

Religious Wars and Their Significant Role in the Emergence of the Modern Nation-State

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Abstract: This paper discusses the role of religious wars in laying the foundation for the emergence of the modern nation-state. The central hypothesis is that the modern nation-state, that governs our world today, cannot be understood in isolation from the political turmoil that Europe experienced starting from the 13th century and the religious wars that reached their peak during the 16th and 17th centuries. An examination of this tumultuous period sheds light on the significant impact it had on the unique evolution of the concept of the nation-state on both religious and political levels. At the first level, religious wars raised the awareness among European peoples of the necessity to neutralize the influence of religion to mitigate its negative effects, which had led to the fragmentation of European unity and social fabric internally, as well as ongoing interstate conflicts externally. This awareness led European countries to enact laws and agreements recognizing religious diversity and endorsing the principle of religious tolerance. On the international level, religious wars reduced the religious authority exercised by the Church, which had imposed its Catholic doctrine on Christians. As a result, Christians began to enjoy greater freedom in practicing their beliefs within quasi-independent states. Politically, religious wars secularized the political sphere, as European states no longer derived their political legitimacy from religious authorities, such as the Church in Rome, or submission to the Holy Roman Empire. Peace agreements that followed these wars, particularly the Treaty of Westphalia, bolstered the national identities of warring states and recognized their sovereignty within their regional borders. Under these agreements, their allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire became merely nominal, and they gained greater independence in managing their domestic affairs.

Keywords: Religious Wars, Nation-State, Treaty of Westphalia, Religious Pluralism, Religious Tolerance, Sovereignty.

1. Introduction

The concept of the "nation-state" emerged alongside the transformations that Europe witnessed throughout its medieval and modern history. These transformations brought about a fundamental shift in the concept of the state, giving rise to a modern pattern that completely broke away from the traditional imperial model. This shift encompassed the structural aspects of the state, its political sphere, its identity, the sources from which it derived its legitimacy, its functions, justifications for its existence, as well as its methods of governance, control, and all institutions symbolizing authority and sovereignty. This transformative process was closely tied to the weakening of the ecclesiastical mode of governance in medieval Europe after a series of religious and nationalist wars, ultimately resulting in the reorganization of the European political landscape on unprecedented historical grounds.

To understand the shifts in question and the pivotal factors that drove them, our attention will be directed towards the religious conflicts that swept across the European landscape. These conflicts reached their apex during the latter half of the 16th century and throughout the 17th century, profoundly shaping the destiny of European nations. We will elucidate this role by examining its impact on two distinct levels:

Ideological Level: We shall delve into the manner in which these religious conflicts contributed to the progression of European states toward secularism, leading them to depart from the longstanding traditions of religious governance.

Political Level: We will evaluate how these conflicts left an indelible mark on the development of the national identities of the belligerent states and fortified their sovereignty.

By delving into these aspects, I aim to shed light on the profound influence of religious wars on the development of the modern nation-state in Europe.

1. On the Religious Level: Neutralizing Religion and Establishing the Modern Secular State

The establishment of the Holy Roman Empire had the purpose of providing a stable political system for all Christians and defending them against those considered heretics and accused of blasphemy. To achieve this goal, the Emperor had to act as the faithful guardian of the papal position within the global Catholic Church.¹ However, the irony here is that the religious wars that engulfed the Holy Roman Empire and all its member states in the name of religion led to entirely opposite results. In fact, the Catholic Church, in particular, and

Christianity in general, would lose much of their religious and political power due to these wars. As Christian nations embarked on campaigns of war in the name of religion, transforming conflicts into sacred crusades driven by religious purification and sectarian rivalries, there was a prevailing expectation that religion would gradually lose its credibility and its capacity to shape the political landscape. Consequently, efforts and focus shifted towards seeking alternatives to resolve these conflicts beyond the confines of religious influence.

The picture painted by historians and encyclopedias that have documented European religious wars strongly suggests that European societies were fundamentally warlike, and that religion was a constant source of tension and the main driver of major historical conflicts, without taking into account the nationalist wars that shaped modern European history.

