CRISTIANA FACCHINI, GIROLAMO IMBRUGLIA,
VINCENZO LAVENIA, SABINA PAVONE

Introduction*

A religion without sacrifice is no religion
Chateaubriand (1802)

1. Sacrifice is well-established as a research topic in the scholarly debate. After the publication of the groundbreaking text by Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert (1898–99), the subject gained ground as a distinct theme in the fields of comparative religion, anthropology, and the history of religions. Although the authors' theorization of sacrifice was the outcome of cultural traits characteristic of their time, the depth of the theory contributed to endorse the theme of sacrifice in many fields of cultural production. As for the genesis of this theory, scholars have detected the relevance of the particular national environment the Durkheimians belonged to, characterized by the culture wars of the French Third Republic, and partly indebted to the creation of a secular approach to the study of religions through the organization of several institutes of higher education.[1]

Another element that propelled theories of sacrifice is better understood when analysed against the backdrop of a 'conversational order', which occurred among scholars and intellectuals interested in religion, politics, and society. In fact, sacrifice had also been a significant topic of enquiry among Victorian scholars, particularly William Robertson Smith, while the theme of dying gods was elaborated largely by the best-selling author James Frazer, whose works touched on innumerable subjects revolving around 'ritual killing'. Frazer and Robertson Smith immensely influenced

* This volume is published by funding from the Department of History and Cultures at the University of Bologna and the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism at the University of Macerata as part of the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN-2017 9JL8WR), "Sacrifice in the Europe of Religious Conflicts and in the Early Modern World: Comparisons, Interpretations, Legitimations", financed by the Italian Ministry of University and Research.

1 The bibliography is very extensive, but see in particular Strenski, Ivan, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); for a more detailed bibliography see the article by Cristiana Facchini in this volume.

Sacrifice and Sacred Violence, ed. by Cristiana Facchini, Girolamo Imbruglia, Vincenzo Lavenia and Sabina Pavone, Studies on Philosophy, Intellectual History, Arts, Sciences, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2025), pp. 17–43
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.SOPHIHAS-EB.5.144681

This is an open access chapter distributed under a CC BY-NC 4.0 International License.

Sigmund Freud's *Totem and taboo*, published in 1913, where a new element of violence was introduced as regards ritual killing.[2]

By the beginning of the early twentieth century a 'complex grammar' of sacrifice was available to social scientists, philosophers, and historians, and ever since sacrifice has become a recurrent topic to be cross-culturally analysed and discussed by scholars in different fields of enquiry. The works of many major twentieth-century intellectuals contributed to enhancing the understanding of sacrifice, favouring certain elements, e.g. economic exchange, food consumption, or violence. Numerous authors have engaged with the topic, offering critical insight or further expanding the enquiry, testing theories and introducing new angles. To simplify a complex history, one could claim that sacrifice has become a benchmark for studies of anthropology, philosophy, political theory, ancient history, and history of religion, just to mention the most important lines of investigation. The selection of chapters in Jeffrey Carter's *Reader* is eloquent.[3]

At the same time, criticism of the concept of sacrifice also gained ground. While historians both probed deeper and tested theories that had become influential,[4] philosophers and cultural theoreticians used sacrifice as a point of departure for understanding different aspects of human cognition and social interaction. Among the most prominent intellectuals and scholars who contributed to this debate, we should mention René Girard's influential and controversial reading and the innovative take of Walter Burkert.[5] Many of these studies associated sacrifice with significant cultural traits, above all the dynamics of violence, or political and ideological activism; others attempted to disentangle the understanding of sacrifice from violence.[6]

This volume offers a new perspective and a large collection of articles that address the question of sacrifice, its various meanings and uses, and its connection with violence and martyrdom, focusing primarily but not exclusively on the early modern period. It also provides significant comparative insights, looking at distinct religious traditions in historical perspective (Section 1).

But why the early modern period? Serge Gruzinski outlined how the early modern period witnessed an early type of global connectivity. As far as Western history is concerned, its global outreach coincides partly with the development of 'comparative religion', as stated by Guy Stroumsa and other scholars.[7] Moreover, the use of the

2 In this volume, see Cristiana Facchini in particular and also references in Daniel Barbu and Jan Bremmer.

3 Carter, Jeffrey, ed., *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (London: Continuum, 2003).

4 See scholars who dealt extensively with ancient religion. A bibliography is available in Ullucci, Daniel, 'Sacrifice in the Ancient Mediterranean: Recent and Current Research', *Currents in Biblical Research*, 13.3 (2015), 388–439.

5 See the important *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. by Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). Cf. Bremmer in this volume.

6 Eagleton, Terry, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2018); McClymond, Kathryn, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2008).

7 Stroumsa, Guy G., *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

term 'religion' became increasingly pivotal in evaluating and mapping other cultures.[8] The idea of sacrifice was often embedded in it, although it was used in different ways, both as a comparative device to praise or demonize the religious practices of other cultures. A clear indication of this attitude is found in a dissertation discussed some decades ago, in which the author analysed a play written around 1540 by an anonymous Franciscan friar in Tlaxcala. The play, *El Sacrificio de Isaac*, aimed to stigmatize the Aztec blood rituals via comparison with the biblical story of the failed immolation of Abraham's son.[9] A controversial and topical biblical narrative shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam had landed in the New World. Colonization and religious conversion, which aimed at eliminating 'idolatry', had found a legitimization to uproot 'human sacrifices', a theme that attracted the attention of European observers and has been extensively studied by David Carrasco, Michel Graulich, Susan Juster, and in Thomas Besom's research on the Inca Empire.[10]

At the same time and in parallel, the early modern period witnessed both the tragic internal crisis of Christianity and an assertive theological and political debate that contributed to elaborate different notions of *politeia*. In 1939 Fritz Saxl published an essay on the iconography of sacrifice in the Renaissance. While highlighting a family resemblance between pagan and Christian sacrifice, Saxl evoked the question of the Eucharist, the myth of ritual murder, and quoted a famous page from Niccolò Machiavelli's *Discorsi* (II, 2):

> Thinking then whence it can arise that in those ancient times peoples were more lovers of freedom than in these, I believe It arises from the same cause that makes men less strong now, which I believe is the difference between our education and the ancient, founded on the difference between our religion and the ancient. For our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honor of the world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming It very much and having placed the highest good in It, were more ferocious in their actions. This can be inferred from many of their institutions, beginning from the magnificence of their sacrifices as against the humility of ours, where there is some pomp more delicate than magnificent but no ferocious or vigorous action. Neither pomp nor magnificence of ceremony was lacking there, but the action of the sacrifice, full of

8 See the article by Smith, Jonathan Z., 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in Smith, Jonathan Z., *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Chapter 8.

9 Dollinger, Karen Rebecca, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Inquisition: Theological, Discourse in the Writings of Luis de Carvajal and in Sor Juana's* Crisis de un Sermón (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002).

10 Carrasco, David, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Graulich, Michel, *Le sacrifice humaine chez les Aztèques* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); Juster, Susan, *Sacred Violence in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Besom, Thomas, *Inka Human Sacrifice and Mountain Worship* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); see also for a more focused discussion of 'idolatry', Botta, Sergio, 'La lotta francescana contro la "materia sacra" nella Nuova Spagna (XVI secolo)', *Quaderni storici*, 169.1 (2022), 21–53.

> blood and ferocity, was added, with a multitude of animals being killed there. This sight, being terrible, rendered men similar to itself [God].[11]

This interesting passage is of course open to interpretation: maybe Machiavelli was among the first to highlight the significance of sacrifice while offering a comparison between the sacrifice of the ancients and Christianity, or perhaps he intended to celebrate the sacrificial culture of the Romans. Be this as it may, his comments certainly illustrate the widespread use of comparison, the methodology of which would be exploited subsequently in many directions.

Recent scholarship has emphasized how the seventeenth century in particular marked a turning point for new interpretations of sacrifice. Jonathan Sheehan, Debora Kuller Shuger, Dmitri Levitin, and Girolamo Imbruglia have analysed the theological controversy fuelled by different Christian denominations around the notion of 'true sacrifice'.[12] At the core of this contention was the interpretation of the death of Jesus, 'the lamb of God', and the meaning of both the Eucharist and the Mass. A heated debate among Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and representatives of radical currents of Christianity, such as Faustus Socinus would, involuntarily, pave the way for the rise of the notion of natural religion. Furthermore, the question of the immolation of Christ became intertwined with political interpretations of sacrifice, as in Hobbes and in works which sought to interpret the metaphor of the body politic and to elaborate the category of political religion as a civil bond.[13] The expansion overseas of European countries, with their Christian cultures, missionary projects and conversionary policies, did not only enhance comparative methods of inquiry. It also brought about an engagement with travel literature, antiquarianism, and illustrated books containing descriptions of exotic rituals and religious practices, including sacrifice, in different cultural settings. Odeporic literature, with its 'autoptic imagination', together with missionary and colonial knowledge contributed to create a significant 'cognitive turn' regarding representations and perceptions of religion and sacrifice.

The first section of this collection, entitled *Comparative Perspectives*, comprises several articles on different religious traditions, including the essay on Greek religion by the eminent scholar Jan Bremmer. It broadens the comparative approach through contributions on rabbinic Judaism (Federico Dal Bo) and Islam (Caterina Bori and Roberta Denaro), adding, for a better comparative evaluation, a contribution

---

11 Saxl, Fritz, 'Pagan Sacrifice in the Italian Renaissance', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2.4 (1939), 346–67, at pp. 366–67 (quoting the *Discorsi*).

