



Exploring the Intersection of Political and Critical Theology: A Case Study of the Soviet Era

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Abstract

The study of how different religious and political ideas from the past come together and clash due to changing beliefs and historical events is currently an important topic. This study explores the relationship between political theology and critical theology and their impact on religious thought and politics. The scope of the research includes a comprehensive historical analysis, a theological investigation, and a critical examination. The goal is a comprehensive understanding of the theological foundations of political and critical theology and how they manifested themselves in the specific socio-political landscape. Through case studies, textual analysis, and a comparative approach, this study seeks to discuss the practical implications of these theological perspectives. It also seeks to highlight not only the distinctive features of political and critical theology but also their convergence in shaping religious and political thought. The findings highlight the ongoing importance of religious thought in shaping historical events and emphasize the necessity for further critical examination of the connections between religion and politics.

Keywords: Critical theology, political theology, the role of religion, Soviet era, ideology.

Introduction

The relationship between theology and politics is complex, intertwining history, philosophy, and religious thought (Crockett, 2013). This study explores this dynamic relationship from a strictly theological perspective and delves into the realm of critical theology, a perspective that offers new insights into the interplay between these two fields. This study aims to explore the complex relationship between theology and politics using a critical theological perspective. Our perspective encompasses theological inquiry, primarily informed by critical theory, as well as the political implications of theological thought and the theological foundations of political theory. In this way, we aim to demonstrate the continuing relevance of this dynamic relationship in our contemporary world, which is characterized by increasing globalization, cultural diversity, and the reverberations of past conflicts.

Understanding the intricate interplay between theology and politics is not only historically significant but also highly relevant for today. In a world facing complex geopolitical challenges, cultural tensions, and religious conflicts, it is crucial to thoroughly examine these interconnected fields. This study introduces a new perspective by incorporating a critical theological framework, providing a fresh and illuminating approach to a topic that is often overlooked in contemporary theological discussions. The study focuses on the critical theological framework as a central theme. It invites us to engage critically with theological constructs in the context of our globalized world. A critical perspective focuses on liberating oneself from subtle ideologies (Lewis, 1981). This critical aspect of our discussion serves as a guide as we move through the historical and philosophical dimensions of religious thought.



It also allows us to discover the transformative potential of the relationship between theology and politics (Krawatzek & Müller-Funk, 2020).

In subsequent sections, we will deepen this journey to include critical theological perspectives, the synthesis of philosophical thought, and the intersection of religion and international politics. Additionally, we will examine these ideas through two intriguing case studies. One case study will focus on the relationship between theology and foreign policy during the Soviet era, while the other will shed light on the political aspects of theology in Uzbekistan under Soviet rule (1924-1991). Consistent with our theological orientation, these case studies will illuminate the profound influence of theology on politics and vice versa¹. Our goal is to comprehensively explore the relationship between theology and politics while remaining true to a strictly theological orientation and not digressing into broader areas. This study promises to untangle the complicated web that links theology and politics. It offers valuable insights into the historical and philosophical foundations of religious thought and their continuing influence on our ever-evolving world.

A Critical Theological Perspective

Sound theological investigation in theology is characterized by a critical response to global concerns. Christian theology has a significant and pressing responsibility to complete in our linked and complicated global environment, which is marked by conflicts of cultural, ideological, and theological nature. Critical theology, a powerful theological framework suited for addressing global issues, revitalizes this context (Van Wyk, 2015). This method provides thoughtful criticism and a progressive agenda for a more radical engagement with theological analysis in our modern society. Crises are moments when the pursuit of truth is paramount, and it is in these turbulent times that critical theology finds its purpose. Rooted in a commitment to emancipate individuals from subtle ideologies, critical theology is fundamentally anchored in the “Christ event” (Lewis, 1981) where divinity and humanity intersected in the most profound way — when “the Word became flesh” (Hummel, 1970).

In the context of theology and its intersections with politics, there are two main avenues of exploration: examining the political implications of theological thought and examining the theological foundations of political theory. Over the years, several studies have addressed these areas, analyzing the works of political theologians from different historical periods and providing insights into the current state of this theological subfield. Among these works, “*An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*” (eds., Cavanaugh et al., 2011), “*Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions*” (eds., Fiorenza & Tanner, 2013), and “*The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*” (eds., Hovey & Phillips, 2015) provide valuable insights into political theology. The religious resonances found in the writings of critical theorists are only briefly addressed in these works.

