RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN THE WORLD:

CAUSES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Edited by

Zoran Matevski

Religious Conflicts in the World: Causes and Possible Solutions

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……………………………………………………………V

Introduction…………………………………...…………………………..VI

Chapter 1:

Daughrity Dyron
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA…………………………………………………. 11

Chapter 2:

Fylypovych Liudmyla
INTERCHURCH CONFLICT IN PRESENT ORTHODOXY: ESCALATION
DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR……………………………………. 23

Chapter 3:

Hwang Alexander
RELIGIOUS REFLECTIONS ON THE PROMISE OF FRIENDSHIP…………….. 33

Chapter 4:

Introvigne Massimo
A DIALOGUE WITH CONFUCIANISM: "ATHEISM" OR RELIGION?............... 41

Chapter 5:

Costanza Salvatore
RELIGIOUS MINORITIES INTERACTING FOR PEACE: ISLAM, ORTHODOX
CHRISTIANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS BETWEEN SICILY AND
MACEDONIA…………………………………………………………………..... 61

Chapter 6:

Mahoney Jon
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AND FAIRNESS: SOME EXAMPLES FROM U.S. LAW………………... 77

Chapter 7:

Mandić Stefan
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HINDUS AND SAINT THOMAS CHRISTIANS AS AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE…………………………………… 87

Chapter 8:

Veselica Milan
FAITH-BASED POLITICS? THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE WARS IN YUGOSLAVIA AND UKRAINE………………………………………… 109

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Introduction

The content of the book is comprised of the papers presented at the First World Conference for Religious Dialogue and Cooperation, held in Struga (North Macedonia) in October 2023. The theme of the Conference was "Religious Conflicts in the World: Causes and Possible Solutions". The Conference featured eminent professors and researchers from Serbia, the United States of America, Finland, Romania, the Netherlands, Oman, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Belgium, Poland, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Switzerland, France, India, Malta, Australia, Azerbaijan, North Macedonia and Ukraine. When we commenced this story four years ago (First European Conference for Religious Dialogue and Cooperation), we were in a state of uncertainty as to whether it would receive positive approval from scientific circles in Europe and the world. Today we see that we have essentially established ourselves in all relevant global academic, scientific and research institutions dealing with religion. Without false modesty, the World Conference on Religious Dialogue and Cooperation has grown into one of the most important scientific events dealing with all aspects of the complex phenomenon of religion in the world. As the editor of this book, I have selected papers that best illustrate the relationship between causes and possible solutions of religious conflicts in modern societies, primarily from a sociological, historical, anthropological, psychological, philosophical and theological point of view. Our aim is to determine the crucial reasons for the outbreak of numerous conflicts in the world that have a religious background. Based on that, we offer resolutions to conflict reconciliation, using religion as the most significant factor of building peace.

Divisions between parties in war conflicts are often based on their different identities, or their awareness of them. Religious divisions have been the cause or the companion of numerous conflicts: between Catholic Christians and Muslims in East Timor; between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East; between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland; between Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir and the Indian state of Gujarat (conflicts between India and Pakistan); conflicts between Hindus and Sikhs in India; Taliban exclusivity towards other religions in Afghanistan. We may add here the war conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa (Victoria and Tanganyika – Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda), in which the clergy also played a certain role; in the so-called Horn (Somali Horn – Ethiopians, i.e., Monophysite Christians against Eritreans and Somali Muslims); then in Sri Lanka (Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamils Hindus); Chechnya (Orthodox and Muslims); Ivory Coast and Sudan (Christians and Muslims); as well as in Kosovo and Lebanon. The characteristics of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh (Monophysite Christian Armenians and Muslim Azeris) are particularly interesting for our topic. And, of

course, we shall pose the dilemma of whether the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the first religious war in the XXI century.

Today, there has been a significant change in the perception of religion as a factor of conflict and possible reconciliation. Three factors are crucial: the strengthening of fundamentalist tendencies in world religions; the role of Christian churches in the radical changes that have taken place in some eastern and central-eastern countries (primarily in Ukraine and Poland); and the strengthening of ecumenical processes in the world. This has had the effect that religious conflicts are no longer derived only from non-religious primary causes, but are also viewed as an independent factor. When it comes to individuals, human sins and evil that cause the negative sides and passions of human nature, then religious organizations in a large number of cases fight against individual manifestations of aggression and violence. However, when it comes to mass phenomena such as religious and nationalist movements and wars between states, which are justified by religious or similar reasons, these same organizations are often found on the sidelines, tacitly justifying the conflicts.

Violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, including in their most egregious manifestations, whether crimes against humanity, war crimes or even genocide, are not issues left behind in 2022, or in the past. The early days of 2023 already showed that such violations will continue. This is because the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity, as well as, in equal measure, because we still do little, if anything, to address the instigators of such violations and act to prevent. As proof of all this, we are witnesses to the disappearance of religious or belief minorities in Afghanistan. Many members of religious or belief minorities were evacuated from Afghanistan as the Taliban were taking over the country in August 2021. Many religious or belief minorities, including Afghan Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, Baha'is and nonbelievers had to flee, as they were unable to practice their faith or express their beliefs openly since doing so meant certain death if discovered by the Taliban. Those who remained had to go underground. Religious minorities such as the Hazara Shias are subjected to constant attacks, including the bombing of predominantly Hazara districts, schools, and places of worship. In 2024, as nothing has been done to address the serious risks, the situation of the Hazara will only deteriorate, posing an existential threat to the community.

In Iraq, over 2,700 Yazidi women and children are still missing, ever since they were abducted by Daesh from Sinjar. Some are reportedly in Syria, others in Turkey. Until now, there has been no joint international effort to locate, rescue and reunite them with their families. In Iraq, to this day, there are laws which are detrimental to religious or belief minorities, and laws which prevent Yazidi and Christian women

and girls from getting justice for their abductions, enslavement and sexual abuse. Genocide has still not been criminalized in the country.

In Myanmar, the military is a perpetrator of genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya. It rules the country and silences any voice expressing opposition to their violent rule. The Rohingya Muslims continue to be under threat as long as the military remains in power. In Nigeria, Christians are targeted by Boko Haram and other militias, with the attacks moving from the north, through the Middle Belt, to the south of the country. The perpetrators enjoy impunity, and, as such, further atrocities are highly likely. In China, religious or belief communities are under constant attack. The atrocities against Uyghurs are considered to meet the legal definitions of genocide and crimes against humanity. Falun Gong practitioners are said to be subjected to forced organ harvesting. Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and others are subjected to severe restrictions of their freedoms and other pressures that prevent them from practicing their faiths.

In Ukraine, Russia continues to target places of worship and religious leaders. This is only the tip of the iceberg. The Russian Orthodox Church sees itself as the main opponent in this apocalyptic battle against evil. It has, thus, aligned its interests with the authoritarian state under Vladimir Putin, both in its efforts to limit social diversity and in its efforts to keep the alleged evil away from its own borders with the use of military force, including nuclear weapons. Part of this alliance is also a historical construct that erases upheavals, ambivalence, inglorious stages from the history of Russia and even rehabilitates the stages of Stalinist terror and Soviet repression. Ukraine, on the other hand, took a different path following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in a religious sense as well. Historically speaking, Ukraine is characterized by great religious diversity. For a long period, changing borders and cultural subordination prevented the emergence and consolidation of a national Church. Even if certain politicians favored one or another Church, relatively democratic processes regularly ensured changes in power. The years after the fall of the Soviet Union brought a reawakening of Ukrainian national identity, which should not be confused with nationalism. Churches played an important, but never exclusive, role in that national identity. This was also influenced by the central meaning of the largest religious community, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and its connection with the Moscow Patriarchate.

The war in Ukraine – no matter how and when it ends – will have enormous consequences for the religious landscape in the region. Some arguments predict the end of Russian Orthodoxy as an institution and a mass exodus of believers from that Church. In Russia, in the foreseeable future, all churches except the Russian Orthodox Church will disappear, along with their charitable institutions, since they are currently no longer receiving any funds for their work. And, at the same time,

there are new processes taking place, according to which Orthodox believers in Ukraine will come closer and find a new form of Ukrainian Orthodoxy that separates itself from many principles represented by Russian Orthodoxy – proximity to power above all.

How important is religion in the Nagorno - Karabakh war? Armenia is the oldest Christian country. It has been so since the beginning of the IV century. On the other side is Azerbaijan, the only Muslim country in the South Caucasus. It is easy to reach the conclusion that we are dealing with a clash of civilizations, Christian and Islamic. For Armenians, Azerbaijanis are first Turks, and only then Muslims. They relate the conflict to the national tragedy they experienced in Ottoman Turkey. They look at Azerbaijanis primarily ethnically, and only then religiously. It is about the genocide of the Armenians. Armenians connect the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh to that disaster. Historically, there is no connection: the Azerbaijanis had nothing to do with the genocide in the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, for Azerbaijanis, Armenians are not primarily Christians, but Armenians. And that is interpreted ethnically. Admittedly, religious authorities on both sides also made some pronouncements. There are Islamist networks in Azerbaijan that attempted to turn the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh into a jihad, but they did not fully succeed. Azerbaijani society is reserved towards such jihadist discourse.

The war goes beyond being a territorial dispute. The area holds strong religious and cultural ties to Christian Armenians. It is a place that features monasteries and other religious sites, some dating back to the Middle Ages. Armenians in Azerbaijan have been victims of pogroms. Indeed, the conflict between the two nations is not limited to Nagorno-Karabakh. Between 1997 and 2006, the Azerbaijani government undertook a devastating campaign against Armenian heritage sites in Nakhichevan, an Azerbaijani enclave separated from the main part of the country by Armenian land. As a result of the conflagration, 89 churches and thousands of carved memorial stones of the Djulfa cemetery, the largest medieval Armenian burial site in the world, were destroyed.

Armenia, which adopted Christianity as its state religion in the early III century, is the world's first Christian nation. Tradition holds that St. Thaddeus preached there in the I century. Armenians have a very strong connection to the Armenian Apostolic Church, with approximately 97% of the country's citizens belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination in communion with the other Orthodox churches. So many centuries later, Christians throughout this part of the world, including Nagorno-Karabakh (where 90% of the population is Christian), remain in a state of crisis.

The destruction of Christian communities like Nagorno Karabakh is a tragedy with profound consequences. These communities, which have preserved their faith and heritage for centuries, are now facing extinction in many parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath have played a pivotal role in exacerbating these challenges, from increasing religious tensions to regional instability and mass migration.

Azerbaijan, with Turkey's backing, is slowly strangling Nagorno-Karabakh. They are working to make it unlivable so that the region's Armenian-Christian population is forced to leave; that is what is happening on the ground. The situation in this region is extremely urgent and critical. This is the oldest Christian nation facing, once again, for the second time in only around a century, the possibility of a genocide, referring to the death of 1,5 million Armenians starting in 1915 during the Ottoman Empire, which has been recognized as a genocide.

On the other hand, however, whilst a concern for the protection of Christian Armenian sites has been raised in numerous European countries, narratives from various European nations have also adopted anti-Turkish and sometimes even Islamophobic justifications for their views on the conflict. These justifications have sometimes been more implicit in their nature. A more direct example of the confluence of Islamophobic ideas with a debate concerning the conflict was the controversial trip made by a group of MPs from the far-right German party AFD. Armenia received criticism for having invited the group to visit the capital, Yerevan, in order to speak with senior officials about the conflict. The far-right party has a history of portraying the conflict in the region as religiously based, something which links into a wider anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic platform that they hold in Germany. Similarly, in France, a lawmaker for the Republican party, Valerie Boyer, proposed that the French senate recognize the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh.

These examples illustrate how the calls for the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh by Western politicians may not have only been motivated by wishing to defend Armenia and the Christian population, but also by a dislike of Turkey and Islam, and even as a means of furthering Islamophobic fears. Therefore, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the way it has been discussed by international figures, is an important reminder that religion, and its role in cementing ethnic and identity divisions, continues to be an important factor, as armed disputes continue in the XXI century. Furthermore, by focusing on the religious discourses surrounding a conflict such as this, the reader learns not just about the conflict itself, but also about how religious considerations impact reactions to global conflict across the globe.

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Chapter 1

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Daughrity Dyron[1]

Abstract: *Interreligious dialogue has gained a foothold in the United States, as the nation has pluralized profoundly over the last few decades. This article unpacks the concept of interreligious dialogue and discusses how it can be practiced most effectively. It discusses various forms of interreligious dialogue practiced in the U.S. today. It discusses the traditional typology to interreligious dialogue that is considered frequently within the context of Christian theology and religious studies in America: exclusivism, inclusivism, and religious pluralism. It investigates why interreligious dialogue is necessary and it provides examples of church and parachurch organizations that are currently devoted to the practice of interreligious dialogue. It then takes a more careful look at whether the U.S. is a Christian nation, and how this may or may not impact approaches to dialogue.*
Keywords: *interreligious dialogue, Christianity in the United States of America, approaches to dialogue, dialogical typologies.*

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, American Christians have come to see that they need to practice dialogue with members of other religions.[2] They realize that there are tens of millions of members of other faiths in this country, and the best way to interact with them is through friendship and mutual respect. For many years, people used the word tolerance to describe the relationship Christians should have with other faiths, but those Christians who work with other faiths have come to see that tolerance is not the best term to use. Members of other religions should go much further than tolerance—a word that has a sense of resistance and antipathy to it. We do not merely tolerate Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, and more. We respect them. We learn about their hopes and dreams. We listen to them as they describe their own religious traditions. We might even celebrate a religious festival with them, such as Eid al-Fitr, Diwali, or Purim.

What is Interreligious Dialogue? How Should it be Practiced?

Literally, the Greek word dialogue means "through" (dia) "words" (logos). The word dialogue has not changed much from its early etymology in the Greek language. When applied to religion, the expression interreligious dialogue can mean several things, and numerous scholars have tried to define it. Martin Forward defines dialogue this way: "Dialogue signified worldviews being argued through to significant and potentially transformative conclusions, for one or more participants." He believes interreligious dialogue is a "consequential encounter" because beliefs are subject to change somewhat throughout the exchange of words. [Forward 2001, 12]

In 1971, the World Council of Churches promoted guidelines for interreligious dialogue, and these guidelines were adopted by many Christian denominations:

- Dialogue begins when people meet.
- Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust.
- Dialogue makes it possible to share in service.
- Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness. [Forward 2001, 12]

[2] In this chapter I use interreligious dialogue and interfaith dialogue interchangibly.

Interreligious dialogue is often misunderstood. Some see it as a religious debate. Others see it as a stealthy way to evangelize a way to potentially convert another person to one's faith. Still, some see it as a conversation; an enterprise that has little personal impact.

There is no established definition of dialogue; therefore, when two people of different faiths come together to reason and to discuss, the outcomes depend wholly upon the context and the motives of the people involved. One thing is clear: dialogue is a reciprocal activity. It is different from a monologue—where one person expresses their will and intentions through words. Dialogue infers that two people exchange ideas, and those two people stand on equal footing. They are peers. They are equals.

The two people or parties involved both agree to the intellectual exchange, and both have equal opportunity to express one's worldview. Dialogue requires listening and learning, as well as explaining one's own faith. Sometimes interreligious dialogues take place in a formal setting. But the vast majority of interreligious, dialogical encounters occur in informal settings: on the street, in chat rooms and other places online, at work, in college and university dorm rooms. Both parties are given their due respect in the conversation. Interreligious dialogue is not supposed to be a strong debate of apologetics, where each side "proves" the other side is wrong. That is different. Interreligious dialogue is an encounter of understanding, of listening with the heart as well as the ears. There is profound empathy involved, as one listens not only to the facts of a particular religion, but also to the individual's personal experience of that religion—how it has impacted them throughout their life. Interreligious dialogue is an intensely personal activity.

Scholars have proposed different kinds of interreligious dialogue:

Dialogue of Life—When people spontaneously encounter members of other religions in their own, personal, day-to-day lives. These can be good or bad experiences.

Dialogue of Action—When faith organizations partner together for the common good in the name of religion and shared values. Examples here would be the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement working together to bring relief.

Dialogue of Discourse—This is the academic/intellectual aspect, when scholars of different faiths discuss and clarify their religious practices and beliefs.

Dialogue of Religious Experience—This happens when one individual or group decides to actively participate in one or more aspects of another faith. This involves a crossing of religious boundaries into the world of the others, as for

example, when a Christian attends a Shabbat, or when Muslims join in the celebration of Diwali with Hindus, or when Jews practice mediation with Buddhists. Countless examples can be imagined here. [Kee-Fook Chia 2018]

These four different forms of interreligious dialogue are practiced every day across the United States, as the nation becomes more diverse due mainly to immigration from abroad—where religions other than Christianity are practiced.

Increasingly, Americans are participating in interreligious dialogue largely because they are encountering members of other religions. They are gaining exposure to other religions through courses in World Religions that now permeate high schools and colleges across the nation. The American people are becoming more religiously literate than ever before. As a result, we are witnessing greater cultural awareness in the United States. Peacebuilding is happening, but often in informal ways, as Hindu boys and girls play with Jewish and Christian children. This religious intermixing brings a shared consciousness about what it means to be human, to share life together, and to learn to accept one another regardless of cultural background or religious practice.

Why Should We Practice Interreligious Dialogue?

Hans Küng famously argued that there will be:

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
- No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions. [Küng 2021]

It is obvious that mutual understanding among nations provides a path forward for achieving peace. And, as Küng relentlessly argued, religions are at the core of human societies; therefore, religious literacy is absolutely essential if peace is ever to be achieved in the political realm.

Interreligious dialogue achieves mutual understanding when it is done well. It can humanize others, easing suspicion among the various parties. It can even create empathy and compassion for members of other religions.

There exists a Roman Catholic lay movement headquartered in Rome called Sant'Egidio. This group has achieved some major successes in international peacemaking in violent contexts. They have mediated negotiations that helped to end a civil war in Mozambique. They worked to achieve greater peace in Algeria by hosting talks between Muslim and secular parties. They have been active in many

nations, including Kosovo, Burundi, and Guatemala. Sant'Egidio's policies for peacemaking are fourfold:

- Exhibit an intimate knowledge of the language and culture of the peoples in conflict.
- Enjoy access to firsthand information about the conflict as it evolves.
- Possess or draw upon political expertise.
- Help to develop and embrace a long-term vision of peace for the conflicted society. [Coward and Smith 2004]

It is clear from these policies that understanding world religions and cultures is vital, and must take place if progress is to be made in a context of intense religious conflict.

Half of the world's 2,5+ billion Christians are Roman Catholics, and their numbers are widely scattered across the world, from the Americas, to Europe, to Asia, and to Africa. Catholic peacemaking groups must play a critical role in the future of religious peacemaking because of the trust that is already present among people of shared Catholic faith. Without the support of Catholic leaders—both lay and ordained—it is unlikely that political peace will take root on the ground level.

While addressing interreligious dialogue, Pope John Paul II once said the following,

> True dialogue is the search for what is good by peaceful means. It is the persistent determination to have recourse to all the possible formulas of negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, to act in such a way that the factors which bring people together will be victorious over the factors of division and hate. It is a recognition of the inalienable dignity of human beings. It rests upon respect for human life… to make the world a place for everybody to live in and worthy of everybody. The political virtue of such a dialogue could not fail to bear fruit for peace. [Sherwin and Kasimow 1999, 33]

In 1990, under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican published a document called Dialogue and Proclamation, which identified four "modes of dialogue":

1. Life: we share with each other our own joys and sorrows, problems and preoccupations.
2. Action: we collaborate in order to bring liberation to people.

3. Theological exchange: specialists share their beliefs with one another so that they can better understand their own faith as well as the faiths of others.
4. Religious experience: we share our spiritual riches with one another, for example communal prayer. [Bennett 2019]

One question that commonly occurs in conversations about interreligious dialogue is whether evangelism or a sense of mission is implicit in the conversation. Scholars vary on this topic. Some are open to evangelism and witnessing for their own faith during dialogical encounters, while others attempt to avoid propagation. Martin Forward argues that for the committed Christian, there can be no separation of mission from dialogue. Christians are called by Christ to witness and to testify to their faith, thus, committed Christians will always maintain hope that their interlocutor might hear and believe the gospel message [Forward 2001, 10].

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, another Christian specialist on dialogue, writes,

> What can also be hoped for in interfaith dialogue is that the encounters result in the 'conversion' of the parties involved. This does not refer to institutional conversion, where one person switches over to another religion, but to intellectual, moral, and spiritual conversion…. One could also call this metanoia or personal transformation where there is a total change in one's attitude and way of life. We would then develop empathy for what our dialogue partner shares with us, a more encompassing moral and social awareness, as well as an inclusive and dialogical worldview. [Kee-Fook Chia 2018]

According to Kee-Fook Chia, interreligious dialogue may lead to metanoia, a significant change in a person's spiritual outlook, or possibly even one's religious practice.

Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue

Historically, the three standard approaches to interreligious dialogue are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. These are the three locations by which Christians—and members of other religions—typically conduct interreligious dialogue.

Exclusivism is an approach rooted in a Christian's deep commitment to the truth of his or her own faith. This normally includes a fundamental commitment that Christianity holds the exclusive key to human salvation. When exclusivists conduct interreligious dialogue, they do so with a confidence that Jesus is the way, the truth,

and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through the Son. Exclusivists are not so concerned with allowing the teachings of other religions to change them. Their foremost concern is that their interlocutors may come to Christ and to recognize him as the Lord. For the exclusivist, a successful dialogue is one that leads the non-Christian to become baptized and to follow Jesus Christ. The exclusivist is interested in other religions, but only insofar that it might be helpful to lead that person to Christian conversion. The exclusivist is, essentially, a missionary and an apologist for the Christian faith.

Exclusivists may even develop friendships with members of other religions. But these friendships rarely result in mutual transformation. The exclusivist is firmly committed to the truth of his or her own faith; therefore, there remains a feeling of sadness towards the one who refuses to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. The person who refuses to come to Christ is in danger of eternal suffering in the mind of the exclusivist. This perspective can be potentially offensive to the interlocutor. It could also be emotionally stirring for the non-Christian to witness the true concern on the part of the exclusivist to save a soul from eternal damnation.

Inclusivism is the second common stance for conducting interreligious dialogue. This is a stance wherein a Christian remains open to learning about God from the person of another faith. There is a fundamental conviction that Christianity is probably not in sole possession of all truth; however, Christianity is the truest of all the world religions. Inclusivists remain convinced that Jesus is the answer. However, they believe God probably saves people in other religions who are righteous and noble. Inclusivists are also open to learning about what God might be communicating through other religions. There is a genuine openness to the religious texts, rituals, and doctrines of other faiths. However, Jesus is truly the Son of God, and inclusivists usually intend to make that conviction clear to their interlocutors.

Typically, inclusivists believe that "Christianity is the fulfillment of what God wants from religion, but not the exclusive possessor of religious truth" [Winkler 2011, 19]. Jesus remains central for inclusivist Christians; however, they believe that God's grace extends to members of other religions through Jesus—particularly his death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus Christ was for all people, and not just for those who happen to have been born into a Christian milieu. Salvation is, indeed, available to members of other religions. They are included in God's plan through Jesus Christ. People from other religions do not have to profess Jesus in order to experience salvation. Rather, God reserves the choice to bring them into the kingdom of God through Christ, but outside of their own awareness.

Some inclusivists believe that non-Christians who live righteous lives are anonymous Christians. They may practice another religion, but that is the only

religion they have ever been taught. Surely God would not condemn them through no fault of their own. God probably includes them in His plan of salvation regardless of their conscious thoughts. They strive to do good, they have righteous hearts, and their intentions are pure. These people are effectively baptized by desire—because they desire the good, the blood of Christ covers them.

Inclusivists are open to discovering God's activity in other religions. Dialogue is an opportunity to understand God's complexity and mysterious beauty, as He works in the lives of people who do not accurately understand Him. Inclusivist Christians are religiously open-minded people, but they are anchored by the belief that Christianity is true. It is not exclusively true, but it is certainly true.