12 The seminal work is Shuger, Debora K., *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

13 Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism, and the Polemics of Distinction', *Past and Present*, 192 (2006), 35–66; Sheehan, Jonathan, 'The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67 (2006), 649–74; Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Sacrifice before the Secular', *Representations*, 105 (2009), 12–36; Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Comparison and Christianity: Sacrifice in the Age of the Encyclopedia', in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, ed. by Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 177–209; Levitin, Dmitri, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 1117–60.

on sacrifice and martyrdom by Emiliano Urciuoli and Pierre Antoine Fabre, which belong to Section 3. Whether and how the category of sacrifice might be used as a transcultural concept is a topic that Chiara Ghidini tackles in her article, looking at how the term was adapted to Japanese cultural and religious history. This section functions as an introductory panel, connecting it with the scholarly debates on the study of sacrifice in different ancient contexts and mostly defined by comparative approaches, as for instance in the collection of essays on the neolithic and ancient Mediterranean edited by Carrie Ann Murray, or David Weddle's comparative analysis of sacrifice in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[14]

The first article of this section is by Jan Bremmer, whose contribution focuses on the 'origin of sacrifice' and animal sacrifice in Greek culture, which has been the object of considerable scholarly scrutiny. Bremmer takes his cue from the book by Karl Meuli and his thesis that animal sacrifice ultimately derived from hunting, which was then further investigated by Walter Burkert, in his *Homo necans* (1972). Bremmer introduces new arguments, such as Indo-European evidence and contemporary anthropological accounts, to support the link between sacrifice and hunting. However, he also highlights what has been overlooked or could not be evaluated due to the lack of analytical data. Bremmer also elaborates on a topical theme, namely 'the end of sacrifice', suggesting that criticism of sacrifice was already quite widespread before the rise of Christianity, given the decline of the so-called sacred laws regarding sacrifice as well as the elite's gradual moving away from traditional religion. Therefore, according to Bremmer, the end of ancient animal sacrifice was the result of several long-term developments, which only partly intersect the ban of the Christian emperors.

Rabbinic Judaism emerged out of a long historical process and survived the recurrent crises experienced by ancient Jewish culture. Rabbinic sources, composed and collected from the first to the fifth century CE, contain layers of material devoted to the discussion of sacrifice, albeit in a period when sacrifice was not even allowed in the Temple, after its destruction following the wars with the Romans. Dal Bo's article analyses Mira Balberg's *Blood for Thought*, a comprehensive and original interpretation of sacrifice in early rabbinic literature.[15] It focuses on Balberg's argument that rabbis unified the interpretation of the sacrificial system, assigning relevance to blood while downplaying individual intention and distinct types of sacrifice. The author aims to argue that rabbinic thought had a very complex evolution with regard to sacrificial concepts, against the backdrop of a destroyed Temple, which was the only place where sacrifices could have been performed. While acknowledging Balberg's important contribution to the rabbinic interpretation of sacrificial matter, the author calls for a more nuanced approach which would include an analysis of the interplay between ritual practice, textual interpretation, and evolving religious and political

14 Murray, Carrie Ann, ed., *Diversity of Sacrifice: Form and Function of Sacrificial Practices in the Ancient World and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016); Weddle, David L., *Sacrifice in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

15 Balberg, Mira, *Blood for Thought: The Reinvention of Sacrifice in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

contexts. This is even more relevant when placed comparatively in the religious transformations of late antiquity, which also gave birth to Christianity and Islam.

Early Christianity, like rabbinic Judaism, is a religion with no sacrificial practices.[16] However, sacrificial language and metaphors did not disappear. In his article Emiliano Urciuoli analyses the connection between the notion of sacrifice and martyrdom, which is generally taken for granted and was to become very significant in the early modern and modern periods.[17] Nevertheless, looking at early Christianity, this contribution argues that the interplay between sacrifice and martyrdom was initially hesitant, loosely interconnected, overshadowed by other competing models of conceptual integration. The integration of sacrifice and martyrdom was accomplished by a theological operation attributed to Origen, whereas before that the association between martyrdom and sacrifice was still peripheral. As Urciuoli writes,

> Quite the contrary, sacrifice appears to be far from crucial to the discourse of martyrdom. Compared to themes such as the imitation of Christ or the public confession of the name, sacrifice is a contingent and peripheral motif. It resurfaces on occasion. As a narratological device, it is merely one trope among several others — military, athletic, gastronomic-symposiac, bridal, agricultural, and so forth — and certainly not the most popular.

Roberta Denaro's article tackles the theme of martyrdom in the Muslim tradition. Adopting a comparative perspective, she explores whether, and to what extent, martyrdom (*šahāda*, *istišhād*) in Sunni Islam (the majority branch) can be understood as a form of sacrificial death, and to what extent it depends on models developed among Christians. Furthermore, she analyses the construction of martyrdom in Shiite Islam, investigating the medieval development of *šahāda* and its connection with the concept of sacrifice. Unlike Christian traditions, it is important to note that *imitatio Muhammadis* does not entail a sacrificial and martyrial dimension, or at least not like the one developed in late antique Christianity. In Shiite Islam, instead, the death of Ḥusayn functions as a founding motif which connects his death with 'a cosmic, divinely preordained, event around which the entire human history revolves'. It was, nevertheless, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that martyrdom and jihad were linked and received a novel interpretation.

Caterina Bori's contribution explores a fascinating and distinctive initiation rite, the so-called *ʿaqīqa*, a 'blood sacrifice' performed on the seventh day after the birth of a child. *ʿAqīqa* is a widely practiced form of sacrifice to this day. The ritual slaughter of the animal/s (two for a boy and one for a girl) is usually associated with the shaving and naming of the child. The rites and images associated with it (pouring blood, naming, shaving, pledge) and the traditions transmitted on the subject are indicative of a practice that was certainly very old. Bori engages with Muslim theories of the medieval period, aimed at explaining this sacrificial practice in detail. She focuses on

16 Stroumsa, Guy G., *La fin du sacrifice: Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

17 See Franco Motta in this volume.

the fourteenth-century Syrian scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), and his chapter on *ʿaqīqa* in his handbook on children: *The Gift of the Beloved on the Rules for the Newborn*. When we contrast this picture with earlier or contemporary collections of traditions on the same subject, or commentaries on such traditions, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's case signals a shift in the logic of *ʿaqīqa*. In his reading, the *ʿaqīqa* is associated with Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son (in the Muslim tradition, Ishmael), and the ritual is conceived to protect the child's physical and inner growth from the damage caused by Satan's aggression in the womb of the mother. Thus, sacrifice at birth works as a ransom and redemption from Satan's aggression and captivity, also countering plausible associations with 'idolatric practices'.

The comparative approach of this first section also takes us to Japan, where Chiara Ghidini explores how notions associated with 'sacrifice', 'worship', and 'religion' entered Japanese culture. Her contribution focuses also on the terminological issues related to the practice of naming and translating 'sacrifice' in Japanese cultural history. Following in the footsteps of Cristiano Grottanelli's short and dense book on sacrifice,[18] Ghidini engages with key terms such as *sai/matsuru* and *hitobashira*, and explores ancient chronicles like the *Nihon shoki* (eighth century CE), premodern sources, and interpretations by influential folklorists, particularly Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953), in order to uncover the ritualistic and socio-religious significance embedded in these concepts. In addition, Ghidini explores the challenges posed by the introduction of Confucius into the Japanese pantheon, examining the symbolic and political dimensions of Confucian sacrifices over time. Lastly, she examines modern forms of sacrifice, both political and spiritual, in the context of wartime Japan and post-war reconciliation. The article is a good example of a diachronic approach, which investigates the procedures of translating concepts from Western cultures and languages into different and quite complex religious traditions. However, this process elucidates and highlights different typologies of 'offering', including 'human sacrifice', and self-sacrifice when discussing personal trajectories towards forms of martyrdom.

Overall, this first section posits several new questions, among which it is worth mentioning that the decline of animal sacrifice in the ancient world of Greek and Roman traditions had multiple motives, and developed in parallel with the birth of Christianity (and then Islam), and ultimately the reconfiguration of Judaism. Taken separately, these traditions seem to deploy very different discursive strategies with regard to sacrifice, which would need to be further integrated by blending knowledge from different disciplinary fields. Moreover, the case of Japan sheds light on the process of conceptualization enhanced by the rise of comparative religion as an innovative field of research, illustrating the varieties of 'sacrifical offer', and the power of the language of martyrdom cast as a form of self-sacrifice.

Pierre Antoine Fabre's contribution, which appears in the third section, functions more as a theological reflection upon the very essence of Christianity as a religion of martyrdom but not sacrifice, which nevertheless retains the memory of the latter, conceptualized in the puzzling story of Noah's sacrifice. Christianity is understood from

18 Grottanelli, Cristiano, *Il sacrificio* (Rome: Laterza, 1999).

the perspective of a dual distinction that has profoundly marked its development. The first distinction is between self-sacrifice, which strictly speaking is reserved exclusively to God, Father and Son, the former sacrificing himself in the latter, and martyrdom, which cannot be the decision to sacrifice but only the grace received from a devotion carried to its extreme. The second distinction is between martyrdom and holiness, wherein martyrdom tends to become a kind of regulating ideal for a Christian life, linked also to preparation for the grace of dying, albeit without hastening death's coming. Between the two models of martyrdom and sanctity, sacrifice, in its most general form of killing, survives its disappearance as the spectre of pure violence, of which Noah's gesture on leaving the ark is, indefinitely, the enigmatic figure.