These religious wars had dire consequences, tearing apart the religious unity of European societies and deepening social and political divisions within individual states and among European countries as a whole. Therefore, the expected response reflected in peace negotiations and reformist writings aimed at reorganizing the internal affairs of European societies and states as well as their inter-state relations on different principles gradually moving towards emancipating themselves from the religious influences that had been a major factor in fueling wars. In the context of this transformation, it is important to highlight here the impact of these wars on the nature of the modern European state, both in terms of recognizing religious pluralism and freedom of religion.

1.1. Recognition of Religious Pluralism and Freedom of Religion

During its recurring religious wars, Europe came to realize that social peace and peaceful coexistence among all segments of society and its religious spectrums required recognition of religious diversity and the right to freedom of belief, as well as the restructuring of relations with those who held opposing religious views on the basis of mutual recognition. Before such principles became constants of modern states in their later stages, their initial foundations were laid during the same religious wars, where rebellious religious sects managed to wrest many of their religious rights, including the freedom to practice their beliefs. As a result, the official recognition of religious pluralism had a direct impact on the legislative, judicial, and educational institutions of the state, which began to undergo gradual changes towards acknowledging the rights of unofficial religious sects. On the level of political relations with those who differed religiously, European countries recognized the necessity of re-establishing their inter-state relationships on the basis of mutual recognition of each state's right to determine its religious affairs and non-interference in its internal policies.

However, recognizing religious pluralism did not necessarily imply religious tolerance among warring religious factions. Therefore, historians approach the issue of religious tolerance in Europe with caution, as it gradually emerged between the late 15th and late 17th centuries. According to these historians, the recognition of religious pluralism emerged as a result of the gradual exhaustion that Europeans experienced due to their involvement in religious wars, which led to a fading of religious fervor and a growing awareness of the need for a rational approach to religious differences.² This psychological perspective strongly implies that the acknowledgment of the rights of religious dissidents was motivated primarily by the imperative of survival rather than by authentic, mutual religious tolerance. The latter, it seems, remained delicate and confined within earthly boundaries. This phenomenon has been the focal point of comprehensive research, encompassing all European nations touched by religious conflicts. The ensuing evidence furnishes a concise overview of its progression.

Regarding the relationship between warring religious denominations, the Peace of Westphalia initially established the principle of religious tolerance. This required the neutralization of religion in the management of political conflicts and the resolution of religious disputes between European states on secular grounds.³ In the context of this initial recognition, a set of safeguarding criteria for religious tolerance was established, marking a significant historical development within the Holy Roman Empire. Some researchers consider this as a sign of the official end of the empire as a unified Christian kingdom and the beginning of the transition towards multi-denominational monarchies.⁴ Indeed, the Treaty of Westphalia included provisions that recognized the right of some religious denominations to return to their churches and ecclesiastical properties and to freely practice their religion, whether in their churches or in their homes. It also emphasized the obligation of all parties to defend and protect all the articles of the peace without discrimination on the basis of religion. The treaty acknowledged the principle of equality among the three recognized denominations: Catholicism, Protestantism, and Calvinism, and expanded the scope of religious freedoms for their followers.⁵

Based on these provisions, many contemporary researchers believe that the treaty enshrined the principle of religious tolerance by establishing equality between Protestant and Catholic states and providing some guarantees for religious minorities. It also reaffirmed previous agreements regarding the right of religious minorities to freely practice their religion different from that of their rulers, the right to conduct their own worship, and the right to educate their children in accordance with their beliefs.⁶ This tolerance was undoubtedly

a significant step forward at a time when religious disputes were being resolved through wars. However, as others have noted, these gains were incomplete and partial, as they did not encompass all religious minorities, and some remained deprived of similar constitutional rights.⁷ These developments undoubtedly provide important indicators of the diminishing religious influence of the Holy Roman Empire in favor of religious pluralism that became recognized for independent monarchies, despite their nominal subordination to the empire.

