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Undoing and Unsaying Islamophobia: Toward a Restorative and Praxis-Oriented Catholic Theology with Islam

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This article explores how Christian theology has historically contributed to the modern ideology of Islamophobia. After arguing that contemporary popular and political Islamophobia has its sources in replacement theology, theological supersessionism, anti-Judaism, antisemitism, Christian-Islamic polemics, Orientalism, and modern racism, it seeks to reorient Catholic theology by undoing and unsaying this discursive and political harm. Constructively, the relatively novel genealogy of Islamophobia this article tentatively traces is based on three discursive moves: linking (1) replacement theology/supersessionism with medieval anti-Islamic theology, (2) the latter to Orientalism, and (3) the previous two to Islamophobia. These three discursive moves are possible because they were and remain sustained by supremacist theologies begotten by replacement theology/supersessionism. The article draws from theories of ideology and social imaginaries to recognize that the words, symbols, narratives, and metaphors that constituted a Christian theology of Islam since the seventh-century emergence of the Islamic tradition cannot be subverted merely by forgetting or ignoring them; they cannot be unlearned merely by learning "positive views" of the Islamic religious traditions (from Muslims, scholars, or both); they cannot be undone through a religion-blind, apolitical theology of religions that rejects nothing that is true and holy in religions; finally, they cannot be dismantled even by a Catholic theology of Islam that cherishes specific beliefs and practices in common with Muslims. It concludes by beginning to construct a Catholic theology of interreligious praxis intended to dismantle and disrupt Islamophobia today. This praxis-oriented theology is grounded in a Christian conception of restorative justice and the Catholic sacrament of reconciliation. At the core of this proposal is the assertion that theologies of the past remain the politics of the present. If Catholic theology has shaped the sociopolitical ideology and structure of Islamophobia today, then an anti-Islamophobic Catholic theology must be political; otherwise, it will remain ineffective in undoing the political harm it has produced.

Keywords: Islamophobia, racialization of religion, theology of religions, Islam, restorative justice, reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, interreligious studies, Catholic-Muslim relations, interreligious praxis

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Introduction

The Catholic Church and its various representatives have historically had a rich and complex relationship with societies of Muslims and the Islamic traditions. Intellectual, irenic, or anodyne interactions notwithstanding, the genealogy of the contemporary and political ideology of Islamophobia is composed of Christian theological positions, such as supersessionism, fulfillment or replacement theology, and their consequents, anti-Judaism and antisemitism; it is also constituted by the history of apologetic and polemical interactions among these religious adherents, including medieval literary and theological depictions of the Prophet Muhammad and violent encounters between Christians and Muslims. Together, these genealogical components elide with the modern discursive and power constructs of Orientalism and Western and white supremacy. Although none of these theologies, histories, and discursive traditions is the explicit and sole *cause* of the *contemporary* ideology of Islamophobia, a tool of Western supremacy, they inform the present-day political and theological imaginary that sustains it. Scholarly consensus has established that one of the principal sources of contemporary antisemitism is historic Christian anti-Judaism; this article begins the process of relating contemporary Islamophobia not merely to medieval Christian anti-Islamic theology, but to the supremacist theology begotten by replacement theology and supersessionism.

This article explores how Christian theology has historically contributed to the modern ideology of Islamophobia. It briefly traces the Christian genealogy of contemporary, popular Islamophobia, and then seeks to reorient Catholic theology interreligiously by undoing this discursive and political harm. Constructively, the relatively novel genealogy of Islamophobia this article tentatively traces is based on three discursive moves. First, even though replacement theology, or supersessionism, is specific to Christianity's relationship with the Jewish tradition, a case is made for understanding medieval anti-Islamic theology as a permutation of replacement theology/supersessionism qua supremacist theology; that is, the emergence of anti-Islamic theology was enabled by the discursive presence of theological supersessionism in Christianity's genealogy, as it were. Second, a case is made for connecting medieval anti-Islamic theology to Orientalism, racism, and the Western, Christian supremacy they sustained. Third, Islamophobia is understood as a particularly harmful ideology that is a species of Western, Christian, and even white supremacy, but which is now used to curtail the freedoms of Muslims not just in the United States and Europe, but also in China, Myanmar, India, and beyond; in other words, the aftereffects of Western,

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Christian Islamophobia forcefully reverberate beyond the European and North American contexts.[1] All three discursive moves were and remain sustained by supremacist theologies begotten by replacement theology/supersessionism.

The article challenges Catholic theologians of Islam, members of the Catholic hierarchy, and educators at the university, secondary, and parish level, particularly in North America and Europe, to adopt an actively anti-Islamophobic theology that should inform interreligious practice with communities of Muslims; just as it is not enough "not to be racist" to abolish racism (rather one must be actively antiracist), similarly it is not enough "not to express anti-Muslim bigotry" to abolish Islamophobia. This article provides background for why this is the case and provides a framework for how to proceed. It draws from theories of ideology and social imaginaries to recognize that the words, symbols, narratives, and metaphors that constituted a Christian theology of Islam since the seventh-century emergence of the Islamic tradition, and which had embodied and political impact on Muslims, cannot so easily be subverted without a critical anti-Islamophobic, praxis-oriented theology. Sociologists and critical race theorists argue that the ideology of colorblindness (the alleged position of "not seeing race") risks ignoring discrimination and oppression of communities of color, thereby perpetuating structural and systemic racism.[2] This ideology prevents the examination of conscience required to uncover what the USCCB has called the "subconscious" and "unconscious" racism that infects our minds; it consequently precludes the reconciliation and work for racial justice demanded by the 2018 pastoral letter against racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts."[3] Similarly, I argue that Islamophobia in the interreligious, private, and political sphere cannot be undone by "religion-blindness," which I suggest is the religion-blind, Catholic theological stance of inclusivity, universalism, or inclusive pluralism; religion-blindness likewise precludes and

[1] See Faisal Devji, "From Xinjiang to Germany: How Did Islamophobia Become a Global Phenomenon?" *The Guardian*, March 27, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/27/xinjiang-germany-islamophobia-global-phenomenon.

[2] See, for example, Stephanie M. Wildman, *Privilege Revealed: How Invisible Preference Undermines America* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Charles A. Gallagher, "Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post Race America," *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 4 (2003): 22–37; and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

[3] USCCB Pastoral Letter Against Racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts," 2018, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf.

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prevents actively working against anti-Muslim policies in the public sphere, as well as unconscious or subconscious Islamophobia in one's actions and thoughts. Additionally, cherishing specific beliefs and religious practices in common with Muslims, as *Nostra Aetate* §3 does, is not sufficient in undoing Islamophobia today.

Nostra Aetate §3 urges "Christians and Moslems [*sic*] … to forget the past,"[4] but Islamophobia cannot be subverted merely by forgetting or ignoring its genealogy. It cannot be unlearned merely by learning "positive views" of the Islamic religious traditions (from Muslims, scholars, or both). Additionally, it cannot be undone through a religion-blind, apolitical theology of religions that rejects "nothing that is true and holy."[5] Finally, even when Catholic magisterial documents attend to specific Islamic beliefs held in common with the Catholic tradition, such as in *Nostra Aetate* §3 and *Lumen Gentium* §16, this merely reproduces a universalist and hierarchical theology that occludes its hegemonic and supremacist structure in which "the other's voice is permitted entry only as the voice of sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself."[6] Consequently, these documents do nothing to undo and unsay the harm already done. Similar to antiracism, interreligious

[4] Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*), October 28, 1965, §3, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. *Nostra Aetate* §3 severely underplays the Western, Christian position of power over societies of Muslims since the era of European colonization and the Euromerican slave trade, which included Muslims, by merely stating that "not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems." This is an example of the church absolving itself from its past sins without sincerely working for reconciliation and restoration, a theological tactic this article directly challenges as insufficient.

[5] Pope Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*) §2.

[6] Ulrich Beck, "The Truth of Others: A Cosmopolitan Approach," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 433. In this article Beck uses Bartolomé de Las Casas as an example of Christian universalism. Although Las Casas advocated on behalf of the rights of Amerindians and sought to end the Spanish colonial *encomienda* system brutally oppressing them, he does so by demonstrating that they were remarkably similar to the Spanish Christians: "They were friendly and modest, respected interpersonal norms, family values, and their own traditions, and were thus better prepared than many other nations on earth to embrace God's word" (ibid.). Beck suggests that Las Casas rejected hierarchical differentiation, and this may be true. However, this sort of universalism becomes ripe for the emergence of hierarchy. "Universalism, then, sponsors more than one way of handling the otherness of others. For Las Casas, a Christian universalist, it is not otherness but sameness that defines the relationship between the other and ourselves. In any form of universalism, all forms of human life are located within a single order of civilization, with the result that cultural differences are either transcended or excluded. In this sense, the project is hegemonic: the other's voice is

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Catholic theology with Islam must be explicitly anti-Islamophobic. To that end, the article begins to construct a Catholic theology of interreligious praxis intended to dismantle and disrupt Islamophobia today. This praxis-oriented theology is grounded in a Christian conception of restorative justice through the lens of the sacrament of reconciliation: contrition and confession, along with an unfinished absolution and ongoing conversion that is valid only in the context of restorative and praxis-oriented repentance. It invites a redemption and reconciliation of Catholic communities and Catholic theology that restores a right relationship (justice) with Muslim communities and Islamic traditions. If Catholic *theology* has shaped the *sociopolitical ideology* and *structure* of Islamophobia today, then an anti-Islamophobic Catholic theology must be political and explicitly confess and repent of the discursive harm this supremacist theology has caused in our present context; otherwise, it will remain ineffective in undoing the sociopolitical harm it has produced. In brief, this article calls for a retroductive warrant to be applied to Catholic theology of and with Islam similar to how it has been applied to post-Shoah Christian theology of and with the Jewish traditions.[7] "Recognizing their culpability in the outcome of these patterns of thought [that placed blame on the Jews for the death of Christ], post-Holocaust Christian theologians have assumed responsibility for theological claims that might have as their outcome anti-Semitism and the violent trajectory of genocide that was witnessed."[8] A similar anti-Islamophobic reimagining of Catholic theology is only beginning to unfold, and this article seeks to make more progress on this front.

Interreligious Studies and Theology

This article is written from a Catholic theological perspective that takes critically and seriously the insights from interreligious and intercultural

permitted entry only as the voice of sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself" (ibid.).

[7] Drawing from Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Jeannine Hill Fletcher writes that "the function of a retroductive warrant is to anticipate the material outcomes of our theological thinking. In constructing a contemporary Christian theology, Christians must ask what are the possible outcomes of particular ways of thinking and must be guided practically by the negative outcomes (as well as the positive) that might be anticipated." See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 44. See also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 58–59; and also Terrence Bateman, *Reconstructing Theology: The Contribution of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).

[8] Hill Fletcher, *Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America*, 44.

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engagement with communities of Muslims and the Islamic traditions. It stands at the intersection of interreligious studies and Catholic theology. Kate McCarthy defines interreligious studies as examining the interactions of religiously different people and groups "in historical and contemporary contexts, and in relation to other social systems and forces … [serving] the public good by bringing its analysis to bear on practical approaches to issues in religiously diverse societies."[9] This article performs this historical and contemporary analysis. It then takes a constructive and interreligious theological turn that relates theology to praxis in search of sociopolitical change. McCarthy's interreligious studies tracks with Catholic public theology. In *Analogical Imagination*, David Tracy suggests that Catholic public theology should engage society, the church, and the academy.[10] Similarly, the scholarly projects and products of interreligious studies often contain prescriptive and normative proposals that relate theory to praxis, that is, there is an interest in social change and the scholar-practitioner is accountable to a religious or secular community broader than the academy.[11] The subject, method, and purview of this article thus stands at the intersection of interreligious studies and Catholic theology; it begins with a second-order analysis of Catholic theologies of Islam and ends with a first-order Catholic theological proposal for interreligious reconciliation among Catholics and Muslims.

After giving a working definition of contemporary Islamophobia, I will proceed in five parts, followed by concluding sections on the sacrament of penance and restorative justice. I develop Islamophobia's theological and ideological sources as a series of three discursive moves. First, I explore early Christian supersessionism and replacement theology as a form of anti-Judaism that would eventually give rise to antisemitism; I begin here because I argue that supersessionist theology begot later Christian and Western supremacy, a mode of which is Islamophobia. Second, I explore medieval anti-Islamic theology as a permutation of replacement theology/supersessionism qua supremacist theology; I intend to tentatively link anti-Islamic theology and thus Islamophobia to theological supersessionism, akin to how white supremacy finds its source in Christian supremacy and

[9] Kate McCarthy, "(Inter)Religious Studies: Making a Home in the Secular Academy," in *Interreligious-Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*, ed. Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), 12.