2. It has recently been emphasized that 'it was in the seventeenth, rather than the nineteenth century that Western history of religions became "modern"'[19] and 'que la religion comme catégorie désignant un ensemble de phénomènes homogènes et spécifiques est une invention occidentale, chrétienne, et relativement récente'.[20] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new concept of 'religions' was constructed that overturned the traditional approach. According to Augustine[21] and Thomas Aquinas,[22] in each *religio* the *lex* was pre-eminent over the cult and determined the correctness of ceremonial and sacrificial practice. In the early modern age, atoning sacrifice became the essential element of the religious phenomenon.

The discovery of the sacrificial nature of religion was due to the Christian world's confrontation with non-European civilisations and the breakdown of its religious unity. It was the result of the discovery of a double otherness, external and internal. The religious necessity of atoning sacrifice and its specific Christian nature was affirmed against both heretics and non-European religions. In the reports on non-European societies, the description of the cult was never absent, and gave apologetic value to the ethnographic documentation.[23] With the idea of a true religion having fallen, all religions being false myths or mutual idolatries, sacrifice became proof of the universality of religious sentiment. Protestants and Catholics followed Thomas

19 Levitin, Dmitri, 'What Was the Comparative History of Religions in 17th-Century Europe (and Beyond)? Pagan Monotheism/Pagan Animism, from *T'ien* to Tylor', in *Regimes of Comparatism*, pp. 49–115 at 51.

20 Borgeaud, Philippe, *Aux origines de l'histoire des religions* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), pp. 203–06; Bremmer, Jan N. 'Greek Religion [Further Considerations]', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Lindsay Jones (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 6:3677.

21 Augustinus, *Retractationes*, ed. by Almut Mutzenbecher (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), 37 (I, XIII,3): 'what is now called the Christian religion was there among the ancients and was never lacking in the human race from the beginning until the arrival of Christ, when the true religion, which was already there, began to be called Christian'.

22 For Aquinas, 'ex naturali ratione' the recognition of divinity requires a *signum* of subjection: 'unde sacrificiorum oblatio ad jus naturae pertinet'. The second moment, the *lex* or *religio*, concerns 'id cui affertur, scilicet Deus' whose 'cultus exhibetur' and 'qui dictum est quod Deus est fidei objectum, non solum in quantum credimus Deum, sed in quanto credimus Deo'. *Summa Theologica*, *Secunda secundae*, q. LXXXV, art. 1, and q. LXXXI, art. 5.

23 Rubiés, Joan-Pau, 'From Christian Apologetics to Deism: Libertine Readings of Hinduism, 1650–1730', in *God in the Enlightenment*, ed. by William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 107–35.

Aquinas, who had said that the absence of worship was a sign of *irreligiositas*, and recognizing the universal presence of worship was confirmation of the universal consensus of religion and the impossibility of atheistic societies. As *secundus inter pares*, sacrifice became the pillar for all apologetics, with the exception of Pascal — for whom ceremonies nevertheless retained an instrumental value.[24]

These two lines crossed in the thinking of Grotius. Grotius defended the universality of worship against the Italian heretic Faustus Socinus.[25] In *De Jesu Christo Servatore* (1594), Socinus had claimed that all false religions were based on atoning sacrifice, and that Christianity, the only true religion, had excluded it. The mythical core of Christianity lay not in Christ's death on the cross, but in his ascension to heaven. Grotius, an Arminian and anti-Trinitarian, refuted Socinus and argued that all religions were founded on atoning sacrifice and that Christianity was a religion like all others because it was founded on sacrifice and the *satisfactio of* divinity.[26] What distinguished Christianity from other religions was its *veritas*, but what made it a religion was the atoning ritual sacrifice.

Grotius thought of sacrifice as maintaining the distinction and *mélange* between the spheres of theology and politics,[27] although he was aware of the danger of their balance.[28] In the early seventeenth century, Grotius wrote *De republica emendanda*, where he argued that God had created the state he liked, the Mosaic theocracy, where the pivot between these two spheres was sacrifice. The relationship between religion and politics in the theocracy was based on the sacrifice of Christ and his moral exemplarity. In *De Jure belli ac pacis*, the category of sacrifice was thought of as punishment, indispensable both for religious life — on which salvation depended — and for political life, because the legitimate authority of the sovereign descended from divinity.[29] In Grotius's view, Christ's sacrifice, like all legal sacrifices, not only did not contradict legal logic, but founded it. In any society, 'the act of punishment' is not available to all citizens — as is the case with liberality, which is restricted to individual arbitrariness — but requires shared rules designed in the common interest. It belongs to the sphere of public law. Punishment, and therefore expiatory sacrifice, 'does not exist for the sake of him who punishes, but for the sake of a community. For all punishment has as its goal the common good, viz. the preservation of order [...].

---

24 Pascal, Blaise, *Pensée* 680, in *Pensées, opuscules et lettres*, ed. by Philippe Sellier (Paris: Garnier, 2018), pp. 508–510.

25 Grotius, Hugo, *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Christi adversus Faustum Socinum Senensem* (Leiden: Jacobszoon, 1617), engl. transl. by Hotze Mulder, ed. by Edwin Rabbie (Assen: van Gorcum, 1990).

26 Imbruglia, Girolamo, 'The Idea of Religion and Sacrifice from Grotius to Diderot's *Encyclopedia*', *The History of European Ideas*, 47 (2021), 1–18.

27 Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Assenting to the Law: Sacrifice and Punishment at the Dawn of Secularization', in *After Secular Law*, ed. by Winnifred F. Sullivan and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 73.

28 'Too bold theologians, keep yourselves at bay! And you, politicians, be on your guard against too bold theologians!', Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis*, II, xxii, no. 71, with a reference to Jacques-Auguste de Thou.

29 Bartolucci, Guido, 'The Hebrew Republic in 17th Century Political Debate: The Struggle for Jurisdiction', in *Ancient Models in the Early Modern Political Imagination*, ed. by Wyger Velema and Arthur Weststeijn (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 214–33.

In this vein, God himself says that he does not derive pleasure from the punishment of those who are punished'.[30]

Just as the violation of the religious order is condemned by divinity, so punishment in the civil order is sanctioned by public authority. Otherwise, the sacrifice of life to which an individual is forced is nothing but a crime.

The religious and political ideal of a theocracy based on sacrifice proved impossible. Already Erastus, a heretic fought by the Calvinists, had denounced the danger of theocracy. Since God hated all disorder, 'he would have considered two heads in one body to be a monstrosity [...]. In summation, in a Christian state there is one magistrate, to whom is committed by God the external government of all things which belong either to civil life or to the life of Christian piety; that the right and authority of rule and jurisdiction has not been conceded to ministers or to any others'.[31]

The modern theocratic project was in the seventeenth century worse than an abstract ideal. From the religious wars in France in the second half of the fifteenth century to the Dutch conflict between Remonstrants and anti-Remonstrants, up to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the theocratic character of the Christian state, whether Catholic, Calvinist or Anglican, provoked political conflicts and justified violence.

In the theocracy, there was a dualism between temporal and religious power, which managed the fear of death and was inevitably the stronger. A unitary sovereignty had to be thought of.

> The maintenance of Civill Society depending on Justice; and Justice on the Power of Life and Death, and other lesse Rewards and Punishments residing in them that have the Sovereignty of the Common-wealth; It is impossible a Common-wealth should stand, where any other than the Sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death.[32]

Hobbes reversed the sacred/sovereign relationship. The religious foundation of the sacred was false. Hobbes followed Socinus. Christ's sacrifice was not atoning; the sacred did not give ontologically different overall meaning to reality and created disorder and violence.

The power of *Leviathan*, which is 'the Sovereign Power of life and death', cannot be 'either abolished, or limited'.[33] One could know 'the Science of Naturall Justice' 'by the naturall Reason'. Sovereignty has no divine foundation and its unity is new:

---

30 Grotius, *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Christi*, II,16, 143.

31 Erastus, *Thesium, Quae de excommunicatione positae fuerant Confirmatio*, published with *Explicatio gravissimae quaestionis utrum excomunicatio mandato nitatur divino an excogitata sit ab hominibus* (London: Wolfe, 1589), pp. 161–62.

32 Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. by Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 2, 698 (Chapter XXVIII).

33 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2, 30 (Chapter XXI).

> nothing the Sovereign Rapresentative can doe to a Subject, on what pretence soever, can properly be called Injustice, or Injury; because every Subject is Author of every act the Sovereign doth; [...] And therefore it may, and doth often happen in Common-wealths that a Subject may be put to death, by the Command of the Sovereign Power, and yet neither doe the other wrong.[34]

The 'right of Punishing' is a prerogative of politics, which produces fear in order to dispose citizens to obedience. The right to punish is not a 'gift'[35] or 'concession' of citizens to power; it is not given, but left to the Sovereign, because all 'onely in layng down [their natural right] strengthened him to use his own'.[36] 'Punishment divine' does not exist, because punishment is not an act of hostility, but is 'inflicted by the Authority of man'.[37] It derives from the right of nature that 'every man' has to 'every thing' and to do 'whatsoever' he thought necessary to his own preservation in the natural condition (for the citizen retains the right to resist public punishment). Sacrifice was contradictory to Hobbesian politics because it constituted a gesture of disobedience to one power and subordination to another. In *Leviathan*, the citizen obeyed the state and himself. 'No law can be unjust, insofar as each man with his assent creates the law that he is bound to abide by and that hence cannot but be just, unless a man can be unjust with himself'.[38] Hobbes's secularization was radical. He did not take Christian language to give it new meaning, but rejected the basis of religion, the atoning sacrifice, and the theocratic political form that had been built upon it. Hobbes's language of sovereignty was no longer religious.