Perhaps the most significant transformation resulting from the treaty was related to the reorganization of the individual's relationship with the state. For the first time, individuals were no longer bound by their allegiance to the church but were instead obliged to pledge loyalty to the state governing them. For example, in Germany, the government was subject to some restrictions regarding the rights granted to individuals as part of the religious settlement. These rights included the recognition of fundamental religious freedom, protection from discrimination on religious grounds, the right to emigrate without unreasonable dues, and the right for individuals to retain or sell their properties without restrictions.⁸ As a result of this transformation, there was no longer a confluence between religious allegiance and political loyalty in the same way as in the past. This previous confluence had often led to the persecution of sects that did not adhere to the official religion of the state they belonged to. This liberation from the dominance of the church and the Roman Empire allowed for the separation of religious belief and political allegiance. There was no longer an inherent connection between them, as the political association had replaced the religious affiliation that was once based on the united religious brotherhood of the subjects of the Holy Roman Empire. This empire had lost its actual political control, even though it continued to be recognized after the Treaty of Peace as a nominal and formal authority.

1.2. The outcomes of religious wars: historical evidence

The outcomes of the religious wars provide many pieces of evidence confirming the success of religious minorities in securing their right to freedom of religious practice, albeit to varying degrees and not always satisfactorily.

In Bohemia, which witnessed one of the first religious wars, the Hussite Wars resulted in significant religious reforms. These reforms included the spread of Hussite teachings, achieving greater religious freedom for Hussites, and their independence from the Catholic Church, all under the Basel Peace Treaty between some Hussite factions and the Holy Roman Empire in 1436. This recognition, which represented a major challenge to the Catholic faith at that early time, paved the way for the broader Protestant Reformation that swept through Europe in the 16th century.⁹

In France, discussions about religious pluralism began among leading thinkers following the Huguenot Wars in the mid-sixteenth century. They viewed it as a solution to the problems arising from sectarian wars rather than as a positive value in itself. The journey towards tolerance for dissenting religious beliefs saw frequent disruptions, leading to a complex map of reforms and setbacks. Under the pressure of wars, official policy sought to maintain a balanced approach, granting reformers some rights while avoiding provoking stubborn Catholic resistance. The accepted formula was the recognition of Catholicism as the official religion of the kingdom, while providing some guarantees of equality and civil rights to Protestants, although these guarantees were not always consistently upheld. For a country like France, where the overwhelming majority of its population was Catholic, granting worship rights to those considered heretics was a significant political concession to a group that could not be eliminated and a way to avoid the high cost of continued wars.¹⁰

In the Netherlands, the wars of independence led to a radical religious shift, with the defeat of Catholicism and the rise of the previously oppressed minority. Despite being considered one of the most tolerant countries in Europe at the time, tolerance in this period, as some historians argue, was a slogan only for the losers and could be easily abandoned.¹¹

In Germany, the Peasants' War, brutally crushed, resulted in the recognition of Protestantism under the "Religious Peace of Augsburg," concluded in 1555. This recognition was further solidified with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 after the Thirty Years' War.¹²

As for the impact, the Thirty Years' War, which ended with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, is often regarded as a pivotal historical milestone in this regard due to its far-reaching consequences on the religious and political landscape throughout Europe. It represented the culmination of a series of intense efforts by warring European states to put an end to the religious wars that had engulfed them due to their chronic religious conflicts. The primary issue before the negotiating states was to reach a settlement that would end the religious wars and establish a political framework for coexistence among the warring nations. They were driven by a desire to overcome the devastating effects of the war, both human and material, and the exorbitant costs it had imposed.

1.3. The relegation of religion and the secularization of politics

Politically, the tragic outcomes of religious wars provided enough arguments to justify the separation of religion from politics to avoid the risks of political conflicts fueled by religious motives. From this growing awareness, the need for a secular state free from religious authority emerged, with an approach to religion as a pragmatic tool to ensure political stability and support civil society's peaceful functioning, while stripping it of its authority in managing public affairs.

This transformation was also strongly reflected in political and philosophical writings that emerged since the Renaissance era and throughout the seventeenth century, culminating with the Enlightenment philosophers in the eighteenth century. Political and philosophical theories, including those of Machiavelli, Hobbes, John Locke, and the Enlightenment philosophers, all leaned toward secularizing religion and rebuilding authority on the basis of natural law and social contract theories. These theories were not detached from the realities of religious wars, sectarianism, and the accompanying retaliatory collective punitive actions, all of which formed the logical and historical justifications upon which these writings based their call for the secularization of politics.