[10] See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

[11] This is how the field of interreligious studies has often been defined. See, for example, Paul Hedges, "Interreligious Studies," in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*, ed. Anne Runehov and Luis Oviedo (New York: SpringerReference, 2013), as well as Patel et al., eds., *Interreligious-Interfaith Studies*, xii.

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supersessionism. Third, I elaborate on Orientalism and racism/white supremacy as the natural offshoots of the medieval anti-Islamic, supremacist theology (and of course anti-Judaism and antisemitism); in this case, the theology produced explicitly political—imperial and colonial—consequences. Fourth, I proffer a section on social imaginaries and ideologies to argue that contemporary Islamophobia remains inf(l)ected by the theological ideas, symbols, images, vocabulary, logics, and conceptual maps detailed in the previous sections. They will not be undone and unsaid unless a Catholic theology of Islam explicitly does so. Fifth, this section is then followed by a brief section demonstrating how, despite its best efforts, Catholic magisterial teaching from Vatican II to Pope Francis remains lacking in this regard; as an example, not a single document has ever mentioned the name Muhammad or referred to the Qur'an, while the anti-Islamic Christian theology (from theological treatises, to preaching manuals and official church documents), which fueled later Orientalism and racism, repeatedly refers to Muhammad and the Qur'an in negative if not outright malicious ways. Although Catholic theologians of Islam have contributed partially to this undoing and unsaying, there remains much room for progress. The concluding sections suggest a path forward through the lens of the sacrament of reconciliation and restorative justice.

What Is Islamophobia?

In contemporary political and theological discourse, the definition of present-day Islamophobia is arguably as contested as the definition of the word "racism" in popular political discourse. Does it require conscious and overt fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims? Or, can it critically explain acts of unconscious or covert fear or hatred? Must the identity of "Islamic" be the sole motivator in any individual act or structural system that harms Muslims for it to be called "Islamophobic"? Or, can it be one among an intersection of identities (say, race, class, immigration status, and country of origin)? Can policies and laws be Islamophobic without the explicit mention of "Islam"? Or, are they Islamophobic merely when they disproportionately impact communities of Muslims? Are representations of Islam and societies of Muslims Islamophobic only when they disinform? Or, are representations ipso facto Islamophobic whenever they are reductive and monolithic, even if they reflect aspects of "the Islamic"?

Perhaps all of these questions can be condensed: for a person, action, discourse, system, or theology to be Islamophobic, must there be an explicit assertion of hate or fear of Islam or Muslims? This article presumes a negative

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response. No, explicit and conscious hatred or fear of Islam or Muslims is not needed for anything or anyone to be Islamophobic. Rather:

> "Islamophobia" accurately reflects a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures that is largely unexamined by, yet deeply ingrained in, Americans.... This phobia results for most from distant social experiences that mainstream American culture has perpetuated in popular memory, which are in turn buttressed by a similar understanding of current events.... This anxiety relies on a sense of otherness, despite many common sources of thought.[12]

Focusing on the American context, this article sources Islamophobia from the "unexamined ... yet deeply ingrained" social anxiety toward Islam and Muslims and within not only those "distant social experiences"—say, medieval Christian and Enlightenment Christian-Islamic engagement—but also the symbols, narratives, metaphors, and language in general that have produced and sustained this anxiety historically and contemporarily—say, Christian supremacist theology and modern Orientalism.

These genealogical sources produce the ideology of Islamophobia today, which is "similar in theory, function and purpose to racism ... [and which] sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting."[13] As an ideology or social imaginary, it operates covertly more often than overtly, by "shaping and determining understanding, perceptions and attitudes in the social consensus—*the shared languages and conceptual maps*—that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other."[14] Islamophobia need not be found only within explicit and direct relationships of power, but is often entailed in the more quotidian and indirect relationships of power. Most importantly, as Christopher Allen reminds us, for a person, community, or system to be Islamophobic, the acknowledged Muslim or Islamic element that is present may be "either explicit or implicit, overtly expressed or covertly hidden, or merely even nuanced *through meanings that are 'theological', 'social', cultural', 'racial'* and so on, that at times never even necessarily name or identify 'Muslims' or 'Islam.'"[15]

It is precisely the theologically, socially, culturally, and racially shared languages and conceptual maps that the proceeding sections explore as the genealogical sources of contemporary Islamophobia. Given the theological

[12] Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 5.

[13] Christopher Allen, *Islamophobia* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 190.

[14] Allen, *Islamophobia*, emphasis mine.

[15] Allen, *Islamophobia*, emphasis mine.

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purview of this article, I focus on the Christian "shared languages and conceptual maps" that have produced and perpetuated Islamophobia. The contemporary state and historical genealogy of Islamophobia parallels that of antisemitism; just as earlier Christian theological anti-Judaism influenced the later racist phenomenon of antisemitism, likewise, has earlier Christian anti-Islamic theology influenced the later racist phenomenon of Islamophobia. In this article, however, I seek to connect these parallel discourses and make a tentative case for sourcing Islamophobia further back in the general Christian supremacist vision that began with replacement theology and supersessionism.

Although our present-day public and social imaginaries are ostensibly secular, liberal, and democratic, they remain a descendant of Christian Enlightenment thinking, itself a product of anti-Islamic theology, replacement theology, and supersessionism as well as a source of racism and Islamophobia today.[16] To undo, unsay, and unlearn Islamophobia, we have to learn the words and actions that produced it in the first place and that continue to sustain it. This task is in response to Karen Teel's call for "white theologians and scholars of religion who are committed to truth and justice [to] critically engage white supremacy, including our own whiteness,"[17] but transposes and narrows the task to the species of white Christian supremacy that is Islamophobia. This transposition is necessary in the American context of racial and religious oppression. Khyati Joshi, in her recent book, *White Christian Privilege*, argues that whiteness and Christianity intersect to doubly marginalize and oppress *both* Black, Indigenous, and other people of color *and* non-Christian communities.[18] The racialization of religion is the "intersection of racial and religious bias, where the notion of Americanness (nationalism) sweeps together Whiteness, Christianity, and native-born status" so that "both non-White communities and 'foreign'

[16] Popular conceptions of the Enlightenment contend that liberal and democratic systems were made possible because of the creation of the private (religious) sphere as separate from the public (secular) sphere. However, critical studies in religion suggest that a particular Enlightenment version of Christianity was in fact normalized within the public sphere and rendered hegemonic over nonconforming ideas and identities, including religions and races. See Craig Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion, and the Private Sphere* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010), and Russell T. McCutcheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent, Or, How to Live in a Less than Perfect Nation* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2005).

[17] Karen Teel, "Whiteness in Catholic Theological Method," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 2 (June 2019): 427.

[18] See Khyati Joshi, *White Christian Privilege* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

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faith traditions are denigrated and seen as suspect and un-American."[19] This process demands that Catholic communities and theology critically engage Christian supremacy no less than white supremacy. Although Islamophobia is a worldwide phenomenon, I am particularly attending to the North American and European contexts (though the form Islamophobia takes in Europe in terms of policies and sociocultural norms is slightly different than the North American form). Nevertheless, it is Western Islamophobia that countries such as Myanmar, India, and China deploy to justify their oppressive tactics against communities of Muslims.

Early Christian Supersessionism and Replacement Theology: From Anti-Judaism to Antisemitism

> In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.
>
> —Hebrews 8:13 (NRSV)

The early Christian discourse on the status of the Jewish covenant bequeaths to later traditions three overlapping theological ideas: replacement theology, supersessionism, and antisemitism. I further aver that these theological ideas beget all forms of later supremacist theology, including Islamophobia. Catholic teaching on the Shoah rightfully makes a distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism; the former pertains to "theological polemics against Judaism developed by Christian teachers as early as the second century" and the latter "was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to euphemize racial hatred directed against the Jews."[20] However, it also asserts that "Christian anti-Judaism [laid] the groundwork for racial, genocidal antisemitism by stigmatizing not only Judaism but Jews themselves for opprobrium and contempt."[21] Scholars have gone further in demonstrating that the power dynamics constructed from the language, words, and symbols of these early ideas dominate Christian theologies of religion to this day. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Karen Teel, J. Kameron Carter, Gil

[19] "The *racialization of religion* is a process in which particular religions are associated with certain physical appearances and human differences come to be treated as absolute, fundamental, and heritable, like race." Joshi, *White Christian Privilege*, 46.

[20] Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah: Implementing the Holy See's We Remember* (2001), https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/Catholic-Teaching-on-the-Shoah-Implementing-the-Holy-See-s-We-Remember-2001.pdf, 9.

[21] Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholic Teaching on the Shoah*, 10.

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Anidjar, and Willie James Jennings are just some of the scholars who have recently connected the specifically anti-Judaic discourses of supersessionism and replacement theology with antisemitism (and its encompassing ideology, white supremacy), colonialism, and empire, all of which remain implicated in Western Christian imaginaries and political systems.[22] However, this interpretation of the gospel of Christ was neither necessary nor the last word; historically and presently, there have always been Christians offering alternative theologies, even if the dominant one was supersessionist and eventually white supremacist.[23]

Replacement theology is the early Christian teaching that the new covenant with Jesus Christ not only fulfilled, but entirely replaced the old covenant between Yahweh and the Jewish people. On the surface this appears anodyne, but in both theory and practice it placed the Christian tradition on a pedestal over the Jewish people. The role of the Jews within Christian theology was a soteriological foil to underscore Christian supremacy. Historically, the suffering of the Jews was a mark of God's wrath for rejecting the Messiah; concomitantly, in Christian discourse the Jews were said to have abandoned God (whence the severing of the Mosaic covenant); finally, the Jews and the Jewish tradition were abstracted from the living (particularly Rabbinical) traditions that remained and subsequently transformed into a totem intended to confirm Christ alone as universal savior.[24]

[22] See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*; Karen Teel, "White Supremacy and Christian Theology," in *Enfleshing Theology: Embodiment, Discipleship, and Politics in the Work of M. Shawn Copeland*, ed. Michele Saracino (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 199–214. Other works include Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), and James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). From outside the discipline of Christian or specifically Catholic theology, the work of Gil Anidjar is outstanding (and, from a Catholic perspective, damning and challenging). See Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[23] See, in particular, Jennings's *The Christian Imagination*, Carter's *Race*, and chapters 4, 5, and 6 of Hill Fletcher's *The Sin of White Supremacy*.

[24] See Randall C. Zachman, "Identity, Theology and the Jews: The Uses of Jewish Exile in the Creation of Christian Identity," in *Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Interreligious Hermeneutics: Ways of Seeing the Religious Other*, ed. Emma O'Donnell Polyakov, (Boston, MA: Brill 2018), chap. 3, 51–67.

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Antisemitism is the natural progeny of the replacement theology of anti-Judaism. "Perfidious Jews," to quote the pre-1959 Good Friday prayer in the Catholic liturgy, were no longer pertinent to the theological universe occupied by Christians except as an example of a people with veils over their hearts, in faithlessness, darkness, and blindness. No strenuous reasoning is necessary to see a direct connection among premodern anti-Judaism, contemporary antisemitism, and the positions of "Jews as Killers of Christ," variously proclaimed by the church fathers (Origen, Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom) and medieval theologians (Isidore of Seville, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Damian, Pope Innocent III, Thomas Aquinas), or the "Jews as a rejected and condemned people,"[25] variously exclaimed by Protestant reformers and Catholic counter-reformers. The Jewish communities of Europe were physically and mentally oppressed precisely because of these theologies, which shaped the social imaginaries and biases of Christians and made their way into legal discourses (canon and civil law).[26]

Even though it is another name for replacement theology, supersessionism is included last in this section because I am tentatively connecting it to a general supremacist theology of religions. Originally, supersessionism is the belief that the Christian message (the new covenant) *superseded* the Jewish message (the old covenant); nevertheless, I am suggesting that it has morphed into the oftentimes unuttered belief that the Christian religion (particularly of white Europeans) supersedes *all other religious/cultural traditions*, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Indigenous, and more (even Oriental Orthodox Christianities), whether they emerged before or after the Christian covenant. Christian supersessionism is a theological doctrine only different in degree to Christian supremacy, which itself then became a theo-political stance of Western (white) supremacy; in other words, supersessionism gave birth to a far more comprehensive supremacist theology. Following this genealogy, supersessionism is thus directly constitutive of the ideology of Islamophobia, conceived theologically, socially, or politically, even though few would explicitly articulate their negative position regarding Islam as supersessionist, much less antisemitic or supremacist.[27]

[25] This is how Martin Luther referred to the Jews in his *On the Jews and Their Lies*, published in 1543. See William R. Russell, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005). 497–503.