Pluralism is the third approach that Christians take when conducting interfaith dialogue. One of the foremost voices for Christian pluralism was the British theologian and philosopher John Hick (1922–2012). Hick believed "… all religions are more or less equally valid paths to salvation or liberation" [Forward 2001, 41]. He had a nuanced approach to truth. His belief was that truth is available only in fragmentary forms. We can never grasp the full truth. Humans simply do not have the capacity to understand the fullness of divine truth. We can only know in part on this side of salvation. We are limited by our birth, by our culture, by our geographical position, by our place in time, and by our mental capacity. Must a person born in the Americas before the time of Jesus (or even the time of Moses for that matter) be automatically assigned to condemnation simply because they did not know Jesus? Of course not, the pluralist would argue. God is just and good. God would never create people only to condemn them to hell. This contradicts the God of the Bible who has mercy, who is just, and who loves humans—His most special creation.

Paul Knitter, a Roman Catholic pluralist, has argued that all humans are essentially "hybrids." We are not purebreds. "We're constantly changing and we're changing through the hybridizing process of interacting with others who often are very different from us." As we learn from other religions, we accommodate that information into our own worldview, and it inevitably shapes us. Knitter reached this conclusion while studying and practicing various aspects of Buddhism. While Knitter holds Jesus Christ in a primary position in his life, he also considers himself a follower of the Buddha. His religious identity is explicitly hybrid [Knitter 2009, 214–215].

Pluralists are constantly aware of the unity that exists behind all religions. Religions are certainly quite different from one another, but there does exist a kind of hidden unity. Many pluralists have tried to define this unity. In 1957, the World

Congress of Faiths held an important conference in Bremen, Germany, wherein participants created a list of seven points held in common by most religions:

- The reality of the transcendent;
- The immanence of the transcendent in human hearts;
- The highest truth is that there is a transcendent force that is present in humans;
- There is divine love and mercy in the hearts of human beings;
- The divine reality can be reached through sacrifice, prayer, and meditation;
- Humans of all religions understand the importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor;
- The last aim of humans is to perfect the soul into the infinity of God [Braybrooke 1996, 99-100].

The World Congress of Faiths is one of the most influential interfaith groups in the world, and its activities have made an indelible impact on the religious tapestry of America and the world. Its work towards pluralism has been influential. However, there are many other approaches to Christian pluralism that continue to be created and developed within the field of interreligious dialogue.

Conclusion: a Christian America?

Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) estimates that seven in ten Americans (70%) identify as Christian. However, it is clear from all surveys that Christianity is declining in the U.S. People from all faiths find the United States to be a place where religious freedom is respected, and where they can practice their religion in peace. Harvard professor of Comparative Religion, Diana Eck, describes the plurality in the nation:

> Even at a time when the emergence of a confident "Christian America" movement is evident, the facts of our American "we" give us a different picture. Muslim Americans have a "Ballot Box Barbeque" in Dallas, and in Houston, they join the caucus process to elect delegates to our national party conventions. Sikh Americans litigate for their rights when facing workplace discrimination on account of their turbans. A Buddhist astronaut died on the Challenger and a Hindu astronaut on the Columbia [Eck 2005, xii].

Members of other religions are extremely comfortable in the United States, and for good reason. The U.S. has long been a hospitable place for members of world religions to settle and to practice their faith without molest. Conservative Jews have

a prayer for the government that illustrates their sacred connection to this land and their sincere desire that it remains this way:

> We ask your blessings for our country, for its government, for its leader and advisors, and for all who exercise just and rightful authority. Teach them insights of Your Torah, that they may administer all affairs of state fairly, that peace and security, happiness and prosperity, justice and freedom may forever abide in our midst [Wald 2005, 41].

Jews have often described the U. S. as the "Golden Land," and the "Kingdom of Kindness" because of the safety and security they found here, as opposed to other nations that denied them citizenship. It must be remembered that Jews had nearly two thousand years of homelessness, often living in ghettos or settlements in order to keep them segregated from the locals. As a result, Jews have not only rejoiced in the religious plurality in America, but they have also tended to oppose public religion due to their painful history. This is changing in recent years, as Jews display menorahs and stars of David. Religious zealotry, however, causes many Jews in the U.S. to become nervous, given the centuries of antisemitism both in the Christian and Muslim world.

The United States enjoys diverse viewpoints from its religious diversity. When members of other faiths come to the U.S., they make real contributions to policy, local government, and grassroot movements taking place from coast to coast. Much has been written about the contribution of Native American spirituality to the modern environmental movement in recent decades. But now, there are many more religions that are making similar contributions, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Shintoism, which are deeply concerned with matters pertaining to the earth. Shinto and Daoist spirituality are animistic at their core, meaning there are spiritual realities in the natural elements, such as rivers, forests, and mountains. Animistic religions do not recognize a radical distinction between humans and the earth, as all share the same spiritual essence.

After a turbulent first decade of the XXI century due to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States is once again a land of opportunity for Muslims. There are 2,000 Islamic centers and over 1,200 Muslim schools in the U. S. And they continue to mushroom. Many Islamic movements exist in the U. S., such as the Islamic Society of North America, the Islamic Circle of North America, and the Islamic Assembly of North America. There are other movements aimed at revitalizing Islam in the U. S., such as Tablighi Jamaat and the Naqshbandi Sufi movement. Scholars claim there is a "rapid rate of conversion of Americans" to Islam, mainly from Whites and Blacks. One Muslim Imam commented that white women in the U.S. are the most likely to

convert to Islam. Numerous Muslim political organizations exist in the U.S.: the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the American Muslim Council, the Muslim Political Action Committee, the Kashmiri American Council, the American Muslim Alliance, and American Muslims for Jerusalem.
Hinduism and Buddhism continue to impact the United States in many ways, as Indian Americans and Southeast Asian Americans increase their influence in the public square. Kamala Harris—the first female and first Asian American Vice President—was born to a South Indian mother. Former governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley, was born to Sikh parents from the Punjab region of northwest India, although she identifies as a Christian. She later served as the 29th U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. In 2023, five Indian Americans were sworn into Congress. Several Indian Americans have run for the office of U.S. President such as Vivek Ramaswamy and Bobby Jindal.[3]

Despite the constant stream of articles stating that Christianity is declining in America, the nation is, still today, a majority Christian nation. In fact, the U.S. has more Christians than any nation in the world. However, as this section discussed, the U.S. is also a nation with substantial numbers of people from other religious backgrounds, making interfaith dialogue critical. As Americans gain exposure to other religions, they will likely continue to gain religious literacy. World Religions courses are already required in many high schools and universities. Let us hope that America continues to be that "Golden Land" for religious minorities seeking dignity and freedom of worship. Interreligious dialogue and interreligious diversity are two of the most important strategies for religious peace and mutual respect in a rapidly diversifying context like the U.S. in the XXI century.

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Chapter 2

INTERCHURCH CONFLICT IN PRESENT ORTHODOXY: ESCALATION DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract: *The interchurch conflict in recent Orthodoxy in Ukraine, escalated by the Russian-Ukrainian war, has grown into a political, social and worldview confrontation among various social forces in the country. Some Ukrainians are clearly aware of their Ukrainian identity, which is also understood as spiritual and religious independence from foreign centers. Other are stuck in the historical failure of the post-communist regime. The religious situation in the country changed its configuration during the war. Until recently, the dominant Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate (UPC MP), was rapidly losing its authority due to an uncertain reaction to Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. The facts of the collaboration of the representatives of this church with the occupation regime brought about the transition of the parishes of the UOC MP to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Public sentiment is gradually changing from support for this church to radical rejection of the UOC leadership's policy. The UOC is polarizing, which affects the state of society in general. The Ukrainian authorities are seeking to solve the problem of yet another split in Orthodoxy between supporters of Onuphrii and supporters of Epiphanii. Following the legal path, the government is proposing to adopt amendments to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1991), which limit the anti-state activities of those religious organizations whose administrative centers are located in the country-aggressor. The UOC MP accepted this neutral bill, which was voted on in the first reading in October 2023, as a law banning its church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is accusing the state of persecution for faith and violation of the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians. The Church, supported by its lobbyists and deputies in the Parliament of Ukraine, is demanding to send this law to the Venice Commission for consideration, which may endanger the national security of Ukraine. Society is looking for acceptable ways to resolve the Orthodox split, realizing that in a war situation, Ukraine does not need a second front to fight the aggressor. The state is not interested in banning the church. It is seeking to limit the activities of those religious*

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structures that are threatening the security of the Ukrainian people. But the state plans to do this only in a legitimate way - through the courts.
Keywords*: Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), interchurch conflict, law on freedom of conscience.*

Introduction

War, as a force majeure event in the existence of any state and nation, triggers new or exposes old problems in all spheres, including religious ones. With the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the orderly religious life of Ukraine began to change noticeably. The annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions affected the Ukrainian religious map. The numerous Muslim communities of Crimea and the occupied east, the churches of the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church (UAOC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP), the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC), and some Protestant communities disappeared from the annual statistics of the religions of Ukraine. Parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) in the occupied territories either directly came under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) or, formally remaining under the omophorion of the UOC's Metropolitan Onufry, began to lead an independent pro-Russian religious life. The war created a new front of struggle between Russia and Ukraine - a religious front, and not only inside the country, but from outside, as well.

Since 2014, the interfaith situation in Ukraine has worsened, especially radically in the Orthodox context. The unifying tendencies between the UOC KP, the UAOC and the UOC MP, which had just begun to manifest themselves on the eve of the war, suffered a final collapse. It became obvious that the main Orthodox churches – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (led by Metropolitan Onufry) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (led by Metropolitan Epiphany) are now far from unity, and even from mutual understanding.

In simplified terms: 1) the UOC MP considers the OCU as a political project of President Poroshenko, Epiphany as the heir of the schismatic Filaret, and, 2) the OCU considers the UOC MP as a constituent part of the Russian Orthodox Church that works for the interests of the political and religious Kremlin.

Thus, the Orthodox community of Ukraine is fragmented, even polarized. The interchurch conflict in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy has escalated during the war. Given the dominance of Orthodoxy in the religious and spiritual life of Ukraine, this situation appears very dangerous for the whole Orthodoxy and Christian world in general.

Main Section

According to the Razumkov Center - the most authoritative research institution in Ukraine regarding state policy in various spheres - the number of Orthodox Christians (according to self-identification) ranged from 62 to 71 percent

in different years. Our calculations show that out of 34,5 million Ukrainians (data from the Institute of Demography of the National Academy of Sciences for 2021), 23,5 million declared themselves as believers, with 14,5 million of them being Orthodox. In other words, Ukraine belongs to the large Orthodox community not only by the number of believers, but also by the number of communities. Among the 36,800 religion communities on January 1, 2021, 19,771 were Orthodox, which comprised 53,7% of the complete religious net [Звіт про мережу].

The latest data (telephone survey of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2022) shows that most respondents, 72%, continue to identify themselves as Orthodox [Динаміка]. However, new trends in determining one's church affiliation have appeared. Even though 12,410 organizations were registered in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and 7,097 in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine [Особливості], distribution among believers in 2022 showed a different picture: 54% of all respondents identified themselves specifically with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Only 4% now identify themselves with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church MP. In addition, another 14% consider themselves simply Orthodox, without specifying the patriarchal jurisdiction. Compared to 2021, the share of those who identify with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine increased from 42% to 54%. Instead, the share of those who identify with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate decreased from 18% to 4% [Звіт про мережу].

Such a drop in the number of supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church can be explained by several reasons.

The UOC leadership did not define their clear position on the war – they did not directly condemn the Kremlin's aggression, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, which supports Putin's policy; the UOC did not disassociate itself from the Russian Church, it did not refuse to make mention of Patriarch Kirill during the service. The UOC banned their priests from commemorating fallen soldiers baptized in other Orthodox jurisdictions in their cathedrals and from holding joint memorial services with the OCU for them, among other examples. Such policies by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have an effect on the public opinion of this church. The rejection and intransigence towards UOC priests are growing.

The condemning opinion in Ukrainian society regarding the position of the UOC leaders, the lack of interchurch, even simple communication, the confrontation among the followers of Epiphanii and Onuphrii have led to the conclusion that there is a new split in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

This split is not the first one of its kind in Ukrainian religious history, though it differs from the previous ones:

1) the split as a result of the Kharkiv council, when the UOC of MP was actually created and metropolitan Volodymyr Sabodan was elected;
2) the creation of the UOC of the Kyiv Patriarchate headed by metropolitan Filaret Denysenko;
3) receiving the Tomos and the formation of the OCU led by metropolitan Epiphanii.

The current split is conscious, deep, burdened with the complicated history of interchurch relations, personal insults, and complex consequences. The prospects of it being resolved are increasingly unreal.

Weak efforts by a small segment of the Orthodox clergy of the UOC to protest the anti-Ukrainian position of the church leadership, especially from the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, against the conservatism of the main mass of Orthodox believers of the UOC in the central and even western regions, do not have broad church-wide support. Separate initiatives by Father Andriy Pinchuk (a priest in the Dnipro Diocese of the UOC), with his questions about the status of the UOC and his calls to condemn Patriarch Kirill for the heresy of the Russian world, etc., were supported by only 400 priests out of 12,000. Pinchuk's activities were condemned by the church leadership; he is now prohibited from serving in his church.

The Ukrainian civil society is reasonably posing the question: how, after nine years of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and especially after the full-scale invasion of Russia on the territory of a sovereign state on February 24, 2022, can the UOC MP exist in Ukraine, which has never officially severed its ties with the church of the aggressor-country, and is even cooperating with the occupation regime in the captured lands? Society is demanding that the Church, with its anti-Ukrainian activities, is banned. However, the Ukrainian law is making this impossible because the Church is not a legal entity. As such, Ukrainian society has two ways with which to deal with the situation:

1) a radical and illegal way – to send all the priests to Russia, and to transfer the cathedrals to the OCU; and
2) a constitutional-democratic way (adopting the relevant law) to resolve the conflict.

To implement the decision of the National Security Council [Указ Президента], a draft of such a law was prepared by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and it has been in Parliament since January 19, 2023. However, the deputies have been ignoring its discussion and adoption for a long time [Проект 8371]. It was only on October 17, 2023 that the law was voted on in the first reading. The second reading and the final vote have been postponed due to threats from the UOC and

their political lobbyists in the Parliament, deputies from the former Party of Regions and the Opposition Platform for Life (OPZZH) led by Boiko and Ko, who are lobbying for Moscow's interests. At the end of November 2023, a group of these deputies appealed to the Speaker of the Parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk, regarding the need to have the draft law approved in the first reading "on the banning of the UOC MP" to the Venice Commission [Керівники]. In this way, the opponents of the law hope to disrupt its further promotion.

The intentions of the official powers to put an end to the issue of the UPC are criticized by the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church MP, which interpret the violations of Ukrainian laws as persecution for faith, as discrimination against Orthodox believers, and as a return to Soviet methods of fighting religion. Recently, international forces have joined well-known law firms (Amsterdam & Partners).

The course of events shows the aggravation of the religious situation in Ukraine, the reluctance of the UOC to comply with the laws of Ukraine, the clear opposition to the decisions of the state authorities, the hostility not only towards the OCU, but also to all religious organizations in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian state adheres to the principles of freedom of religion proclaimed in 1991. In Ukraine, there are no systematic prohibitions against the Church, but there are targeted restrictions on the anti-Ukrainian activities of individual priests and bishops. Bringing these or other priests or bishops to court, the state, in particular, the SBU, the prosecutor's office, the courts issue court sentences not because of the membership of these people in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and not because of their Orthodox faith as Orthodox Christians, but for committing civil and criminal crimes as citizens of Ukraine - for treason against the Ukrainian people, for cooperation with the occupiers.

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the SBU has exposed around 70 clerics of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UPC MP) who cooperated with Russia, sold weapons, and distributed child pornography [Від співпраці]. According to the revealed facts, “comprehensive measures are being taken to identify all persons involved in subversive activities in the religious environment of Ukraine in conditions of war,” the message reads. The agency emphasizes that the SBU operates exclusively within the limits of the Constitution of Ukraine and current legislation, and respects the rights of every citizen to freedom of choice of religion and worldview.

Such radical changes within Ukrainian Orthodoxy have affected the balance of power in universal Orthodoxy and the Christian world in general. Moscow has perceived the intra-Orthodox processes in Ukraine, in particular the movement

towards the autocephalization of religious life, very painfully, as the loss of its Ukrainian Orthodox brothers, and, as such, as a reduction of its own flock. This religious argument (the returning of Ukrainian Orthodox believers to the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church) was used by Russia to justify its aggression against Ukraine. Putin has repeatedly called the UOC "our church, the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine."

The role of the religious factor in the war was never denied by the Russians because they came to liberate the Ukrainians not only from the Nazis and the Fascists, but also from the schismatics (rozkolniki) and the Unionists (uniaty). There were attempts to declare the special operation as a holy war, blessing Orthodox and non-Orthodox Russians to fight global evil or Satanism. Ideologically, the Russian-Ukrainian war does not amount to a religious one, although there are attempts to clearly distinguish the church aspect in this war.

The creation of the United Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in 2018 was initially aimed at solving its local problems: legitimizing the UOC KP by obtaining Tomos from the Ecumenical Patriarch through the unification of Orthodox churches in Ukraine into one local Orthodox church. No one planned to reshape the world Orthodox space. Everyone was satisfied with the uncertainty and latency of the conflict, which was most clearly manifested during the preparation and holding of the 2016 Ecumenical Council in Crete. By the ROC's refusal to take part in that Council, Orthodox Moscow demonstrated that it did not agree with the growing authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and with his efforts to reform the rigid Orthodoxy and to solve centuries-old problems in Orthodoxy. Moscow managed to convert its old satellite friends, who also refused to participate in the Council: Bulgarian, Georgian, Antiochian (Syrian) churches, so as to sabotage the Council.

With the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the situation steadily worsened in the international Orthodox arena. Russia has decided that it is possible to achieve its ambitious plans with the use of force, and to return the UOC to its orbit of influence, to show its strength and importance in the confrontation with Constantinople. However, the Ukrainians have put an end to the unlimited dominance of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ecumenical Orthodoxy. It turns out that the number of Orthodox parishes or dioceses, or even the number of parishioners or clerics cannot influence the authority of the Church and its unconditional dominance. The strength of the Church is gained by conformity to the traditional belief and its adequate implementation and contextualization of the Church's activity in a given space and time.

Thanks to Tomos, spiritual and administrative ties with the Russian Orthodox Church were severed for the united OCU. Historical justice was finally restored,

according to which the Church of Constantinople, not Moscow, was recognized as the Mother Church for Orthodox Ukrainians. The ideas of the Russian world (one country "Holy Rus", one people - Russian, one history, etc.) have been put to the cross. The Russian Orthodox Church did not expect that Patriarch Bartholomew would have the courage to sign this decree on the autocephaly of the newly-created church. The Russians were simply silent for several months, unable to believe such a brazen initiative of schismatics. The Orthodox world, in general, was also not ready for such radical changes, for the appearance of the 15th local church in the diptych list of Orthodox churches. For the last five years, the Orthodox world has been slowly coming to terms with what happened. Today, Ukraine has gained recognition of the autocephaly of the OCU from only four churches - the Ecumenical and Alexandrian patriarchates, Cypriot and Hellas churches. The Bulgarians and Romanians are close to recognizing the OCU. For some, such a weak dynamic in the recognition of the autocephaly of the UOC is a tragedy, but the process of recognition is historically a long process, if we remember that the Russian Church was recognized by other Orthodox churches for 141 years.

The appearance of the OCU is a serious support for Constantinople in its age-old confrontation with Moscow, it is a strengthening of the positions of the anti-Moscow camp. The consecration of the war with Ukraine by Patriarch Kirill put an end to the ghostly hopes of the Orthodox world to come to an agreement with Moscow, to consider it a co-faith brotherly country. The aggressiveness of political Moscow, its policy of extermination of Ukrainians, including Orthodox Christians in Ukraine, proved the anti-humanity of this regime and the anti-Christianity of this Church which justifies and supports Putin’s regime. The gulf between the two centers of Orthodox life - Moscow and Constantinople - is increasing, and the hope of overcoming it is diminishing. Moscow accuses Patriarch Bartholomew of heresy, of betraying the ideals of Christianity, and calls on Orthodox churches to sever all ties with him. In 2018, the Russian Orthodox Church, in response to the donated Tomos and the de-anathematization of Metropolitan Filaret, decided to completely break the Eucharistic communion. Such a step is the highest measure of institutional church sanctions. Moscow dreams of creating an alternative alliance of Orthodox churches in opposition to Constantinople. But with every further day of the war in which thousands of Christians are being destroyed, which is becoming obvious even to Russia's historical allies (Poland, Serbia, Georgia, etc.), Moscow's chances of regaining the glory of the leader of the Orthodox world are dwindling.

With the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the OCU is taking its first successful steps in religious diplomacy and in establishing international interreligious relations. It has announced itself at the World Council of Churches. On September 25, 2023, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine became a full member of

the Conference of European Churches, which unites 115 Orthodox, Protestant and Old Catholic Churches in Europe - the most authoritative international Christian ecumenical organizations, where until recently the UOC was present as a constituent part of the Russian Orthodox Church. Now the situation is changing. Canonical through the ROC, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, during the course of the war, having lost its authority, strength and ability to constructively solve its intra-church problems, is, in fact, becoming an outcast in Ukrainian society, losing believers and parishes that are transferred to the OCU or are annexed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, and now the Kherson and Zaporizhia regions, which are illegally included in the Russian Federation). The UOC is turning into a marginal phenomenon, losing its influence at the international level as well.

Conclusion

Determining the role of war in the escalation of the inter-Orthodox conflict both in Ukraine and in the world, we may summarize the following:

The war has reshaped the established and structured religious space both inside and outside of Ukraine, extremely aggravating relations among the Orthodox churches. In this conflict, the interests of different parts of Ukrainian society and different states have seriously clashed. The painful process of religious self-identification of the Ukrainian people, who aspire to be free and independent in their spiritual life as well, is coming to an end. Currently, Ukraine in the religious world is turning from a barely noticeable part of the religious space into a creative element of predictive changes, where new trends, new forms of religious life, new institutions are being born, which set new spiritual meanings, goals, and purposes of humanity. Thanks to Ukraine and its spiritual choice, we see a renewal in the arrangement of political forces both inside and out.

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Chapter 3

RELIGIOUS REFLECTIONS ON THE PROMISE OF FRIENDSHIP

Hwang Alexander[1]

Abstract: *This paper is a brief Western Christian reflection on the phenomenon and mystery of friendship in the context of the efforts at peace. While interreligious dialogue is key to this effort, this paper suggests that the next step should be encouraging and facilitating the interreligious friendships. Though friendship is a fundamental human relationship universally recognized and valued, it has not received adequate attention as a formal field of religious enquiry. Friendship is not only essential for human flourishing, but is an underutilized resource for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Drawing on Christian sources, primarily from the early Church, and non-Christian sources, primarily from the Greco-Roman tradition, this paper explores friendship as a social function, an academic field of study, and a theological issue. It concludes with a hopeful vision of the possibilities and promise of interreligious friendship.*

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Introduction

Much of my paper is about what you already know, but perhaps have never had the opportunity to think about what we all know is an essential relationship for human flourishing.

I want to begin with a little mental exercise. Imagine you are in an Albanian jail—we got a little too excited on the dinner boat cruise and caused a minor international incident. Do you have someone who is not family that you can call and who will come and rescue you?

How many of us have such a friend? Some of us might have to rot away in an Albanian jail. Why would an unrelated person rescue us? Why would I rescue an unrelated person? It is because of friendship. But the deeper mystery is why we are attracted platonically to some and not to others? What is it that makes us "click" immediately with a stranger and see them completely differently than all the other people in our life, so much so that we would willingly donate a kidney or even sacrifice our own life to save theirs? For a true friend, we would do anything . . . but why? Maybe it has something to do with the way Nick Carraway felt when he saw Gatsby for the first time:

He had one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced, or seemed to face, the whole external world for an instant and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself (The Great Gatsby, ch. 3).

Ever have that experience?

