

I.B. TAURIS

# Missionaries in Persia

*Cultural Diversity and Competing Norms  
in Global Catholicism*

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Christian Windler

Translated by Pamela E. Selwyn

**I.B. TAURIS**

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## Abbreviations

AAV	Archivio Apostolico Vaticano
ACDF	Archivum Congregationis pro Doctrina Fidei, Rome
Acta	Acta Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda fide, APF
AGOCD	Archivum Generale Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum, Rome
AN	Archives Nationales de France, Paris
APF	Archivio Storico <i>de Propaganda fide</i> , Rome
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu
ASFI	Archivio di Stato, Florence
ASPD	Archivio di Stato, Padoa
BA	Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BL	British Library, London
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
CP	Congregazioni Particolari, APF
DAAG	Directorate of Archives and Archeology, Goa
EIC	East India Company
IOR	India Office Records, BL
MAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve
MEP	Archives des Missions étrangères de Paris
Mss. fr.	Manuscrits français, BNF
n.a.f.	nouvelles acquisitions françaises, BNF
NA	Nationaal Archief, The Hague
SC	Scritture riferite nei Congressi, APF
SO	Sanctum Officium, ACDF
SOCG	Scritture originali riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, APF
St.St.	Stanza storica, ACDF
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

# Glossary of Latin Terms

**baptism *in articulo mortis*** baptism “at the point of death”

***bigamia simultanea*** “simultaneous bigamy,” the crime of entering a second marriage while the first marriage is still valid and the spouse alive

**bishop *in partibus infidelium*** a bishop “in the lands of the unbelievers,” in this case a nonresidential or titular Latin bishop of a diocese in the Near East

***casus reservatus*** a sin that can only be absolved by a higher church authority, i.e., a bishop or, in some cases, the pope

***communicatio in sacris*** sacramental community, in this case between Catholics and Eastern Christians or Protestants

***consultor*** an expert who gives a nonbinding advisory opinion in a procedure at the Holy Office

***devotio domestica*** domestic devotion, in this case the devotional practices of religious minorities restricted to their home

***donati*** the lay brothers of a religious order, in this case the Discalced Carmelites

***dubium***, pl. *dubia* a question (“doubt”) on church doctrine addressed to the Holy Office

***dubia circa sacramenta*** “doubts” concerning the proper administration of the sacraments

***excommunicatio latae sententiae*** an excommunication incurred *ipso facto*, which comes into force automatically, although no church authority is aware of the offense and no sentence has been passed

***facultates*** the competencies and rights assigned to clerics, in this case the missionaries

***formula scribendi*** the rules governing the correspondence of the members of the order with their superiors, established in the Society of Jesus

***ius scribendi*** the right of a regular cleric to correspond with the superiors of his order

***litterae annuae*** the annual letters that each Jesuit mission, college, and province were required to submit to the superiors

***nihil esse respondendum*** “there shall be no answer,” a formula used by the curial congregations to avoid taking a position on controversial issues

- ordinationes** the directives by which the visitors clarified rules at the end of a visitation
- plenitudo potestatis** “the plenitude of power,” the supreme jurisdiction and the supremacy over law claimed by the papacy
- potestas absoluta** “absolute power,” as opposed to power subject to law (*potestas ordinata*)
- primatus honoris** the “primacy of honor” attributed to the bishop of Rome as the successor to St. Peter, to be distinguished from the primacy of jurisdiction claimed by the papacy
- Propaganda Fide** *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith
- Rituale Romanum** the “Roman Ritual,” published in 1614, regulating the ritual functions performed by a Roman Catholic priest
- suspensio a divinis** the suspension of a cleric from the exercise of the powers of orders



## Introduction

*I must not neglect to mention that the missionaries move throughout the entire Orient in their own habits; among the common people there they are considered physicians and surgeons, who treat the sick for the love of God; they pass for dervishes, that is, men detached from the world and devoted to the veneration of God and the service of their neighbors. The fact that they generally confirm this reputation with a rather pure and orderly way of life renders them agreeable to the Mohammedans.<sup>1</sup>*

The man who described Catholic missionaries in Persia in these words was Jean Chardin, a French jeweler who, after living in Persia for several years, published the first version of his travel account in 1686. This work appeared in numerous editions and translations into various languages and thus became the most important source on Persia in the European Enlightenment. When he published the account, Chardin was living as a Calvinist refugee in England. His travelogue was strongly influenced by his experiences as a religious refugee, and he contrasted religious toleration in Persia with persecution in Catholic France. In his work, Chardin promoted an understanding of religion in which godliness depended on the individual believer's sincere veneration of God and resulting way of life. He contrasted this conception of religion, which he encountered in his contacts with the Islamic societies of the Near East, with the Catholic confessional church's commitment to institutionally bound regularity.<sup>2</sup>

Despite his negative experiences in Europe, Chardin's view of Catholic missionaries working in Persia was by no means wholly negative. During his sojourns in Persia in the years 1666–7, 1669, and 1672–7, Chardin enjoyed the hospitality of the Capuchins and the Discalced Carmelites in Isfahan on several occasions. They were among his most important informants on the country, and they introduced him to local contacts, although they were well aware that their guest was a Protestant. Chardin in turn acknowledged these services and was prepared to respond in kind when the occasion arose. In his work, he testified to the diverse social roles that missionaries assumed on the ground. He described them as men of God who lived withdrawn from worldly affairs, as bearers of medical and scientific knowledge and as local experts who could open doors and introduce him to useful contacts.

Chardin's comments on and relationship with Catholic missionaries in Persia lead us to key questions for a novel history of Catholic missions. This book tells this story not as a history of expansion but instead centers the missionaries as local actors

operating at the intersection of divergent systems of norms. It directs attention to the members of various religious orders who saw themselves as pioneers in the universal mission of their church, but who did not bow submissively to the demands of the Roman Curia. Rather than focusing on the Jesuits, as most studies of early modern missions in Asia have done,<sup>3</sup> this book considers the whole range of religious orders present in Safavid Iran: Augustinians, Discalced Carmelites, Capuchins, Jesuits, and Dominicans. Special attention is given to the Discalced Carmelites (the male Italian branch of the order reformed by Teresa of Ávila), who found it particularly challenging to reconcile their active lives as missionaries and envoys in the service of the papacy with the requirements of a contemplative mendicant order.

This book draws on the heuristic potential of microhistory to show how early modern global Catholicism confronted, and was shaped by, cultural diversity and competing normative demands in multiple ways.<sup>4</sup> It uses the interactions between Catholic missionaries in the Safavid Empire and the superiors of their orders and the Roman Curia as a lens through which to deconstruct the notion of a uniform Tridentine Catholicism as a myth created during the nineteenth-century conflicts between the Catholic Church and the new nation-states.<sup>5</sup> Instead of simply juxtaposing Europe and Asia as monolithic entities, the book highlights the coexistence of competing normative systems and their impacts on the experience of both the missionaries on the ground and the societies of Catholic Europe with which they stayed in touch.<sup>6</sup>

In early modern European societies, religious, social, and common good-oriented norms competed and conflicted with each other. It was only during the period of the Atlantic Revolutions around 1800 that the coexistence of these different systems of norms was fundamentally reorganized. In Europe and the Americas, reformers and revolutionaries claimed to privilege political norms oriented toward the common good over alternative religious and social normative frameworks, thus disentangling, and more clearly demarcating, the various social fields with their respective normative demands.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the move toward less ambiguity as a result of confrontations with the churches that emerged from the Protestant Reformations, different systems of norms continued to coexist and intermingle within early modern Catholicism. Thus, for example, in their rejection of a worldly way of life, the religious orders distinguished themselves from Roman court society and the Curia, but even within the Curia, there was a virtually inherent diversity of and competition between norms due to the dual spiritual and secular nature of the papacy.<sup>8</sup> The rights of patronage or protection that secular Catholic rulers asserted over the churches of their dominions and the missions, the influence of these rulers, which extended as far as the Roman Curia, and the privileges of the religious orders gave early modern Catholicism a composite and polycentric character. Not dissimilar in principle from particular law in secular “composite monarchies,” the privileges of the local churches and the orders meant that the practices of alignment with the *one* prince of the Church were decisively shaped by the agency of subaltern actors.<sup>9</sup>

Safavid Persia, in turn, was not the monolithic Shi’ite “theocratic state” historians once imagined it to be.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, two centuries after the Safavids rose to power, around one-third of their subjects were still Sunni

Muslims, and even a segment of the political elites had converted only superficially to Shi'a Islam.<sup>11</sup> To legitimize their rule, the Safavids appealed not just to Shi'a Islam but also to key figures in the Abrahamic prophetic tradition and to pre-Islamic Persian and Turkish-Mongol history.<sup>12</sup> Together with their antagonism toward the Ottomans, which the Safavids shared with the papacy and secular Christian courts in Europe, the inclusive character of their imperial rule, especially under Shah 'Abbās I (r. 1588–1629), created the preconditions for the reception of Catholic missionaries at the Safavid court and for their establishment in Isfahan and its Armenian quarter of New Julfa starting in the early seventeenth century.

