

# GEOPOLITICS OF GLOBAL CATHOLICISM

Politics of Religion in Space and Time



PETR KRATOCHVÍL

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN RELIGION AND POLITICS

# GEOPOLITICS OF GLOBAL CATHOLICISM

*Geopolitics of Global Catholicism* uncovers the key trends in today's Catholicism, providing an incisive analysis of its deep entanglement with national, regional, as well as global politics.

This book offers an exciting exploration of five versions of local Catholicism(s) and sheds light on the various theo-political constellations that not only differ widely across these national contexts but also have global geopolitical consequences. It is built around a novel theoretical argument showing that Catholic geopolitics contains not only a spatial dimension (as classic geopolitical studies would have it) but also a temporal one. As a consequence, the Catholic role in the world cannot be simply understood as a result of the spatial expansion of the Church but rather as a result of the complex relationships between Catholicism and colonization, inculturation, backwardness, and modernization(s). To counter the lingering Eurocentrism of most studies of the Catholic Church, this book's case studies explore Catholic geopolitics in five non-European contexts, focusing mainly on the Global South (plus the United States): Latin America (Brazil), North America (the United States), Asia (India and China), and Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo). These case studies also show that the successes and failures of Catholicism cannot be explained by a recourse to a single, top-down interpretation of Catholic geopolitics, but rather by exploring the various Catholic spatio-temporal constellations on the global, regional, and local levels. With the accelerating diversification of the Church and the growing role of the Global South, these local and regional influences gain further importance as they are likely to increasingly define the future of Catholicism.

This book will be of utmost interest to scholars of International Relations, Religious Studies, Political Science, and Theology, as well as Geopolitics,

especially to those studying the global rise of religion. Its accessible language will also appeal to the wider public beyond academia, especially those interested in global Christianity, as well as church leaders, and members of Catholic organizations.

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*Petr Kratochvíl*

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For Dawn: neither day, nor night: the shining darkness, the silver moon, and the black sun. We are neither, both, and all.





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# INTRODUCTION

I started writing this book some three years ago when I was living and doing research in Rome. My apartment was located on Via Merulana, an ancient street in Rione Monti, which connects two major papal basilicas, Santa Maria Maggiore and Saint John Lateran. My afternoon strolls thus constituted little pilgrimages between these two churches. I started at Santa Maria Maggiore, the church consecrated just after the Council of Ephesus proclaimed the Virgin Mary Mother of God, and finished my walk at the Lateran Basilica, where the papal cathedra stands and which until today serves as the seat of the Bishop of Rome.

My first research trip beyond Europe, which was related to this book, was to attend Catholic World Youth Day (WYD) in Panama in 2019, and it also started from Rome. One of the symbols of the World Youth Days is Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani*, a precious icon that is housed in the very same church I strolled by every day, the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. Before each World Youth Day, this icon (or rather, its copy) travels the world only to finally arrive at the venue of the WYD. I realized that in a sense, not only Rome but also Via Merulana makes the pilgrimage to the locations of each WYD – the icon from the basilica on one end of the street and the Pope, from his official seat at the Lateran, on the other.

In the self-understanding of the Church, the movement of the icon can be seen as a metaphor for the historical expansion of the Church from its centre (be it in Jerusalem or in Rome) to the farthest reaches of the world, *ecclesia itinerans*. But this movement is as much temporal as it is spatial: it is not only from the centre to the margins but also from the past to the future – an ancient Byzantine icon at the global gathering of the young generation of Catholics,

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the “future of the Church”. When pondering this expansion, I was reminded of Emmanuel Levinas and his argument that Christianity was an endless march, an “irremissible expansion” through history, never stopping, always looking beyond, spatially and temporally. The same conviction about the combined spatio-temporal expansion of Christianity was summarized by Pope Benedict XVI in a letter to the Chinese Catholic Church, in which he claimed that

just as during the first Christian millennium the Cross was planted in Europe and during the second in the American continent and in Africa, so during the third millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in the vast and vibrant Asian continent.