In contrast, Carl Raschke’s “*Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis*” (2016) is a comprehensive and unique approach in that it deals in depth with the theological implications contained in the writings of continental social and political philosophers of the last half-century. This approach bridges the gap between critical theology and the philosophies of critical theorists and provides a better understanding of their interaction (Van’t Land, 2018). Contemporary theologians [*might*] face unprecedented

¹ This statement is an assumption in which the “theological orientation” of the researchers naturally leads them to illuminate the profound influence of theology on politics and vice versa in their case studies. That is, their theological perspective provides direct and clear insight into the relationship between theology and politics in selected cases. However, this assumption needs to be justified through serious research and analysis, because the relationship between theology and politics is complex and multifaceted, and illuminating it may require careful examination and interpretation of empirical data.



geopolitical challenges in the twenty-first century². Western culture, previously hailed as a post-communist secular global order, is now confronted with the imminent threats of neoliberal capitalism, nation-state neocolonialism, and environmental ecocide. In the early 20th century, intellectuals observed the connection between globalization, religion, and nationalism following the disillusionment of World War I. At the same time, theologians such as Karl Barth, in his “crisis theology” (Webb, 2009), criticized liberal German thought for conflating theoretical constructs with the experience of the very Other (Nielsen, 2023). The initial wave of critical theorists faced the challenge of Marxism’s crisis as the Western working classes rejected socialism and doubted the anticipated socialist revolution. Building on Hegel’s insights, the philosophers of the Frankfurt School argued that it is impossible to fully comprehend any entity, whether it be a social class or a political movement, by focusing solely on its one-sidedness (Giladi, 2020).

From the fusion of these intellectual currents emerged “critical theology”, which offered a collective critique of ideological justifications for the established status quo, all in the name of a radical divine spirit. Recognizing a crisis as a distinct problem is a significant intellectual accomplishment. In reconsidering Hannah Arendt’s concerns about the trivialization of evil, we are reminded of how the circumstances that gave rise to the Holocaust can resurface in cultures dominated by overarching ideologies, such as secular liberalism or radical Marxism, both of which gained prominence after the decline of Christianity.

Political theology often assumes a religious social crisis. To illustrate this, we can trace the theological research in *Athens of Plato*, which emerged in response to socio-political change and the “death” of the Homeric gods (Heath, 2019). The development of political theology from Augustine to Spinoza, and its revival in the twentieth century by Carl Schmitt, marked a transition from epistemological absolutism to a more pluralistic discourse (Panaite, 2013). The New Left, influenced by the Frankfurt School, revealed the connection between the universalism of the Western Enlightenment and Western colonialism, considering it a delusion (Herrero, 2023). However, in the 21st century, the concept of pluralism is being challenged due to events such as the *War on Terror*, the *Great Recession*, and international immigration crises. In the 21st century, the concept of pluralism, which emphasizes diversity, tolerance, and coexistence among different cultures, religions, and ideologies, is facing unique challenges that make it less straightforward and more complex. The War on Terror, the global response to terrorism and extremism, has introduced a new dimension to the challenge of pluralism, as counterterrorism efforts and security concerns often clash with upholding pluralistic values. Critics argue that counterterrorism measures can infringe on civil liberties and target specific communities, potentially marginalizing certain religious or ethnic groups. The Great Recession, characterized by economic downturns, has also had ripple effects on pluralism, intensifying social divisions and contributing to xenophobia and exclusion. Economic anxiety can drive divisive sentiments, straining the inclusiveness of a pluralistic society. International immigration crises, such as those involving people moving across borders, have also tested the openness and inclusivity of pluralistic societies. Debates about immigration policies, refugees, and border security often intersect with questions of pluralism, as nations weigh their commitment to diversity against concerns about national identity and security. So, the 21st century has introduced specific complexities and challenges that make the concept of pluralism more contested and multifaceted. This has led to a more nuanced discussion about how societies can balance pluralistic values with contemporary geopolitical challenges. Thus, pluralism is now seen as an ideological metanarrative that aims to

² Contemporary theologians face unprecedented geopolitical challenges in the 21st century, raising questions about their nature and importance compared to past theologians. The validity of this “claim” depends on factors like nature, distinction from historical issues, contextual background, and theologians involved. Examining the specific geopolitical issues required for modern theology’s authenticity is crucial.



assimilate subaltern groups into bourgeois society, rather than promoting a sectarian revolt against the system. This change necessitates the establishment of a new universalism based on the Christ event, replacing previous investigations into the theological notion of sovereignty that formerly supported the *illegitimacy of the nation-state*. In light of these changes, critical theology is undergoing an evolution in its relationship with religion (Thinane, 2023). A new generation of Marxist critical theorists, including Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek (2009), explored religion as a potential source of the revolutionary spirit. Their objective was to establish a connection between Christianity and historical materialism and acknowledge that eternity can only be attained through time, particularly through the *Incarnation event* (Badiou & Žižek, 2009).