Deism responded to Hobbes and imagined a religion without sacrifices. In *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, or, The Original of Idolatry, Together with the Politick Institution of the Gentiles Sacrifices* (1680), Charles Blount described the sacrifices, especially the 'Sanguinary ones, as being the most horrid and brutish of all others'.[39] Blount shared Hobbes's and Spinoza's idea that rituals were forms of superstition, which was a religion that was born 'out of Fear'.[40] But another religion had been possible. 'Before Religion, that is to say, Sacrifices, Rites, Ceremonies, pretended Revelations, and the like, were invented among the Heathens, there was no worship of God but in a rational way'.[41] This kind of religion had honoured the divinity 'out of love' and without irrational rites. Deism did not emerge from this dilemma. All religion was superstition. Diderot took up Hobbes in one of the most beautiful articles in the *Encyclopédie*, and swept away all illusions.

---

34 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2, 572, 568 and 574 (Chapter XXXI).

35 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2, 568 (Chapter XXXI): '*Gifts*, that is to say *Sacrifices* and *Oblations*'.

36 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2, 568.

37 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2, 484.

38 Hobbes to John Bramhall, quoted by Lessay, Franck, 'Tolerance as a Dimension of Hobbes's Absolutism', in *Hobbes on Politics and Religion*, ed. by Laurens van Apeldoorn and Robin Douglass (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 63–78 at p. 65.

39 Blount, Charles, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, or, The Original of Idolatry, Together with the Politick Institution of the Gentiles Sacrifices* (London: s.n, 1680), p. 2.

40 Blount, *Great is Diana*, p. 15.

41 Blount, *Great is Diana*, p. 3.

> Les bois ont été les premiers lieux destinés au culte des dieux. C'est dans le creux des arbres et des antres, le silence des bois et le fond des forêts, que se sont faits les premiers sacrifices. La superstition aime les ténèbres; elle éleva dans des lieux écartés ses premiers autels.[42]

Out of that dilemma came Montesquieu. He too recognized the universality of the religious phenomenon, like Diderot and Holbach, but gave it another cause. In *La politique des Romains dans la religion* (1716) he said that its origin lies neither in fear nor in pity, but in sociality.[43] The Spinozists and traditional apologetists were wrong to speak of a *homo religiosus*. The root of religions was 'la nécessité où sont toutes les sociétés d'en avoir une'.[44] This belief could have rituals that were not expressions of terror. 'The world no longer has that cheerful air that it had in Greek and Roman times. Religion was mild and always in accord with nature. Great gaiety in the ritual was joined to complete independence in the doctrine.'[45] In the pagan world there reigned 'that spirit of toleration and gentleness' that became unknown to Christian societies.[46]

Montesquieu described the historical phenomenology of the religion of sociality; Rousseau provided the theory. Mindful of Machiavelli and Montesquieu, according to Rousseau too it is essential that the state has a religion. Religion was necessary to the state, but none of the three known types of religion could be the citizen's civic religion. There was the religion of man, which is apostolic Christianity; the religion of positive divine right or law, which is Roman religion, a form of theocracy; and finally there was evangelical theism, which was useless to the state, since men would be driven to detach themselves from earthly things and hence from earthly laws. The solution was to establish a 'purely civic' religion, a new religion that was the natural religion of the *Social Contract*. The sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject. It was the expression of *Salus populi suprema lex esto*, which inspired the passions of the man and of the citizen, indicated the fanatical maxims, such as intolerance, to be shunned, and the social principles that should be embraced to show they are capable of loving laws and justice and of sacrificing their lives out of duty when necessary. Sacrifice was again the essential category of politics, but of the free republic and not of theocracy.

---

42 Diderot, Denis, 'Bois sacres', in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: David, 1751–65), 2, p. 310.

43 Imbruglia, Girolamo, 'Religions Revealed, Civil and Natural: Cultural Transfer and Montesquieu's *Dissertation on the Politics of the Romans in Regard to Religion*', in *The Internationalization of Intellectual Exchange in a Globalizing Europe (1636–1780)*, ed. by Robert Mankin (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2018), pp. 119–41.

44 Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, *Dissertation sur la politique des Romains dans la religion* (1716), ed. by Lorenzo Bianchi, in Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Catherine Volpihac Auger *and others*, vol. 8/1 (Oxford-Naples: Voltaire Foundation, 2003), p. 83.

45 Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, ed. by Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), p. 459.

46 Montesquieu, *Dissertation*, p. 92.

In the second part of this volume, devoted to the relationships between religion and politics, Daniel Barbu has reconstructed the connection between sacrifice and idolatry, which has been central to the western imagination of ancient religions, and has also served to understand other forms of idolatry in non-European cultures since the fifteenth century. Already in the New Testament, sacrifice was linked to idolatry. The sacrifice there is a discursive device, useful for upholding the new myths and rituals of Christianity, or for denouncing the traditional ceremonies and rituals of the Roman Empire as an expression of superstition or idolatry. This position asserted itself both in the confrontation with the alien wisdom of Jews and of Romans and in the internal controversies within Christianity. Having overcome this dramatic conflict, the Christian doctrine of sacrifice underwent no further significant changes until the sixteenth century in the dual wake of the Reformation and the Age of Discovery. The question of idolatry, as distinct from that of sacrifice, returned to the forefront to defend the 'true nature' of Christianity against internal heresies, and to define what the true religion was in relation to other beliefs. The Bible was also caught up in this dynamic. Based on Maimonides' reading, the Bible became a form of testimony to the beliefs, customs, and rites of ancient paganism, a window onto the polytheistic environment. The Bible represented a fundamental source for the study of ancient and new religions and the institution of sacrifice. Robertson Smith considered sacrifice as a central feature of every religion and thus a guide to the primitive conditions under which religion itself emerged in the history of humankind. Sacrifice is not only a gift or an offering, but rather a pact, uniting the individual members of a clan through a shared transgression, the killing and consumption of its totemic deity, to whom the members of the clan trace their common genealogy.

The contribution of Cristiana Facchini probes deeper into the 'scientific theories' of sacrifice, which appeared between the nineteenth and twentieth century. Her article is based on a working hypothesis that aims to provide a preliminary mapping of how notions of sacrifice were conceived and elaborated in the early modern period against the backdrop of intra-Christian theological strife and the discovery of new religions in the Americas. She suggests that issues such as atonement and the comparative method were re-discussed and challenged both by the school of Durkheim, the scholars of Victorian England, and by Freud. These theories acknowledged the importance of sacrifice, but at the same time they provided different interpretations, which in turn provoked a scholarly debate that aimed at obliterating the theological meaning.

Sierhuis and Quatrini have innovatively studied Grotius's discussion of the Christian category of sacrifice as the pivot of the relationship between theology and politics in the early modern era. Grotius refuted the thesis of Faustus Socinus, whom he judged to be the heretic that most radically challenged the very foundations of Christianity. As Sierhuis and Quatrini show, Socinus's work was well known in the Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century, and Grotius wished to insinuate himself into an already heated debate. Socinus had argued that Christianity was the only true religion precisely because atoning sacrifice was alien to it: this was the characteristic of all religions and constituted their falsehood. The mythical moment

at the heart of Christianity was Christ's bloodless ascension into heaven, which indicated that the way to salvation was the imitation of Christ's moral life, not his death. It was an echo of Erasmian religion.[47] Grotius reiterated that every religion, and hence also Christianity, required the ceremony of bloody sacrifice, which made the relationship between man and God revolve around *satisfactio* and atonement.[48] The analysis that Quatrini and Sierhuis make of the theme of the human nature of Christ in Grotius, with recourse to little-known texts, is of the liveliest interest. They explore Grotius's ambivalent Christology from the perspective of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. They examine a wide range of texts to show that Grotius appeared to hold a nonconformist view of Christ: from his early drama *Christus patiens*, to his anti-Socinus treatise *Defensio fidei*, to later writings such as the *Bewijs* and the *Annotationes*, Grotius time and again emphasizes the figure of Christ as a mortal man, as a teacher and moral example, rather than the divine Son of God. This view — which brings Grotius close to the Socinians — is then reflected in his political treatise *De iure belli ac pacis*, where he demonstrated leniency — if not ambivalence — towards the kind of pacifism put forward by the Socinians. The legitimacy of the state, which for Grotius in its ideal form was represented by the theocracy, rested on the sacrificial element. By recognizing the religious foundation of the right to punish, one could admit both the right of the sovereign to exercise violence and punish, and the possibility of Christians to exercise public functions.

In his contribution, Yelle recognizes the Socinian character of Hobbes's thesis, which denies that Jesus's death in itself had any power of redemption, which Hobbes argues is dependent on God's freely given grace. According to Hobbes, the sacrifice of Jesus in itself held no redemptive power because for Hobbes the sacrifice was merely a ritual element of the politics, not of Rome, as for Machiavelli, but of the Mosaic theocracy, without any religious characteristics. Consequently, in *Leviathan* sacrifice is an exclusively political category, which could be managed only by the sovereign power. In an earlier article discussing Assmann's thesis, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*,[49] Yelle showed that Hobbes judged negatively the fact that Moses had provoked the rebellion of the Hebrews in Egypt and led them to monotheistic deity worship and theocratic politics. While in the philosophical and antiquarian culture, from Grotius through Selden and Vossius to Spencer, this event was judged positively as being at the origins of Christianity. For Hobbes it was instead a gesture of rebellion against legitimate power, and the source of the subsequent theological-political sedition, including that of England. The properly biblical connection of political theology was on the one hand false, because it was impossible to define any religious discourse as true, and on the other hand dangerous, because it fomented violence and political uprisings. Hobbes therefore

47 Marchetti, Valerio, 'Dall'esegesi erasmiana all'ermeneutica sociniana', in *Erasmo, Venezia e la cultura padana nel '500*, ed. by Achille Olivieri (Rovigo: Minelliana, 1995), pp. 225–40.