A simplistic Hindu and Buddhist explanation for such an unusually strong and immediate bond with another person--why we have a kindred spirit or another self—is because of reincarnation. We know people from previous lives. We were friends in another lifetime and we are just continuing a relationship that was put on hold for a shorter or longer time. I like that explanation, and it resonates with many of my students. However, in both Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics, this is not the only world or universe and one should not assume one will be reincarnated as a human, in the same world, at the same time, and in the same place. What are the chances you get reincarnated as a human into the same universe, same world, same time as your friend from a previous life? Theoretically possible, but, surely, there must be more plausible explanations.

The title of this paper is the promise of interreligious friendship. I am defining promise as a mutual understanding or pledge between friends. I believe this type of

interreligious friendship is an important but understudied, underappreciated, and underutilized tool for achieving interreligious peace.

This paper is a brief reflection on friendship from a Western Christian perspective. It is the only perspective that I am familiar with, but I have noticed that there are some remarkable similarities among the world religions on the value and importance of friendship.

1. Friendship and Society

Friendship is the only essential relationship not regulated or protected by the law. There are laws and strong mores that regulate and define how you relate to a family member; what you can and cannot do. One thing that you cannot do is to wake up one day and leave and never have contact with them again. If I am a child, I must petition the courts to be emancipated from my parents. If I am a parent, I am required by law to provide for my child until they come of age. Not only laws, but there are religious and social norms and expectations for familial relationships. Society values these types of relationships and there are consequences for ending them without good cause, such as jail time, monetary fines, financial ruin, and/or social stigma. The same goes for our professional relationships; I have legal and professional obligations as a professor to my students and a colleague to my peers. There are strict laws that will punish you for transgressing these relationship boundaries and you could very well end up losing your job, in jail, or worse, "cancelled". But no one goes to jail because they ended a friendship or gets cancelled because they betrayed their best friend.

I have a few best friends since childhood, but there is nothing, no law or social pressure that continues to bind us, except for an unspoken and unacknowledged promise—that invisible thread—weathered, worn, and tested—which has bound us together over the many years. But like all threads, links, and connections, these, too, can break or be cut or untied at any time—for anything from benign neglect to malicious intent. There is a movie called *The Banshees of Inisherin* that speaks about the importance, but also the fragility and tragedy of friendship. What do you do when your best friend since childhood decides they do not want to be friends with you anymore? You cannot force someone to be your friend if and when they change their mind and break their promise to be your friend—although, you could certainly "buy" plenty of so-called "friends", if you have the money.

Friendship is something we all agree is good and important, even essential in our lives. However, while this type of relationship is highly regarded, it is widely assumed what friendship is, since it has not been given much scholarly attention in the field of religious studies.

2. Friendship as a Field of Study

I have been interested in friendship as a field inquiry for the past decade or so. My training is in Latin Patristics and my focus is on Augustine and the reception of Augustine's thought. One of the most poignant and emotionally and spiritually charged themes in his life was friendship. One cannot begin to understand Augustine without appreciating the essential role of friendship in his life. Augustine, in keeping with other wise persons in the past, said that happiness is impossible without friends (Confessions, 6.16.26).

In 2016, I organized a group at the American Academy of Religion to explore the religious dimensions of friendship, Religion and Friendship Seminar (https://papers.aarweb.org/pu/religious-reflections-friendship-seminar). Since it was founded in 1963, the American Academy of Religion has never had a group or seminar devoted to friendship. The first volume of essays, Multireligious Reflections on Friendship, was published a couple of months ago (A-M. Ellithorpe, et al. 2023) and they are now working on the second volume that will focus on friendship from interreligious perspectives.

If the goal of interreligious dialogue and cooperation is peace, what are the relationships that will help achieve peace? We have engaged in interreligious dialogue and cooperation, we have talked, dialogued, exchanged ideas, perhaps the next step is to consider friendship, which has always been hoped for but not explicitly planned for or promoted. In a sense, all religious dialogue and cooperation are also opportunities for personal connections. In America, we have a saying, "talk is cheap". I believe friendship is a key resource for preventing and solving the many, too many, religious conflicts of our time.

I was very heartened to read Maite Hes's paper on connecting cultures through music: and how friendships, though not formally planned, were naturally formed. Social scientists generally agree that it takes a given minimum amount of "contact" hours—a term used in American colleges for hours spent with an instructor—to be able to call someone a friend. According to one recent estimate it takes somewhere between 40 to 60 hours to move from acquaintance to casual friend, and between 80 to 100 hours to call someone a friend (L. Denworth 2022, 154-55). When planning events, conferences, and meetings for the promotion of religious peace, one should keep those numbers in mind.

3. A Christian Understanding of Friendship

One of the notable changes to Augustine after he became a baptized Christian was his view on friendship. Augustine was, of course, well aware of the rich philosophical tradition of friendship. In particular, Marcus Cicero's book on friendship, De amicitia, was a major influence. Cicero's work was no doubt inspired by Aristotle's definition of friendship, in which he divided friends into three categories.

Friends who are useful or practical. Having a friend who is a physician is very useful and being friends with many of my colleagues is practical. Friends who are pleasing—based on enjoyment of a common activity—sports and drinking are popular. The third kind of friendship is based on virtue; it is the virtuous qualities that draws these types to each other. And the most important defining goal of this friendship is to make each other better—more virtuous.

Cicero adds to this definition of virtuous friendship: True friendship can only exist between good persons. One cannot be friends with a tyrant or scoundrel, who uses the other for their own gains. A bad person can never experience true friendship. And true friendship makes both persons better—more ethical, peaceful, loving, spiritual, religious, and good, and less prone to violence and hate.

Augustine was in agreement with Cicero, but takes a decidedly Christian turn when it comes to the point or goal of true friendship: to share life together, with one heart and mind, on the same journey of loving God and loving neighbor. And when such a friend was taken away from him, Augustine expressed his pain in this way:

> I was amazed that I could go on living, when he was dead. He was half of my soul--one soul in two bodies. I could not bear to be only half alive, and perhaps I was so afraid of death because I did not want the whole of him to die, whom I had loved so dearly. Woe to the madness which thinks to cherish human beings as though more than human! How foolish the human heart that anguishes without restraint over human ills, as I did then! Feverishly I thrashed about, sighed, wept and was troubled, and there was no repose for me, nor any counsel. Within me I was carrying a tattered, bleeding soul that did not want me to carry it, yet I could find no place to lay it down. Not in pleasant countryside did it find rest, nor in shows and songs, nor in sweet-scented gardens, nor in elaborate feasts, nor in the pleasures of couch or bed, nor even in books and incantations (Confessions, 4.6-7).

During Augustine's lifetime, there was a tragic story of friendship between Ausonius of Bordeaux and his former pupil and dearest friend, Paulinus of Nola. Ausonius was a Christian, but only in name—he washed his face in the morning and prayed to God and that was the extent of his Christian commitment (Ausonius, "Daily Round," Ausonius, vol. 1, p. 23). Paulinus, a man of immense wealth and reputation, became one of those Christians completely devoted to Christ and living the Christian life. Ausonius was not pleased with Paulinus's excessive faith and made it known to him. In their last correspondence, after years of mutual silence, Paulinus tried to explain the reason for the dramatic change in his life, along with an ultimatum:

> But now another power, a greater God, inspires my mind and demands another way of life. He asks back from man His own gift, so that we may live for the Father of life. He bids us not to spend our days on the emptiness of leisure and business, or on the fictions of literature… I am resolved to end my worldly cares while life remains, to entrust my possessions to God against the age to come, and to await harsh death with untroubled heart. If you approve this, take pleasure in the rich hopes of your friend. If you disapprove, leave me to win approval from Christ alone (Paulinus, "Letter 10 to Ausonius", pp. 59, 69).

Ausonius never responded and Paulinus waited for the letter that never came. Among Christian friends this is not so uncommon, especially when one friend becomes fully devoted to the Christian way of life, while the other cannot understand the change.

What Christians like Augustine and Paulinus knew was that friendship, true friendship, was a gift from God and an opportunity to grow closer to Christ.

Conclusion

The question is: is there space or the possibility of interreligious friendship?

The Christian response is complicated and varied. There are Christians who believe true friendship cannot happen with anyone who is not a committed Christian, and there are Christians who believe friendship is not only possible, but encouraged, even to the point of compromising Christian identity for the sake of superficial peace.

Augustine's City of God speaks of two cities: the city of God and the earthly city. They run parallel in space and time—sometimes they converge but mostly they are separate, because their goals and values are different. One loves itself and wants

only to please itself. The other is based on love of God and neighbor. Augustine could only imagine Christians in the City of God. I want to suggest that the City of God is big enough to include non-Christians who love God and neighbor.

Why has God given me the opportunity to have friends with people of different religions? To convert them? Or perhaps they are a grace and through that, friendship, peace and understanding can come into being.

Practically speaking—friendships could save the world. It is difficult to fight and kill a friend. Perhaps in the heat of battle and the fog of war, there will be that moment of hesitation when one soldier sees his friend on the other side. And in that hesitation—God can multiply that space, a space for peace and reconciliation. A space where swords transformed into plowshares (Micah 4.3).

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Chapter 4

A DIALOGUE WITH CONFUCIANISM: "ATHEISM" OR RELIGION?

Introvigne Massimo[2]

Abstract: *Chinese Communist Party ideologists often argue that Confucianism is an early form of atheism. They claim that this actually demonstrates both that atheism has ancient roots in China and that traditional Chinese culture was intrinsically non-religious. Actually, whether "Confucianism" is a religion has been debated by both Western and Chinese scholars for at least two centuries. Answering the question requires a look at how the notions of "Confucianism" and the character of "Confucius" himself were socially constructed throughout the centuries. There are, also, different "Confucianisms," with different opinions on the question of whether gods or spirits exist. The paper argues that, while not a "religion" in the sense this word is used for Christianity of Islam, "Confucianism" is not an atheistic philosophy either but a pluralistic "religious tradition." Making it a precursor of Marxism is just political propaganda.*

Keywords: *religion in China, Chinese concept of religion, Confucianism, Confucius, Ru, Way of the Ru, atheistic propaganda in China.*

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China, Atheism, and Religion

In 2022, China launched a new nation-wide campaign to promote atheism, which followed indications by President Xi Jinping himself at the National Conference on Work Related to Religious Affairs in December 2021. A key tool in this campaign was a book by Professor Li Shen called The Principles of Scientific Atheism. One interesting feature of Shen's book is that it presents atheism as a Chinese invention. While he admits that for a "scientific" atheism the world had to wait for Marxism, he claims that Chinese Confucians had already taught an "advanced form of atheism" some 2,300 years before Karl Marx (1818–1883). Li is at the same time the vice-chairperson of the Chinese Atheism Society and an academic committee member of the International Confucian Federation (Peng, 2022). Obviously, he regards atheism and Confucianism as compatible, if not exactly one and the same.

These claims offer a good opportunity to discuss the relationship between Confucianism, atheism, and religion. This is an important topic since it is crucial to Xi Jinping's claim that the "excellent Chinese culture" is intrinsically non-religious. I would add a personal note. On September 2, 2021, Father Joseph Shih (1926–2021) passed away at age 95. Shin, a Jesuit who taught at Rome's Gregorian University for 35 years, was my first mentor on matters Chinese when I studied there in the 1970s. He taught, inter alia, a course on Confucianism, where all the essential questions were asked and addressed, although more recent scholarship has provided new material. This short text is a tribute to him.

As Australian scholar Tony Swain has written in his useful book Confucianism in China: An Introduction, answering the question whether Confucianism is a religion is "a devilishly tricky business" (Swain 2017, 11). Canadian scholar of comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), called it "a question that the West has never been able to answer, and China never able to ask" (Smith 1963, 86). Smith wrote these words in 1963. Today, Xi Jinping's campaigners for atheism believe they have grasped both the question and the answer—but even in Xi's China, others are allowed to disagree.

The question is so tricky because both "religion" and "Confucianism" are difficult to define. In 1997, the European Union sponsored an interdisciplinary study of the notion of religion in its member states. I was one of the scholars participating in the project, whose results were published in 1999 in a volume edited by Dutch scholars Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk, The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests. While the book received positive reviews, our conclusions were that both scholars and courts of law in the different European

Union countries, as well as outside them, used a variety of different definitions of religion, not compatible between themselves (Platvoet and Molendijk 1999).

On the other hand, our study did not leave us, and our European Union sponsors, only with the "I know it when I see it" option, the one Justice Potter Stewart (1915–1985) famously adopted in his approach to pornography. In fact, we came to some shared conclusions or, to be more precise, recognized that there were some general conclusions widely shared within the international community of scholars of religion, notwithstanding their differences.

American historian Jonathan Z. Smith (1938–2017) reminded us that before the XVIII century very few people cared about defining religion (Smith 1982). According to Saudi anthropologist Talal Asad, this was because before the Enlightenment there was no notion of religion's "Siamese twin," secularism (Talal 2002, 146). To understand and define a term, humans normally refer to its opposite. To know what "hot" means, we need to have a notion of "cold." Similarly, J.Z. Smith and Asad argued, Europeans started asking what "religion" was when they were confronted with religion's antagonist, secularism, which hardly existed before the XVIII century.

Those who participated in the European Union 1997 project, and most other scholars who debated the matter, agree that a religion should include three elements: 1) an organized community; 2) practices unique to that community; 3) a notion of a "ultimate reality" (as German-American philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich [1886–1965] called it), or something similar, with which the community engages through its practices. This "ultimate reality" should not be conceived as purely material or as one that can be grasped by purely scientific methods.

The first and the second elements are necessary but not sufficient. Chess players are an organized enough community whose practices may appear arcane to those who do not play chess. However, these practices do not put them in relation with an "ultimate reality."

The third element is also necessary but not sufficient. History is full of philosophers who wrote books about their own concept of "ultimate reality", or even about God, but did not propose any practice to get in touch with these supreme realities, nor did they bother to create a community.

Of course, it is the third element that is the most difficult to define—but not impossible. Most Western scholars today would use "ultimate reality," or similar concepts, rather than "God" or "the gods." This is a by-product of a long debate about Buddhism, particularly in its earliest Theravada version. Few seriously doubt

that Buddhism is a religion, but one can argue with good reasons that in (most schools of) Theravada Buddhism there is no God or gods.

If we regard a purely material-materialistic ultimate reality a community passionately engages with as enough to have a religion, we can easily conclude that Marxist Communism is a religion too. This was seriously debated in the XX century. However, most scholars concluded that Marxism is not a religion, because an "ultimate reality" that is purely material does not make those who engage with it part of a religion. In a religion, the "ultimate reality" may be immanent rather than transcendent with respect to the visible world, yet it should have features that are not merely material nor perceivable with the tools commonly used by science.

The West itself had no clear notion of religion until the Enlightenment, but in China a corresponding word for "religion" never existed until the late XIX century, when it was created in conversation with Christian missionaries. The word thus coined, "zongjiao" (宗教), or "the teachings of a sect," never persuaded the majority of the Chinese. The problem, thus, created is not purely theoretical. It is eminently political since it allows the Chinese Communist Party to claim that the peculiarity of Chinese culture was that, unlike its Western or Indian counterparts, it was always non-religious. This is, however, an intellectual fraud, perpetrated by creating confusion between the absence of a word for "religion" and an alleged absence of religion.

As Canadian scholar David Palmer reports, in surveys, 94% of the Chinese indicate that they do not follow a "zongjiao," by which they mean that they are not members of an organized religious institution, but this does not mean that they are all atheists. When asked in other surveys, a substantial part of the Chinese answers that they believe in astrology, divination, and other practices a scholar would call "religious," and many who declare themselves not followers of any "zongjiao" nonetheless visit temples. China was always "religious," yet several intellectual movements proudly claimed it was not. "What is 'exceptional,'" Palmer concludes, "is not Chinese religion, but the intellectual discourses that have succeeded in occulting the fact that, like in all human societies, Chinese culture has always included the universal building blocks of religion" (Palmer 2017, 17–34).

Does Confucianism Exist?

In addressing the question whether Confucianism is a religion, we should first overcome misunderstandings about an allegedly non-religious Chinese culture and the world "zongjiao." Our troubles would just start, however. We should also ask whether "Confucianism" exists.

Does Confucianism exist? The question is not pedantic, even if there are entire libraries of books including "Confucianism" in their title. Like other terms, "Confucianism" was originally a piece of chinoiserie, a word invented by Westerners that the Chinese had never used. Actually, the process was twofold, and involved an ecumenical cooperation of sorts between Catholics and Protestants.

First, Catholics invented the word "Confucius." Before the XVII century, nobody had heard of Confucius, although everybody in China and some outside the country knew the name of an early Chinese sage called Kong. He was referred to in China with the honorific titles of Kongzi (Master Kong) and Fuzi (The Master). As Lionel M. Jensen argued in 1998, "Kongfuzi," a word putting together "Kongzi" and "Fuzi" was very rare in written Chinese, but was used in the spoken language. Jesuit missionaries heard it and Latinized it into "Confucius" (Jensen 1998).

Yet, "Confucianism" was rarely, if ever, used until Protestant missionaries started being interested in Confucius. It was the Scottish missionary James Legge (1815–1897) who perhaps created and certainly popularized the word "Confucianism." Actually, Legge did much more. He became the first professor of Chinese at Oxford University, and a friend of German philologist Max Müller (1823–1900). When Müller published his monumental 50-volume collection Sacred Books of the East, four volumes on Confucianism, edited by Legge, were included. From then on, that Confucianism was one of the world's great religions became a matter of course, and "Confucian" representatives, in fact officers of the Qing imperial court, were invited to the first Parliament of the World's Religions organized in Chicago in 1893 (Swain 2017).

This is not to say that Chinese resisted the use of "Confucius" and "Confucianism." On the contrary, they embraced the terms quite enthusiastically, and ended up forgetting that these words had been invented by Western Christians. Today, the cultural institutes and international propaganda outlets of the People's Republic of China are called "Confucius Institutes," and "Confucius" and "Confucianism" pop up everywhere, including in speeches by Xi Jinping.

However, even official translations of Chinese documents translate with "Confucianism" two different Chinese expressions, "Kongjiao" (孔教), the "teachings [or religion] of Confucius" and "Rujia" (儒家), the "Way of the Ru" (there is also "Rujiao," the "teachings [or religion] of the Ru"). "Kongjiao" was introduced in the Chinese language in the XIX century to translate the Western word "Confucianism." Although it is promoted today by those who would like to see Confucianism officially recognized as a religion, " Rujia" remains the most common expression.

The astute reader would have noticed that Confucius or Master Kong is nowhere to be seen in "Rujia." This explains a curious incident reported by Tony Swain at the beginning of his book Confucianism in China. When visiting Qufu, in Shandong province, the hometown of Confucius and for this reason a popular tourist destination, Swain was given a bilingual tourist brochure. In the English version, it was explained that "Confucius was taught Confucianism" as a young man (Swain 2017, 1). It did not make sense, and nobody would say that Jesus Christ was taught Christianity (by whom?) at an early age. However, the word translated as "Confucianism" in the brochure was "Rujia," not "Kongjiao."

Was he alive, Confucius would probably abhor the world "Kongjiao" but would wholeheartedly agree that he was trained in "Rujia" by good masters. In fact, as far as we know, Confucius always insisted that he did not invent or create any new doctrine. Father Joseph Shih, the already mentioned Jesuit scholar who introduced me to Confucius some 50 years ago, started his courses by explaining that Western Enlightenment philosophers had turned Confucius into a subversive, whose aim was to get rid of the old Chinese religion. In fact, Confucius was a traditionalist. He believed that China, at his time in a deep cultural and political crisis, had once been great; it had forgotten its past greatness and badly needed to return to its ancient ways.

Who was Confucius?

Confucius (551–479 BCE, if we believe the traditional dates) lived under the Western Zhou dynasty (1050–256 BCE), at a time of political crises and revolts, which led to the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) a few years after the sage's death. Confucius looked with nostalgia at the early Zhou years around 1000 BCE, when King Wu ruled, assisted by his younger brother, the Duke of Zhou. The learned Duke is credited with having created the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, according to which Heaven gives, and may withdraw, its mandate to rule to subsequent Chinese dynasties (I rely on Yao, 2000, in addition to Swain, 2017, for this and the next two paragraphs: interested readers may find further bibliographical references there).

While the Duke had to fight those who wanted to restore the ousted Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE), Confucius believed that there was a lot to be praised among the Shang too, as well as among their predecessors, the Xia. The sage was a true believer in the mythical history of China, and was not bothered by theories by later scholars that many of the characters he referred to likely never existed.

The Xia, Shang, and early Zhou kingdoms had been great and prosperous, Confucius argued, because they promoted culture and morality, and honored the sages. He came, in his own words, "to transmit, not to innovate," and to restore the real or supposed wisdom prevailing at the times of the Duke of Zhou, which he believed dated back to much early ages. Here we encounter again "Rujia," one of the terms translated today as "Confucianism." Confucius wanted to restore the wisdom of the Ru, but who were the Ru? The term is often translated as "scholars," but, in fact, indicated a class of scholars who had mastered certain texts referred to as "Classics" and supposedly dating back to the early Zhou years, if not before.

These were at the time of Confucius, or shortly thereafter, the "Five Classics," i.e., the Classic of Poetry, the Book of Documents, the Book of Rites, the I Ching (Book of Changes, also used for divination), and the historical Spring and Autumn Annals. The Annals, a compilation of historical facts, cover a period until Confucius' last years, and were allegedly added to the Classics by him, although they were probably written later and supplemented by commentaries, including the esoteric Gongyang, which became among certain scholars more important than the text itself. It is also said that Confucius added parts to the Book of Rites and appendices to the I Ching. Later, many additional Classics were added, including the Analects, a collection of sayings by Confucius written after his death, probably in layers during the course of three or more centuries.

There are problems with Confucius similar to those Christians have with Jesus. There is evidence enough to persuade scholars that Confucius existed, but most of the biographical details about him were written down centuries after his death. What is probably accurate is that he was born in the state of Lu, in present-day Shandong province, in an aristocratic family that had lost its status and was regarded as "semi-aristocratic" only. He trained as a scholar and obtained administrative positions in his home state, including commissioner of police. Both hoping to spread his program of restoring the glory of the Ru and escaping political instability, he traveled around China. He did not have much success, though, and returned home to spend his last years teaching a small number of selected disciples.

Confucius did not want to be called "master" or even "sage," and he claimed he just wanted to teach the old Ru ways. At the same time, if we believe the Analects, he repeatedly said he was acting on behalf of "Heaven" (Tian). But what was "Heaven" for Confucius, exactly?

What did Confucius Teach?

Confucius presented himself as one who "transmits but does not innovate." He claimed to transmit "the way of the Ru," the early sages who knew their classic books. Among the Ru, he greatly venerated the Duke of Zhou, who may (or may not) have lived in the century before the year 1000 BCE. Besides being regarded as the main author of the I Ching, the Duke, as mentioned earlier, reportedly created the theory of the Mandate of Heaven. It is Heaven that bestows the right to rule China on a dynasty. It can also withdraw this right if the dynasty is no longer virtuous.

Through the Mandate of Heaven, the Duke of Zhou—or whoever wrote the texts attributed to him—wanted to justify the fact that the Zhou dynasty, whose founder happened to be his brother, had defeated and replaced the previous dynasty, Shang. Confucius, however, interpreted the Mandate of Heaven in a much broader sense. How can we be sure that what the Duke of Zhou taught about the Mandate of Heaven is correct? Confucius answered that the Duke's teachings were guaranteed by the fact that he had received a mandate from Heaven himself. Heaven also bestows its mandate on authorized scholars.

But what is Heaven (Tian) exactly? Of course, the question is crucial for any assessment of "Confucianism" as a religion or otherwise (see Su 2016). What is certain is that for Confucius, Heaven is not a personal god. According to the Analects, Confucius taught both that Heaven is silent and that he, Confucius, preferred to remain silent about Heaven. The texts attributed to the Duke of Zhou took a similar position. Was this not contradictory with the claims by both the Duke and Confucius that they were speaking on behalf of Heaven? They were, but they did not claim that Heaven was speaking to them. That is, not personally. Heaven speaks through the history of the world (which for Confucius meant the history of China) to those who are capable of interpreting it.