However, from a contrasting perspective, a conservative faction of scholars questions the role of religion in igniting religious wars and challenges the interpretation that modern secular states were a result of a desire to overcome religious wars.¹³ In reality, such a claim lacks historical insight and overlooks centuries of oppressive political practices officially endorsed by the Church. This includes its brutal record in the notorious inquisitions, its adoption of the feudal system, its unconditional support for political despotism in the name of divine rights of kings. In addition to that, the Catholic Church offered unconditional support for political despotism in the name of the sacred divine right of kings. It staunchly defended its social, economic, and political privileges, which allowed it to occupy the top position within the aristocratic class that thrived at the expense of the poor and the common people. In light of these practices that characterized ecclesiastical rule throughout the middle Ages, it was natural for philosophers and reformers to work towards undermining the foundations of religious state rule and to aspire to build the opposite model—the modern secular state.

On the level of foreign relations, a clear trend emerged in the neighboring countries' efforts to rebuild their bilateral relationships based on the principles of common interests, international peace, and political stability, independent of religious influence. According to some historians, the handling of religion began to shift from being an imperial matter to an internal issue concerning the governing state since the Augsburg Agreement of 1555. This shift weakened the role of religion in European inter-state relations. This trend became even more pronounced with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, driven by the desire to maintain a balance of power among conflicting states, imparting a secular character to European relations.¹⁴ However, with the weight of this interpretation, it is challenging to envision a sharp decline in the role of religion in European conflicts in the post-Westphalia period, as some European historians believe.¹⁵

From this perspective, these historians caution against contemporary opinions and writings that exaggerate the extent of this transformation, which claims the exclusion of religion from politics after the 1648 treaty. They acknowledge that the treaty provided conditions for building a new international system that clearly leaned toward a secular system based on more equal and sovereign states.¹⁶ The reality is that this outcome has become a historical fact, regardless of the extent of influence the Catholic Church lost in its international political domain.

In a collective study examining the magnitude of this qualitative evolution, the book's conclusion clearly emphasized the need to distinguish between conflicts in Europe before and after 1648. In the century leading up to the Peace of Westphalia, Protestants and Catholics sought to resolve their religious divisions through military means, each defending what they believed to be the one true faith. Religion was thus a decisive factor in fueling religious wars. However, after 1648, Europeans learned through bitter experiences that such wars were futile. They embraced religious diversity and ushered in a new era characterized by secularism, where political and economic interests predominated over religious beliefs and affiliations.¹⁷

Regardless of the extent to which the Treaty of Westphalia eroded the Catholic religious authority represented by the Holy Roman Empire, it undoubtedly marked a significant historical turning point that laid the foundation for the religious independence of emerging European states. While the importance of this shift cannot be understated, it was not decisive in entirely excluding religion from European conflicts. Such a radical change would not occur so suddenly in societies where policies, wars, and relationships revolved around conflicting religious ideologies.

2. on the Political Level: The Formation of National Unity and the Reinforcement of Sovereignty

Over centuries of internal conflicts, Europe succeeded in building the modern nation-state with its national identity. However, the historical achievement came at a high cost, as significant sacrifices were

necessary to bridge the deep divide between the religious state and the modern nation-state. The transitional period required to bridge this gap was long, extending from the early 13th century, which marked the beginning of the rise of competing monarchies vying for sovereignty. It continued through the religious wars that resulted in the Treaty of Westphalia, which had the most significant impact in solidifying the sovereignty of these competing monarchies. It concluded with subsequent nationalist wars.

2.1. The conflict of sovereignties and the promotion of the principle of sovereignty

There are indeed clear indicators of the role of monarchies in promoting the principle of sovereignty, and we will focus on two of them: historical events and political theories.

2.1.1. The Historical Events

The rising monarchies initiated their continuous conflicts against the Holy Roman Empire from the early thirteenth century. In the face of these rebellious political forces, the Empire encountered significant challenges in asserting its authority over its members. This situation inevitably led to the weakening of its central authority, which was one of the driving factors that contributed to the emergence of the concept of sovereignty because of the weakening central power. Thus, the concept of sovereignty emerged simultaneously with the rise of monarchies in Europe, taking two parallel paths: a military one through the wars of emerging monarchies and an intellectual one through the major political thinkers of the Renaissance.