The study of the missionaries' experiences in this context contributes to the enterprise of provincializing early modern Europe.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the Persian missions, the centrality of Rome as the norm-setting authority in missionaries' everyday lives was profoundly called into question. This was not just a result of the adverse conditions under which missionaries, the superiors of their orders, and the Roman Curia communicated over great distances. The fact that missionaries in seventeenth-century Asian empires participated in local societies from subaltern positions also clearly contributed to the "de-centering" of the Roman authorities. As Jürgen Osterhammel has shown, in their descriptions of the Asian empires, European observers at that time resorted to negative othering less often than they searched for similarities and equivalences. It was not until the period of the Atlantic Revolutions that the inclusive Eurocentrism of the Enlightenment was replaced by an "exclusive Eurocentrism" that took European superiority "as axiomatic."<sup>14</sup> While they hoped to convert the Persians to their faith, in the seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries did not differ from secular visitors from Europe in viewing the Persians as heirs to a glorious past.<sup>15</sup>

In this respect, Catholic missions to Asia differed starkly from the missionary enterprises in the Americas. Unlike in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Americas, European "expansion" in Asia rarely resulted in conquest and the takeover of political power. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the power and influence of the Portuguese, and later the Dutch and English, in Asia were largely limited to maritime spaces, while on land they interacted with locals from a subordinate position.<sup>16</sup> Their inferiority found symbolic expression in the ceremonial practices to which their agents and envoys of various ranks and status—including Catholic clerics—had to submit at the courts of Persia, the Mughal Empire, and China.<sup>17</sup> By participating in Safavid court life, missionaries from the distant European "province" contributed to establishing the host court as a political and cultural center.

Such conditions contrast sharply with the conventional narratives about the missions, which, starting in the sixteenth century, were shaped by the Catholic Church's claims to universality. In the context of Iberian expansion and opposition to Protestantism, the Latin term *missio* took on its double meaning of spreading the faith among non-Christians and intensifying it among Christians. According to this understanding, the term contained the aspiration to change entire societies.<sup>18</sup> As such, missions throughout the world became a central pillar of the identity of the papacy, religious orders, and secular Catholic rulers.<sup>19</sup> They could be portrayed as a triumph over the Protestant churches, which only began to dispatch missionaries overseas on a larger scale in the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Viewed from this perspective, missionaries

were the spearhead of a new, confessional Catholicism, one that drew increasingly narrow boundaries around what was considered orthodoxy. Congregations within the Roman Curia such as the Holy Office and the *Propaganda Fide* established in 1622, which institutionally underpinned papal claims to *plenitudo potestatis* in doctrinal matters or missions, were meant to project the image of a more strongly centralized confessional church.

Contemporaries, by contrast, were aware of the challenges associated with missions across the globe. The image of missionaries was accordingly ambivalent even within the Church: even those orders, like the Society of Jesus, that had expressly enshrined the apostolate as a central task in their constitutions regarded missionary activities not just as the fulfillment of a duty but also as potentially perilous for the observance of the order's Rule.<sup>21</sup> The varied, new local forms of ecclesiastical practice that emerged from the overseas expansion of Catholicism ran utterly counter to efforts to more clearly establish the requirements of the Catholic confessional church. While missions all over the world were central to the self-fashioning of Counter-Reformation, confessional Catholicism, missions also increasingly led Catholic clerics to interact with diverse societies, which fostered processes of pluralization.<sup>22</sup> Clerics who set out to win over souls for the "true religion" turned into local actors who built their reputations by defining their social roles in accordance with the expectations of the host society. In Persia, the missionaries failed from the very beginning to gain large numbers of new converts and instead cultivated "friendship" and "good correspondence" with Muslims and Christians of various denominations (Roman Catholics, as well as Armenians and Protestants). More and more, this practice was at odds with the increasingly rigid ways of understanding Catholic Christianity as exclusive of any other faith.

As a consequence of European expansion to America, Africa, and Asia beginning in the late fifteenth century, encounters with previously virtually unknown cultures acquired an unprecedented intensity. When the problematic consequences of mass baptism, as practiced in the early period of Iberian expansion in the Americas, were recognized over the course of the sixteenth century, Catholic missionaries in America and Asia contributed to a new body of knowledge whose aim was to facilitate more individual forms of inner conversion that were not limited to the formally correct performance of church rituals.<sup>23</sup>

Missionaries differed from other intermediaries in that they not only encountered people from remote cultures in everyday interactions but ideally were also able to influence them in the transcendental dimensions of their lives. In commercial or diplomatic exchanges, knowledge of the other and trust in their future actions could be reduced to those aspects that were immediately relevant for human coexistence. The permanence of such relationships depended upon whether the actors could reach an agreement about the rules that applied in the specific situations in which they interacted with one another.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of missionary activity, however, the processes of knowledge accumulation went deeper. The consequences of these processes were accordingly also farther reaching. Thus, starting in the second half of the seventeenth century, contrary to the intentions of the people who had gathered it, knowledge about the "heathen" societies in Asia increasingly challenged the Church's certainties. The great

Asian empires did not fit into the category of barbarism but were instead experienced as at least equal to European societies. The engagement with non-Christian cultures promoted by the Catholic missions thus decisively contributed to relativizing European certainties, a process that Paul Hazard described as a “crisis of the European mind.” Particularly in the wake of the so-called Chinese rites controversy, it ultimately seemed impossible to reduce the unknown to the known and Chinese religion to Catholicism: “Nothing now remained but to acknowledge the existence of an entity with which no terms could be made, yet an entity at once strange and majestic.”<sup>25</sup>

The starting point for the debate over rites and the resulting destabilization of European certainties was the local ritual practices that church actors, first in China and later in Europe, regarded, depending on their viewpoint, either as permissible or as backsliding into idolatry. The wide-ranging resonance of these controversies contributed early on to an increased interest in the history of the missions to China. The scholars who began to study missionary activities within local sociocultural contexts shifted their attention to practices of adaptation or accommodation, while still focusing mainly on the missionaries. Since the 1990s, studying missions from the perspective of a history of expansion has given way to an exploration of Chinese Christian communities. The practices of these communities are now understood as the expression of specific forms of Christianity that emerged from interactions between locals and missionaries.<sup>26</sup> Associated with this historiographical shift is a focus beyond the courtly urban milieu of the male *literati*, for example, to include rural Christian communities<sup>27</sup> and the female-dominated domestic sphere as well.<sup>28</sup> These developments have also led to the insight that the priests working in the context of the Catholic missions were “more than just missionaries of the Christian faith,” since they assumed diverse social roles on the ground.<sup>29</sup>

The same development toward a history of local forms of Christianity has also become evident in research on other regions of Asia. Ines G. Županov has written of “tropical Catholicism” in South India, a practice of adapting Tridentine Catholicism to local conditions.<sup>30</sup> In the Near East, Bernard Heyberger’s work on Christians in the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire is representative of the growing research focus on local Christianities that has been underway since the 1990s in this context as well. Since converting Muslims was forbidden, missionaries in the Ottoman Empire had to content themselves with proselytizing among Eastern Christians. These contacts led to a heightened sense of religious difference among Eastern Christians as well as to a standardization and simultaneous internalization of their religious identities, which were not too different from the processes in contemporary Europe that scholars of confessionalization have described.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, the practices of sacramental community (*communicatio in sacris*), which continued to shape the relationships between Eastern Christians and Catholic missionaries at the end of the eighteenth century, illustrate the limits of these processes of confessional disambiguation.<sup>32</sup>

The multiplication of studies on different settings also allows for a reevaluation of the interactions between missionary practices and cultural transformations in Europe. Recent research has postulated that the Chinese and Malabar rites controversies were “geographically, chronologically and epistemologically part of larger processes.”<sup>33</sup> This

book takes up this challenge and analyzes these sorts of transformations within global Catholicism from a Near Eastern, Persian perspective.