48 Grotius, *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Christi*.

49 Yelle, Robert, 'Hobbes the Egyptian: The Return of the Pharaoh, or the Ancient Roots of Secular Politics', in *Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence*, ed. by Alan Strathern and Azfar Moin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), Chapter 10.

constructed a notion of sovereignty completely devoid of religious foundation and on new, secularized foundations. Yelle brilliantly and convincingly polemizes the thesis of Schmitt who, precisely with regard to Hobbes, argued that modern political language had done nothing more than use theological language, pursuant to a failed secularization.

3. The section *Christian readings on sacrifice in the global sphere* mostly offers an interpretation of sacrificial rites from a European perspective, using different types of sources. Many of these are missionary sources, since the presence of European missionaries during the early globalization period was undoubtedly significant. These documents, like travel accounts, were aimed at a Western audience but were produced by eyewitnesses. The iconographic documentation, which is equally well reconstructed in this section, is different, in that it was conceived not so much at local level but mainly in Europe. Moreover, the European perspective raises an issue related to the very use of the term 'sacrifice', which recurs in all sources from the early modern era in relation to certain ritual practices described by missionaries, travellers, and colonists, yet poses an unavoidable historiographical problem today. For Europeans, the term 'sacrifice' did not always refer to the dimension of the transcendent, and not all rites described as such had, in themselves, a sacrificial value.

Maria Berbara, starting from a lively debate sparked on this topic among Brazilian historians and sociologists, asks in her essay whether the ritual executions of war enemies by the Tupinambá can be considered sacrifices. Her hypothesis is that European debates on sacrifice influenced the imagination of Europeans present in Brazil. This hypothesis is linked to what Peter Burke asserted in *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*,[50] where the British historian interpreted the iconography of otherness expressed by the 'Western gaze' as following a binary logic of opposition/affinity. This seems to be further supported by the lack of translation of the terms 'sacrifice' and 'immolation' in the Tupí dictionaries, which leads to the assumption that such rites were detached from a pre-existing religious dimension.

As for the missionaries, addressing the issue of sacrifice meant grappling with very different perspectives. Observing the 'sacrifices of others' entailed a Christian reading, though it did not completely exclude the ethnographic and anthropological dimensions, which sought to distinguish how such sacrifices were interpreted in different forms in the four parts of the world.[51] The Jesuit sources on the sati rite, illustrated in Sabina Pavone's essay, show not only the different interpretations of the ritual, which were composed in Europe and elsewhere, but also the Jesuit missionaries' attempts to persuade widows to avoid the fate of immolation through conversion to Catholicism. The interpretive reading, which could vary from missionary to missionary over time,

50 Burke, Peter, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

51 Gruzinski, Serge, *Les quatre parties du monde: Histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions de la Martinière, 2004).

was also associated with the instrumental use of conversion as a means to escape the self-sacrifice.

At the same time, as the history of evangelization is closely connected with that of colonization, missionaries were also seen as executioners, complicit in the extermination of indigenous populations. It is not surprising that in such contexts, missionaries could in turn become victims of reprisals by the local populations.[52] For those engaged in evangelization, it was therefore necessary to accept death as a plausible and concrete outcome of their missionary work,[53] a martyrial vocation not only present in the sources but also exalted in certain European publications. Franco Motta (whose essay is in another section but is relevant to this discussion) highlights how this theme was evident in the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, where Bartolomé de Las Casas referred to the indigenous people as sacrificial victims of the Spaniards: 'tigers and savage lions who have not eaten meat for days'. Motta comments on this passage by describing Las Casas's words as a form of 'martyrdom without sacrifice [...] whose victims are martyrs not as witnesses of Christian faith, but of the cruelty of the conquistadores.'[54] This ambiguity made it very difficult in the early modern period to distinguish whether missionaries were killed as religious figures or as colonizers. The example of the martyrs of Salsette (India) illustrates this overlap between Portuguese imperial-colonial identity and religious identity.[55]

Regarding the theological perspective, the martyrial vocation understood as self-sacrifice also risked colliding with the meaning of Christ's sacrifice. Aspiring to martyrdom was quite different from actively seeking it. In those cases, the risk that it could be interpreted as a call to suicide was equally strong. For example, Daniello Bartoli recalls in his *Asia* how the Jesuit Antonio Criminali repeatedly refused the Portuguese sailors' invitation to board their ship to escape an attack by the Badaga on the coast of Cape Comorin, eventually falling victim to the attackers. The man who

52 From a contemporary perspective, it should be noted how the canonization of the Franciscan missionary Junípero Serra (2015), desired by Pope Francis, drew attention to the statues dedicated to him. Not only were some of these statues vandalized and subsequently destroyed, but the inscription 'Saint of Genocide' appeared on the base of the statue at the Carmel Mission, highlighting his culpable involvement in the extermination of Native Americans. Pope Francis canonized him in a ceremony in Washington, 'suggesting that his legacy had been misinterpreted' (Linthicum, Kate, 'Mission Statue of Serra Sustains Damage', in *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 2015, https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-los-angeles-times-mission-statue of/19318173/ [accessed October 23, 2024]). On 22 June 2020, the word 'racist' also appeared on the base of a statue of Junípero Serra in Palma de Mallorca. In China, the statues of the 120 Catholic martyrs canonized by John Paul II in 2000 and erected in various Chinese churches have been removed by the Chinese Communist Party.

53 See Colombo, Emanuele, *Quando Dio chiama: I gesuiti e le missioni nelle Indie (1560–1960)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2023).

54 Motta, Franco, 'Self-sacrifice in the Ordinary Duty: Early Modern Martyrial Culture and Hagiographical Rhetoric in Mathias Tanner's *Societas Iesu apostolorum imitatrix* (1694)', in this volume, p. 282.

55 The best-known among them was the Jesuit Rodolfo Acquaviva, nephew of the General of the Society, Claudio Acquaviva. It was not until 1893 that the beatification process came to a positive conclusion, approximately four hundred years after its opening (1583).

would later be regarded as the protomartyr of the Society of Jesus struggled to be recognized as such precisely because of the circumstances of his death.[56]

In recent years, a rich historiographical phase has borne witness to the attention given to these themes, significantly broadening the scope of sources. The global projection of the 'martyrial turn' (which we will return to later) has drawn attention not only to the better-known Roman documents but also to local sources, often produced by communities of converts eager to present their own martyrs as identity symbols both in the local context and beyond.[57] More focus has thus been placed on canonized martyrs from colonial contexts,[58] studied from a perspective that is not solely European. One of the most famous cases is that of the Japanese martyrs, Jesuits and Franciscans, for whom there is now an extensive bibliography. From a global perspective, martyrdom narratives, often conceived to promote beatification and canonization processes and, more generally, to propagate evangelization in lesser-known areas such as the Mariana Islands, have led scholars to value sources that had been previously overlooked.[59]

Motta speaks of a 'martyrial turn' that took shape around the mid-seventeenth century, as evidenced by the many works published by Mathias Tanner during that time, from the better-known *Societas Iesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem* to the lesser-known *Societas Iesu apostolorum imitatrix*, on which the scholar focuses here, offering a suggestive interpretative hypothesis. According to this, in the self-representation of the Society of Jesus, martyrdom changed in meaning, taking on that of a sacrifice of life that did not necessarily imply the shedding of blood: a sort of 'bloodless martyrdom' or 'sacrifice without martyrdom'. Thus, the Jesuits, while drawing on the martyrial culture of the older religious orders (Dominicans and Franciscans) within the broader framework of universal evangelization, integrated it into a form of 'spiritual imperialism', which Motta proposes as a key reading for the Tridentine and post-Tridentine era.[60] In this perspective, as already mentioned, the

---

56 His beatification process began in 1901, reflecting the difficulty of recognizing his sainthood, and has not yet been positively concluded.

57 See Trento, Margherita, 'Martyrdom, Witnessing and Social Lineages in the Tamil Country: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Annales HSS* (English Edition), 10.1017/ahsse.2022.26 [accessed 31.10.2024]; first published in French in *Annales HSS*, 78.1 (2023), 35–71. In a sociological perspective attentive to the global turn, see also Middleton, Paul, ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), Section IV: *Martyrdom in Global Perspective*, pp. 355–68.

58 See for example Fiume, Giovanna, '"Illuminare gli infedeli, soccorrere l'afflitti christiani priggioni": Il martirio di Juan de Prado (Marrakech 1631)', *Quaderni storici*, 42.126 (2007), 773–818.

59 See for example the lives and martyrdoms of some of the Jesuit fathers, brothers, and laymen that ministered in the Mariana Islands documented in the folders of the provincial archives of the Society of Jesus in Barcelona. Some of these (the protomartyr of the Mariana Islands Father Luis de Medina, coadjutor brother Pedro Pavon, and oblate Felipe Sonson) have been published in Coello de la Rosa, Alexandre, and David Atienza, eds, *Scars of Faith: Jesuit Letters from the Mariana Islands (1668–1684)* (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources-Boston College, 2020), pp. 109–81.

60 Motta draws inspiration from Lundberg, Matthew D., *Christian Martyrdom and Christian Violence: On Suffering and Wielding the Sword* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), who argues that 'violence suffered in the form of martyrdom and violence inflicted in the form of holy war or persecution are both parts of the same original experience of Christianity' (Motta, 'Self-sacrifice', p. 265 footnote 9).

printed reproduction of Jesuit and also Protestant martyrial iconography contributed to 'the sedimentation of a canon of the visual imagery of violence and torture',[61] and to the circulation and cross-fertilization of iconographic models that thus transcended confessional boundaries.

