.

One can envisage Catholic and Protestant presences coexisting in this district: the unified religious representation embodied by Jeoldusan Martyrs' Shrine alongside the dispersed, decentralized form of Yanghwajin Cemetery, co-located within the same physical field. Studies by Dehaene and De Cauter demonstrate how reading urban space through heterotopia deconstructs commercialized, publicized spaces as products of post-civil society, where diverse groups enact public life in everyday places rather than grand platforms (Dehaene and De Cauter 2008). Similarly, the juxtaposition of Jeoldusan and Yanghwajin

presents multiple images within one space, enabling multidirectional memory generation through mutual reference.

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Appendix A

Akerholm, Earland

Thy Will Be Done (이루어지다 - 주기도문 중 _ 마태복음 6:10)

永生者我生命者亦我信者雖死必生而信我者永不死爾信否

(나는 무활이요 생명이니 나를 믿는 자는 죽어도 살것고 무릇 죽어 나를 믿는 자는 영원히 죽지 아니하리니 이것을

너가 믿느냐 _ 요한복음 11:25~26)

하는님이 우리를 세우심은 노약을 빛게 충심이 이안으로 오리우리에 예수그리스도를 밝히여 구원을 빛게 하소니

예수가 우리들 머신전하 여오소서 우리가 거룩지 지저탁 여 파괴 실패해주드니라

Anderson, Lillian B.

Till He Comes(때수 오실 때까지)

Appenzeller, Alice R.

Not to be ministered unto, But to minister

성경을 받으려 함 아니니라 도로써 섬기려 하나노라(마가복음 10:45)

Appenzeller, Henry D./Appenzeller, Ruth N.

Underneath are the everlasting arms

그 원하신 광이 네 야해에 깃도다 _ 신명기 33:27

Appenzeller, Henry. G.

우리는 무활절 (아침예) 이곳에 왔습니다. 그날 사망의 권세를 이기신 주께서 이 땅을 움직여 깨갯을 꾸우사 하나님

의 지도로서의 자유와 빛을 주시옵소서(체들뜨예 성복하신 것 기도)

Avison, Douglas B.

In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me _ St. Matthew 25:40

(여기 내 형제 중에 지극히 작은 자 하나에게 한 것이 곧 내게 한 것이니라 _ 마태복음 25:40)

Avison, Kathleen I.

(하는님이 우리에게 소심 것은 두려움하는 마음이 아니요 오직 능력과 사랑과 철저하는 마음이니 _ 디모데후서 1:7)

Baird, William M. Jr./Baird, Richard H.

Give God the Glory _ 2TIM. 4:7

하나님께 영광 - 나의 달려갈 길을 어지고 믿음을 지켰으니 _ 디모데후서 4:7

Baird, William M./Baird, Annie L. A.

More than conquerors thru Him that loved us

(우리를 사랑하는 이로 말미암아 우리는 병탈히 이기느니라 _ 로마서 8:37)

Bourns, Beulah V.

All whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me _ MATT 18:5

(누구든지 내 이름으로 이런 어린이를 영접하면 곧 나를 영접함이니 _ 마태복음 18:5)

半生 四十二年間 看護宣敎에 아버지하시면서 많은 孤兒와 棄兒를 돌소 키우셨다

Brockman, Frank M.

For Twenty Four years in Korea-Seer, Builder, Peacemaker, Friend

(한국에서의 24년-총인, 건우, 평화주무자, 친구)

Bunker, Dalzell A./Bunker, Annie Ellers

Untill the Day Dawn the Shadows Flee Away

(낮이 새어고 흑암이 돌려갈 때까지)(아가 4:6)

Campbell, Josephine E. P.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord

(주 안에서 죽는 자들은 복이 있도다 _ 요한계시록 14:13)

Chadwell, Arthur E.

May His wounds be both wound and heal me. He enkindle, cleanse, anneal me

Be his Cross my strength and stay

주의 상처는 나를 상하게 해야 고치며, 불붙여 깨끗이 하며 단련하고,

주의 십자가는 내 힘과 의지가 되어야한다 _ 상수 131장 9절

Denio, Sproulie H.

God's faithful Servant 하나님의 충성된 종

Durack, Julia A.

Yes, I shall arise and return to my Father

(나는 다시 일어나 나의 하나님께 돌아가리라)

Ellison, Milbra K.

Christian, Mother, Missionary, Friend to All

(그리스도인, 어머니, 선교사, 모든인 백)

Gale, Hattie G. Heron

Until He Come(예수 오실 때까지)

Galt, Edith J.

Good and Faithful Servant(착하고 충성된 종)

Genso, John F./Genso, Mabel R.

Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him

(예수 안에서 자는 자들도 하나님이 그와 함께 데리고 오시리라 _ 데살로니가전서 4:14)

Gifford, Daniel L./Gifford, Mary H.

Write blessed are the dead which die in the Lord

(기록하라 주 안에서 죽는 자들은 복이 있도다 _ 요한계시록 14:13)

Goodwin, Charles

Devoted Father of the Homeless Children

(집 없는 아이들의 아버지로 헌신했다)

Greenfield, Maude S.

And whom he called he also glorified _ ROM 8:30

(또한 그들을 부르시고 그들을 또한 영광케 하셨느니라 _ 로마서 8:30)

Hall, William J./Hall, Rosetta S.

Hall, Sherwood/Hall, Marian B.

Whether we live, or die, we are the Lord's

(사나 죽으나 우리가 주의 우리라 _ 로마서 14:8)

Heron, John W.

The Son of God Love Me, and Gave Himself for Me

(하나님의 아들이 나를 사랑하여 자신을 내게 주셨다 _ 갈라디아서 2:20)

Hill, R. Florence

東出十三年余之生命爲朝鮮民族獻身日日歡過
(한국에서의 13 년 동안 자신의 생명을 조선족을 위해 바친 헌신했다)
Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus (예수님, 예수님, 귀하하신 예수님)
Hillman, Mary R.
Nevertheless I live(그런즉 내가 산 것이니요 _ 갈라디아서 2:20)
Hirst, Sadie B. H.
Her children rise up and call her blessed(자녀들이 그녀의 축복을 기리다)
Hobbs, B. Ellen Puch
That in all things He might have the preeminence
(이는 천하 만물의 오各项 먼저 하나님께서 _ 콜로서서 1:18)
Hodges, Cecil H. N.
Come Unto Me(내게로 오라)
Hulbert, Homer B.
I would rather be buried in Korea than in Westminster Abbey
나는 웨스민스터 성당보다 한국 명매 묻히기를 원하노라
Jensen, Anders K.
이에게 큰 사랑이 없느니라 _ 요한복음 15장 13절
Greater Love Hath No Man _ John 15:13
Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets
... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God,
who gave it _ ECCL 12
(이는 사람이 거기의 평원함 원으로 돌아가고 조부엍이 거기로 몰아나라
... 흙은 어찌하 평원 돌아가 평은 그 주신 하나님께 돌아가 거 어찌하라 _ 전도서 12:5, 7)
Johnson, Walter V.
Faithful unto death
贊牧師至死盡忠於上帝
찬 목사가 하나님께 목록 충성을 다하였느니라
Kendrick, Ruby R.
If I had a thousand lives to give, Korea should have them all
(만일 내게 줄 수 있는 책 개의 생명이 있다면, 모두 조선을 위해 바치리라)
Lewis, Ella A.
遠涉大洋 初到朝鮮 廣傳福音 多救靈魂
(멀리 대양을 건너 처음 조선에 와 널리 복음을 전하여 많은 영혼을 구원하였다)
One of the First Servants of God in the Land of Morning Calm
(조용한 아침의 나라에서 힘선한 초기 하나님의 증론 중의 한 사람)
Lois, Lay/Nora
願救主矜恤之 (주수령 흙증을 원합니다)
Mckenzie, Annie P.
She Hath Done What She Could (그녀는 할 수 있는 일을 하였다)
Miller, Anna R.
In Jesus(예수 안에서)
Moore, James H.
참된 목사 침원 선교사
Those things which we have seen and heard, we declare unto you _ 1John 1:3
(우리가 보고 들은 바를 어머분께 전하노라 _ 요한1서 1:3)
Moore, Samuel F.
朝鮮人士를啓發與工 生을 예수로 引導하기를 願했답니다
더희 수고를 듣지며 그 행한 일이 피곤나니다 _ 요한제서 14:13
(저희 수고를 그대에게 그 행한 일이 피곤나니다 _ 요한제서 14:13)
Morris, Charles D.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want more than all in thee I find
(오리스토여, 주는 나의 원하는 전부이시니, 주 안에서 내가 더 풍성해 합니다
_ 찰스 웨즐리(Charles Wesley)의 기로문)
Pieters, Elizabeth C.
He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it
(내를 위해서 지지 목숨을 잃는 자는 얻으리라 _ 마태복음 10:39)
Pieters, Eva F.
Asleep in Jesus(예수 안에서 잠들다)
Quinn, Margaret J.
Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends
Randle, Pauline G.
Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life
(죽도록 충성하라 그러하면 내가 생명의 관을 네게 주리라 _ 요한계시록 2:10)
Reavis, Edith J.
To know Christ and to make Him known ...
(크리스도를 알고 그를 알게 하라 _ 베테리아보전교회의 모토)
Richards, Williams
Duty done - Victory won(해야 할 일을 마쳤고 - 승리를 얻었다)
Rue, George H.
나는 한국에 나의 뼈를 담고자 오는 사람이었습니다 ... 나는 어느 누구도 소름치 치료하지
않았습니다
I came to this land to give my whole body ... I have never treated any patient lightly
Shaw, William E./Shaw, Adeline H.
Faithfulness crowned with eternal joy
(신실한 믿음이 영원한 기쁨의 관을 받는다)
Shaw, W. Hamilton
Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends _ John 15:13
Soda Gaichi
孤児의慈父 (고아의 자부)
Stokes, Arlene A.
In Thy presence is fullness of joy _ Ps 16:11(주의 앞에는 충만한 기쁨이 있고 _ 시편 16:11)
Toft, James
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith
(나는 선한 전투를 싸우고 나의 달리길을 지나고 믿음을 지켰으니 _ 디모데후서 4:7, 8)
Jesus is Mighty to Save(예수는 구원의 힘)
Turner, Arthur B.
Shew Thy Servants Thy Work and Their Children Thy Glory
願主之僕人得見主之行爲, 願其子孫得觀主之榮光
(주께서 행하신 일을 주의 종들에게 나타내시며, 주의 영광을 그들의 자손에게 나타내소서
_ 시편 90:16)
Underwood, Horace G./Underwood, L. S. Horton
In all these things we are more than conquerors
(이 모든 일에 우리는 밧탈히 이긋나니라 _ 로마서 8:37)
Underwood, Horace H.
Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day
and having done all, to stand
하나님의 전신장갑을 취하라. 이는 악한 날에 너희가 능히 대적하고 모든 일을 행한 후 세지
위함이라
(에베소서 6:13)
Underwood, Ethel Van W.

(하나님이 우리에게 소심 것은 두려움하는 마음이 아니요 오직 능력과 사랑과 철저하는
마음이니 _ 디모데후서 1:7)

Underwood, Horace G. Jr.

Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, good report,
if there be any virtue or praise, think on these things

종들로 전쟁들아 무엇에든 참되며 경건하며 옳으며 청결하며 사랑할 만하며 칭찬할 만하며
무슨 덕이 있든지

무슨 가치가 있든지 이것들을 생각하라(믿음보서 4:8)

Underwood, Joan Vida D.

Be always joyful; pray continuously; give thanks whatever happens

항상 기뻐하며 쉬지 말고기도하며 벌써 어디 상황하라(데살로니가전서 5:16~18)

Widdowson, Mary

Servant of God. Well Done! Rest from Thy Loved Employ

(하나님의 종, 잘하였도다! 수고를 그치고 쉬게 되기를. J. 콧미케리의 찬송시 중)

Young, Mabel B.

She Hath Done What She Could(그녀는 할 수 있는 일을 했다)

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Article

Contributing to Public Deliberation by Religious Behavior: Beyond the Inclusivism–Exclusivism Debate

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Abstract: Recently, political philosophers have debated the role of religious reasons in public deliberations, such as appealing to religious convictions and religious classics. Exclusivists, such as Rawls, Quong, Hartley, and Watson, argue that democratic governments and citizens should restrict or exclude the use of religious reasons in making laws and policies, while inclusivists, such as Gaus, Vallier, and Billingham, oppose such categorical exclusion. Nevertheless, the debate mainly focuses on the role of religious reasons in public deliberation. In this paper, I will argue that religious behaviors—defined as highly altruistic actions motivated by religious beliefs, such as dedicating substantial time and effort to serving the poor and advancing the common good—can exert positive influences on public deliberation. Through this kind of altruistic action, religious believers can subtly influence non-religious citizens. While religious believers may not rationally persuade non-religious citizens through religious reasoning, the altruistic actions exhibited by religious believers could emotionally inspire admiration and motivate non-religious citizens to learn more about those religions. This enhances mutual understanding among different religious and secular sects and thus improves public deliberation. Furthermore, I argue that the improved understanding fostered by religious behaviors can facilitate exclusivism and inclusivism to overcome certain philosophical challenges, such as the problems of incompleteness and anarchy, which are among the most frequent criticisms directed at exclusivism and inclusivism. Hence, this paper highlights an aspect overlooked in the exclusivism–inclusivism debate: no matter whether the democratic government and citizens should permit or restrict religious reasons, religious behavior is still beneficial in public deliberation.