Compared to the missions in China, Japan, India, and the Ottoman Empire, the activities of Catholic missionaries in Persia have received little attention from scholars.<sup>34</sup> This may be in part because, within the master narrative of Catholic expansion, the Persian mission could only be viewed as a failure. Initial hopes to convert Persian Muslims proved to be in vain. The missionaries hardly fared better among the Armenians who became the main target of the mission because of the prohibition on missionary activities among Muslims: only a small segment of Armenians agreed to enter into a union with Rome. In 1714, more than a century after the arrival of the first missionaries, there were four Catholic churches in New Julfa, the Armenian quarter of Isfahan, the imperial capital of Persia. Three of them—belonging to the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and the Discalced Carmelites, respectively—mainly served the approximately 100 Latin Christians (known as Franks) there. The fourth church was that of the Armenian Catholic parish, which was under the patronage of the Armenian merchant family Sceriman and had about ninety members. Given that there were some 30,000 Christians living in New Julfa at the end of the seventeenth century, this was a miniscule number. Even the fact that the Scerimans, one of the leading, globally active Armenian merchant families of New Julfa, supported the union with Rome cannot disguise the Persian mission's lack of success from the perspective of conversion.<sup>35</sup>

However, precisely the aspects that make the Persian missions appear unattractive from the standpoint of a history of expansion also make it a worthwhile object of study if we turn our attention instead to the multiple social roles of clerics and their entanglements with local society. Several peculiarities set the Persian mission apart from other missions in Asia. First, members of several orders (up to five at times) of different origins were present at the same time in the same place, namely, the imperial capital of Isfahan and its Armenian quarter of New Julfa. Second, the small size of the European diaspora and the mutual interdependence of its members facilitated close contacts across confessional lines. The resulting multivocality of the documents affords us a unique opportunity to reconstruct the local entanglements and diverse social roles of the missionaries.

The Discalced Carmelites were dispatched to Persia by Clement VIII (Ippolito Aldobrandini, r. 1592–1605) in 1604 and arrived in Isfahan in 1607. There they encountered the Portuguese Augustinians, who had come to Persia in 1602 and considered the mission there to be under the patronage (*Padroado*) of the kings of Portugal in their *Estado da Índia*.<sup>36</sup> Challenging such claims of secular rulers was a central aspect of the politics of Clement VIII, whose significance for the history of post-Tridentine Catholicism has been made increasingly clear by recent scholarship. With the help of his nephews Pietro Aldobrandini and Cinzio Passeri Aldobrandini, additional confidants, and the congregations of the Curia, the pope sought to consolidate his hold on the Church at the expense of the College of Cardinals, to strengthen the rights of the Church and push back the influence of the Iberian powers.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the Persian mission of the Discalced Carmelites was *the* project in the field of foreign missions. It was conducted not under Spanish or Portuguese auspices but directly from Rome by members of an order that had been founded by Clement VIII immediately

before he sent them to Persia. This policy was continued by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*), which was established in 1622 by another reformist pope, Gregory XV (Alessandro Ludovisi, r. 1621–3), against the resistance of the Iberian powers.<sup>38</sup> Like Clement VIII, the members of the *Propaganda Fide* were initially convinced that Persia would prove a fruitful field of endeavor, thanks to the mission of the Discalced Carmelites.

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, relations with the Safavid Empire occupied an important place in papal self-presentation, as evident from the pictorial program of the *Sala Regia* in the Quirinal Palace commissioned by Paul V (Camillo Borghese, r. 1605–21). Together with the emissaries of other non-European rulers, the ambassador of Shah ‘Abbās I is depicted as paying homage to the papacy’s claim to universal jurisdiction (cover illustration).<sup>39</sup>

The conflict between the Curia and the Portuguese *Padroado*, the competition between the various orders, and the rivalries between the secular Catholic courts finally led to a situation in which five different orders as well as secular priests from the French *Missions étrangères de Paris* were active at the same time in the small space of Isfahan and New Julfa. The Portuguese Augustinians and the Discalced Carmelites were followed in 1628 by the French Capuchins and in the middle of the century by the Jesuits. By supporting the missions of these two orders, Louis XIII (r. 1610–43) and Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) compensated for the weak French commercial presence in Persia and the Gulf region. Until the arrival of a secular envoy in the early eighteenth century, the guardian of the Capuchin mission in Isfahan was considered the French king’s agent at the Safavid court. The Jesuit mission was dependent on the order’s Lyon province but was also under Polish protection. In the 1680s, the Dominican Sebastian Knab, archbishop of Nakhchivan, founded a settlement of his order in New Julfa, which was associated with the Roman reform congregation of Santa Sabina and thus, like the Discalced Carmelites, was relatively closely connected to the Curia.<sup>40</sup> Aside from the Augustinians, Discalced Carmelites, Capuchins, Jesuits, and Dominicans, individual secular priests from the French *Missions étrangères* were also active in Isfahan and New Julfa in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Members of religious orders also established themselves for a time in other cities, especially Shiraz (Discalced Carmelites), Tabriz (Capuchins), and various ports on the Persian Gulf (Discalced Carmelites). In the 1620s, the Discalced Carmelites and the Augustinians also settled in Basra. Although this town was ruled by a local dynasty at the time and later conquered by the Ottomans, the Discalced Carmelites and the Roman Curia treated the convent there as part of the mission to Persia. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, some priests from the *Missions étrangères* lived in Hamadan as part of the retinue of the French bishop of Babylon (Baghdad).<sup>41</sup>

Due to the unusually large presence of regular and secular clergy in the same location—Isfahan and New Julfa—the lack of success in conversions was already quite striking for contemporaries. While clerics could not avoid the sobering conclusion that the mission to Persia must be regarded as a failure, their accounts, together with those of laymen such as Jean Chardin, open up perspectives on the multiple social roles occupied by missionaries in their relations with various local actors. Clerics and laity

alike integrated into local society and maintained relations with the court and people of varying status and religion.

With its decentering perspective, the present study follows recent work on local forms of Christianity in Asia and the Near East. By concentrating on the missionaries as local actors, it also sets its own very specific emphasis. The investigation focuses on the practices of the missionaries in their capacity as mediators between differing normative systems rather than on the practices of the indigenous Christian community in interaction with European clerics. The history of the Catholic missions told here is thus not one of a transfer of confessional ecclesiastical practice from Rome and other Western European centers to Persia. Instead, the focus has been placed on the missionaries as actors embedded in local and translocal relationships who gave their actions meaning as they worked through each specific local interaction.

With its focus on the Discalced Carmelites, the book highlights an order relatively close to the Curia. Yet this relationship to the papacy points to a significant characteristic of Catholic missions in the early modern period: even after the establishment of the Roman *Propaganda Fide* in 1622, the missions remained primarily a matter for the individual orders. The limits of the papal mission are further borne out by the fact that the papacy's preferred instruments in the Persian mission, the Discalced Carmelites, did not evolve to become an actual missionary order. Both the number of religious active in the missions and their proportion relative to the overall personnel of the order remained consistently low.<sup>42</sup>

While the secretaries and members of the *Propaganda Fide* themselves were very much aware of their dependence on the orders, the state of relevant source materials and limited access to the archives of the orders have led researchers to overemphasize the role of the Roman Curia over that of the orders. One exception is the Jesuits, who, thanks to their well-organized and accessible archives, have been the subject of countless studies exploring the order's scope of activities especially in the missions, which as such have come to be closely associated with the Society of Jesus. To the extent that the relevant archival sources have been preserved and made accessible, it is clear that the missionaries of other orders also mainly corresponded with their own superiors, to whom they were responsible by virtue of their vows. Thus, while this book examines the social roles of missionaries in their local contexts, it studies them primarily as members of religious orders.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from the documentation in the *Curia generalizia* of the Discalced Carmelites and the Society of Jesus in Rome, the author consulted a multiplicity of sources of varied origin, notably the holdings of the archives of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* and the Holy Office. The responses to the challenges of living with tensions between different normative systems differed according to the order, the individuals involved, and the point in time, as reflected by the correspondence between missionaries on the one hand and superiors and the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* in Rome on the other. These epistolary exchanges illuminate the relationships of missionaries with Armenians and European Christians of other confessions, as well as their relations with the Muslims with whom they communicated at court and in scholarly venues. Despite the missionaries' tendency to convey the impression that they were faithfully fulfilling the norms of the Church, the *Propaganda Fide* had to deal with a plethora of

deviant behaviors, as the records of the congregation show. The Holy Office played a key role in clearing up doubtful cases (*dubia*) relating to sacramental practices and church doctrine that were brought to the attention of the Curia. The dossiers of the *dubia*, preserved in the archives of the Holy Office, offer important insights into the treatment of deviating practices by missionaries as well as the Latin and Armenian laity. We must consider, however, that the scope of the archival holdings of the *Propaganda Fide* and the Holy Office mainly reflects the differing reach of the two congregations and less the relative importance of individual missions on the ground. In the case of the missions to Persia, the archives of both curial congregations document the Discalced Carmelites and Dominicans sent directly by the papacy relatively well, whereas their holdings concerning the Portuguese Augustinians, French Capuchins, Jesuits, and priests of the *Missions étrangères de Paris* are far more fragmentary.

Like most studies of foreign missions, the present work relies overwhelmingly on archival materials originating in the activities of the leadership of the order and the Curia. Since the missions in Isfahan and New Julfa were abandoned during the turmoil after the toppling of the Safavids in the eighteenth century, they lacked the institutional continuity into the nineteenth century that might have ensured the preservation of local archives.<sup>44</sup> The surviving source material ought to be taken with a grain of salt. The documents in the Roman archives offer insights into everyday missionary life only when local actors turned to their superiors and to the curial congregations for various reasons, or when these superiors or congregations sought information about circumstances on the ground, for example during visitations. The image of local practices conveyed by the archival holdings of the order superiors and the Curia is thus not merely fragmentary; these documents consistently measure local practices against the expectations placed upon missionaries from Rome.<sup>45</sup>

Sources produced outside the conflicted area between local practice and ecclesiastical norms are comparatively rare but provide important alternative insights. Worth mentioning in this context are the travel accounts of Protestant authors such as Adam Olearius, Engelbert Kaempfer, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, and Jean Chardin. All of them maintained close relationships with missionaries, whom they met not just as followers of other faiths but also as fellow Christians and compatriots.