Eastern Christianity became closely intertwined with the state during the Soviet era and served as a support system during periods of foreign occupation. The Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet era is an example of the intertwining of Eastern Christianity with the state, especially during periods of foreign occupation. Under Joseph Stalin's regime, the Soviet government pursued an unofficial policy of state atheism to limit the influence of religion in the USSR. While religious practices were discouraged, the Russian Orthodox Church, a major religious institution, played a unique role during periods of foreign invasion, such as World War II. The Church provided moral support by portraying the conflict as a struggle between godless Nazis and faithful Soviets and emphasizing the spiritual aspect of the war. This relationship shows how Eastern Christianity could become closely associated with political power in times of crisis, even in an atheistic regime, and expand its role beyond spiritual issues. Thus, the emergence of liberation theology in the 1960s added another layer to the connection between religion and politics. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union pursued an *unofficial policy* of state *atheism* aimed at undermining religious belief within its borders. While religion was never officially banned, the state made extensive efforts to weaken the influence of religious beliefs in society. This policy had clear Marxist influences and served as the foundation for analyzing the Soviet Union's influence on the growth and dissemination of liberation theology. It is worth mentioning Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa's narratives (Pacepa, 2007)³, as he was the highest-ranking "defector" from the Soviet bloc. He made claims about liberation theology and its connection to the Soviet Union. During this period, the majority of the country's religious institutions were closed, and Stalin's "cult of personality" suppressed the freedom of Soviet citizens to practice Islam, Christianity, and other religions (de Jong, 2014).

Methodology

This study utilizes a comprehensive methodology that aligns with the theological focus of the research. The approach combines historical analysis, theological examination, and critical inquiry to explore the intersections between political theology and critical theology during the Soviet era. The core elements of our methodology include the following components.

Historical research is an important aspect of academic study

This study conducts a comprehensive examination of primary and secondary sources to understand the historical and philosophical background of religious thought. Historical research examines the events and ideological influences that shaped the Soviet era, as well as the dynamics of religious practice and repression during that time. The aim is to identify the historical context in which the interaction between political theology and critical theology occurred.

³ Ion Mihai Pacepa was an operative of the Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service during the Cold War era. He defected to the US, where he was granted political asylum. Also, he is described as "the highest-ranking intelligence officer of the Soviet bloc to defect to the West (Clay, 2021).



Theological Analysis

An integral part of our methodology involves conducting a thorough theological analysis. We analyze the theological underpinnings of political theology and critical theology to identify their key principles, ideologies, and worldviews. This analysis provides the theological foundation necessary to understand the influence of these perspectives on religious thought during the Soviet era.

Case Studies

The study utilizes case studies to demonstrate the practical implications of the intersection between political and critical theology. The study examines historical examples, such as the Catholic Church's relationship with the Soviet Union and the political aspects of theology in Uzbekistan under Soviet rule. These case studies provide practical examples of how theological ideas were implemented in real-world scenarios.

Integration of philosophical thought

This study incorporates relevant philosophical thought into the analysis, recognizing the significance of philosophy in shaping theological and political ideologies. The examination of philosophical frameworks that influenced political and critical theology provides a comprehensive view of the ideological landscape during the Soviet era. The integration of philosophical considerations into analysis can be challenging due to potential divergences and contradictions between philosophical and theological perspectives. These perspectives often approach fundamental questions from different angles and methods, making it difficult to reconcile them. The historical context of the Soviet era adds complexity, as philosophical and theological ideologies were heavily influenced by the state. Interpreting these interactions requires a nuanced understanding of their complex relationships and their impact on shaping the ideological landscape.

Interdisciplinary approach

The research is multifaceted, so this study takes an interdisciplinary approach. The study develops a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interaction between political theology and critical theology by incorporating concepts from history, theology, philosophy, and political science. Through the use of this multifaceted technique, the complicated link between political and critical theology in a theological setting may be thoroughly examined. This study aims to enhance our understanding of how theological viewpoints influenced religious thinking and politics during the Soviet era. It achieves this by integrating historical research, theological analysis, and case studies.