[26] See the entries for "Canon (Church) Law and Jews" and "Church and Jews" in Norman Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003); see also Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

[27] Those who criticize the strictures and alleged arbitrariness or unreasonableness of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*, which is the discipline that interprets the *sharīʿa*, or

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In the next two sections, I propose that covenantal supersessionism eventually transformed into a doctrinal and rational supremacy, as well as racial supremacy, all of which together cast Islam and Muslims as doctrinally heterodox, theologically irrational, and racially inferior. The tentative connection between medieval anti-Islamic theology and its elder, anti-Judaism, is forged by the totalizing logic of Christian supremacy that finds its source in supersessionism. Willie James Jennings argues that supersessionism is the replacement of Israel with Jesus Christ and the church; this supersessionism was persistently repeated historically in the many Christian (colonial and imperial) encounters with non-Christians, not just Jews.[28] Although the case of Islam is different from the case of so-called pagans (say, in the encounter of Native American peoples), the *theo-logic* of the "usurpation of the people of God, Israel replaced by the church,"[29] which thus places the church as God's chosen people, yields a supremacy that, I argue, shapes anti-Islamic theology: "Church has replaced Israel as the bearer of the vision of the one true God, and all those outside the church are pagan."[30] Replacement theology made it nearly impossible (there are exceptions) for Christians to encounter Muslims and Islam in a way that was not supersessionist or supremacist. In some cases, Islam was portrayed as a regression either to Jewish teachings or to heresies thought to have been destroyed; as such, Christianity

Islamic law) often unwittingly reproduce the same antisemitic arguments against Jewish law. A great example of this is a recently published (January 14, 2021) opinion piece by Zubair Simonson in "A Former Muslim Discovers the Goodness of Bacon," *National Catholic Register*, https://www.ncregister.com/blog/goodness-of-bacon.

[28] See, for example, Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 96–97.

[29] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 272.

[30] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 97. Jennings proposes this supersessionism as a sort of malformed supersessionism. He argues that the incarnation of Jesus Christ as Jewish flesh transforms the relationship between Jew and Gentile (and consequently all other "kinship networks"): "This transformation of the space from two to one implies the transformation of peoples from two to one. This does not happen simply in the removing of the boundary but in the reconfiguration of living space itself around a new center. If there is a moment at the heart of Christianity in which something is superseded it may be found precisely here. It is not the usurpation of the people of God, Israel replaced by the church, but of one form of Torah drawn inside another, one form of divine word drawn inside another form—that is, the word made flesh. If Torah was inseparably connected to the living of life in the promised land, then Torah's transformation into the living word of God in Jesus continues its central purpose" (273). For an excellent analysis of Jennings' argument, see Sameer Yadav, "Willie Jennings on the Supersessionist Pathology of Race: A Differential Diagnosis," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2021).

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supersedes Islam qua "backward" or regressive religion.[31] In other cases, Islam was conceptualized as a threat or inferior to Christianity in terms of theological doctrines and practices, and Muslims were represented as racially inferior; as such, Christian supremacy informs these discursive characterizations.

Medieval Anti-Islamic Theology: Christian Polemics in the Context of Islamic Expansion

> [Twelfth-century Latin] authors, like their predecessors, do not see Islam as an independent phenomenon, a distinct religion. Rather, they see the law of the Saracens as part of a panoply of diabolically inspired error that threatens the souls of Christians and the hierarchy of the church. Faced with this perceived threat … many twelfth-century authors responded with hateful slander, not refuting their adversaries but vilifying them, denigrating them so that their readers could not take them seriously.
>
> —John Tolan, *Saracens*[32]

The supremacist vision of Christian identity was challenged in the Middle Ages with the rise of Islam.[33] Dominant medieval Christian conceptions of linear time (from creation to the "end times"/apocalypse and the second coming of Christ), the belief in the temporal punishment for sins, and the unexpected rise of a military force worth reckoning with—this all meant that Christian thinkers needed to categorize Muslims into one of a collection of "enemies of Christ," who, let us recall, replaced Israel as the bearer of God's vision and truth. As Tolan has demonstrated, medieval Christian authors describing Islam employed Isidore of Seville's (d. 636 CE) typologies of religious others detailed in his *Etymologies*. Were they Jews, pagans, heretics, witting or unwitting followers of Satan, forces of the anti-Christ, or some combination thereof?[34] The medieval Christian worldview did not permit the

[31] For instance, in the mind of the well-known architect of Christian anti-Judaism, Isidore of Seville, by circa 600, both paganism and heresies "had been dealt their death blows," John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 16.

[32] Tolan, *Saracens*, 147.

[33] Although Christians felt challenged by Islam and argued against it before the medieval period and well outside the Latinate context (such as in eighth- and ninth-century Syria in the writings of John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurrah), this section remains focused on the later medieval and Latinate context. This article does not address the Eastern Christian context as it lies outside the genealogy of Islamophobia as an aspect or tool of Western, Christian supremacy; for this topic, see Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[34] See Tolan, *Saracens*, chap. 1, esp. 18ff.

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possibility that other religious traditions could be physically or spiritually salutary on their own merit.[35] Pre-Islamic Christian typologies of the religious other informed Christian conceptions of Muhammad, Muslims, and Islam, and those typologies were all largely based on either a supersessionist or supremacist vision. Furthermore, the medieval conflict between Christendom and Islamic caliphates and empires further solidified the elision of religion and race, part of the Christian imaginary of the Jewish people. Medieval Christian discourse on "Islam" and "Muslims," terms rarely used until the sixteenth century, were often ethnic, such as Arabs, Turks, Moors, and Saracens.[36] The racialization of religion is thus not merely a modern process. Indeed, although referring to Jews as both an ethnic people and a religion does not (entirely) contradict Jewish self-conception, it makes no sense in the Islamic context. The community of Muslims (the *umma*) was a multiethnic collection of people and not synonymous with people of a common ancestry or ethnicity (known as *shaʿb*, variously translated as people, folk, tribe, or race); being Muslim has no correlation with one's

[35] There are exceptions, such as Nicholas of Cusa's (d. 1464) *De Pace Fidei* ("On the Peace of Faith"), which came close to granting theological merit to other religious traditions, particularly the Islamic. Another exception is Ramon Llull's (d. circa 1315) *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis* ("Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men"), which exhibits ambiguity regarding the place of Islam within the Christian dispensation: "Llull's zeal for the conversion of all Muslims to Christianity, taken along with his frequent expression of admiration for Muslims and for the value of Islamic thinking, has aptly been called 'a curious mix of fanaticism and tolerance,'" Gregory Stone, "Ramon Llull and Islam," in *A Companion to Ramon Llull and Lullism*, ed. Amy M. Austin, Mark D. Johnston, and Alexander Ibarz (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 120, citing Tolan, *Saracens*, 258. See also Annemarie C. Mayer, "Llull and Inter-Faith Dialogue," in *A Companion to Ramon Llull and Lullism*, 146–75. Finally, William of Tripoli (d. circa 1273) composed two lesser known works, *De Notitia de Machometo* ("Information regarding Muhammad") and *De statu Sarracenorum* ("On the Realm of the Saracens"), both of which compare Islam with Christianity in an unusually positive way (see Thomas F. O'Meara, "The Theology and Times of William of Tripoli, OP: A Different View of Islam," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 [March 2008]: 80–98); O'Meara cites *De statu Sarracenorum* demonstrating as much ("The Saracens are neighbors [*vicini*] of the Christian faith and are near [*propinqui*] to them on the way of salvation" [98]). Discussing the nuances of these exceptions remains outside the purview of this article; suffice it to say that a tentative conclusion is that these minority opinions failed to gain traction in a Christian imaginary so dominated by supersessionist and supremacist theology and in a Christian world on the eve of becoming an imperial power.

[36] Muslims were also referred to biblically as Ishmaelites or Hagarenes (which still implied an ethnicity distinct from Jews and of course from the various peoples of present-day Europe), or in a way antithetical to Muslim self-conception, that is, as Muhammadans (which once again implied an Arabic provenance). See Tolan, *Saracens*, xv.

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ethnicity. In any case, the combination of (1) discourse on Christian conflict with Islam, (2) Muslims' categorization as enemies of the church/Christ (now bearer of God's vision and truth), and (3) their description in ethnic terms—these are all three additionally constitutive of the present-day ideology of Islamophobia. The previous section's caveat remains here: there were always exceptions to the rule, but the dominant anti-Islamic theology and literary depictions remained the primary ideology that shaped the Western conception of the Islamic "other." Indeed, just as the medieval Christian worldview did not permit the possibility that other religious traditions could be physically or spiritually salutary on their own merit, likewise today Western systems and worldviews do not permit the possibility that non-Western social, cultural, or economic systems and worldviews could be effective alternatives.

The popular literary depictions of Islamic misbelief and malpractices, attendant with polemical images of Muhammad's lack of moral rectitude, were part of a larger Christian theological position regarding Islam. The Christian gospel was final and universal, and so all other beliefs and practices were a threat to this Christian supremacy. Christian-adjacent traditions such as the Jewish and Islamic were, in a way, more of a menace given their proximity—geographically, biblically, and theologically.[37]

There is no dearth of scholarship regarding Western and Christian views and theologies of Islam. For the sake of the present argument, I refer to Thomas Aquinas, who while personally knowing very little about Islam, in

[37] The spread of Islam through the Arabic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, followed by the imminent threat of Ottoman forces against European Christian communities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, would suggest that the Islamic traditions were likewise shaped by a supremacist theology. However, Qur'anic, early, classical, and postclassical Islamic theologies of the religious other (be they People of the Book—*ahl al-kitāb*—or otherwise) are better categorized as subordinationist than supersessionist. The details and nuances of these differences are well outside the purview of this article; comparing Christian and Islamic theologies of the religious other in terms of supersessionism and subordinationism and how they shaped Christian imperialism/colonialism and Islamic expansion in different ways is a scholarly desideratum. It is only in modernity that groups of self-described Islamic forces seek supremacy over certain regions and their populations, such as the case with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the stateless network of al-Qaeda, and the self-ascribed proto-state of ISIS/ISIL/Daesh. But even in these cases, it is not global supremacy that is so much sought as regional autonomy (taken by force and with many atrocities, to be sure); this autonomy is, in their views, threatened by Western supremacy in the region. Of course, I am in no way excusing the violent actions of these forces, but only suggesting that it may not be sourced in Islamic supremacist theology, and that, even if supremacist theology exists in Islam, it never morphed into a secular worldview in the same way that Christian supremacy morphed into Western supremacy.

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his *Summa contra gentiles* relies on and summarizes the anti-Islamic theology of Peter the Venerable and others; this work is indicative of the majority if not official view of medieval scholastics and the church.[38] Aquinas employed the monotheistic, biblical, and Aristotelian imaginaries held in common with Jews and Muslims as a way to refute them, but not without inheriting previous discourse and providing language for future Islamophobia.

> [Muhammad] seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also … gave free rein to carnal pleasure … [and] he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration.… On the contrary, Muhammad said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believed in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Muhammad forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms.… [He] perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law. It was, therefore, a shrewd decision on his part to forbid his followers to read the Old and New Testaments, lest these books convict him of falsity. It is thus clear that those who place any faith in his words believe foolishly.[39]

Inordinately sensual, unusually violent, shrewdly spreading lies, and of backward, desert provenance, once again our imaginations need not be stretched at all to see the source of early modern and modern constructions of the Arab and the Muslim as religious fanatic, terrorist, regressive, and despiser of all things *righteous* and *rational* (read: all things *Christian* and *Western*). If

[38] In addition to Tolan's *Saracens*, see his *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), as well as R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964); and David R. Banks and Michael Frassetto, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perceptions of the Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[39] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, book I, chapter 6, article 4. This text was considered a missionary handbook until recent scholarship disproved that assumption; see Mark Jordan, "The Protreptic Structure of the 'Summa Contra Gentiles,'" *The Thomist* 50 (1986): 173–209.