*(Pope Benedict XVI 2007, n.p.)*

But beneath the simple image of a Church with a fixed centre and a gradual spatio-temporal expansion, there is a significantly more complex geopolitical reality. Both the travels of the icon to the WYD locations and the pontifical visits might give the impression that the immovable centre of gravity of the Church is in Rome and, by extension, in Europe. It is there, after all, where the Popes reside and where the icon is permanently located. And yet, the Church of today is increasingly more present outside Europe than within its confines. The Philippines, which hosted the WYD of 1995, is projected to become the third-largest Catholic country in the world (after Brazil and Mexico) in 2050, with twice as many Catholics as any European country.

This complex global geopolitical reality is then reflected on the micro level of everyday Catholic geopolitical practices. At the WYD in Panama, it impacted everything ranging from the organization of the meeting to the composition of its participants. Those attending the WYD were not simply the most fervent young Catholics. Their participation (and the absence of others) was influenced by the types of Catholic spirituality to which they adhered, the geographic proximity to the venue (the event was clearly dominated by Spanish-speaking Catholics), global political economy (only a small share of young Catholics from other continents could afford to travel to Panama), as well as the questions of indigeneity and colonialism (with special “indigenous” events organized on the sidelines), and many other factors. If the Catholic World Youth Days reveal anything about the geopolitics of Catholicism, it is that local variations of Catholicism need to be taken seriously and that the local thescapes (more on this concept later in this chapter) cannot be derived from Catholic doctrine alone, but need to take into account a much richer palette of factors.

My experience from Panama (and subsequently, from my other research trips to explore Catholicism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) thus constituted a counterpoint to my interviews in the lofty Vatican palaces. Catholicism, as understood by those whom I interviewed (and honestly, never before

did I carry out interviews in so many languages, from German to Portuguese, and from Italian to Polish), was always imagined bottom-up, as part of a family tradition, a local collective identity, or a national historical memory; or as a lived experience that did not draw strict lines between personal faith, attending a Catholic school and voting for a Catholic political leader. Catholicism was seen as serving multiple purposes, far beyond the purely spiritual ones, often with direct geopolitical consequences. Sometimes it was understood as a tool of modernization, and at other times as a defence against the secular decadence, and at yet others as a replacement for the failing state.

The roles Catholicism fulfils in various contexts thus depend on a high number of factors: the strength of state institutions, the independence of the Church, levels of secularization, the support or hostility of the society, and the ideology of the ruling elites, but also the positioning of the local Church regarding the South-North relations, including the colonial past as well as the present dependence on or independence of the West in cultural, political, and economic terms.

The Catholic doctrine, especially its social teaching, gives similar impulses to all Catholic communities across the world, but as a consequence of the diverse local conditions, local Catholicisms assume vastly different geopolitical positions – vis-à-vis their countries' governments, vis-à-vis the Vatican, and also vis-à-vis the international order. Let us take, for instance, the effects of the global capitalist economy: the attitudes of national bishops' conferences to it vary, ranging from largely positive assessments of its functioning to sharply critical ones. And such deep differences in (geo)political outlooks are not an exception, but a rule, impacting everything from views of US politics to different opinions on the relationship between the Catholic Church and China or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All of these topics (and many more besides) are currently objects of intense intra-Catholic disagreements.

...

What started as a series of interviews with Church representatives in the Vatican gradually took a more concrete shape in the course of the many conversations with my academic colleagues – at Sciences-Po in Paris, at Oxford, at La Sapienza, and at the Gregorian Pontifical University. During the subsequent work on the project, I embarked on long research trips to all four corners of the Catholic world and beyond, from Panama to Ghana, and from India to Brazil.

