Security, Society, and the Perennial Struggles over the Sacred: Revising the Wars of Religion in International Relations Theory

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Abstract   International relations theory tends to build on the conventional narrative of the Wars of Religion (WoR), which holds it was the irrationality of religious violence that generated the modern international system of pragmatic secular states—resulting in the presumed secularized, rational, and unemotive nature of politics. In contrast, this article reorients our focus to Durkheim's more social view of religion as a community of believers and to the continued role of the sacred and shared emotion/affect in social and political life. Specifically, it examines how modern communities (such as nations) remain constituted by a shared faith in conceptions of the sacred and how the corresponding sense of moral order is central to the enduring pursuit of ontological security. Therefore, it argues that international relations should focus on the perennial struggles over what communities hold sacred and that we can better understand the propensity for ("religious" or "secular") violence by examining the continual interplay between the sacred, ontological security, and the hermeneutics of morality—with the so-called WoR being the *locus classicus* of this argument. Historical studies exploring how participants in the WoR navigated such struggles over the sacred thus allow us to explore these dynamics and further conceptualize our understanding of the sacred within modern "secular" politics. The article concludes by examining how the prospect for violence is interrelated with the perennial struggles over the sacred within, and between, political orders—a sentiment that brings into relief some of the hazards accompanying growing intrastate moral polarization and interstate ideological rivalry.

Early modern Europe was beset with violence. The Reformation split political communities internally along religious lines while externally they engaged in protracted wars, often in reference to confessional lines. Such "religious" wars were to cease following the Peace of Westphalia, which solidified sovereignty and non-interference on religious grounds and ushered in pragmatic states and secular politics—or so the conventional myth goes. While Westphalia represented changes within post-Reformation Europe,[1] scholars have challenged its role in institutionalizing sovereignty and

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1. Nexon 2009.

ushering forth the modern state system.[2] More recently, postsecular scholarship, which critically engages the "secular" and the various concepts considered to fall under its guise,[3] has criticized how the field of international relations (IR) invokes the Wars of Religion (WoR) and embraces the "Westphalian presumption": the notion that prolonged battles over beliefs and doctrines exposed the need to eliminate religion from politics given its proclivity for irrationality and violence.[4] Not only did interfaith alliances emerge throughout the WoR, but scholars also struggle to distinguish "religious" from "secular" violence; definitions are often unable to incorporate religions they want included (such as Confucianism) or to exclude ideologies they hold separate (such as nationalism).[5]

This article further pushes back against core assumptions within IR that, as laid out in the first section, are informed by myths around the WoR—specifically the presumed secularized, rational, and unemotive nature of politics. Rather than taking the WoR as dissimilar to modern secular politics, it argues we should focus on the *continued* role and importance of the sacred and collective emotions/affect in social and political life. Specifically, the article reorients our focus to Emile Durkheim's more *social* view of religion as an affective community constituted by shared faith in conceptions of the sacred and to how the corresponding sense of moral order is critical to the enduring pursuit of ontological security (OS)—the security of being. This allows us to recognize how perennial struggles over the sacred remain crucial to secular politics and violence. In other words, we can better understand the propensity for violence by examining the continual interplay between the sacred, OS, and the hermeneutics of morality—with the so-called WoR being the *locus classicus* of this argument.

Accordingly, the second section explores how communities are constituted by moral orders entwined with a shared faith in conceptions of the sacred and how we can consequently understand the pursuit of OS as interrelated with efforts to safeguard the sacred and act faithfully within/toward these moral orders. Conversely, the perceived defilement of the sacred can generate moral disorder and ontological *insecurity*—forcing actors to consider how best to repair their community. This allows us to consider the contemporary relevance of the shifting historiography of the WoR following Natalie Davis's argument it was the "community's sense of identity and autonomy, as well as its shared sense of purpose and meaning," that motivated and justified violence,[6] particularly in France.[7] The WoR, from this perspective, were not derived from some irrational essence of religion, but interrelated with the moral disorder and *ontological insecurity* sparked by competing conceptions of what communities held sacred.

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2. Costa Lopez et al. 2018; de Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011.
3. Hurd 2008.
4. Thomas 2005, 54.
5. Cavanaugh 2009.
6. Davis 1973, 53–54; see also Desan 1989, 56.
7. On similarities across Europe, see Benedict 1999, 2006; Kaplan 2010.

Following Durkheim, the third section argues that such concerns over the sacred are enduring and reveals the continued prevalence of the sacred within modern secular politics—as exemplified by political/civil religions and, of particular focus, nationalism.[8] Therefore, the WoR can be seen as merely *one instance* of a more *general* characteristic of the hostility that can accompany the perennial struggles over *what* communities hold sacred—further challenging the presumed uniqueness of post-Westphalian politics.[9] To this end, historical scholarship on the WoR, by exploring the "passions and emotions" of participants and *how* they contended with struggles over the sacred,[10] holds important insights for further conceptualizing the implications of the sacred and OS within modern secular politics and instances of violence.

Therefore, the remainder of the article draws out three major implications that emerge from exploring how the interplay between the sacred, OS, and the hermeneutics of morality influenced the WoR. This includes how the trajectory of conflict was interrelated with the processes through which participants return to the sources of the tradition to work out how best to refashion moral order; how social traditions and prevailing conceptions of the sacred informed the perceived legitimacy of peace; and how interpretations of the sacred and moral order (re)constructed social hierarchies and authority. Building on these insights, the article concludes by examining how, at a broader level, recognizing the perennial struggles over the sacred allows us to better account for the dynamism of *raison d'état*—that is, for the "relation between organized violence and political order of any sort."[11] This is of critical importance given that the recurrence of organized violence—war, civil war, and terrorism—has been central to the study of IR. Accordingly, our understanding of IR is strengthened when we recognize that the prospect for such violence is interrelated with the perennial struggles over the sacred within and between political orders—a sentiment that brings into relief some of the potential dangers accompanying growing intrastate moral polarization and interstate ideological rivalry.

The Wars of Religion in International Relations

While IR theorists don't often engage with the WoR directly, we find core assumptions of the discipline are rooted in the "Westphalian presumption"—the argument by Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke that failure to separate civic and religious order generates violence by enabling irrational factors or because the diversity of religious beliefs cannot be mediated.[12] The implications of this narrative are

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8. Gentile 2005; Hirschi 2012; Smith 2003.

9. A presumption that sanitizes its "imperial hierarchical formations" (de Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011, 756) and, by assuming Europe bequeathed "civilised and rational institutions to the inferior Eastern societies" (Costa Lopez et al. 2018, 507–508) obscures forms of sovereignty in premodern, non-Western, contexts.

10. Holt 1993, 534.

11. Wagner 2007, x.

12. Cavanaugh 2009, 125–30.

profound. For one, it partakes in the modern invention of religion: the seventeenth-century reformulation of religion as "a set of propositions to which believers gave assent" and which could be compared against each other and "against natural science."[13] Elites subsequently legitimated greater state power by framing the WoR as struggles over religious beliefs that only subsided with state centralization.[14]

Moreover, the WoR feature as the "origin point of modern Western secularism," wherein religious beliefs on salvation are differentiated from a doctrine that morality should be based solely on "the well-being of mankind in the present."[15] Countries around the world subsequently "inherited, borrowed, had imposed upon them, or somehow ended up living with (or in tension with)" European narratives of secularism and secularization.[16] Specifically, there is a presumption that Westphalian sovereignty, which is (speciously) held as "devoid of theological content," demarcates the modern state system from an "'orientalized' Other"—from the medieval era's "exotic congeries of ideas, institutions, and structures"—and juxtaposes an "increasingly advanced (because increasingly secular) West and a backward (because perpetually religious) rest."[17] Importantly, "secularization" can have multiple interpretations. For one, there is the thesis's "definable core" regarding a historical process of increasing differentiation between religious and secular spheres, with the latter increasingly appropriating functions of the former.[18] Of more interest, however, are two additional propositions derived from Enlightenment critiques of religion: the supposed "decline of religious beliefs and practices, and . . . marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere."[19] These propositions influenced IR in two interrelated ways: the understanding and application of rationality, and deficient discussion of religion given its presumed privatization.[20]

Enlightenment narratives of the WoR, and especially Kant's turn to universal philosophy,[21] helped construct a dichotomy between the "perceived irrational, magical, or emotive qualities of religion and the inherent rationality of the secular" (for example, the state or economy).[22] Likewise, thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke championed the secular nature of sovereignty, emphasizing the resources only rulers could wield and that law is not about "moral assent … [but] controlling behavior and the disposition of property," while obscuring those "forces in history and human nature that gave rise to sovereignty in the first place"—the ability to inspire awe and collective identity.[23] The WoR were thus used to support liberal modernity,