Regarding self-sacrifice in non-European cultures, Paola Wyss von Giacosa's essay focuses on the *Collectiones peregrinationum in Indiam orientalem et Indiam occidentalem*, published by the de Bry family of publishers, highlighting how their enterprise was 'a creative hub of pictorial knowledge, contributing to the wide dissemination of images of the various cultures of the world'.[62] Tying in with Sheehan's considerations on the comparative instincts that the theme of sacrifice aroused in the European public,[63] Wyss-Giacosa sees de Bry's *Collectiones* as serving such comparison, with the intent to discredit the 'other', considered essentially idolatrous, where the images play an active part in the European debate on sacrifice.

The focal point of her discussion concerns a little-studied theme: the self-immolation of Javanese widows. On the one hand, it is evident that the iconographic model is that of widow immolation in India (not surprisingly, an engraving by de Bry is cited by both Wyss-Giacosa and Pavone). The scholar emphasizes how de Bry's Javanese iconography of immolation displays unique features, making it not only distinctive but also deliberately aimed at connecting the self-sacrifice of widows with demonic idolatry. Indeed, it shows how the widows, before throwing themselves into the fire, mortally wound themselves with a 'devilish' kris dagger. Moreover, the engraving depicts a collective self-immolation.

It is known that, in certain cases, even in India, sati sometimes took the form of a collective self-immolation ritual, as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier mentions in his *Six Voyages*, where he describes one such ceremony.[64] Among the Rajputs, a collective sacrificial ceremony (*jahur*) involved the immolation of high-born women, not necessarily widows, who, when faced with military defeat, preferred not to fall into the hands of the enemy. One of the most famous cases of the early modern period occurred in Chittorgarh in 1568, during the siege of the city by the Mughal emperor Akbar. Despite de Bry's attempt to expand the models of reference, the traditional depiction of sati prevailed in European iconography, with a single woman ready to throw herself into the flames.

In his contribution, Joan-Pau Rubiés too emphasizes the close connection between sacrifice and idolatry in the Christian debate of the early modern period. The author's choice to focus specifically on Sub-Saharan Africa is justified by his desire to concentrate mainly on areas characterized by "pagan rites" in order to determine

---

61 Motta, 'Self-sacrifice', p. 270.

62 von Wyss-Giacosa, Paola, 'Staging Sacrifice: de Bry's Pictorial Representation of Javanese Women's Self-Immolation', in this volume, p. 314.

63 See Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Comparison and Christianity: Sacrifice in the Age of the Encyclopedia', in *Regimes of Comparatism*, pp. 177–209.

64 See Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste, *Les Six Voyages qu'il a fait en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes* (Paris: G. Clouzier et C. Barbin, 1676), vol. 2, Book III, Chapter X: *Histoires remarquables de plusieurs femmes qui se sont brulées après la mort de leurs maris*, 389–94, esp. 389–91.

whether there are differences in interpretation between Catholics and Protestants. Rather than extensively using the concept of 'misunderstanding' to describe the relationships between Europeans and Africans, for the proposed case studies (Gold Coast, Congo, Benin, and Angola), Rubiés finds the category of 'hybridization' more useful, as it better captures 'the dynamic aspects of the religious encounter'.[65] Drawing from both Catholic sources and Protestant ethnographic reports, the scholar identifies immanentist aspects in Christianity, particularly Catholicism, that, for example, facilitated the conversion of the Kingdom of Kongo, starting with Queen Njinga.[66] Others, such as the Dutch Protestant Pieter de Marees in his *Description of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, described the worship of fetishes as a sort of inversion of Christian sacrifices, employing the same iconographic arsenal.

The analysis of the rites of the Imbangala of Benguela, described in *Strange Adventures* by Andrew Battel,[67] leads Rubiés to question, as Berbara did with the case of the Tupinambá, whether these are genuinely religious sacrifices. He thus proposes two distinct negative paradigms present in discourses on 'idolatrous' sacrifices: 'the barbaric-inhuman paradigm' (often associated with practices of divination and political terror rather than the worship of deities) and 'the imperial-religious monstrosity of large-scale ritualized human sacrifice'.[68] Despite the peculiarities of the different individual contexts, these two paradigms seem to him to be common to both Sub-Saharan Africa and the New World, ultimately reflecting the belief in the superiority of Christian Europe — a belief that, incidentally, is not affected in any way by European involvement in the slave trade. At the same time, West Africa represented a territory where spaces for negotiation seemed broader. Ultimately, however, both Catholic and Protestant observers agreed in evaluating religion and sacrifice in West Africa as an expression of the agency of the Devil.

Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, in his essay, bridges the two perspectives on self-sacrifice that we have explored so far. Focusing on the Chinese context, Hsia examines both the martyrdom of European missionaries and the notion of self-sacrifice in Chinese society, particularly from a gender perspective. The novelty of Hsia's approach lies in his consideration of the different contexts in which missionaries from various religious orders operated — not only the well-known persecutions in Beijing but also lesser-explored regions such as Fujian.

One key point that Hsia highlights is the comparative dimension often overlooked by the missionaries in China. As he writes, 'While European missionaries privileged a discourse of martyrdom — of themselves and of elite Manchu converts during the eighteenth century — they seem to have ignored the deep currents of sacred

65 Rubiés, Joan-Pau, 'Discourses of Religion and Sacrifice in Sub-Saharian Africa', in this volume, p. 380.

66 On Njinga's conversion see now also Lavenia, Vincenzo, 'Njinga, regina guerriera dell'Angola', in Petrolini, Chiara, Vincenzo Lavenia, and Sabina Pavone, *Sacre metamorfosi: Racconti di conversione tra Roma e il mondo in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2022), pp. 50–59.

67 *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel of Leigh in Angola and Adjoining Regions*, ed. by Ernest G. Ravenstein (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1901).

68 Rubiés, 'Discourses of Religion', p. 401.

violence present in Chinese society'.[69] This observation ties into the second part of his essay, which focuses on gender dynamics. Here, Hsia explores 'the interesting question of the relationship between the rise of female sanctity and women's loss of power in Chinese society'.[70] Hsia examines three case studies where young women gain empowerment by rejecting marriage and patriarchal society. Through acts of self-sacrifice, they assert control over their bodies, achieving a form of divine status and the power to protect other women. This phenomenon can also be observed in Hindu culture concerning the sati ritual, where Indian widows were believed to achieve sanctity by becoming sati after their immolation. Such a concept was difficult for Christian missionaries to understand, as illustrated by the account of the Jesuit Baltasar Nunes discussed by Sabina Pavone.[71]

The Scottish missionary Alexander Duff (1806–78), writing in his *India and India Missions* a decade after the formal abolition of the sati ritual by the British government (1829), reflected on the traditional Hindu interpretation of the rite. Despite acknowledging its cultural significance, Duff viewed the ceremony as an expression of a deeply patriarchal system that continued to subjugate widows. He noted that if a woman agreed to immolate herself, it is because she intensely believes that she is to be instantly received into the heaven of Indra. It is because some of those books, which she has been taught to regard as divine, assure her that such and so great is the merit of this particular act of self-immolation, that it even extends beyond herself; that, if her husband had been the vilest of the vile, and banished for his misdeeds into one of the lowest hells, this heroic act of self-sacrifice on the part of his widow would rescue him from torment; raise him up beyond the natural course of transmigration; and transport him too to the heaven of Indra.[72]

This last quotation emphasizes how missionaries like Duff grappled with the tension between respecting cultural traditions and critiquing practices they saw as oppressive, especially in the context of gender roles and power dynamics.

It is interesting to note how John William Kay (1814–76), a historian and officer in the East India Company, in *The Administration of the East India Company: A History of Indian Progress* (1853) associates the ritual of sati with female infanticide,[73]

---

69 Hsia, Ronnie Po-chia, 'Martyrdom and Sacred Violence in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century China', in this volume, p. 350.

70 Hsia, 'Martyrdom and Sacred Violence', p. 346.

71 Pavone, Sabina, 'Save the Body to Save the Soul: Interpreting Sati in Jesuit Missionary Sources', in this volume, p. 364. An indication of such of mutual misunderstanding, albeit not referring to a female figure, is reported by Berbara regarding the Jesuit Azpilcueta Navarro, who 'failed to save a Tupinambá war prisoner from death because he himself refused to escape in such a way'. (Berbara, Maria, 'Ritual Killings amongst the Tupinambá and the Christian Concept of Sacrifice in Early Modernity', p. 299 footnote 4).

72 Cf. Duff, Alexander, *India and India Missions: Including Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism, both in Theory and Practice; also Notices of some of the Principal Agencies Employed in Conducting the Process of Indian Evangelization* (Edinburgh: J. Johnstone, 1839), pp. 156–57; see also pp. 249, 617–18.

73 Kay, John William, *The Administration of the East India Company: A History of Indian Progress* (London: Richard Bentley, 1853). It is interesting that the section dealing with these issues was extrapolated and republished under the following title: *The Suppression of Human Sacrifice, Suttee, and Female Infanticide* (London-Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1898).

which invites a deeper analysis of the power dynamics related to sacrifice and the condition of women even in contemporary India. This prompts us to consider that, among the various dimensions of self-sacrifice discussed in this section, the gender aspect would deserve further investigation in the future.