When the Jesuit Catholic missionaries encountered Confucius in the XVII century, they translated "Tian" (Heaven) as "God," and used it as an alternative to "Shangdi" (Supreme God). The current Chinese campaign proclaiming Confucius the father of Chinese, if not of global, atheism, is aware of this tradition, but claims it is wrong. It relies on Mozi (470–391 BCE), an influential Chinese philosopher who was born a few years after Confucius' death. Mozi, who was undoubtedly a religious spirit, believed that Heaven is a force separated from the physical universe and with its own independent will, which rules through ghosts and spirits, who act as Heaven's enforcers. He accused Confucius and the whole Ru tradition of denying the existence of spirits and ghosts, and of making Tian indistinguishable from the physical universe. What for Mozi was an indictment of

Confucius, for the contemporary Chinese propagandists of atheism becomes a compliment he paid to the sage.

It is true that, while he maintained that he spoke on behalf of Tian, Confucius did not say much about Tian itself. But something he did say was that Tian reveals itself through human nature (Xing). So, to know Xing is a valid way to know Tian. Those who really know human nature find there benevolence or humaneness (Ren). Not that all humans are benevolent: Ren should be cultivated. It is also the case that humans may be misled by false teachings.

While we are accustomed to defining the Chinese culture by the "Three Teachings"—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—rarely did the respective teachers and practitioners cooperate harmoniously. Sometimes, they hated each other, and asked the emperors to eradicate the rivals. Confucians, in particular, accused Buddhism and Taoism of teaching an ascetic withdrawal from society as the preferred way to enlightenment. Not so, they countered. Ren is achieved by cherishing and cultivating relations, between parents and children, husband and wives, the Emperor and his subjects—and all these relations are hierarchical, making Confucianism a pillar of the status quo.

Another of Confucius' teachings, perhaps the main one, that Father Joseph Shih never failed to emphasize was that reverence to Heaven and to human nature should be expressed through rituals (Li). Shih was a Jesuit, and Jesuits were fascinated by Confucian rituals since the times of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)—so much so that Ricci and his missionary companions actively participated in these rites. They were denounced to the Vatican by rival religious orders, who claimed they had fallen into apostasy and the worship of pagan gods. Although the Jesuits lost the Chinese rites controversy in the XVIII century, when the Popes repeatedly forbade their participation in Confucian rituals, they are now somewhat rehabilitated as forerunners of an intelligent "Sinicization" of Catholicism, not to be confused with its adaptation to the principles of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Jesuits' enemies pointed out that Confucian rituals ostensibly adored ancestors and spirits, which was not permissible for a Catholic. The Jesuits countered that these were not religious ceremonies. They were much more similar to civil events, they said, where people may honor flags or symbols of the state and the king, or commemorate deceased heroes or sages, which also took place in Christian countries without being seen as usurping the role of religion.

Most Western scholars in the XX century tended to side with the Jesuits. Offering sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, some of them quite spectacular, and honoring kings and sages, including Confucius himself, did not construct the object

of the honor as divine. The Confucian "spirits" were at best symbolic representations of impersonal forces.

By the XXI century, scholars were no longer so sure. Joseph Adler, an eminent scholar of East Asian religions, was among those who warned that Confucianism or, more precisely, the Way of the Ru, was not a monolithic phenomenon. There is a rich variety of Ru or "Confucian" schools and scholars, who have expressed different ideas on several topics through some 2,500 years of history of "Confucianism." Some obviously did not believe that spirits existed. They taught that this did not really matter. The rituals honoring them were for the self-cultivation of the living. That the spirits of the ancestors or the sages existed in a separate dimension or not was not important. The living derived benefits from the rituals, and this was good enough reason to perform them (Adler 2020).

Other eminent Confucian masters clearly taught that spirits had an independent existence, and not merely a symbolic one. However, they were careful to add that the question was difficult, was, after all, of secondary importance, and was not one respectable Ru should quarrel about among themselves.

And yet, this was always only part of the story. Those who visited temples of Confucius, from the Jesuits to XX century travelers and scholars, could not avoid noticing that they had several features in common with Buddhist and Taoist places of worship, and that devotees prayed to Confucius fully believing that he was able to help them. Popular Confucian religious movements and a "folk Confucianism" where the worship of Confucius coexisted with occult practices always existed, and continue to this day.

Throughout the centuries, debates were introduced about "Principle," which some interpreted as an immanent divine reality. The story of "Confucianism" will allow us to introduce additional elements. However, we can already provisionally conclude that when discussing "Confucianism," the alternative between being a religion and an early form of atheism creates intractable dilemmas. Perhaps the question itself is not formulated correctly. Contemporary scholars believe a third possibility exists, that without being a religion in the sense of the word we use for Christianity or Islam, "Confucianism" is, nonetheless, what Adler and Swain call a "religious tradition": not organized religion, but a tradition with deep religious concerns—which is certainly different from atheism (Adler 2020; Swain 2017). And a living tradition, one that perhaps is evolving towards becoming a full-fledged religion.

Confucianism, a Plural Phenomenon

This paper is not a history of "Confucianism," much less a systematic presentation of its doctrines, which extend to such diverse fields as morality, music, and politics. Its much more limited purpose is to discuss whether the tradition of the Ru commonly associated with the name of Confucius can be regarded as "religious" or, on the contrary, as "atheistic."

So far, I have discussed the issue in general terms, something that may lead to overlook the fact that the Ru tradition evolved during at least 2,500 years and, as all traditions do, changed. "At least" because, as we have seen, Confucius claimed that he had not invented anything and had merely collected and restored previous wisdom. Ideas and rituals connected with the Ru, if not the word "Ru" itself, existed before Confucius.

In Confucian temples, the sage is often depicted surrounded by four key disciples, Yan Hui (ca. 521–481 BCE), who died young, but is mentioned in the Analects as the master's favorite, Mengzi (372–298 BCE), whose name was Latinized by the usual Jesuits as Mencius, Zengzi (505–435 BCE), and Zisi (483–402 BCE).

The Great Learning by Zengzi, the Doctrine of the Mean by Zisi, and the Mengzi by Mencius, together with the Analects, came to constitute the Four Books, or the Confucian canon. "Disciples," here, does not mean that they were taught by Confucius personally, but that they belonged to a chain of transmission. Zengzi, a direct disciple of Confucius, taught Zisi, who happened to be Confucius' grandson, and Zisi, in turn, was the teacher of Mencius.

Zengzi, Zisi, and Mencius had to teach during the troubled Warring States Period (476–221 BCE). Mencius, who centuries after his death came to be regarded as the "second sage", almost on equal footing with Confucius, was less successful during his lifetime. He preached against wars of aggression, and recommended to focus on cultivating "xin," a word that means both "heart" and "mind" and is sometimes translated as "heart-mind"—or perhaps should not be translated at all.

Confucius believed that Tian, Heaven, was unknowable in itself but its designs could be understood by looking at human history. Mencius did not deny it, but he believed an even quicker way to understand Heaven was through our own xin. Those who know xin know human nature, Mencius taught, and those who know human nature know Heaven. If this looks like introspection, it is because it was. Mencius spent much less time than Confucius discussing rites, which was another reason he was not popular with the kings of the Warring States Period, who saw rituals as a tool of government.

Because of the honors tributed to Mencius, many tend to forget today that the triumph of Confucianism as China's official ideology, which looked improbable in the Warring States Period, yet started becoming a fact under Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (156–87 BCE), happened not thanks to Mencius but against him. The version of Confucianism that Emperor Wu decided to patronize was that of Xunzi (ca. 310–238 BCE), who was born some ten years before Mencius' death.

While Mencius regarded human nature as basically good, Xunzi saw it as a mixture of goodness and evil, with the evil at constant risk of prevailing. A quick look at the dates confirms that Xunzi was still teaching during the troubled Warring States Period, which somewhat explains his pessimism. To overcome evil in human nature, Xunzi taught, rituals are crucial, and there is nothing wrong in using them to consolidate the power of the rulers.

Xunzi had two controversial disciples called Han Feizi (ca. 280–233 BCE) and Li Si (280–208 BCE). They went much further in emphasizing the primacy of the rulers, and became notorious as advisers of Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259–210 BCE), the founder of the Qin dynasty. Having unified the country after the Warring States Period, Qin proclaimed himself the First Emperor of China. He was also a tyrant, who believed the scholars might conspire to overthrow him.

Allegedly, he ordered the books of the Ru tradition to be burned and 460 Ru scholars to be buried alive, although whether he really killed human beings rather than destroying books only is disputed by modern scholars. Reportedly, Han and Li supported the emperor's infamous actions, which, for a while, reflected negatively also on the fame of their master, Xunzi.

However, the short-lived Qin dynasty collapsed four years after the death of its megalomaniac founder. The Han came, and they were there to stay for four centuries, from 202 BCE to 220 CE (with a short Xin dynasty intermission from 9 to 23 AD). The Ru did not immediately recover from the book-burning crisis, and they had to compete with other schools. Traditionally, the story told is that Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), a Ru who interpreted his tradition within the framework of the universal interplay of yin and yang, prevailed upon Emperor Wu and persuaded him to create the system of hiring Ru to teach the Classics.

Appointees to official positions were selected based on their knowledge of the Classics, which later evolved into the complicated system of exams. In a word, Wu is credited with having converted Confucianism into a "state religion," something modern scholars see as an exaggeration. Wu only started a process that took centuries to consolidate and, although Dong was a renowned thinker, his role as advisor of the Emperor was perhaps exaggerated by later Confucians as well.

Slowly, however, the position of "Confucianism" (remember, the name did not yet exist) was consolidated and, while having to coexist with Buddhism and Taoism, it came to dominate the court rituals and the system of education and governmental appointments. It was the result of a long and not linear process, with Ru Learning (Ruxue), the study of the Classics, and the Classic-based exams becoming the cornerstone of the Imperial system around 1000 CE.

They continued in this role for more than 900 years until the fall of the Empire in 1911. The orthodox interpretation of Ru came to be recognized as the one given by Zhu Xi (1130–1200), the most influential Medieval philosopher of China. He is also very important for the question of "religious" Confucianism.

By Zhu's time, "Confucian" thinkers had come to agree that the stuff of the universe was something called Qi. Zhu explained that Qi changed and consolidated into the forms of non-living and living beings under the impulse of "Principle" (Li). Zhu maintained that Li is precedent to Qi, which would seem to place him closer to Buddhist and Taoist ideas about a universal, although impersonal, source of all beings.

However, Zhu explained that Li is not really separated from Qi, but exists "in" Qi only. Some English-speaking scholars have translated Zhu's "Principle" as "Supreme Ultimate." However, again, the Supreme Ultimate does not really exist independently and separately from its manifestations. If it is a divine principle, it is an eminently immanent one.

In the early modern era, as the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which was not always protective of the Ru as a class of scholars but maintained the main structure of official rites and exams, ruled for almost three centuries, another great teacher emerged, Wang Yangming (1472–1529). He believed in the Principle, but regarded attempts by Zhu to understand it starting from the natural world as futile. There is only one locus where the Principle can be apprehended, Zhang said, our own xin (heart-mind).

In the XVII century, the Ming were replaced by a foreign dynasty, the Manchu Qing (1644–1912). They needed to control an enormous empire where they were part of an ethnic minority. They reinforced the Confucian system of administering the state and the rites, but discouraged wild philosophical speculation. They favored a return to Xunzi's ideas about a way of the Ru that kept the evil trends of human nature in control and supported the rulers through the rites. The leading Qing Confucian was Dai Zhen (1723–1777), who taught that Principle existed, but was just the form making things what they are. There was no Li (Principle) independent of Qi.

With the Qing, the Way of the Ru—which in the last years of the dynasty some finally started to call "Confucianism" (Kongjiao)—still remained at the core of education and bureaucracy, but it became somewhat dry and uninspiring. It had to face new forms of competition by Christianity and by a plethora of new religious movements. Some of them criticized Confucianism, others claimed to embody Confucius' most genuine spirit.

Then, in 1912, the collapse of the Empire destroyed the system of the so-called official Confucianism. Some saw in this disaster the opportunity to reconstruct Confucianism in a completelly different way, as a religion or "church" similar to other religions.

The Death and Rebirth of Confucianism in the XX and XXI Centuries

On February 12, 1912, the child emperor Puyi (1906–1967) abdicated, putting an end to the millennia-old Chinese Empire. Many, including Western scholars, believed this was the end of Confucianism as well. Confucianism had a doctrine and rites, but no independent organization. Its organization was the Imperial Chinese state. Without the Empire, Confucianism lost its body and was reduced to a wandering ghost, a metaphor several scholars have used.

But it was not exactly so. Popular Confucianism, where Confucius was worshipped and prayed to for healing or good fortune in a myriad of temples, existed quite independently of the Imperial bureaucracy, and survived. So did the new religious movements that included or had incorporated Confucian elements, including the large and successful Yiguandao (Billoud 2020). And there was more. Seeing the writing on the wall, an intellectual called Kang Youwei (1858–1927) in 1898 had proposed to save both the Empire and Confucianism by establishing a constitutional monarchy, and a state "Confucian Church" that would be to China what the Church of England was to the British Empire.

Both his proposals ultimately failed, but his disciple Chen Huanzhang (1881–1933) formally established a Confucian Church in 1912. Several personalities of the Chinese Republic followed the experiment with interest, seriously considering the idea of establishing Confucianism as China's state religion.

From the subsequent decade on, however, the main ideologists of the Republic were inspired by the European Enlightenment, and believed Confucianism was a backward influence to be marginalized. They also tried to suppress new religious movements and several aspects of folk religion they denounced as superstition, but the effectiveness of their campaigns was limited.

Communist China was an entirely different matter. In the 1950s, Chairman Mao (1893–1976) launched a massive persecution of new religious movements, which particularly targeted Yiguandao (Palmer 2012). More than ten million Yiguandao devotees ended up in jail, and thousands were killed (Shao 1997, 452, 455)

Folk religion was initially left alone, but the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) destroyed most of Confucius' temples. It also conducted public trials where Confucius himself was denounced as the epitome of counter-revolutionary superstition, and later as the alleged inspirer of the disgraced Communist leader Lin Biao (1907–1971). In Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, the sage's statue was destroyed, and the cemetery of his family desecrated.

Once again, many commented that this was the end of Confucianism, whose vestiges could perhaps survive in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora only. Once again, this was not the case. Yes, it was outside Mainland China that a vigorous philosophical movement to revive Confucianism as a "New Ru Learning" had developed around Mou Zongsan (1909–1995), a Shandong-born thinker who had moved to Taiwan in 1949 and from there to Hong Kong in 1960.

Mou was a main force behind the "Manifesto on Chinese Culture" of 1958, which indicated that restoring the Way of the Ru was essential for promoting a democracy with Chinese characteristics. Although originally few noticed the Manifesto outside the Taiwanese academic milieu, in retrospect it has been considered a milestone towards a new spring for philosophical Confucianism that somewhat managed to spread to the Mainland as well (Chen 2013).

This was not good enough for several academics and businesspersons who emerged as advocates for Confucianism in Mainland China after the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death in 1976. What they asked for Confucianism was official recognition as a religion, and acknowledgement that it was indeed the most Chinese of all religions (Billoud and Thoraval 2014).

Mao tried to control religion in China through the five authorized religions, whose leaders were appointed by the Communist Party. These were Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. The Cultural Revolution destroyed the five official organizations, and Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) resurrected them, but through all these developments the religions thus acknowledged remained five. Confucianism was not one of them, although some have argued that it was, and remains, the sixth recognized religion in Hong Kong.

There were different reasons for this: Mao's antipathy for Confucianism, the Communist Party ideologists' idea that it was not a religion, and—perhaps more

importantly—the fact that the whole project was aimed at controlling organized, and post-imperial Confucianism was not really organized.

In 2014, Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval published a fascinating book, Le Sage et le peuple. Le renouveau confucéen en Chine. One part of the book details the quest for official recognition of Confucianism as a religion in China, an enterprise involving tenured academics and wealthy businesspersons, who built new temples and "academies" in the old Ru style. They founded a Holy Confucian Church (孔圣会, Kongshenghui) in 2015, although they cautiously registered it as a cultural NGO rather than as a religious organization (Billoud and Thoraval 2014).

There are three points to be noted about this movement. First, it obviously believes that Confucianism is a religion. Perhaps it was a "religious tradition" rather than a religion for millennia. In the mind of these activists, however, it is now becoming a full-fledged religion. Second, although a subject of great fascination for Western scholars, the movement has not become a main player in the Chinese religious and political arena. Third, so far nobody has been arrested, and the organizations the Confucian activists have founded have not been declared illegal. As all observers of Chinese religion know, the latter is a circumstance that can change overnight. But so far so good for Confucius and his followers.

Why it is so is an interesting question. Chen Yong, the author of Confucianism as Religion: Controversies and Consequences (Chen 2013), has told the story of how an "official Confucianism" had a prehistory under Hu Jintao and became an important part of the Communist Party ideology under Xi Jinping. "Not until 2012", writes Chen, "when Xi Jinping took office, did the Communist Party start to systematically and consistently integrate a Confucian persuasion into its established ideology" (Chen 2021, 45).

But what is exactly a "Confucian persuasion"? In 2013, Xi Jinping was the first leader of the People's Republic of China who paid an official visit to Confucius' birthplace in Qufu, which had been restored after the Cultural Revolution.

Xi is not shy when it comes to quote in his speeches the Five Classics and the Confucian canon, as if to style himself as a modern Ru. He has sent the Communist Party top cadres to attend mandatory courses on the Classics and Confucius. He has even authorized the leaders of provincial governments to attend rituals honoring Confucius in Qufu and elsewhere, although they sometimes look more like pop events, where even popular singers perform, rather than as religious rites.

Several Chinese and Western scholars have noted the prevalence of Confucian terminology in Xi's discourse, and have emphasized the importance of a 2017 Comunist Party document, "On Implementing the Project of Preserving and

Developing the Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture" (Chen 2021). Is Confucius back, and is he, this time, waving a red flag?

Again, it is easy to misunderstand what is going on. The 2017 document never mentions Confucius, Confucianism, or Ru. They are there, of course, but implicitly only. Confucius temples are being restored, but the process some have called "museification" also continues. They fare much better if they serve as museums than if they try to be real places of worship.

Chen Yong's analysis of Xi Jinping's approach to Confucianism notes that it is based on the idea that the Communist Party is the legitimate heir of the Ru. This is why Xi does not take those who want to reorganize Confucianism as a religion very seriously. Confucianism had once a body, the Chinese Empire. Today, it does not need a new body in the shape of a "church" because it has already found one. This body is the Chinese Communist Party (Chen 2013, 2021).

Make no mistake, the fact that the Party embodies the "excellent Chinese traditional culture," which includes the Way of the Ru and Confucianism, does not make the Party any less Marxist. The 2022 campaign for the promotion of atheism, which argues that Confucius was the first great atheist philosopher in the world, is important as it allows to include Confucius and Marx in the same Communist pantheon. In 2023, Xi Jinping himself promoted a serialized TV movie called When Marx Met Confucius, developing a 1925 short story by Communist writer Guo Moruo (1892–1978). It features a meeting between Confucius and Marx, who agree both between themselves and on how Xi interprets their respective thoughts (Zhou 2023).

Actually, Xi Jinping's claims are even more grandiose. I have noted elsewhere (Introvigne 2022) that to understand Xi Jinping, Marx is not enough, and one should consider his debt to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Xi's may be a simplified Hegel, but in how the Chinese President sees history, the Hegelian scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is never far away (I do not believe Xi is interested in contemporary Western scholarly discussions on whether Hegel really taught the tripartite model).

The official history of the Chinese Communist Party, consecrated in 2021 in the Third Resolution on the History of the Party, teaches that in the history of the People's Republic Mao was the thesis, Deng Xiaoping was the antithesis who reacted against certain excesses of Mao, and Xi Jinping serves as the synthesis who incorporated the best of Mao and Deng, yet, according to a dialectic version of history, could only come after them.

Simultaneously, however, a broader dialectic model sees the "excellent Chinese traditional culture" as the thesis, Marxism as the antithesis, and Xi Jinping's thought as the synthesis. The "excellent Chinese traditional culture" —by which Xi means the Classics and the Confucian tradition (with the addition of certain other elements)—is only valuable if it is subsumed in this dialectic scheme.

Since not everything is amenable to dialectic, Xi should subtract from Confucianism all the religious elements, and leave free rein to those presenting Confucius as the father of atheism. The latter are as incorrect as those who make Confucius the founder of a "church."

Confucianism is indeed a religious tradition—neither a religion nor a school of atheism—something that would not suit either Xi Jinping or the Holy Confucian Church. While the latter is a curiosity, Xi Jinping's ideological falsification of early Chinese culture is much more dangerous, as it is used as a justification for authoritarianism, repression, and Chinese imperialism.

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Chapter 5

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES INTERACTING FOR PEACE: ISLAM, ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS BETWEEN SICILY AND MACEDONIA

Costanza Salvatore[3]

Abstract: *As concerns religious dialogue in the Mediterranean and Balkan space with the aim of solving conflicts between minorities and majorities, a debate is underway on the subject, which should be underpinned with specific examples. It is noteworthy to focus on the role of Islam in today´s Sicily with respect to the Medieval Arabic occupation (827-1061), which assigned a crucial role to this island within the Islamic world. Muslims exercised a relevant political and economic influence in Sicily under Christian rulers, as well, especially in Norman (1060-1094) and Hohenstaufen times (1194-1266). This multicultural period of toleration proved a valuable experience of political, religious and cultural interaction, which we can also note in the al-Andalus region in the Iberian peninsula until the XV century. This example may stimulate our discussion about today's Sicilian Islam, whose numbers are increasing due to migratory reasons, as well as individual conversions. I will especially focus on the Islamic community in Messina, which provides an interesting centre for dialogue with the Roman Catholic diocese and the other religious communities.*

At the same time, we may analyse the Greek-Orthodox community in Sicily. This group is also extensively linked with people with migratory backgrounds from Eastern Orthodox countries, as well as withthe Grico minorities indebted to the legacy of the Easter Roman rule in Italy. Native speakers of the Grico dialect in Southern Italy and Sicily date back to Byzantine times. The Greek Orthodox Church also plays a vital role in Calabria and in Sicily, and their members are also actively involved in religious dialogue and the commitment for peace. In this respect, we may quote the liturgical function of Easter, which was celebrated this year in a Pan-Orthodox spirit with the participation of Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian believers, besides the Greek and Sicilian believers beyond any nationalistic division.

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Conversely, we observe the role of the Roman Catholic community in the Republic of North Macedonia. Despite being a tiny minority, it has a vital presence. This local Church received a visit from Pope Francis in May 2019, which was the first time a Roman Pope had visited the country. On this occasion, he encouraged Catholics to be engaged in ecumenical dialogue following the example of Holy Mother Theresa, who was born in Skopje.

All this ascertained, the topic of religious dialogue enhances transcultural perspectives as a means of education and interaction for peace in the Mediterranean and Balkan space within a strongly globalized world.

Keywords: *Islam, Orthodoxy, religious minority, religious dialogue, ecumenism, inclusion, peace.*

Introduction

Religious minorities are often involved in political conflicts against majorities. Despite national laws and international covenants on civil and political rights actively promoted by the United Nations, their members are frequently object of intimidation and defamation. Europe is plagued by ethnic cleansings and religious conflicts, even today. It is vital to empower positive communities open to mutual respect and inclusiveness of the Other beyond any confessional, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Therefore, it is useful to focus on religious minorities interacting for peace and providing a systemic approach that empowers a positive dialogue. No global peace is to be envisaged without a dialogue between religions that does not mean renouncing one´s identity (Küng 2004, 1978). Such a cooperation is based upon various activities as a vehicle for the sharing of good practices. Peaceful members of these groups are called to be problem-solvers and innovators of their milieu, disregarding mutual prejudices and biases. As concerns the Mediterranean and Balkan space, it is particularly interesting to note the Islamic community in Sicily and the Greek-Orthodox church in Southern Italy, given the prestigious legacy of Arabic and Byzantine civilization in this area. On the either hand, Muslims and Roman Catholics in North Macedonia are a unique case study of multiple interactions. This country with an Orthodox majority in the heart of the Balkans is also the centre of one of the largest Muslim communities in Europe.