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scholastic theologians asserted that Christian doctrine was based on "natural reason," then the assumption was that it could be explained to Jews and Muslims for the sake of their (logical) conversion to Christ; thus, when they did not convert, it must have been because *they* were *irrational*. Indeed, Muhammad, Muslim, and Islam as irrational or illogical replicates the Christian anti-Judaism that understood Jews as illogical and "hard of heart."[40]

Aquinas was inheriting from Christian depictions of Islam and Muhammad, and these included papal decrees regarding the Crusades. We can see how polemical images and language flowed from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom masses by following Innocent III's writings. In *Quia Maior*, one of three letters in 1213 calling for a new crusade and a general council, Innocent III writes:

> [After Saint Gregory I], a certain son of perdition, the pseudo-prophet Muhammad, arose, and he seduced many away from the truth with carnal enticements and pleasures. Even though his perfidy has lasted until the present, still we trust in the Lord who has now made a good sign that the end of the beast, whose number, according to John's Apocalypse [Apoc 13:18], counts 666, of which now almost six hundred years are completed, approaches.[41]

Innocent III here calls for a new crusade precisely because of his apocalyptic interpretation of contemporary events: the time of the beast (i.e., Muhammad, Islam, and Muslims) is nearing its end, and victory will be granted to Christ's warriors, thereby reestablishing Christian supremacy. The equation of the anti-Christ with Muslims is then preached as sermons among the masses. His *Pium et Sanctum* is circulated among preachers who are recruiting for the crusade.[42] "From the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century, networks of Paris-trained masters collaborated with members of [various religious] orders in the promotion of … several crusades. The increasing institutionalization and intensification of crusade recruiting

[40] Isidore of Seville's *Against the Jews* is infamous for this characterization. As Tolan summarizes, for Isidore, "Christians are rational, as befits men; Jews congregate like irrational sheep" (Tolan, *Saracens*, 15).

[41] Innocent III, *Quia Maior*, 1213, in *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291*, ed. Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 107–12, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh9x5.19.

[42] See Innocent III, *Pium Et Sanctum*, 1213, in Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell, eds., *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh9x5.20.

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meant that, for the first time, manuals specifically designed for the crusade preacher began to be produced, and crusading sermons were recorded by Paris masters and their monastic and mendicant coworkers."[43] A key feature of these sermons, and relevant to this article, is that participating in crusades was "viewed as an expression of religious devotion and penitence."[44] Here we see how anti-Islamic ideologies are circulated among all levels of society; it becomes a social and public imaginary, and one linked to penitence, and thus repentance from sins. To view the Muslim as a threat and to act on that threat in service to the Christian crusades functions as a penance for the absolution of your prior (and perhaps future) sins.

There is neither need nor space to list the many permutations of Christian polemical images of Islam in the medieval period. Christian views of Muhammad during the Middle Ages included idol, trickster, heresiarch, pseudo-prophet, Antichrist, and more; in all these polemical images, and especially during the rising threat of the Ottomans, in the minds of European Christians Muhammad and Islam were representatives of evil in a Manichean struggle for Christian victory.[45] Although medieval Western and Christian views of Muhammad, Muslims, and Islam were certainly not monolithic, the images that survived into the modern and even present period are the polemical ones.[46] As Tolan notes, "the ideological responses to Islam" forged between the eighth and thirteenth centuries were "reused, anthologized, translated, and published" into the Enlightenment and modern period.[47]

Although the concept of supersessionism is specific to Christianity's relationship to Judaism, when understood according to Willie James Jennings' account, mentioned above, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the anti-Islamic theology of the medieval period is an echo if not outright effect of supersessionist thinking that makes Christ and the church absolute and totalizing. There are ripples of this universal—if not hegemonic and supremacist—theology even in *Dominus Iesus*. Jacques Dupuis critically appraised this declaration as dangerously reverting to an ecclesiology in which the church

[43] Jessalyn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell, eds., *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 114, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh9x5.21.

[44] Bird, Peters, and Powell, *Crusade and Christendom*, 114.

[45] See Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*.

[46] In addition to the more recent scholarship by Tolan (*Saracens* and *Faces of Muhammad*), Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) and Southern's *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* offer an even broader scope of images.

[47] Tolan, *Saracens*, 275.

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is equivalent to the kingdom of God and to a Christology in which the person of Jesus Christ is equivalent to God's absolute and universal revelation.[48] It may not be appropriate to label anti-Islamic theology as supersessionist, but one may tentatively suggest that supersessionist theology is at least the necessary though not sufficient cause of anti-Islamic theology, precisely because supersessionist thinking begot Christian supremacy. The anti-Muslim discourses of the Middle Ages provided "key theoretical underpinnings for European Christian hegemony over those who are non-Christian," and it must be added, over those who were nonwhite. The ideology—the words, symbols, narratives, literary depictions, theologies—that rendered Islam a danger to Christianity, and perceived irrational and lascivious Muslims as a source of terror to Christians, pervaded the social and public imaginaries of Christians and Europeans into the present day in the forms of social, legal, and embodied restrictions and violence.

Among other scholars, Daniel Vitkus, in his "Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe," has established a bridge between medieval anti-Islamic theology and modern Orientalism: "Medieval accounts of Islam form an important foundation, comprising an entire tradition of polemical misrepresentation, for the attitudes taken later by early modern theologians, both Protestant and Catholic."[49] Protestants and Catholics alike had recourse to the images, narratives, symbols, typologies, and metaphors of medieval anti-Islamic theology to label the Turks their mortal enemy. Muhammad was identified as the Antichrist portended in the book of Revelation, prophesying the ultimate and universal victory of Christ over all peoples imagined to be opposed to him.[50] Indeed, the Christian imaginary of early modern Orientalism portrayed the Turks and thus all Muslims and Islam as "hell-bent" to convert the entire world to their religion—allegedly compelled by Islamic law.[51] Muslims became represented in popular literature, too: romances, chivalric legends, chansons de geste, chronicles, captivity narratives, epic poetry, and plays.[52] In all of these early modern representations, Muhammad and Muslims

[48] See Jacques Dupuis and William R. Burrows, *Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition: Two Essays by Jacques Dupuis on Dominus Iesus and the Roman Investigation of His Work* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), particularly 46ff regarding Christology and 56ff regarding ecclesiology.

[49] Daniel J. Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe," in Banks and Frassetto, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 208.

[50] Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 214.

[51] Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 214–15.

[52] Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 209, 215–16.

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were represented in ways nearly identical both with medieval anti-Islamic theology and with the modern Orientalist discourse to come: Muslims were reduced to their ethnic identities and rarely categorized as "religious," never as "Abrahamic" or part of the Jewish and Christian prophetic traditions; they were pagans, frauds, or renegades, and "Islam was narrowly defined and caricatured as a religion of violence and lust—aggressive jihad in this world, and sensual pleasure promised in the next world."[53] As if to foreshadow the "bad Muslim, good Muslim" trope of the twenty-first century that demands Muslims assimilate socially into European and American culture, early modern Orientalist narratives depicted "bad Muslims" as defeated (dead or captured) and "good Muslims" as converts to Christianity.[54]

The permutations of early modern Orientalist discourse need not be protracted. What is unique about this period between the medieval and the modern is that the Christian powers were in fact deeply threatened by Islamic wealth, power, and cultural superiority.[55] Europeans had real anxieties about the imminent threat of Muslim (Ottoman) forces; this is true.[56] However, two points may be drawn from this early modern period. The first is that these Western, Christian representations of Muhammad, Muslims, and Islam were maintained if not amplified in modern Orientalist discourse, racism, and contemporary Islamophobia. The second, suggested by Alan Mikhail's recent book, is that the threat of Islam and Muslims fueled the colonization of the Americas: "Islam was the mold that cast the history of European racial and ethnic thinking in the Americas, as well as

[53] Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 217.

[54] Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 216. For aspects of this twenty-first-century trope, see Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 766–75.

[55] "[The] creation of the distorted image of Islam was largely a response to the cultural superiority of the Muslims, especially those of al-Andalus," W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), 88.

[56] "While the Christians of Spain, Portugal, England, and other nations were establishing their first permanent colonies in the New World, they faced the threat at home of being colonized by the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the power relations that were in effect in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the opposite of those that operated later under Western colonial expansion and rule. Many of the images of Islam that were produced by European culture in the early modern period are imaginary resolutions of real anxieties about Islamic wealth and might. The Christian West's inferiority complex, which originated in the trauma of the early Caliphate's conquests, was renewed and reinforced by the emergence of a new Islamic power, the Ottoman Turks, who achieved in 1453 what the Ummayad armies had failed to accomplish in 669 and 674—the capture of Constantinople" (Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism," 210).

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the history of warfare in the Western Hemisphere."[57] There is thus a nearly unbroken link from medieval anti-Islamic theology to the contemporary discourses of Orientalism and racism, and thus Islamophobia. Although the early modern period is complicated by the political and military rise of the Ottoman empire, the supremacist vision of Christian theology remains the necessary (if not sufficient) cause of the West's totalizing venture of universal supremacy—and Islamophobia remains this venture's crucial tool.

Contemporary Discourses: From Orientalism to Racism

> The idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures [is a major component in European culture]. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness.... Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.
>
> —Edward Said, "Introduction" to *Orientalism*[58]

In the transition from late medieval anti-Islamic theology to early modern Orientalism and then to modern Orientalism and racism, it becomes

[57] Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 396: "Filtering their experiences in the Americas through the lens of their wars with Muslims, Europeans in the New World engaged in a new version of their very old Crusades, a new kind of Catholic jihad. Long after the many Matamoros—Moor-slayers—who sailed to the Americas aboard Columbus's ships were dead themselves, Islam would continue to forge the histories of both Europe and the New World and the relationship between the two" (386). Elsewhere, Mikhail concludes: "Indeed, the idea that Islam is a deep existential threat to the Americas is one of the oldest cultural tropes in the New World. Its history is as long as the history of European colonialism and disease. It must, therefore, be a part of any understanding of the history of the Americas. After 1492, European colonialism, as we have seen, folded the Americas into the long history of European-Islamic relations. Seeing American history in this way allows us to give a more holistic accounting of the American past. The history of the United States does not begin with Plymouth Rock and Thanksgiving. The first European foothold in what would become the continental United States was not Jamestown, but a Spanish Catholic outpost in Florida. The origins of the American people must obviously include the history of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, West Africans, and the Jewish and Catholic subjects of mainland European polities. This history must also include Muslims, both African slaves and Selim's Ottomans, for Islam was the mold that cast the history of European racial and ethnic thinking in the Americas, as well as the history of warfare in the Western Hemisphere" (396).

[58] Edward Said, "Orientalism," in *The Edward Said Reader*, eds. M. Bayoumi and A. Rubin (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 73.

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increasingly difficult to disentangle the political discourses producing "European superiority over Oriental backwardness," as Edward Said puts it, from theological Christian supremacy. However, this theopolitical entanglement is in fact the point being established. Indeed, toward the end of Norman Daniel's massive study of Western and Christian views of Islam, he concludes that the medieval canon of literature vis-à-vis Muhammad, Muslims, and Islam was an influence on the modern academic approach to the study of Islam and communities of Muslims: "We need to keep in mind how medieval Christendom argued, because it has always been and still is part of the make-up of every Western mind brought to bear upon the subject."[59] However, the twenty-first-century situation regarding Western views of Islam is now beyond the scope of Daniels's observation. The influence of medieval anti-Islamic theology is not restricted to academic scholarship, but part and parcel of the popular imagination, reproduced digitally from blogs to podcasts and from videos to social media posts and groups, and even given a public platform through influential political figures, all of which has been termed the "Islamophobia industry."[60]

Said gestured toward the connection between Western antisemitism and "the Islamic branch" of Orientalism, calling the latter a "strange, secret sharer" of the former.[61] He even argued that "the Arab *superseded* and became the Jew (or a previous incarnation of the Jew): '[t]he transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.'"[62] There has been some scholarly headway seeking to connect Christian theology to Orientalism and antisemitism to Islamophobia, but not so much through the lens of theological supersessionism and supremacy, which this article seeks to do in order to provide a framework for a specifically anti-Islamophobic theological praxis.[63] This section will reproduce in detail neither Said's critical study of Orientalism nor the tomes of scholarship

[59] Daniels, *Islam and the West*, 326.

[60] Nathan C. Lean, John L. Esposito, and Jack G. Shaheen, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

[61] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient-Reprinted with a New Afterword* (London: Penguin, 1995), 27–28.

[62] James Renton and Ben Gidley, "Introduction: The Shared Story of Europe's Ideas of the Muslim and the Jew—A Diachronic Framework," in *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?*, ed. Renton and Gidley, (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 9 (emphasis added), citing Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient-Reprinted with a New Afterword* (London: Penguin, 1995), 286.