The book in front of you is the final result of this endeavour. Its aim is to offer the reader a glimpse into the complexities of geopolitics of Catholicism. A note of caution: It does so in a specific manner. This book does not replicate what many others have done before with greater skill: This is not a top-down analysis of papal diplomacy or of the Church's central institutions and their role in international relations. Instead, this study looks at geopolitics from the bottom, showing what the geopolitics of Catholicism



means in different contexts. Or better yet, it explains what the geopolitics of various Catholicisms means as there are multiple local/national/regional versions of Catholicism, with surprisingly diverse (geo)political outlooks. Using five countries that are essential for the future of global Catholicism as its case studies, this book sheds light on the historical evolution of Catholic communities through a geopolitical lens. It explores the conditions under which Catholic geopolitical *theoscapes* are born and why these *theoscapes* evolve so differently, contributing to the fascinating, but at times bewildering diversity within Catholicism today.

### Space, time, and geopolitics of Catholicism<sup>1</sup>

In November 2022, Pope Francis visited Asti, a town in Piedmont in Northern Italy, from where the Pope's family originated. Vatican News, the news website of the Dicastery for Communication, ran a story about the trip with the title "The Pope in Asti, a visit between memory and the future" (Gisotti 2022, n.p.). And indeed, Pope Francis repeatedly talked about the importance of life's journey during the visit, about the continuity of faith, and about the communal relations between generations that span both space and time. And he supported his narrative with the words of the poet Francisco Luis Bernárdez: "that which the tree has visibly in bloom, thrives on what is buried beneath" (Gisotti 2022, n.p.). So strong was the impression of the Pope's trip as a travel through space and time that the Vatican News article described the trip as a journey that "can be measured not only in kilometres, but in years" (Gisotti 2022, n.p.).

This book, while empirically focussed on global Catholicism, builds on the theoretical insight that not only do we live in space and time, but that these two categories are the conditions of human experience (Hutchings 2008). Time and space are thus necessarily connected in all domains of human cognition, ranging from ordinary language to the academic study of geopolitics of religion. Space, expressed as distance or as movement, is intrinsically linked to temporality, as in embarking on a pilgrimage of five days or even in everyday expressions such as "leaving something behind". But time is also constructed as a quasi-spatial phenomenon: it is no accident that we talk about the "flow" of time, an "extended" or "protracted" period of time, or "time flying by" (cf. Koselleck 2004).

But saying that time and space as essential categories of our lives are linked does not mean that they are fixed or that all of us understand the time(s) and the space(s) we live in in the same way. Especially if we approach time and space on the level of communities, and at the level of politics, we may be tempted to define ourselves as occupying a certain, uncontested space (our "place",<sup>2</sup> our "country"), while constantly moving unidirectionally through time to the future. In this understanding, human communities, including

communities of faith, live in space and time, but their space is fixed, and their time is linear and unchangeable, and so both are beyond our control. Thus, they become simple facts of life that one has to accept and – literally – move on. And here comes the second fundamental claim this book propounds: that neither our political spatiality nor our political temporality are fixed. They are not only amenable to change, but continuously subject to redefinitions, reconfigurations and, indeed, to continuous manipulation.

These political reconfigurations are always essentially both spatial and temporal, even if one or the other can be prioritized (as is often the case). We can ask questions that seemingly contain only one or the other element: Is our society aimed at overcoming past injustice or are we aiming at recreating a golden past? Can the temporal trajectory in which our society is heading be reversed? Do we see our country as a hub of a globe-spanning trade network or as a fortress under attack from insidious enemies? The first two questions seem to be exclusively temporal, and the third spatial. But in reality, these narratives are always both, always spatio-temporal. By saying that we see our country as a fortress under attack, we also necessarily invoke past narratives about how our community defended itself from past enemies. By saying that our country is the centre of a global economic network, we necessarily bring forth the imaginary which is related to the political economy of the empires of the past. And vice versa, if a leader of a great power talks about recreating the past glory in a temporalizing political narrative, the implications are always spatial (perhaps leading to a desire to reconquer territories that were once part of the empire or to efforts to increase the country's influence in areas where regional or global rivals are emerging).