Theology and Politics

Synthesis of Philosophical Thought

Aristotle's "Politics" is a significant work in the field of political philosophy, as it explores fundamental questions about the structure and governance of human societies. It has had a major influence on political thought throughout history. Aristotle explores the inner workings of societies, ranging from households to city-states, and delves into the complexities of effective constitutions and their upkeep. The relationship between ethics and politics is central to Aristotle's view, with ethics serving as the foundation for a just society. The ethical foundation, as outlined in his previous work, the "Nicomachean Ethics", comes before the establishment of political structures (Crisp, 2014). Aristotle categorizes knowledge into theoretical and practical domains and highlights the importance of moral philosophy in governing one's *personal life (ethics)*, *household management (economics)*, and *societal affairs (politics)*. In his work "Politics", Aristotle meticulously constructs a framework for understanding and organizing human societies, with the goal of promoting human flourishing within the social context (Eikeland, 2008).



The exploration of politics is reflected in Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility" (2014), specifically in the theme of proper household management, known as "*oikonomia*", in the novel (Giffin, 2002). This theme goes beyond the household and aims to create an optimal social environment conducive to family flourishing and virtuous living. This aligns with Aristotle's views on the well-being of individuals and society in his ethical and political writings, which highlight the interconnectedness of ethics, theology, and politics.

Islamic scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (2005) address the theological dimensions of justice by drawing on the teachings of the Quran and contrasting them with Greek philosophical perspectives. Al-Attas' research (2005) highlights the integration of theological principles in the analysis of justice and emphasizes the compatibility and convergence of theological and philosophical ideas.

In the modern world, scholars like Kostas Kalimtzis provide insights into political instability as a social "disease" by using Aristotle's "four causes" as a framework (Kalimtzis, 2000). This perspective enables us to contextualize ancient philosophical ideas within current societal challenges and emphasize the enduring significance of theological-philosophical inquiry in the political sphere. Modern philosophers like Jonathan Wolff (2023) delve into key topics in political philosophy, including the state of nature, the legitimacy of the state, governance, liberty, equality, property, and justice. While Aristotle's influence remains significant, modern thinkers provide crucial insights into the changing dynamics of theology and politics. The intersection of theology and politics provides valuable insights into social organization, governance, and ethical foundations.

Intersection of Critical Theology and Politics

The intersection of critical theology and politics is profound when considering sacred texts. Religious scriptures provide valuable insights into the roles and responsibilities of individuals, rulers, and governments in maintaining a just and ethical society. Essential teachings found in the Quran, Hadith, and Biblical verses can be applied to the fields of critical theology and politics. However, the complexity of interpreting and applying these sacred texts to contemporary political and theological issues should not be underestimated. The potential for divergent interpretations and selective use of scripture poses a significant limitation in achieving a harmonious intersection of politics and critical theology.

In the Quran, there is a verse that states, "*And when it is said to them, 'Do not cause corruption on the earth,' they say, 'We are but reformers'*" (Quran, 2:11). This verse from the Quran highlights the significance of peace and the avoidance of social conflict. It aligns with the principles of critical theology, which emphasizes ethical engagement and constructive dialogue. It also highlights the responsibility of religious and political leaders to advocate for peace and justice. The verse warns against associating with unjust individuals, as it may lead to negative consequences. It emphasizes the importance of relying on Allah for protection and assistance. Quran says: "*And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped*" (Quran, 11:113).

The Quran emphasizes the importance of avoiding injustice and oppression. In critical theology, this teaching inspires an unwavering commitment to justice and calls for theological discourse to serve as a moral compass in the face of political challenges. The verse "[...] *And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram lead you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty*" (Quran, 5:2), emphasizes the importance of avoiding sinful behavior and oppression, and reminds believers to be mindful of Allah's strictness in punishing wrongdoing. The prohibition against assisting in injustice or oppression underscores the ethical foundations of critical theology. It provides guidance for



theologians and policymakers to reject involvement in unjust acts and uphold ethical standards. *“And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers”* (Quran, 42:40). This verse serves as a reminder to critical theologians and political leaders of their duty to oppose and rectify unjust actions. It aligns with the core principles of critical theology, which aim to challenge oppressive structures and ideologies. The story of Joseph (peace be upon him) in the Quran exemplifies the moral qualities of a righteous and wise ruler and demonstrates the profound influence that ethical leadership can have on society: *“And the king said, “Bring him to me; I will appoint him exclusively for myself.” And when he spoke to him, he said, “Indeed, you are today established [in position] and trusted. [Joseph] said, “Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian.” And thus We established Joseph in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We touch with Our mercy whom We will, and We do not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good* (Quran, 12:54-56). This narrative serves as a model for critical theology's call for leaders to exercise their authority responsibly.