[63] See, for example, Renton and Gidley, "Introduction," in *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe*. The sharpest critique of Christianity and its role in shaping the modern world along oppositional racial-religious lines is the work of Gil Anidjar (cited previously).

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thereon. Rather, it aims to underscore the entanglement and bridge between Christian supremacy and Islamophobia, a tool for European, Western supremacy, and it uses Orientalism and modern racism to build that connection. *Pace* Talal Asad, there *is* a *continuity* between medieval theology and modern secularism, and Islamophobia is one example of that continuity, albeit transformed, that exists between the two.[64]

To that end, the concept of Christian universalism is helpful. The theological idea that all humans—even all creation—are encompassed by the revelation and atoning death of Jesus Christ is a broad definition for Christian universalism. How this principle is politically manifested varies from the justice-oriented praxis of liberation theology to the colonialist and imperialist theology that had a firm hold of the institutional Catholic Church by the early modern period.[65] Indeed, Christian universalism is a superficially anodyne theology that, left unchecked by Christian self-emptiness, compassion, liberation, justice, and solidarity, as well as a genuine respect for radical religious, cultural, and racial difference, morphs into adversity against those who *refuse* to be encompassed by Christendom's universal scope or who *appear* in their cultural mores to be hierarchically inferior to the European Christians' conception of a "civilized" or "rational" people.

A brief example from outside the scope of Christian-Muslim encounters provides a comparison that illuminates the subtle hegemony and supremacy of Christian universalism. Bartolomé de Las Casas is an excellent example of a Christian universalist who, at first glance, appears benign. Although Las Casas advocated on behalf of the rights of Amerindians and sought to end the Spanish colonial *encomienda* system brutally oppressing them, he does so by demonstrating that they were remarkably *similar* to the Spanish

[64] Talal Asad makes the case for neither continuity nor simple break between the religious and the secular in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); esp. 24–25. Anidjar's most recent critique of "the rhetoric of novelty" or of discontinuity with respect to the relationship of Christianity to modernity, particularly to secular violence, suggests that this relationship can be thought of "in terms that are neither filial (*a direct descendent*) nor arcane (*Christianity in disguise*)" and that Christianity is "at once the history of its transformations and the endurance of its efforts to change the world benevolently and violently," Gil Anidjar, "II The Violence of Violence: Response to Talal Asad's 'Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism,'" in *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (January 1, 2015): 441–42.

[65] Typologically, justice-oriented, liberation theology tracks with Dorothee Sölle's radical theology and Justo Gonzalez's Type C theology, while the colonial, imperialist theology is a product of what Sölle terms orthodox/conservative theology and Gonzalez Type A theology. See Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1990), chap. 2, and Justo L. González, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989).

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Christians: "They were friendly and modest, respected interpersonal norms, family values, and their own traditions, and were thus better prepared than many other nations on earth to embrace God's word."[66] Las Casas may have *thought* he was rejecting hierarchical differentiation; however, his sort of universalism merely reproduces hierarchical differentiation more subtly:

> Universalism, then, sponsors more than one way of handling the otherness of others. For Las Casas, a Christian universalist, it is not otherness but sameness that defines the relationship between the other and ourselves. In any form of universalism, all forms of human life are located within a single order of civilization, with the result that cultural differences are either transcended or excluded. In this sense, the project is hegemonic: the other's voice is permitted entry only as the voice of sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself.[67]

Indeed, in this case, "universalism and hegemony are merely two aspects of the same phenomenon."[68] What occurs during the age of colonization and into the formative period of Orientalist discourse is that the Other is consistently *represented* as culturally (religiously, racially, and socially) inferior to European Christians, who remain at the top of the religio-cultural hierarchy. Even when the Other is respected, as is the case with Las Casas (and, as demonstrated later, with Muslims in Vatican II documents), it is only insofar as they are the *same* as Christians.[69]

On the eve of the Enlightenment, several European voyagers encountered land foreign to them, and other European kingdoms remained in conflict with Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East. The demand to encompass all land, men, and women in Christian salvation produced papal bulls that all but commanded subjugation of the non-Christian. As already mentioned, Alan

[66] Beck, "The Truth of Others," 433, citing Las Casas.

[67] Beck, "The Truth of Others," 433.

[68] Beck, "The Truth of Others," 435.

[69] Sometimes they are potentially the same as they outgrow their childhood and enter the "age of reason," more often than not with the violent discipline of their caretakers (colonizers). See Sophie Bessis, *Western Supremacy: Triumph of an Idea?* (New York: Zed Books, 2003), 17. Bessis is in general agreement with Beck in arguing that Las Casas effectively provides the first version of "the white man's burden." She quotes Las Casas: "When such savage peoples are found in the world, they are like uncultivated land, which readily produces weeds and brambles, but which has in it so much natural virtue that, if it is worked and taken care of, it yields edible, healthy and useful fruits" (ibid.). In this case, Las Casas offers a humanist vision, but one that still maintains the religio-cultural (and racial) hierarchy that keeps Christianity, Europe, and whiteness at the summit.

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Mikhail argues that it was the perceived Islamic threat to Christian supremacy that spurred on the colonization of the Americas. Christian supremacy was so entrenched in the theopolitical ideologies of European Christians—particularly the institutional church—that when it was threatened it would only redirect itself to other lands rather than trigger an identity crisis and perhaps be subverted. Pope Nicholas V's *Dum Diversas* (1452), in the context of Portuguese expansion in Iberia and into northern Africa, granted them "full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens [Muslims] and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, and other property … and to reduce their persons into perpetual servitude."[70] Later transatlantic voyages and colonization of the Americas were sanctioned—blessed—by other papal documents, from *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) to *Inter Caetera* (1493). As Newcomb has argued, these papal documents shaped US law and Supreme Court decisions that dispossessed Native Americans of their sacred land.[71]

In the meantime, the Enlightenment brought about the enthronement of reason as the absolute principle governing universal morals. The problem is that the reason enshrined was not at all moral, for it permitted the slave trade, colonization, empire, subjugation, and more. It was reason in collusion with European Christian hegemony and supremacy over non-Western and non-Christian (the two interchangeable perhaps in many minds) lands, peoples, religions, cultures, and literary and theological ideas. It was a rationality and logic that justified oppression for the sake of salvation. The medieval, polemical ideologies against Islam gave birth to Orientalism. The non-Western (the East, the non-Christian) was encountered in the context of an unequal power dynamic that placed Christians in control of the other: by 1914, Europeans and their descendants had conquered 84 percent of the earth. It may be that, in line with Christian supersessionism and supremacy, the penitential rite of spreading the Christian message via military conquest (inherited from the Crusades) disciplined Europeans to pursue glory on the battlefield—and they spared no expense for it was God's will to "civilize" (to save) the world.[72]

[70] Diana Hayes, "Reflections on Slavery," in *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teaching*, Readings in Moral Theology 13, ed. Charles E. Curran (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 67.

[71] See Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2008).

[72] "[King Louis XIV] and the other kings in Europe had been raised since childhood to pursue glory on the battlefield, yet they bore none of the costs involved—not even the risk of losing their thrones after a defeat. Leaders elsewhere faced radically different incentives, which kept many of them militarily weak. In China, for example, emperors

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Orientalism is an academic discipline that conjured the Orient (East) in the scholar's mind, but based on ideas, symbols, narratives, theologies, and discourses that were both inherited from the early and medieval Christian theological imagination and also concomitant with the age of European military conquest. It is a style of thought based on ontological and epistemological distinctions between "the Orient" and "the Occident." That is, the East and the West have *essences* that are opposed; consequently, *how we come to know them* is shaped by the following preconceived dualisms:

Western/Christian	**Non-Western/Non-Christian**
Rational	Irrational
Scientific	Superstitious
Modern	Primitive/Premodern
Advanced/Progressive	Traditional/Backward
Liberal	Conservative
Creates/Makes History	Preserves History
Secular	Religious
Moral	Immoral
Civilized	Uncivilized
Logical	Fanatical/Illogical
Peace-seeking	Violent

Orientalism may be innocently defined as the study of the geographical land, peoples, cultures, societies, and religions east of Europe. However, this study was ineluctably wedded to the European (and eventually the United States') geopolitical goal of dominating that very same land. It was rarely ever an unbiased affair, but one shaped by the preconceived aim of discursively producing the East, and in this specific case, "the Islamic" and "the Muslim," as worthy of, if not requiring, domination (salvation). For Orientalist discourse, the West *represented* the East, in a manner similar to how Christians *represented* Muslims in medieval anti-Islamic theology. Even though Orientalists were incomparably better trained linguistically to read and translate Islamic texts and converse with Muslims, they were still repre-

were encouraged to keep taxes low and to attend to people's livelihoods rather than to pursue the sort of military glory that obsessed European kings," Philip T. Hoffman, "How Europe Conquered the World: The Spoils of a Single-Minded Focus on War," *Foreign Affairs*, October 7, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2015-10-07/how-europe-conquered-world.

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sented, on the whole, as either a threat (from fanatic to terrorist) or culturally and religiously inferior (from legalist to irrational mystic).[73]

Shifting our gaze from premodern and modern Europe to the contemporary United States, it is unarguable that Islam and Muslims are encountered, studied, and represented to the public imagination in a way that is a near direct descendent of Orientalism and Christian conceptions of Islam. Since the 1970s, the "Islamic world," interchangeable with the lands and peoples of the Middle East and South Asia, is important *not* for its literary culture and theological ideas, but because of its geopolitical location and resources (reconquering the Iberian Peninsula or the Holy Land in Christ's name transforms into controlling access to oil to protect American supremacy). Western (white), Christian supremacy has morphed into American supremacy.[74] A lengthy monograph is required to demonstrate that the historical and theological discourses of early and medieval Christian supersessionism, anti-Judaism (then antisemitism), and anti-Islamic theology form the necessary and constitutive parts of Islamophobia today. This Islamophobia is now a tool in the larger Western supremacist project, the details of which are outside the purview of this article but whose connection to Christian supremacy have yet to be explored. A tentative conclusion is that the currents of Christian supremacist theology detailed in the above sections (from supersessionism to anti-Islamic theology) are predominantly the cause.[75] Sophie

[73] As usual, there are always exceptions to the norm, but the general point is that the *dominant* discourses of Orientalist scholarship persistently represented the Muslim and Islam in this harmfully reductive way.

[74] "So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression. I do not think it is an accident, therefore, that recent talk of U.S. military intervention in the Arabian Gulf (which began at least five years ago, well before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) has been preceded by a long period of Islam's rational presentation through the cool medium of television and through 'objective' Orientalist study: in many ways our actual situation today bears a chilling resemblance to the nineteenth-century British and French examples previously cited," Edward Said, "Islam through the Eyes of the West," in *The Nation*, April 26, 1980, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/islam-through-western-eyes/.

[75] Ethan Katz begins to map this process in his "An Imperial Entanglement: Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Colonialism," in *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1190–1209. This article is phenomenal in both summarizing and furthering the academic discussion on the entanglement of antisemitism with Islamophobia as a Western discourse of "othering" and constitutive of the European age of colonialism. However,

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Bessis rightfully notes that although the West "did not have exclusive rights over the idea of universality, [it] alone shifted the debate outside the field of religion to construct a secular universal from which it drew the principle of equality."[76] In Bessis' account, the West has an uncanny ability to posit universals and absolutize them in hegemonic fashion across the globe, and I would argue that it is precisely because Western secular discourse has its roots in the theological absolutes of Christian supremacist universalism detailed above.[77] *The theologies of the past remain the politics of the present.*

Zooming in on the twenty-first-century US context, Islamophobia and racism become linked; indeed, the bond is easy to make, given how Christian supremacy gave birth to white supremacy. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, in his *A History of Islam in America*, demonstrates how national identity formation of race, religion, and progress is established as whiteness, Christianity, and progress.[78] During the twentieth century, this leads to exclusionary policies that oppressed not only formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants as well as Native Americans, but also Jews and southern and eastern Europeans (and, important to note for later, Catholics), and finally Muslims. Eventually, more religious and ethnic groups "became white" through social and political changes.[79] But to this day, Muslims and BIPOC

similar to Bessis, Katz begins the story with the Enlightenment, while I begin with the early roots of Christian theological supersessionism, supremacy, and anti-Islamic theology. See also Michael Dobkowski, "Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism," in *CrossCurrents* 65, no. 3 (2015): 321–33, and Renton and Gidley, "Introduction," in *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe*.

[76] Bessis, *Western Supremacy*. 6.