Keywords: inclusivism; exclusivism; public justification; religion; liberalism; Neo-Confucianism

1. Introduction

Rooted in the religious tumult of early modern Europe, liberalism is notably characterized by its commitment to embracing the pluralism of religions. While a wide range of religious organizations enjoys robust protection in liberal democracy, religion is simultaneously subject to various restrictions. Notably, several philosophers argue for constraints on the use of religious reasons in the public justification of laws and policies (Rawls 2005; Quong 2011; Schwartzman 2011; Watson and Hartley 2018; Neufeld 2022; Wong 2022). These philosophers call their view *exclusivism*. For example, Rawls (2005, p. 453) and Quong (2011, p. 275) argue that reasonable citizens should not make political decisions solely on the grounds of religious reasons. They may support certain laws and policies based on religious reasons, but in due course, they should be able to offer public reasons to justify their decisions, which are decisions accessible to other reasonable citizens. Watson and Hartley (2018, p. 76), furthermore, propose the total exclusion of religious reasons from public justification. They argue that the act of appealing to religious reasons itself is disrespectful to other citizens (Wong 2020).

Meanwhile, some philosophers reject this restraint on religious reasons and argue that citizens should have the permission to make political decisions solely on the grounds of religious reasons (Eberle 2002; Gaus 2011; Waldron 2012; Wolterstorff 2014; Vallier 2014;

Billingham 2022). These philosophers call their view *inclusivism*. For example, Waldron (2012, p. 845) contends that the government and citizens should not impose an outright ban on religious reasons in public discussion simply because they are “non-public reasons”, given the complex and varied nature of religion, which often includes aspects that are sufficiently accessible to other citizens. Additionally, Vallier (2014, p. 66) posits that barring religious reasons from public justification places an unfair burden on religious believers in the public domain, compared to their secular fellow citizens. The prohibition of invoking religious reasons compels religious citizens to split their identities and conceal their genuine beliefs in the public domain of liberal democratic societies. This leads to a kind of self-estrangement and an assault on their personal integrity.

As discussed above, the debate between exclusivism and inclusivism has been one of the most dominant debates in liberal political thought about the relationship between religion and politics.¹ Both sides present sophisticated arguments, yet it seems that the philosophers who participate in this debate have excessively focused on whether religious reasons should be permitted in public deliberation. Religion is a multifaceted entity that encompasses a vast array of practices, and it is vital not to neglect those aspects that fall outside the realms of speech and debate. In this paper, I will concentrate on a research gap in liberal political theory, where the role of religious action has been overlooked by philosophers in favor of reason and argument. Instead of aligning with either exclusivism or inclusivism within the debate, I will rather focus on an often-neglected aspect of religion by both camps—*religious behavior*, specifically those altruistic actions inspired by religious convictions. My research question is *how religious behavior influences public deliberation in liberal democracy*, and my claim is that *religious behavior plays a beneficial role in public deliberation, as it can demonstrate an exemplary influence on other citizens and mitigate disagreement in a pluralistic society*.

This research holds theoretical significance that will contribute to the field of liberal political theory. First, it broadens the inclusivism–exclusivism debate by shifting the focus from the frequently discussed issue of religious reasons in public deliberation to a new dimension—religious behavior. This shift offers a fresh perspective that re-examines the role of religion in liberal politics. Second, it presents a novel perspective on understanding the positive impact of religious behavior on liberal politics through the lens of moral exemplarism. The paper suggests that religious practitioners, acting as moral exemplars, can inspire admiration and curiosity among citizens, potentially leading to a more harmonious society.² This viewpoint can contribute to theories of civic virtue and moral leadership within liberal democracies. Third, my paper draws upon Neo-Confucianism to exemplify the role of religious behavior. This introduces cross-cultural insights, which can diversify and enhance the current inclusivism–exclusivism debate that is predominantly Western-centric.

2. Religious Behaviors

Religion manifests itself in highly diverse traditions and cosmologies. Amidst this variety, there is a notable commonality in the moral guidelines offered by religions, most prominently reflected in their encouragement of altruistic action. Here, altruistic actions mean actions showing a sincere, selfless concern for the welfare of others, often manifested through actions of religious believers who intend to help without expectation of personal gain or reward (Nagel 1970, p. 79; Barasch et al. 2014, p. 393). This emphasis on altruism can be found in the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—but also in the main dharmic religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism (Bakker 2013). All these religious groups tend to limit self-interested behavior and encourage altruistic actions (Shaver et al. 2016, p. 129). One example of this is the idea of *agape*, epitomizing a kind of love that is both unconditional and sacrificial, reflecting the nature of God’s boundless affection for humankind. Emulating God’s example, Christians are called to love others with the same selflessness and generosity. This commitment to *agape* often translates into Christians contributing their money, time, and resources to assist those less fortunate and bolstering

charitable organizations dedicated to alleviating suffering and need (Jackson 2021). Buddhists have the practice of giving (*dana*), which means offering food, shelter, wisdom, or medicine to monks, nuns, and other laypersons. In Islam, *Zakat* is one of the Five Pillars, which is a form of almsgiving to the needy. *Zakat* is obligatory for all financially stable Muslims and thus supports many Muslim faith-based relief and development organizations in reducing poverty and providing basic education to less affluent people. In other words, despite the diversity in religious beliefs and practices, altruism is a universal value shared among various faiths. As the evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson observes, most enduring religions promote altruism expressed among members of the religious community (Wilson 2015).

I shall define those highly altruistic actions motivated by religious beliefs as *religious behaviors*. These religious behaviors include donating a large portion of income to the needy, spending time and effort on activities of their church or religious organizations that help the poor, visiting the sick, providing disaster relief, etc. An example of a person wellknown for his religious behavior is St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, whose members are known for their devotion to simplicity and their dedication to helping the needy. St. Francis renounced most of his wealth and chose a life of poverty that serves the poor and marginalized. Another example is Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who established a grassroots aid organization during the Vietnam War, rebuilt villages, and later founded Plum Village in France, where he inspired many people to embrace compassion and mindfulness. These people consistently performed ascetic practices of self-discipline and abstention from indulgence for the sake of helping others in need.

I do not mean that all altruistic actions are motivated by religious beliefs. However, as some social scientific studies show, religious beliefs often serve as a powerful incentive for individuals to dedicate their time, resources, and energy toward altruistic activities (Gill 1999, 2005; Lunn et al. 2001). For example, Robin Gill (1999, pp. 145–70) utilizes extensive international data from social attitude surveys and examines the potential correlation between religious belief and altruistic behaviors. The findings indicate that those who are religiously engaged exhibit distinctive altruistic attitudes and actions. It is observed that their views can evolve over time, particularly concerning issues like sexuality, and there are notable ethical divergences among various congregations. Yet, in comparison to their non-religious counterparts, those with religious beliefs tend to exhibit a distinctive consistency in both their attitudes and actions related to altruism. Individuals who regularly attend Christian churches not only hold specific theistic and Christian beliefs but also possess “a strong sense of moral order and concern for other people” (Gill 1999, p. 197). As stated in surveys by the European Value Systems Study Group in the 1980s and 1990s, “churchgoers in Britain, and more widely in Europe, were two or three times more likely than other people to be involved in some form of voluntary service” (Gill 1999, p. 172). Many voluntary community services such as childcare facilities, youth organizations, charity stores, and elderly care rely substantially on the contributions of churchgoers (Gill 1999, p. 173). Additionally, they prioritize international charitable donations and take the needs of the poor overseas more seriously than do other people (Gill 1999, p. 197). An analysis of data from the British Social Attitudes survey in 1994 on preferred uses for national lottery funds reveals that regular churchgoers are significantly more likely to support spending on helping starving people in poor countries (48%) than non-churchgoers (22%) (Gill 1999, p. 190).

The reason for this is that, for many religious believers, altruism is not pursued for recognition or tangible rewards. Rather, it is a duty stemming from their spiritual perspective, integral to their understanding of existence. Their actions align with their beliefs, dictating that they assist others regardless of their circumstances—wealth, poverty, acclaim, or criticism. This explains the sincerity and consistency of religious believers.³ Below, I shall illustrate the idea of religious behavior through a Neo-Confucian idea of oneness, showing how altruistic actions are required by this metaphysical and religious idea in the

Confucian tradition. There are two reasons that I use Confucianism as an example. First, Confucianism's potential to contribute to democratic politics in public deliberation has not been as extensively examined as other religions such as Christianity or Islam. Christianity (e.g., Quinn 2005; Billingham 2021) and Islam (e.g., March 2009; Westfall 2024) have been the subject of significant scholarly attention regarding their contributions to democratic politics, whereas Confucianism, particularly Neo-Confucianism, has not been afforded the same depth of analysis. Secondly, apart from China, Confucian philosophy has had a significant impact across various East Asian societies, including Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Hence, exploring how individuals with these Confucian values and beliefs could influence public deliberation would be of great academic significance.

3. The Neo-Confucian Idea of “Oneness”

For over two millennia, Confucianism has significantly shaped the religious and philosophical landscape of East Asia. Originating from the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE), this school of thought gained prominence when it was adopted as the official ideology by Chinese dynasties starting in the 1st century BCE. Confucius, along with other classical Confucian thinkers like Mencius (372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (310–238 BCE), concentrated primarily on the practical questions of “how”, such as how a person can learn to be virtuous and live a moral life, rather than what the world is (Sarkissian 2010, pp. 11–12). The lack of a well-defined metaphysical framework within Confucianism has rendered it comparatively less appealing to Chinese intellectuals in the wake of Buddhism's transmission to China. Buddhism, which made its way to China around the 2nd century, reached the zenith of its influence from approximately the 6th to the 9th century, primarily during the Tang dynasty. It boasts a detailed and expansive metaphysical system that robustly underpins its ethical teachings and self-cultivation practices. This comprehensive metaphysical foundation in Buddhism highlighted perceived shortcomings within Confucian thought, prompting many Confucians during the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties to acknowledge these gaps. In response, they began to formulate a more substantial metaphysical structure to enrich the Confucian philosophical tradition.⁴ Due to their emphasis in metaphysical speculation, these Confucians, such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529), are often called Neo-Confucians (Chang 1955). *Oneness* is one of the metaphysical ideas that Neo-Confucians have often appealed to. In this section, I shall explain this idea and its ethical implications.⁵

Oneness is a view of the fundamental essence of the world; it primarily emphasizes the ethical dimension of the connection between an individual and others, including fellow humans, animals, and various things within the world. According to this view, “we—and in particular our personal welfare or happiness—are inextricably intertwined with other people, creatures, and things” (Ivanhoe 2018, p. 1). The reason that Neo-Confucians look at the world from this perspective of oneness can be attributed to their ideas of *li* (理, pattern). In general, Neo-Confucians hold the view that *qi* (氣), a vital and dynamic substance, forms the foundation of all things in the world. However, they were also skeptical that *qi* by itself could fully explain everything of significance about the phenomenal world. Neo-Confucians recognized a profound coherence and structure in the world, which they deemed of great value. This is observable in phenomena such as the natural behaviors of plants and animals and the harmonious interplay between the changing seasons and the cycles of life they support and propagate. To explain this intricate order and unity, many Neo-Confucians posited that an additional, underlying principle must be shared among everything in the world. They referred to this principle as *li*, which they believed underpinned the observable order of the universe (Angle and Tiwald 2017, pp. 23–49). Furthermore, this *li* does not exist independently of everything. Rather, many Neo-Confucians believe that “everything in the world contained within itself all the... patterns in the universe” (Ivanhoe 2018, p. 22). In brief, Neo-Confucians believe that *all in each*. The creation and demise of any one thing can have an impact on everything in the world. An example of this

view of oneness can be seen in the writing of Wang Yangming (Ivanhoe 2009, pp. 160–62). To Wang, great people feel with all things in the universe, viewing Heaven, earth, and all entities as extensions of themselves. This perspective sees the world as one family and does not differentiate between self and others based on physical separation. This intrinsic empathy is a natural expression of one's benevolence, extending not just to other humans but also to animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. This universal empathy is evident in the instinctive compassion one feels towards a child in danger, the pain of animals, the distress for damaged plants, and even the concern for broken objects. Wang suggests that this is not due to their similarities to us or the fact that they possess life, but rather because of an inherent feeling of benevolence that enables us to connect with all of them.