Historic and Contemporary Islam in Sicily in Comparison

Islam is not extraneous to the history and context of Sicily. Its presence is not a new demographic development in recent decades, as it happened in many Western Europeans countries. Given its crucial geographical position in the Mediterranean, between the East and the West, Sicily was conquered and ruled by Arabs (827-1061). They moved their capital to Palermo, known in Arabic as Balarm, or just as al-Madīna, as the Prophet´s town, to emphasize its key role as the Islamic centre of political and spiritual life (Barone 2003, 105). Islamisation was, thus, a decisive process, especially in the North and West of the Sicilian emirate, which followed the Muslim mainstream trends (Granara 2006, 744-745). Sicilian Muslims kept their privileged status quo even after the Norman conquest, which implied a vigorous Westernization by orientating this country into a Latin orbit under the supremacy of the Roman Church by founding Latin cloisters and assigning political pre-eminence to Latin clergy (Décarreaux 1974). However, Norman and Staufen rulers of Sicily largely affiliated Muslim factions to Christian leadership and granted them

a peculiar role in the exercise of military and economic power (Metcalfe 2013, 32). The early Norman period was especially relevant in terms of toleration. The Sicilian Muslims communities were still flourishing in the XI and XII centuries, as Arabic chroniclers report and extant archives also testify. In particular, Muhammad al-Idrīsī (d. 1165) attests several mosques in Palermo, Catania and Butera to the mid-XII century, while a mosque in Syracuse is attested by the jurist al-Himyarī (XIII-XIV c.), besides archaeological evidence for prayer centres in other towns like Segesta, medieval Qalatameth (Barone 2003, 108). Muslims freely continued practising their religion. They were protected by Christians even if they were now subject to paying a collective tax (census) levied in virtue of their religious status. It was a reversed fiscal system of the ğizya, which was paid by the non-Muslims in the Arabic period, since Sicily was no more dār al-Islām, "the home of Islam", but indeed dār al-Kufr, "the home of misbelief" (Udovitch 1994, 192; Barone 2003, 107; Metcalfe 2013, 33-35). However, the Islamic or, at least, the Arabic speaking learned elite held a relevant cultural hegemony at the Hauteville´s Court. Jews and Greeks were still particularly active and they gave rise to a peculiar unity of purpose. Their relationship with Muslims corresponds to an artistic hybrid style, which arose from combined Arabic/Moorish, Romanesque and Greek Byzantine elements in luxurious architectonic monuments erected to the glory of Christian Sicilian kings. In the Norman Royal Palace, the Palatine Chapel (Cappella Palatina, that is, Royal Chapel) was built around 1140 under the rule of Roger II, with painted wooden ceiling vaults bearing architectural elements known as muqarnas. These are one of the most common features of Islamic architecture, resembling stalactites and connecting the roofs of two adjacent cells (Dold-Samplonius & Harmsen 2005, 86-87; Rebold Benton 2009, 87-89). As Gasparini (2020: 156-157, 169) stated, the patterns decorating the muqarnas of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo revealing Central Asian heritage were built by the worshippers of the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

After the Norman and Staufen times, toleration was abrogated. The Jewish and Islamic presence in Sicily disappeared during the times of the Spanish viceroyalties. The memory of Sicilian Islam was dissimulated against any evidence of an Arabic past, which surfaces in many literary, music and popular traditions up to the present (Costanza 2009; Zarcone 2017, 188, 192). With respect to Sicilian folktale, we cannot avoid mentioning the mask of Giufà (or Giucà), who corresponds to the Arabian Ǧuḥā (or similar names such as Zha in Morokko, Djoha in Persia, Gawhā in Nubia) and the Turkish Nasr-ed-Din Hoca (hence, in Albanian Nastradin Hoxha, in Bosnian Nasruddin Khoja, in Macedonian Stradin Hoca and variants attested to in Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China). The Arabian Ǧuḥā acts in paradoxical ways, he subtly criticises social conventions and religious norms. In

turn, the Sicilian Giufà is a wise fool. He is seen as a fool (babbu) and madman (foddi), but he uses his naïveté to overcome the vexations of the upper classes, according to a trickster-fool character going back to a Mediterranean, Balkan and Caucasian koiné (Corrao 1991, 21-27; Ead 2001, 135; Terzi 2020, 32-35; Petruzzella 2022). This context also propitiated the Sicilian cunto, an acting practice unparalleled in Southern Italy but comparable to oral storytelling by performing artists, which was very popular in Maghreb (halqa), Syria and Iran (naqqāli), as masterfully pointed out by D. Tomasello (2021: 51-54, 63-65), with analyses of the Sicilian storyteller (cuntista): whose body language based upon emotional gestures and the use of holding a sword to mark times of the story are ritually linked with the conflict between Muslims and Christians). The mask of Giufà, as well as the cunto, are faces drawn from the living memory of Islamic civilization. Muslims play the role of the enemy in Sicilian storytelling, which represents the Arabic archetypal of the (rejected) Sicilian identity (ibid., 67, 69-71).

In the second half of the XX century, the situation radically changed. Muslims organized regular communities in the last decades by opening cultural centres taking a leading role in social life, as had already happened in Italy (Ferrari 2009, 219-221, 226-228; Camassa 2015, 124-128). Their presence was increasingly due to a migratory flow, especially from North Africa (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt), Sahel and Middle Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh). As Gerard Kester masterfully pointed out in his essay (2022), we have no right to refer to this migration phenomenon just as a social burden for the European community. Indeed, this meeting with different ethnic and religious groups offers a greater chance to all European citizens. It is an opportunity to build an inclusive society. Europeans with a migratory background are to be engaged in every possible effort of inclusiveness with their fellow citizens (or citizens-to-be). It is not a matter of merely an administrative process of acquiring legal status as "New Europeans", but rather a complex issue of multipolar identity, which is gained by the sharing of heterogeneous cultural and religious elements that belong to two or more different cultures. "Old Europeans" cannot demand from immigrants to deny their own religious identity. Everyone should have full right to practice their own religion conforming to a previously-defined identity and to be accepted in an inclusive way. All this ascertained, Sicily may (re)discover Islam on the grounds of its previous Arabic history and the subsequent cultural heritage in view of better interacting with the Islamic communities in the present day. It is always useful to orientate the dialogue between believers of the Abraham faiths instead of creating a conflict with Muslims, as Dario Tomasello also stated (2003a: 9): our societies cannot see Islam as a foreign body, nor as an unwelcome guest. Indeed, European countries have to observe the roots of their common history as an integral factor of their own development. Islamic centres in Sicily have long been open to the community by interacting with multiple social players, as the case is in

Messina. Friday sermons are regularly translated into Italian and English in order to overcome the barriers of mistrust, given that these Prayers are very important for the strengthening of the self-identity of the community itself, as well as its individual identity in relation to the others (Küng 2004, 173-174). The social profile of visitors is quite transversal, comprising of economic migrants in search of a better fortune, as well as academics, PhD holders or PhD candidates studying at a local university, having thus come from around the world. Many believers are not from Arabic countries, but from the former Soviet Union, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, and the subsequent international milieu is marked by different geographical, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The Islamic Centre in Messina is chaired by President Mr. Mohammed Refaat, with the help of leading intellectuals such as the above-quoted scholar, Prof. Mr. Dario Tomasello. It provides us a good example of problem-solving for better integration. In fact, misconceptions about Islam often arise from misunderstandings about religious concepts such as sharī'a or jihād, which are disregarded by European public opinion (Tomasello 2003b, 367, 374; Id., 2018, 15, 167-169, 277-281; Samir 2007, 82-86, 204). This centre continuously promotes a number of concrete initiatives aimed at increasing interreligious dialogue, better mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different faith groups as prerequisites for a transcultural process of dialogue (Samir 2007, 214-217). In this respect, it is noteworthy to seek a particularly significant initiative for peace and reciprocal knowledge. I would refer to the meeting organized in October 2019 by the Islamic Cultural Centre of Messina under the title: "Francis and the Sultan: A testing ground for dialogue – Christian Community and Islamic Community in Messina". It was held in the city mosque, and attended by the local Archbishop Mgr. Giovanni Accolla, as well as many representatives of the Islamic and Roman Catholic communities. Besides lectures, the 2019 Conference in the city mosque featured artistic performances, such as a recital of some Franciscan poems, as well as 99 God's names both in the original Arabic and their Italian translations (Costanza 2022, 24-27). The Conference was organized to mark 800 years since Saint Francis of Assisi met the Ayyūbid Sultan of Egypt and Syria Malik al-Kāmil (1218-1238) in Damietta. Apart from partly conflicting or even misleading interpretations of this episode, both Arabic and Western sources attest this encounter dating back to June 1219 (Buffon 2019, 45; Pirone 2019, 45-48). Sultan al-Kāmil is also known to Western historiography because Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, signed a treaty with him in 1229 to be granted recovery of the Holy Land by diplomacy. This is a unique case in the history of the Crusades, referring to a peaceful agreement without resorting to weapons (Blasone & Cardini & Ruta 2019; Kühn 2019, 49; Delle Donne 2022). This meeting provided a paradigm for contemporary Islamic-Christian dialogue so as to directly inspire Pope Francis' decision to meet the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Aḥmad al-Tayyib in Abu Dhabi and

to co-sign a remarkable document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" on February 4, 2019 (Sandri 2019). This event was also mentioned at the Conference held at Messina. On this occasion, Saint Francis' visit to the Ayyūbid Sultan was seen through a spiritual perspective. Both Muslim and Catholic lecturers pointed out how Francis and al-Malik al-Kāmil were followers of the Abrahamic promise which oriented their lives. As Mr. Tomasello particularly emphasized, Saint Francis was not at all unknown to the Sultan. Indeed, the political ruler recognized his Christian visitor as a messenger of the Divine revelation, according to the many parallel examples provided by the Islamic ascetic tradition throughout the centuries. A perfect way to express the spiritual unity of Christian and Islamic asceticism in medieval times despite, or more so, considering the countless obstacles that arose from the military and economic rivalry at that time. The highly significant lesson demonstrated by this meeting held in the Messina city mosque may serve as an example to the spread of this type of educational practices for peace, even in the present day, overshadowed by various conflicts, so as to encourage all people of good will to cooperate in opposing war, xenophobia, and ethnic Euro-centric biases.

Greek Orthodox Communities in Sicily from Byzantine Times to the Present

Cultural heritage is a matter of a complex political discourse focused on religious activity enacted by Greek monks in the Italian regions of Byzantine oikoumene (Špidlík 1972-1973, 1201-1204; Morini 2013, 69-102). The heritage of Byzantium is particularly evident in southern Italian areas, where Greek monks played a pivotal role as cultural and educational factors during the many centuries after the last Eastern Roman armies had definitively departed from the peninsula. In fact, the loss of Bari, the capital of the Catapanate besieged by the Normans (1071), marked the end of the Byzantine rule in Italy, but it did not stop the crucial influence of Greek culture, especially with reference to areas where Greek-speaking communities were still flourishing, such as Apulia, Calabria, and North-Eastern Sicily around Messina (Martino 1980, 315-331; Falcone 1973; Id., 1991, 257-260). In the early 1180s, Messina was already a prosperous port with an almost exclusively Christian population. El-Andalus pilgrim Ibn Ǧubayr (d. 1217) did not find Muslims in the town, which appeared to him to be a prosperous Christian trading centre (Barone 2003, 110; Metcalfe 2013, 31). Val Demone, the NE region of Sicily, was undoubtedly the stronghold of Christian faith and was largely populated by Greek-speaking Christians (Falkenhausen 2017, 27-66). Generally speaking, learned Greeks were very active at the Norman court. They did not interact only with Latin rulers

and Western newcomers, but also with Jews and Muslims. In this respect, it is worth mentioning a key figure such as Christodoulos, also known as Abd al-Rahman in Arabic sources, who achieved the rank of Great Admiral in the Norman kingdom. He was the chief administrator during the regency of Countess Adelaide, from 1101 throughout the early years of the autonomous reign of her son, King Roger II, whose education was entrusted to him (Karen 2007, 24). Bilingual titles in Greek and Arabic indicate the high extent of assimilation between Christians and Muslims at that time. Subsequently, the Hauteville Court at Palermo was a paradigm of toleration corresponding to a multireligious society. Without a doubt, Christodoulos came from this milieu. He served his Norman lord loyally, but he was also awarded the title of protonobilissimos by the Eastern Roman Emperor, thus gaining a high rank in the Byzantine court hierarchy. Finally, Christodoulos largely provisioned the Greek monastery of Theotokos Hodēgētria, that is, the Mother of God, "who shows our way", today Santa Maria del Patìr. This relevant architectonic complex in north-eastern Calabria is still today a centre for multifarious cultural initiatives focusing on the cultural heritage of Italic-Greek monasticism and the discovery of the Byzantine historical past. In this area, the Orthodox Eparchy of Mercourion actively promotes the memory of the ancient Greek roots in Calabria (Russo 2023). This cooperation also provides useful links for visitors coming from Greece, Macedonia, and other Orthodox Balkan countries. The living Byzantine legacy in southern Calabria propitiated the revival of the Orthodox Church by strengthening Italian ties with religious Eastern tradition in an atmosphere of dialogue and the sharing of common roots. In the past few years, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has cemented this spiritual, cultural, and religious legacy, never to be forgotten, by visiting key Calabrian pilgrimage sites. In particular in 2001, H.H., the Archbishop of Constantinople, inaugurated the Regional Institute of Byzantine Studies named after him in S. Severina, blessed the restoration works of the recently-built Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Elias Speleotis in Melicuccà, and visited the Greek Orthodox Chapel of Our Lady of Greece in Gallicianò, the stronghold of the Grico area, where an amphitheatre bears his name (Archinà 2002, 10). On this occasion, he addressed the Hellenophones of Calabria by openly encouraging them to preserve their Grecanico dialect at any cost and by any means in order to safeguard their ethno-linguistic identity, as well as their religious specificity against the threat of assimilation (ibid., 120). In Messina, the revival of Byzantine liturgical and spiritual identity also offers a chance to ensure that inter-religious dialogue continues in a dynamic reality, which today includes the Greek-Catholic Parish of Saint Kosmas and Damian, as well as the Greek-Orthodox Parish of Panagia Sumelà and St. James Apostle under the pastoral care of Father Giovanni Amante. Both parishes share the same Byzantine cultural, ritual, and religious identity, with the difference being that the latter is under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. This is also a

Pan-Orthodox church attended by Griko and Greek people living in Sicily, but also by immigrants coming from other Eastern European countries with an Orthodox majority. Thus, I would like to conclude by giving my personal testimony relating to the last Easter celebration, that is, April 16, 2023. Greeks, Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians peacefully celebrated the solemnity of Orthodox Easter in the ecumenical and conciliatory spirit of the great Feast beyond their national differences. At that time, religious unity bypassed ethnic and nationalist feelings, even in tragic times overshadowed by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Father Amante invited his parishioners to create a unity of hearts following the Risen Lord Christ as King of Peace, while no president alone could give peace and salvation. In fact, the believers embodied this example of perfect harmony. In addition, the Greek-Orthodox parish has been at the forefront in helping Ukrainian refugees in Messina, as well as in sending humanitarian aid to war victims in that theatre of war. With this aim, it has greatly cooperated with the leaders of Caritas and the Roman Catholic diocese of Messina. Subsequently, the commitment of solidarity and active closeness to people in need has overcome confessional, ethnic and political barriers.

Islam and Roman Catholics in Macedonia

If we were to now consider religious matters in the Western Balkans, we should previously consider that Islamic rule was exercised there by Ottoman Turks throughout many centuries. The Turkish Empire inherited the geopolitical role of Byzantium as Balkan and Anatolian hegemony and left a remarkable legacy on the European territories formerly subjected to its rule (Küng 2004, 386-388). As we have also noticed, medieval Arabic conquest is highly meaningful with respect to today's Sicily. The former Muslim rule in Eastern Europe is also a crucial factor in evaluating the development of Muslim-Christian relations in the contemporary Balkan states. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina belonged to the Ottoman Empire from the time of the Turkish conquest (1463) until having been surrendered to Austria-Hungary at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (Dževada Šuško 2019, 7). Lengthy integration into the Ottoman Empire is unavoidable in defining today's Bosnian identity as a Muslim-majority country. Historical roots are key elements if we plan to interpret the present-day social issues with the aim of building a future of peaceful coexistence. This principle is also valuable for Macedonia, where the Turkish occupation lasted even longer than in Bosnia, precisely from the mid-XIV century until the First Balkan War (1913). It means more than 500 years of Ottoman occupation. Present-day Macedonia has borrowed the premises of a peaceful coexistence among different faith groups that are delineated according to certain specific traditions, customs, and historical divisions from the Ottoman past of this country, as Zoran Matevski (2007: 54-55) points out. The cultural heritage left to this Western Balkan Republic suggests

a cooperation founded on the principle of religious pluralism. In line with this, its inhabitants are able to accept diversity to a greater degree (Matevski 2005; Id. 2007, 52-54). The Macedonian model is an unavoidable factor in interpreting actual crises among monotheistic religions by providing an already-practised lifestyle based on mutual interaction.

In this specific social context, the tiny Roman Catholic minority is called upon to mediate external conflicts, given its painful history. As members of both Byzantine and Latin rites, Catholics are today less than one percent of the Macedonian population. On the eve of National Independence, the First and Second Balkan Wars between 1912 and 1914 were disastrous for Macedonian Catholics on the mainland, as they were attacked by Greeks and Serbs. The invading Greek army destroyed 12 parishes and forcibly converted six parishes to Orthodoxy. Approximately 2,000 Catholics of Macedonian origin escaped from pogroms and fled to Strumica and its surroundings, where they found refuge (Frazee 1983, 247). So, Mgr. Kiro Stojanov, the current Roman Catholic Bishop of Skopje, was born in Radovo, near Strumica. Besides being the first Catholic Bishop of Macedonian nationality, since 2018 he has also been the Strumica-Skopje Eparch, of the newly-established Eparchy. Therefore, he is a bi-ritual Bishop, that is, the Custos of Latin and Byzantine liturgy, and in a Balkan state such as Macedonia, set between the East and the West. Pope Francis established this Eparchy which has been entrusted to Mgr. Stojanov, who welcomed him in Skopje. Francis was the first Roman Pontiff to visit this Balkan Republic during his apostolic journey on May 6-7, 2019. The slogan chosen for this journey to Macedonia was drawn from Luke 12:32: "Do not be afraid little flock!" (Не бој се мало стадо!). In the video message prior to his journey to North Macedonian, the Pope addresses the people of Macedonian as "little flock" (malo stado) by asserting the positive value of inter-religious dialogue among different faith groups:

"Today more than ever there is a need to promote in Europe and throughout the world the culture of encounter and of fraternity, and I will come among you to sow these seeds, sure in the knowledge that yours is good soil, and that it will be able to welcome them and bear fruit. The particular beauty of your country comes from the variety of cultures and ethnic and religious affiliations that inhabit it. Living together is not always easy; we know that. But it's worth struggling toward because the most beautiful mosaics are the ones that are richest in colors."

The Holy Father encouraged the believers to pursue the ecumenical dialogue in a complex kaleidoscope marked by multiple ethnic identities. Despite being truly a "little flock", the Roman Catholic diocese of Skopje gave birth to Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta (born as Anjez Gonxhe Bojaxhu), a leading figure of XX century Christianity. It has often been undervalued that St. Theresa's openness to Muslim

and Hindu believers since her first arrival in India was surely indebted to her youthful experience in a multi-religious context, such as the one she experienced in her birthplace. Mother Theresa's origins, set far from traditional Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain or Poland, revealed something providential as she was able to communicate with non-Christians by accepting them as brothers and sisters without prejudice.

Conclusion

As Zoran Matevski (2007: 52) remarked: "Islam and Christianity are part of the Eastern faiths, but they do not exclude each other. Judaism, Christianity and Islam use different names for the same God". It is imperative to create an environment among the population of the host countries which accepts immigrants, as well as religious minority groups. This attempt at an inclusive society is linked with comprehensive information, vital dialogue and mutual respect, with the aim of creating a culture against xenophobia or Islamophobia. As observers may remark, such a pluralist culture is outlined in the above-mentioned historical examples serving as paradigms for our debate. Inclusiveness is implemented in today's Macedonia in virtue of its pluralistic political orientation since its independence in 1991. The lessons of Mediterranean history, as well as the trends in the present-day Balkans are moving in a straight line. History has much to teach us, especially if we consider the heritage of tolerance by the Norman kings of Sicily, al-Andalus in Spain or Ottoman Bosnia. On the other hand, an upsurge of nationalism can undermine peaceful and democratic life, as the tragic events that occurred in former Yugoslavia in the 90s of the XX century show. We can only be successful if we set the right points of religious pluralism and multilateral dialogue on track for a peaceful tomorrow, as did the meetings with the clergy and the religious leaders of the Mediterranean and Balkan countries promoted by Pope Francis in September 2023.

Generally speaking, religious minorities cannot be integrated in host countries according to programs of forced assimilation. This bias is based on a misunderstanding – a fallacious idea – about a certain religion claiming the moral high ground (Küng 2004, 781). Every alley of rejecting immigrants because of their culture that we can run down is a dead end.

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Chapter 6

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AND FAIRNESS: SOME EXAMPLES FROM U.S. LAW

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Abstract: *Liberal constitutionalism professes a strong commitment to toleration and respect for liberty. Toleration requires accepting some beliefs, practices, and lifestyles that one opposes. Liberty confers a right to engage in some beliefs, practices, and lifestyles that others oppose. The U.S. Supreme Court is supposed to be one essential guarantor of liberal constitutionalism. A study of case law reveals that the U.S. Supreme Court sometimes fails to uphold liberal constitutional values at the expense of religious minorities or persons likely to face barriers from discrimination or significant harms from oppression. The aim of this article is to examine some ways that the Supreme Court imposes an illiberal interpretation of the legal and political values that should protect citizens from the harms of discrimination and oppression. Two legal cases are highlighted to show how the Supreme Court sometimes fails to live up to its task of ensuring that law is interpreted in ways that are compatible with the ideals of liberal constitutionalism. In one case the Court considered whether Mormons should have a right under the First Amendment to practice polygamy. The other case considered whether a for-profit business owner should be able to refuse services to customers on the basis of their gender identity, despite a law that prohibits for-profit businesses from engaging in such discrimination. The author's view is that these are examples of how law is sometimes interpreted to side with those who want to deny equal status to others or those who want legal permission to engage in unfair forms of discrimination.*

Keywords: *liberal constitutionalism, toleration, illiberalism, equal status, the First Amendment*

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Introduction

Toleration in a liberal constitutional order requires legal enforcement of fair terms between citizens with respect to liberty and civil rights. An early version of how a liberal constitutionalist might navigate boundaries of toleration was offered by Locke who argued in A Letter Concerning Toleration (Locke, 1698/1983) that the authority of government to enforce norms of toleration in the domain of 'civil affairs' does not apply in the same way to 'private affairs'. For example, does toleration in a liberal constitutional order require applying the same norms of toleration to a voluntary religious organization and a for-profit business? On a Lockean model, a church can oppose same-sex marriage, female clergy, or premarital sex, deny membership to those at odds with church doctrine, or expel members for violating religious obligations. By contrast, an employee at a for-profit business or customer at a restaurant has a right against discrimination or refusals of service. In short, on this view liberty within the domain of private affairs concerns internal rules for voluntary associations, such as criteria for membership, and the freedom to adopt a code or doctrine so long as it does not violate fundamental rights. The important point here is that norms of toleration are enforceable in civil affairs in ways they are not in private affairs.

In what follows I briefly consider two examples from U.S. Constitutional law that show why it is important to be clear on religious toleration and its limits. Of course, two examples from case law do not suffice for a blanket assessment. Yet they do highlight a recurring feature to U.S. constitutional legal practice that cannot be reconciled to liberal constitutionalism and, thus, some general lessons can be drawn from them.