[77] Later, Bessis adds that "the West's inexhaustible capacity to disassociate what it says from what it does has long made its modernity both unintelligible and illegitimate for those it designates as others, even if it is true that they have benefited from it by default" (Bessis, *Western Supremacy*). Indeed, the same could be said for much of Christian theology and its collusion with supremacy, subjugation, and colonization. Bessis dates the birth of the West and thus of the Western supremacy she discusses in her book at around 1492; she dates the birth of the myths of Western supremacy at the Renaissance (Bessis, *Western Supremacy*, 12–15). However, I am seeking to locate the roots of supremacy further back and more deeply embedded in supersessionist theology (similar to Willie James Jennings, J. Kameron Carter, Jeannine Hill Fletcher, and Gil Anidjar).

[78] See Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Though, at least until the 1950s, it was Protestantism specifically and not Christianity generally.

[79] See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

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remain largely excluded from this nation's "civil religion."[80] Once again, it is not unreasonable to argue that the Christian theological imagination—particularly its supremacist strand that remained dominant—facilitated this oppression and covertly maintains it to this day. In any case, it is de facto the case that interreligious work with communities of Muslims in America will likely, though not necessarily, be interracial work, too. Hence, for any Catholic interreligious engagement with Muslims to be fruitful, the history and present-day permutation of racism and white supremacy needs to be recognized.

The task at hand is to underscore one prevalent permutation—or better yet discursive tool—of this supremacist vision—be it Western, white, Christian, or a combination thereof: Islamophobia. Given its genealogy, from Orientalism to the older discourses of antisemitism, Christian anti-Islamic theology, anti-Judaism, and finally supersessionism/replacement theology, and given Catholic theology's witting or unwitting collusion with producing if not sustaining this anti-Islamic discourse, it should be a pressing task for Catholic theologians, educators, and the church hierarchy to undo and unsay this discursive harm.

Unsaying and Undoing Islamophobia: Words Matter

The ideas, ideologies, and dominant social imaginaries of our present order remain inflected—worse yet, infected—by the words that constituted the history of Islamophobia detailed in the previous sections. In the twenty-first-century US context, Islamophobia is institutionally sanctioned and reinforced by the surveillance and police state, discriminatory practices by Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and other security apparatus, and media representations of Islam and Muslims; internationally, Islamophobia is evident through the so-called war on terror in lands predominantly occupied by Muslims, through extrajudicial killings and torture, and more recently in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) concentration camps and violent oppression of Uighur Muslims in Xinjian province (the CCP in fact justifies their actions

[80] For a case study of this exclusion, see Rosemary R. Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017). See also Rhys H. Williams, "Civil Religion and the Cultural Politics of National Identity in Obama's America," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 239–57. For a study that aims explicitly to connect racism with Islamophobia, see David Tyrer, *The Politics of Islamophobia: Race, Power and Fantasy* (London: Pluto Press, 2013). Most recently, Khyati Joshi's *White Christian Privilege* forcefully and rightfully makes this case.

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using US foreign policy regarding the war on terror).[81] To this list we can add the maltreatment of Muslims in Myanmar, India, and Europe. In the United States, given the domestic demographics of communities and the racialization of religion, Muslims tend to suffer the intersectional brunt of both racism and Islamophobia. A Catholic community entering into any form of interreligious engagement at the local, lay level, or in academia must address this history directly; it is not sufficient to ignore or forget it, or merely state, "Well, we are no longer like this" or "I am not personally responsible." Although not seeking to restrict present action to the guilt of the past, it must be borne in mind that historical events have present-day legacies; the present remains shaped by the past. Catholics must not only disavow the detrimental, supremacist theologies and practices of the past that were enacted in the name of Christ, but also acknowledge that, even in the secular, civil, and political sphere, we live under this legacy to this day and must seek to undo it by unsaying it, as it were. The theologies of the past remain the politics of the present. Interreligious theologies and practices in solidarity with communities of Muslims in the US context do not need an imaginative leap of empathy; early twentieth-century Catholics of Irish and southern European descent share with today's Muslims the fact of being strangers in a foreign land, immigrants or refugees excluded from American civil and political discourse in various ways precisely because they were deemed inferior to Americans of northern European descent.[82]

Words matter. Indeed, in the Christian tradition, words and the logic (*logos*) they produce are constitutive of our relationship not just with one another but with God, for "the Word [*Logos*] was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The enfleshment of the Word renders the flesh, our bodies and relations with others, at the mercy of the power and meanings of words. Mayra Rivera poetically demonstrates the thick relationship between words and the imaginaries they produce in our knowledge, on the one hand, and our embodied practices and relations, on the other.[83] Our perception of others is shaped by what and how we implicitly and explicitly know through language and logic. Christians should then seek to be predisposed to the Word, the incarnate logic of Jesus Christ crucified. Likewise, in the Islamic tradition, words matter. In the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is of course the

[81] See the following news program produced by CGTN, which is funded in part or wholly by the Chinese Communist Party, "China Exposes the Truth about Xinjiang, but the West Ignores. Why?," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRy1AKUzb2o.

[82] See Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, and McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*. Of course, discriminatory policies remain against the predominantly Catholic migrants from Latin America even to this day.

[83] See Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

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Word of God, and the divine words and logic shape communities of Muslims. The poetics of the text shape perceptions and actions; and later Muslim poets are inspired by the same revelatory language. But the verses (*ayāt*) of the Qur'an are not restricted to its text: "We will make them to see our verses/signs (*ayāt*) in the horizons and within themselves, until it become clear that it is the Truth" (Q 41:53). The divine words are witnessed in and through all things. In Islamic traditions, words and signs of revelation create reality.

The theology underpinning the import of words is supplemented by studies of ideology and social imaginaries. Simply put, an imaginary is "the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life."[84] The words we are given (or not) create our social world, how we relate to one another, how we characterize others, and even what we perceive, which "is organized into patterns for which we, the perceivers, are largely responsible."[85] A Catholic who wishes to live by the incarnate logic of Jesus Christ would inevitably disrupt these dominant imaginaries that pattern our perception and behavior. If Islamophobia has thus patterned our contemporary context, and if the Catholic tradition has contributed to forming this pattern, then a Catholic response must not be a religion-blind theology of tolerance, inclusivity, or even universalism. The Catholic response must also go beyond merely cherishing beliefs and practices held in common with Muslims and the Islamic faith, as *Nostra Aetate* §3 and *Lumen Genium* §16 do, as this unwittingly sustains hegemony. Similar to Las Casas' judgment of the Amerindians, the Muslim and the Islamic tradition are theologically valued only insofar as they are the same as the Catholic and Catholic tradition; this may no longer be religion-blindness, but it is still a form of religion-myopia. That is, the Muslim is perceived in their sameness to the Catholic, distorting their perception and leaving *both* large swaths of the Islamic tradition *and also* the Muslim experience of discriminatory practices in the United States and elsewhere *invisible* to this myopic vision. Rather, the Catholic response must confront this ideology head on, undoing it by unsaying it in both word and deed.

Catholic Theology of Islam: From Vatican II to Pope Francis

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church and Catholic theologians have arguably remained committed to renouncing supersessionism, replacement

[84] John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1984), 6.
[85] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), 41.

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theology, and antisemitism. Likewise, the Catholic Church and Catholic theologians have slowly moved away from explicitly anti-Islamic theology, especially thanks to the pioneering work of Louis Massignon and his influence on the Vatican II documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*.[86] However, a more direct and concrete theological response is necessary given how anti-Islamic theology transmuted into the modern ideology of Islamophobia and remains the latter's progenitor. This concrete response, I argue later, requires a robust, praxis-oriented theology with Islam and Muslims that actively resists and subverts Islamophobia in our present political context. I address three topics in turn before proceeding to the next section: the post–Vatican II status of Christian supremacy, of replacement theology and antisemitism, and of a Catholic theology of Islam.

With respect to Christian supremacy, Hill Fletcher forcefully demonstrates that Vatican II teaching on other religions reproduces the Christian supremacist theology of the past, even if it is toned down with inclusivist language. *Nostra Aetate*, despite its relatively novel theology of religions, maintains a "logic of Christian inclusivism [whereby] people of other faiths can enjoy some status on the sliding scale [of humanity] when their faith orientation reflects 'a ray of that Truth' which is Jesus Christ (NA, no. 2)."[87] In a way, Vatican II teaching remains supremacist qua its universalist principles. Others are valued insofar as they are the same, as Beck noted with respect to Las Casas. Hill Fletcher terms this the logic of "different is deficient" because others are saved with respect to their relationship with (similarity to) the Catholic faith:

> Muslims rank close to Christian supremacy in their adoration of "the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth." Muslims are assessed as worthy of recognition insofar as they "revere [Jesus] as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother" (no. 3). Similarly, Jews might have a share in Christian

[86] Christian Krokus rightfully argues "the high probability that Louis Massignon's work on Islam in the decades prior to the Second Vatican Council was the key influence on the conciliar statements regarding Muslims" (Christian Krokus, "Louis Massignon's Influence on the Teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam," in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 [July 2012]: 342). Krokus does a fantastic job of summarizing previous scholarship on the likely influence of Massignon on Vatican II, and so I refer the reader to his article. In addition, chapter 4 ("The Council and the Muslims") of Gavin D'Costa's *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) provides a helpful overview of the council's teachings regarding Islam and Muslims. In my view, D'Costa is too generous in his interpretation of the documents. In the end, these documents fail to undo the centuries of harm that remain the legacy of modern-day Islamophobia.

[87] Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 19.

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> supremacy because (so the document asserts) Christians and Jews share common fathers in the faith and God, as guarantor of supremacy, "holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers" (no. 4).... The theo-logic of *Nostra Aetate* is that insofar as Muslims and Jews are like Christians, their religious traditions are to be valued, but the logic of Catholic teaching is that the fullest form of religious life is the Christian form. This is a sliding scale of humanity, rooted in the value-laden opposition of Christian versus non-Christian and exhibiting the same theo-logic that God's favor rests on Christians.[88]

However, the subtext of this teaching is that insofar as Muslims and Jews are *different* from Christians, they remain *inferior* to the Catholics (qua their faith, not qua human dignity, to be sure—though this conception of human dignity abstracted from their embodied faith is harmfully problematic). Hill Fletcher's project is to connect Christian supremacy to the racist project of white supremacy, and this she does brilliantly. This Christian supremacy is thus implicitly connected to the white, Christian supremacist ideology of Islamophobia.

Nevertheless, since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has done an admirable job of undoing replacement theology and thus antisemitism. *Nostra Aetate* §4 began the process of acknowledging that "the covenant that God has offered Israel is irrevocable" and even admitting that the "term covenant ... means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians," adding that the "New Covenant can never replace the Old but presupposes it and gives it a new dimension of meaning" for Christians.[89] This theological reorientation was and remains the catalyst for ongoing inter-religious engagement and reconciliation among Catholics and Jews at a local and global level, demonstrating that words do indeed matter because they transform internal perceptions of the Jewish traditions and external actions alongside Jewish communities.[90] The task presently is to perform an unsaying and undoing of Catholic polemical theology of Islam similar to the undoing of replacement theology and antisemitism initiated by post–Vatican II theology. This reorientation pertains to individual believers and institutional positions

[88] Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*.

[89] "Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews: The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29), A Reflection on the Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (No 4.)," paragraph 27, http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html.

[90] The literature on post-Shoah and post–Vatican II Catholic theology of Judaism is too vast to engage in this article.