Here, Wang Yangming vividly describes the Neo-Confucian view of oneness.⁶ First, the scope of oneness extends beyond humanity. It encompasses not just sentient beings within the cosmos but also inanimate entities. Therefore, the principle of oneness suggests a profound connection with all aspects of the universe. Secondly, oneness does not mean that everything is *biologically* connected by *li*. The suffering and demise of other creatures and entities would not harm us directly. Nevertheless, we are *emotionally* connected by *li* with other things. Thus, the aesthetic appeal of a beautiful building can bring us joy, while its damage can leave us feeling a sense of regret. Thirdly, the idea of oneness suggests *an expanded conception of self* (Ivanhoe 2018, p. 70; cf. Tien 2012). The boundary between self and others is undermined. The idea of oneness requires one to incorporate the other into one's own identity, embracing the "other" within a broader and evolved understanding of oneself. As Wang outlines, this process begins with encompassing fellow humans into one's sense of self, followed by sentient beings, and ultimately extends to non-living things. Over time, the joy and pain experienced by these "others" cease to be solely *their* experience; instead, their emotions are interwoven with our experiences of joy and pain.

Given this expanded conception of self, Neo-Confucians advocate for *religious behaviors* that aim to promote the collective good of every being and find balanced, mutually beneficial, and harmonious ways of living together. This expanded conception of self enables Neo-Confucians to understand the cosmos as an integrated whole, where each component, no matter how seemingly insignificant, plays a role in the maintenance and functioning of the larger system. This view fosters a deep concern for the welfare and suffering of others. Every being is seen as contributing to the prosperity of one another. Therefore, the ideal scenario is one where all beings coexist in harmony, minimizing harm to one another, and collectively thriving. To Neo-Confucians, there is no difference between altruistic actions and egoistic actions. For when they promote the collective good of all beings, they do not do this at the cost of their self-interest. Rather, their altruistic actions benefit others *as well as* them.⁷ Philip Ivanhoe once used parenting as an example (Ivanhoe 2018, pp. 72–73). A father perceives unity with his children, recognizing their welfare and joy as extensions of his own. In the act of benefiting them, the father's actions are for the children's benefit, yet they also promote the father's personal well-being and happiness. Often, when the father attends to their needs, he is not preoccupied with thoughts of personal sacrifice. Instead, he finds satisfaction in nurturing their development. The father is conscious and accepting of the fact that to foster the children's happiness truly, the father must be attentive to their individual desires and vigilant against the imposition of his own wishes and ambitions onto them. In the words of Neo-Confucianism, this father is *in oneness* with his children, and Neo-Confucians ask us to expand this scope of oneness all over the world.⁸

This idea of oneness explains why many Neo-Confucians have consistently performed altruistic and ascetic activities throughout their lives. One example of this is Zhu Xi, the most representative Neo-Confucian during the Song dynasty. While contemporary scholars often focus on the comprehensive philosophical system of Zhu Xi (e.g., Ng and Huang 2020), his religious behaviors should not be overlooked. Like his contemporaries, Zhu Xi was well versed in Confucian classics and succeeded in civil service examinations, securing a position as a government official. However, he was deeply committed to the resurgence of Confucian teachings, which often put him in conflict with other officials. This tension

resulted in a cyclical career, oscillating between governmental roles and scholarly seclusion. During his retreats, he dedicated himself to prolific writing and the establishment of academies, steadfast in his mission to rejuvenate the teachings of Confucius.

As the Sinologist Chan Wing-tsit observes, Zhu Xi lived a life marked by severe financial scarcity (Chan 1989, pp. 61–89). His familial background did not afford him wealth, and his own earnings were meager. Despite this, Zhu Xi frequently allocated much of his limited resources to assisting those less fortunate, establishing educational institutions and disseminating Confucian texts, thereby facilitating the spread of Confucian doctrine. He spent his money on acquiring farmland to provide a steady source of support for academies, and he also set up charitable granaries, which allowed individuals to stockpile food in anticipation of potential famine. He managed his finances in such a frugal manner that he maintained only the most basic level of sustenance for himself. “He led a very thrifty life, needing only enough clothing to cover his body and food to fill his stomach, and took situations in stride that others would have found unbearable” (「其自奉則衣取蔽體，食取充飢，居止取足以障風雨。人不能堪，而處之裕如也。」) (quoted from Chan 1989, p. 77). Despite these challenging circumstances, Zhu Xi still insisted on promoting Confucian rituals, assisting those in need, and instructing his disciples. His religious behavior can be explained by the idea of oneness. Zhu Xi held the conviction that the world could improve if a greater number of people were liberated from poverty and cultivated goodness, guided by the teachings of Confucius. Therefore, in his view, his personal poverty was not a misfortune but a necessary expenditure for the greater collective good.

Zhu Xi’s ascetic lifestyle garnered considerable respect from scholars during that time. He spent most of his life in Fujian, a peripheral region distant from the flourishing capital. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi’s location on the fringes did not deter eager learners from various locales. They journeyed to this outlying province to study under him. Among those whose names are recorded, over four hundred were his students, not to mention the countless others whose names have not been etched into the records of history. Some even predict that Zhu Xi may have the largest number of students of any Neo-Confucian in history (Chan 2007, pp. 176–93). Despite the looming threat of a death sentence as a result of his critical stance against influential politicians, and the active suppression of his teachings, Zhu Xi maintained a loyal following of students up to his demise. The adherence to Zhu Xi went beyond an appreciation for his profound knowledge of Confucian classics. It was also because his sincere and ascetic religious behaviors provided a tangible example of sagely conduct. This demonstration of virtue captivated many, inspiring admiration and emulation among those who aspired to lead a similar life of virtue.

To clarify, I do not claim this peaceful, service-oriented way of life as unique to Neo-Confucians. The idea of oneness, as well as the religious behavior inspired by this idea, can be found across various significant philosophical and religious traditions, albeit manifested in diverse forms (Ivanhoe et al. 2018; Streib and Klein 2016, p. 76). For example, according to Aquinas, Christianity believes that the world is formed by the “Great Chain of Beings”, which means “the seamless continuum of being from God to the lowliest inanimate entity” (Shields and Pasnau 2016, p. 175).⁹ Within this chain, while distinct gaps demarcate different species, there is also a certain degree of overlap. Take humans, for instance; we share certain characteristics with the primates that are considered below us in this hierarchy, as well as with the angels that reside above us. This interconnectedness implies that the natural world is so intricately linked that any destruction to one part can have far-reaching effects on the whole. Aquinas further suggests that the expression of God’s goodness is not limited to the well-being of individual beings. Rather, it is through the collective thriving of all creatures, in their rich diversity, that God’s goodness truly manifests (Shields and Pasnau 2016, p. 172). Therefore, many Christians’ moral action extends beyond personal or anthropocentric concerns, for they have a consideration of the well-being of the entire world. This holistic view underscores the moral demand to preserve and nurture the diversity of life, as each creature plays a role in the universe.¹⁰

Similarly, Buddhism presents a vision of the self that is deeply interconnected with the entire universe, seeing each individual as a part of a vast, interwoven network. The concept of a fixed “self” is replaced by an understanding of a constantly shifting composition of elements. Buddhism, therefore, challenges the notion of a lasting, unchangeable identity. The self is considered to be more like a loose container, with boundaries that allow a continuous flow of sensations, thoughts, emotions, and consciousness. In other words, the self, like all things in the world, is impermanent (Kaza 2018, p. 435). From this viewpoint, it is a significant misconception to regard oneself as a separate, enduring entity, distinct from the rest of existence. Buddhist thought emphasizes “interdependence”, the idea that all beings are interconnected and mutually reliant (Ivanhoe 2018, p. 52). Nothing can exist in isolation; it is always the product of a network of causes and conditions, which in turn are influenced by other factors. This leads to a complex, web-like structure of causality, where everything is in some way linked to everything else. Given the intimate and inextricable interconnection between self and world, Buddhists argue that to get rid of the suffering of oneself, one must seek to get rid of the suffering of all beings of the entire world. This holistic concern for the collective well-being is especially evident in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which places a strong emphasis on “great compassion” (mahākaruṇā) as a fundamental virtue (Ivanhoe 2018, pp. 94–95). This tradition promotes a broader sense of care, advocating for the welfare of all beings.

To conclude, a multitude of philosophical and religious traditions espouse a world-view that all entities in the universe are fundamentally interconnected. This perspective suggests that an individual’s existence is deeply entwined with that of others, encompassing fellow humans, animals, and the environment. Consequently, a person’s concern should extend beyond their own welfare, embracing a selfless approach that encompasses the well-being of all beings. This way of altruistic living is exemplified by revered religious figures like Thích Nhất Hạnh, as previously noted.¹¹ In the following, I shall explain how these altruistic religious behaviors could have positive influence on public deliberation.

4. Religious Behavior and Public Deliberation

In the last section, I illustrated religious behavior through the example of Neo-Confucians, who were driven by the idea of oneness. They embraced the collective welfare of the world as their personal responsibility and consistently demonstrated altruistic and ascetic behavior throughout their lives. In fact, philosophers have often neglected this aspect of religious action in the inclusivism–exclusivism debate. Usually, when exclusivists and inclusivists discuss the interactions of religious believers with dissenting individuals, three primary modes of engagement are often mentioned. The first mode is offering religious reasons (Eberle 2002; Vallier 2014). Religious believers can support or reject a law or policy by offering religious reasons. For example, some Christians oppose the recognition of homosexuality based on biblical passages such as Romans 1:26–27, which they interpret as characterizing homosexual acts as unnatural. The second mode is to translate your religious beliefs into public reasons and present them (Rawls 2005; Schwartzman 2011). For instance, while Martin Luther King Jr. opposed racial segregation on the basis of Christian ethics, stating that “every man must be respected because God loves him” (King 1986, p. 122), he also articulated that racial segregation is objectionable because it violates fundamental liberties and undermines social solidarity.¹² The third mode is conjecture, which means that religious believers imagine themselves adopting the comprehensive doctrine of fellow adherents from different faith traditions, presenting arguments derived from those believers’ own comprehensive doctrines (Schwartzman 2012; Clayton and Stevens 2014; Wong 2019). The aim is to demonstrate that, based on their religious belief, they should agree or reject certain laws or policies. Although these three activities vary in approach, their unified goal is persuasion, articulating reasons why my stance is logical or why you might consider altering your viewpoint. Essentially, these actions can be viewed as employing a “pushing” strategy. While these religious believers provide reasons to others,

their intention is still to “push” others to revise their thinking through dialogue and reasoning.

In contrast with these activities, religious behavior is more like a “pulling” strategy. Religious behaviors are often based on non-scientific beliefs. For example, the religious practices of Neo-Confucians, as mentioned in the previous section, are founded on their worldview of oneness, which clearly conflicts with modern science (Priest 2019). Hence, it is unrealistic to expect that other citizens who do not believe in this religion would be rationally persuaded to perform religious behavior. However, the influence of religious behavior is not on rational grounds, but on emotional grounds. Those religious practitioners dedicate their time, efforts, and sometimes their very lives to advancing the greater good of humanity. This level of sacrifice is extraordinary, so much so that it often surpasses what many people would be willing or able to endure. Yet, for these religious practitioners, such sacrifices are not only bearable but can be sources of fulfillment and joy. Their actions, marked by a sincere and selfless concern for others, can spark curiosity of those who witness them. In the words of Linda Zagzebski, they become a kind of moral exemplar, people that we naturally admire and strive to emulate (Zagzebski 2017, p. 2).¹³ These moral exemplars can exert an exemplary influence on others, leading observers to become intrigued by the deep sense of purpose and fulfillment that these religious practitioners exhibit. Questions might arise about the driving force behind their willingness to forsake personal gain and comfort. What beliefs fuel their passion? What convictions compel them to live in such a self-denying yet contented manner?

As admiration grows, it can lead to a deeper exploration of the religious practitioners’ way of life. Other citizens may start to reflect on the principles and values that guide these religious practitioners. This exploration can evolve into a thorough engagement with the believers’ spiritual texts and teachings, fostering a genuine appreciation for their religious doctrines. Through this process of inquiry and discovery, some people may find that the teachings resonate with their own search for meaning and purpose. This resonance can lead to a more profound connection with the religious community, where what started as simple admiration may blossom into a personal spiritual journey, potentially culminating in the decision to emulate the practitioners and become followers themselves. This process of moral learning, which begins with the admiration of moral exemplars and progresses by emulating their virtues, has been frequently proposed by philosophers of education in recent years (Zagzebski 2017; Kristjansson 2017; Croce 2020). Even if people do not become followers of those religious practitioners, they may still be moved by those religious behaviors and take their religious views seriously. This transformative experience is a testament to the power of religious behaviors and the impact they can have on the world. In other words, instead of being “pushed” to change their view, these people are “pulled” to these religious practitioners, voluntarily seek to comprehend them further, and may eventually join the ranks of the faithful.