Militarily, Western historians argue that the already fragile theocratic union, which had ended by 1300, became practically impossible to realize after the Church had already relinquished its temporal authority to the emerging monarchies. Regarding the relationship between the Holy Roman Empire and the emerging monarchies, tension remained high. In his comprehensive study of the emergence and decline of the nation-state, Martin Creveld highlights the major historical milestones, starting from their early signs in 1300 CE to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. During this period, Europe witnessed the entry of monarchies into a continuous struggle against the Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire, and the nobility and feudal lords of the cities. In all of these conflicts, the emerging monarchies achieved successive victories against their adversaries, allowing for the possibility of surpassing the system of global empires and the emergence of relatively independent states that could exercise their sovereignty.¹⁸ In the midst of all these confrontations against rebellious forces, the empire faced significant difficulties in imposing its authority on its members. This situation inevitably led to a weakening of its central authority. The escalating rebellion, which gained strength over time, inspired new political ideas that were employed to challenge the authority of the Church and the empire, while justifying regional sovereignty in opposition to them.

In light of this, emerging monarchies actively encouraged and developed legal writings by reviving ancient Roman law. In this political-intellectual context, where conflicts among these monarchies coincided with the revival of Roman laws, new concepts of authority and law emerged. These concepts were reconstructed on rational and secular foundations.

As noted by Olivier Nay, the kings contributed to the development of legal studies, which they used as a tool to assert their temporal legitimacy in the face of papal authority, as well as to expand their power over feudal lords. In all of this, legal scholars increasingly avoided relying on ecclesiastical teachings, instead increasingly relying on ancient secular rules and new statutory laws. Thus, this arsenal of ideas and legal standards, stripped of any religious reference, was put in the service of the dominant secular political powers.¹⁹ The resulting conclusion from this political-philosophical development is that the concept of sovereignty emerged and evolved within the framework of conflicts waged by monarchies to enhance their political influence and liberate themselves from both imperial and ecclesiastical dominance.

In the midst of these political changes, the nationalist trend became dominant in European states after 1500 for several reasons:

Territorial Control: European states increasingly exerted continuous and precise control over specific territories. They established clearly defined boundaries and exercised authority over these territories.

Centralized Power: These states had relatively centralized authority, meaning that power was concentrated in the hands of the monarch or ruling elite within the state. This centralization of power allowed for more effective governance and control.

Resource Control: States sought to bolster their claims to sovereignty by controlling key resources, including military and economic resources, within their territories.

Imposition of Authority: They actively enforced their authority within the territories under their influence.²⁰ As a result of these unforeseen political variables, the central authority claimed by both the Pope and the Emperor came under continuous attack from local nationalist forces even before the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. At that time, neither the Pope nor the Emperor was in a position to effectively curb those opposing political tendencies towards decentralization.

Undoubtedly, the self-political independence that the kings wrested weakened the authority of the Holy Roman Empire to a great extent and its ability to actively intervene in the internal affairs of properties that became stronger and more autonomous. This noticeable weakness, in turn, translated into increased sovereign powers that steadily strengthened the authority of properties within their spheres of influence. This can be considered the beginning of a real transition towards the concept of national state sovereignty, without necessarily meaning a complete match with its contemporary meaning, i.e., full sovereignty.

2.1.2. Political Theory

In this political context, the first writings on sovereignty emerged with Jean Bodin (1530-1596), one of the early pioneers of this new political and legal thought. He played a significant role in laying the foundations for modern states based on the principle of sovereignty. Indeed, Bodin's theory of sovereignty cannot be understood in isolation from the political contradictions that were affecting monarchy in France during his time, because of the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. For Bodin, one of the main goals of his theory of "sovereignty" was to support the absolute authority of monarchy as the sole guarantor of societal security and stability. This goal was present in his mind when he defined sovereignty as "the absolute and perpetual power of the state."²¹ According to this definition, sovereignty is characterized by being an absolute power to which all subjects must submit under the laws. It is simultaneously indivisible and does not accept sharing with any other power. It is also perpetual, as long as absolute power cannot be granted to one or more individuals simultaneously.²²