1. Polygamy and LGBTQ+ Customers

The two legal cases I examine considered the right to polygamy and whether a for-profit business owner should have a right to deny service to LGBTQ+ clients on the basis of her religious scruples. The U.S. Supreme Court considered whether religious freedom should be interpreted to permit consensual polygamy among adults in its first religious freedom case in Reynolds v. United States (1879). In Creative LLC ET AL v. Elenis ET AL (2023) the Court considered whether a for-profit business owner should be permitted to deny services to prospective customers on the basis of their gender identity.

In the polygamy case the Supreme Court ruled against the claim that polygamy is protected by the free-exercise clause of the First Amendment. The relevant text of the First Amendment holds that government cannot prohibit "the free-exercise" (U.S. Constitution, Amendment I) of religion. Since the First

Amendment includes a guarantee of religious freedom, and since some religious persons—at the time, Mormons—claimed they have a religious obligation to form a polygamous marriage, the Court had to decide whether polygamy should be accommodated.

In rejecting the request to accommodate polygamy, the Court stresses three claims. One is that religious freedom extends primarily to belief, not practice (Reynolds: 167). A second is that polygamy is not widely practiced in the west and is more common among "Asiatic and African people" (Reynolds: 164). A third claim is that polygamy exposes women to a risk of exploitation in marriage (Reynolds: 166). From the standpoint of liberal constitutionalism, only the third claim has any merit.

The claim that belief but not practice is central to religious freedom is curious, given the tradition of religious liberty that informs the First Amendment's doctrine of religious freedom (Nussbaum 2008). My own view is that the belief/practice distinction, as invoked in this case, is an example of bad-faith legal reasoning. Even in the XIX century religious practices had been singled led out for special protection, such as a legal guarantee against having to serve in the military for Quakers. The belief/practice distinction is likely deemed salient by the Court because an unpopular religious minority makes an accommodation request. The second claim, that polygamy is generally not practiced in the west or in Christian societies, is irrelevant. Religious freedom is a value that should not bend to favor or disfavor a religious belief or practice based on the number of adherents. To claim otherwise is to impose a kind of illiberalism on liberal values, such as that a way of life or tradition at the center of a nation's identity deserves special support from government. The reference to "Asiatic and African people" is nothing more than chauvinism and racism.

The exploitation argument against tolerating polygamy is important, but in the larger context of the Court's argument it is a red-herring. First, the Court was not about to affirm an egalitarian conception of marriage. Doing so would have jeopardized pretty much any marriage practice in the XIX century (Mill 1869/1978), not to mention many that exist today. Second, Mormons at that time were subject to significant religious persecution (Smith 2015). Political elites also refrained from defending the liberty rights of Mormons and some even took part in anti-Mormon efforts including political rhetoric and mob violence. Given these factors it is fair to say the Court's apparent egalitarianism is insincere. The reality is that the Court needed the appearance of fairmindedness in order to defend a problematic verdict.

In 2023 the Court ruled in favor of a web designer who asked the Court to grant an exemption, for religious reasons, from having to design webpages for gay, lesbian, or trans clients. The issue arose because in the relevant jurisdiction—the state of Colorado—an anti-discrimination statute prohibits for-profit businesses

from denying services due to the sexual orientation or gender identity of the customer. As a rule, exemptions from anti-discrimination laws are not granted to for-profit businesses. As a matter of law this is important because the web designer in question wants to run a for-profit business. The standard of distinguishing 'civil' and 'private' affairs is usually interpreted to imply that for-profit businesses must comply with provisions in labor law that protect employees and clients from discrimination. The Supreme Court navigates this feature to law by claiming this is a free-speech case, not simply an anti-discrimination law case. That view is problematic from the standpoint of liberal constitutionalism because of how it blurs the line between civil and private.

Historically, U.S. law has provided the strongest protections for speech by private individuals speaking for themselves, or to journalists, media platforms and the like. But the expectation of protections for freedom of speech have generally been much weaker in the case of speech in the context of for-profit commercial enterprises, with a notable exception for media. Recent case law has altered this traditional paradigm. For example, in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010), the Court ruled that a corporation can spend money from its general treasury fund on certain types of electioneering speech. Without getting into the fine points of election law in the U.S., an important outcome of this case is that corporations can now play a much greater role in promoting political causes during election periods (Mahoney 2013). More recently, the Court laid some more of the basis for the Creative verdict when it ruled in favor of a wedding cake designer who had refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple (Mastercake Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission, 2018). In that case the Court sided with the business owner without directly addressing whether Colorado's anti-discrimination law should apply to a religious business owner. Instead, the Court sided with the business owner on grounds that members of Colorado's Civil Rights Commission had expressed religious bigotry against the owner in their deliberations about how to handle the case (Mahoney 2019).

These verdicts are part of a pattern in recent First Amendment jurisprudence that claims to expand liberty, yet in reality grants more power to for-profit businesses and erodes protections against gender-identity discrimination. The traditional way of delineating what on a Lockean model would involve civic and private affairs is in the process of being dismantled by the current Supreme Court. Here is one way to put this point: on a Lockean model that distinguishes 'civil' from 'private' affairs, norms of toleration that protect someone from discrimination deserve strongest protection in the domain of 'civil affairs'. Religious institutions, non-profit organizations, and other voluntary associations fall under 'private affairs' and are free to promulgate their views on gender identity and many other topics. From this standpoint, the Supreme Court is drawing the line between civil and

private affairs to include for-profit commercial activity under the 'private affairs' category. This is bad news for civil rights. By characterizing the legal issue as mainly concerning free speech, the Court hands a victory to those opposed to LGBTQ+ rights.

Likewise, the Court misconstrues the aims of toleration in a liberal constitutional regime. The public status of persons as equals should be guaranteed (Anderson 1999). What I mean is this: toleration requires respecting persons we oppose by treating them as equals (Mahoney 2020) in contexts such as employment or commerce. We cannot be compelled to like our co-workers or clients, but law can require that in certain contexts we treat them as equals. The business owner that for religious or other reasons opposes gay or trans persons can believe whatever she wants. Yet she cannot legitimately treat employees or clients differently because of characteristics that are irrelevant to persons' status as citizens.

The Court says that protecting customers from the private prejudices of a business owner is not a compelling state interest when the owner's rights to freedom of expression would be objectionably curtailed. In reply we can say that it is not simply the content of speech that matters, but rather content in a commercial rather than private context.

2. Some Takeaways: Illiberal Interpretations of Liberal Values

These brief summaries of two Supreme Court verdicts are illustrations of a kind of intolerance. They do not suffice to justify a sweeping account of the Supreme Court's role in delineating the boundaries of toleration in U.S. law. Yet they do represent a failure to interpret basic rights and liberties in a manner consistent with liberal constitutionalism.

Respect for liberty entails tolerating disagreement, except when everyone agrees, which is never the case with respect to religion, among many other topics. Well known versions of this liberal creed are developed by Spinoza, Locke, Mill, and many others. Yet liberal toleration also depends on equality, because in contexts of religious and other forms of pluralism accommodating persons for who they or the values they pursue are requires a commitment to equal status. The Supreme Court sometimes defends a conception of liberty for privileged citizens at the expense of equal status for citizens subject to social and other forms of prejudice. As Thomas Scanlon remarks, "The tolerant person's attitude is this: 'Even though we disagree they are [just as]…fully members of society as I am" (quoted Mattefone 2020, 167). Rainer Forst defends an important feature to this conception of toleration: "Claims for toleration…are claims for justice, and intolerance is a form of injustice, favoring one ethical community [or religion or ethnicity or tradition] over others…. Hence

toleration is a virtue of justice" (quoted in Mattefone 2020, 70). In addition, Alan Patten (2014) who favors an egalitarian multicultural liberal model of toleration offers a principle that can help navigate cases that challenge the limits of toleration. The principle is: each citizen should have a fair and equal opportunity for self-determination. Fairness and equality are two important concepts here. Fairness captures the idea that one person's liberty should not come at the expense of another's. Equal opportunity captures the idea that a liberty right to pursue important values and projects does not entail that others are obligated to subsidize or in some way further such projects (Patten 2014). Rather, our collective political obligation is to defend the right to pursue such projects. A liberal constitutionalist conception of toleration should be guided by the values expressed by Scanlon, Forst, and Patten.

In the present context resistance to what I am calling a liberal constitutionalist approach to toleration is in part a backlash by those who oppose extending equal treatment to historically oppressed citizens (Norris and Inglehart 2019). As more citizens come to favor LGBTQ+ rights, there is an increase in the panic and hysteria that serve as proxies for prejudices that are being challenged. This factor influences some justices on the Supreme Court who are aligned with a kind of illiberalism. Illiberalism often appeals to national identity, the majority culture, or traditional values as compelling state interests that should be a basis for law (Laruelle 2022). A case in point is the claim in Reynolds that polygamy is usually only practiced in non-western societies. In a liberal constitutional regime, values such as liberty and equality should not be interpreted in ways that enforce traditional values when doing so amounts to creating roadblocks to an equal opportunity to pursue one's beliefs and practices (Patten 2014). We should be alert to the fact that oftentimes a defense of the status quo is a defense of intolerance.

Liberal constitutionalism invites us to ask questions such as, 'what do values such as equality and liberty imply for LGBTQ+ rights?' or for religious minorities, among many other examples. Whether appeals to 'our nation's history' are helpful for answering those kinds of questions is not settled by the history as such. It depends on fidelity to the values, not simply the practice (Dworkin 1986). If the practice is unfair, that will not be noticed unless we focus on the values.

In my view some judges on the U.S. Supreme Court today hold a view about toleration that is not compatible with this conception of liberal constitutionalism. For example, the Court has eroded protections from labor law for persons who work at religious schools by claiming the American's With Disabilities Act does not protect an employee from being fired due to disability (Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012). The Court has claimed that for-profit corporations can be exempt from health

care policy that requires coverage for contraception if the owners hold a religious viewpoint that opposes the use of contraception (Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., 2014). Many are familiar with the recent Supreme Court verdict upholding Trump's executive order that effectively blocked all forms of migration from five Muslim majority states (Trump v. HI, 2018).

Conclusion

To conclude, I do not think there is a systematic ideology of illiberalism that drives the intolerant interpretations of First Amendment jurisprudence highlighted above. At the moment the most impactful form of illiberalism in U.S. law and politics is arguably something more like an opportunistic than ideological illiberalism. Currently, the U.S. does have some pundits and political elites who espouse an illiberal ideology, for example, those who embrace the label 'Christian nationalist'. Christian nationalism in the contemporary American political context is a proxy for resistance to challenges to status privileges that white and Protestant citizens have long enjoyed. One salient dimension to recent attempts to instrumentalize an imaginary national identity that is mostly white and mostly Protestant is the concerted effort to block calls for extending legal guarantees for equal status to non-heterosexuals or to prospective Muslim migrants. This opportunistic illiberalism might evolve into a more articulate, coherent, and, thus, more dangerous ideological illiberalism. For example, if Trump and his allies were to adopt a more coherent vision, and if Trump and like-minded candidates win big in the upcoming 2024 elections, then some form of ideological illiberalism would likely become more central to U.S. law and politics. That might happen, and, at least, in the short run illiberal and authoritarian populism will become one of the most significant threats to liberal constitutionalism in the U.S. One reason for longer term optimism is a generational component to this issue: young persons including conservatives are less likely to embrace opportunistic illiberalism and even fewer affirm an ideological illiberalism. However, even without a clearly articulated illiberal ideology there is an illiberal core to the muddled authoritarian populism that plays an alarming role in contemporary U.S. law and politics. This characterization of threats to liberal constitutionalism is not unique to the U.S., of course. In the broader context, we should be mindful of the intersections between illiberal currents in contemporary U.S. law and politics and the authoritarian populism that has taken root in India under Modi, Turkiye under Ergodan, and Hungary under Oban, among the many alarming trends that do not bode well for liberal constitutionalism (Sajo 2021).

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Chapter 7

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HINDUS AND SAINT THOMAS CHRISTIANS AS AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Mandić Stefan[5]

Abstract: *Saint Thomas Christians are autochthones Indian Christians who settled in the south of India during the III century AD. They are a vibrant ethno-religious group that constitutes approximately 12,5% of the population of the Indian state of Kerala. Throughout history, Saint Thomas Christians have coexisted mostly peacefully with the predominantly Hindu population. Bearing that in mind, the fundamental goal of this study is to determine the factors that have led to two highly distinct religious traditions living in harmony and tolerant coexistence for almost two millennia. The aim of this paper is to ascertain whether this interreligious harmony is connected to the unique worldview of Hinduism, which, due to its internal characteristics, is capable of peacefully integrating other religions. Saint Thomas Christians have integrated into the Hindu social order as a distinct ethno-religious group organized in two major subcastes whilst retaining their core theological beliefs and ritual practices. The caste system inherent in Hinduism could have facilitated a higher degree of religious tolerance by granting separate ethno-religious groups the autonomy to organize their own religious practices as long as they adhere to the basic norms of caste behavior. A broader objective of this paper is to draw lessons from the example of mutual tolerance and coexistence between the Hindus and the Saint Thomas Christians, the lessons of the highest value for the conceivable resolution of religious and other conflicts in different parts of the world.*

Keywords: *Saint Thomas Christians, Hinduism, religious tolerance, caste system.*

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Introduction

The main objective of this study is to determine which characteristics of Hinduism have contributed to the tolerance towards the St. Thomas Christians as an indigenous Indian Christian group that settled in South India during the III century AD. Religious tolerance is defined as the tendency of the dominant religion to allow the existence of minority religions (Zagorin 2003). Throughout history, different dominant religions have exhibited varying degrees of tolerance towards minority religions. For instance, in the Islamic world, adherents of the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians) were accepted as second-class citizens (dhimmis) and were not persecuted provided they paid a religious tax (jizya), indicating a certain level of tolerance (Hodgson 1974). However, in the border territories of the Islamic civilization, Muslim armies often waged holy wars against "unbelievers", especially in regions like Anatolia (between the XI and XV centuries), northern India (between the VII and XII centuries), etc. (Holt 1970). The Christian civilization has often been less tolerant than the Islamic civilization and has persecuted various minority religions. In medieval Christian states, certain versions of traditional Christianity were considered official and partially tolerated, while minor variants were rarely accepted. For example, in Orthodox Nemanjić Serbia, Catholics were accepted, but only in certain areas of maritime cities like Kotor, Bar, Ulcinj, and in trading and mining outposts in the hinterland, which were under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Bar or the Archbishopric of Kotor (Komatina 2016). All forms of non-Orthodox and non-Catholic Christianity, such as Bogomils and Cathars (versions of Gnostic Christianity) or Hussites (precursors to Protestants), were brutally persecuted in Europe (Barber 2010; Fudge 2002). Similar fates befell the pagan Baltic and Slavic people, whose religious traditions were completely eradicated in the Northern Crusades from the XII to the XV centuries (Christiansen 1997). Jews were occasionally accepted, if they engaged in specific occupations and lived in ghettos, but they got cast out if the circumstances were different (Elukin 2007). During the Crusades, the Latin crusaders were often brutal towards the Jewish, Muslim and Eastern Orthodox Christian population (Frenkel 2013; Jonathan 1994; Phillips 2004). Eastern religions, such as Hinduism, historically displayed significantly more tolerance than the Abrahamic religions. In the following chapter the characteristics that made Hinduism particularly tolerant will be analyzed. Subsequently, the paper will delve into the history of the emergence and existence of the St. Thomas Christians as the first indigenous Indian Christians, as well as their relations with wider Hindu society.

1. Basic Features of Hinduism that made it Religiously Tolerant

To understand the tolerance of Hinduism, one must analyse its fundamental characteristics: caste, atman, dharma, samsara, and karma. The explanation of Hinduism in this paper will frequently be based on the work of one of the most influential sociologists of religion, Max Weber. Traditional Hindu society was based on the caste system. A caste represents a closed social group whose broader social position is determined by the ritual and magical characteristics of its members. The caste, as a social institution, established a direct link between religious beliefs and the social stratification of society. No caste exists independently, but only in relation to other castes. Therefore, the caste is reproduced through the specific ritual practices of its members and through the prohibition of marriage and social interaction with other, especially lower, castes. The basic division of Hindu castes is into four fundamental castes, differently named as varnas (or colours): Brahmins (priestly caste), Kshatriyas (warrior caste), Vaishyas (merchant caste), and Shudras (peasant and manual labourer caste). Brahmins are hierarchically the highest caste, followed by Kshatriyas, then Vaishyas, and Shudras as the lowest caste. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas are considered twice-born castes because all the male members of these castes undergo an initiation ritual in their youth, symbolizing rebirth and granting them the privilege to wear the sacred thread around their waist. The hierarchical division into the four basic castes manifests in reality as the existence of tens of thousands of castes, known as jatis. At the very bottom of the caste hierarchy are the "Dalits," also known as the untouchables. These are the castes engaged in occupations considered ritually impure in Hinduism, such as cleaning streets, handling dead bodies, disposing of various types of waste, professions associated with a nomadic way of life, etc. Physical or symbolic contact between higher castes and low castes or ritually impure untouchable castes can ritually defile members of the higher castes, which is why such contact is strictly avoided. The restraining from interaction with untouchables historically often had some extreme forms: the members of higher castes avoided contacts even with the shadows of the lower caste individuals; it was forbidden for the lower caste members to touch the wells used by higher castes, etc. (Weber 1958; Bendix 1977).

In Hinduism, there is no universalistic morality. Each caste has specific moral and ritual duties to fulfil to preserve its caste position. Each caste has its own dharma – specific religious and moral duties. The dharma of a specific caste of priests is entirely separate from the dharma of a merchant caste or a caste of thieves. The concept of dharma is closely linked to the concept of samsara. Samsara represents the eternal hierarchical wheel of the past, present and future lives of each individual. Therefore, the concept of samsara is connected to the belief in reincarnation. Whether a particular individual will belong to a higher or lower caste in the next

life, or even whether they will be human or an animal, depends primarily on whether they have respected their caste duty (dharma) in this life. Progression in the cycle of life is, therefore, directly related to fulfilling caste dharma. Those consistently fulfilling caste dharma will accumulate positive karma, meaning their positive actions will determine that they are born into a higher hierarchical position in the next life, and vice versa (Weber 1958; Bendi, 1977).

Since each caste must fulfil different dharmas, they have different paths to salvation, or moksha. In classical Hinduism, the right to salvation was reserved for members of the higher castes (higher varnas): Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. They could liberate themselves from the cycle of life and achieve eternal salvation by merging their individual soul (atman) with the supreme deity (Brahman). Various schools interpreted the means of achieving salvation differently. According to classical Brahmins, salvation could be attained through proper knowledge of the world, or proper gnosis; according to yogic schools, salvation could be achieved by elevating consciousness through the successful application of various bodily meditation techniques, etc. From the III century AD Bhakti movements developed in Hinduism, which promised salvation even to lower castes through the worship of the purest emanations of Brahman. According to some Bhakti movements, the purest emanation of Brahman is Shiva, for some Vishnu, while others consider it to be Shakti or Smatra (Weber 1958; Bendix 1977).

Various Hindu philosophical schools had different views on the nature of the relationship between atman and Brahman. For dualists, the phenomenal world was merely an illusion that an individual must overcome to unite their atman with Brahman. According to monists, Brahman is present in everything, and only the realization of the pantheistic nature of the supreme deity can lead an individual to salvation. The diversity in understanding the nature of reality and the ways to achieve individual salvation has led to the existence of six basic orthodox schools in India, differing significantly on crucial ontological questions: Nyaya, Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Purva Mimamsa, and Uttara Mimamsa. Some of these schools are monistic, some dualistic, some rationalistic, and some, like Samkhya and Mimamsa, can even be considered atheistic (in a sense that they reject a personal God with attributes). What makes them orthodox is the minimal condition that every individual or movement must be fulfilled if they want to be classified as Hindu, which is accepting the authority of the Vedas as the sacred texts and the existence of an individual soul or atman (Bartley 2011; Klostermaier 2007; Nicholson 2013; Ravikumar 2015).

In India, between the VII and the V centuries BC, powerful heterodox religious movements, such as Buddhism and Jainism, emerged, entering into a competitive struggle with classical Brahmanic Hinduism for dominant social

standing. Heterodox movements rejected the Hindu understanding of atman and Brahman, and often criticized the caste system. The conflict between the orthodox Hindu schools and the heterodox religious movements, in the vast majority of cases, was not violent, but primarily based on philosophical debate. Nevertheless, after initial crisis and a loss of dominant position between the III century BC and the II century AD, Hinduism was able to integrate these movements into the broader caste system, usually assimilating them into the higher caste, simultaneously accepting and marginalizing them. Thanks to the successful process of a centuries-long gradual integration, by the VII century AD, Jains and Buddhists had mainly become distinct castes within the broader Hindu caste system. As long as they fulfilled their caste dharma, Hinduism did not pose a threat to what they specifically believed in and how they understood the path to salvation (Bronkhorst 2011; Weber 1958).

Examples of Jainism and Buddhism highlight Hinduism's capacity to integrate minority religions into the caste system, emphasizing that the caste system is often a more significant and powerful social factor than Hinduism itself. This is further indicated by the following facts: the caste structure, in the sense of organizing its religious communities on the Indian subcontinent, is often accepted by universalistic and monotheistic religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism (Bayly 2004; Leach 1971; Nesbitt 2005), even though this contradicts their fundamental principles. Hinduism had been utilizing the gradual model of peaceful pacification of Jainism and Buddhism to integrate immigrants with diverse religious traditions into the caste system. These immigrants, primarily due to their literacy level and religious taboos that prevented them from carrying out certain occupations, were most commonly integrated into higher caste positions, typically within the Vaishya or Kshatriya subcastes. Here, we shall analyze two interesting examples of religious communities that Hinduism has successfully integrated into the caste system.

Firstly, in India, there are indigenous Indian Zoroastrians. They migrated to India during the VII century AD, after the Arab conquest of Persia, to escape the Islamization imposed by the new Muslim rulers of Persia. In India, they formed a distinct ethno-religious group known as Parsis. The largest concentration of Parsis is in the northern Indian state of Gujarat. Primarily belonging to higher castes, Parsis, along with the Brahmin caste and certain higher Christian and Muslim castes, constituted the foundation from which the modern middle class in Gujarat emerged during the XIX century (Hinnells & Williams 2007; Varma 2007). Another specific religious group that successfully integrated into Indian society is the Jewish community. The Jews are most commonly found in the western Indian coast and in the big commercial cities. The Jews in India are divided into distinct ethno-religious

groups with various caste positions, including Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews, and Bene Jews (Slapak 1995).

The relationship between Hindus and Muslims differs somewhat from Hinduism's relationship with other religions. From the VII to the XII centuries, Muslims increasingly appeared as conquerors of India. During the XII century, they established the Delhi Sultanate, the most powerful state in northern India. In the XV century, an even more powerful Muslim state, the Mughal Sultanate, was formed. At its highest point of power, the Mughal Sultanate controlled most of the Indian subcontinent. Only the southern states of India remained independent, where Hinduism was observed as the official state religion. In the early stages of the conquests, Hindus and Buddhists were not considered "the People of the Book", leading to significant reprisals and the Islamization of parts of the population belonging to these religious traditions. With the establishment of stable Muslim government in northern India, Hindus gradually acquired the status of dhimmi. The administrative apparatus of Muslim states accepted them as second-class subjects, and as other non-Muslims, they were forced to pay a special religious tax, jizya (Hodgson 1974). The unfavourable position of Hindus led to frequent uprisings, some of which contributed to the emergence of new Hindu states in the north, such as the Marathas, formed during the XVII century (Pearson 1976). The relationship between Muslims and Hindus was not only based on conflict, but also on syncretic blending. As a result of the fusion of Islamic and Hindu traditions in the Punjab region at the end of the XV century, Sikhism emerged as a new syncretic monotheistic religion (Owen & Singh 1995).