The malleability of time and space leads to multiplicity. As Ernst Bloch famously wrote, “not all people exist in the same Now” (Bloch 1977, 22) and we may add that they do not exist in the same “here” either. The post-Cold War fantasies of the early 1990s notwithstanding, the whole of humankind does not share one and the same spatio-temporality. In fact, the belief in a unified spatio-temporality is not only erroneous, but typically also a product of an imperial mind that wants to subsume the difference under one totalizing whole.

This is why the simultaneous co-existence of multiple modernities (as famously advocated by S. N. Eisenstadt [2000]) is still so hard to accept for some, especially in the West. The thesis is provocative precisely because European modernity contained a forceful claim that it alone represented modern civilization, that it alone understood what to be modern means. Phrased with this in mind, this book not only puts forth the claim that this multiplicity continues to exist and exert tremendous influence on global politics, but also that it extends both in time and in space – not all people inhabit the same time or the same space.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, this multiplicity is deeply political, but also potentially conflictual on a fundamental, epistemological level.

One could even claim, together with Reinhart Koselleck, that the existence of the different spatio-temporal configurations may well be one of the main reasons for the persistence of any type of political conflict, including war (Koselleck 2013).

Space and time are not only always multiple and always malleable, but they also play an essential role in politics. Few things can evoke such a forceful reaction as when our spatio-temporal configurations are threatened, when “our place” is under attack or when somebody attempts to change our temporality. Let us take, for example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. If Ukraine is cast, spatially, as part of “us”, our Western civilization, then the way we perceive the attack is radically different from arguing that the invasion is simply a conflict between two distant post-Soviet countries. But the invasion can be framed not only as a spatial aggression but also as a radical reversal of the temporal flow; as a return to the past, an attempt at the past’s erasure and rewriting and, ultimately, its reconstitution. And then it becomes particularly alarming, as “our way of life” is then attacked both spatially and temporally. Similarly, how convincing the fight against climate change is for the public, depends on the perceived danger of climate change causing a fundamental spatio-temporal rupture in the everyday flow of life. But spatio-temporality is no less fundamental for understanding the religion-politics nexus, ranging from the millenarist movements to the concept of the Third Rome in Russian Orthodoxy (Sidorov 2006).

To put my argument in the shortest possible way, geopolitics has always been about politics of both space *and* time. But in the academic study of geopolitics, the relationship between space and time has always been asymmetrical, in favour of the former: while the spatial dimension has been acknowledged from the very birth of the scholarly field of geopolitics (as the name itself indicates), the temporal dimension has remained on the sidelines. True, every classical geopolitician would confirm that empires expand and contract in space as well as time, but following immediately after that statement, they would turn their attention back to the spatial, geographic problems of politics.

It is somewhat paradoxical, however, that while students of geopolitics tend to underestimate the significance of temporality, the students of religion often overstress temporality at the expense of the spatial aspects. The main reason for this temporal focus is the understanding of religion as being transmitted from one generation to another. Stories of religious traditions<sup>4</sup> are primarily temporal – typically from the creation of the world to its destruction (with possible temporal ruptures caused by divine intervention), and only secondarily spatial. These stories are sometimes more linear, and sometimes cyclical, but these lines and cycles are drawn in time, not in space. It is for this reason that the geopolitics of religion is so exceptionally well positioned to explore the double spatio-temporal focus, balancing the stress on spatiality in

much of classical geopolitics with the emphasis on temporality in the study of religion. The present study is an exercise in geopolitics of religion understood in this way: It is primarily a study of the spatio-temporal constellations, of the variety of thescapes that exist in today's global Catholicism.

...