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that are *covertly* shaped by the history of Catholic polemics against Islam and Muslims, even though *overt* acts of Islamophobia performed by Catholics, and by members of the Catholic hierarchy no less, are not lacking.[91]

The Catholic Church has done a far poorer job of explicitly renouncing—undoing and unsaying—the anti-Islamic theology of its past. In fact, despite the (arguable) development of doctrine vis-à-vis Muslims in Vatican II, it seems the most conciliar documents did was "[make] it unambiguously clear that positive relations should be sought with Muslims and [produce] a remarkable list of shared elements between Muslims and Catholics that are to be admired."[92] Now this itself is a necessary task, to be sure, and Catholic theologians and scholars of Islam have Louis Massignon to thank for opening up the church to dialogue with Muslims (even if Vatican II teaching on Muslims and Islam did not go as far as Massignon would have wanted). Catholic theology and scholarship regarding Islam by authors such as, among others, Georges Anawati, Robert Caspar, Christian Troll, Daniel Madigan,

[91] The most famous one is Pope Benedict XVI's comments about Islam at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2006. Ralph M. Coury cogently and rightfully connects the pope emeritus's comments to Orientalism and Islamophobia in his "A Syllabus of Errors: Pope Benedict XVI on Islam at Regensburg," *Race & Class* 50, no. 3 (2009): 30–61. Another example is Cardinal Raymond Burke's comments at the Rome Life Forum on May 17, 2019, when he averred that "to be opposed to … large-scale Muslim immigration is … a responsible exercise of one's patriotism," opining without evidence that Muslim immigrants are mere "opportunists" and falsely claiming that "Islam … believes itself to be destined to rule the world." See Jules Gomes, "Opposing Muslim Immigration is a 'Responsible Exercise' of Patriotism, Says Cardinal Burke," *Virtue Online*, May 21, 2019, https://virtueonline.org/opposing-muslim-immigration-responsible-exercise-patriotism-says-cardinal-burke. See also Robert Duncan, "Cardinal Burke: Limiting Muslim Immigration is Patriotic," *American Magazine*, May 21, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/05/21/cardinal-burke-limiting-muslim-immigration-patriotic. Arguably, Cardinal Burke is representative of many Christians who equate their Christian faith with white, Western, or Euro-North American racial or nationalistic imaginaries, adhering to a form of Christian ethnonationalism. For an argument considering the religion-race-national identity nexus within American civil religion, and how it expresses a religio-racial tribal identity that ascribes a particular character and purpose to the American people, see Williams, "Civil Religion and the Cultural Politics of National Identity in Obama's America." For a popular article regarding the rise of this form of nationalism, see David Albertson, "Whose Nation? Which Communities? The Fault Lines of the New Christian Nationalism," *America Magazine*, September 19, 2019, www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/09/19/whose-nation-which-communities-fault-lines-new-christian-nationalism. For recent polling on this issue, see Joanna Piacenza, "Roughly Half the Electorate Views Christian Nationalism as a Threat," *Morning Consult*, April 2, 2019, www.morningconsult.com/2019/04/02/roughly-half-the-electorate-views-christian-nationalism-as-a-threat/.

[92] D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, 210.

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David Burrell, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, Paul Heck, John Renard, and Pim Valkenberg, have certainly contributed a great deal to the endeavor of building and sustaining "positive relations" with Muslims at the level of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology. These positive relations have even been cultivated at the pontifical level: Saint John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have all, to a varying degree, encountered and dialogued with Muslims in leadership positions. Pope Francis has even coauthored a document with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, a passage of which he incorporated into his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.[93]

All of these developments are to be enthusiastically welcomed; however, this interreligious engagement with Muslims and Islam ignores the ways in which the supremacist and anti-Islamic theology of the past remain constitutive of present-day Islamophobia. The subversion of the contemporary political ideology of Islamophobia remains an issue of justice, and to work for justice one requires a liberating praxis: *a theology that demands political action in solidarity with Muslims*. As Krokus reminds us, "Massignon … called for a *Copernican revolution* in the Church's relationship to Islam, such that God, not the Church, would be at the center of the Christian's worldview and dialogue with Muslims."[94] Centering the church rather than God is precisely what sustained the supremacist theology of Vatican II, as Hill Fletcher indicates. Centering God instead of church is a necessary first step in countering supremacist theology. However, I argue Catholic theology with Islam also requires an additional step in a slightly different direction, especially in the European and North American contexts: the church's relationship with Islam should center an explicitly anti-Islamophobic theology through the lens of restorative justice and reconciliation.

A Restorative and Praxis-Oriented Catholic Theology of/with Islam

Karen Teel's advice in "Whiteness in Catholic Theological Method"[95] is that Catholic theologians must interrupt their racist thinking by learning our

[93] See "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," published in Abu Dhabi, on February 4, 2019, by Pope Francis and The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html. A portion of this document is then cited in *Fratelli Tutti*, 285.

[94] Krokus, "Louis Massignon's Influence on the Teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam," 336.

[95] Teel, "Whiteness in Catholic Theological Method."

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own histories, acting in solidarity first (then reflecting), and participating in movements of liberation in our own communities.[96] Similar advice can be given for undoing Islamophobia in Catholic interreligious engagement with traditions of Islam and communities of Muslims. When Catholic theology and communities engage members of the Islamic faith, but remain silent about the church's historic role in constituting the Islamophobic present, we are de facto colluding both with contemporary racism and discrimination against Muslims, be they Euro-American communities, the Uighur Muslims forced into internment camps by the Chinese Communist Party, or the communities of Muslims from Myanmar to India under attack by their neighbors; we are also colluding with the neocolonial project of economic supremacy (disentangling Islamophobia and racism from the objectives and system of late capitalism is impossible, but explaining why is outside the purview of this article).[97] An anti-Islamophobic Catholic theology is intersectional. It expressly underscores the position of power inherited from the premodern legacy of Christian supremacy and in which members of the Catholic Church operate by mere fact of being Christian in America. Concomitantly, it recognizes the marginalized position constructed by these premodern legacies and which Muslims inhabit in a white Christian nation.[98] Anti-Islamophobic Catholic theology recognizes how "people exist in different relations to social, economic, political, and religious power within the matrix of domination."[99] At a too simplistic level, Muslim communities in America experience the divine and sociopolitical relationships differently from Catholics because they are practitioners of different religious traditions (disparate *abstract* theologies and revelations). However, at a more complicated and realistic level, and drawing from M. Shawn Copeland's theological

[96] Teel, "Whiteness in Catholic Theological Method," 427–28. "From there, perhaps we can begin to conspire with like-minded people to provoke moments in which white supremacy no longer reigns supreme, in which justice and mercy can gain the upper hand, however fleetingly" (428).

[97] One is tempted to use "Western supremacy" here instead of "economic supremacy." As evidenced by the violent maltreatment of Uighur Muslims by the Chinese Communist Party, however, it is Muslims that are caught in the middle of an economic war of domination between Euro-North American nations and the Chinese Communist Party, with even Muslim-majority nations such as Saudi Arabia gladly colluding with the oppression of Muslims who do not adhere to their Wahhabi-Salafi interpretation of Islam. For a succinct overview of the internment camps in China, see "China's Secret Internment Camps," *Vox*, https://www.vox.com/videos/2019/5/7/18535634/chinas-uighur-muslim-internment-camps-reeducation.

[98] See Joshi, *White Christian Privilege*.

[99] Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 107.

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anthropology, Muslim communities and Muslim bodies in particular experience the divine and sociopolitical relationships differently because the context of coming to know God is "marked" by Christian supremacy and Islamophobia in America (disparate *concrete* experiences of God).[100] Catholic interreligious engagement with Islamic theology and communities of Muslims seek to learn from this different social, political, racial, and religious location, which offers "us new, unexpected, and necessary viewpoints to move us toward a greater collective knowledge of God and work toward justice."[101] In other words, Catholic interreligious theology of/with Islam must be a contextual theology that seeks to undo what feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has called kyriarchy, the "socio-cultural and religious system of domination … constituted by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression,"[102] which in this case include white, Christian, and American supremacy.

One way to imagine this praxis-oriented, contextual interreligious and Catholic theology of/with Islam is through a restorative justice approach to the Catholic sacrament of penance. The sacrament of penance reconciles the Catholic both with God and with those harmed by their misdeeds; more specifically, "it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction."[103] Conversion to God involves reconciliation with one's neighbors who were harmed by the confessed sins; it consists not merely of an inward disposition of compunction, but also of an outward act of satisfaction that repairs the harm and restores right relationship with the community.[104] The constitutive parts of the

[100] M. Shawn Copeland understands not only religion, but also race, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, immigration status, and more as "marks" on the body. This is a feature of her theological anthropology: "For bodies are marked—made individual, particular, different, and vivid—through race, sex and gender, sexuality, and culture. The protean ambiguity of these marks transgresses physical and biological categories, destabilizes gender identities, and disrupts ethical and relational patterns (*who is my brother, who is my sister?*). These marks delight as much as they unnerve. They impose limitation: some insinuate exclusion, others inclusion, for the body denotes a 'boundary' that matters," M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 56.

[101] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*.

[102] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 118. Kyriarchy includes sexism, racism, speciesism, homophobia, classism, economic injustice, colonialism, militarism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, and nationalism.

[103] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1423, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

[104] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1459.

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sacrament are contrition, confession, penance, and absolution. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again";[105] confession, the disclosure of sin that "frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others";[106] and penance, the satisfaction necessary to restore our relationship with God and neighbor.[107] Absolution is the forgiveness of sin, but it does not have external effects of removing the *consequences* of sin. More specifically, "Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused."[108] In our present example, the church's historical sin of supremacy and anti-Islamic theology have caused disorders in our systems and structures of Islamophobia today; confessing with contrite hearts means nothing without ongoing conversion and satisfactory penance in meaningful acts of reconciliation that explicitly address these disorders (i.e., structural and systemic Islamophobia). Arguably, as innovative (and necessary) as much Catholic theology with Islam (be it interreligious dialogue or comparative theology) has been, it has more often than not skipped to "positive relations" and to examining shared (and abstracted) theological points of constructive comparison *without addressing either the very real injustices that exist for Muslims today* or the *genealogical source of these justices*, namely, *nearly 1,400 years of Christian supremacy and anti-Islamic theology*. Restorative justice is necessary.

Restorative justice is a theory of criminal justice contrasted with retributive justice. Rather than demanding punishment (retribution) for the offender, restorative justice seeks to reconcile offenders and victims in an act of transformative healing.

> Restorative Justice works to resolve conflict and repair harm. It encourages those who have caused harm to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and gives them an opportunity to make reparation. It offers those who have suffered harm the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made.[109]

It is often referred to as transformative justice because rather than restoring the victims to their previous condition (an impossibility), "a dialogue

[105] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1451.
[106] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1455.
[107] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1459.
[108] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1459.
[109] Marian Liebmann, *Restorative Justice: How It Works* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 25, citing Restorative Justice Consortium, 2006.

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between victim and offender can transform the crime into something different, so that the experience can be a healing one for all concerned."[110] This is precisely where restorative justice meets both the sacrament of penance and Catholic interreligious engagement with communities of Muslims, as well as Catholic theology with the Islamic traditions. Perfect justice is an impossibility, not only because historical injustices are impossible to prevent (crudely put, we cannot time travel to the early church and prevent Christian supersessionist and supremacist theology from emerging), but also because perfect justice is impossible to attain in this world broken by original sin.

Indeed, original sin and its consequences are appropriate analogies to understand the relationships among premodern Christian supremacy, anti-Islamic theology, and modern-day Islamophobia. "Forgetting the past," as *Nostra Aetate* §3 urges Catholics to do, falsely absolves Catholic theology of its role in producing Islamophobia today. But apologies and even remorse for the past and promises heretofore not to be (consciously and explicitly) Islamophobic are also not enough, just as "repentance gives no exemption from the consequences of [postlapsarian] nature, but merely looses sins,"[111] as Athanasius reminds us. According to the Alexandrian, the consequences of original sin are corruption (φθορά) and death (θάνατος). The theological imaginaries of *the past* (detailed in the above sections) are the original sins whose consequences are Islamophobic imaginaries and structures *today* that cause much injustice in the world. Unconsciously, systemically, or otherwise, we live with the consequences so long as there is not an active undoing and unsaying that restores a right relationship with the traditions of Islam and communities of Muslims; just as, for Athanasius, "The Word of God came into his own so that ... he might be able to *restore* [ἀνακτίσαι] humanity"[112] and "renew again"[113] (ἀνανεῶσαι) the human person. Though perfect justice is impossible, the model of original sin, its consequences, and the restorative justice of the Incarnation and sacrament of penance provide a framework to begin undoing and unsaying the sin of Islamophobia in transformative dialogue with Muslims and the Islamic traditions, thereby restoring right relationships in this broken world. Similar to antiracism work, this is an anti-Islamophobic theology that demands political and social transformation.

[110] Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, 26.

[111] Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 7, in Athanasius, *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 151.

[112] Athanasius, 167, translation modified.

[113] Athanasius, 165.

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The following section proposes a general outline for a praxis-oriented theology with Islam.