4. The final part of this book, relating in particular to the essays in the second and third sections, is dedicated to sacrifice as sacred violence and as self-sacrifice or martyrdom, in keeping with the proposals of many interpreters such as Margaret Cormack, Charles Selengut, Moshe Halbertal, and Philippe Buc (who are inspired by different and sometimes controversial perspectives).[74] But what are we to understand by sacred violence, beyond René Girard's interpretative proposal?[75] A possible key to interpretation is offered by Jan Assmann, who has reflected on the relationship between violence and monotheism. He observes that the account of the extermination of the Canaanites by the Jews and that of the exploits of the Maccabees played a central role in marking the distinction between the people of Mosaic revelation ('thou shalt have no God but me') and the idolatrous enemy to be subdued or annihilated. Moreover, in a short text Assmann classified five types of violence: brute violence (dictated by wrath, lust, and revenge); legal violence (the right to inflict death); state violence (war); sacrificial violence; and religious violence, which supplanted it. The last two forms are not easy to distinguish, but for Assmann religious violence is based on the opposition between true and false; it involves the extermination of enemies but also the martyrdom of the faithful (self-sacrifice); it includes what we now call religious terrorism and, in essence, its ideological origin goes back to the Hebrew Bible.[76] This schema helps one to orient oneself in the traditions of self-sacrifice and holy war that have innervated the history of Christianity, before being reinterpreted and secularized in the modern world.

Starting with martyrdom, it is perhaps needless to point out, once again, that the Christian notion of holiness, with its symbols, its hagiographic language, and a series of social and ritual practices that were refined over the course of the Middle Ages, is based on the testimony of faith through passive self-sacrifice. As for the early modern age and the centuries that followed, holiness was increasingly a distinctive feature of the Catholic faith. For the militant Church of the Counter-Reformation — which maintained the sacrament of the Eucharist as a repeating sacrifice — it was necessary to mobilize resources such as miracles, prophecy and thaumaturgy to strengthen the fight against all forms of 'heresy' and encourage a new global missionary season, adding new martyrs to those dating back to the first centuries of

74 Cormack, Margaret, ed., *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Selengut, Charles, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Halbertal, Moshe, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Buc, Philippe, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror: Christianity, Violence, and the West* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015).

75 Girard, René, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977 [1972]).

76 Assmann, Jan, *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt* (Vienna: Picus, 2007). More recently Assmann, Jan, *Total Religion: Ursprünge und Formen puritanischer Verschärfung* (Vienna: Picus, 2016).

Christianity. Thus, the Roman Church became the guarantor and beneficiary of a new era of self-sacrifice, exalting the martyrs of the wars of religion in France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Eastern Europe, and later those killed by revolutionary armies, socialists, anarchists, or atheists. Beyond canonized sainthood through increasingly rigid rules, the Catholic imagination was populated with saints and martyrs (male and female) who also served to encourage conversionist engagement with Jews, Muslims, pagans, Protestants and unbelievers.

Obviously, the concept of self-sacrifice as self-immolation of the true Christian was not an ideological vehicle restricted to the Catholic Church: the only one in the West to preserve the cult of saints. Zwingli considered death in battle as a duty when it was a matter of defending a republic and its religious choices. For Calvin martyrdom was an expression of individual vocation (*Beruf*): failing to go through with it (for doctrinal reasons or reasons of expediency) manifested *ipso facto* the predestination to be damned for not having proclaimed and embraced the message of the Reformation up to death. Furthermore, martyrdom as a testimony of faith played a crucial role in the conflicts of religion, when the Reformed espoused the role of 'warriors of God' for the construction of a new Jerusalem on earth, in competition with the Catholic mystique of the Christian soldier. The (active) self-sacrifice was also essential for the construction of the Protestant identity through memory and historiographical writing, which made the martyr-dissidents oppressed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy over the centuries the witnessing heroes of the new Churches, substituting them for the saints of the Roman calendar. As for the Radical Reformation, for the Anabaptists and apologists of tolerance, martyrdom represented the visible attestation of the true *Ecclesia Dei*: that of the persecuted.[77] Not to mention that in the early modern age, for Reformed communities, radical groups, and Catholics (where these were in the minority, as in England), the sacrificial imagery of martyrdom became intertwined with reflection on the right to rebel against authority in the name of God.

Without insisting upon a fixed representation, in this book we have tried to explore and compare the Christian notion of martyrdom (Urciuoli, Denaro, Ghidini, Fabre), and have illustrated some examples of the use and representation of self-sacrifice in the European and global context (Motta, Hsia). But we have also tried to explore the connections between self-sacrifice and immolation in the battleground, going back as far as the medieval idea of crusade,[78] and then insisting on the persistence of such an interpretative paradigm, which moralized and sacralized the violence of war or that of religious and political militancy. As Daniele Menozzi has shown in a book with an extensive bibliography, the idea of crusade was to survive the revolutionary crisis of the late eighteenth century and was to continue to be manipulated — not only by Catholics — even in the nineteenth, twentieth and

77 Gregory, Brad S., *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

78 For a bibliography, see the essay by Irene Bueno in this volume.

twenty-first centuries, in an often reactionary key.[79] As for the early modern era, not counting the military confrontation between the Christians and the Ottomans, the God of armies was invoked in chaplains' catechisms, in battlefield ceremonies, and in the prayers of the opposing Catholic and Protestant armies, at least until the Thirty Years' War and the English Revolution.[80] Scripture was used as a reservoir for models of extreme sacrifice and self-immolation that served to justify the violence of religious wars and to mobilize one Christian group against another. For instance, the resistance of the Maccabees against the oppressors of the Jews, or the figure of Samson, whom John Milton in the seventeenth century transfigured as a martyr: the consecrated warrior who, invoking God, had made himself an offer and had died himself (not committing suicide) while annihilating the altar and the Philistine idolaters.[81]

As the acute interpreter Ernst Kantorowicz has observed, the motto 'dying for the fatherland' not only took up classical models, but had strong Christian roots that would resurface especially during and after the Great War of 1914–18.[82] As we know from numerous studies, it was this carnage that justified the upsurge in nationalistic rhetoric of sacrifice for the fatherland, the construction of a public cult of the 'martyrs' who died in battle and the mobilization of religion alongside the armies.[83] Moreover, while not espousing here the controversial theories of secularization,[84] it is difficult to

79 Menozzi, Daniele, *Crociata: Storia di un'ideologia dalla Rivoluzione francese a Bergoglio* (Rome: Carocci, 2020). See also *Violenza sacra. 2. Guerra santa, sacrificio e martirio in età contemporanea*, ed. by Maria Paiano (Rome: Viella, 2022).

80 Lavenia, Vincenzo, *Dio in uniforme: Cappellani, catechesi cattolica e soldati in età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017).

81 Campos, Lea, 'The Maccabees in Dutch Political Thought', in *Religious Obedience and Political Resistance in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Luisa Simonutti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 285–31; Lavenia, Vincenzo, 'Holy Scripture, Theology and Violence: Terror and Samson in the Early Modern Era', in *Christianity and Violence in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: Perspectives from Europe and Japan*, ed. by Fernanda Alfieri and Takashi Jinno (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 35–53; Lavenia, Vincenzo, 'Figure di Sansone: momenti del dibattito cinque-seicentesco sulla violenza sacra', in *Violenza sacra. 1. Forme e manifestazioni nella prima età moderna*, ed. by Lucia Felici (Rome: Viella, 2022), pp. 227–49; Lavenia, Vincenzo, 'Gentili e i Maccabei: Come leggere le guerre bibliche fra teologia e diritto', in *Alberico Gentili ieri e oggi: Teologia, religioni e diritto internazionale*, ed. by Luigi Lacchè and Vincenzo Lavenia (Macerata: Eum, 2024), pp. 33–57 (with bibliography).

82 Kantorowicz, Ernst H., '*Pro patria mori* in Medieval Political Thought', *The American Historical Review*, 56 (1951), 472–92; Housley, Norman, '*Pro Deo et patria mori*: Sanctified Patriotism in Europe, 1400–1600', in *War and Competition between States*, ed. by Philippe Contamine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 221–48.

83 For example, works such as Henri Massis's *Le sacrifice* or Georges Duhamel's *Vie des martyrs* (1917). See Becker, Annette, *La guerre: De la mort à la mémoire, 1914-années 1930* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2015), pp. 40–41. Cf. Frantzen, Allen J., *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Boniface, Xavier, *Histoire religieuse de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), pp. 248–51; Merker, Nicolao, *La guerra di Dio: Religione e nazionalismo nella Grande Guerra* (Rome: Carocci, 2015). But the bibliography is endless.

84 For Charles Taylor, in a secular and 'immanent' context, martyrdom becomes more philanthropic and humanitarian than it has been in a Christian context, since it is accomplished without the promise of an afterlife reward. But in his opinion in this case it would be better to speak of heroes rather than martyrs. Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 702 (on sacrifice and violence see also p. 656 ff.).

deny that the cult of the nation — which began to emerge after the era of religious wars, and even more so after the French Revolution — somehow appropriated the notions of sacrifice and self-sacrifice, up to the terrible outcomes that Michel Foucault would define as the extreme moment of biopolitics in the twentieth century. But already in a *Discours sur le patriotisme* (1788), written on the occasion of a debate promoted by a literary academy in Châlons-sur-Marne, we read that the love of country consists in the willingness to sacrifice individual passions and one's own life in the name of the happiness of the political community one belongs to.[85] A century later, in *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation* (1882), Ernest Renan was to proclaim that the nation is 'a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future'. In his eyes, the nation is a living body, a community of purpose ('a daily plebiscite') that draws its lifeblood from the sentimental memory of the sacrifices made in the past and the anticipation of those that will happen in the future.[86] In the twentieth century, states, fascist regimes, and movements of the right and left were to invoke self-sacrifice to mobilize citizens or militants, even at the cost of their lives, not to mention, recently, the use of the rhetoric of martyrdom to consolidate terrorist groups of religious or, once again, political matrix. This is a vast field of research; but in this volume we have limited ourselves to including three studies devoted to different and significant moments in which the relationship between sacred violence and the rhetoric of self-immolation emerged powerfully.