While the narrative outlined may seem idealistic, it does provide insight into how revered religious figures often garner extensive support and sympathy from diverse populations. Take, for instance, Zhu Xi, the Neo-Confucian mentioned earlier. His religious behavior drew a multitude of disciples from across the country, eager to learn from his wisdom. Remarkably, Zhu Xi’s influence was so compelling that it even persuaded students of other contemporary Neo-Confucians, such as Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1193), to abandon their original teachers and seek tutelage under him (Chan 2007, p. 185). Although some people disagreed with Zhu Xi’s thought, they still acknowledged that he was a public-minded and respectable figure. In a similar vein, the followers of St. Francis of Assisi and Thích Nhất Hạnh were not primarily swayed by theological discourse or religious arguments. Instead, it was the tangible manifestation of their faith through their actions that touched people deeply. Observers became captivated by the extraordinary way these venerable individuals lived their lives, which sparked a desire to understand the spiritual underpinnings that fueled such exemplary behavior.

This pulling effect of religious behaviors can make positive contributions to public deliberations. As numerous liberals suggest, a primary challenge in public deliberation is the disagreements stemming from diverse secular and religious convictions, which often escalate into moral and political controversies (Rawls 2005, p. xvii; Larmore 2020, p. 76). To address this, liberals seek out various strategies for coexistence and the establishment of laws that gain legitimacy from diverse viewpoints. This includes limiting the basis of lawmaking to publicly accessible public reasons (Quong 2011; Schwartzman 2011) or allowing religious citizens to use their religious reasons as grounds for contesting laws and policies (Vallier 2019). These approaches mainly discuss how people can live with each other given the disagreement.

Religious behaviors, however, offer a means of mitigating disagreements directly. By consistently engaging in religious behavior, the religious practitioners can attract the attention and admiration of other religious and secular citizens. They may be sympathetic with those religious practitioners and thus eager to know more about their religion. Eventually, they may even join the sect of those religious believers. No matter whether they convert or not, such admirations of religious behaviors can narrow down the gap between differing religious and secular viewpoints in public deliberation. Over time, the religious values of those practitioners might gain broader acceptance. The religious behavior can enhance other people's understanding of the religious practitioners' doctrines. This mutual understanding may facilitate all citizens reaching certain agreements with each other in public deliberation. In other words, while many liberals focus on how *rational* exchanges and justifications among secular and religious citizens are possible, I suggest that liberals should not underestimate the *emotional* effect caused by religious behavior, such as admiration (Zagzebski 2017, p. 28), that is, the "pull" people feel to understand more about each other's view and narrow down disagreement in public deliberation.¹⁴ Citizens should publicly commend such religious behaviors and encourage broader participation in these practices. While the moral respectability and value of religious behavior are widely acknowledged, its positive political impact has not been given sufficient consideration.¹⁵

However, I shall clarify that the pushing strategy (e.g., translating religious reasons to public reason, convincing others by religious reasons, etc.) and the pulling strategy (e.g., religious behavior) are not mutually exclusive. I do not mean that merely performing religious behaviors is sufficient to address moral and political disagreement. Religious behaviors cannot replace the function served by public reason and religious reason in public deliberation. On the contrary, these two strategies can be seen as mutually supplementary. The pulling strategy aims to emotionally motivate citizens to explore each other's moral and religious doctrines, thereby fostering a deeper mutual comprehension. This approach reduces the disparities in viewpoints among diverse secular and religious groups and aids in enabling citizens to persuade one another public or religious reasons. Put succinctly, *the pulling strategy facilitates the pushing strategy to be more likely successful*. Hence, the aim of my discussion of religious behaviors is not to present it as a third alternative to exclusivism and inclusivism in addressing disagreement. Rather, my contention is that both exclusivism and inclusivism can be benefited by acknowledging the value of religious behavior. Consequently, religious behavior is an element of religion that should not be overlooked in this philosophical debate.

5. Why Both Exclusivism and Inclusivism Should Be Concerned with Religious Behavior

I shall explain how religious behavior can help address certain theoretical issues that challenge exclusivism and inclusivism. First, for exclusivism, religious behavior can help to resolve the problem of incompleteness. The problem of incompleteness is a philosophical issue raised by some philosophers in opposition to exclusivism (Reidy 2000; Horton 2003). According to these critics, exclusivism fails to explain how a government can resolve fundamental moral and political controversies because it excludes too many considerations from the political domain. Only very few moral values can be used as public reasons

that are accessible to different reasonable citizens. The content of public reason is not substantial enough to settle controversial matters. While various exclusivists have explained how this problem can be resolved (e.g., Schwartzman 2005, pp. 209–14), religious behavior offers a novel approach to tackling this challenge. If some religious practitioners persist in their religious behavior, they could prompt others to explore their religious doctrines, possibly leading to an increase in followers. Even individuals who do not completely convert may adopt some of the moral values advocated by these practitioners. Citizens may then gradually share these religious values, and this enables these religious values to become a part of public reason. As some philosophers suggest, public reason should not be seen as an ahistorical, unchangeable set of moral values. Rather, it can be adapted and expanded, depending on different historical and cultural settings (Flanders 2012; Bonotti 2017, p. 135). Religious behaviors, therefore, can be seen as fostering an environment that piques the interest of people with different comprehensive doctrines and thus enriching the content of public reason. This, in turn, provides citizens with richer resources to resolve a multitude of disputes.

Secondly, inclusivism has been troubled by the problem of anarchy. The problem of anarchy is a philosophical issue raised by critics of inclusivism (Wall 2013; Boettcher 2015; Enoch 2015).¹⁶ According to these critics, inclusivism argues that non-public reasons, such as religious reasons, should be permitted to enter public justification. Citizens should be able to legitimately reject laws and policies on the grounds of these non-public reasons. This, however, leads to an embarrassing situation in which nearly all potential options of agreement are objectionable on the grounds of some non-public reasons. Consequently, inclusivism is left with no choice but to accept a state of anarchy (Wall 2013, p. 169; Enoch 2015, p. 118). Religious behavior, however, can help inclusivism to avoid this problem, for it enhances mutual understanding of different religious and secular sects in a pluralistic society. As some philosophers suggest, a way for citizens to convince others in inclusivism is to understand others' comprehensive doctrines and offer arguments that could be derived from these doctrines (Kogelmann and Stich 2016, pp. 724–25). In other words, citizens can convince each other by conjecture and may eventually reach agreement (Schwartzman 2012). However, this process hinges on the precondition that the citizens proposing conjectures possess an understanding of the religious doctrines of those to whom they are directing their conjectures. Coincidentally, religious behaviors can foster better mutual understanding among citizens with varied comprehensive doctrines, thereby aiding them in presenting conjectures to one another. Even if citizens do not believe in certain religious values, those religious values may become popular through the religious behaviors of some practitioners. Consequently, citizens can utilize these religious values to formulate conjectural arguments to convince those citizens who believe in those religious values. In brief, the popularity of certain religious values can reduce the difficulty of offering conjectural arguments, thereby enhancing the likelihood of achieving agreement among citizens within an inclusivist framework.

6. Conclusions

Instead of taking a side in the inclusivism–exclusivism debate, this paper posits that both sides focus too heavily on the task of offering reasons and arguments. My claim is that religious behavior, which means highly altruistic actions motivated by religious beliefs, should not be neglected in this debate because of its beneficial influence on public deliberation. I illustrate religious behavior using the example of the Neo-Confucians, who believe that everything in the world is inextricably intertwined. Thus, people should incorporate everything into their expanded conception of self and consistently strive to advance the collective good, even at significant expense to their own personal well-being. I further suggest that religious behavior represents a largely overlooked method of exploring the interactions between religious believers and their fellow citizens. Unlike the “pushing” strategy often adopted by exclusivists and inclusivists, which aims to rationally convince others or justify one's position using public or religious reasons, religious behaviors can

be seen as a “pulling” strategy which emotionally inspires the admiration of other citizens towards moral exemplars and motivates them to understand other religions in greater depth. The pulling effect of religious behavior can be supported by the effect of moral exemplarism suggested by Linda Zagzebski. While I do not intend to argue that the pulling strategy can replace the pushing strategy, I believe that these two strategies are mutually complementary. Relying solely on religious behaviors may not resolve moral and political disputes, yet it can enhance mutual understanding among different religious and secular groups. This, in turn, assists both exclusivism and inclusivism in tackling some of their philosophical problems, such as the problems of incompleteness and anarchy. In sum, this paper makes three contributions: (1) it presents a novel perspective on the positive impact of religious behavior on liberal politics through the lens of moral exemplarism; (2) it introduces cross-cultural insights by drawing upon Neo-Confucianism to illustrate the role of religious behavior; and (3) it broadens the inclusivism–exclusivism debate by shedding light on an aspect of religion that both sides have overlooked. No matter whether inclusivism or exclusivism is justified, that is, whether public reasons are necessary or religious reasons can be the sole grounds for political decision making, religious behavior can still play a beneficial role in mitigating moral and political disagreements in modern societies.

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Notes

¹ For an overview of this philosophical debate between inclusivism and exclusivism, see (March 2013; Zoll 2021, pp. 249–62; Wong 2021, pp. 69–71).

² However, I shall clarify that I do not intend to advocate for an autocratic understanding of religion. In other words, I do not argue that a single religion should eliminate pluralism in society. My paper assumes the idea of public justification, a notion accepted by many exclusivists and inclusivists alike. For the idea of public justification, it assumes that members of society will freely develop their worldviews, leading to a diversity of opinions on political and legal matters. To treat people as equals, we must ensure that political power is justified to them according to their own views, meaning that laws and policies should be justified by reasons that the public can recognize as valid. Exclusivists, like Rawls (2005, p. 229) and Quong (2011, p. 43), and inclusivists, like Gaus (2011, p. 15) and Vallier (2014, p. 24), both support this idea of public justification. In alignment with this, I also advocate that the pluralistic views in a liberal democratic society should be respected and thus laws and policies should be publicly justified, not based on religious reasons that some citizens may reject. Consequently, it is illegitimate for a government to enact religious laws and policies that are biased toward a particular religion because they would not be justifiable to believers of different faiths or to secular citizens. While I share this idea of public justification with exclusivism and inclusivism, my paper intends to go beyond the inclusivism–exclusivism debate, arguing that religious behavior can mitigate disagreements among citizens and facilitate public justification. This positive contribution of religious behavior to public justification should not be overlooked by both sides in the debate.

³ I shall clarify that my argument does not assert the superiority of religious altruism over non-religious altruism. In fact, altruistic acts from those who are non-religious are equally admirable and deserving of respect. The altruistic behaviors of some non-religious citizens may also attract people to understand these citizens more and thus narrow down possible disagreements. The emphasis of this paper on religious altruism is merely because it is a more common phenomenon for religious individuals to exhibit altruistic behavior (e.g., Gill 1999).