This chapter will contain two sections, the first being about my understanding of geopolitics of religion, and the second more specifically about geopolitics of Catholicism. The first section will be more theoretical: I will commence by shedding more light on both spatiality and temporality in the study of geopolitics. Then I will show why the study of the linkage between space and time is even more important in geopolitics of religion than elsewhere. Finally, I will introduce the central notion of this entire study, that of a "thescape". In the second section of this chapter, I will explicate my understanding of global Catholic geopolitics, distinguishing between the Catholic Church and Catholicism as two related, but distinct phenomena. Here, I will first explain the unique role the Catholic Church plays in international relations and the centrality of the Holy See for the Church. But I will also claim that in the study of global politics, the unfortunate conflation of the Holy See, the Church, and Catholicism has often led to seeing Catholicism as a mere reflection of the institution, or an even more narrow expression of the activities of the Holy See. The chapter will conclude by arguing that in order to understand Catholic geopolitics, we need to balance the top-down institutional focus with the analysis of Catholicism in its many global, regional, and local embodiments.

### **A short note: on the spatial in (the study of) global politics**

Although the spatial dimension of politics is more widely acknowledged than the temporal one, spatiality is as often misunderstood as temporality. The problem is that spatial aspects of politics are sometimes seen as the objectively given geographic environment in which politics takes place, as if politics were the only malleable part of the story. But this is a fundamental misconception: With politics (and our social action more broadly), we transform space, define and redefine it, or establish its borders. Simply put, we create places (our home, our capital, our country, our civilization, etc.): Space is unstable; place is an attempt at a temporary fixation of space.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, space becomes intelligible only through meaning-assigning activities: Is this river a transportation route, a valuable resource, a source of threat, a "natural" protective border or a goddess of fertility? All these answers may be true depending on the combination of the river's physical properties, climate conditions, available technologies, and the relations of the human communities alongside the river, which include their economic, religious, cultural and political ties, etc. This means that space is constructed

too, and is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated: its forms, borders, and political meanings are not given, but established (Meyer, Rau, and Waldner 2016, especially the introduction).

None of this is entirely novel for students of geopolitics. The social construction of (political) space constitutes perhaps the most fundamental axiom of the entire subfield of critical geopolitics (Kuus 2010; Agnew 2013; Dodds 2001). It is no accident that critical geopolitics started to expand in academia in the post-Cold War period as the more traditional theories (classical geopolitics, structural realism, and the like) were reeling from their inability to predict the swift collapse of the bipolar contestation. The seemingly fixed categories of long-term rivalries disappeared, the properties of the global system suddenly changed and countries firmly embedded in the Communist bloc were “returning to Europe” (Daniszewski 1990). The ideology of Marxism-Leninism that was so heavily future-oriented, suddenly became the past from which these countries tried to escape.

Other processes, such as globalization, contributed to the transformation of the global order on a different level. Globalization is, after all, a process of global “dislocation, both cognitively and spatio-temporally” (Riaz 2011, 20). These changes were so fundamental that pundits left and right argued that the world was entering an entirely new era in which the very exercise of political power would be redefined. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for instance, argued in the famous *Empire* that the emerging global order would be deterritorialized and denationalized, and its enemies would also cease to be identified with a particular location, transforming instead into elusive non-territorial criminals (Hardt and Negri 2001).<sup>6</sup>

And yet, the process of decoupling of space and politics (and economics) has elicited a ferocious counter-reaction. What is usually labelled as “the return of geopolitics” (see the issue edited by Almqvist and Linklater [2022] is in fact a re-assertion of the connection between a particular community and the space it occupies. In a similar manner, the concept of the “new wars”, of denationalized and deterritorialized conflicts (Kaldor 2012), which used to be popular 20 years ago, is now challenged by the return of the “old wars”, territorial conquests such as the Russian war on Ukraine.

None of this means that the argument of critical geopolitics about the constructed nature of space and time is erroneous. But it shows that scholars should explore more carefully under what conditions spatio-temporalities are constituted and when they remain stable. What the political *cum* academic clash over the return of geopolitics reveals is that geopolitical constructions of the past cannot be simply discarded as a soon-to-be-overcome vestige of a bygone era. The real challenge is to acknowledge the significance of space for politics while not reverting to the naive geographic determinism of geopolitics past.