In keeping with recent historiography that has focused on the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance age, Irene Bueno addresses the issue of the persistence of the idea of crusade after the loss of Acre (1291). As she recalls in her essay, since Late Antiquity the Christian concept of holy war conveyed sacrificial notions underlying the ideas of sacred violence and death in war. The crusades of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries marked a decisive step in constructing the Christian discourse on violence. The annihilation of the enemy, the death of the crusader as a penitential tool, and the sacredness of his mission deployed the semantics of sacrifice and the connotation of crusading as an imitation of Christ in the very sites of the Passion, where his sacrifice with the shedding of blood on the Cross for the redemption of all had taken place. After Acre, the loss of the Holy Land by the Latin crusaders did not put an end to the idea of crusading, which continued to legitimize holy war even in the years of the Avignon papacy. To demonstrate this, Bueno analyses in particular three treatises dedicated to the recovery of the Holy Land (*de recuperatione*), written in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. In these writings, military plans for the reconquest were mixed with the evocation of a new crusade in which the *milites Christiani* of the West would once again have to manifest their vocation for sacrifice.

---

85 Quoted in Bell, David A., *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism 1680–1800* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 155–56. Moreover, the whole volume is fundamental, even for the French Revolution, on which cf. Zizek, Joseph, 'Revolutionary Gifts: Sacrifice and the Challenge of Community during the French Revolution', *The Journal of Modern History*, 88/2 (2016), 306–41.

86 Renan, Ernest, 'What Is a Nation?', in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 2–55 at p. 53.

Fidentius of Padua's *Liber de recuparatione Terrae sanctae*, Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis*, and the anonymous *Directorium ad passagium faciendum* refer to earlier production on the crusades (William of Tyre, Jacques of Vitry, Vincent of Beauvais, and Burchard of Mount Sion) and insist on the liturgical image of Jerusalem as the place of Christ's sacrifice. According to these authors, the *crucesignati* ought to display the same self-sacrifice as the Maccabees and wage a war of God (*bellum Dei*) to liberate the land consecrated by the blood of Christ, fighting not only the Muslims, but also the schismatic Eastern Christians: the holy war would have purged their errors as well. As Bueno points out, these elements and the rhetoric of sacrifice and sacred violence 'do not play a merely rhetorical role; rather, they provide the necessary conceptual scaffolding to grant validity to the projects being proposed, beyond their own political agenda, economic benefits, and individual ambitions'.[87]

What difference is there between the sacrifice of a classical hero and that of a Christian martyr? The question emerged as early as the first centuries of the Christian era, when Tertullian (*Ad martyras*), Augustine (*The City of God*, books I and V) and other Church fathers posed the problem of interpreting the stories of the pantheon of heroes of pagan Rome: Publius Horatius Cocles, Lucius Junius Brutus, Titus Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, Marcus Atilius Regulus, or Caius Mucius Scaevola who had shown extreme courage in opposing King Porsenna and his threat to the freedom of Rome. While distinguishing between sacrifice for glory and sacrifice made in the name of God, the Church Fathers had nevertheless established a parallel between the hero and the Christian martyr, emphasizing the political and worldly virtues illustrated in the stories of ancient Rome. Olivier Christin summarizes this debate to address the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, when the heroes of Rome reappeared in a number of depictions with a political-religious significance that is deciphered in his essay. In particular, he focuses on Strasburg and the years immediately following the Diet of Speyer in 1529. The tolerance granted by Bucer had brought to the city the Anabaptists and radical groups who had escaped the atrocious persecutions of 1526. However, their religious radicalism worried the famous reformer, who, by signing the Tetrapolitan Confession a few years later found himself isolated even from Luther and the lords in Germany who opposed the decisions taken by Charles V at Speyer. In this context, marked by the fear of new persecutions and the danger of a war waged by the emperor against the Protestants, a flysheet attributed to Hans Weiditz developed an explicitly anti-Trinitarian motif, in accordance with the beliefs of a number of religious refugees that were flocking to Strasburg. The martyrs depicted on that sheet to the left of Christ were none other than the true Christians (the radicals) over whom hung the threat of the Magisterial Reformation and the Strasburg authorities. Those same authorities which, conversely, in the same period refused to invoke the rhetoric of martyrdom to legitimize their resistance to the emperor. As in the areas dominated by Luther's message (which could not entirely legitimize rebellion against political power), in Strasburg too the stories of the heroes of Rome, and in particular that of

87 In this volume, p. 411.

Scaevola — whose sacrifice was to enjoy enormous popularity right up to the French Revolution — inspired a cycle of works by Hans Baldung (1529–30), based on mythological themes. As Christin points out, Porsenna, 'the tyrant-king that threatens freedom and the fatherland, honour and the goods and families of the citizens [of Rome], is no other than the Emperor himself, who reneges on his commitment and breaks the laws of the Empire by going back on the recess of 1526.'[88] In short, while the radical groups had employed the rhetoric of martyrdom against the masters of the Reformation, Bucer and the authorities of the imperial cities, especially those without the political support of Lutheran overlords such as Philip of Hesse, preferred to resort to images of the heroes of ancient Rome to represent their rejection of imperial decisions without recourse to the Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice.

Lucia Ceci's essay also addresses the ambiguous status of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Her study is focused on the radicalization of the political struggle in Northern Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century, where nationalism and Catholic militancy overlapped in the practice of violence against the London government. How were the escalation of the conflict and the strategy of the IRA interpreted by the Italian Catholic Church, close to the Vatican hierarchy? And again, what interpretation was given to the riots of 1969, Bloody Sunday in 1972, and the hunger strike promoted by Bobby Sands, which ended with him and some young members of the Ulster independence movement tragically dying in prison, interpreted? Was the battle of the Catholics of Northern Ireland religious or merely political? Could the use of violence and terrorism by the Catholic minority be legitimized? How could cordial relations between the Vatican and London be maintained without disavowing the just reasons that drove Ulster Catholics to denounce British and Protestant rule? Above all, could one speak of martyrdom for the victims of repression and those who died in British prisons without legitimizing a form of suicide? The fear of Marxism, the rejection of violence, and the internal divisions within the Church after the Second Vatican Council in the context of the worldwide struggles for civil rights and decolonization are the framework within which Ceci provides an acute analysis of the articles that appeared in the Italian press between the pontificate of Paul VI and that of John Paul II. As her essay highlights, 'the refusal to investigate the tangible links between religion, nationalism, and the use of violence seemed motivated by Catholicism's self-absolving determination to protect religion from any charges of responsibility for supporting the rhetoric and practice of violence.'[89] While a part of the Italian Church sympathized with the hunger strike, on the whole Catholic analysts avoided completely supporting the mystique of self-sacrifice that animated part of the Irish Republican Army's struggle, without however probing the deep links that existed between nationalism and sacred violence even in that delicate political context and elsewhere.

This collection of articles revolves around the generative power of the concept of sacrifice, in the variety of practices that it encompasses, in its plural nuances, multiple

88 In this volume, p. 431.
89 In this volume, p. 447.

meanings, and in connection with notions of violence and martyrdom, which are seldom intertwined. It looks comparatively at different religious traditions, crossing different periods and historical contexts.

Moreover, in its outcome, this collection aims to provide a global understanding of how these notions crossed the religious crisis of Latin Christendom, applied to its global outreach, and reached the twentieth century, with the rise of 'secular societies'.

Whilst the first theories that were elaborated against that backdrop, resonate with some of the themes presented in this collection, what is mostly interesting is the dynamism of the conceptual cluster that emerges from the variety of studies, whose meaning and cognitive function has changed in different periods and across cultures, and yet provide useful tools for the interpretation of complex encounters among cultures.

This book was designed to conclude a national research project directed by Vincenzo Lavenia that involved the Italian universities of Bologna, Florence, Macerata and Naples-L'Orientale (PRIN-20179JL8WR, *Sacrifice in the Early Modern World: Comparisons, Interpretations, Legitimations*). It included historians of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, historians of Asian cultures, historians of the Middle Ages, of the early modern age and of the modern world. A team of young researchers recruited for the purpose has set up a website (https://sacrifiles.unibo.it) that makes available to the scholarly community an extensive bibliography on the subject of sacrifice and numerous sources and images divided according to useful categories to facilitate research. The group would especially like to thank our colleague Chiara Petrolini for having completed the set-up and for having tirelessly contributed to the final conference, which served to prepare this volume and which took place in the Department of History and Cultures of the University of Bologna on 14 and 15 December 2023. We would also like to thank Marisa Linton — who presented a paper but was unable to contribute to this volume, — those who agreed to discuss the research of our group, and guests at the Bologna conference: Fernanda Alfieri, Guido Bartolucci, Emanuele Colombo, Fabio Dei and Roberto Tottoli. We are also grateful to the institutions that kindly provided the images reproduced in this volume, and to Manuela Sanna and Luisa Simonutti for their generosity in including this work in such a prestigious series. Our thanks extend to Aelmuire Helen Cleary for her meticulous editing of the Introduction, as well as Chapters 13 and 18. Lastly, the editors wish to express their heartfelt gratitude to Jirki Thibaut and Eva Schalbroeck for their patience and invaluable assistance.