Practically, this definition confers a legal character on absolute monarchical power, where no one can share in the king's authority. Bodin states: "Since there is no one on Earth greater after God than the princes possessing sovereignty, and since they have been appointed by God as his assistants to rule over the rest of the people, it was necessary for their care to ensure their distinction in order to achieve the respect and reverence due to their majesties, and for them to be felt and spoken of with all honor, because whoever despises their sovereign, despises God, who represents His image on Earth."²³

It is clear that this belief reestablishes the theory of divine right in authority, where the sovereign becomes God's image on Earth and His sole representative. However, despite all the criticisms that can be directed towards this justificatory approach to absolute authority, it must be recognized that thanks to the writings of Jean Bodin, the concept of sovereignty later acquired its modern meaning as the foundation of civil authority, according to the specifications he provided about the characteristics of sovereignty. These characteristics are five: first, possessing the authority to enforce the law on everyone in general and on every individual in particular. Second, monopolizing the right to determine sovereignty rights, including declaring war or making peace. Third, the right to appoint top officials. Fourth, that the ruler is the final and highest refuge for judicial authority. Fifth, the power to grant pardons to the condemned.²⁴ These five characteristics, as defined by Bodin, were influenced by their historical context, where he made them a fundamental and distinctive sign of the prince. However, in return, he laid the cornerstone for the characteristics of sovereignty in terms of being a central concept in modern states where the will of the people replaces the will of the ruler.

In this specific context, Olivier Nay suggests that the concept of sovereignty has an even older historical origin and was known since the twelfth century. Nevertheless, Jean Bodin was the first philosopher to present a rational theory that drew on logical foundations, which was a crucial stage in the development of modern Western political thought. Bodin's ideas represented the first intellectual landmarks in political philosophy that prevailed in the subsequent centuries. The French Revolution, which later drew inspiration from his ideas, would integrate the people into the theoretical realm of sovereignty. Whereas Bodin considered the state the seat of sovereignty, the revolutionaries would make the people the new sovereign while also subjecting the state to the nation.²⁵

2.2. Religious Wars and the Establishment of the Modern Nation-State

2.2.1. The Role of Religious Wars in Strengthening the National Identity of Emerging States

Both internal and external religious civil wars contributed to fostering a sense of nationalism and the need to build a common identity based on political loyalty rather than religious affiliation as a way to escape the cycle of armed violence. The natural response to the vertical division of European societies and the administrative chaos caused by religious wars was the pursuit of building a central authority that, over time, would become increasingly religiously neutral. Its goal was to preserve public order as a rational alternative to armed conflicts that threatened the security and stability of religious communities within the state. Based on this foundation, some historians argue that the chronic crises witnessed in Europe during the late Middle Ages led to profound developments on both the ideological and organizational levels, resulting in the birth of the modern nation-state.²⁶ Inspired by this political awareness, religious civil wars played a role in reconstructing the state on the basis of a common political identity. Wars between states also led to a growing sense of the necessity for

achieving national unity and strengthening the domestic front to face external threats.

This desire to promote national unity was reinforced against the backdrop of simmering political conflicts within both the Catholic and Protestant camps, which required prioritizing political interests over religious considerations. When political animosity prevails among co-religionists within the same religious faction, the instinct for survival demands the supremacy of national interests and transcending religious affiliations. Taking all of these variables into consideration, it can be said that the religious wars fought in the name of religious fanaticism and the protection of sacred beliefs marked the end of the era of religious dominance that prevailed throughout most of European political history. On this basis, some historians argue that the chronic crises witnessed in Europe in the late Middle Ages, in general, led to profound developments at both the ideological and organizational levels, resulting in the birth of the modern nation-state.²⁷

2.2.2. The Treaty of Westphalia and Its Role in Enhancing the National Identity of Emerging States

Historians typically view the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) as a pivotal turning point towards the establishment of modern nation-states. It marked the aspirations of rising states to achieve sovereignty and relative independence from the Holy Roman Empire, along with the demarcation of their political boundaries and the formation of their unique identities and cultures.²⁸