13. Asad 1993, 40–41.
14. Thomas 2005, 22–23.
15. Connolly 1999, 21; Hurd 2008, 14.
16. Hurd 2011, 62.
17. Cavanaugh 2009, chap. 4; Costa Lopez et al. 2018, 497–98, 506–508.
18. Casanova 1994, 7, 13.
19. Casanova 1994, 211; Cavanaugh 2009, chap. 3.
20. On variants of secularism aligning more with Huntington's clash thesis, see Hurd 2008, 15–16.
21. Cavanaugh 2009, 127; Hurd 2011, 64.
22. Schwarz and Lynch 2016.
23. Lovin 2003,157–58; Williams 2010, 311–12.

which takes politicized religions as "dangerous to reason, freedom, and political stability" and religious adherents as "psychologically disturbed … inciters of intolerance and violence."[24] However, it was assumed rational autonomous individuals will progressively evolve "from superstition to reason," which is why secularization often assumed the abandonment of the sacred in society.[25] Faith and ritual are thus circumscribed to the private sphere, whereas "rational argument is said to exhaust public life."[26] Accordingly, the "secular public sphere is construed as the domain of reason, objectivity, deliberation, and justice, and the religious private sphere the domain of subjectivity, transcendence, effeminacy, and affect."[27]

IR theory largely adopted this dichotomy,[28] alongside scholarship in the social sciences and on modernization theory suggesting a zero-sum relationship between tradition and modernity.[29] Religion is subsequently held as "peripheral" or a security problem due to its "absolutist, divisive and insufficiently rational character."[30] For Hurd, realism and liberalism are "expressions of rationalist thought deeply antithetical to religion," while "laicist assumptions sit quietly beneath the surface of structuralist and materialist" theories that take religion as "epiphenomenal to more fundamental material interests."[31] Thomas similarly demonstrates links between the "Enlightenment project" and the mainstream neorealist/liberal conceptions of rationality as "independent of social and historical context or cultural or religious tradition."[32] We also find a general tendency within IR to adopt "a deeper modern attitude" that places "emotions in opposition to rationality."[33] Again, given the presumed privatization of religion, it was assumed that "primary 'public' institutions (state, economy) no longer need or are interested in maintaining a sacred cosmos or a public religious worldview,"[34] and that political decisions would be "free of passion."[35] Emotions were thus either unincorporated into analysis or referenced to explain "irrational" decisions.[36]

Rethinking the Narrative

The theoretical implications of the Westphalian presumption were not universally adopted by IR scholars—see, for example, Morgenthau's and Niebuhr's polemics

24. Lynch 2000, 742; Thomas 2005, 21.
25. Casanova 1994, 16–17; Farrands and Wrightson 2000, 35; Hurd 2011, 65–66.
26. Connolly 1999, 5, 20.
27. Hurd 2011, 75.
28. Sandal and Fox 2013, chap. 1; see also Philpott 2009.
29. Bolton 2023; Thomas 2005, 53.
30. Mavelli 2011, 178; Williams 1998.
31. Hurd 2011, 69, 71.
32. Thomas 2005, 68, 62; see also Philpott 2002, 80.
33. Hutchinson and Bleiker 2014.
34. Casanova 1994, 37.
35. Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 49.
36. Hurd 2011, 74.

against rationalism and the liberal idea that we can inhibit passions from stymying reason.[37] Both rejected the "power of reason … to solve the social problems of our age," that the "social world is susceptible to rational control,"[38] and the dualism of rationality and emotion.[39] Likewise, both recognized the importance of anxiety and efforts to offset meaninglessness—that the "intellectual and moral history of mankind is the story of inner insecurity … of metaphysical anxieties,"[40] and that we require a "sense of what cannot be questioned, what one cannot go beyond."[41] However, Morgenthau's critique of scientism chafes with his view of Westphalia as ushering forth sovereign states that will or should pursue "rational, objective, and unemotional" foreign policies.[42] Moreover, he feared this was jeopardized by the "political religion" of nationalism, which reverts war to the "religious type" of the sixteenth century.[43] Niebuhr likewise spoke of the dangers of nationalism, which, as Ross summarizes, becomes a greater "manifestation of selfishness and pride."[44] Therefore, we again find remnants of the Westphalian presumption, with Philpott taking Morgenthau's emphasis on power and security and Niebuhr's advocacy of "the lesser of two evils" as emblematic of post-Westphalian secularization and the conception of states as "bereft of religious purposes."[45] Still, we find in classical realism a preliminary recognition that politics remains interrelated with emotions, anxiety, and moral order—sentiments gaining traction with the growth of OS studies.

OS studies explore how efforts to manage the existential anxiety that accompanies our awareness of potential "nonbeing" "manifest in social and political behavior."[46] Because one's community plays a vital role in the construction of self-identity and the management of anxiety around existence, meaninglessness, and guilt/condemnation —for example, providing stability, frameworks of meaning, and a sense of "home"[47]—large segments of a population are invested in preserving the community's sense of self.[48] More recently, OS scholars have pursued a Lacanian-informed analysis of anxiety, wherein the unending desire to overcome our lack of a full sense of self drives individuals to identify with various signifiers and narratives.[49] Others, pulling from, for example, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, see subjects as constantly trying to *become* secure by not only managing anxiety but, at times, embracing it to allow for more authentic forms of being.[50] Unfortunately, mirroring IR

37. Williams 2013.
38. Morgenthau 1947, 10; Niebuhr 1932, 214.
39. Ross 2013, 280–81.
40. Morgenthau 1947, 9–10.
41. Niebuhr, cited in Farrands and Wrightson 2000, 43.
42. Morgenthau 1960, 7.
43. Morgenthau 1949, 87.
44. Ross 2013, 285.
45. Niebuhr 1932, 174; Philpott 2002, 78, 80.
46. Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020, 246.
47. Berenskoetter 2014; Bolton 2021a; Browning 2018.
48. Bolton 2021b; Steele 2008.
49. Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020; Solomon 2014.
50. Berenskoetter 2020; Browning 2018; Rumelili 2020.

theory more broadly, the role of shared emotions/affective contexts remains underdeveloped.[51]

Only recently have studies started to remedy this disregard. For example, Steele briefly discusses the affective dimensions of soldier reunion videos as generating a sense of OS, while Mälksoo conceptualizes the identities around deterrence as interrelated with rituals that generate affective entanglements. In particular, Bolton pushes OS studies toward IR's "emotional turn" by reconceptualizing the sources of OS as interrelated with affective communities constituted by shared faith in a moral order entwined with the sacred.[52] These shifts have important implications for the presumed dichotomy within IR between premodern–irrational–religious and modern–rational–secular politics. Specifically, given that OS is taken as a fundamental and enduring human need,[53] they provide a new prism for elaborating on the *continued* entanglement between politics, emotional identifications, and conceptions of the sacred[54]—and thus for exploring the contemporary relevance of historical scholarship on the WoR. To develop this argument, it helps to establish Durkheim's sociological view of religion, which informs much of the historical scholarship inspired by Davis,[55] and Bolton's reconceptualization of OS as interrelated with the sacred.

Moral (dis)Order, Ontological (in)Security, and the Sacred

Durkheim proposed a broader conception of religion as a moral community constituted by "beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden."[56] He thus strove to understand the perennial nature of the sacred and how what is "set apart and forbidden" is subject to change between, and within, societies. Accordingly, the sacred is entwined with the emotional energies that arise from collective effervescence and are revitalized through ritual. During these moments, individuals are lifted out of egoism by the "self-transcending experience of social solidarity,"[57] experiencing emotions of strength and warmth. Because the power of these emotions is felt to be both internal and external to the individual, it becomes ascribed to an external force: a force associated with objects bestowed with sacred qualities within the collective conscience (for example, the objects, symbols, and myths at the center of rituals). Therefore, the "genesis of sacredness is a fundamentally anthropological phenomenon" interrelated with experiences of self-transcendence.[58] In other words, affective experiences are the foundation of the

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51. Solomon 2018.
52. Bolton 2023; Mälksoo 2021; Steele 2019.
53. Zarakol 2017, 50.
54. Hassner 2009, 177; Kubálková 2000; Nexon 2011, 157–58.
55. Holt 1993.
56. Durkheim 1995, 44.
57. Mellor 1998, 92–93.
58. Joas 2016, 27–28.

shared faith, a "predisposition toward believing that goes in advance of proof," in the "beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends … that express the nature of sacred things."[59] The sacred is thus the focus of a shared reverence and devotion—it commands a willingness to sacrifice. It is these "emotional, symbolic and ideational forces" that in turn constitute society by allowing a moral order to emerge. Durkheim's interest in religion was thus related not to a Parsonian focus on order but to accounting for the "dynamic, always contingent, processes through which individuals become 'social beings'."[60]

   Bolton subsequently argues we can understand the drive for OS as leading actors to try to preserve the moral order, entwined with the sacred, that constitutes their community and provides meaning to its members.[61] This position is reinforced by Durkheim's argument that society is an "integral part of our being and, by the same stroke, uplifts it and brings it to maturity": that those in moral unison experience a "confidence, courage and boldness in action,"[62] and that communing with the "gods" and the sacred provides the "strength to endure the trials of existence." However, "these effects can be realized only in so far as the god is represented in his mind," which requires that the gods (society) are "believed in with a collective faith."[63] This dependence is why actors are willing to make a *variety* of sacrifices on the "gods'" behalf, or otherwise "feel extreme remorse."[64] Importantly, this does not imply conservatism or that there is a single reading of faith. Instead, by taking seriously the dynamism of faith and tradition and recognizing that tradition and reflexivity are in no way antithetical, we find that the drive for OS is predicated on the hermeneutics of morality and the continued revitalization of a dynamic moral order—processes engendering varying degrees of change.[65] In other words, actors creatively return to the sources of the tradition and engage in an ongoing dialogue regarding the virtuous life and the sacrifices required for preserving the sacred.[66] This is qualitatively different from circumstances when the sacred becomes polluted and moral order destabilized, potentially generating *anomie*.