- 4 Nevertheless, as some scholars observe, although many Neo-Confucians saw themselves as fighting off Buddhism, their thoughts were deeply influenced by Buddhism at the same time (Ivanhoe 2000). Some ideas that are similar to the idea of oneness can also be found in the traditions of Daoism and Buddhism (Ivanhoe 2018).
- 5 For other possible areas in which Confucianism could contribute to modern societies, see (Wong 2021, 2023; Wong and Jackson 2023).
- 6 A similar view of oneness can also be found in the writing of another Neo-Confucian Zhang Zai (1020–1077). Zhang once wrote that “Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I regard as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions” (Tiwald and Van Norden 2014, p. 135).
- 7 However, this does not mean that all beings are considered *equally* in the perspective of oneness. Neo-Confucians still admit that there is a hierarchy of concern, even for the sage. Human beings, as the creatures that have the best quality of *qi* and are thus most capable of making the world better, have a uniquely high value. The perspective of oneness, therefore, should be called “anthropocosmic”, rather than “anthropocentric” (Tu 2002, p. 2). Human beings do not need to consider everything equally, but they have a greater sense of shared identity and destiny between self and world, aiming for the collective good of the entire interrelated system.
- 8 This does not mean that only a Confucian father would feel a sense of unity with his children. Fathers from other religions, as well as non-religious fathers, can also experience this feeling. The example of Philip Ivanhoe is simply used to demonstrate that the feeling of oneness is not a rare occurrence but rather a common aspect of parenthood. What Confucianism suggests is that we ought to take this feeling seriously and strive to extend it to all beings in the world.
- 9 In fact, the idea of “great chain of being” has a long history in the West. See (Lovejoy 1936).
- 10 Some might argue that the altruistic actions of these Christians are not out of pure altruism but to ensure their place in heaven, thus attributing a self-interested motive to their actions. However, as Thomas Aquinas suggests, acts of charity are not self-serving. Rather, they are manifestations of participating in God’s love, which is inherently selfless toward others. Therefore, altruistic deeds are not a means to an end, such as securing a place in heaven, but are expressions of the individual’s participation in the ultimate good, which is God (Porter 2012, pp. 267–68). The final outcome, which means securing a place in heaven, is at most a byproduct, but not an ultimate goal of altruistic actions.
- 11 Some might argue that religions in practice tend to be exclusive and be partial to those who share their faith. I also agree that these biased behaviors should be avoided. Nevertheless, regarding the question of whom to help, most major religions, including Christianity (Jackson 2021, pp. 1–2), Buddhism (Heim 2020, p. 37), Islam (Esposito 2011, p. 128) and Confucianism (Ivanhoe 2018, p. 70), concur that one should help people universally, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Therefore, unconditional altruism is a shared moral belief among these major religions, and I mainly attempt to argue that religious behaviors inspired by this unconditional altruism are beneficial to public deliberations in liberal democratic societies.
- 12 This can be seen as a kind of declaration (Rawls 2005, p. 465), which means that religious believers declare their own comprehensive doctrines in order to show that they support a political conception of justice in their political advocacy. Nevertheless, this approach of offering public reasons also encounters the problem of cheap talk (Wong and Li, forthcoming).
- 13 Here, I adopt Linda Zagzebski’s exemplarist moral theory (Zagzebski 2017), which outlines in detail how moral exemplars can inspire admiration in others and become central to moral education.
- 14 To clarify, my stance is not to overlook the various negative aspects that can be found within religious communities. Indeed, instances of corruption and scandal within some religious charities are undeniable and should be rightfully condemned and punished. Nevertheless, my argument does not encompass the broad assertion that religion is inherently advantageous to public discourse in liberal democratic societies. Instead, I am presenting a more focused viewpoint: I contend that religious behavior—specifically, altruistic actions that are driven by religious beliefs—can have a positive impact on public deliberations within liberal democratic societies. It is vital to differentiate these positive actions from the corrupt and scandalous activities that occur within some religious communities, which are not representative of religious behavior and do not invalidate the beneficial aspects of religious behavior.
- 15 Nevertheless, I am hesitant to suggest that the state should use subsidies to encourage religious behavior, as these subsidies may suggest government bias toward a particular religion, which could be objectionable to adherents of other religions and to secular citizens from the standpoint of public justification. Both exclusivist (Quong 2011, p. 61) and inclusivist (Vallier 2014, p. 202) perspectives would likely reject such subsidies. Therefore, I maintain that praise and encouragement for religious behavior should occur at the level of individual citizens, rather than at the level of government.
- 16 Given that “anarchy” is a term frequently encountered in various contexts, readers might mistakenly assume that “the problem of anarchy” is relevant to the discussion of anarchism. To clarify, “the problem of anarchy” as it is used here does not pertain to anarchism but is a particular philosophical concept used in critiques of inclusivism, notably by thinkers like David Enoch. This “problem of anarchy” refers to the concern that inclusivism, by allowing a broad range of defeater reasons in the public justification process, could paradoxically result in a situation where no laws can be recognized as legitimate within its own system.

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Article

No to Third Term! Pastoral Statement by the Church in Zimbabwe as an Indictment on President Mnangagwa's Bid to Amend the Constitution

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Abstract: The Second Republic of Zimbabwe has witnessed continued political and socio-economic crises. Despite the worsening crisis under the new dispensation, there have been calls for extending the current administration's term limit beyond 2028. The impending crisis has attracted several responses and criticisms across various sectors. The church collective in Zimbabwe has raised concerns over the crisis and issued several statements commenting on the developments in the national landscape. However, the church has been criticised for failing to speak with one voice, especially on political matters. The purpose of this article is to analyse the ecumenical statement that was released by the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) on 21 January 2025, titled 'Statement on Presidential Constitutional Term Limit'. The letter is the church leader's response to the ongoing pronouncements for extending the presidential term limits to allow the incumbent President Emmerson Mnangagwa to rule beyond his constitutionally mandated two terms, into 2030. The paper seeks to establish the role of the prophetic voice of the church in defending the constitution and the implications of such actions on the nature of the church–state relations in the Second Republic of Zimbabwe. The paper draws data from the issued ecumenical statement, the official government response to it, and general responses to it available online.

Keywords: pastoral letter; presidential term limit; ecumenical statement; second republic; church–state relations; ED2030

1. Introduction

The article analyses a pastoral letter that was released by the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) on 21 January 2025. The ecumenical statement is titled 'Statement on Presidential Constitutional Term Limits'. This comes at a time when the Zimbabwean state is on the brink of a constitutional crisis with the incumbent President Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa (also referred to by his initials, ED) clandestinely seeking for third term¹. The statement can be viewed as a proactive response by the church to voice its concerns about the impending political crisis and provide a national moral compass to direct the nation towards upholding constitutionalism and democratic principles. The history of Zimbabwe's politics indicates that the church is not a stranger to politics as it has, in many respects, provided the moral compass for the country (Masengwe 2024). The statement, therefore, presents the church's commitment to non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflict as one of its values and principles. While this is not the first time the church has commented on political matters, it was the first time that the

church spoke strongly and openly against the third term brigade and stood up to defend the constitution. Taking into cognizance the fact that the Zimbabwean state is in crisis, the pastoral letter can be viewed as a response that was meant to intervene in the likely conflict that could unfold as a result of extending the presidential limit. The letter presents an opportunity to assess the intersection between the church and the state in the quest to deal with potential and actual political violence, as well as the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflict. This paper will first discuss the prevailing political climate in Zimbabwe, particularly in relation to the calls for the extension of the presidential term limits. Secondly, the paper will unpack the official statement by the ZHOCD on the matter and discuss the subsequent response(s) by the government and citizens in general. The paper highlights what this means for the Zimbabwean people and the future of constitutionalism. Analysts have cautioned that the campaign for a third term could potentially lead the country into political instability (Mavedzenge 2025).

2. Background

This third term syndrome in Africa has received widespread scholarly attention, see (Demarest 2016; Vandeginste 2016; Yarwood 2016; McKie 2019; Tull and Simons 2017; Heyl 2019; Mangala 2020; Reyntjens 2020; Grauvogel and Heyl 2020). There is a growing trend in Africa whereby presidents have sought to extend their terms of office by removing term limits. This fashionable trend has gained momentum since the turn of the new millennium such that terms have been changed 47+ times in 28+ African states from April 2000 to July 2018 (Wiebusch and Murray 2019). However, this growing trend of circumventing term limit rules by the incumbents should not be mistaken to mean that Africans prefer a return to the president for life era of strongmen (Dulani 2015). Evidence shows that even those who have been successful in gaining their third term have not done so in the interest of the majority of the population (Lotfy 2022) (There are many mitigating factors that account for this, but this is beyond the scope of this article). This paper will, however, argue that the drive for a term extension is a self-serving agenda by the ruling elites, which in most instances attracts strong opposition from the general populace. This opposition is generally faced with repression from the state, which resorts to silencing dissenting voices. A closer look into the Zimbabwean case study is thus crucial.

As has been shown above, this phenomenon is not unique to Zimbabwe, many other African states have ‘modified constitutionally determined presidential term limits or adopted a flexible interpretation of relevant constitutional provisions to allow incumbent leaders additional terms in the highest office’ (Wiebusch and Murray 2019, p. 131). What is interesting, however, about the Zimbabwean case is that President Mnangagwa came into power through a military-assisted coup in 2017 (Tendi 2020), although he claims to be a constitutionalist. The Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS 2024) made interesting observations, arguing that coup leaders and military governments are allergic to term limits. The study establishes a link between coups and the evasion of term limits by highlighting that unconstitutional actions of one type (such as term limit evasions) beget unconstitutional actions of another (such as seizures of power via military coups) (ACSS 2024). This is true in the Zimbabwean case where former President Robert Mugabe’s tenure characterised by constitutionality for 37 years was ended by a ‘soft coup’. In the same vein, this paper argues that the opposite is the same, military coups beget term evasions. ACSS (2024) summarises the scenario as follows:

The relationship between military government and term limit evasions operates in both directions. Ten of the fourteen leaders who have evaded term limits have come to power via military coup, civil conflict, or military support. In other words,

leaders who gained power through extraconstitutional means, subsequently tend to violate legal constraints on their time in power. (ACSS 2024)

It is not surprising that President Mnangagwa, like his predecessor and mentor (former President Robert Mugabe), seeks to extend his stay in power. Mugabe's reign was characterised by the manipulation of the judiciary and constitutional processes to justify his continued stay in power. This resultantly rendered regional and domestic legal avenues ineffective in challenging his extended rule (Petrica 2020). President Mnangagwa was a key ally and trusted confidant in this system with a long history of ensuring President Mugabe remained in power. Since taking over in 2017, Mnangagwa positioned himself as a reformist and constitutionalist, promising that his administration (dubbed the new dispensation) would offer a complete break from the past and the beginning of a new era of democracy and prosperity in Zimbabwe. However, many scholars have argued that this 'new dispensation' led by Mnangagwa is simply a continuation of the old guard as the character and *modus operandi* of the regime has remained unchanged or even worsened in some aspects (Dube 2023; Moyo 2020; Tembo and Singh 2023). Others have termed it the new deception (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2019). The administration has been characterised by rampant stifling of opposition and dissenting voices and the lack of the rule of law and economic decline, which makes any extension of the president's tenure untenable.

3. A Quest for a Third Term by Hook and Crook

The proponents of the ED2030 agenda made various pronouncements which triggered a response from the ZHCOD. However, this paper argues that these pronouncements were not made in a vacuum and can be traced to President Mnangagwa's proclamation in 2019 at a political rally that '2030 ndendichiko!!!' (Shona translated: 2030 I will still be there in power) (Mavedzenge 2025). However, since his proclamation, which some may have brushed off as a bluff, there have been several worrying pronouncements made by politicians, church leaders, prominent members of society, ZANU PF activists, and, more recently, Members of Parliament (MPs) from both Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the hijacked opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party. From as early as 3 June 2024, newspaper headlines such as 'Vapostori join ED's 2030 bid bandwagon' (Nyangani 2024) show that this move was already in motion and interested parties were now joining to show their solidarity and endorse the idea. This headline highlights the church–state dynamics, politics, and discord in Zimbabwe's landscape. The apostolic sect and indigenous church leaders under the banner of Vapostori² and Ma Zion³ for ED (representing the apostolic sect and indigenous church leaders) welcomed and acknowledged President Mnangagwa's term extension bid. The Vapostori have aligned themselves with President Mnangagwa's administration and have blatantly and openly showed their support for the president, hence this call to endorse the 2030 bid was not surprising.

Some have argued that the indigenous churches have been co-opted by the state and now function as an extension or subsidiary of the ruling ZANU PF party (Matikiti and Pandasvika 2023; Musoni 2021; Mpofu 2021). At the meeting on 3 June 2024, church members, leaders, and ZANU PF members in attendance were all chanting ED 2030 slogans and singing praises to his leadership and administration (Nyangani 2024). The meeting was convened to celebrate ZANU PF's victory in the 2023 disputed elections where the indigenous church (in this case, Vapostori and MaZion), through its own admission, voted resoundingly for President Mnangagwa and his party. This shows a clear marriage between this group and the ruling elite. As such, the relationship can be explained as being sustained on a *quid pro quo* basis. Some religious leaders have overtly or covertly assumed the role of

enablers of the current Zimbabwean political matrix, thereby threatening democracy, social justice, and accountability, by using religious narratives to buttress the status quo (Dube 2021). This presents a challenge for the Zimbabwean church collective as there are some who side with the government without questioning to an extent that those like the ZHOCOD who raise concerns or seek to oppose government advances are labelled as enemies of the state, and thus not a true representation of the church voice. This article will return to untangling these complex dynamics later in the section, which discusses the responses to the ZHOCOD letter by the government.