In Islam, the prophetic tradition states that *It has been narrated through a different chain of transmitters, on the authority of Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman who said: “Messenger of Allah, no doubt, we had an evil time (i. e. the days of Jahiliyya or ignorance) and God brought us a good time (i. e. Islamic period) through which we are now living. Will there be a bad time after this good time? He (the Holy Prophet) said: Yes. I said: Will there be a good time after this bad time? He said: Yes. I said: Will there be a bad time after good time? He said: Yes. I said: How? Whereupon he said: There will be leaders who will not be led by my guidance and who will not adopt my ways? There will be among them men who will have the hearts of devils in the bodies of human beings. I said: What should I do. Messenger of Allah, if I (happen) to live in that time? He replied: You will listen to the Amir and carry out his orders; even if your back is flogged and your wealth is snatched, you should listen and obey”* (Sahih Muslim, 1847b). This hadith recognizes that there may be rulers who stray from ethical principles and offers guidance for theologians and political thinkers who are critical of such rulers. It emphasizes the need for a strong moral foundation in leadership. Or, *Narrated `Abdullah bin `Amr: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Whoever killed a Mu'ahid (a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslim Caliphate) shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise though its fragrance can be smelt at a distance of forty years of traveling* (Sahih al-Bukhari 6914). This hadith emphasizes the sanctity of life and the importance of keeping contracts and agreements. It is consistent with critical theology's emphasis on ethical foreign policy and international relations.

Biblical verses are also relevant to critical theology. The Bible verse Proverbs 28:15: *“[As] a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; [so is] a wicked ruler over the poor people”* compares an evil ruler to a roaring lion and a ravaging bear, emphasizing the negative impact such a ruler can have on a poor population. This Bible verse emphasizes the significant influence that rulers have on the welfare of their people. It is consistent with the important theological idea that leaders have a great responsibility for justice and well-being. Romans 13:1 says, *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”*. The verse acknowledges the divine appointment of authority and emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership. In the context of critical theology, this verse serves as a reminder of the ethical expectations placed on rulers. Furthermore, Matthew 20:20-23 states, *“{20:21} Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping [him,] and desiring a certain thing of him. {20:21} And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. {20:22} But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. {20:23} And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but [it shall be given to them] for whom it is prepared of my Father.”* The exchange in this verse touches on the longing



for positions of power and authority. It aligns with important theological discussions on ethical leadership and the obligation of those in positions of power to exercise wisdom and fairness.

Thus, incorporating these teachings from sacred texts into critical theology and policy serves as a constant reminder of the ethical imperatives that should guide theological engagement and policy-making. These teachings provide valuable insights into the pursuit of justice, ethical governance, and the promotion of peace within the framework of critical theology and politics.

Intersection of religion and international politics

The study of international politics has temporarily marginalized the central role of religion, a trend due to several factors. The emergence of the social sciences brought about a bias against studying religious issues. Classical liberal ideas promoting the separation of church and state have had a lasting impact on the field of social science. This tendency has partly contributed to the neglect of the impact of religion on international politics. Quantifying the exact impact of religion on political decision-making is a difficult task due to the complex nature of this relationship. Religion plays a significant role in international politics in various ways.

First, the formation of worldviews is crucial. Religion significantly influences the perspectives of policymakers and constituents as it fundamentally shapes the context in which policy decisions are made.

Second, it is an important source of legitimacy. Religion significantly shapes the moral compass of political leaders and serves as a basis for the legitimacy of political actions and decisions.

Third, it is important to note the transnational influence in this matter. Religious issues often transcend national borders, triggering domestic disputes with far-reaching international consequences. International religious movements, including fundamentalist movements and political expressions of Islam, the foreign policies of theocratic states, and governments based on religious ideologies have proven capable of exerting significant influence on the global stage.

The transition of leadership within religious communities following the departure of a religious leader is similar to the need for governance in a secular society. In both scenarios, leadership is critical to the preservation of laws, values, and doctrines. The intersection of religion and politics, especially in the Muslim community, has notable aspects. The concept of holy war is significant and illustrates the seamless transition from caliphate to royal authority. This unique feature of Islamic governance entails that the person in charge dominates both the religious and political spheres.

Different religious groups prioritize religious matters and royal authority differently. The Israelites, for example, initially gave priority to religious matters, appointing religious figures such as the "*Kohen*" to oversee religious practices. However, evolving social dynamics necessitated the emergence of political leadership among the Israelites. External challenges, including invasions, led to the installation of kings (Bland, 1986). Prophets and Kings – David and Solomon (peace be upon them), played a central role in the history of Palestine, highlighting the complex relationship between theology and politics. A significant turning point in the history of this era was the division into two dynasties, which brought about a major change in governance.