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This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 elucidates the conditions and practices of communication between the Roman Curia, religious superiors, and missionaries within the context of early modern processes of institution building. With the deconstruction of older notions of secular “absolutist” rule, the study of ecclesiastical institutions has also been placed on new foundations. How effectively could the Curia actually monitor and direct missionaries acting far away from Rome? How did the missionaries use the institutions of the Curia and their religious orders? To what extent could the Curia and the order’s superiors expand their reach thanks to the demands of actors on the ground? Moving away from an approach oriented toward the Curia, the chapter places equal attention on communication within the orders, for the study of which the archive of the Discalced Carmelites in Rome provides unusually rich sources. It offers insights into the coexistence within early modern

Catholicism of differing systems of norms, which in turn interacted with foreign cultures in the missions.

Chapter 2 introduces the Safavid Empire under ‘Abbās I and his successors as an arena of Catholic mission. It shows how the conflicts with the Ottomans and the inclusive domestic strategies of rule since the reign of ‘Abbās I created favorable conditions for Persia’s interaction with European courts and trading companies, as well as for the reception of the missionaries. Yet, contrary to older narratives, the chapter locates relations between the court and European actors within the Asian context into which the Safavid Empire was integrated. Furthermore, it points to the importance of the Armenians of New Julfa as a main target of the Catholic mission, and it shows how the global entanglements of this local Christian minority through its commercial activities opened up new possibilities for Catholic mission. The final subchapter demonstrates how the inclusive nature of Safavid rule fed images of a philo-Christian court and how the Roman Curia began to base important decisions on this fiction, which proved surprisingly long-lived.

The three chapters that follow explore the interactions between the missionaries and Muslims, Armenians, and laypeople of European origin, respectively. When the Augustinians and the Discalced Carmelites arrived in Isfahan in the early seventeenth century, they turned first to the ruler and his court (Chapter 3). While their plans for alliances and hopes to convert Shi’a Muslims were soon thwarted, the missionaries did manage to gain access to the court. The missionaries’ disputations on points of religion and philosophy with Shi’a clerics polarized them on questions of dogma, yet fostered a degree of familiarity between people who respected each other’s standing as scholars. Beyond the narrow circles of the court, Persian Muslims appealed to the missionaries as healers. Did they attribute the missionaries’ capacities in this field only to their presumed medical knowledge or also to their ability as men of God to bring about miracles?

The elevated status of some missionaries framed their activities among the Armenians (Chapter 4) and the small European diaspora (Chapter 5), who lived as *ḍimmī* (non-Muslim “protected persons”) under the authority of the shah. In both cases, relations of “friendship” and “good correspondence” went hand in hand with the othering of Armenians and Protestants as “schismatics” or “heretics” and introduced a considerable degree of ambiguity, even in religious practice. When the Augustinians and the Discalced Carmelites first arrived in Persia in the early seventeenth century, favorable assumptions, further nourished by a friendly reception by the Armenian clergy, facilitated *communicatio in sacris* (Chapter 4). Starting in the 1630s, both sides articulated confessional differences more clearly, while the missionaries cultivated close relations with Armenian families who were active in trade with Catholic commercial hubs from Western Europe to the Philippines and adapted their religious practice to the places where they were staying. Chapter 5 analyzes relations between Catholic missionaries and laypeople of European origin who operated in conditions of mutual interdependence. As with the relations with Armenians, social proximity managed to blur clear-cut confessional differentiations up to the eighteenth century.

Chapters 3 to 5 also inquire into the multiple social roles that missionaries played in their interactions with people of different confessions and religions. Their services as religious specialists can be viewed against this backdrop. The chapters ask how participants attributed specific meaning to the religious rituals, including the sacraments, that the missionaries performed in local contexts. What did the coexistence of diverse normative frames of reference mean for the actions of people who had been sent by their superiors to spread *the* one and only truth? How did they reconcile their church's demand for confessional unambiguity with local practices that showed a relatively high degree of tolerance for ambiguity?<sup>46</sup>

Against this backdrop, the relationship between the integration of missionaries into local sociocultural systems and the norms of strict observance, whose implementation was demanded by the religious orders, remains to be explained (Chapter 6). As members of a contemplative, mendicant order, the Discalced Carmelites faced a special dilemma: their constitutions did not allow for the sort of accommodation practiced by the Jesuits. Missionaries were not to become involved in worldly affairs or engage in trade and finance. Yet in their interactions with the Safavid court, the Carmelite friars had to adopt signs of social distinction, for example, riding horses, carrying arms, or keeping enslaved people. The neat lines of demarcation that the orders and the Roman Curia were trying to draw flew in the face of the material constraints on the ground, most notably insufficient funding from Europe. Missionaries grappling with chronic underfunding responded to local demands for worldly and spiritual services to secure the long-term survival of the mission.

Finally, attention turns to the repercussions of the integration of missionaries into local contexts for the Catholic Church as such and its place in the European societies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Chapter 7). To what extent did exposure to foreign cultures cause Europeans to relativize their own certainties, and how did the Roman Curia respond to such undesirable outcomes? In connection with this, the chapter takes a fresh look at the decision-making processes at the Roman Curia. It explores the issue of *communicatio in sacris* with “schismatic” or “heretical” Eastern Christians and shows that the Roman Curia responded with a strategy of decision avoidance when it recognized that it would be unable to enforce the very decisions that the true doctrine of the Church would have demanded. Clear-cut papal decisions on controversial questions of missionary practice—controversies over the Chinese and Malabar rites and the practice of sacramental community—only started to be made from around 1700 onward. The chapter interprets this new decision-making strategy as a result of the growing awareness at the Roman Curia of the challenges posed by cultural diversity, the resulting diversification of missionaries' social roles, and the public controversies relating to these issues. It places the doctrinal clarifications during the pontificates of Clement XI (Giovanni Francesco Albani, r. 1700–1721), Benedict XIII (Pietro Francesco Orsini, r. 1724–30), and Benedict XIV (Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, r. 1740–58) in the context of the processes of disambiguation in which the Church, finding its authority under attack, gradually withdrew into an all-the-more vigorously defended core religious arena, distinct from “profane and civil society.”



Figure 1 Giacomo Cantelli, “Regno di Persia,” 1679 (from *Mercurio geografico* [...] [Rome, 1692], vol. 2, map 172)

## The Short Arm of Rome: The Curia, Superiors, and Missionaries

Catholic missions were closely associated with early modern institution-building processes. The post-Tridentine Church's efforts to assert its contested claim to universality by disseminating its faith among non-Christians and intensifying belief among Catholics dovetailed with papal efforts to centralize important decisions at the Curia and the expansion of the papal bureaucracy. Roman congregations such as the Holy Office and the *Propaganda Fide* paid close attention to the formalization and standardization of their procedures in order to lend legitimacy to their decisions. The papacy justified its claim to the *plenitudo potestatis* by invoking a universal responsibility based on salvation history and divine and natural law in a way that became a model for secular princes claiming absolute power, as Paolo Prodi has demonstrated.<sup>1</sup>

However, while the pope, as head of the Church, claimed a symbolic authority that was in principle far more absolute than that of secular rulers, this could not obscure the inner diversity and the "layered" and "composite" structure of early modern Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> This inner diversity profoundly shaped missionary activities, as will be shown in this book. In the present chapter, I will reflect on the extent and limitations of institution building at the Roman Curia and in the order of the Discalced Carmelites.

As Wolfgang Reinhard has shown in his pioneering research, in the early modern Roman Curia and the Papal States, institution building and personal networks complemented each other as factors of political integration. The deconstruction of the concept of absolutism further called into question the assumption that the actions of the newly established Roman congregations were guided by impersonal, bureaucratic rationality. Today's discussions foreground the role of personal networks and the competition or congruence, as the case may be, of various social, religious, and common-good-oriented norms in a given situation.<sup>3</sup> As rulers in an elective monarchy, the popes were even more dependent than hereditary princes on competing noble kinship groups, to which they themselves belonged.<sup>4</sup> These families were, in turn, linked to competing secular rulers, who, in the struggle for primacy in Catholic Christendom, sought to influence papal elections and the popes' exercise of office.<sup>5</sup> Within and outside the Papal States, relations between the Roman Curia and subordinate actors functioned similarly to those that secular princes maintained with their vassals. In both cases, efforts at better integrating the periphery were structured by personal networks.<sup>6</sup> Despite its claim to universality, in terms of its jurisdictional

activity the post-Tridentine papacy was a largely Italian institution. As a result of both a lack of resources and the legal constitution of the Church, its capacity to act remained limited even on Italian soil.<sup>7</sup>

Given the material limits of papal power, the role played by the deployment of symbolic resources was all the more important in affirming the papacy's universalist claims. In this sense, the dispatch of the Discalced Carmelites to Persia in 1604 and the framing of this event at the Roman court as a papal mission were tied to efforts to strengthen the pope's position in church governance.