The Insecurity of Anomie

While it is commonly equated to normlessness, scholarship has shown Durkheim spoke of *anomie* in relation to *règle,* a prescriptive moral formulation, and *dérèglement*, a state of "corruption, evil, agitation, torment, impiety"—in short,

59. Durkheim 1995, 34, 364. On larger discussions around whether the sacred emerges from violence, see Heinämäki 2015.
60. Mellor 2002, 18–19.
61. Bolton 2023.
62. Durkheim 1995, 211, 213, 427.
63. Durkheim 1995, 421, 489.
64. Kubálková 2000, 685.
65. From "questioning the status quo, to revivals, renewals, and revolutions." Bolton 2023, 236.
66. Bolton 2023, 247–249; Nexon 2011, 157–58.

moral disorder or "immorality."[67] At the same time, he deployed *anomie* in reference to various conceptions of sin. Much as sin pertains to a "disease to be healed" and "general hostility against God," *anomie* entails "moral pollution, and the profaning of the sacred," resulting in a "painful state or condition felt by individuals as well as by society."[68] Contradicting the strength of moral unity, *anomie* thus entails a weakening of the sources of OS, generating a "'deranged' state of disorganization" that "sets the stage for violence and abuse." Therefore, when faced with *anomie* actors must work more intensely to refashion moral order—"establishing fixed normative referents, promoting social integration, and ensuring that existing norms are coordinated, incorporated into policies, and function properly."[69] When curtailed by persistent "moral threats," actors must then try to determine the sacrifices required to preserve the integrity of, and repair, the community, from "performing rites of purification" to using violence to remove the perceived "contamination."[70]

Anomie can be instigated by forces within and outside society. Regarding the latter, external actors might constrain a community's efforts to pursue its sense of "the good" or stigmatize it for the values it champions.[71] Regarding the former, we can examine the relationship between the "real" yet imperfect society that exists around us and the perfect society that is "a fancy, a dream … [of] aspirations toward the good." The two cannot be separated, since it is by creating and recreating this ideal that society (re)makes itself. However, moments arise when society "hesitates over the manner in which it must conceive itself," potentially leading to conflict between ideals,[72] or even antithetical ideals that divide society.[73] Likewise, the affective forces underpinning society might be revitalized in ways engendering revolutionary change and new formulations of the sacred (as in the French Revolution). However, this does not guarantee that the "revolutionary religion" is uniformly embraced, with the sacred becoming an "arena for conflict, change, and violence."[74] Following scholarship inspired by Davis, we find this is precisely what occurred in France, where competing Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the sacred generated *anomie* and ontological *insecurity*.

The Wars of Religion: A Story of Anomie and Ontological Insecurity

By shifting analysis of the WoR to the "passions and emotions" of participants, Davis explains how, in contrast to earlier scholarship's emphasis on elites and state centralization, "religious divisions sparked violence in the localities even before leading

67. Meštrović and Brown 1985, 84; Meštrović and Lorenzo 2008, 183.
68. Meštrović 1985, 126–27; Meštrović and Brown 1985, 81–83.
69. Meštrović and Lorenzo 2008, 180.
70. Hassner 2011, 29.
71. Bettiza, Bolton, and Lewis 2023; Bolton 2023.
72. Durkheim 1995, 422–23, 425.
73. Gentile 2005, 24.
74. Hunt 1988, 31, 39.

grandees raised the banner of revolt,"[75] and how, far from following "ties of clientage or factional rivalry," religious riots proved crucial to the outbreak and duration of civil war.[76] Conflict was thus linked to a palpable sense the body social "had been dangerously polluted and needed to be purified," with Protestants and Catholics interpreting each other's purification efforts as further defiling the sacred.[77] This included the place of the Mass, the sacrament, and images and relics, all of which were critical to how France was defined—to its very identity and sense of order.

Specifically, a French national community had emerged in the late medieval/early modern era, one premised on links to the Franks and the perceived sanctity of France as the beacon of Christianity—fostering an early sense of ethnic election and the designation of "most Christian" for king, people, and territory.[78] Being French thus "meant to be a particularly good Christian,"[79] with the king swearing to defend the church, preserve "true peace for the Church of God," and expel heretics.[80] This enabled the king to become "the focus of a new Christian cult, and France—a Church in its own right."[81] By the fifteenth century France had become "personified [as the] most Christian *domina Francia*," and there emerged a wider attachment to *la France*.[82] There was thus a prevailing image in which the "civic, monarchical, and Catholic symbols merged,"[83] with the community understood in reference to the "royal person, the high priest of a unique religious cult."[84]

Protestantism thus threatened to rupture society by radically breaking from France's "fathers,"[85] inhibiting concord (religious and political unity),[86] and profaning what was held sacred.[87] For example, visceral reactions to the emergence of placards attacking the Mass and the Eucharist derived from the fact that the Mass primarily represented "the bond between the communicants"[88] and, particularly for the laity, was about engaging in a "communal rite of greeting, sharing, giving, receiving, and making peace."[89] The placards affair is thus emblematic of Protestants' wider desire to "revolutionize society by eliminating false worship and idolatry and by renewing morals," challenging the community's very foundation.[90] These rival interpretations of purity and pollution left members "fear[ing] for the safety

75. Benedict 2012, 164.
76. Benedict 2016, 76; Diefendorf 2012, 33; Neuschel 1989, 31–34.
77. Diefendorf 2017a, 384.
78. Smith 2008, 98–99.
79. Benedict 2016, 84–86; Greenfield 1993, 94.
80. Benedict 2009, 68; Holt 2005, 7–8.
81. Greenfield 1993, 95.
82. Smith 2008, 100–101.
83. Holt 1993, 539.
84. Greenfield 1993, 102.
85. Venard 1999, 143.
86. Roberts 2007b, 298; Turchetti 1991.
87. Davis 1981.
88. Diefendorf 1991, 28–48; Holt 2005, 18.
89. Reinburg, 1992, 531–33.
90. Diefendorf 2012, 35; Turchetti 1991.

of the entire community unless proper expiation was done."[91] Protestants thus voluntarily withdrew from society to form "closed communities of the faithful" and were involuntarily excluded as they became equated to "gangrenous members."[92]

Where Protestant numbers grew, they began to purify churches—removing statues and whitewashing walls—and society, for example, by forbidding Mass and removing objects of idolatry.[93] For Catholics, these actions directly threatened "the social and sacral community," resulting in an increasing militancy and "spiritual reawakening" and the use of various ceremonies "to repair the pollution of iconoclasm and restore the place of the sacred in society."[94] For example, processions were used as a "symbolic (legal) appropriation of public space," while edicts periodically confined Protestants to the private sphere and relegated worship to remote and degrading locations that represented their "social and religious distance … from a legitimate order." Protestants, meanwhile, sought to reclaim space, for example, leaving workshop doors open and cooking meat on Lent, or singing psalms while marching to worship.[95] It was during such times, when "differences were publicly acted out," that violence targeting the perceived sources of defilement erupted.[96]

Therefore, the violence that culminated in, and prolonged, civil war in France was interrelated with the *anomie* and ontological *insecurity* that emerged from antithetical conceptions of the sacred coming into direct competition and inspiring actions destabilizing the other's sense of moral order. To this end, rather than taking the WoR as unconnected to modern secular politics, we should view the WoR as merely one instance wherein the perennial struggles over the sacred devolved into violence targeting perceived sources of defilement.