This counter-reaction, which is ironically carried by the temporal construction of the “return of the past”, is particularly acutely felt in geopolitics of religion, including that of Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the resurgence of religion in global politics (Thomas 2005) is part of the same conflict between two paradigms of geopolitics – one seeing the world as increasingly fluid and the other re-essentializing collective identities. However, the politically ascendant religious identities, ranging from the Evangelical support for President Trump to the Hindutva nationalism of Prime Minister Modi, seem to be emerging more uniformly on the essentializing side, on the side that defends the local against the globalized fluidity. And again, the challenge is not to succumb to either of the two extremes: It would be wrong to reduce geopolitics of religion to an exercise that just links religious traditions to their habitual, “natural” locales without realizing how false these conventional accounts are and how quickly the religious map of the world is changing. But it would be equally wrong to redefine geopolitics of religion as the study of the deterritorialized, transnational circulation of religious ideas, as if territory did not matter.

### **A second short note: on the temporal in (the study of) global politics**

In one way or another, spatiality has been part of the study of politics for centuries (and for more than 100 years, as an explicit field of study). In comparison, temporality is a newcomer to the analysis of politics. And yet, it is difficult to overstate how important political temporality is. The orientation of a society in time is essential for its functioning and a society with a future-oriented ethos will substantially differ from a society that is focussed on the past: Is the aim, for instance, to achieve greatness through technological advancement or is it rather the veneration of the great deeds of one’s ancestors, an effort to recreate a lost golden age?

Political temporalities also serve as securitization strategies or tools of mobilization. An influential Chinese narrative about China in global politics is driven by the “century of national humiliation”, an experience that must never be repeated again (Chong 2014, 941), and the Russian historical construction of the Time of Trouble (Gruber 2012) is a similar case. Conversely, the past may become an imagined haven from the instability of today or the dangers looming on the horizon, such as when the many deleterious effects of climate change are considered. Politicians then turn away from the future and insist on the need to “take back control” or make one’s country great again. Obviously, in political practice, various temporalities can be easily combined: the so-called Islamic State may yearn for the re-establishment of the Caliphate, but it may simultaneously pride itself in its ability to take advantage of the most recent technological innovations.

The broader intellectual momentum for greater appreciation of temporality was slowly building up throughout the 20th century, especially in political philosophy: Ernst Bloch studied the non-contemporaneous contemporality (Bloch 1977), Nicos Poulantzas explored space-time matrices (Poulantzas 1978), Reinhart Koselleck advocated a spatio-temporal understanding of human history (Koselleck 2013), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari reinvented the concept of *espace-temps* (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), and so on and so forth.

In social sciences, on the other hand, temporality gained sustained attention only after the collapse of the Cold War bipolar structures. The debate between the proponents of the “end of history” (Fukuyama 1989) and the critics of the thesis was centred on the question of whether humankind as a whole has reached the apogee of its development, combining a planet-wide spatial unification with the temporal closure of history. Although critical scholars frequently distanced themselves from the latter interpretation, they too elevated the link between spatiality and temporality to one of their favourite topics (Harvey 1990; Massey 1992; Osborne 1995; Greenhouse 1996, and, later, Grosz 2004).

The process was even slower in the field of international relations. While two giants of critical IR studies, James Der Derian and R. B. J. Walker, addressed the role of temporality in global politics in the early 1990s (Derian 1990; Walker 1991), a sustained attention to temporality emerged only years later. Kimberly Hutchings published her pioneering study *Time and World Politics* in 2008 (Hutchings 2008), but it still took several more years for studies on temporality in global politics to start appearing more regularly. In the last ten years or so, an academic version of a temporal avalanche has come: Among the studies of this sort that deserve a specific mention are, for instance, the contributions by Hom (2013, 2021), Basham (2015), Stevens (2016), Agathangelou and Killian (2016), Kraidy (2017), Collins (2018), Edelstein (2020), and McIntosh (2019 and 2022). The popularity of temporality led some scholars to argue that the discipline has entered a “temporal turn” (cf. Bertrand, Goettlich, and Murray 2018).<sup>8</sup>