Yet, not unlike the Portuguese and the Spanish Crowns, the religious orders defended their position by citing the privileges that they had been granted. Clement VIII tried to solve this problem by recruiting "his" missionaries from a community that had only arisen during his pontificate. With the founding of the Italian congregation of Discalced Carmelites in 1600, not only all Italian convents of this order came under the protection of the pope but also all those to be founded in the future outside of Spain.<sup>8</sup> That is why the Discalced Carmelites of the Italian congregation seemed better suited than members of other orders to promote missionary activities as a dependent arm of the Roman Curia.

We will have to keep these considerations in mind when we survey both the curial institutions and the order of the Discalced Carmelites. In the process, actors who adhered to differing sets of norms will come into focus: first, the curial bureaucracy as part of Roman court society; then, a religious order whose members claimed to have renounced worldly honors and riches and yet often acted within the "world," not least in their communications with the Curia. According to the most recent scholarship on social elites, institution building and personal networks were not opposites but rather complementary aspects of the processes of political integration. In this chapter we will see whether this also applied to an order whose members had vowed to renounce status and rank. To what extent did regular clerics rely on personal relationships when they addressed their superiors? What conventions applied when they had to address a curial congregation or its individual members?

The aim of better integrating peripheral actors was associated with both the expansion of the curial bureaucracy and the formation of institutions within the order. Yet in both cases we have to ask how long the arm of Rome actually was.<sup>9</sup> To what degree did strengthening the authority of curial congregations and the superiors of the orders also depend on the demands of subaltern actors and consequently on "empowering interactions"?<sup>10</sup> Since its foundation in 1622, the *Propaganda Fide* had become a source of protection alongside the superiors of the order. Did this affect the relations of regular clerics with their own superiors?

The Discalced Carmelites as well as the Jesuits and other communities were founded in the sixteenth century as a result of the widespread sense of dissatisfaction with the existing state of the Church. This raises the question of whether members of a reforming order might have set limits to their duty of obedience to the *Propaganda Fide* by invoking not just the privileges of their order but also their own specific system of values and norms, which was rooted in the transcendental. The discussion of these issues leads us, finally, to the question of how the persistence of competing normative systems within early modern European Catholicism influenced the interactions in missionary territories and what repercussions these contacts, in turn, had in Europe.

## The Holy Office and the Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide*: Aspirations and Obstacles to Enforcing Papal Primacy

In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Catholic Church drew the boundaries of orthodoxy increasingly more narrowly in order to distance itself from the churches that emerged from the Protestant Reformations. The insistence on confessional norms also had consequences for relations with Eastern Christians, Muslims, and “pagans,” since it limited the willingness to tolerate divergent practices among potential converts. At the Roman Curia, two congregations of cardinals were at the forefront of enforcing the new orthodoxy and orthopraxy in this field: the Holy Office and the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*.

The Holy Office (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) was created by Paul III (Alessandro Farnese, r. 1534–49) as a tribunal directly subordinate to the pope and reorganized as a congregation by Sixtus V (Felice Peretti, r. 1585–90). The new institution embodied the papal claim to uniformly define doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline and to enforce them as universally binding. Apart from judging and punishing deviations, the Holy Office also examined the questions posed to it in the form of doubts (*dubia*). Since its archives were opened in 1998, early modernists have focused great attention on the Holy Office as an Inquisition court, inspired by the broad public interest in spectacular trials such as that of Galileo Galilei.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, research on its role in handling *dubia* has been limited to case studies, which historians have only begun to integrate into more general surveys.<sup>12</sup>

In both of its roles, we encounter the Holy Office as a body whose actions were marked by efforts to lend legitimacy to its decisions by formalizing procedures. The handling of *dubia* revealed this concern with establishing orderly procedures, especially in linking the decisions of the cardinals and the pope to the opinions of the *consultores*, who examined the concrete case in the light of the universally valid principles of church doctrine and discipline, as well as previous decision-making practice. The cardinals and, ultimately, the pope were, however, free to make decisions that diverged from the advice of the *consultores*. The pope’s independent decision found its legitimation in the power vested in him as the vicar of Christ. As we will see in the course of this study, however, cardinals and popes could not act in a manner untethered from their specific social and cultural environments.

When the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) was established in 1622, it was a sign of the will of Gregory XV to assert papal primacy in the missionary field and to use the missions to legitimate his claims to primacy.<sup>13</sup> Like the reform of the procedure for the election of a new pope, which took place at the same time, the foundation of the *Propaganda Fide* was a project of reform-minded cardinals and scholars in the Curia who defended the primacy of religious and ecclesiastical norms against the interests of secular rulers. Both reforms were intended to help the papacy assert itself as a superior, spiritual power vis-à-vis the secular princes—chief among them the king of Spain. Both projects were supported by the so-called *zelanti*, who gathered in the *Accademia dei Virtuosi* during the years 1621 to 1623 under the leadership of the cardinal-nephew, Ludovico Ludovisi. A leading member of the circle and confidant of the Ludovisi pontiff, Francesco Ingoli, became the first secretary of the *Propaganda Fide*.<sup>14</sup>

The main aim of the new congregation *de Propaganda Fide* was to convert the infidels, “heretics,” and “schismatics.” It was also charged with supervising the activities of missionaries among the Catholics who lived under the rule of “heretics” or “infidels,” as well as Greek Rite Catholics in Italy. The founding of the congregation was part of the efforts to make Rome *the* central site of missionary knowledge, replacing the previous points of origin of the missions under the patronage (*patronato*) of the Iberian powers. Like the secular courts in Western Europe that aspired to rule over non-European societies, the Roman Curia recognized the instrumental and symbolic importance of acquiring knowledge about conditions on the ground, for decisions could only be adapted to the local contexts if the decision-makers possessed appropriate insights. At the same time, the accumulation of knowledge helped to lend decisions a veneer of legitimacy. However, in its effort to document conditions at the sites of mission as thoroughly as possible and to apply this knowledge to decision-making, the congregation faced a variety of difficulties.<sup>15</sup>

Three sets of problems will be addressed here: the limited financial resources of the *Propaganda Fide*, the jurisdictional conflicts between the *Propaganda Fide* and the Holy Office, and finally the conflicts resulting from the fact that the newly created papal institution challenged ancient law—the rights of patronage of secular rulers and the privileges of orders.

### Limited Financial Resources

The *Propaganda Fide*’s limited resources contrasted strikingly with its sprawling remit. Although scholars have paid little attention to its finances thus far, the *Propaganda Fide* clearly shared three characteristics with other Roman congregations: a very modest financial position in comparison, for instance, to the budgets of rich cardinals; dependence on funding from the Papal States and, in a few cases, from other Italian territories; and the high proportion of resources that were expended in Rome. Viewed against the background of the existing research on papal finances, these findings are hardly surprising, but they do shed new light on the role of the *Propaganda Fide* and the Roman Curia overall in promoting the missions.<sup>16</sup>

According to Volker Reinhardt’s study of the finances of Scipione Borghese, cardinal-nephew of Paul V, “private interests and undertakings intended to promote the family of the pontiff, its status and elevation” took precedence over “efforts directed at the overall spiritual and political duties of the papacy.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, the revenues and outlays of a cardinal-nephew from a family in the process of rising into the Roman aristocracy vastly exceeded those of the future *Propaganda Fide*. While the average revenues and expenses of Scipione Borghese between 1605 and 1633 amounted to 225,003 *scudi* and 224,556 *scudi* per year, respectively,<sup>18</sup> the revenues of the *Propaganda Fide* between 1651 and 1709, according to its *bilanci*, ranged from 21,158 to 25,745 *scudi* per year, and its outlays from 19,027 to 29,335 *scudi*, with no clear upward trend over the years. And yet the *Propaganda Fide* was still better funded than the Holy Office, whose average annual revenues between 1633 and 1678 amounted to just 7,978 *scudi*, with expenses of 8,243 *scudi*.<sup>19</sup> During his pontificate, Paul V gave monetary gifts of 1,095,130 *scudi* to his family, in addition to many donations in kind, as well as lucrative benefices to his

cardinal-nephew.<sup>20</sup> Even Alexander VII (Fabio Chigi, r. 1655–67), who at the beginning of his pontificate ostentatiously excluded his kinsmen from the government, spent some 620,000 *scudi* in 1659 just to support his nephew Agostino Chigi on the occasion of the latter's marriage to Maria Virginia Borghese.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the *Propaganda Fide* had a capital amounting to just 610,196 *scudi* in 1651 and 748,289 *scudi* in 1693. As in secular monarchies, the ceremonialism of the Roman court that was aimed at elevating the pope's position barely concealed the fact that it was wealthy noble kin groups rather than the emerging institutions that set the financial tone.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of this courtly economy of favors, the *Propaganda Fide* depended on donations from families in the Papal States with close ties to the papacy. To be sure, in 1622 Gregory XV promised the congregation a tax of 500 *scudi* each on the cardinals' rings. It was no longer the heirs, but the cardinals themselves, who had to pay this tax when their new dignities were conferred upon them. However, as Giovanni Pizzorusso has emphasized, the symbolic importance of this tax outweighed its material significance. While some cardinals turned the payment into an act affirming their loyalty to the papacy, non-Roman cardinals refused to pay, citing the privileges of their local churches. More important for the accumulation of the congregation's capital were the donations and legacies of individual cardinals, above all those of Antonio Barberini Sr., brother of Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini, r. 1623–44).<sup>23</sup> Like the building of churches, legacies in favor of missions were well suited to deflecting criticism and increasing the reputation of the donors and their families. While they represented a limited financial burden, they offered all the greater gain in symbolic capital, as they documented the dedication of the donors to a central concern of the post-Tridentine papacy.