As the political landscape continued to evolve, the dispersion of the Jewish people and the influence of Christian and Roman rulers added further complexity. The development of Christianity was different and was characterized by the establishment of a religious hierarchy. Early Christian leaders, such as Peter and Ananias, established a separate religious authority from political leadership. The emergence of the term "pope" was significant, as the Pope of Rome assumed the title "Father of the Fathers" (Ramadan, 2006). Christianity struggled with



internal theological disputes that led to the formation of various Christian sects, each of which appointed a patriarch in charge of religious affairs, shaping the diversity of religious practices. This constant interplay between theology and politics illustrates the ever-evolving relationship between these fields.

The complex relationship between religion and politics also applies to foreign policy. The religious beliefs of political leaders greatly influence their worldviews and their pursuit of legitimacy, which in turn impacts a state's foreign policy decisions. This dynamic also applies to diplomatic relations, humanitarian interventions, and international conflicts. Transnational religious movements, such as political manifestations of Islam or the politics of theocratic states, can form alliances or conflicts with other nations, thereby influencing foreign policy decisions. This study underscores the complicated and multifaceted relationship between religion and international politics. It underscores the central role of religion in shaping worldviews, providing a basis for legitimacy, and exerting transnational influence. It also reveals how the interaction between theology and politics evolves over time and continues to influence international relations. A deep understanding of this dynamic is essential to understanding the complex interplay of theology, history, and politics in the global arena.

Case Study: Theology and Foreign Policy During the Soviet Era

This case study examines the complicated relationship between Christian theology, particularly the perspective of the Catholic Church, and foreign policy during the Soviet era. It examines the dynamics between the Vatican, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern Orthodox Church and how these interactions played a crucial role in shaping both the theology of the Church and the geopolitical landscape. During the Stalinist era (1922-1953), persecution of the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union was widespread and severe (Bociurkiw, 1959). This era was characterized by the systematic dissolution of Catholic institutions, the confiscation of property, and the eradication of religious influence. This wave of persecution occurred during the pontificate of Pope Pius XII when the Catholic Church had to endure considerable hardships. The Vatican's relations with Russia were marked by tension. The Soviet government declared the separation of church and state in 1918, resulting in the dissolution of Catholic institutions and the confiscation of Catholic property. Pope Benedict XV condemned communism in 1920, and Pope Pius XI expressed his concern through encyclicals such as *Miserantissimus Redemptor*, *Caritate Christi*, and *Divini Redemptoris*. During World War II, Pope Pius XII maintained Vatican neutrality and refrained from directly criticizing the Soviet Union, despite its ongoing persecution of the Catholic Church.

The Pope neither advocated nor supported military action against communism or the Soviet Union. He focused on saving lives, especially in occupied territories, but avoided public protests against mass killings and deportations. After World War II, leaders of the Oriental Catholic churches who had united with Rome faced intense pressure to break their ties with the Vatican and instead join the Russian Orthodox Church. Some religious groups, such as the Ruthenian Catholic Church, became isolated and were compelled to merge with the Orthodox Church. This struggle significantly changed the landscape of the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe. Pope Pius' XII response to the persecution of the Catholic Church was measured and restrained. He refrained from calling for violence or advocating war against communism or Russia. In his various encyclicals, including *Orientalis omnes Ecclesias* and *Sacro Vergente*, the pope expressed deep concern for the suffering of the faithful and the plight of persecuted bishops and priests (Kent, 2003).

The concept of peaceful coexistence between the Vatican and the Soviet Union began to gain ground after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. The Vatican cautiously explored possibilities for cooperation, especially in the interest of the faithful, but progress was slow and modest. The Soviet Union launched "Operation Seat 12", a disinformation campaign with the goal of undermining the moral authority of the Vatican, specifically targeting the discrediting of Pope



Pius XII. This campaign aimed to portray the pope as a Nazi sympathizer and sought to tarnish the Catholic Church's anti-Communist stance (Kent, 2003).

The relationship between Christian theology and foreign policy during the Soviet era was highly intricate. Pope Pius XII's cautious approach to condemnations and his efforts to protect the faithful reflect a difficult balance between the Church's theological principles and realpolitik. This case study highlights the significant influence of theology on foreign policy decisions and how geopolitical events in turn influenced the theological stance of the Catholic Church. Thus, this case study underscores the challenging dynamic between Christian theology and foreign policy during the Soviet era and demonstrates that the Catholic Church's principled stance against communism and persecution influenced its relationship with the Soviet Union and neighboring Orthodox churches. This relationship serves as an essential context for understanding the political and theological landscape of the time.