As closely related as the disciplines of geopolitics and international relations seem to be at first glance, scholars of geopolitics have chosen a different path to studying temporality, one which, paradoxically, dedicates both more and less attention to the temporal dimension of politics. On one hand, temporality and temporal technological advancement have always been central to geopolitics, even in its most classical guise (e.g., in Mackinder’s analysis of temporal changes and their consequences for the balance of power between the sea-based and land-based great powers [Mackinder 1904]). On the other hand, time has almost never been explicitly theorized in classical geopolitics and it has often been seen as relevant only as far as it impacted the swiftness with which spaces could be traversed, resources delivered and armies transported.



But even the newer geopolitical studies, while somewhat more sensitive to the role of temporality, have certainly not experienced a temporal turn of the magnitude experienced in international relations. For example, the otherwise excellent analysis of critical geopolitics by Merje Kuus (2010) does not refer to time as a relevant concept at all. Perhaps even more surprisingly, even encyclopaedic volumes, such as *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography* (Agnew et al. 2017), do not include any entries on temporality. *The SAGE Handbook of Political Geography* circles around temporality, discussing topics such as politics of transition, that of localization or that of re-bordering, but never directly time (Cox, Robinson, and Low 2007). Even the critically oriented *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp 2013) entirely ignores the topic. But even in geopolitics, the number of works on temporality has been gradually increasing, with the excellent volume titled *Timespace. Geographies of Temporality* as the prime example of this trend (May and Thrift 2001). Studies on temporality are thus not rare anymore, but they still constitute a small fraction of the overall academic output on geopolitics (e.g., Freedman 2016; Holloway, Holt, and Mills 2019; Tazzioli 2018 or Ho 2021). As a result, it is safe to argue that temporality, its intrinsic connection to spatiality notwithstanding, is still waiting to be fully embraced as part of the story of geopolitics.

### Temporality and geopolitics of religion<sup>9</sup>

Geopolitics of religion is a field, which is well-suited for the greater acceptance of temporality, as temporality plays a particularly important role there. There are three main reasons for the significance of time in geopolitics of religion. The first is the above-mentioned definitional aspect of religion, which contains an essential historical dimension. Religions not only emerge and develop as a consequence of specific historical constellations of knowledge and power (Asad 1983), but they are also typically focussed on temporality in both their myths and their political theologies.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, and relatedly, religions as socially and materially embedded sets of practices and beliefs can be best described as religious traditions, that is, as a temporal passing of these sets throughout history, which naturally does not imply an identity, but a continuous transformation.<sup>11</sup> Third, geopolitics of religion can build on the political aspects of the well-established connection between the cosmological narratives of religious traditions and the span of human life. The analogy between human history and the individual human life is a well-known phenomenon in religious discourses (the creation of the universe is akin to the birth of a baby, and the end of the world is analogous to death, etc.). This connection renders these narratives decidedly political as the identification of a collective religious identity and an individual one actualizes the former and politicizes the latter. In other words, through the superimposition



of the personal over the millennia-old developments of a religious tradition, events such as rebuilding the Temple, recreating the Caliphate, or recovering the Holy Land during one's lifetime gain a special appeal.<sup>12</sup> Geopolitics of religion thus contains an oft-neglected, yet central affective dimension that becomes clearly visible here.