The use to which the *Propaganda Fide* put these proceeds was reflective of their origins in the Papal States: the lion's share of its financial resources was invested in the city of Rome. Some 40 to 50 percent of expenditures served to stage *missio* as a papal enterprise in Rome, where the *Propaganda Fide*, together with its *Collegio Urbano* and the *Tipografia Poliglotta*, was housed in a purpose-built palace on Piazza di Spagna designed by two highly respected architects, Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Francesco Borromini (Figure 2). The prestigious building, along with other projects, such as the paintings in the *Sala Regia* of the Quirinal Palace or the *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* on Piazza Navona, helped to represent in courtly and urban spaces the papacy's universalist claims, of which the missions had to be considered the expression par excellence.

Behind the baroque facade of the palace on the Roman Piazza di Spagna stood an institution that financially supported only a small portion of the missions from its *stato temporale*. The Persian mission was a typical case: although Clement VIII had launched it as a papal enterprise, the Discalced Carmelites were dispatched with funds from their own order. In 1655 Pope Alexander VII transferred control over these funds to the *Propaganda Fide*. This, along with the fact that the Discalced Carmelites subsequently received no additional funding, contributed to their estrangement from the Curia. In eighteenth-century Persia, only the Dominicans of the reform congregation of Santa Sabina and the bishops of Isfahan, who were recruited from either the latter order or the Discalced Carmelites, received subsidies from the *Propaganda Fide's stato temporale*.



**Figure 2** Rome, *Collegio di Propaganda Fide* (from Giuseppe Vasi, *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna libro secondo* [...] [Rome, 1752], plate 40 [detail])

The Augustinians, Capuchins, and Jesuits, in contrast, had to rely on their secular patrons, the kings of Portugal, France, and Poland. Only rarely did the congregation contribute funds to the Capuchin missions, and any payments of travel allowances or subsidies were extremely modest when compared to the needs of the recipients. The *Propaganda Fide* sent its monies to places where the patronage of secular rulers left gaps for activities by the Curia. Foremost among them were parts of the Ottoman Empire, followed by Armenian communities in Poland as well as Ireland and Scotland. Otherwise, in place of the curial congregation, it was actors whose influence the post-Tridentine papacy sought to limit that stepped into the breach: secular patrons and protectors as well as religious orders. What all missions had in common, however, was that their funding was insufficient to sustain the settlements. For that reason, the settlements themselves had to generate a more or less large proportion of their resources, as I will show for the Persian mission.<sup>24</sup>

### **Jurisdictional Conflicts and Personal Networks**

Upon its establishment in 1622, Pope Gregory XV gave the *Propaganda Fide* a wide remit in all aspects of mission. This assigned the new congregation a field of endeavor that was already partially occupied by the Holy Office. The founding of the

*Propaganda Fide* was thus followed by protracted conflicts over how to delimit its areas of responsibility. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such conflicts tended to arise wherever the spheres of activity of new, specialized congregations overlapped with those of existing institutions.

Attempts to clarify competences began immediately after the founding of the *Propaganda Fide*, when Gregory XV authorized the Holy Office to decide on the granting of the *facultates*—that is, the assignment of the various competences and rights of missionaries: the *Propaganda Fide* submitted the application to the Holy Office and had the *facultates* issued to the missionaries. The decision on the *facultates* was routine business for the Holy Office, as evident from the nearly always slim files, the almost complete absence of personal data, and the formula “with the usual faculties” used in the decisions. From the perspective of the performance of authority, it was precisely this routineness that constituted a significant part of the meaning of these decisions, since they gave the Holy Office repeated opportunities to reassert its primacy over the *Propaganda Fide*.

Of far greater relevance was the competence to settle questions concerning controversial aspects of church doctrine and discipline. The Roman authorities were presented, in the form of *dubia*, with opinions and practices whose compatibility with the established doctrine and discipline had kindled doubts. The petitioner expected the matter to be settled in such a way that it served as a guideline for the faithful. The presentation and resolution of a *dubium* helped to give shape *in actu* to papal assertions of definitory power. The author of the *dubium* was never punished because his request for clarification laid bare a willingness to be consistent with church teachings. Among the petitions, the *dubia circa sacramenta* took center stage because of the importance the Roman Church placed upon the sacraments as signs of divine grace, whose salvific effects were contingent on their correct administration by a priest or exceptionally (as in the case of emergency baptism) by a layperson.<sup>25</sup>

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the emergence of new Catholic churches outside Europe created a need to settle many questions. While the Curia's dealings with the *dubia* underscored its claim to ultimate decision-making power, the *dubia* themselves also reveal the scope of action available to actors outside the Curia, who introduced their own ideas and contributed to the diversity of ritual practices. In their sheer numbers and frequent repetitions, the *dubia* suggest the difficulty of reconciling local practices with the norms of the Roman Church. We may also ask to what extent, in practice, examining the *dubia* mutated from a process of creating clarity to a channel for articulating diversity and ambiguity.

In the missions to both China and the Eastern Christians, the competition between two congregations—the Holy Office and the *Propaganda Fide*—helped to dynamize the controversies. Ever since its founding in 1622, the question of the new congregation's relationship to the Holy Office arose on a number of occasions when *dubia* arrived from the missionary territories. The *Propaganda Fide* repeatedly formed *ad hoc* committees to examine controversial questions. In 1625, this included charging a congregation of theologians with studying and responding to a book written by Persian Muslim scholars against the *Truth-Showing Mirror*, penned in the Mughal Empire by the Jesuit father Jerónimo Javier de Ezpeleta y Goñi. Following this *Congregatio Persiae*, the *Propaganda*

*Fide* installed additional committees to clarify missionaries' *dubia*. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to speak of jurisdictional conflicts without considering the connections with the Holy Office. While the secretary of the *Propaganda Fide*, Francesco Ingoli, was the driving force behind the assertion of the jurisdiction of "his" congregation, some cardinals belonged to both dicasteries and used the resources that these dual memberships offered them according to their personal logic. Since 1632 and 1633, respectively, both the Holy Office and the *Propaganda Fide* were subject to the authority of a nephew of the reigning Pope Urban VIII as secretary or prefect. While on an institutional level there were two separate jurisdictions, on a personal level the congregations were closely intertwined. Close connections also existed on the level of the experts who made up the committees appointed by the *Propaganda Fide*. Unlike the Holy Office, with its staff of *consultores* and qualificators, the new congregation did not have a fixed circle of specialists to scrutinize the *dubia*. The committees formed by the *Propaganda Fide* thus consisted mainly of qualificators from the Holy Office, who were, however, supposed to perform their duties as experts on behalf of the *Propaganda Fide*.<sup>26</sup>

Jurisdiction was ultimately decided by Alexander VII, who in 1658 forbade the *Propaganda Fide* from discussing the *dubia*. The practice that now took hold corresponded to the procedure that had already been used to bestow the *facultates*. The *Propaganda Fide* conducted the correspondence with missionaries while the Holy Office deliberated on the *dubia*. Accordingly, it was the *Propaganda Fide* that referred most *dubia* from the missions to the Holy Office. The focus was on matters of ritual practice raised by the missionaries and occasionally other persons from the places of mission. Despite the decision made by Alexander VII, the coexistence of the two congregations continued to create a situation in which the Curia spoke with two voices on important matters.<sup>27</sup>

Such processes suggest that the institutional structures were still less fixed than the arguments mobilized in the jurisdictional conflicts might lead us to believe. Those involved deployed institutional rationality and personal logic in different ways. If we are to believe the first secretary of the *Propaganda Fide*, Francesco Ingoli, the conflicts between the *Propaganda Fide* and the Holy Office should be characterized as jurisdictional conflicts. The secretary sought to position the *Propaganda Fide* as a body responsible for all mission matters. Meanwhile, the cardinals partially bridged these contradictions by dint of their dual membership in both congregations: while Ingoli defined his social status and radius of action at the Curia through his position as secretary of the *Propaganda Fide*, well-connected cardinals had the opportunity to act, depending on the situation, as members of the *Propaganda Fide* or the Holy Office.