Perennial Struggles for the Sacred

Social understandings of religion, as adopted by Davis, have not gone without criticism. Cavanaugh, while sympathetic to this approach, laments that it still suggests there "is something out there called religion."[97] At the same time, Cavanaugh emphasizes that his argument is that "people kill for all sorts of things that they treat as gods" and that secular causes are not "'disenchanted' at all, but are rather prone to idolatry."[98] This focus on "gods" lends itself to Durkheim's position that sacred objects symbolize not only the "god(s)" but also society, "transfigured and imagined in the physical form"—and it is "because the gods are in a state of dependence on the

91. Benedict 2016, 80.
92. Diefendorf 2012, 37–38.
93. Diefendorf 2017b.
94. Diefendorf 2012, 40, 42; Greengrass 1999, 71–72.
95. Foa 2006, 373, 380–82.
96. Davis 1973; Diefendorf 2012, 43.
97. Cavanaugh 2009, 119, 158–60. For a contrary view, see Benedict 2016.
98. Cavanaugh 2014, 490, 497.

thought of man that man can believe his help to be efficacious."[99] Therefore, whether conceptions of the sacred are termed religious or secular, important insights are garnered from studying how individuals, driven by the desire for OS, are continuously willing to sacrifice on behalf of the sacred and how the sacred/profane boundary is constructed, negotiated, and managed. This allows us to explore *how* competition between conceptions of the sacred can turn violent[100]—a position *transcending* Westphalia.

Again, for Durkheim, while the sacred can change its form it remains a constant feature of society, given that the profane cannot morally unite individuals.[101] This leads into Cavanaugh's claim that the gap "between early modern and modern is not as wide as we would like to believe."[102] From explorations into the early modern "migration of the holy" from Church to European nation-states,[103] to the contemporary "metamorphosis of the sacred" seen in "civil and political religions,"[104] we find a recurrence of collective emotions, faith, and the sacred. Therefore, in addition to instances where the division between "politics" and "religion" remains alien or contested, we must also consider, for example, the secular sacred: how "secular practices and values can take on well-nigh sacred dimensions," becoming vital to contemporary "politics of binding, belonging and exclusion."[105] Of particular interest is how nation-states—the supposed exemplars of secular politics—are constituted by the sacred and how religion "re-emerges within [modernity] in new guises … transmuted in and by nationalism."[106]

To establish this relationship we must go back to the fifteenth-century fragmentation of Christendom and the Council of Constance, during which a "new principle of territorial kingdoms, legitimated in terms of 'nations',"emerged.[107] At the same time, there was an increasing consciousness among sixteenth-century populations, particularly in Western Europe, of belonging to a "particular cultural and/or political community"—the "attachment of myths, symbols, traditions, values, and memories to certain culturally defined populations."[108] This laid the groundwork for nationalist ideologies, as contemporaries creatively engaged the Old Testament.[109] Europe thus began experiencing the "ideological power generated by attaching reformed religious faith (and Catholic post-Tridentine counter-faith)" to nations.[110]

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99. Durkheim 1995, 208, 349–50.
100. Benedict 2016, 86; Diefendorf 2014, 553–54.
101. For a discussion, see Bolton 2023, 244–45.
102. Cavanaugh 2009, 177.
103. Cavanaugh 2009, 174–78.
104. Both of which "consecrate '*a collective entity*,' formalise a '*code of commandments*,' consider their members a '*community of the elect*' … and institute a '*political liturgy*' which represents a '*sacred history*'." Gentile 2005, 30.
105. Balkenhol et al. 2020, 6–7.
106. Smith 2000, 811.
107. Hirschi 2012, 85; Smith 2008, 116.
108. Cavanaugh 2009, 175; Smith 2005, 410.
109. Hastings 1997; Smith 2003.
110. Smith 2005, 409–410.

While European rulers long applied the Old Testament notion of sacred kingship, Protestants began emphasizing the conditional covenant between God and the Israelites and the creation of a "holy nation." This resulted in discussions of the elect nation and the emergence of religious nationalisms. In England, Catholic plots against the Crown and the threat of Spain facilitated a fusion of "English national sentiment with strong Protestant conviction" and, by the 1640s, a desire to forge a republic inspired by the Old Testament. Likewise, the Dutch revolt led to comparison with ancient Israel, with the Dutch people "described as 'God's elect' and 'God's people'."[111] On the other hand, France's emphasis on "one king, one faith, one law" developed into "divine right," a synthesis of the Salic Law and the "most Christian" king's long-term independence from Rome into a "coherent and morally compelling system." The Salic Law and "the community of which it was an emanation" thus became sacralized, while "the king's state … became an end in itself and a source of moral values."[112]

The WoR thus gave way to the religions of nationalism, which emphasized "the elevation of 'the people' … a people with a long past, now reborn to a new and authentic destiny as long as it adheres to God's will."[113] While the emphasis on uniting these nations with a specific confession eventually tapered off, there still remains only a secondary difference between religion and nationalism, since "at the heart of both are the cult and the faith."[114] Durkheim, for example, saw the French Revolution as birthing a new religious order, and equated the commemorations of national forbears who forged a "moral charter" to Christian celebrations of Christ.[115] Building on these sentiments, Hayes argues nationalism comprises religious sentimentality and ritual, as exemplified by national flags and anthems, commemorations of national heroes/events, and adherence to a national "theology" derived from "sacred" texts and past deeds.[116] Smith, meanwhile, elaborates on the beliefs and sentiments regarding the "sacred foundations" of nations to make sense of the "strength of national attachments." This includes parallels between nationalism and traditional religions, including ideas of "chosenness," attachment to a perceived "holy" land, and conceptions of the people as a sacred community. More generally, Smith takes nationalism as a "political religion surrogate," with its object of concern being the "sacred—a sacred communion of the people."[117] Underscoring this communion is a "cult of authenticity," a form of holiness wherein that which is conceived as authentic to the nation—as derived from social and cultural traditions, heroic figures, and Golden Ages—is revered and held sacred.[118]

111. Smith 2008, 125–27, 129.
112. Greenfield 1993, 111–15, 118; Harding 1981, 409.
113. Smith 2005, 410.
114. Smith 2003, 28.
115. Durkheim 1995, 215–16, 429.
116. Hayes 1926, 106–110.
117. Smith 2003, 4–5, 17–18, 2005, 412–14.
118. Smith 2003, 32–33, 38, 66.

Therefore, we can continue to see modern secular communities—and in particular nations—as constituted by shared faith in what their members hold sacred and are willing to sacrifice for,[119] enabling a sense of moral order and OS. Exploring how actors have historically contended with struggles over the sacred—and how such struggles can degrade into violence—thus allows us to develop our understanding of the recurrence of violence within, and between, modern communities (such as nations). The remainder of this article thus uses the WoR's rich historiography to explore how the interplay between the sacred, OS, and hermeneutics of morality influenced conflict and the broader implications this has for conceptualizing the sacred and OS in regard to secular politics and violence. Specifically, we find these relationships influenced the trajectory of conflict, framed the legitimation of acceptable settlements, and (re)constructed social order and authority.

Hermeneutics of Morality and the Trajectory of Violence in France

OS studies often explore the importance of national narratives, which offer an enduring sense of community,[120] and national signifiers, which offer a fantasy of homogeneity and stability.[121] However, we must avoid taking the nation as "no more than the sum of its cultural representations."[122] Instead, we must maintain a "thick" view and appreciate the affective reality of communities (such as nations)[123]—"the bonds of allegiance and belonging which so many people feel" and the "powerful and popular cultural resources and traditions … [that] endow them with a sense of tangible reality"[124] and which successful narratives draw on.[125] Turning to the WoR, we find the trajectory of conflict was greatly informed by the politics of interpreting faithful behavior, wherein Protestants and Catholics returned to sacred sources and reinterpreted social traditions to devise and debate legitimate solutions for refashioning moral order. Contrary to the assumptions of tradition rooted in modernization theory, as well as criticisms suggesting that OS studies have a status quo bias or foreclose space for ethical debate,[126] the WoR thus demonstrates how the quest for OS is interrelated with the dynamism and hermeneutics of morality.

Calling for the eradication of heretics, advocating coexistence, entering cross-confessional alliances[127]—these all represented different interpretations of how best to address the "moral questions at stake"[128] following the "difficult adjustment"

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119. Cavanaugh 2009, 175–76.
120. Berenskoetter 2014; Steele 2008.
121. Solomon 2014; Vieira 2018.
122. Smith 1998, 137.
123. Bolton 2023, 240–41.
124. Smith 1998, 137.
125. Kinnvall 2018, 533.
126. Berenskoetter 2020; Bolton 2023; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020.
127. Cavanaugh 2009, 144–47.
128. Benedict 2006, 163–64.

to the emergence of competing confessions "for which little in the country's traditions prepared it."[129] Of course, such interpretations did not occur in a vacuum; pre-existing aristocratic rivalries, systems of clientage, and socioeconomic tensions meant participants were navigating a "society long divided by social hierarchy"[130] and a political culture comprising a "constant interplay" between elite and popular politics.[131] These considerations thus intersected with the more fundamental anxieties that emerged over moral order, with the "most important question … the one that sparked the most intense passion and the most recurrent conflict on all sides" being over whether, and on what terms, the different confessions should coexist.[132] The determination of legitimate behavior in light of this central question greatly influenced the conflict's trajectory.