Case Study: The Political Dimensions of Theology in Uzbekistan During Soviet Rule

This case study addresses the complex interplay of theology and foreign policy in the context of Uzbekistan during the Soviet period (1924-1991). It examines how the Soviet government's approach to religion significantly affected the theological landscape, influenced foreign policy decisions, and triggered long-term consequences. Islam was the second-largest religion in the Soviet Union, with a sizable Muslim population in Uzbekistan. In the beginning, the Bolsheviks (1917) refrained from harsh repression of Islam, hoping to promote revolutionary ideals among the Muslim population. In the 1930s, however, the Soviet government undertook a drastic campaign against religious institutions; mosques were closed, religious leaders massacred, and the Islamic education system was abolished. The Soviet government's policy toward religion was driven by its goal of promoting atheism. Although mosques continued to exist in major cities, their numbers decreased significantly, reflecting a general suppression of religious activity. There were, however, temporary changes, such as the restoration of the "Mir Arab Madrasa" in Bukhara city in 1946, which provided limited religious education.

During the administrate of Sharof Rashidov (1917-1983), a prominent political figure in the Uzbekistan SSR, a more nuanced attitude toward religion developed. Rashidov gave religion a higher priority in ideological discourse, possibly to consolidate power and adapt to prevailing sentiments (Starr, 2018; Mardonovich, 2023). In the late 1980s, the promotion of *scientific atheism* was discontinued and some *religious restrictions* were lifted. Previously closed mosques reopened, and the translation of the Quran into local languages allowed for a resurgence of Islamic practices. During this time, there was a revival of religious activity in Uzbekistan and other regions of the Soviet Union. The suppression of religion and the subsequent easing of restrictions had a profound impact on Uzbekistan's foreign policy and relations with neighboring Muslim-majority countries. The atheistic policies of the Soviet government resulted in a decrease in religious belief and a widespread lack of knowledge about religion. Given the systematic erasure of religious influence, Uzbekistan's foreign policy could not solely rely on religious or theological ties with other nations.

This case study demonstrates the influence of politics on theological dynamics and vice versa. The Soviet Union's approach to religion directly affected the religious landscape in Uzbekistan, with lasting consequences. The fluctuating attitudes toward religion in Uzbekistan reflect broader changes in Soviet foreign policy, in which atheism was often central. At the same time, this study highlights the resurgence of religious practices in the face of repressive policies that ultimately changed Uzbekistan's foreign policy outlook. Thus, the relationship between theology, politics, and foreign policy is complicated and evolving, with profound implications for nations like Uzbekistan. Understanding this intricate connection is critical to understanding the political dynamics in countries where religion plays a central role in shaping national identity.



Discussion

In the light of the profound insights drawn from sacred texts, including the Quran, Hadith narratives, and Biblical verses, it becomes evident that theology, especially within the context of critical theology, is intricately entwined with the philosophical and historical tapestry of religious thought. The intricate relationship that unfolds between theology and politics, characterized by the fusion of philosophical and theological ideas, has significant ramifications for the interaction of religion and international politics. In this theological discussion, we will explore the complex interplay between these elements, using case studies from the Soviet era. Critical theology, as outlined in the theoretical background, emerges as a potent framework for addressing the pressing issues of our globalized world. It is rooted in a critical response to the challenges and circumstances it confronts. In this context, a critical theological perspective serves as a vessel for profound theological analysis and engagement in our contemporary world. It conscientiously acknowledges the search for truth, especially in times of crisis, offering a principled response to the tumultuous events that shape our world. This perspective serves as a liberating force, revealing hidden ideologies and driven by the transformative "Christ event," in which divinity is deeply connected to humanity. The theological implications of critical theology challenge established paradigms and extend beyond traditional boundaries, encompassing the critical theological imperative.

The synthesis of theological and political thought has its origins in the history of philosophy of religion, tracing the development of the relationship between theology and politics. This dynamic relationship is enhanced by the significant contributions of influential philosophers and theologians, highlighting the profound depth and interconnectedness of this interplay. The discourse that emerged from the likes of Karl Barth and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School underscores the imperative for theology to address the political ramifications of theological thought and the theological foundations underpinning political theory. The interwar period, disillusionment after World War I, and a shift in ideological constructs have all influenced this discourse. Critical theology serves as a bridge between these realms, providing valuable insights into the theological implications of the works of continental social and political philosophers. The interplay between theological and philosophical thought demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between these domains, influencing contemporary theological inquiry.