### **The *Propaganda Fide* and Claims to Secular Rights of Patronage**

In his *Relazione delle Quattro Parti del Mondo* of 1629–31, Francesco Ingoli referred to the "political affairs of princes" as the main obstacle to the rapid spread of the Christian faith. He was referring here mainly to the rights of patronage of the kings of Portugal and Spain, which he believed hindered the appointment of new bishops and the sending of missionaries, and set the monies intended for the Church aside

for other purposes. Ingoli then issued a scathing critique of the missionaries recruited from the ranks of the regular clergy. Far from the eyes of their superiors and bishops, they reveled in their “sensuality” and their stinginess; many were ignorant and did not live upright lives. Instead of spreading the Christian faith, their comportment drove away potential converts.<sup>28</sup> Ingoli thus addressed two fields in which tenuous legal claims stood in the way of the efforts of the *Propaganda Fide* to impose itself as the sole authority over the missions: the rights of patronage of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns, and the privileges of the religious orders. Behind Ingoli’s critique was a fundamental question: Were the pope and the curial congregation bound by ancient law, or could they suspend or even revoke it by citing the absolute papal *plenitudo potestatis* grounded in the history of salvation and divine and natural law, if the service of God’s Church demanded it?

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the missions in America and Asia had largely been shaped by the conditions that the Iberian powers created based on the rights of patronage the papacy had bestowed upon them. Asia belonged to the part of the world that Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, r. 1492–1503) had assigned to Portugal in the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. Based on the papal privileges, the kings of Portugal claimed patronage over the missionary churches there: the right of the Crown to present the pope with candidates for the archdiocese of Goa and the episcopal sees corresponded to its obligation to disseminate the Christian faith and build churches. Many conflicts arose from the fact that the papal bulls issued in the sixteenth century to establish the archbishopric of Goa and its dependent dioceses did not draw their external borders to coincide with the territories of Portuguese rule but kept them open in the hope that missionaries would be able to conquer new souls well beyond the areas under formal Portuguese control.<sup>29</sup> The settlement of Portuguese Augustinians in Isfahan in the name of Philip III of Castile as king of Portugal (r. 1598–1621) in the early seventeenth century was associated with Portuguese claims to patronage over the missionary churches in the Safavid Empire. The royal coat of arms on the facade of the convent underlined their dependence on the Portuguese Crown. As in Japan, China, and broad swaths of Southeast and South Asia, in Persia, too, the claim to the *Padroado* was extended to a territory that never came under Portuguese rule.

Starting in the seventeenth century, these secular claims clashed with ideas of papal supremacy, which were first affirmed with the arrival of missionaries from the Discalced Carmelites in Isfahan in 1607. The establishment of the *Propaganda Fide* in 1622 further exacerbated the latent conflict. To be sure, the new congregation was supposed to respect the rights of patronage of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns, but in practice it tended to limit these to those territories under the effective secular rule of the kings of Spain and Portugal. While the Spanish territories in America were *de facto* largely off limits by virtue of the *patronato real*, over the course of the seventeenth century new opportunities opened for the congregation in Asia. Since only a tiny part of Asia fell under Portuguese control, and Portuguese influence in Asia was substantially weakened by competition from other European powers, most notably the United Provinces of the Netherlands and England, the issue of the enforceability of Portugal’s rights of patronage arose with increasing frequency. Ingoli argued in his *Relazione delle Quattro Parti del Mondo* that where the Portuguese did not rule—especially in China

and Japan—bishops and archbishops could be appointed by the pope independent of the *Padroado*. With the appointment in 1632 of two bishops for the dioceses of Isfahan and Babylon (Baghdad), the *Propaganda Fide* affirmed that Persia and Mesopotamia did not belong to the *Padroado*, a fact that had already been claimed when the Discalced Carmelites were sent there almost three decades earlier.

Beginning in the 1630s, the *Propaganda Fide* faced similar challenges to Rome's primacy from the French Crown. At first, the Curia tried to use the installation of French clerics to undermine the *Padroado*. This was a risky strategy because the ecclesiastical policy of the French Crown did not differ fundamentally from that of the kings of Portugal. When the weakening of Portuguese influence left a gap in the Catholic missions, it was less the Curia than the French Crown that stepped in. This became evident in East Asia starting in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup> Yet the founding of the Capuchin and Jesuit missions in Isfahan (in 1628 and 1647, respectively) had already proceeded in concert with other French initiatives in various corners of the world, where commitment to the "true faith" legitimized French claims to supremacy. As an *éminence grise* in the shadow of Cardinal Richelieu, the Capuchin Joseph de Paris played a key role in sending his order's missionaries to Persia.<sup>31</sup> This mission was part of an enterprise by French Capuchins under royal protection that primarily targeted the Ottoman Empire. The dispatch of missionaries served the aim of strengthening the French Crown's political influence: the guardian of the Capuchin mission in Isfahan served as an agent of the French king at the Safavid court. In 1634, using Crown funds, the Capuchins purchased a residence located in the immediate vicinity of the shah's palace. Although Père Joseph sought and received legitimation from the *Propaganda Fide*, the settlement of French members of his order planted the seeds of rivalry not just with the Portuguese Augustinians but also with the Discalced Carmelites. Like the Augustinians under Portuguese patronage, the French Capuchins and later the Jesuits in Persia largely evaded the authority of the *Propaganda Fide*—less through open defiance than by regulating their affairs as much as possible without recourse to Rome and avoiding correspondence with the congregation.

French influence extended to the secular clergy, including the two dioceses in the area. The episcopal see of Babylon was held by a French cleric starting in 1637, when Urban VIII had given his assent to this clause as part of a donation agreement with Élisabeth Le Peultre, the wealthy widow of the childless Antoine de Ricouart, *conseiller au Parlement de Paris*, who agreed to offer 120,000 *livres tournois* (about 40,000 *scudi*) to the diocese in return. Until Isfahan acquired its own bishop in 1693, the bishops of Babylon were also apostolic vicars of that diocese. However, it was not until the 1680s that two vicars, François Picquet and his successor Louis-Marie Pidou de Saint-Olon, fulfilled their residential obligation and began working from Isfahan and Hamadan to solidify French influence. When they moved to Persia, they were accompanied by priests of the *Missions étrangères*, who worked together with the *Compagnie des Indes orientales* to expand French influence.

French claims to the protection of the missions in the Safavid Empire were only formalized in the early eighteenth century. These treaties mirrored stipulations in the capitulations of the Sublime Porte, which at once legitimized the preeminence of the Most Christian King within Catholic Christendom and justified the practice

of overwhelmingly peaceful relations with Muslims. Like the capitulations of the Porte, the treaty that the envoy Pierre-Victor Michel negotiated with the Persian court in 1708 contained protective provisions for all Catholic Christians, regardless of origin. Unlike the Iberian patronages, French protection of the missions and Catholic Christians in both the Ottoman Empire and Persia lacked a basis in canon law. Instead, these claims derived unilaterally from the Ottoman capitulations, and in Persia from the treaty of 1708.<sup>32</sup> The struggle to get the French protection recognized was thus fought out above all on the level of everyday interactions and through symbolic communication, as we will see.

Suffice it to say, at this point, that even without a comparable basis in canon law, French protection was no less a challenge to papal primacy than the claims of the Portuguese Crown derived from the *Padroado* had been. If the *Propaganda Fide* wished to assert its jurisdiction on the ground, it had to rely on the practices of indirect influence: at times, it may have seemed expedient to challenge the claims of the Portuguese Crown by promoting French clerics. More promising overall, however, was the deployment of regular clerics with a more direct relationship with the Curia: first the Discalced Carmelites and later also the Dominicans, who belonged to the Roman reform congregation of Santa Sabina. Unlike the bishops of Babylon, who had to be of French origin starting in the 1630s, as per the donor's provisions, the Latin bishops of Isfahan appointed from 1693 onward belonged to these orders exclusively, which set limits on Portuguese and French claims and was intended to assert the jurisdiction of the *Propaganda Fide* in Persia.

### **The *Propaganda Fide* and the Privileges of Religious Orders**

The jurisdiction of the *Propaganda Fide* was limited not only by the rights of patronage bestowed on the kings of Spain and Portugal but also by the ancient law of religious orders, both in the form of privileges and customary rights.<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, the popes had preferred specific orders for certain mission territories, granting them more or less extensive privileges. In the context of the Spanish patronage, the mendicant orders acquired privileged positions in the Americas and the Philippines, while the Society of Jesus was at the forefront under the Portuguese *Padroado*. The Roman Curia retained limited opportunities for influence by extending similar privileges to rival orders. When the Augustinians were sent from Goa to Isfahan, this occurred within the context of Clement VIII's opening of the missions under the Portuguese *Padroado* to the mendicant orders—the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians.