Initially, the Reformation sparked curiosity in France.[133] However, Protestantism's more radical thinking eventually prompted a backlash, with the Sorbonne condemning Luther and the Crown heavily repressing Protestants.[134] The continued advance of Protestantism, and the linking of confessional cleavages with rival nobles, subsequently heightened social unrest. As tensions flared, the regency government for Charles IX under Catherine de Medici drastically shifted policy to prioritize order, diminishing the influence of extreme positions on both sides while elevating moderates, including Protestants such as Gaspard de Coligny. Intent on preventing, and then ending, civil war, Catherine subsequently undertook three concerted efforts to instill coexistence: the edicts of January, Amboise, and Saint-Germain. Ultimately, these failed, given their incongruency with dominant interpretations of faithful behavior and inability to reduce tensions within a populace intent on safeguarding antithetical conceptions of the sacred or to curtail elite rivalries—and while nobles were often reluctant to harness the masses,[135] their continued recourse to war facilitated crowd violence. Accordingly, the edicts were interpreted by many as a source of angst and *anomie*.[136]

To begin, the perceived potency of the Protestant moral threat was entwined with the emerging thinking of Protestant leaders.[137] In particular, the turn to iconoclasm, which sparked much Catholic outrage, was not "the implementation of some 'off-the-peg' doctrines" but a "gradually emerging *logic* of iconoclastic destruction that only made sense in the particular dynamic context that gave it force."[138] Similarly, while some Protestants called for patiently enduring oppression and suggested the

129. Benedict 2009, 92.
130. Holt 2005, 51; see also Diefendorf 2014.
131. Carroll 1995, 125.
132. Benedict 2016, 79–80.
133. Nicholls 1996, 183–86.
134. Knecht 1982, 252.
135. The influential Guise family, for example, initially preferred to rely on "traditional conventions of court politics." Carroll 1995.
136. On this angst, see Diefendorf 2012, 46–47; Foa 2004.
137. Benedict 2016, 80.
138. Greengrass 2013, 34.

possibility of coexistence,[139] the most influential voices (such as Beza) stressed upholding the true faith—particularly given Calvinism's focus on social regulation.[140] Accordingly, many supported violence and the total elimination of Catholicism.[141] Meanwhile, the eventual turn from constitutional and legal arguments toward increasingly radical justifications for resistance, conceiving royal "authority as resting on contract and obligated to obey the divine will,"[142] augmented fears among Catholic nobles over "social and political order."[143]

Catholics, meanwhile, debated whether *temporary* coexistence was legitimate as a path to religious uniformity, or a harbinger of disorder and "new war and cruelty."[144] Moderates justified edicts through biblical precedent and the need for loyalty to a king who could heal divisions.[145] At the same time, there was a turn to France's intellectual history, going back to Pierre du Chastel's opposition to the execution of heretics. More contemporary works by, for example, Michel de l'Hôpital subsequently pointed to the "unworkability of any '*forcement de conscience*'."[146] Instead there was an effort to distinguish religious affairs, determined through Church councils, from temporal affairs, with the edicts devising "precise rules" for unity under the king.[147] Some moderates also tried to refashion the understanding of France. L'Hôpital stated in the lead-up to the Edict of January, "L'excommunié ne cesse pas d'estre citoyen,"[148] while commissioners under Charles established "civic reference points" as a new basis for unity.[149] Still, for most moderates, l'Hôpital included, coexistence was seen as "a temporary solution" until unification could be achieved[150]—as a "mild but effective medicine" for the ills of society.[151] But opponents had the advantage of "France's most deeply rooted political myths, which linked the nation's existence to its historic success in combatting heresy."[152] Many thus felt even *temporary* pluralism was immoral, let alone the Protestant demands that edicts should at least guarantee "religious freedom, public worship, and equal justice"—hence the widespread opposition to the Edict of Beaulieu, which came closest to these demands.[153]

These dominant moral judgements among Catholics and Protestants, coupled with the posturing of elites, largely undermined the edicts. Starting with the 1562 Edict of

139. Crouzet 1999.
140. Holt 2005, 23.
141. Benedict 2009, 68, 70, 92.
142. Crouzet 1999, 113.
143. Holt 2005, 79.
144. Roberts 2007a, 150–53, 2007b, 307.
145. Roberts 2007b, 299.
146. Benedict 2009, 68–69.
147. Christin 1999, 210.
148. Kim 1993; Smith 1994, 37.
149. Foa 2004, 267.
150. Roberts 2012, 77.
151. Roberts 2007a, 163.
152. Benedict 2009, 92; see also Pollmann 2006, 112.
153. Greengrass 2000; Roberts 2007b, 303.

January, Protestants continuously flaunted its restrictions,[154] while the legal recognition they gained was a "volte-face that most Catholics found difficult to swallow."[155] Following a stalemate in the ensuing civil war, Catherine sought to restore peace with the 1563 Edict of Amboise. However, efforts to enforce the edict through commissioners, biconfessional courts, and a two-year royal tour of justice ultimately failed to alleviate widespread tensions,[156] particularly given the continued proliferation of Catholic confraternities intent on combatting heresy.[157] Coupled with the militant Guise's mounting influence in court, Protestant nobles opted for rebellion, and a period of protracted warfare took hold. The eventual result was the 1570 Edict of Saint-Germain.

Made possible by military exhaustion and reemergence of a moderate coalition at court, the edict appeased Protestants by authorizing worship in specific towns, offering legal recognition, and garrisoning four strategic fortified towns. Around this same time, Catherine finalized a marriage between her daughter and the Protestant Henry of Navarre. However, the edict ultimately failed to grapple with the fact that most Catholics remained adamant in "pursuing a new Jerusalem devoid of all infidels," that many Catholic nobles were growing perturbed by Protestant rhetoric challenging sacral monarchy, and that people's exposure to war was leading the "religious zeal and piety of the masses … to display itself more openly," resulting in further instances of crowd violence.[158]

In addition to being perceived as illegitimate, the edicts often hindered participants from implementing stable mechanisms for restoring and maintaining moral order. Not only did fluctuation between edicts leave the legal place of Protestants unpredictable, heightening anxiety,[159] but they also became "a provocation, a cause and a pretext for the violence" they were intended to prevent,[160] facilitating hostile interactions associated with each side's efforts to "restore their imagined community."[161] For Catholics, it was this failure to establish clear religious borders and hierarchy that tended to result in Protestants becoming "transformed from unwanted though generally harmless irritants … to dangerous pollutants that threatened civil order."[162]

Overall, many Protestants and Catholics interpreted the edicts as deepening *anomie* and ontological *insecurity*—as jettisoning "any sense of being carefree," facilitating the "erosion of community," and transforming "areas traditionally reserved for the reproduction of life" into zones of war.[163] These tensions came to a head during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, when a more limited effort to assassinate the

154. For example, Diefendorf 1991; Holt 2012, 63.
155. Holt 2005, 47–48.
156. Holt 2005, 55–56, 62; Venard 1999, 136–38.
157. Pollmann 2006, 96–97; Roberts 2007a, 154.
158. Holt 2005, 72, 74.
159. Holt 2012, 71.
160. Roberts 2012, 77.
161. Diefendorf 2012, 34; see also Foa 2006, 378–79, 383.
162. Holt 2012, 54
163. Foa 2017, 428–29, 430–31.

Protestant leadership devolved into Catholics ritualistically killing Protestants throughout Paris and in cities where Protestants were still a sizeable minority.[164] Those Protestants who opted to remain subsequently began to openly oppose the Crown, reinforcing Catholic worries over "the traditional political and social order."[165]

However, while the breadth of this violence further polarized society, it also led many, repulsed by the savagery, to finally view *temporary* coexistence as morally tolerable. Crowd violence subsequently fell, given this guilt and the fact that confessional minorities had become regionally "less politically threatening" on both sides.[166] These shifts coincided with growing discontent with royal authority and taxation. A small group of malcontent Catholic nobles, eventually led by the king's brother François, then formed an interim alliance with Protestants to solidify coexistence and address shared "grievances about royal misgovernment," excessive taxation, and the power of the Estates-General.[167] The Crown's weak position forced it to temporarily acquiesce with the Edict of Beaulieu, which included extensive Protestant concessions while rewarding François with the title Duke of Anjou.[168] While the ensuing Estates-General saw most Catholic representatives and the wider populace denounce Beaulieu, it also revealed an increasing gulf between moderate Catholics opposed to continued war and those wishing "to exterminate heresy entirely."[169] However, even among the latter, many were reluctant to provide the necessary funds for war—and indeed a series of cross-confessional peasant riots erupted, spurred on by the Crown's reduced authority and long-standing socioeconomic concerns that had become compounded by constant warfare.[170]

These divisions took on further dimensions in 1584, when François's death left the Protestant Henry of Navarre heir to Henry III, compounding Catholic anxiety over moral order. The eventual result was civil war between a Catholic League, emphasizing the Law of Catholicity, and the *politiques*, who, while agreeing to Catholicity, prioritized the Salic Law and royal authority. The designation *politique*, a derogatory term implying that they were "completely without religion,"[171] was thus disingenuous. Moderates supported unification and sacral monarchy—merely advising, in the words of one prominent *politique,* "sufferance of those of the new opinion for a short time."[172] Where they differed was over Henry's "susceptibility to conversion" and later the sincerity of his conversion.[173] The emergence of inter-Catholic war and cross-confessional alliance between *politiques* and Navarre (explored later in the

164. On these events, see Davis 1973; Diefendorf 1991.
165. Holt 2005, 100.
166. Benedict 2009, 86.
167. Benedict 2016, 72.
168. Holt 2005, 107.
169. Diefendorf 2014, 559–60; see also Holt 2005.
170. Holt 2005, 113
171. Beame 1993, 355, 379.
172. Holt 2005, 128–29.
173. Wolfe 1987, 293.

article) must be examined in the context of these increasingly hostile moral debates.[174] Accordingly, when the moral threat posed by Henry IV receded following his conversation in 1593 and absolution in 1595, coupled with efforts to demonstrate that "the body politic had been restored to the body of Christ,"[175] most Catholics pledged fealty. With this support in hand, Henry set about bringing Protestants into the fold, the result being the Edict of Nantes—the ostensible end of the French WoR.