However, on the flip side, there is a strong debate among Western historians regarding the political outcomes of the treaty and its historical significance in laying the foundations for the modern nation-state. Some scholars interested in European political history argue the relativity of the hypothesis that considers this treaty as the origin from which the principle of sovereignty, as commonly understood in contemporary international relations, emerged. They contend that the evidence supporting this hypothesis does not hold up to historical scrutiny. Before the second half of the twentieth century, no one associated the emergence of sovereignty with the Treaty of Westphalia. Furthermore, the states that signed the treaty continued to interfere in each other's internal affairs. What's more important is that a system of sovereign states requires different governments that recognize each other's authority within their respective borders but do not acknowledge any higher authority above them. However, the historical reality was different, as the Holy Roman Empire challenged the sovereignty of all national states through its existence. These states even recognized the Emperor as the highest ruler above them for the purpose of establishing peace in the Christian world, including some of the most aggressive and powerful states like France and Spain, which continued to acknowledge the Emperor as the highest authority in the Christian world.²⁹

In Deed, this view is not entirely without merit, as this historical period deeply entrenched in the traditions of European medieval history could not bear political concepts that did not necessarily align with their modern meanings. However, historical events provide enough political evidence to suggest that European monarchies exercised relative sovereignty over their spheres of influence. Their allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire and recognition of its sovereignty were merely nominal after the weakening of the Church and, along with it, the Holy Roman Empire.

Based on the course of events described by Martin Creveld, the Holy Roman Empire remained a living intellectual idea, but its real power had been declining since the second half of the 13th century. One of the main factors responsible for the emperors' weakness was the persistent growth of the monarchies they claimed to rule. This led to the enhancement of political power for the kings within the regional areas under their rule.³⁰

As for the historical arguments presented by Creveld regarding the role of the treaty in enhancing the authority of the monarchies, they are diverse, all of which confirm that the imperial territories were realistically fragmented. They had lost a significant portion of their lands, such as the Kingdom of Sweden, a large part of the Baltic coast, a substantial portion of Alsace, and even the Swiss, who had gained their complete independence. When the dividing lines were drawn between the territories belonging to the empire and those that were not, the emperor lost all claims to other rulers he still held. Western and Central Europe became divided between secular rulers and kings. Even those who remained within the empire effectively enjoyed all sovereign privileges, including the right to possess their own armed forces and the right to form alliances with each other, and even with foreign powers, as long as they were not directed against the emperor. After presenting these facts, Creveld concludes that instead of protecting the peace of others, the empire itself needed protection.³¹

Based on these historical data that cannot be overlooked, we believe that the Treaty of Westphalia is considered a turning point in the transition from the imperial theocratic rule to the modern nation-state with its scientific significance. Despite the tragic and bloody nature of the Thirty Years' War that gave birth to this treaty, it is generally seen as a "war of state-building" in Europe, as it allowed for the formation of new states and the restoration of old states to their independence.³²

2.2.3. Treaty Clauses and their Role in Strengthening the National Identity of Emerging Monarchies

The Clauses of the treaty contributed to legitimizing the political entities that had become a reality on the ground. As we have seen, the idea of a sovereign independent state had gained legitimacy with the wars of the monarchies against the Church since the 13th century. With the end of the Thirty Years' War, the Treaty of Westphalia granted these monarchies political legitimacy within the context of negotiations seeking a way out of their religious conflicts.

This conclusion can be supported by many texts within the treaty. Some of its clauses stated, "To prevent any differences that may arise in the future, the rights, privileges, freedoms, and the free exercise of regional rights have been established and confirmed for all electors, princes, and estates in the Roman Empire."³³ It also granted states clear sovereign powers in foreign policy: "Freedom is always granted to every state in the Empire to form alliances with foreigners for its preservation and safety."³⁴ Similarly, another clause affirmed unprecedented sovereign powers regarding the management of internal affairs of states, including property, annual revenues, taxes, judicial authority, and other matters related to customs, rights, and freedoms.³⁵