A look at the headlines for the Zimbabwean newspapers shows the extent and gravity of this drive for President Mnangagwa (ED)’s 2030 agenda. Zimbabwe has four daily newspapers namely The Herald and Chronicle (published by ZIMPAPERS) and Newsday and Daily news (published by Alpha Media House and Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe, respectively) (Heseltine et al. 2024). Additionally, the two leading Sunday newspapers in Zimbabwe are The Standard (published by Alpha Media Holdings and The Sunday Mail (published by ZIMPAPERS). In this paper, we purposefully selected these six newspaper outlets to draw perspectives from the headline stories and paint a picture of the political mood and prevailing discourse as a background that prompted the church leaders to respond and invoke their prophetic voice. The choice to use these publications was based on their widespread readership. The paper also draws from publications from the state-owned publishing house (ZIMPAPERS) and the privately owned publishing houses (Alpha Media House and Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe) to avoid biases and present balanced perspectives. Table 1 captures the top stories related to the 2030 agenda as presented in the six selected publications.

Table 1. Newspaper headlines for January 2025.

Date	Headline	Newspaper
2 January 2025	No stalling ED 2030 Push . . . ZANU PF says it will effect this resolution this year	Daily News
4 January 2025	CCC MPs to visit Mnangagwa farm . . . planned field trip tomorrow part of push for talks.	Daily News
	Opposition to unite against ZANU PF: Timba	Newsday
5 January 2025	2030: CIO, Police Shake-up raises eyebrows	The Standard
6 January 2025	ZANU PF plots ED’s life presidency	Newsday
7 January 2025	ED farm visit tears CCC apart	Newsday
8 January 2025	Zw must defer 2028 polls . . . CCC reiterates as it pushes for national dialogue.	Daily News
9 January 2025	Defer polls to 2030 for continued development: CCC	The Herald
12 January 2025	Deferring the 2028 elections is doable, government says.	Daily News
	Tshabangu’s backing of ED2030 backfires	The Standard
13 January 2025	VPs fully back ED2030 push . . . ZANU PF big gun says, warns those opposing the bid.	Daily News
	Lawmakers endorse extended Presidential bid	The Herald
14 January 2025	ED 2030 push covers ground . . . as government readies for constitutional amendments.	Daily News
	Farm tour meant to extend ED tenure	Newsday

Table 1. Cont.

Date	Headline	Newspaper
15 January 2025	Government ready for constitutional amendments . . . Changes to extend Presidential term	The Herald
	MPs get 2030 bid underway . . . as they craft draft motion to defer 2028 polls by 5 years	Daily News
	ED’S third term bid impossible: Madhuku	Newsday
16 January 2025	Fringe parties oppose election postponement	Daily News
	Tshabangu backtracks on 2030 agenda	Newsday
17 January 2025	EFF Zim backs Tshabangu’s ED 2030 push	Daily News
	ZANU PF ploughs on with ED2030 agenda	Newsday
19 January 2025	2030 bid increasingly looks a done deal bar the shouting	Daily News
	Legal process to extend President’s term explained.	The Sunday Mail
	ZANU PF divisions over Mnangagwa exposed	The Standard
20 January 2025	ZANU PF reads riot act to officials resisting 2030 push	Daily News
	ZANU PF gears for referendum	The Herald
22 January 2025	Churches trash ED2030 Plan	Newsday
23 January 2025	OPC slams media over 2030 misinformation	The Herald
	People have a right to talk about ED2030: Minister	The Herald
24 January 2025	ZANU PF panics over anti-ED2030 Pushback	Newsday
	President not responsible for 2030 call: Ziyambi	The Herald
26 January 2025	Nothing can stop the people from editing the Constitution	Daily News
	Presidential term extension unstoppable	The Sunday Mail
	ZANU PF structures resist ED2030 agenda	The Standard
27 January 2025	War vets turn against ED	Newsday
28 January 2025	War vets savage 2030 agenda	Newsday
29 January 2025	Zim at tipping point over ED2030	Newsday

The above table depicts the prominent extent of the ED2030 agenda in Zimbabwe’s main newspaper publications (in January 2025). While this paper will not delve into an analysis of each of the above newspaper articles, it is essential to note that the media has consistently reported on the call for the extension of the presidential term. However, the framing of the bid to extend the term limit beyond 2028 has been glaringly different between the state-owned publishers’ narratives and independent media houses. For instance, the state media has consistently projected the call for the ED2030 agenda as a necessity for development and continuity, which must be embraced by all. The state narratives also present the extension as a grassroots outcry by the citizens and not a selfish agenda by the President and the ruling elite. This is not surprising as state-controlled media has been widely criticised and accused of blindly supporting the ruling ZANU PF party and advancing state propaganda (Moyo 2010). On the other hand, independent media voices have framed the call for the ED2030 agenda as an attempt to circumvent the constitution, undermine democracy and the rule of law to safeguard the interest of the minority ruling elites, particularly those close to the President. The independent media has presented critical perspectives on the dangers of extending term limits and exposed dissenting voices to the ED2030 agenda. Independent media has been critical of the government and seeks

to identify with the public (Mpofu et al. 2022; Sauti 2020). What is clear from both the state narratives and independent voices is that there are multiple proponents for the agenda and equal resistance to the same, which then prompted the church as a key stakeholder in the Zimbabwean national landscape to respond and weigh in on this critical matter.

However, the prophetic voice of the church is divided, as some leaders align themselves with the political figures while others attempt to maintain an independent posture (Tagwirei 2023; Dube 2020; Tarusarira 2020a). The prophetic voice is, therefore, a contested terrain as various ecumenical groups and independent church leaders continue to claim to speak on behalf of the church particularly on issues of national importance. Ecumenical groups such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (collectively constituting ZHOCD), and other non-conformist religious groups such as Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and churches in Manicaland have contributed towards the prophetic voice of the church in many respects (Tarusarira 2020b). Who speaks for the church in Zimbabwe is still a contested matter with multiple ecumenical groups and various independent leaders claiming to speak on behalf of the church and representing the Christian prophetic voice. The next section will discuss one such moment when the ZHOCD issued a critical statement as a crucial prophetic voice for the church in Zimbabwe.

3.1. No to Third Term—*Sekwanele! A Pastoral Statement by the Church in Zimbabwe*

The various ecumenical bodies of the church in Zimbabwe have been voicing their concerns to the state through meetings and pastoral letters (Manyonganise 2022). Pastoral letters play a fundamental role in crisis communication and are instrumental in helping the church respond to social and political crises (Hlova 2023). Historically, church leaders have issued pastoral statements as a mechanism through which they can inform, guide, and caution their members and the nation at large about major socio-political events and this has often sparked controversies and attracted state responses (Marek 2023). Zimbabwe has witnessed several instances whereby the ecumenical churches have issued guidance through pastoral letters. For instance, in 2019, the ZHOCD issued a pastoral letter suggesting the postponement of elections for seven years (ZHOCD 2019), a proposal which received criticism from the politicians, civil society, and citizens in general, leading to the church leaders withdrawing their proposal (Mujinga 2023). The ZCBC issued a pastoral letter titled, *the March is not Ended*, on 14 August 2020. The bishops admonished and challenged the government on corruption and misgovernance and the letter provoked a scathing response from the government (Iheanacho 2022). This shows that in times of socio-political crises, the church has pronounced its prophetic voice through pastoral letters which have been a valuable tool for providing guidance to believers and reinforcing moral positions (Hlova 2023). Therefore, with the impending political crises concerning the likelihood of a possible extension of the presidential term and increasing calls and pronouncements for the constitutional amendments by some sectors in society, the ZHOCD released an ecumenical statement on 21 January 2025, highlighting its position on the matter. This letter will be discussed in the following sections using a thematic analysis.

3.1.1. Term Extension Is Unconstitutional

The statement by the church leaders illustrates the church's bold move in defending the constitution and throwing its weight against the third term brigade. Church leaders expressed their 'concern' over ongoing pronouncements to extend the presidential limits. In their opening statement, the ZHOCD said:

The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) is concerned about the recent pronouncements by some Members of Parliament and Political activists

urging His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa to extend his term of office beyond 2028. (ZHOCD 2025)

Here, the church leaders were timeously invoking the church's prophetic voice in the midst of an impending political crisis. This comes at the backdrop of scrutiny from different sectors of society on the ability of the church collective (particularly Pentecostal leaders) to promote peace and democracy, as most churches have been accused of taking a passive stance or allowing themselves to be co-opted by the regime (Musoni 2021; Mudzanire and Banda 2021). In a true prophetic stance, the church leaders analysed the ongoing pronouncements by parliamentarians and political actors who were pushing for the president to extend his term of office beyond 2028. That the first point of call by the church is to flag some disturbing pronouncements by elected members of the legislature on a constitutional matter is a bold move that must be applauded. The church, in raising its prophetic voice and voicing its concerns about political statements about the future of the nation, was taking a proactive move towards avoiding political conflict that such pronouncements may ignite in a politically volatile environment like Zimbabwe.

The statement goes on to 'prayerfully urge His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe, Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa to resist the calls and the temptation by those calling for the extension of the Presidential Term Limits for the greater good of the country' (ZHOCD 2025). The church 'prayerfully' urged the president to resist the evil calls to abandon the constitution. The church's voice prayerfully and humbly requests and encourages the president to do the right thing. In confronting the Head of State on the matter, the church leaders were exercising their prophetic mandate to judge all political systems according to their adherence to God's justice and providing the moral compass for the nation (Mudzanire and Banda 2021). In doing so, the church leaders are conscious of the polarised nature of the Zimbabwean political landscape; hence, they choose to tread very carefully on this contentious matter, making it clear in their statement that this was not a demand but a humble, prayerful request for the president to consider doing the right thing for the nation. It is clear from the onset that the ZHOCD are opposed to any extensions to term limits by any means. For the church leaders, such a move would be tantamount to 'overthrowing the Constitution of the Country' (ZHOCD 2025).

The second paragraph of the statement draws solace from the remarks by the president as a testament to his commitment not to extend his term of office. In their opinion, the church leaders seem to appreciate that President Mnangagwa is the constitutionalist that he claims to be. The church leaders remind him in the statement of his commitment to upholding the constitution and preserving the gains of liberation and hard-won independence. The church leaders state the following:

The Church takes relief from the consistent remarks made by His Excellency on several occasions where he has repeatedly affirmed his commitment to uphold the Constitution of Zimbabwe by committing not to extend his Presidency beyond the Constitutional and legal limits. The President's pronouncements have always been clear and a significant step towards reinforcing the gains of the liberation struggle, good governance, democratic norms and promoting national peace and unity. We believe His Excellency intends to remain true to his oath to uphold, defend and respect both the Constitution and the Law in letter and spirit. (ZHOCD 2025)

The real question however is whether the church leaders really believe in President Mnangagwa's rhetoric? What makes the bishops confident that President Mnangagwa's remarks will translate into a true 'commitment' to upholding the constitution? Where does the church obtain the basis for this relief on President Mnangagwa's sentiments? Has

the president not given enough proof that he speaks without sincerity? How does the church have so much faith in an individual who has been on a rampage of mutilating the constitution through excessive amendments? These are critical questions particularly in the Zimbabwean context. President Mnangagwa has been notorious for finding creative ways of extending the terms of office of various State officers, sometimes in violation of constitutional term limits for those officers (Mavedzenge 2025). For instance, the president extended Chief Justice Malaba's term of office and allowed the amendment to benefit the incumbent. While this extension of the tenure of the Chief Justice was met with legal resistance (Tembo and Singh 2023), Chief Justice Luke Malaba's extended time in office was sustained, thanks to legal gymnastics in statutory interpretation (Kika 2025). Early in January this year, he also extended the Zimbabwe Defence Forces Commander General Valerio Sibanda's term of office by another year after he had reached the mandatory age of retirement (Mabika 2025). The extension of tenures for these office bearers is not a coincidence but a calculated move by the president to weaken institutions and arms of government and allow the executive to exert its influence and/or lobby for favours when needs be. The results of the Chief Justice tenure extension means that the president is likely to extend the tenure of judges who are viewed as favourable to the system (Tembo and Singh 2023). The same can be argued for the service chiefs who, in this case, were instrumental in ED's catapulting to the highest office. Thus, if the president can go to such lengths to extend the service chief's and Chief Justice's terms of office, what will stop him from extending the tenure of the Commander in Chief? With such a record of ignoring term limits for state officials, it would take a miracle for him to honour the presidential term limit. As Kika (2025) explains, those wanting to amend the constitution are not Democrats and are willing to bend all manner of rules and procedures. Why the church chooses to deliberately ignore this record and culture of extending term limits at any costs is worrisome. One wonders whether this is a deliberate oversight by the church, or perhaps this is a diplomatic way by the church leaders to appeal to the president's conscience and persuade him to be true to his word and do the right thing. Only time will tell.