Therefore, to better appreciate how actors reason, we must take seriously the affective power of the sacred while simultaneously recognizing the hermeneutics of morality. Accordingly, a central feature of the WoR was the emergence of conflicting conceptions regarding "what was sacred and what was polluting, aggressively expressed in public spaces."[176] *How* actors, driven by a desire for OS, (re)interpreted faithful behavior following these challenges—while simultaneously navigating socioeconomic tensions and concerns over social/political standing—was thus critical to the conflict's trajectory. Specifically, underlying the edicts, civil wars, and crowd violence was an ongoing and dynamic moral debate over the sacrifices required to stave off *anomie* and refashion moral order—processes that informed understandings of, and responses to, perceived moral threats.

Social Traditions in Conflict-Coexistence: The Edict of Nantes

In taking seriously the dynamism of moral order, we find that adherents of different traditions and conceptions of the sacred are not predestined to violence—there are always choices to be made.[177] During the WoR, violence was periodically avoided as Catholics successfully devised alternative mechanisms for refashioning moral order. In Tours, for example, once Protestants were "reduced to political impotence" they were "protected by a municipality determined to prove how firmly they were in control of events."[178] Similarly, local leaders in Dijon avoided violence by enforcing Protestants' second-class status and coercing certifications of conversion—not regarding theology, but promises "to '*vivre catholicquement*'," indicating that the aim was to maintain "the unity of the Catholic community in practice and behavior … [and] the social and political order."[179] This raises additional considerations regarding the implications of OS for conflict resolution.

OS studies often examine how conflict resolution, by disrupting constructed objects of fear that help provide answers to existential questions, generates an ambiguity that unsettles "previously taken-for-granted self-understandings about being

174. For an overview, see Venard 1999, 146–47.
175. Holt 2005, 160, 163.
176. Benedict 2016, 86.
177. Appleby 2000.
178. Nicholls 1994, 32.
179. Holt 2012, 68–70.

and identity."[180] The corresponding anxiety can generate the impetus required for the Self-Other reconstruction necessary for peace, but also lead to re-securitizing the Other. While anxiety is an important factor, greater focus needs to be placed on the sacred[181]—on how the choices that are perceived as "legitimate" and that garner support are interrelated with the moral order participants are embedded in. As we have seen, the various edicts struggled to gain legitimacy within the existing social traditions of France and often exacerbated perceived threats to the sacred. Therefore, so long as one side feels that what it holds sacred is imperiled and they are able to try to oppose this through various means, settlements will be hard to implement.[182] Turning to the Edict of Nantes allows us to further explore these dynamics.

As we do this we must recognize that the participants were focused not on religious tolerance, which contemporaries associated with "being subjected to some evil," but on legal permission.[183] Importantly, this permission became feasible because Nantes included provisions making it morally tolerable to at least the majority. Unfortunately, these provisions also made it unstable because they merely provided mechanisms for managing relations until one side could cement their conception of moral order. Louis XIV's eventual revocation thus represented more a change in the balance of power than a wholesale shift in attitude.[184]

To begin, the edict was palatable to many Catholics because it clearly delineated Protestants as second-class citizens. While Protestants' relative strength mandated the inclusion of contentious concessions,[185] the edict "underscored the Catholicity of the crown and the realm," the universal right to Catholic worship, and observance of certain Catholic regulations and ecclesiastical tithes, all while restricting Protestant worship.[186] Protestant support, on the other hand, derived from the inclusion of two temporary brevets granting partial military and political independence. However, because the edict also contradicted these concessions in alluding to religious unity, most saw it "as transitory."[187] Accordingly, Nantes represented enough Catholics accepting *temporary* coexistence, with Henry expecting reunification by 1606. It was this support, coupled with the peasantry's desire for peace and the fact many Protestants were encouraged by (provisional) guarantees of civil rights, security, and justice, that allowed the agreement to work temporarily,[188] with each side able to "assert its own identity materially … and liturgically."[189] Therefore, what distinguished Nantes was its ability to present Catholics a morally justifiable settlement;

180. Rumelili 2015, 16.
181. Ginges and Atran 2014.
182. Hassner 2011, 30–31.
183. Benedict 2009, 67; see also Gold 1988, 7; Kaplan 2010, 8–9.
184. Gold 1988, 6; Luria 2005, 8; Turchetti 1991, 22–24.
185. Sutherland 1988, 31–33.
186. Holt 2005, 168; Luria 2005, 5–6.
187. Sutherland, 1988, 33–34, 28 n2.
188. Benedict 2009, 83; Holt 2005, 150, 172–73.
189. Lualdi 2004, 733.

Catholic support was always premised on accommodating "one faith, one king, one law."[190]

However, notwithstanding the spectrum of views on how much peace should be prioritized, and despite greater cross-confessional interactions, coexistence remained a "veneer." While it introduced mechanisms for managing moral threats, Nantes failed to address the continued antithetical conceptions of moral order and the sacred, with most people rejecting coexistence as an appropriate long-term model for organizing society.[191] The result was a coexistence of intolerance,[192] with hard-liners working to reinforce boundaries and society maintaining a "strong tendency toward group endogamy," allowing segregation to proliferate.[193] At the same time, royal dedication to the Gallican principle slowly eroded the concessions enabling Protestant support. While Henry's murder in 1610 increased Protestant anxiety, we must appreciate that both Henry and his successor, Louis XIII, worked toward confessional unification, with growth in the Crown's relative power enabling the enforcement of moral order by whittling away Protestant rights. When Protestants called for a rival government following Louis's campaign to restore Catholic worship in Béarn, Louis affirmed the actual Edict of Nantes by eliminating Protestant political and military resistance, underscoring "Catholic concord and unity" and leaving Protestants "heretics in a Catholic world."[194]

Therefore, when conceptualizing the implications of OS within peace settlements, we should consider the vital role of concerns over moral order in delineating relative support and perceived legitimacy. This is not to endorse subjugating morally threatening others—the demarcation of Protestants as second-class citizens was "disturbing and depressing."[195] Instead, we can turn to Davis's call to "think less about pacifying 'deviants' and more about changing the central values."[196] Of course, such processes face numerous hurdles—specifically how to facilitate such change. One possibility is that participants emphasize different groupings; Migault's emphasis on local community, for example, enabled peaceful relations. Yet such examples remained the minority, suggesting their difficulty.[197] A second possibility is that prolonged coexistence slowly changes central values.[198] However, coexistence must, in the first instance, be perceived as moral; for example, prevailing social traditions in the Low Countries facilitated more widespread coexistence than in France.[199] Accordingly, peace settlements must first strive to resonate with prevailing morals and values interrelated with the sacred. Meanwhile, the prolonged nature of value change provides opportunity

190. Holt 2005, 198.
191. Diefendorf 2017a, 385; Marr 2017, 448. On peaceful relations, see Hanlon 1993.
192. Benedict 2007, 250. For exceptions, see Konnert 1989.
193. Diefendorf 2017b, 75; see also Benedict 2009, 87, 91; Lualdi 2004, 722.
194. Holt 2005, 192; For discussion, see Luria 2005, 309–10, 317; Sutherland 1988, 29–30, 41–43, 48.
195. Holt 2012, 72.
196. Davis 1973, 91.
197. Luria 2005, 314–15.
198. Diefendorf 2012, 51, 2017a, 384; Holt 2012, 73.
199. Benedict 1999.

for disruptive elements to intervene, or exploit changes in relative power, particularly when there is not a neutral arbitrator[200]—hence Louis XIV's eventual revocation of Nantes due to diplomatic rationale and enduring hostility to pluralism.[201]

Still, we need not adopt the pessimism of Huntington's clash thesis. Instead, it is by considering the OS motivation of participants to act faithfully within/toward a moral order that "legitimate" solutions might be developed. Therefore, by taking seriously concerns over the sacred—for example, by prioritizing symbolic gestures[202] and treating the "language, culture, or religious vocabulary" of participants "as resources for a creative process"[203]—we might develop the "political space in which a friend/ enemy relationship … transform[s] into one of legitimate adversaries."[204] Likewise, abstracting from Hassner's work on sacred space, we can emphasize how "religious" leaders "capable of shaping and reshaping the meaning, value, and parameters of sacred places can ameliorate or even resolve disputes."[205] This, in turn, leads into questions around who is perceived as a "legitimate representative" of the sacred,[206] and the interrelationship between social hierarchies and interpretations of the sacred.