Most Christian groups in India originated from the missionary work of the Catholic Church and various Protestant churches associated with European colonizers, like the Portuguese and the British. Christians are particularly present in the federal states of Kerala, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Goa, etc. (Latourette 1939; Frykenberg 2010). Some Christians are not associated with European missionary activities and have been in India for more than a millennium. Among these Christians, the most significant are the St. Thomas Christians, present in southern India since the III century AD (Frykenberg 2010). In the following chapters, their history and the broader historical context that led to their emergence in India will be shown. Before the aforementioned analysis, it is important to briefly list the characteristics of Hinduism that historically enabled it to tolerate and integrate minority religions into society:

1. Hinduism, due to its caste system, has a particularistic morality. As long as a caste fulfils its caste dharma, its members can believe in whatever they choose to;

2. In orthodox Hinduism, there are multiple paths to salvation, thus non-Hindu/heterodox paths to salvation are tolerated;

3. The pluralism of Hindu philosophical schools allows the Hindu religion to tolerate conflicting philosophical directions and ontological views, even those unrelated to Hinduism.

2. The Historical Context that led to the Emergence of St. Thomas Christians

2.1. Early Christianity

Christianity has undergone several phases of development, each marked by conflicts among different Christian and quasi-Christian groups over essential theological questions. The first phase of Christianity's development spans from its origin in Judea during the 30s AD to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD (or up until the first three ecumenical councils) (Chadwick 1993). In this phase, four main groups of Christians emerged: proto-orthodox Christians (precursors to Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism), Jewish Christians, Gnostic Christians, and Arians. Proto-orthodox Christianity can be defined as the form of Christianity that became dominant during the IV century and existed before the IV century (Ehrman 2003).

Proto-orthodox Christians believed that Jesus Christ had both divine and human nature united in one person, and that God consisted of the Holy Trinity composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Ehrman 2003). Jewish Christianity was characterized primarily by the belief that Jesus Christ was the prophesied Messiah, but also that anyone who wanted to be a Christian had to adhere to Jewish religious law (kosher dietary laws, observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, etc.) (Tabor 2013). Proto-orthodox Christianity disagreed with the insistence that newcomers to Christianity had to follow Jewish religious law. Its followers believed that those who did not practise Jewish laws could become Christians and, therefore, lifted the ritual prohibition on practices such as alcohol consumption, pork consumption, and non-circumcision.

Gnosticism, in a broader sense, does not necessarily fall under Christianity. The basic beliefs of Gnosticism include:

1. Dualism - the belief that matter is evil and entraps the inherently good spiritual soul;

2. Asceticism - the belief that the soul can detach from the shackles of the material world through ascetic practices;

3. Belief in the Supreme Being - the initial deity and the mover of the universe, which does not actively engage in its occurrences;

4. Belief in Aeons as emanations of the Supreme Being - spiritual beings originating from the essence of the Supreme Being, more or less actively involved in the occurrences in the spiritual and material worlds;

5. The belief that the material world was created by the lowest emanation of the Supreme Being, due to ignorance, error or evil, and that, consequently, human souls, as divine sparks of the Supreme Being, are trapped in the material world. This lowest form of emanation is known by different names in various Gnostic traditions - Demiurge, El, Satan, Yahweh, Archon (ruler of the material world) (Broek & Hanrgraaff 2020; Rudolph 1987).

Various authors suggest that the emergence of Gnosticism was influenced by Neoplatonism, Zoroastrianism, and even Buddhism. In the context of early Christian history, it is essential to note that certain Gnostic movements combined Gnostic teachings with Christianity. One of the most prominent movements of Gnostic Christianity were the Valentinians, prevalent in Egypt, who gave new meanings to certain Christian concepts. According to them, the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in the Epistle to the Romans is a symbolic representation of conflict between people trapped in matter and spiritual people destined for liberation from the material. Another significant group of Gnostic Christians was the Marcionites, most dominant in Anatolia. According to the Marcionites, the God of the Old Testament is the evil Demiurge, while the Jesus Christ of the New Testament is sent by the Supreme Being who is striving to free humans from material bonds (Broek & Hanrgraaff 2020; Irenaeus 2015; Magris 2005; Rudolph 1987; Verardi 1997). Proto-Christianity was more successful than Christian Gnosticism for one fundamental reason. Christian Gnosticism did not have a developed moral system, and its teachings applied only to the elite who, through successful asceticism, were allegedly destined to liberate themselves from the shackles of this world and achieve secret gnosis. Proto-orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, believed that the truth was revealed to everyone, could not be reduced to secret gnosis, and that anyone, by believing in Jesus Christ and behaving morally, could achieve salvation, not just a chosen and selected elite. Christian Gnosticism had a significant influence on later quasi-Christian movements, such as the Bogomils and Cathars, as well as on modern Western esotericism and New Age movements that developed during the XIX century (Broek & Hanrgraaff 2020).

The main competitor of proto-orthodox Christianity was Arianism. Like proto-orthodox Christianity, Arianism accepted the Holy Trinity. However, according to Arians, Jesus Christ did not exist eternally; he was rather created by

God the Father. Therefore, he cannot be identified with God the Father, who is hierarchically and spiritually above Jesus Christ, although Jesus had become coeternal with God the Father after his creation. Arianism was particularly popular among the Germanic tribes, such as the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths, who were among the first Germanic people to adopt Christianity. After facing persecution by the Roman state from the I to the III centuries AD, proto-orthodox Christianity was declared the official imperial religion by Emperor Constantine with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. Soon after, the First Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 AD, officially condemning Arianism as heresy and proto-orthodoxy became orthodox Christianity by being declared the only correct interpretation of faith and the official religion of the Roman Empire (Berndt & Steinacher 2014).

In contrast to Hinduism, where the coexistence of multiple ontological truths was allowed, Christianity, as a universalist religion, could only accept one truth in a dominant position. The question arises: why was this the case? According to the author of this paper, after the failure of the deification customs of Roman emperors, Christianity was adopted as the religion and ideology of the empire in an effort to unite its economically, civilizationally, and culturally diverse parts by one unifying universalist dogma. To a certain extent, similar process occurred in the Sassanian Empire, where Zoroastrianism was promoted as the primary imperial religion from the III century onwards (Boyce 1984). In India, on the other hand, the Brahmin caste successfully maintained control over the reproduction of social differences through the regulation of caste system. Therefore, it did not insist on ideological unity and tolerated the pluralism of ontological truths.

2.2. Nestorians and Miaphysites as Special Branches of Eastern Christianity

At the Third Council of Ephesus, held in the year 432 AD, the Church excommunicated the Nestorians. Nestorianism was particularly present in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, in the Levant, and the broader region of Mesopotamia. This perhaps suggests that the periphery of the Roman Empire wanted to ideologically underlay its cultural and economic distinctiveness from the central regions located in the Balkans, the Italian Peninsula, and the Aegean coast. According to Nestorianism, named after Nestorius, a former Patriarch of Constantinople of Syrian origin, the two natures of Jesus, human and divine, are separated into two different persons. This stood in contrast to the position of orthodox Christology, which asserted that Jesus had two natures, human and divine, unified in one perfect person. After the excommunication, Nestorianism was mostly tolerated by the Sassanian Empire as the dominant version of Christianity in the

Persian territory, although there were periods of persecution of Nestorian Christians (most notably during the rule of Shapur II) (Baum & Winkler 2003).

Nestorians, within the Persian state, organized the Church of the East, or the Nestorian Church, which, alongside the later-established Catholic and Orthodox Churches, became the third most significant branch of Christianity in the world from the V to the XIII centuries. After the Arab conquest of Persia, members of the church, in accordance with Sharia law, were reduced to the status of dhimmis, obliged to pay the religious tax (jizya), similar to Zoroastrians. However, this position did not prevent them from spreading to the Far East. Between the XIX and the XIII centuries, the Nestorian Church was the geographically the most widespread variant of Christianity. Nestorians successfully converted part of the population in the various regions of the Chinese Empire during the rule of the Tang Dynasty (VII to XIX centuries AD). They were persecuted and nearly eradicated by the Tang emperor Wuzong, but experienced revival during the X century. The Church of the East was particularly active in the territories where the Turkic and Mongolian people lived, where it also successfully converted a part of the population. It even became an integral part of the court of Genghis Khan, who tolerated its existence and activities. At its height, it had a diocese from the Mediterranean coast, across Mesopotamia and Persia, all the way to China and Mongolia. For this study, it is crucial to note that Christians who settled in southern India during the III century, known as St. Thomas Christians, also traditionally belonged to the Nestorian Church in the period between the III and the XV centuries AD (Baum & Winkler 2003; Moffett 1999; Winkler 2009).

The influence of the Church of the East (Nestorian Church) sharply declined between the XIII and XIV centuries. Several factors contributed to this decline. After the era of Genghis Khan, his descendants divided the vast Mongol Empire, where the official religions of their new states became Islam or Buddhism, leading to the eradication of other religious traditions, including Nestorianism. During the rule of Timurlane, one of Genghis Khan's prominent descendants, the Timurid state was formed, which established itself as a great empire and a Central Asian power. The Timurid state adopted a militant version of Islam and radically eradicated Nestorianism from the territories of Persia and the Middle East. Following the establishment of the Ming Dynasty in the XIV century, Nestorianism was actively rooted out in China. All these processes led to the gradual weakening of the Church of the East and its complete disappearance during the second half of the XIV century and the first half of the XV century (Baum & Winkler 2003; Wilmshurst 2000).

The Assyrian Church of the East is the main surviving part of the Nestorian Church, existing to this day and gathering around one million believers who were traditionally located in Iraq (Muure van der Berg 2011). After the fall of the Church

of the East, St. Thomas Christians, who lived in India, became isolated from the wider Christian world for a short time. This changed when the Portuguese colonisers became active in south India at the end of the XV century. St. Thomas Christians had extensive contact with Portuguese Catholic missionaries during the XVI century, so one significant branch of them was integrated into the Catholic church. Another important branch of St. Thomas Christians, dissatisfied with the Portuguese treatment, entered into communion with the Miaphysite Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch in the second half of the XVII century (Frykenberg 2010; Vadakkekara 2007). In this context, it is crucial to briefly delve into the history of Miaphysite Christianity.

Miaphysitism was declared a heresy at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451 AD. According to their doctrine, divine and human natures of Jesus Christ do not exist as two separate natures, but constitute one perfect nature and person. In contrast, orthodox Christianity is moderately dyophysitic, considering human and divine nature as separate, but united in one perfect person. After the declaration of Miaphysitism as heresy, churches located on the periphery of the empire or outside of it separated from the main Church (Brock 2016; Winkler 1997).

The four main Miaphysite churches, also known as Oriental Orthodox Churches, are the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the largest in number - the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In 1993, believers in Eritrea separated from the Ethiopian Church, leading to the establishment of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The fifth traditional Miaphysite church emerged in 1665, when a significant part of St. Thomas Christians entered into communion with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, forming the traditional Malankara Church (Baum & Winkler 2003; Russell 2010).

3. Saint Thomas Christians in India

According to the traditional belief, the first Christian who, in the I century AD, settled in South India was the apostle Thomas. Because of this legendary story, the indigenous Christian community in Kerala refers to itself as St. Thomas Christians. Historical research indicates that the first traces of Christians in South India could be found as early as the III century AD, with additional migrations during the IV and VIII centuries AD. Today, St. Thomas Christians constitute 12,5% of the population of the Indian state of Kerala, and 70.73% of the Christians in the state (around six million people) (Zachariah 2006; Thomas 2018), and are one of the oldest and most influential communities. The rest of this chapter will explore and

analyze the relationships of the St. Thomas Christians with other Christian groups, as well as their historical position in the predominantly Hindu society.

3.1. St. Thomas Christians: between Nestorianism, Miaphysitism, Catholicism, and Protestants

Historical research suggests that St. Thomas Christians were most probably members of the Nestorian Church of the East during the first wave of their settlement in the Indian peninsula in the III century AD. Their community was officially incorporated into the Church of the East as the Metropolitanate of India by Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (780–823 AD). The Metropolitanate of India had a developed hierarchy of bishops, and a tradition of always appointing a local archdeacon. Like all the other parts of the Church of the East, St. Thomas Christians used the East Syriac Rite. During the period of Nestorian influence, the Metropolitanate of India enjoyed high autonomy in managing its local affairs, mainly because the archdeacon was of local origin, as bishops often were as well (Baum & Winkler 2003; Brock et al. 2011; Frykenberg 2010). After the decline of the Nestorian Church of the East, St. Thomas Christians found themsleves briefly isolated from the external Christian world. This quickly changed when they came into contact with the Portuguese. During the XVI and XVII centuries, the Portuguese aggressively tried to convert St. Thomas Christians to Catholicism, leading to the first schism within the indigenous Indian Christian community. Some of the St. Thomas Christians were integrated into the Catholic Church, accepting the Pope as the supreme religious leader, and organized themselves into the partially autonomous Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, which retained the traditional East Syriac Rite. Another faction, resisting the Portuguese attempts at Catholicization, established contacts with the Miaphysite Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. This led to the formation of the Malankara Church in 1665, which embraced Miaphysite teachings, entering into communion with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and adopting the West Syriac Rite (Frykenberg 2010; Vadakkekara 2007). In later centuries, the Catholic Church and various Protestant groups, through their proselytizing activities, further contributed to the fragmentation of St. Thomas Christians, resulting in their present-day division into four basic groups:

1. Miaphysites:

• Those who accept the authority of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (Jacobite Syrian Christian Church) (Russell 2010);

• Those who separated from the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and declared autocephaly, forming the Malabar Independent Syrian Church (1772) and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (1912) (Baum & Winkler 2003; Russell 2010);

2. Catholics:

• Those who accepted the authority of the Catholic Church in 1662 and retained the East Syriac Rite (Syro-Malabar Catholic Church) (Robertson 1999);

• Those who accepted the authority of the Catholic Church in 1930, and practice the West Syriac Rite (Syro-Malankara Catholic Church) (Brown 1956; Robertson 1999);

3. Protestants:

• Those who, influenced by Protestant missionaries during the XIX and XX centuries, became Oriental Protestants (Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church; St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India) (McGavran 1979; Sunni 2017);

• Those who became Anglicans, Pentecostals and Adventists - many of Protestant Christians are not St. Thomas Christians by heritage, but come from lower castes and those of Protestants who have St. Thomas Christian origin still avoid intermarrying with lower caste brethren (Bergunder 2008; Forrester 2017; Frykenberg 2010; Neill 2002);

4. Nestorians:

• Those who, in 1945, renewed ties with the Assyrian Church as the successor to the Nestorian Church of the East, adhering to Nestorian doctrine and the East Syriac Rite (Chaldean Syrian Church) (Brown 1956).

Today, the largest among all religious communities of St. Thomas Christians is the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church with 2,345,911 members, followed by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church with 493,858 members, the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church with 482,762 members, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church with 465,207 members and the Protestant/reformed Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church with 405,089 members (Zachariah 2016). It is worth mentioning that St. Thomas Christians managed to preserve their unity until they engaged in more active relations with European missionaries. This development is not unique to the coast of Kerala, but is characteristic of India as a whole, where Catholic and Protestant missionaries were, and often still are, persistent and aggressive in their proselytism.

3.2. Analysis of the Position of St. Thomas Christians in Hindu Society

St. Thomas Christians in South India formed a distinct ethno-religious group, also known as Nazranis. They can be divided into two ethnic subgroups: the majority Northist group and the minority Southist group. According to tradition, the Northist group traces its origin to the higher caste Nair population converted by St. Thomas upon his arrival in India, while the legendary ancestor of the Southist group is the wealthy Syrian merchant Knai Thomma. The division into Northists and Southists was established during the period when the Chera dynasty ruled the Kerala coast (220 AD - 1100 AD) and those two ethno-religious subgroups are also two basic subcastes of St. Thomas Christians (Forrester 2017; Frykenberg 2010; Kollaparambil 1992). In their liturgies, St. Thomas Christians use the Syriac language, but in everyday life, they speak Malayalam, the predominant native language of the Indian state of Kerala. Culturally, they are often described as "Indian in culture, Christian in faith, and Syrian in liturgy" (Amaladass 1989). Many of their cultural practices are similar to those of the Hindu majority, and their customs related to birth, marriage, pregnancy, death, etc., are largely adopted from Hindu traditions (Collins 2007).

To better understand the social position of St. Thomas Christians, it is necessary to consider the socio-historical characteristics of the Kerala coast (part of the wider Malabar coast). The Chera dynasty (220 AD -1100 AD) initially ruled the region, followed by various smaller kingdoms, with the most significant being the kingdoms of Cochin (XII century CE-1949) and Travancore (1729-1949). The Kerala coast was one of the wealthiest parts of India, primarily due to its location on the maritime Silk Road. The people of this area mainly exported spices produced in its hinterland. Trade with Europe had already been established during ancient times (Bayly 2003; Sreedhara 2007). Noteworthy is that in ancient times the annual value of trade of the Kerala region with Rome reached, according to Pliny the Elder, 50 million sesterces annually (Pliny 1859). The traditional mercantile character of the Kerala coast attracted traders of different ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations to settle in the region. This largely explains why Muslims (26,6% of the population) and Christians (18,4% of the population) are significant minorities in Kerala today (Zachariah 2016), making it one of the most religiously diverse Indian federal states, and why, until the XX century and their emigration to Israel, even a small group of autochthones Cochin Jews was present (Slapak 1995).

Since recorded history of St. Thomas Christians in Kerala, they have been involved in trade. During the XIII and XIV centuries, they even received monopoly rights from local rulers for the production and sale of spices. During this time, they were also appointed as port revenue officers by the local rulers. Besides trade, over time, they gained the right to engage in other prestigious occupations, such as

warfare, training of the army, and collecting taxes for ruling dynasties. The before-mentioned illustrates their high caste status and economic and social power in the Chera kingdom and later, in the smaller kingdoms of which the most prominent are Cochin and Travancore (Bayly 2003; Vadakkekara 2007).

Their high caste position allowed St. Thomas Christians to have many special social privileges. Similar to the Brahmin caste, they had the right to sit and dine with kings and nobles, as well as to ride horses and elephants, which was considered a royal right. Moreover, they were one of the rare ethno-religious groups and castes allowed to visit elite Hindu temples held by the Brahmin caste, as well as to participate in the festivals organized by them. Additionally, Christians in Kerala were traditionally financial sponsors of Brahmin temples and festivals, while Hindu kings also sponsored Christian ceremonies and the building of Christian churches. To maintain their caste status, St. Thomas Christians practiced the custom of untouchability, which was generally strictly observed in South India. This custom meant avoiding social contact (especially marriage) with lower and ritually impure castes, even though this practice was, under the Portuguese influence, officially condemned as unchristian in the late XVII century by the St. Thomas Christians religious bodies. In addition to all the benefits of belonging to higher castes, St. Thomas Christians had another specially elevated ritual role. They were traditionally designated as guardians and protectors of the 17 lower castes and because of that they held the honorary title of Lords of 17 castes. For St. Thomas Christians, doctrinal differences among Nestorians, Miaphysites, Catholics, and Protestants were not as important. They sought connections with foreign church centres primarily to confirm their uninterrupted lineage with St. Thomas as external confirmation of their ancestral story, which was crucial for maintaining their caste status (Bayly 2003; Vadakkekara 2007).

St. Thomas Christians retained their high caste status until the XIX century when, due to the influence of emerging factors, it rapidly declined. For this paper, it is essential to determine the social processes that led to the fall of the caste status of the Kerala Christians. The kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore were forced to demilitarize after they were defeated by the British. This led to a sudden loss of economic status for all Muslim, Christian, and Hindu warrior castes. The abrupt decline in the trading power of the Kerala region, due to new British impositions and changes in global and Indian trade patterns, seriously undermined the economic power of St. Thomas Christians engaged in trade. The fall in material position led to only a partial decline in status for Nazranis (Bayly 2003).

The most significant impact on their exclusion from the broader Hindu order came from the British colonizers and their policies. Firstly, the British prohibited the participation of St. Thomas Christians in the tradition of sponsoring the construction

and maintenance of Hindu temples and festivals, deeming it heretical and false, considering it imposed on Nazranis by the Hindu majority. This prohibition significantly diminished the social status of St. Thomas Christians. Secondly, British radical Protestants, due to their anti-Catholic and anti-papist views, created a rift between the Catholic and the non-Catholic groups of Kerala Christians, favouring the latter at the expense of the former. Thirdly, and most importantly, British Protestant missionaries promised members of Hindu lower castes that they would become "Nazranis" and have the same status as St. Thomas Christians if they converted to Christianity. This violated the principle of ritual purity of St. Thomas Christians, leading the Brahmin caste to forbid them from accessing sacred places and temples and to start avoiding social contact with them. All these colonial policies led to conflicts and violent clashes between St. Thomas Christians and higher Hindu castes, as well as violence and animosity between different subgroups of St. Thomas Christians. Although they lost their traditional caste status, St. Thomas Christians adopted new behavioural patterns in the second half of the XIX century to preserve their relatively good class position, compared to the majority of the population in Kerala. Different religious groups of Kerala Christians began baptizing members of lower castes, mostly those who worked on their estates, thus establishing new forms of ideological control over the population which was already economically dependent on them. Despite that, they still did not want to include their lower caste brethren into their religious services and practices (Bayly 2003).

In spite of the partial decline of their traditional caste status, St. Thomas Christians are at present one of the economically most successful groups in the Indian federal state of Kerala. They played a crucial role in the development of modern banking and contemporary forms of trade in this part of India (Anju & Aggarawal 2020). Almost 18% of them are self-employed, which is the highest rate among all the ethno-religious groups in Kerala (Zachariah, Elangikal & Rajan 2003). They are also the largest landowners in Kerala, and one of the most educated segments of the population, leading to their high representation in educational institutions and government administrative bodies. Although their caste status was shaken during the XIX century, the traditional social characteristics they developed over the centuries as members of higher castes, such as literacy and education, have been successfully leveraged to create significant economic capital in modern society. Hence, they have established themselves as economically the most successful ethno-religious group in present-day Kerala (Zachariah 2006).

Conclusion

The history of the caste status of St. Thomas Christians indicates that, as a minority, they were not only tolerated, but also a highly socially-privileged group (except for the decline in status in the XIX century). This suggests that the broader Hindu society:

1. Does not hierarchize groups based on their beliefs, but primarily on whether they engage in ritually prestigious and pure occupations;

2. Considers as important in determining a caste position whether a group has a mythological story about a prestigious ancestor who they originate from;

3. Judges caste position of a group based on whether its members adhere to the rules of ritual purity and avoid contact with ritually impure groups.

It should be mentioned once again that during the XIX century the caste status of St. Thomas Christians somewhat declined, primarily due to the loss of prestigious occupations and partial social mixing with ritually impure castes.

At the very end of this scientific paper, we shall see whether and how the findings can contribute to the reduction of religious and other forms of conflict in the modern world. A certain degree of moral and ontological universalism is necessary for the functioning of a modern civil society. Enlightenment perspectives, asserting that all individuals possess inalienable human rights and are, therefore, equal before the law, undoubtedly stem from a universalist position and serve as the foundation for any democratic society. However, radical forms of universalist views, traditionally often associated with Abrahamic religions, and in modern times, with ideological systems such as communism, fascism and neoliberalism, can lead to intolerance towards those with somewhat different value systems and ontological perspectives. This intolerance, in certain historical contexts, can result in symbolic and sometimes unfortunate physical removal ("cancelling") of those with different opinions. Particularistic societies, like the ones connected with traditional Hinduism, have facilitated pluralism of values and diversity of ontological truths by emphasizing correct practices as being more important than beliefs for the social status of groups and individuals. Perhaps contemporary society can learn something from the ancient Hindu order, regardless of many of its negative characteristics, such as extreme forms of social exclusion and the degradation of those deemed ritually impure. Instead of maximalist forms of universalism, social order should be based on minimal universalism, where individuals are allowed pluralism of beliefs in the moral, religious and ideological spheres, regardless of how foreign those beliefs may seem to the majority. The social progress of individuals should be based more on correct practices (competent job performance, adequate application of education,

respect for the fundamentals of essential social values) rather than their ontological and value worldview. This form of minimal universalism would undoubtedly contribute to the reduction of the social, ideological, and religious tensions that are becoming more frequent in modern times. These tensions arise, according to the author of this paper, from increasingly radical forms of maximalist universalism, which are becoming more prevalent in contemporary public discourse.