Contrition and Confession: Understanding the Harm

The first two parts of the sacrament of penance are contrition and confession. For our purposes, this should likely occur primarily within the context of Catholic communities, parishes (sacramental and catechetical formation), and institutions of secondary and higher education. A popular stance regarding historical injustices is that individuals should not be responsible for the sins of their ancestors. This is often the case in the US context regarding America's original sin: the white supremacist racism of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and segregation. It is likewise the case regarding the genealogy of present-day Islamophobia detailed in the above sections; that is, Catholics may ask, "Why are we responsible?" But this popular stance ignores the fundamental Christian theology of original sin, namely, even though the original sin of our ancestor Adam was forgiven and redeemed in the Incarnation, passion, and death of Jesus Christ, the *consequences* of sin remain. Transposing this, we can say that the consequences of the sin of Christian supersessionism, anti-Judaism, antisemitism, supremacy, anti-Islamic theology and violence against Islam and Muslims, Orientalism, and racism remain in the present-day structures and theo-logics that constitute our religious, political, economic, civil, and social engagement with Muslims and Islamic traditions—the theological imaginaries underwriting our politics. This is precisely why the sacrament of penance as an integral ritual of restoration and conversion remains a part of the Catholic mysteries: the effects of sin perdure in our individual and social sins. In terms of restorative justice, rather than "taking punishment" for the offense, Catholic communities and the church must "take responsibility for the [historical] harm done."[114] Unless Catholics are taught about the ways in which the church contributed to modern-day Islamophobia, any sort of interreligious engagement with Muslims and the Islamic traditions will be inauthentic (and modern-day Islamophobia will be perpetuated). Consequently, Catholics must be educated on this history. Although "religious literacy" regarding Islam and "positive relations" with Muslims are both worthwhile, for penance and restorative justice to occur it must happen as *interreligious* literacy of Catholic relations with societies of Muslims historically and in the context of Christian supremacy detailed above.

[114] Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, 26.

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Perpetual Penance and Unfinished Absolution: Listening and Learning toward Restorative Justice

Penance is the satisfaction of the sins committed through prescribed acts of atonement or amends. Understood through restorative justice, this penance should prioritize victim support and healing, encourage dialogue to achieve understanding, and together aim to right the harm done.[115] Given the broken world in which we live, penance in this case is perpetual, and the absolution that follows unfinished. In the US context, the structural systems of power place Christians (often white) in positions of dominance over Muslims (often not white). Within this context, dialogue with communities of Muslims should prioritize listening and learning from their experience of being Muslim in America. Sure, interreligious dialogue concerning abstract theology is thought-provoking and nonetheless necessary, but it should be in the context of what Muslim community members are seeking in their concrete sociopolitical situations: a contextual interreligious theology and dialogue. These engagements should be in the light of a liberating praxis that has interfaith justice as a goal.

Following this perpetual process of penance is the attempt to right the historical harm done—*attempt* because perfect justice in this broken world is impossible. In this case, after listening and learning, indirect and direct action in solidarity with communities of Muslims should follow. What is it communities of Muslims need in any given local context? These needs may include social, political, or legal changes in how communities of Muslims are disproportionately targeted in the US context. This act of solidarity is modeled in the restorative act of the Incarnation: God becomes human and pitches camp among us, becomes our neighbor, suffering with us (compassion), and restores our relationship with God. The point is not that Catholics can do the same, but that Catholics must strive to *embody* solidarity with communities of Muslims who are likely marginalized in the US context. Suffering with marginalized communities of Muslims takes no leap of the imagination, in any case, given how Catholics were marginalized in similar ways in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America (and Catholic Latinx communities remain similarly marginalized today). The unfinished absolution is in the context of a perpetual penance, which is working with Muslims to undo the sociopolitical systems and imaginaries of white Christian supremacy in America.

As this article has detailed, Christian supremacy and Catholic anti-Islamic *theology* have shaped the *sociopolitical ideology* and *structure* of Islamophobia

[115] Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, 26.

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today. Consequently, an anti-Islamophobic Catholic theology must be political and explicitly confess and repent of the discursive harm this supremacist theology has caused in our present context; otherwise, it will remain ineffective in undoing the sociopolitical harm it has produced. It would remain effectively a religion-myopic theology of Islam, if not a religion-blind one, because the beliefs Vatican II documents proclaim Catholics share with Muslims are disembodied from the practices, theologies, and political context of real, living Muslims today.

Ongoing Conversion: Redemption and Reconciliation of Catholic Theology with/of Islam

Contrition, confession, penance, and unfinished absolution should be focused on education, listening and learning from Muslims, and making satisfactory penance in the form of sociopolitical action toward justice in solidarity with communities of Muslims. All this is a process that informs an ongoing conversion of Catholic theology with/of Islam; it follows Teel's advice to act first and reflect later (largely analogous to the Catholic theological project of having experience inform one's interpretation of Scripture and tradition/revelation via reason). Restoratively, if offenders are to avoid future harm and repetition of the offense, then a conversion (transformation) of Catholic theology with/of Islam must occur, and this conversion must suffuse the bodies, minds, and hearts of individual Catholics. Just as Vatican II theology of the Jewish covenant radically undid and unsaid the antisemitic replacement theology of pre–Vatican II, likewise must there be a radical reversal of Islamophobic theology. It is not enough to accept universally "all that is true and holy" in other religions generally; nor is it enough to produce "a remarkable list of shared elements between Muslims and Catholics that are to be admired."[116] Rather, and in terms of restorative justice, there must be an active effort to reintegrate both Muslims and Catholics into a sociopolitical, justice-seeking community.[117] This can be done only with an explicitly anti-Islamophobic interreligious theology that redeems sinful words and actions and reconciles Muslims and Catholics.

One might even suggest an official Vatican document concerning the Islamic religious traditions that addresses the Islamophobic history and theologies detailed in this article. Anna Bonta Moreland, in her recently published *Muhammad Reconsidered*, insightfully draws attention to the silence regarding the Prophet Muhammad's position within various magisterial

[116] D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, 210.
[117] Liebmann, *Restorative Justice*, 27.

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documents concerning Catholic theology of religions and of revelation.[118] Neither the seventh-century Seal of the Prophets (*khātim al-anbiyā'* for Muslims), Muhammad, nor the revelation he proclaimed, the Qur'an, is ever referred to by name in any document.[119] After 1,400 years of Catholic theological documents, treatises, and sermons representing Muhammad as a diabolical pseudo-prophet in league with the Antichrist, after 1,400 years of Catholics doing hermeneutical violence to the Qur'an, the revelation he proclaimed, it is not radical to suggest that referring to the Prophet and Qur'an by name (at least!) in official documents may prove reconciliatory and restorative; even better would be pastoral letters to Catholic parishes that unsay Islamophobia, undoing the sermons preached in the Middle Ages, and actively calling for resistance to Islamophobic policies. Similar to "Open Wide Our Hearts," the pastoral letter against racism, one can imagine a pastoral letter against Islamophobia. Moreland's proposal of recognizing the *possibility* that the Qur'an is revelation from God to Muhammad would be an admirable first step.[120] But even Moreland's charitable reading of Vatican documents that address issues of revelation and de facto religious pluralism render the text of Islamic revelation (the Qur'an) a mere species of the universal appreciation for "all things that recall the creator" within "a set of complex historical events and developments."[121] Once again, after 1,400 years of documents, treatises, and sermons representing the Qur'an as irrational, pseudo-prophetic babble, it is not too much to unsay and undo this theological imaginary with a document that acknowledges the Islamic

[118] See chapter 2 of Anna Bonta Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020).

[119] Among those analyzed by Moreland are *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), "Dialogue and Proclamation" (published twenty-five years after *Nostra Aetate* by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue), and *Dominus Iesus* (Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000).

[120] Moreland analyzes Vatican documents on revelation and religious pluralism and then turns to Thomas Aquinas concerning postbiblical prophecy to construct a Catholic theology of revelation that could embrace Muhammad as a prophet, at least in an analogical sense (here she employs Aquinas' "third way" of understanding language, between univocity and equivocity).

[121] Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered*, 21–22. For this critique of Moreland's otherwise impressive book, see Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, "Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* (2020), doi: 10.1080/09596410.2020.1802862.

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understanding of the Qur'an as sacred and divine speech, one that continues to lead the human family toward the merciful and compassionate God—sometimes in broken ways, just as Christians sometimes interpret their revelation in broken ways (to which this article attests!).

If the theo-logics of the past informed and engendered the present Islamophobic logic and rationality in our civil discourse, national politics, and international policies, then theo-logics of the present will redeem and reconcile the future. This may be giving theology too much credit, but only if theology is reduced to academic discourse in university towers and Vatican halls, or to the (otherwise insightful) academic interreligious and comparative theology with Islam that, though necessary, is not enough. But this is not the case with an explicitly anti-Islamophobic interreligious theology that seeks to pervade lay members of Catholic communities and parishes, and even the non-lay members of secondary and higher education, through a restorative sacrament of penance detailed above. Justice demands an explicit unsaying and undoing of the promulgation of Islamophobic discourse among Catholics from the Middle Ages to the present; this can be done through a promulgation of the converse today.

There remains room for academic theology to situate the Islamic intellectual and spiritual traditions on par with the Catholic; I intend not to disparage the work of comparative theology with Islam. Indeed, this sort of redemption and reconciliation of Catholic theology occurs at the level of interreligious or comparative theology *with* Islam and *not* Catholic theology *of* Islam (theology of religions). Understanding that interreligious theology is contextual, it turns to the Islamic context to illuminate the critical questions asked not only by Catholic theology but also by Islamic traditions: issues of mercy and justice, unity and/in diversity, the well-being of society, prophetic imagination, embodiment and theophany, piety and God-awareness, devotion and the saints/friends of God, political theology, theological epistemology and anthropology, and more. But lest comparative theology with Islam merely become a neocolonial project that perpetuates the appropriation and plundering of the theological riches of the subjugated other for the sake of "fresh theological insights,"[122] these acts of comparison need to be shaped by a liberating praxis that is intersectional and seeks to undo kyriarchy at all levels; it must be shaped by the task of undoing and unsaying the Islamophobic and white, Christian supremacist systems that remain to this day, even if it need not be the primary topic of every act of comparison. Interreligious theology with Islam must turn to the Islamic tradition for

[122] Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.

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speculative, constructive, and practical theological exercises that seek to dismantle the kyriarchical systems of oppression largely produced by white Christian supremacy.

Conclusion: A Perpetual Praxis of Undoing and Unsaying Islamophobia in the Public and Political Sphere

> And when your Lord said to the angels, "I am placing on the earth a vicegerent (*khalīfa*)," they said [in reply], "Will you place thereon one who causes corruption and sheds blood, while we glorify you with Your praises and sanctify you?" [God] said [in response], "Indeed, I know (*aʿlamu*) what you do not know (*taʿlamūna*)." And [God] taught (*ʿallama*) Adam all of the [Divine] Names. He then presented them to the angels, and said: "Inform Me of [the Divine] Names, if you are truthful!"
>
> —Qur'an 2:30-31, *sūrat al-baqara*[123]

> O truly necessary sin of Adam,
> destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
> O happy fault
> that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!
>
> —*Exsultet*, Easter Proclamation

The praxis of undoing and unsaying Islamophobia in Catholic theology, be it at the lay and parish level, educational institutional level, or the academic, ecclesial, or episcopal level, is a perpetual task that strives toward the impossible goal of justice. Injustice forever remains in this world *precisely* because of the Christian theology of original sin; *perfectly* to right the injustices of the world requires uncreating the world, undoing it completely. Likewise, in the Islamic tradition, this world is marked by both injustice and mercy precisely because of the freedom humans possess and angels lack. We exist—free—and this is good; we exist—free—and so does injustice. As Athanasius teaches us, we cannot remove the consequences of original sin any more than we can time travel to redo history. The consequences of white Christian supremacy and Islamophobia remain today. The theological task of undoing and unsaying these structures and ideologies of power is daunting precisely because of how endemic to our modern systems are their consequences. The empirical proof of original sin is evident in this.

But there is theological hope in both the Catholic and Islamic traditions. As the Qur'anic text above indicates, the injustices of humanity are concomitant with our capacity to know all of the divine names, from the merciful to

[123] The bracketed portion, "Divine," draws from the Islamic commentarial traditions.

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the just. This world is the stage on which humans manifest God's names, in which our roles as vicegerents is to return the world to God and restore justice. The Easter proclamation in the Catholic tradition surprises many by its seeming praise of sin. But it is not so much sin that is praised but the incarnate logic of redemption and restoration that emerged in response to it, giving us a model for embodying restorative justice in this broken world. Working to undo and unsay the supremacist and Islamophobic, racist past is a task that endures within the context of oppressive social structures, original sin, and humanity's corruption. The incarnate logic of solidarity provides the Catholic today with a liberating response to the enduring consequences of the sinful past. This response is a theological exercise that encompasses both religious and political spheres, private and public squares, ecclesial and civil discourse. A Catholic theology with Islam seeks to be interreligious by bringing these communities together to strive for the impossible: justice in this world.

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