The importance of these clauses lies in their role in consecrating a political reality that was previously dominant on the ground, through their official approval and endorsement by the treaty signatories. Therefore, we can say that the Treaty of Westphalia did indeed mark a historical turning point towards the birth of modern sovereign nation-states. Although the term "sovereignty" was not explicitly mentioned as a political concept in the treaty clauses, its essence was strongly present, as confirmed by the preceding model texts. This is perhaps what justifies Wilson's description of the "Westphalian state" as having an indivisible sovereignty, no longer sharing its internal governance with any other bodies, having clearly defined and impenetrable borders, and possessing a unique identity and culture for its inhabitants.³⁶ In contrast, the authority of the emperor eroded due to the monarchies' self-independence to the extent that after 1648, the Holy Roman Empire became a loose union of independent states.³⁷ While it is true that recognition of the Roman Empire would continue after the treaty's signing, the monarchies emerged from it stronger, benefiting from the official recognition of their entities by the empire to enhance their independence by developing their institutions within their territories.

This brief overview of the transformations accompanying religious conflicts illustrates that religious wars played a significant role in the emergence of the modern nation-state, as these shifts prepared European societies to embrace the foundations of the modern state. These developments, as we have seen, laid the groundwork for the emergence of the modern state along two parallel paths: the first being political, establishing the concept of the nation-state with national sovereignty, historically intertwined with the rise of monarchies. The second path was ideological, founding a secular state that aimed to neutralize religion and separate it from politics, a concept deepened by critical political writings that stripped the ruling authority of its religious and moral authority. Both of these aspects will be strongly supported, particularly with the Treaty of Westphalia, which is indeed a pivotal milestone in Europe's transition towards the modern nation-state.

3. Conclusion

As a summary of this historical narrative of the developments in religious and political affairs, it is evident that the transformations preceding the Treaty of Westphalia and beyond marked a significant historical turning point on both religious and political levels. The changes brought about by the religious wars in Europe affected the ideological foundations of the state, from which political legitimacy was derived, as well as the structure of the state that defined its political system.

On the religious level, these wars weakened religious unity and curtailed papal claims to authority over subjects under the rule of kings. They stripped the Church of the religious weapon it used as a tool of deterrence and contributed to the growth of local national awareness on secular grounds. This religious shift would eventually influence the trajectory towards the modern nation-state, which found alternative legitimacy in philosophical theories imbued with humanistic tendencies that undermined the foundations of the religious state, ultimately giving rise to a secular, modern, and civil state.

On the political level, the religious wars provided the objective conditions for transitioning from the imperial state model, characterized by global sovereignty transcending borders and nationalities, to the national state model, where sovereignty was confined within national borders. With the official recognition of the independence of regional entities, the emerging monarchies became the solid nucleus of the modern nation-state. This marked Europe's entry into the era of the modern state, a concept that would later be reinforced as humanistic tendencies grew, nationalistic sentiments deepened, and the secularization of the state progressed. All of these factors were corroding the ailing body of the Church and paving the way for the resolution of escalating conflicts against its spiritual and temporal authority in the late 18th century.

Therefore, based on the evolution of the paths of religious wars and their consequences, it can be said that as much as these wars were a curse on European societies due to the immense destruction they wrought in lives and property, they also had profound consequences on Europe's political future. Leaders of states and

warlords, through arduous negotiations and subsequent peace treaties following the wars, realized that the stability of states required the neutralization of religion, the clipping of the claws of ecclesiastical rule, the recognition of religious freedom, and the opening of the field to growing humanistic tendencies. This led to the revival of Europe's pagan Greek and Roman heritage as an alternative to religious heritage, all of which were novel elements that initiated a qualitative shift towards secularization in the political arena.

The historical lesson Europe drew from its religious wars pushed it to minimize the religious influences that were the primary factors behind its social divisions and political conflicts. To overcome these societal and political complications, there was no choice but to neutralize religion and withdraw it from the realms of social and political frictions. This recognition paved the way for religious tolerance and religious diversity, and the gains associated with peaceful coexistence could only be achieved within the secular context. In this regard, secularism, which works to neutralize religious influences, was the optimal solution to the crisis of religious conflicts and the end of religious strife.

Endnotes

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