What is clear from the statement is that the church leaders are calling for respect for the constitution by all, and most importantly, the president. This culminates in the church leaders making significant pleas, first and foremost to the president urging him to lead by example as the first citizen. First and foremost, the church leaders urge:

- (i) The President to uphold the Constitution and respect the Presidential Term Limits ensuring that elections are held in 2028 and that he supports a smooth power transition in 2028. (ZHOCD 2025)

This is the key plea that the statement is communicating, and it is targeted at the president to uphold the constitution and pronounce the elections when his term ends, as stipulated by the constitution. This means that the church expects the president to pronounce elections as scheduled for 2028 and allow other candidates but himself to participate and he must then be willing to accept the outcome of the elections and cede power to the elected administration, whether from his own party or opposition. According to the church leaders, this is the only option available for the president. Any diversion from the aforesaid will be unconstitutional. The options of the president are limited to this one major request—NO to third term—Sekwanele!—is a clear and recurring theme in the statement. This is predicated on the need for regular, free, and fair elections, a key theme which will now be discussed in the following section.

3.1.2. Elections in 2028 Are Not Optional

The issue of elections has always been contentious in Zimbabwe since 1980. Elections have been characterised by gross violence and electoral subterfuge (Kwashirai 2023; Moore

2023). Turning to the issue of elections and electoral reforms, in the third and fourth paragraphs of the statement, the church leaders emphasise their collective commitment to democracy and the rule of law. The church positioned itself as a key player in entrenching constitutionalism and therefore encouraged the president to do the same by adhering to the set constitutional term limits and supporting a 'peaceful transition of power in 2028'. This is quite a bold statement by the church leaders. According to Masezerano (2022), the peaceful, credible, and consensual change in power through democratic practices is a crucial element for sustainable peace and development for African states. The church leaders are, therefore, aware of this crucial factor, hence the call upon the president to be prepared to hand over power to a different administration in 2028. This encouragement is key as it is based on the realisation that peaceful alternation of power, especially between incumbents and opposition governments, is usually infrequent and rancorous (Idowu and Mimiko 2020). The church leaders are therefore encouraging the president to be willing to accept electoral outcomes even if it means the defeat of the ruling party. Scholars have argued that the willingness to accept electoral outcomes, mainly when candidates accept defeat, reinforces the peaceful transition of power that sustains the democratic political order (Piazza 2021). At the heart of the message by the church leaders is the idea that as far as the constitution is concerned and as far as the church is concerned, 2028 is the end of the lifeline for the 'new dispensation' and a newer administration must be allowed to take over governance. This must be understood for what it is. It does not suggest that ZANU PF will be out of power, as the next administration may be from any political party which emerges victorious from the plebiscite. What is clear, is that no matter the outcome, President Mnangagwa will not be the leader, as he would have already served his constitutionally mandated two presidential claims. He, therefore, becomes a crucial actor, as his acceptance of this factor is key for the legitimacy and lifeline of the next administration.

However, this is only possible after 'free, fair and credible elections'. This, again, is an indictment on the current administration which has been accused of electioneering itself into power by whatever means necessary. Both the 2018 and 2023 elections that gave ED his two successive terms have been characterised by allegations of vote rigging and political intimidation, violence, and vote buying. As such, the church leaders emphasise the following:

The ZHOCD wishes to reiterate commitment to promoting democratic values, entrenching constitutionalism, and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. As the church, we encourage the President to adhere to the constitutional term limits, and to support a peaceful transition of power in the year 2028 following free, fair and credible elections. The proposal to extend presidential term limits may irretrievably erode public trust in the electoral processes in Zimbabwe and would destabilise the country at a time when unity and peace are most needed for our economic and social transformation. (ZHOCD 2025)

For the church leaders, 'the proposal to extend presidential term limits may irretrievably erode public trust in the electoral processes in Zimbabwe and would destabilise the country at a time when unity and peace are most needed for our economic and social transformation' (ZHOCD 2025). The church leaders are correct in their assessment of the consequences of the political move to extend the term of office and argue that this will affect the socio-economic trajectory of the nation. The church leaders are adamant that such a move will erode the public trust in the electoral process, hence it ought not to be entertained as it will most likely drive chaos and instability in the country. According to Mavedzenge (2021), delaying elections or tampering with constitutional processes in Zimbabwe has historically led to governance crises, the erosion of democratic legitimacy, and increased political instability. It is based on these factors that the church leaders caution

the possibility of instability. Such an act in delaying elections is likely to attract public outcry and resentment by the general public as their right to vote will be taken away from them. This underscores the need for the holding of free, fair, and credible elections as scheduled, hence the church makes a stern call:

As the Church, we emphasize the importance of implementing electoral reforms and ensuring regular free and fair elections to ensure accountability, transparency and the peaceful transfer of power. We urge the Government to adhere to the electoral timelines as stipulated in the Constitution and ensure that all elections are conducted in a transparent, credible, and peaceful manner. (ZHOCD 2025)

The church, therefore, reiterated the need for implementing electoral reforms and ensuring free and fair elections. The church further daringly urged the government to adhere to the electoral timelines as stipulated by the constitution. This is an important and interesting call by the church leaders, particularly the ZHOCD. As mentioned earlier, in 2019, the ZHOCD called for a sabbath and issued a controversial pastoral letter suggesting the postponement of general elections for seven years (ZHOCD 2019). Their views received widespread criticism, leading to the withdrawal of the proposal by the church leaders as they realised the major risks associated with postponing elections in an environment marked by political intimidation, mistrust, and allegations of vote rigging (Mujinga 2023). One may argue that in speaking against the idea, the church leaders were exhibiting great signs of learning from their mistakes and self-correcting from a once misguided position for the sake of preserving democracy. The ZHOCD recognises that if elections are not called in 2028 as stipulated, such a delay will undermine democratic governance and most likely open avenues for authoritarian entrenchment (Kibble 2013).

3.1.3. A Call for Oversight and Separation of Powers

The church further calls for oversight to ensure checks and balances on the abuse of power. This call is directed at the government, which includes all its branches, including the executive branch, legislature, and judiciary. This is based on the principle of separation of powers, which seeks to avoid the usurpation of power (Tikhanov 2024). This is a crucial principle in any democracy as it guarantees stability, security, and the advancement of democracy (Kadyrbekov 2024). By directing such a call to the government, the church leaders are cognisant of the functions of government and the existing fissures which undermine the system meant to provide checks and balances that avoid the abuse of power. In its call, the ZHOCD called upon not just the president but the entire executive branch (comprising the president and cabinet) to make sure they adhere to the stipulations of the supreme law of the land. This means that the executive is responsible for ensuring that the president is not led astray into seeking to extend his term limits but must be accountable to the dictates of the constitution. Secondly, the call is equally made to the legislature not to seek the extension of the parliamentary lifeline in a bid to allow President Mnangagwa to rule beyond 2028. Most importantly, the call for the MPs is to ensure they exercise their mandate of holding the executive accountable and not allow any infringements on the constitution. In order to effect the term limit extension, parliament will have to amend the constitution; hence, the church is calling upon the MPs to uphold their oath and vote against any such motions should they arise. Thirdly, the call is directed at the judiciary to ensure it fulfils its mandate of ensuring rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. Executive, legislature, and judiciary, the three organs of the government, need to be independent and accountable to each other as propounded by Montesquieu's Separation of Power doctrine and Checks and Balances (Shanthi et al. 2023). The church is therefore aware that while in principle, these organs are independent of each, there are constant attempts by the

executive to exert its influence over the judiciary and the legislature. In light of this, the church leaders in their fourth plea, explicitly urge:

- (iv) Members of Parliament to ensure that they contribute to the entrenchment of constitutionalism and play their oversight role for the Executive to uphold, respect and defend the constitution by adhering to the presidential term limits.

The above call to MPs to play their oversight role is a reminder to the elected officials that they must stick to their constitutional obligations and duties. Recently, MPs have been wining and dining with the executive and are hosted at the president's farm (Daily News 2025). Commenting on the current interactions between the executive and parliament, one social media post concluded the following:

That thing is no longer Parliament. It's a crime scene. No person who understands the doctrine of separation of powers would take the entire House to the farm of the person they're meant to be holding to account. We can't have a country where there is no separation between the three arms of State. It's a charade tainted with illegitimacy. It's a mess. (Mahere 2025)

The current parliament has received widespread criticism and has been characterised as a captured parliament subserviently serving executive interests (Kika 2025). Tamborinyoka (2025) makes the following characterisation of the current state of the legislative organ of government in Zimbabwe:

Indeed, apart from Sengezo Tshabangu's sponsored shenanigans in that House, our Parliament has in every respect become a red-light district where cheap and loose souls are openly peddling themselves for a political quickie without any value-protection! (Tamborinyoka 2025)

In summary, this paints a picture of a captured parliament, subservient to the executive and disarmed of its ability to hold the executive to account. Therefore, in its statement, the church rightfully reminded the parliamentarians to remember their mandate and not sell out. Given the recent development, whether the current constitution of this parliament is able to fulfil such a mandate is highly questionable.

3.1.4. A Call for Unity of Purpose in Defending the Constitution

The statement by the church is a clear call for unity of purpose in defending the constitution. The church makes a call to all Zimbabweans and all political parties to set differences aside and unite for the common cause of defending national interests. As such, the second major plea by the church leaders is directed towards the nation, all Zimbabweans. The citizens are urged to:

- (ii) All Zimbabweans to clearly pronounce themselves in support of the call to put Zimbabwe first and uphold the Constitution of the Country. (ZHOCOD 2025)

The church calls upon Zimbabweans to rally against the third term brigade and put the country first. This broad-based and inclusive call is a call to go beyond party affiliation and religious denominations in making a sober and sound decision to defend the constitution and put the nation's interest first. Here, the church is calling upon the nation to unite for a common cause and rise above the divisions whether religious or political. Gaga et al. (2023) recommended that there is need for the ZHCOD to engage far and wide groups of Christian organisations of all persuasions if a comprehensive Christian response to the Zimbabwean crisis is to be attained. The church could have chosen to direct the plea towards its membership, over which it has some form of control, but it decided to widen its call to all Zimbabweans in a bid to bring the nation towards sustainable nation-building. The church understands that this is not only a political crisis but a national crisis which

requires everyone's united voice (or at least the majority). This direct call to the entire nation could be a result of the anticipation that the proponents for the third term limits may push for a referendum. Therefore, the church is proactively mobilising the nation to reject such calls should they arise. This will not be the first time the church has rallied the nation towards a no-vote in a referendum. In 1972, clerics such as Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Reverend Canaan Banana rose to popularity when they rallied people to oppose the Rhodesian settlement under the banner of No Independence Before Majority Rule (NIBMR) (Ndlovu 2024). The people emerged victorious, and the clerics filled the leadership vacuum in the political scene, leading to the formation of the United African National Council (UANC). Should the nation be called for a referendum, the church seeks to become the middle ground, calling upon the nation to go beyond political affiliations and put the nation first. In the same breath, the church leaders extend the call to all the political actors in the Zimbabwean landscape to uphold the constitution. In the fourth major plea, the church asks the following:

(v) All political parties to observe and adhere to the Constitution and Law of Zimbabwe. (ZHOCD 2025)

While this is a noble call, one may argue that it is misdirected. There is only one political party that should be urged to observe and adhere to the constitution: the party in power. This is mostly directed towards ZANU PF, which must ensure that it abides by the law. It is ZANU PF that resolved through its National People's Conference in 2024 the now popular 'Resolution 1', which states that ED's tenure must be extended beyond 2028 to 2030. It is ZANU PF that has constantly made pronouncements that it intends to enforce this resolution in 2025 (Mashaya 2025). It is such a call that should be addressed directly by the church leaders rather than using an umbrella approach. The resolution is dangerous to the soul of the constitution; hence, if there is any need for a prophetic voice to speak against excesses by the ruling elite, it needs to be directed at the ruling party. Whether the bishops missed their moment or they deliberately avoided confrontation with the ruling party is a topic worth exploring. The ruling party read between the lines and personalised the plea, as seen in their scathing response to the church, which will be discussed below.

Lastly, in concluding their statement, the church leaders cited Micah 6:8 (NIV):

'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'.

This serves as a reminder to the president and all those in power that they are mortal beings and as such, will not reign forever. However, while they reign, there is a clarion call, supported by God, to do what is right, act according to justice, and walk humbly before the Lord. Such a reminder is key, even to the nation at large, to remember to do what is right and act in the interest of justice and not selfish political or religious gains. It waits to be seen whether the president, the government of Zimbabwe, and all Zimbabweans will be equal to the task come 2028.

4. Government Responds: 'Back-Off Pastors!'—Politics Is for the Big Boys

In response to the ecumenical statement, the government, through its Minister of Information and Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Dr Jenfan Muswere, released a statement on 24 January 2025, with an almost similar title, Statement on the Presidential Limit Extension (GoZ 2025). It is interesting to note that the title deliberately omitted the term 'constitutional', as was the case with the ZHOCD statement. This may appear trivial, but as the contents of the statement will prove, it is a deliberate omission. The statement

by the government shows that the government read the statement by the ZHOCD as a political statement which warranted a political response.