However, in religious traditions, the linear understanding of temporality is problematized in several ways. Most importantly, religious narratives rely, to varying degrees, on linear and/or cyclical understandings of time (or a combination of both). The distinction between a cyclical and a linear temporality again applies to the history of the humankind as well as to individual human life (if the world exists just once, so does the human; if the universe is undergoing a continuous process of rebirth and annihilation, then individual beings can repeatedly reincarnate as well). The traditional distinction between the linear timeline of the Western monotheistic traditions and the cyclical understanding in the Eastern traditions such as Hinduism, has now been proved to be an oversimplification (Barua 2011), as cyclicity of time occupies a special place in religious traditions of all kinds. Most typically, the significance of cyclical temporality is derived from the natural rhythm of changing seasons or the more abstract, but still structurally similar ritual or liturgical cycles. Even in Christianity with its very linear temporality leading from creation via incarnation to the end of the world, the repetitive commemorations of the key events nourish a strongly cyclical popular imagery. What this imagery celebrates is the interruption of the secular flow of time, caused by God entering human spatio-temporality, in the acts of revelation, incarnation, etc. As a consequence, the study of temporality in geopolitics of religion is continuously confronted with the tension between the linear and the repetitive temporality, as well as with the distinct, but cognate relationship between the secular temporality and the role of the sacred. This tension has far-reaching political consequences: should we, for instance, see Christianity more as a religion of continuity and repetition or as one of disruption (cf. Chambon 2020)?

Another corollary is the problem of the cultural and spatio-temporal continuity and discontinuity of Christian communities (Mosse 2012). Temporally, the question is related to the continuity with or the difference from the pre-Christian cultural norms and traditions; spatially, the problem revolves around the relationship between the Christian community and its broader cultural environment. In fact, these two questions, often subsumed under the notion of inculturation, constitute the perhaps most widespread conflict in the expansion of Christianity, again directly impacting geopolitics of Catholicism. Where is the borderline between the cultural norms to which a Christian convert can continue to adhere and those norms that are incompatible with Christianity? In other words, how much continuity with the non-Christian world remains in Christianity and how is this borderline

negotiated and policed? This very question underlies the bitterest and longest ecclesial conflicts in the global spread of Catholicism, such as the so-called Chinese Rites controversy: can Catholic Christians continue to venerate their ancestors and take part in the regular public Confucian ceremonies, or are such practices contrary to Christian teaching? In the Indian context, the same question led to a similar conflict over how far Christianity can or should respect the structures of the local society, including the caste system – a problem that has never ceased to plague Indian Catholicism.

However, the problem of the continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and culture has a reverse dimension too, which was less thematized by the European missionaries of the past centuries but which is all the more relevant today. Missionaries often assumed the temporal and spatial continuity of their religious traditions with the cultural forms they knew from their native contexts: the neo-Gothic Christian churches in the Philippines and the blue-eyed Madonnas in India are among the many examples of this cultural continuity. Politically and ecclesially more deleterious examples abound as well, such as the often violent efforts towards the full Latinization of the perfectly orthodox St. Thomas Christians in Southern India by the Portuguese.<sup>13</sup>

However, the consequences of a particular temporality for geopolitics of religion often cannot be expressed as a simple dichotomy. For example, the assumed distinction between this world, which is subject to secular temporality, and the eternal realm beyond, can easily lead to false dualisms between religion and culture or between the purely secular and the eternal devaluation of the temporal (Casanova 2019)<sup>14</sup>, which we will never find in the lived religious traditions in this pure form. In a similar manner, it would be false to argue that those religious traditions that prefer linearity such as Christianity also always exhibit a greater openness towards political and social innovation (“Behold, I am doing a new thing”, says the prophet Isaiah [Isaiah 43:19]). Such a general conclusion would be patently incorrect, especially when analysing Catholic Christianity in the period following the Western early modern invention of secularism.

### **Temporality and geopolitics of Christianity**

As is hopefully evident from the preceding discussion, spatio-temporality is an essential element of geopolitics of religion and, more specifically, geopolitics of Christianity. But it is also central to the self-understanding of Christian churches. In Christian metaphysics, the connection between time and space has been a staple of theological discussions for centuries. For instance, the “zero thesis” advocated by Boethius (that soon became a standard theological interpretation of eternity and is still in use today [Tapp 2019]) is based on the interconnectedness of time and space: God, who is an ever-lasting now, also does not inhabit a specific spatial location. Being timeless, Boethius argued,