The convergence of theology and politics naturally extends their influence into the realm of international politics. This case study examines the relationship between theology and foreign policy during the Soviet era, illustrating how political actions and theological ideologies intersect. It draws attention to the pivotal roles played by institutions like the Catholic Church, the Soviet Union, and the Eastern Orthodox Church, illustrating the profound impact of religious thought on international politics. The tensions, diplomatic complexities, and ideological clashes revealed in this context highlight the intricate relationship between theological principles and the practical world of politics. Gaining insights into the geopolitical landscape and the lasting influence of theology in shaping international relations is crucial for understanding this dynamic.

The first case study, which focuses on the Soviet era, provides a clear example of the crucial role that theology plays in foreign policy. The persecution of the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era illustrates the difficulties that religious institutions faced under political control. The Catholic Church's steadfast opposition to communism and persecution had a lasting impact on its relationship with the Soviet Union and neighboring Orthodox churches. This dynamic is deeply rooted in theological thought, where faith and the response to political ideologies played a pivotal role in shaping the geopolitical landscape.

The second case study, focusing on Uzbekistan under Soviet rule, sheds light on the political aspects of theology. The unofficial policy of state atheism in the Soviet Union, which involved closing mosques and suppressing religious practices, highlights the power dynamics between theology and politics. The religious landscape of Uzbekistan, coupled with the subsequent



shifts in the relationship between theology and political authority, serves as a poignant example of the intricate interplay between these two domains. The political ideologies rooted in Soviet rule had a direct influence on religious practices and theological thought, further emphasizing the inseparable relationship between the two realms.

This discussion highlights the complex relationship between theology and politics, which is rooted in the historical and philosophical foundations of religious thought. It navigates the theological framework of critical theology, the fusion of philosophical ideas, and the intersection of religion and international politics, as exemplified by the case studies of the Soviet era and Uzbekistan. This discourse emphasizes the strong influence of religious thought on the global landscape of political thought and action, maintaining a strictly theological perspective.

Conclusion

In the course of our exploration into the dynamic nexus between theology and politics, viewed through the lens of critical theology, we have unveiled a compelling and enduring dialogue between these two profound domains. In this concluding reflection, we will revisit the key elements of our study and consider their importance in the broader context of history, philosophy, and religious thought. At its heart, this study has been anchored in the critical theological perspective, offering a distinctive vantage point to dissect the interrelationships between theology and politics. This critical framework is centered around the noble goal of freeing individuals from the influence of subtle ideologies, a task that remains urgent. Our journey has called for discernment and clarity, ultimately leading to a deeper comprehension of the implications and interconnections between these spheres.

Throughout this study, we embarked on a journey to synthesize the philosophical underpinnings that inform the intersection of theology and politics. Our exploration has charted the evolution of these ideas, from the existential crises of the early 20th century to the pluralistic discourse prevalent in contemporary times. This synthesis has provided profound insights into the ever-evolving nature of theological constructs and their enduring influence on the realm of political thought. We delved into the intersection of religion and international politics, shedding light on the intricate relationship between the divine and the secular. Through this inquiry, we have come to appreciate how religious beliefs and values profoundly shape the worldviews of political leaders, the moral compass of societies, and the foreign policies of nations. Consequently, this journey has granted us a deeper insight into the global impact of theology and religious thought on the intricate tapestry of international affairs.

As a crucial point in our journey, we delved into two captivating case studies. The first, a nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between theology and foreign policy during the tumultuous Soviet era, illustrated how theology intertwines with political decisions, shapes national policies, and influences the destinies of religious communities. The second case study unveiled the intricate political dimension of theology within Uzbekistan during the era of Soviet rule, offering tangible examples of theology's sway over political choices and religious communities. These real-world applications underscore the historical and contemporary relevance of this ongoing dialogue, especially in regions and eras marked by profound geopolitical transformations.

To conclude, this study has unveiled the intricate web of interconnection that binds theology and politics. From the vantage point of critical theology to the broader philosophical and historical dimensions of religious thought, we have unearthed a dialogue that transcends time and remains perpetually pertinent. Our understanding of how theology shapes worldviews provides legitimacy, and exerts transnational influence extends beyond historical contexts. It is of utmost importance in navigating our complex modern world. This inquiry concludes that theology and politics maintain an ongoing dialogue, which is important for us to actively



participate in with a critical and reflective mindset. By doing so, we do not merely decipher the rich history of religious thought; we also illuminate its profound implications for our world today. This study emphasizes that theology is not outdated but rather a powerful influence on our collective human experience. By acknowledging and embracing this influence, we are better prepared to face the challenges of our globalized world with wisdom and insight.

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