In the statement, Minister Muswere described the ZHOCD as a paltry conglomerate of civil society entrepreneurs purporting to represent the views of the church in Zimbabwe (GoZ 2025). He went on further to characterise the ZHOCD as a minority entity bent on misrepresenting the cordial relationship that the state and the church enjoys. This scathing attack on the church by the government shows how much the ruling elite is against any form of dissent and is unkind towards any negative criticism. Above all, it shows how the government minimises the church's efforts at uniting and consolidating its prophetic voice. The ZHOCD is a grouping of four apex organisations that represent 77.2% of the Zimbabwean Christian population (ZHOCD 2023). It serves as an umbrella body that aims to reunite Christian efforts of Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Indigenous traditions to collectively influence democratic processes in Zimbabwe (Gaga et al. 2024). Therefore, such a dismissal by the government is telling!

In its opening statement, the government characterised the call for the third term limit extension as a politically broad-based call. This seeks to accuse ZHOCD of misreading the political atmosphere prevailing in the country. To give the bishops a clear picture, the government makes it clear that such a call to extend limits remains a 'rightful and unquestionable obligation for parliament ... ZANU PF and other legitimate political stakeholders ...' (GoZ 2025). This means that the church (or at least the ZHOCD in this case) is an illegitimate political actor and, thus, unqualified to speak on this matter. This is exactly what ZANU PF does; it relegates, sidelines, and silences any dissenting voice (Mavedzenge 2021). Secondly, this means that the parliamentarians making the pronouncements are, in fact, within their own rights and should be allowed to express their preferences without being questioned. Again, the emphasis on unquestionable authority is based on the ZANU PF's modus operandi of ruling with impunity; therefore, the statement seeks to remind the church leaders of this reality.

The second paragraph justifies the fact that parliamentarians from across the political divide (that is, MPs from ZANU PF and CCC) are correct in speaking about the third term. The government statement is quick to note that these submissions by the Honourable Members reflect the aspirations of their electorate in the constituencies. This is difficult to dispute considering that in representative democracy, the authority of parliamentarians derives from electoral processes and constitutional provisions (AbdulRaheem 2020). The legislature represents the will of the people; the citizens are given the opportunity to elect their representatives and determine the future of their country (Vyshnevskaya 2024). In Zimbabwe, parliamentarians have a constitutional mandate from the people for a five-year term. At the end of the term, fresh elections are held to renew the mandate.

Parliamentarians can speak on behalf of the people who voted them into power. In a democracy, this is a privilege that the parliamentarians and other elected officials enjoy, but the church leaders cannot claim to have a legitimate mandate to speak authoritatively for all their constituents/members of their congregation (at least on political issues). Authors have questioned the appropriateness of church leaders to claim to speak on behalf of both God and the people, especially when such claims have no legal or democratic basis (Mudzanire and Banda 2021). The fundamental difference between the church leaders and the elected politicians is that the political representatives derive their legitimacy from the electoral processes, which give them a direct mandate based on the democratic will of the people while church leaders appeal to moral authority (Mohamad and Othman 2020). Elected politicians have a direct mandate from the people and they are duty-bound to represent those views. As such, the response by the government capitalises on this advantage over the church leaders and argues that parliament is answerable to the people, the electorate,

and not the church! So, the government drives its point that the parliamentarians are answerable to the majority of the people of Zimbabwe and not pockets of society to which the church has been categorised.

With this political grounding established, the government statement moved on to escalate its attack on the church. The government goes into its default settings and characterises the church as Western-sponsored regime change agents. This is no surprise, as ‘the government has always blamed internal and external forces which are bent on enforcing regime change. It has particularly blamed Western countries for fomenting conflict and economic collapse to advance a neo-colonial agenda’ (Manyonganise 2022). The government relegates the church’s statement to a donor funding gimmick, a ploy to attract Western funding in order to push for a regime change agenda. The church leaders clearly stated in their statement that the government must prepare for a new regime without President Mnangagwa post 2028! This was misinterpreted as an antic for regime change and anti-government, whereas the church simply called for reforms that allowed for a peaceful transition of power.

To defend its case further, the government (in particular, the ruling party) reminded the church that ‘ZANU PF is a political establishment which delivered freedom of expression and freedom of religion (constitutional elements) and that it still today ‘ferociously defends freedom of worship for all’ (not only for ZHOCD) (GoZ 2025). This is a scathing attack on the church to stay out of political matters and let the political establishments deal with constitutional matters. In other words, the state is reprimanding the state and is saying to the church enjoy the freedoms we gave you and do not abuse them. In some ways, it is a statement giving limits to the extent to which these freedoms must be enjoyed. The church is reminded that when it speaks up against the government, it is abusing its rights!

In its closing statement, the government says that ‘the proposal to move a motion on the presidential term limit extension will follow the provisions of the law with the constitution being centrifugal throughout the process with no iota of infractions’ (GoZ 2025). This means that ZANU PF is ready to engage in lawfare to defend its call for an extension to the presidential term limits. The state has weaponised the justice system to further its own agendas, as evidenced by multiple amendments to the constitution. Controversially, the Chief Justice has been a beneficiary of this constitutional manipulation as his term of office was extended to allow him to serve beyond his limit (Kika 2025). Now, it remains to be seen how he will return the favour in doctoring the law to favour the incumbent president to serve beyond 2028. The church in Zimbabwe should, therefore, be ready to challenge such government excesses and stand true to its prophetic mandate and defend justice and the constitution.

5. Materials and Methods

The article used the pastoral statement by the ZHOCD titled, Statement on the Presidential Constitutional Limit (ZHOCD 2025), and the response by the Government of Zimbabwe titled Statement on Presidential Term Limit as the primary sources of data. The statements are used to reflect on the nature of state–church relations and on the wider political and religious landscape in Zimbabwe’s second republic. The paper also draws from secondary sources and responses to the statement available online. The paper uses a qualitative thematic analysis to present the findings.

6. Implications and Conclusions

The above letter from the church leaders and the subsequent response by the government have far-reaching implications for the Zimbabwean religio-political landscape. The letter by the ZHOCD emphasises the supremacy of the constitution and the will of

the people. The church's statement acts as a crucial reminder to the nation that the 2013 Constitution was adopted by a referendum that imposed strict measures on presidential term limits. The nation needs not to be reminded how it had been under the rule of a strong man since its independence, with a sitting president in power for more than three decades. To avert this prolonged stay in power, the people decided to place stringed limits on the term limits. As such, the constitution captures the voice of the people regarding this matter, a voice that must be respected at all times by all Zimbabweans. Therefore, calling on the president and government not to entertain calls to amend the constitution is a bold defence of the constitution and the church is echoing the voice of the majority of Zimbabweans who subscribe to the notion of placing term limits for elected officials.

The church's statement recognises that there is a small sector of individuals driving this agenda for their own selfish aggrandisement. The letter is therefore a critical prophetic stance by the church to defend the constitution against its usurpation and mutilation by power hungry individuals purporting to be acting in the interest of the people. The statement must therefore be read as a strong message to anyone trying to ignore or misrepresent the will of the people. The church is sending a message to say: 'Hands off our sacred constitution!'

However, while such a courageous prophetic voice is commendable, this paper argues that ecumenical statements alone are not enough. The potency of the ZHOCD statement in stopping the ED2030 agenda is limited. There is a need for the prophetic voice of the church in Zimbabwe to be translated into real action. The church should not only issue statements, but it must also be prepared to mobilise its constituency and the wider citizenry through programmes of action that advance the agenda of rejecting these proposed term extensions and the mutilation of the constitution. The church must take a cue from the church in Malawi, which participated in activities such as public demonstrations and debates, in addition to issuing media statements, highlighting the dangers of removing the constitutional provision of term limits (Dulani 2011). In other words, the church followed up its statements through practical engagements with society, and this led to the abortion of the proposal to remove term limits.

In countries where attempts to remove or extend presidential term limits were successfully thwarted, those who led these efforts were well-organised, diverse groups who came together under one common purpose. These groupings 'operated in unison by pooling the wholesome of their resources to run well coordinated campaigns that proved to be ultimately successful in preventing the removal of term limits.' For instance, in Zambia, church leaders collaborated with other civil society organisations (including lawyer associations, trade unions, NGOs, and student movements) to form the Oasis Forum, which became the main vehicle for driving the agenda against the removal of term limits as proposed by President Frederick Chiluba in 2001 (Lumina 2020; Dulani 2011). Similarly, in Malawi, the church leadership were part of the nationwide, pro-democracy groups (including trade unions, farmer organisations, lawyer associations, student representatives, and human rights organisations) who created the 'Forum for the Defence of the Constitution', (FDC) (Dulani 2011; Nowack 2020). Through the FDC, the pro-democracy movement in Malawi was able to present a successful united front against the efforts by President Bakili Muluzi to remove term limits in 2002 and 2003 (Nowack 2020). To this end, the church in Zimbabwe, particularly the ZHCOD, must therefore make realistic and practical efforts towards its major plea number 2 (discussed above). The church must extend an olive branch towards other pro-democracy groups to formulate a clear, mutual forum that will drive this agenda forward, without which, this paper argues that the efforts by the church leaders will be futile.

This paper, however, acknowledges that the contexts in Zambia and Malawi are strikingly different from the prevailing political climate in Zimbabwe. This may further present challenges for the church leadership in Zimbabwe in executing their mandate beyond the statements. The political climate in Zimbabwe is hostile, which affects the ability of the church leaders to mobilise and be effective agents of change. In a study investigating the prophetic role of church leaders in mitigating political violence in Zimbabwe, it was concluded that church leaders operate within a context characterised by real threats of violence, and they must navigate this mortal danger (with the complexity of remaining alive) while also extending their capacity to have a lasting impact (Ndlovu 2024).

Given such a context, and as further evidenced by the government's response to the ZHOCD statement, it is crystal clear that the government of Zimbabwe's posture towards dissenting voices opposed to the third term bid is unfortunately hostile. The church in Zimbabwe, finds itself in a similar predicament as was the church in Uganda whereby the government was hostile to voices against the removal of term limits. In 2005, those who attempted to formulate a united front (under the banner of the Popular Resistance Against Life Presidency) against President Museveni's bid were met with violence and detention by the state security apparatus, which resulted in uncoordinated efforts and a failure to stop the term removals (Dulani 2011). This means that the church leaders and any pro-democracy groups seeking to defend the constitution and stop the extension of presidential limits must be able to count the cost and be prepared to face resistance from the state, which may at times be damaging.

The government response suggests that such a call is foreign to the Zimbabwean people. The government suggests that any voices (whether from the church fraternity, opposition circles, or civil society space) that are opposed to extending presidential term limits are a product of imperialistic regime change advocates and are Western-sponsored. The implication of such a mischaracterisation is that it suggests that no ordinary Zimbabwean has the will to oppose any unconstitutional moves by the ruling elite. It suggests that the only recognised voice of the people is one that favours the government and supports it without question.

The response by the government further shows the nature of the church–state relations in the Second Republic. The state monopolises the freedom of worship and freedom of speech and threatens the church to be cautious when exercising such freedoms. The state repudiates church voices that oppose its operations while it consecrates the voices that do not challenge it (Dube 2023). The statement exposed the government's allergic reaction to dissenting voices. The response by the government shows its unwillingness to listen to opposing views. The response exposes how the government characterises dissenting voices as anti-revolutionary and detrimental to advancing the gains of the liberation to which it has assumed the outright monopoly. This should not intimidate the church from silencing its voice; the church in Zimbabwe must continue to stand firm and defend justice even in the face of harsh resistance by the state.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front
ZHOCD	Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations
NIBMR	No Independence Before Majority Rule
ACSS	Africa Center for Strategic Studies
UANC	United African National Congress
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
FDC	Forum for the Defence of the Constitution
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
MP	Member of Parliament
ED	Emmerson Dambudzo (Mnangagwa)

Notes

- ¹ Others may argue he is not really being clandestine about it. His usual mantra is the voice of God is the voice of the people. And by people he means ‘his people’.
- ² Vapostori are the white garment churches also known as the apostolic sect. These form part of the African Indigenous Churches and are controversial for siding with the ruling elite and accused of being regime enablers by forming the Vapostori for ED. (See Musoni 2019). Indigenous Churches and are prevalent in Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe there are two main types of Zionist churches namely: Zion yetambo (Zion of the sacred cord) and Zion yeshayatambo (Zion of the cordless tradition). These Zionist churches are vociferous about their allegiance to the ruling elite, in Zimbabwe they have formed a group called the MaZion For ED, a platform for open political support to President Mnangagwa (See, Chimininge 2024).
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