Efforts in the wake of the Council of Trent to regulate the faculties of dispensation and absolution more strictly and link them to the church hierarchy led to conflicts with the orders. When the *Propaganda Fide* was founded, the Roman Curia abandoned the practice of granting permanent privileges for certain mission territories and orders in favor of issuing *facultates* for a limited time and following more uniform criteria. The *facultates* were meant to improve the preconditions for conversions or to prevent people in confessionally mixed milieus from turning away from the Catholic Church, for example by giving absolution to “heretics” or offering dispensation from the strict application of canon law.

The rules for granting the *facultates* were laid out more precisely in the years 1633 to 1637 within the framework of the Particular Congregation *super facultatibus missionariorum* established by Urban VIII, which was composed of members of the Holy Office and the *Propaganda Fide*. The Particular Congregation elaborated five universally valid formulas and four that applied in special cases. It defined the missionaries' *facultates* of dispensation from ordinary canon law most broadly where the secular authorities limited or forbade the practice of the Catholic faith or where other circumstances made access to parish priests and bishops especially difficult. Based on the *facultates* bestowed upon them, missionaries enjoyed authority that, in Europe, was restricted to higher church officeholders, particularly with regard to granting dispensations and absolution. Where distance or other factors made recourse to the Curia impossible, the missionaries were even authorized to grant absolution in cases otherwise reserved for the pope himself. Thus, even within the framework of the new rules, the mission territories remained areas of particular law, removed from ordinary church jurisdiction, where Tridentine norms could be enforced only to a limited degree.

In early modern societies, legitimacy was derived from ancient law. Consequently, the Roman Curia's challenge to the privileges of orders—much like that posed by secular monarchies to the privileges of the nobility—met with resistance from those affected. Unilateral decisions by the Curia had boundaries imposed by processes of negotiation that exhibited clear parallels to the relationship between secular rulers exercising their *potestas absoluta* and the estates that insisted upon ancient rights. In a protracted struggle, the Curia had to attempt to enforce the new regulations against contrary claims. In the process, it was more concerned with defining its own competences *in actu* by making decisions on concrete matters than with refusing requests for dispensation. The broad privileges granted by the popes obstructed efforts to regulate the missionary activities of the orders. The obstacles were lower in the new mission territories such as Persia. Like secular princes in their territories, Clement VIII deployed the bestowing of privileges to gain the loyalty of the Italian congregation of Discalced Carmelites, which he had founded. Subsequently, the order also cited these privileges to support its social status and legal position.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, too, we can see striking parallels to the behavior of secular actors: like aristocratic families, the religious orders defended their own ancient rights, on the one hand, while also using their relations with the highest granter of favors to acquire advantages and privileges and to improve their position in relation to their peers, i.e., the other orders. At least initially, the newly founded Italian congregation of the Discalced Carmelites was particularly dependent on maintaining good relations with the Roman Curia.

The established orders had a wider scope of action. In their dealings with the *Propaganda Fide*, the Jesuits were especially adamant in defending the right of their general to send, transfer, and recall missionaries at his own discretion. In 1629, shortly before the convocation of the commission *super facultatibus missionariorum*, Urban VIII had reaffirmed the Society's privileges. Under such conditions, the only hope was to convince the order's superiors to adhere to the formulas developed by the particular congregation when preparing the *facultates* for the missionaries they themselves sent out. In 1643, the general of the Jesuit order accepted the new formulas for his

missionaries. The Jesuits, however, reserved the right to send, transfer, and recall missionaries independent of the *Propaganda Fide*.

The *Propaganda Fide* had to rely on the personnel reservoir of the orders to staff the missions, and on the authority of the orders' superiors to implement its authority over the missionaries. In a 1657 memorandum that paints a pessimistic picture of what had been achieved since 1622, the secretary of the congregation, Mario Alberizzi, could not help but acknowledge the continuing importance of the regular clergy for missionary recruitment. The unity of organization and governance in the orders led to shared attitudes and interests, which favored their activities. After reluctantly acknowledging their significance, Alberizzi offered an extensive critique of the orders. He accused them of claiming individual missions for themselves alone and excluding other orders or even clerics of the same order but from different provinces, as well as of preventing the ordination of native priests. The picture Alberizzi painted of relations between the *Propaganda Fide* and the orders was similarly negative: while the well-organized orders (especially the Jesuits) obeyed only their own Rule and wished to remain independent of the congregation, in the less strictly organized communities each member sought to live without being subject to the superiors and the Rule. Visitors were no help, Alberizzi said, because it was nearly impossible to find secular priests for this task, and the members of an order were so suspicious of other orders that many were not willing to answer to them. According to Alberizzi, the Curia's attempts to rectify this state of affairs were ineffective because the orders insisted on their privileges and appealed to secular princes.<sup>35</sup>

The Curia's dependence on the regular clergy had already been manifest in Clement VIII's missionary mandate to the Discalced Carmelites. The fact that the pope recruited "his" missionaries in 1604 from the newly founded Italian congregation was met with surprise both within and outside of the order; after all, the reform of the Discalced Carmelites inspired by Teresa of Ávila and Juan de la Cruz was strongly oriented toward a contemplative way of life.<sup>36</sup> The extremely scant personnel resources similarly complicated the deployment of this order for the Persian mission, seeing as in 1604 the Italian congregation could only draw from its convents at Genoa, Rome, and Naples. On the plus side, unlike the established missionary orders, the newly founded congregation of the Discalced Carmelites did not enjoy extensive privileges and was more dependent on papal favor. Together with the orientation toward a largely new mission territory, the choice of the order was symptomatic of the practical limits of the papal claim to primacy.

### The Discalced Carmelites: Dysfunctional Institutions and Internalized Discipline

The reorientation toward mission confronted the Discalced Carmelites with new challenges, with regard not only to the order's contemplative orientation but also to its organization. To be sure, the Discalced Carmelites had adopted a constitution from the mendicant orders that connected the individual convents to provinces and oriented the members' affiliation toward the provinces and the overall order. In an

order dedicated to withdrawal from the “world” and to a contemplative life in the collective framework of the convents, however, there was no provision for individual members living in tiny communities scattered across vast distances. This, however, was precisely the situation of the Persian mission and subsequent undertakings. In this section, I will therefore explore the efforts to build functioning organizational structures to ensure that the order’s scattered members pursued common goals and adopted a shared behavioral code.

The orders were no mere objects of papal policy; rather, they participated actively in the early modern processes of institution building. Thus far, however, research in this field has concentrated on the Society of Jesus. Since historians have not yet studied the governance of the order of the Discalced Carmelites, it seems appropriate here to proceed from studies of the Jesuit order and, based on them, to inquire into the peculiarities of institution building among the Discalced Carmelites.

The missionary mandate in the order’s constitutions tasked the Society of Jesus with preserving unity among its members who were dispersed across the world. The constitutions provided for a strictly hierarchical structure and the absolute obedience of members to their superiors.<sup>37</sup> Because of this comparatively centralized structure, its self-understanding of representing an elite, and the integration of contemplation into *actio* in the world, the Society of Jesus has been described as a “‘modern’ type of order.”<sup>38</sup> The controversies surrounding the “monarchical” constitution of the order, which began with the founding of the Society of Jesus,<sup>39</sup> have further contributed to a particular scholarly interest in how it functioned, making the Jesuits the best-studied order by far. What Hartmut Lehmann still characterized as “a kind of absolutist rule in a supranational association of persons,”<sup>40</sup> however, was also subject to the limitations characteristic of early modern rule over long distances more generally, which has led scholars of secular configurations of rulership to abandon the paradigm of absolutism. According to Markus Friedrich’s seminal research, local events “could only rarely be simply controlled by regulations and instructions.” The superiors remained dependent on the willingness of actors on the ground to cooperate and not to instrumentalize operations to benefit themselves. Not only was the disciplinary power of church actors over the laity restricted, but the internal practice of even the apparently “most modern” order can only be grasped from the perspective of a specifically early modern understanding of authority.<sup>41</sup>

While clear parallels can be drawn to secular configurations of rulership, some characteristics were specific to the ways religious orders functioned: on the one hand, religious orders styled themselves as independent from the worldly obligations that personal networks spawned; on the other, they used specific practices of internalizing values and norms that guided action. Within the Society of Jesus, personal entanglement lacked the legitimacy it possessed in the “world.” Even in the Society of Jesus, the bureaucratic procedures of personnel administration, with their declared aim of doing away with the logics of entanglement, nevertheless ran up against obstacles. Personal connections between men from the same region or country played an important role among the Jesuits as well.<sup>42</sup>

Such a dynamic of entanglement, which could weaken the authority of the order’s leadership, ran up against order-specific practices for internalizing shared values and