(Re)Constructing Authority in France

In thinking about the intersection of OS and authority, it helps to tun to Zarakol's exploration of the historical contingency of the modern arrangement of states as primary OS providers, and how "*sovereignty* itself cannot be thought of as separate from such an institutional monopolization of the provision" of OS. During the Axial Age, for example, religious institutions were the main OS providers, with political authority "subservient or irrelevant to religious authority."[207] Building on these insights, we can think about power and authority as interrelated with questions of the sacred and moral order—as predicated on being taken as a legitimate defender and arbitrator of the sacred. This, in turn, substantiates works examining political authority as the result of "constant negotiation, definition, delimitation, and categorization."[208] Accordingly, we find that the French struggles over the sacred were inherently linked to power, order, and legitimacy: that conceptions of the sacred "legitimated political authority, justified social hierarchies, and facilitated social order by establishing codes of right and wrong."[209] To this end, hierarchies in

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200. Luria 2005, 316.
201. Benedict 2009, 82–83; Diefendorf 2017a, 385.
202. Ginges and Atran 2014.
203. Podziba 2018, 384.
204. Aggestam, Cristiano, and Strömbom 2015, 1738.
205. Hassner 2009, 153–54.
206. Podziba 2018, 389.
207. Zarakol 2017, 49, 54.
208. Costa Lopez 2020, 229.
209. Diefendorf 2014, 553–54. See also Roberts 2004.

France influenced, and were influenced by, interpretations of the sacred and moral order.

Two aspects emerge regarding the former. The first pertains to power relations *within* a community and how certain individuals/institutions are perceived as having (legitimate) authority over what acting morally entails—or who "can claim to speak in God's name in a given time and place."[210] The Sorbonne, for example, was influential in interpreting the Protestant "threat" and, as we will see, propagating a Catholic cultural (and political) revolution. Likewise, Gallicanism provided the Crown a powerful allure that many were hesitant to defy. We must also appreciate that interpretation of moral threats often reinforced existing hierarchies, a sentiment exemplified by how cross-confessional peasant riots were, like Protestantism, described as "threats to proper order under a Gallican monarchy."[211]

The second aspect pertains to the relative power disparity *between* communities, which can influence perceived threats (for example, violence often erupted when "heretics" threatened political and judicial control)[212] and opportunities. For example, Protestants' diminished power influenced reactions to Catholic aggression in the run up to the revocation of Nantes.[213] While some advocated rebellion, the dominant discourse emphasized the New Testament and Protestantism as "a peaceful and rational Christian tradition, defending an evangelical morality," resulting in calls for "pan-Christian tolerance based on making clear distinctions between ecclesiastical and civil structures" and the need to love God and one's neighbor.[214]

Meanwhile, by *creatively* returning to social traditions, participants were often *revising* existing structures.[215] This is most evident in Protestants' open challenge to the existing social order, and later the monarchy, when they drew on traditions of the Franks and Gauls to draft a republican constitution. However, Catholic efforts to revitalize moral order also had significant implications, as demonstrated by events surrounding the Catholic League. Traditionally, there has been a focus on the political and socioeconomic motivations of the League, which comprised an aristocratic band of nobles loyal to Guise and a more independent band of urban notables. Certainly, through the League, the Guise opposed tax increases, strengthened their position, and pursued "political machinations aimed against Henry III and Henry of Navarre." Likewise, urban notables used the League to press for political and social revolution—coming into tension with the more aristocratic strand. These various dimensions, however, cannot be disentangled from more fundamental concerns over the sacred: that this was a "Holy Union" driven, and held intact, by a mission to maintain a Catholic Crown and the purity of France.[216]

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210. Diefendorf 2014, 561.
211. Holt 2005, 117.
212. Holt 2012.
213. Luria 2005, 85.
214. Benedict 2006, 171; Grosse 2017, 417–18; Marr 2017, 445.
215. As seen with confessionalization. Cavanaugh 2009, 168–71.
216. Holt 2005, 123, 150. See also Benedict 2016.

Specifically, the emergence of, and support for, the League was interrelated with a growing sense of "religious duty" to enact reforms informed by a Tridentine Reformation–inspired cultural revolution. This stemmed from concerns over rampant corruption, that the royal court was becoming "a moral sink," and that "institutions of political society" were failing in their intended task: "to combat the evil in man, remove temptations, punish and encourage, show the way to virtue."[217] Magistrates thus began adopting measures to instill moral discipline in society, while a new wave of Sorbonne preachers turned "reformism into revolt" against "immoral" leadership.[218] This constructed an "alluring image of the League as 'bon François' and 'bon Catholique'."[219] Accordingly, what provided, for example, the League's "revolutionary movement credibility" was widespread support for its "opposition to Protestantism and its announced intention of keeping the monarchy Catholic" and the conveyance "of post-Tridentine Catholic piety."[220] This helped demarcate the "alleged ethical purity of League officers and the alleged selfishness and corruption of royalists"[221]—a division solidified when Henry, seeking to reassert royal authority, had the Guise brothers assassinated and leaders of the Paris League arrested. The result was bourgeoning support for the League and more expansive challenges to the Crown.[222] Royalists were forced into an alliance with Navarre—one "wholly favourable to the Protestant cause"[223]—while League preachers justified war against the Crown by combining Augustine's "just war" with a theory of divine election of nobles.[224]

Henry III's assassination in August 1589 brough the crisis to a head, presenting Catholics a "searing question of conscience."[225] Each side subsequently appealed "to a deeply ingrained sense of sacred community" as they debated just "what it meant to be 'bon François Catholique'": abiding the Salic Law or Catholicity. *Politiques*, while intent on the triumph of Gallicanism and Henry IV's conversion, deployed historical and legal arguments to argue that only royal obedience "could lay the groundwork for a general religious reconciliation." Leaguers meanwhile remained united in their drive to "defend the monarchy and church from the twin perils of heresy and moral corruption." Henry's eventual conversion thus removed the primary obstacle for moderate Leaguers, who wanted to reaffirm a strong monarchy, to pledge fealty,[226] while his subsequent absolution brought most hardliners around.

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217. Harding 1981, 403, 406.
218. Harding 1981, 397–99, 401.
219. Wolfe 1987, 305.
220. Holt 1993, 542, 2005, 124–25.
221. Harding 1981, 404.
222. Wolfe 1987, 290. The Sorbonne theologian Jean Boucher, for example, removed "the monarch from the contract between God and the people." Holt 2005, 134.
223. Holt 2005, 135. See also Greengrass 1983.
224. Harding 1981, 406–409.
225. Benedict 2016, 81; Greengrass 1983, 491.
226. Wolfe 1987, 296–98, 304, 309.

Therefore, moral contestation between Leaguers and *politiques* was, by its very nature, interrelated with struggles over power, specifically the moral obligations that underpin configurations of authority, such as the Crown, aristocracy, or clergy. Moreover, (re)interpretations of the sacred and morality helped transform wider social structures, with debates over *bon François Catholique* resulting in people "slowly redefining and then reaffirming what they thought to be the traditional order of a society." There was thus a return to the "moral bases" of the Crown's authority, and a sense that the "moral *freins* inherent in French kingship had to be re-established."[227] In doing so, many advocated "wholesale reform and rejuvenation of all of French society through an infusion of moral purpose and integrity in its vital institutions."[228] Likewise, Catholic reclamation of the landscape following Nantes was not "merely an attempt to restore what had been lost, but to sacralize and confessionalize the landscape," generating "new rituals and perceptions of the sacred."[229] In Orleans, for example, Catholics started venerating those who had fallen upholding the faith and appropriated elements of the city's history, with Jeanne d'Arc taking on a new "quasi sacred role."[230] The Catholic Reformation engendered even more dramatic changes, as exemplified by seventeenth-century missions that purposively disrupted social life to prompt "deep emotional reactions" and alter how Catholics "thought and acted."[231]

Therefore, focusing on the pursuit of OS as interrelated with moral order allows us to appreciate how it is also inherently entwined with questions of power and hierarchy. As seen during the WoR, and exemplified by the Catholic League, participants were struggling "over *power* and *control*, as well as over meaning, doctrine, and definitions of the body social," with violence often bestowing "novel roles, power, or status."[232] In other words, the OS drive to refashion moral order was intrinsically linked with (re)establishing hierarchies of power. These events further demonstrate how change can emerge in ways perceived unthreatening to OS,[233] with many experiencing, for example, the Catholic Reformation as "ensuring the proper social and moral order."[234]