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Chapter 8

FAITH-BASED POLITICS? THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE WARS IN YUGOSLAVIA AND UKRAINE

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Abstract: *The World Council of Churches (WCC) is an international faith-based organization whose mission is to provide a forum for ecumenical dialogue. The political background of the activities of the WCC during the Cold War was well-researched in literature. However, the political behavior of the WCC after the Cold War, in the new international conditions, remained relatively unexplored. This article aims to contribute to the debate about the position of faith-based organizations in political disputes. It presents a comparative analysis of the actions of the WCC in the conditions of the Yugoslav and Ukrainian wars. Both cases represent significant international crises with a significant role of the Orthodox churches that are members of the WCC (the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church). The content analysis and discourse analysis were applied in all articles, official statements, and chronicles published in the official journal of the WCC, The Ecumenical Review, for the period of crises (1991–1999; 2014–2023). A comparative analysis of the actions of the WCC in the conditions of the Yugoslav and Ukrainian crises showed that the WCC has the ability to achieve faith-based politics, which mainly refers to maintaining a certain degree of political autonomy and the character of a forum for inter-church dialogue and not catalyzing political conflicts.*

Keywords: *World Council of Churches, war in Yugoslavia, war in Ukraine, faith-based organization, religion and politics.*

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Introduction

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded at the beginning of the Cold War, during the Berlin blockade and the Iron Curtain's fall in Europe in 1948. It was part of the Marshall Plan and, initially, of the Truman anti-communist front (Kirby 2001). At the end of the Cold War and the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, there was a flare-up of nationalism, followed by the rise of mass religion. The war in Yugoslavia was one of Europe's first conflicts in the 1990s, with a crucial religious dimension. At that time, the WCC experienced the 'quo vadis' question in the changed global circumstances: "[I]t is clear that the 'end of the Cold War' is a momentous change for an organization like the WCC, whose history so often bears the marks of that geopolitical conflict" (Castro et al. 1991 p. 1). The peak of the institutional crisis was the problem with the Orthodox churches questioning their membership in the WCC.

After the major crisis with the Orthodox churches had been overcome, a new one arose as a result of the war in Ukraine. However, it is no longer just a question of the relations among the Orthodox churches, but a new Cold War dynamics that is spilling over into the relations in the Orthodox world. Hence, how the WCC will deal with the new challenges is not a question of religion, but of politics. In the war context, the politics of religious organizations should primarily be directed towards peace negotiations and mediation because religious actors have significant political and social legitimacy and leverage to influence the conflicting parties (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). On the other hand, religious organizations are actors in international relations that tend to preserve their status and achieve their interests. The WCC is no exception to this. Therefore, the topic of this paper is how the WCC tackles political crises in which its member churches are involved or targeted.

1. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

There are many ways in which religion can be implicated in conflict and peace, resulting in that there is "no single, elegant theoretical model enabling us to deal adequately with all relevant cases of religion's involvement in contemporary conflict, peace-making, and peace-building" (Haynes 2019, 645). The reason for that is the ambivalence of religion, which especially comes to the fore regarding faith-based organizations (FBOs). According to Jeffrey Haynes (2019: 646), the FBOs, as actors in international relations, can be either "angels of peace" or "warmongers". Some FBOs, like Al-Qaeda, overtly advocate political violence. However, in recent times, FBOs have frequently advocated for peace and mediation (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church). Moreover, especially in Christianity, ecumenical FBOs are a shift from centuries of religious wars and intolerance.

This paper is not intended to contribute to the just/unjust war debate in Orthodoxy (for that theme, see e.g. Clapsis 2010). It attempts to contribute to the literature on the politics of international religious organizations or FBOs (Berger 2003; Haynes 2001, 2019; Lehmann 2016). Although "God's century" (Toft et al. 2011) has brought a flourishing of religious international and non-governmental organizations in the world,[7] their role in political conflicts has not been sufficiently addressed. The role of FBOs in war, peace-making, and peace-building processes is based on the fact that religious actors can have significant political and social legitimacy and leverage to influence parties in conflict (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). On the other hand, war can directly affect FBOs, especially if the members are somehow involved or targeted in the conflict. This is the case with the WCC during the wars in Yugoslavia and Ukraine. However, the WCC showed a different attitude than some member churches and state actors in international relations.

With 352 member churches representing approximately 580 million Christians, the WCC is among the world's most essential FBOs. Since it has been involved in politics from its foundation, papers on this topic primarily concern the WCC's politics during the Cold War (Bouwman 2022; Cviic 1979; Јовић 2016; Kirby 2001; Kunter 2015, 2019; Kaplan 2019). However, the political behavior of the WCC after the Cold War, in the new international conditions, has remained relatively unexplored. Authors who approach it from the view of theology and ecclesiology point out that the propagation of nationalism by the churches is a direct violation of the principles of the ecumenical movement. Therefore, it is claimed that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) "by its stance on the war in Ukraine has made it hard to see the lordship of Christ and has thereby dismembered itself from the ecumenical community" (Clements 2023, 254). If this theological argument is correct, why did the WCC not expel the ROC from its membership? Why did it not do the same with the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) during the war in Yugoslavia? What does this tell us about the position of the WCC in the conditions of the post-Cold War political crises in which its member churches are involved?

In order to find the answer to these questions, we shall apply the comparative method. There are several reasons for choosing the cases of the war in Yugoslavia and the war in Ukraine. First, both wars have a significant religious dimension. In both cases, the Orthodox churches that are members of the WCC are stigmatized by

[7] About 10% of all NGOs in the world have a religious background, while half of that number have Christian roots (Lehmann 2016: 35).

the world as warmongers. Second, in both cases there were requests from some member churches to expel these churches from membership. Third, both cases represent internationally significant post-Cold War conflicts, which allows us to see the character of the WCC as an actor in international relations after the Cold War.

Content and discourse analysis will be applied in the research. The data source is all official announcements and statements of WCC representatives related to the subject of the investigation. Also, we shall analyze all the editions of The Ecumenical Review, the official journal of the WCC, which publishes, in addition to scientific and academic articles, all relevant documents, statements, and the WCC chronicle. The time frame of the research is, for the first case, the period 1991–1999, and, for the second case, the period 2014–September 2023.[8]

2. War in Yugoslavia

From the very beginning of the WCC, the relationship between the SOC and this organization was determined by political circumstances. The WCC was part of the Marshall Plan (Kirby 2001). As part of this U.S. foreign policy project, the WCC distributed significant material and financial aid to Yugoslavia, collected mainly by the humanitarian organization the Church World Service, founded in 1946. Aid was delivered through the Yugoslavian Red Cross to local churches (primarily Orthodox and Protestant) from 1948 to 1964 (Archives of Yugoslavia, 1948–1964). Due to the start of the Cold War in Europe and the blockade of Berlin, the ROC made the decision not to participate in the work of the Founding Conference of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, which was followed by the other Orthodox churches from the Eastern Bloc, as well as the SOC. However, when the conflict between Stalin and Tito emerged in 1948, and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform, the SOC turned to full cooperation with the WCC.

The SOC joined the WCC on January 1, 1965. This was preceded by the process of de-Stalinization in the USSR and the rapprochement of the ROC with the WCC (Jović 2016). In those years, the WCC was already active in decolonizing Third World countries, even sending extensive financial aid to left-wing guerilla groups, leading to it being considered a left-wing organization (CIA, 1983, 1988). Moreover, the WCC itself expressed an exceptional interest in Yugoslavia and the SOC, which was confirmed by the visit to Belgrade at the highest level (of the General Secretary and Secretary of the WCC) in 1950, 1952, and 1964 (Archives of Yugoslavia, 1948–

[8] The war in Ukraine is still ongoing at the time of the writing of this article (August–September 2023), but the WCC has taken a clear stance on the ROC's membership in that organization that will not likely change soon.

1964). After the meeting of the Orthodox churches in Rhodes in 1964, the Orthodox churches that were not members of the WCC decided to change this. Finally, at the instigation of the state authorities of socialist Yugoslavia, i.e. the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, the Holy Bishops' Council of the SOC decided to join the WCC (Jović 2016).

At the very beginning of the 1990s, the WCC Central Committee, at the meeting in Geneva in March 1990, welcomed "the developments in Central and Eastern Europe which are bringing in new liberties and processes towards participatory democracy to many countries including the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia" (WCC Central Committee 1990: 349-350). However, at the 7th Assembly of the WCC in Canberra, in 1991, General Secretary Emilio Castro (1992: 120) noted that he "see friends coming from Yugoslavia in the middle of a latent and real civil war". In the works published in The Ecumenical Review during the war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in 1991–1995, it is only sporadically mentioned, together with other previous and current conflicts in the world that affect Christians (Ferris 1992; Goltz 1993; Ichiyo 1994; Jacques 1994; Leite 1993; Liveris 1994). At the height of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 2nd issue of 1994 published an article that talked about the war in Yugoslavia in the context of violence against women, in which the Orthodox churches are accused of not participating in what was supposed to be a general protest against violence against women in the world (Liveris 1994).

At the meeting of the WCC Central Committee in Johannesburg in 1994, it was only stated that the WCC Central Committee paid "careful attention particularly to the following current concerns and issues: former Yugoslavia, Armenia-Azerbaijan, South Africa, Sudan and the Horn of Africa, Haiti, Angola, Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Pacific and Guatemala" (Keshishian 1994, 219). In the report of General Secretary Konrad Raiser, published in April 1994, it is noted that ecumenical teams (in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches) visited Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as other conflict-ridden areas (Albania, the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine). However, Raiser (1994: 232) adds that "special mention should finally be made of the efforts towards reconciliation with regard to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, carried out in close collaboration with the Conference of European Churches". Elizabeth Ferris (1994), immigration and refugee program director of the Church World Service, emphasized the connection between humanitarian assistance and the peace process, citing the examples of Bosnia, Liberia, and El Salvador.

In a statement from Colombo titled Ethnicity and Nationalism: A Challenge to the Churches, issued on November 19, 1994, the seriousness of the situation in the war zones was emphasized:

> Conditions seem ripe for more Bosnias, Rwandas or Sri Lankas, for more cities and villages to be destroyed, for more people to be left destitute, for more blood to flow. Along with other concerned groups, the church of Jesus Christ must reflect on this issue. And we must act (WCC, 1995: 225).

The second issue of The Ecumenical Review in 1995 was dedicated to religion, identity, and nationalism. However, there is only one author who dealt with the Yugoslavian problem. Miroslav Volf, an American Protestant theologian of Croatian descent, was the first to publish a work in The Ecumenical Review during the war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in which the topic of war and theology is directly dealt with. Nevertheless, he primarily relied on his idea of "a theology of embrace", which should overcome the division between "us" and "others". In this regard, Volf (1995) questioned what he considered negative Croatian and Serbian social phenomena:

> Belonging without distance destroys: I affirm my exclusive identity as Croatian and want either to shape everyone in my own image or eliminate them from my world. Distance without belonging isolates: I deny my identity as Croatian and draw back from my own culture. But more often than not, I become trapped in the snares of counter-dependence. I deny my Croatian identity only to affirm even more forcefully my identity as a member of this or that anti-Croatian sect. And so an isolationist "distance without belonging" slips into a destructive "belonging without distance" (p. 198).

> Territory should be pure: Serbian soil must belong to Serbs, cleansed of all non-Serbian intruders. We want our world to ourselves, and so we create a monochrome world without "others"; we want to be identical with ourselves, so we exclude "others" (p. 201).

The first official message addressed to the churches in the former Yugoslavia was published in the Declarations on Public Issues, issued by the WCC Central Committee in Geneva in 1995. The message states that the WCC, together with the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, regularly followed and visited churches affected by the war and even organized meetings with the Muslim community in Bosnia. Nevertheless, this

message indirectly mentions the role of the churches and some church leaders during the war. Although it is not stated which churches are meant, it undoubtedly refers primarily to the SOC and the Roman Catholic Church:

> The churches of the former Yugoslavia cannot control the military powers, but some do have influence in their respective societies. The narrowly nationalist tone and content of positions taken by some church leaders, however, have increased tensions between the communities and given rise to controversy in the wider ecumenical fellowship (WCC Central Committee, 1996: 119).

The direct accusation of churches and some church leaders of nationalism, which deepened the divisions during the war, did not remain without consequences within the WCC. Dissatisfaction among the Orthodox members soon flared up. We see a hint of this in the article by Ioan Bria from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the former executive director of the WCC program unit on unity and renewal. Bria (1996: 206) wrote: "Many of the WCC's statements – for example those on the former Yugoslavia – are determined by geo-strategic considerations". The WCC Central Committee made a slightly more moderate statement at the meeting in Geneva on September 12–20, 1996:

> The role of churches in any situation of ethnic conflict is always difficult and often ambiguous. Many churches themselves are caught in inter-ethnic conflicts. In some cases they have for centuries been the avantgarde of their peoples' struggle for survival and self-determination (WCC Central Committee, 1997: 100).

At the time of the most serious accusations made against the Serbs by the world, the Swiss and German Protestant churches demanded that the SOC be expelled from the WCC (Powers 1996). However, the WCC Central Committee did not agree to such a thing. Moreover, the WCC Central Committee took a moderately pro-Serbian position by questioning the achievement of justice by the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY):

> Frequently during this period resort has been had to law as a political instrument to punish those perceived to be the enemy, but it has rarely contributed significantly to the resolution of a conflict or the healing of the deep wounds of history. The international tribunals hastily established to identify and try those charged with crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda have been perceived to lack impartiality and thus effectiveness. Some have suggested that such special judicial bodies are too susceptible to the politics of the moment, and that they should be

> replaced by a permanent international criminal court endowed with authority to assure fair, consistent and equitable administration of international law (WCC, 1997: 280).

In summary, in the researched period from 1991 to 1999, the SOC was not directly accused in The Ecumenical Review, in scientific papers, or in institutional statements. Particular churches and church leaders were indirectly accused of nationalism that encouraged intolerance. However, a more moderate claim was made that the position of churches in war conditions is complex and that often the churches themselves are victims of war events, and not warmongers. By criticizing the impartiality of the ICTY, the WCC indirectly supported the positions represented by Serbia. The Serbs were stigmatized by the world and accused of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia. Although some member churches demanded that the SOC be expelled from the WWC due to the entire Yugoslav crisis (Jović 2016), the WCC did not accept such a position in their public statements. Therefore, it can be concluded that the WCC took a moderately pro-Serbian position during the Yugoslav crisis.

Nevertheless, at the session of the Holy Synod of Bishops in May 1997, the SOC decided that it "will no longer be an organic member of this organization" (Вукашиновић 2005, 377). At the same time, the Synod of Bishops of the ROC decided to convene an all-Orthodox meeting where further participation in the WCC would be deliberated, which was also supported by the SOC. At the all-Orthodox meeting in Thessaloniki in 1998, it was pointed out that "the current structure of the WCC makes meaningful Orthodox participation increasingly difficult, and for some even impossible" (WCC, 2006: 2). That is why the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation was formed at the 8th Assembly of the WCC in Harare in 1998. Only the Bulgarian and the Georgian Orthodox Churches finally left the membership, while the other Orthodox churches remained.

3. War in Ukraine

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the ROC in 1948, the Russian Patriarch Alexy I issued a document rejecting the WWC (Jović 2016). However, the tremendous geopolitical turn of the WCC took place in the 1960s with the promotion of human rights, freedom, and social justice, as well as the establishment of the Program to Combat Racism in 1970, which donated considerable funds to anti-colonial movements in the so-called Third World countris, many of which inherited their ideas of socialism and were close to the Soviet Union. According to Jeffrey Kaplan (2019: 33), "[a]fter 1961, the Soviets saw the group as a useful conduit for propaganda messages as designed by the Active Measures program that designed

and disseminated Soviet propaganda throughout the Cold War". Finally, the ROC became a member of the WWC in 1961.

The 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe in 2022 was opened by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who compared the wrong path of anti-Semitism of the German churches during the time of Hitler and the path of the ROC in the context of the war in Ukraine:

> The heads of the Russian Orthodox Church are currently leading their members and their entire church down a dangerous, indeed blasphemous path that goes against all that they believe. They are justifying a war of aggression against Ukraine – against their own and our own brothers and sisters in the faith. We have to speak out, also here in this room, in this Assembly, against this stance, this propaganda targeting the freedom and rights of the citizens of another country, this nationalism, which arbitrarily claims that a dictatorship's imperial dreams of hegemony are God's will. (…)
>
> There are also representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church here today. The fact that they are here is not something we should take for granted in these times. I expect this Assembly not to spare them the truth about this brutal war and the criticism of the role of their church leaders. (…)
>
> The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church has aligned itself with the crimes of the war against Ukraine. This totalitarian ideology, disguised as theology, has led to the complete or partial destruction of so many religious sites on Ukrainian territory – churches, mosques, synagogues, educational and administrative buildings belonging to religious communities. No Christian who is still in possession of their faith, their mind and their senses will be able to see God's will in this (Steinmeier 2022).

It is not the first time a member church has been directly accused of supporting war and crimes (i.e. the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa during the Apartheid). However, it is unusual that there were numerous requests to expel the ROC immediately before the 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, among which were requests from some member churches. At the initiative of the Acting General Secretary, Dr. Rev. Ioan Sauca (Romanian Orthodox Church), the WCC Central Committee did not expel the ROC. The decision was made unanimously. In his explanation, Dr. Sauca provided an important explanation towards the relationship between church members and the politics they support:

> If it was not for the theological reasons mentioned in its basis, WCC did not exclude anybody unless they excluded themselves. This was even the case of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, which supported and argued theologically for apartheid. That created strong debates and condemnations from other WCC member churches. In the end, it was the church that "excluded" itself from the WCC as she felt she did not belong there anymore. But it was not the WCC that suspended or excluded the DRC (Sauca 2022b).

Furthermore, Dr. Sauca insisted that representatives of two Ukrainian churches, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, be invited to the assembly. This was done despite the fact that both churches were not members of the WCC, due to Dr. Sauca's conviction that "the WCC is a free space for dialogue, and we come together not because we agree with one another but because we disagree" (Werner 2023, 20).

The crisis in Ukraine boiled over in 2014. This was emphasized by the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' Kirill at the meeting with Dr. Sauca on October 17, 2022, in Moscow. He said he had sent letters to the WCC but with no response:

> Eight years ago there were first Ukrainian shellings of Donbass. Destroyed houses, heavy casualties – that's the reality. More than 2 million refugees from that area found refuge in Russia. Personally, I wrote three letters during those years to the political and religious authorities of the world, including WCC, and asked to intervene that the problems be solved through dialogue and mediation and to avoid killings and destructions. I had no concrete answers and such requests were met with total silence (The Russian Orthodox Church – Department for External Church Relations, 2022).

On the other hand, at the meeting on June 15-18, 2022, the WCC Central Committee stated that "the various initiatives [were] taken by the WCC and its members and ecumenical partners with regard to the situation in Ukraine, dating back to before the initial crisis of 2014, and especially since the invasion on 24 February 2022" (WCC Central Committee, 2022). Indeed, Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC General Secretary at the time, said on March 3, 2014, that the WCC "is deeply concerned by the current dangerous developments in Ukraine. The situation puts many innocent lives in grave jeopardy" (Kirill 2022). Patriarch Kirill reminded Dr. Sauca of that statement in his letter of March 2022, with which he tried to show that this war did not start recently but that it had long-term causes and that it represented a conflict between the East and the West, not between Russia and Ukraine (see Kirill, 2022).

In the new letter to Patriarch Kirill, Dr. Sauca wrote that he was "aware that it is not in your power and authority to stop the war or to influence those who have such powers of decisions. But the faithful are waiting for a comforting word from Your Holiness. They think that if you come out with a public statement and request, as the spiritual father of so many millions of Orthodox in both Russia and Ukraine, that might have an impact" (Sauca 2022a).

Without hesitation, the WCC Central Committee condemned the war in Ukraine as "the illegal and unjustifiable war inflicted on the people and sovereign state of Ukraine" (WCC Central Committee, 2022). The WCC Central Committee did not condemn the ROC in its statement. Moreover, it praised the ROC's efforts to engage in dialogue on Ukraine within the WCC:

> We acknowledge and welcome the commitment of the Moscow Patriarchate – representing the WCC's constituency in both Russia and Ukraine – to engage in encounter and dialogue on the situation in Ukraine under the auspices of the WCC, though circumstances prevented them from taking part in either of the two ecumenical roundtable meetings so far convened (WCC Central Committee, 2022).

In the second ecumenical round table on Ukraine, on June 10, 2022, the participants from the WCC and the European churches, without the ROC, rejected "the apparent instrumentalization of religious language by political and church leaders to support an armed invasion of a sovereign country" (WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, 2022). It is a somewhat different approach compared to Dr. Sauca, who told Patriarch Kirill that he knew Kirill had no power to stop the war or influence those who had such power (Sauca 2022a). Under the mandate of the WCC Central Committee, Dr. Sauca said at the meeting with Patriarch Kirill on October 17, 2022:

> We value the Russian Orthodox Church. It is one of the biggest Churches of the WCC. And all of us would like to see that the Russian Orthodox Church continue to be a part of it because your contribution over the years was very important for the ecumenical movement and also for the Orthodox unity (The Russian Orthodox Church – Department for External Church Relations, 2022).

Moreover, it is a radically different approach towards the ROC as compared to many churches in the West. During the debate at the 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, the proposed text of the statement on the war in Ukraine caused fierce comments, both from the Western Protestant churches, as well as from representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

(Moscow Patriarchate), and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Most of them were not satisfied with the vagueness of the statement (Peränen 2023). However, the adopted proposal remained acceptable enough for the majority of members and remained on the same course as the June 2022 announcement of the WCC Central Committee (WCC 11th Assembly, 2022).

The current WCC General Secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, visited Patriarch Kirill. In the interview after the visit, he explained the current position of the WCC regarding its member church:

> (…) But also, more importantly, the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the largest members of the World Council of Churches. So, we have a right and an obligation to visit with him, to listen to them, and, of course, to even challenge them on their particular positions as related to the war (World Council of Churches, 2023).

Both Ukrainian churches aspire to membership in the World Council of Churches. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine has already submitted a request, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is waiting for a resolution of the crisis in Ukraine (Bortnyk 2022; Yevstratiy 2022). After the state confiscated churches and monasteries from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and handed them over to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine for use, it seems that the membership of any of them would cause conflicts within the WCC. That is why the General Secretary, Prof. Pillay, called all three parties (two Ukrainian churches and the Russian Orthodox Church) to a new round table in the second half of 2023 (Pillay 2023). Thus, the WWC shows caution in its actions, especially towards the Russian Orthodox Church, and confirms its character as a forum for dialogue.

Conclusion

The most significant crises in the WCC came from the Orthodox churches. Although after the crisis of the 1990s, when the Bulgarian and the Georgian Orthodox Church left the WCC, it is much more significant for the international position of the WCC that the ROC and the SOC remain as members. From the WCC point of view, it is of utmost importance that the ROC remains in the WCC despite the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's membership application. Why is it important to keep the ROC? The reasons are not only related to this church's size or political influence.

The way the WCC approached the question of the role of the ROC in the war in Ukraine is related to maintaining the position of a bridge between the East and the West. While, for example, the Conference of European Churches is more and

more pro-Western oriented (with the admission of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and the exit of the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches), the WCC tries to maintain the character of an all-Christian forum for dialogue. The character of that dialogue was explained by Dr. Sauca when he said that "we come together not because we agree with one another but because we disagree" (Werner 2023, 20).

As the war in Ukraine showed that the Orthodox world is significant for establishing a new international order, the WCC is once again faced with the old question from the time of the Cold War: where to go next? If the ROC were to cease to be a member of the WCC, it would be a significant loss for the WCC. It would thus, first of all, lose its legitimacy in terms of the notion of political autonomy. Of crucial importance is the fact that the WCC is currently the only forum where two warring currents in the Orthodox world permanently meet and negotiate: Moscow and Constantinople. This was not the case even at the all-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016.

On the other hand, the logic of the WCC's political behavior in this dispute is expressed by Prof. Pillay with three points: to visit them, listen to them, and challenge them. These three points were also present during the war in Yugoslavia regarding the SOC. Hence, it can be said that they form the backbone of the WCC's faith-based politics during political crises in which their member churches are involved. Faith-based politics is how the WCC, as an FBO, achieves soft power in both ecumenical and international relations.

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