Conclusion: Political Order and Raison d'État

This article has pushed back against core assumptions within IR rooted in narratives distinguishing the "irrationality" of religious violence from modern, pragmatic,

227. Wolfe [1987], 299, 303–304. Wolfe, borrowing from Claude de Seyssel, uses *freins* as another word for constraints.
228. Wolfe [1987], 305.
229. Luria [2005], 86–88; Spicer [2007], 250–51.
230. Reinburg [2017]; Spicer [2007], 260, 264–65.
231. Harding [1980]; Luria [2005], 48, 53, 89.
232. Desan [1989], 66–67. See also Roberts [2004].
233. Solomon [2018].
234. Marr [2017], 445, 453.

secular politics. I have argued that we are better served by examining how both premodern "religious" and modern "secular" politics are intrinsically linked to the interplay between the sacred, OS, and the hermeneutics of morality—particularly given the continued prevalence of civil/political religions and nationalism. In other words, we are better served by thinking of the WoR as merely *one* instance of the more perennial struggles over the sacred—as one in a series of crucibles from which can emerge misery and violence, but also new hope and ways of being. Exploring how participants navigated such struggles during the WoR is thus of great relevance to our more general understanding of the continued role of the sacred in politics and violence. Accordingly, we have seen that *how* participants interpreted faithful behavior—how they creatively returned to a moral order interrelated with the sacred—greatly influenced the conflict's trajectory, the perceived legitimacy of settlements, and the (re)construction of social structures and authority.

Building on these insights, we can conclude by examining how, more broadly, the perennial struggles over the sacred—the interplay between the sacred, OS, and the hermeneutics of morality—account for the dynamism of *raison d'état*: the relationship between organized violence and political order. Specifically, our understanding of *raison d'état* is advanced by starting with the conceptions of the sacred that constitute communities, legitimize authority, and provide members with meaning and OS. The sacred is thus the hinge of domestic and international politics, with the former informed by varying degrees of competition over interpretations of moral order and the latter informed by how the beliefs of the community intersect with international power structures and the beliefs and actions of others. The threat of *anomie*, and of the legitimation of violence, resides at both levels; domestic debates can degrade into antithetical interpretations of moral order, and external relations can fundamentally challenge the beliefs of a people.

This helps unpack the recognition within the tradition of *raison d'état* that political orders require a "consolidation of coercive, economic, and symbolic power and violence" and that symbolic logics often do not "conform to the same logic as one based on material fear and coercion." The dilemma of politics for classical realists was thus an appreciation that political orders bereft of ultimate values become "hollowed out"[235] and that pure realism lacks four things essential to "effective political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action."[236] Building on these insights, we can see decisions around domestic/ foreign policy as partially related to the sacrifices actors feel are required to safeguard conceptions of the sacred which (re)constitute their political order. The implication is that the concerns of *raison d'état* are inseparable from a set of social traditions entwined with the sacred.[237] The policies of Cardinal Richelieu, for example, were

235. Williams 2010, 312.
236. Carr 1941, 113.
237. This aligns with OS studies discussing ethical/moral arguments in policy debates and the power of "sacred" places. Ejdus and Subotić 2014; Steele 2008.

informed by his place within a "social caste that had drawn much of its *raison d'être* from the martial luster of foreign ventures" and general societal faith in Gallicanism and divine absolutism, the French as a "chosen people," and France as an exceptional nation. The result was a "pragmatic, yet religiously inflected, foreign policy ethos" defended in reference to "recovering France's 'natural' primacy on the continent."[238]

Therefore, as Aron asked, "What life does not serve a higher goal? What good is security accompanied by mediocrity?"[239] The *understanding* of this goal, however, is subject to the hermeneutics of morality and the ongoing revitalization of the sacred. Accordingly, we cannot assume a priori that "religion" will manifest in the type of violent nationalism feared by Morgenthau—resulting in pragmatism or barbarism. Hayes, for example, notes that nationalists, like medieval Christians, distinguish between types of unbelievers, with heretics, "fellow countrymen who have lapsed from the pure faith," often treated more harshly than "infidels" and "pagans"—unnaturalized immigrants and "inhabitants of foreign countries."[240] Yet violence in the face of heretics or pagans/infidels is not predestined—such encounters take numerous forms.[241]

This helps us understand some of the potential dangers accompanying the increasing moral polarization within many societies.[242] Davis, for example, draws parallels between the WoR and unrest in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, or more extreme violence, such as Kristallnacht.[243] The question then is what sacrifices actors might feel compelled to make to offset perceived moral threats and moral disorder—for example, storming the US Capitol. Similar concerns arise regarding the progressive ideological contestation within the international system.[244] While actors during the WoR predominantly focused on threats of pollution *within* their communities, concerns over moral order also resulted in strong reactions to heresy close to one's border,[245] competing models of international society,[246] and constrained alliances.[247] We find similar considerations regarding the Cold War, which for Morgenthau and Aron was "a combination of traditional power politics and ideological competition."[248] Specifically, as Cesa summarizes, Aron felt a negotiated settlement on the former was impossible given the latter,[249] hence his argument for envisioning the international system in terms of power (bipolar or multipolar) and values/ideals (homogeneous or heterogeneous).[250] Therefore, when powerful

238. Church 1972; Rehman 2019, 44–46, 60.
239. Aron 1962, 598.
240. Hayes 1926, 115.
241. A focal point of the journal *Medieval Encounters*.
242. Bolton 2021a; Crimston, Selvanathan, and Jetten 2022.
243. Davis 2012.
244. Bettiza, Bolton, and Lewis 2023.
245. Benedict 2006, 169.
246. Wight 1986, 82.
247. Nexon 2011, 150; Wolffe 2013, 258.
248. Cesa 2009, 182.
249. Ibid.
250. Aron 1962, 99–104.

"pagans and infidels" are seen as hindering efforts to act in accordance with "the good," or as promoting or expanding formations of international society premised on values incongruent with one's own,[251] the potential for moral threats to intercede in decision making becomes particularly acute.

However, despite these current trends, appreciating the hermeneutics of morality and the dynamism of tradition allows us to avoid becoming overly pessimistic—there is always opportunity for hope and change. Take the Soviet debates over ideological reforms that facilitated peace with the West. While the Soviets originally imitated "the spirit of the Crusades" in seeking to "spread the New Faith," Gorbachev's "counter-reformation" began prioritizing Finlandization and incorporating "values created against the will of" the established orthodoxy.[252] While certainly impacted by material considerations, these values were the result of long-term intellectual ("theological") evolution, with advocates endowing with "normative significance" ideas partially codified during détente.[253] These changes were successfully legitimated by "appealing to norms that resonated in the Soviet political culture"[254] and remaining faithful to a more fundamental understanding of Russia as the center of international political leadership.[255] On the other hand, in explaining the resurgence of conflict between Russia and the West it helps to examine the struggle between liberals and traditionalists within the post-Soviet "spiritual vacuum," with the latter ascending since 2000 and embracing values that are taken, particularly by Putin, as threatened by the West.[256]

To better understand how actors reason, and to develop more "legitimate" policies and agreements, policymakers should thus remain attuned to how *raison d'état* is understood in relation to a dynamic set of social traditions interrelated with the sacred. Consider Serbia–Kosovo. Throughout the 1980s, as communism waned, Serbians engaged in processes of national revival, tapping into social traditions interrelated with long-held myths of Kosovo as the sacred land of Serbia. Accordingly, Serbians focused on enforcing their control over Kosovo through military force, and later through diplomatic and legal tactics. The independence of Kosovo subsequently ignited a moral debate; while many maintained hard-line positions, new interpretations emerged legitimating the relinquishment of Serbia's *physical* control. However, the continued sacred status of Kosovo has thus far stymied the legitimacy of recognizing Kosovo's independence—despite political costs.[257] Similarly, conflict in Northern Ireland was interrelated with competing cultural religions, comprising their "own sacred events and symbols, their own fraternal orders, and their own versions of both the past and the future."[258] However, it was by devising new, creative

251. Bolton, 2021b, 280.
252. Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994, 229, 234 n52.
253. Herman 1996.
254. Evangelista 2001, 16.
255. Herman 1996.
256. Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2022, 33.
257. Ejdus and Subotić 2014.
258. Demerath 2000, 132.

ways to incorporate these rival social traditions and conceptions of community, and by finding a way for "political leaders to govern together without compromising the basic principles of their constitutional identities," that progress was made toward peace.[259]

Therefore, the ability to creatively appeal to the OS-inspired motivation of actors to remain faithful within/toward their conceptions of the sacred will go some way in charting how well we navigate the increasingly hot crucible of moral polarization and ideological rivalry. To this end, we must take heart—and take care—in recognizing that such hurdles are not unique. International politics is a story of trying to navigate perennial struggles over the sacred, and while this has resulted in bloodshed, it has also resulted in creativity and hope.

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259. Hain 2007.

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Acknowledgments

Key Words