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Is the nation-state a European specificity? A Study of the Renaissance Era and Treaty of Westphalia

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Abstract: This article assumes that the prevailing "Nation-state" model, now widely adopted across the globe, fundamentally originated in Europe, and Its is linked to European political history. To clarify this specificity, the article highlights the historical, political and intellectual aspects that led to its emergence. Historically, it recalls the events and major transformations that marked European political history in its transition from the Transnational Imperial State to the Nation-state. Intellectually, it emphasizes the significance of certain political theories that accompanied the Renaissance era and significantly contributed to the deconstruction of the foundations of the theological state in favor of the civil Nation-state. As for the political level, it mentions the contribution of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to the strengthening of the political achievements of the Nation-state, particularly in regards to fundamental concepts of the modern state, such as sovereignty, religious freedom, and state secularization.

Keywords: The Holy Roman Empire, Nation-state, religious wars, Westphalia, sovereignty.

1. Introduction

The concept of the "Nation-state" emerged as a direct result of profound political and religious transformations that swept across the European continent during its medieval and modern history. These sweeping changes gave rise to an entirely new political paradigm that diverged significantly from the traditional imperial model. The process of this transformation can be traced back to the decline of the conventional governance system in medieval Europe, triggered by a series of political and religious conflicts. These conflicts ultimately led to a complete reorganization of the European political landscape on novel principles. With the emergence of the Nation-state as an established de facto and de jure system, it marked a decisive departure from all previous political models.

This article aims to explore the factors that triggered the structural shift in political power, leading to the virtual disappearance of old models both within Europe and on a global scale. However, implementing this approach presents certain challenges due to the extended duration of these transformations, which began as early as the 5th century when the Church established itself as a transnational authority on the European continent. The historical expanse is vast, making it difficult to gather detailed information from this entire period to construct a comprehensive chart of the ensuing political upheaval and its impact across Europe.The article assumes that the concept of the nation-state originated in Europe and its development was closely intertwined with European political history. The widespread adoption of the nation-state model as the dominant and prevailing system globally led to the decline of other political systems worldwide. This prompts inquiries about its universal acceptance and its implications for the diversity of political systems.

In this study, our main focus is to investigate the evidence that supports the specificity of the European state. To accomplish this, we will analyze two critical periods: the Renaissance era and its associated intellectual transformations, along with the events of the Thirty Years' War, which ultimately resulted in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. These periods are considered pivotal in the transition from the traditional governance model that dominated Europe during the middle Ages to the modern nation-state model. As part of this exploration, we will delve into three essential issues that are key characteristics distinguishing theemergence of the European state: the reinforcement of the concept of sovereignty at both the political and intellectual levels, the secularization of the political sphere, and the separation of ethics from politics.

2. The Historical Turning Point of the Renaissance and the Emergence of the Nation-state

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the nation-state in Europe, one must take into account the intellectualThe concept of the "Nation-state" emerged as a direct result of profound political and religious transformations that swept across the European continent during its medieval and modern history. These sweeping changes gave rise to an entirely new political paradigm that diverged significantly from the traditional imperial model. The process of this transformation can be traced back to the decline of the conventional governance system in medieval Europe, triggered by a series of political and religious conflicts.

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The political, social, and religious changes that occurred during the Renaissance. These changes profoundly impacted both the structure of power and the foundations of political legitimacy. The nascent nation-state was heavily influenced by humanistic ideas, which advocated for a system based on civil power, in contrast to religious authority. Consequently, this evolution occurred amidst a context dominated by wars between nations or religions and intellectual conflicts between the religious vision represented by the Catholic Church and the emerging humanistic ideas. At the same time, Renaissance humanism and the revival of classical texts brought forth new ideas and a spirit of inquiry. Intellectuals of the time began to question traditional notions of authority and governance, seeking to understand the origin and limitations of political power. The works of philosophers like Machiavelli, Bodin, and Hobbes played crucial roles in shaping the discourse on sovereignty.

2.1. The middle Ages: The Imperial State and the Emergence of the Theocratic State

Christian Europe was built within the framework of the old Roman Empire and its political traditions. Organizational-wise, this imperial state had a central administration through which it exerted full control over the Roman world. According to Philippe Nemo, it was the emperor Domitian who marked the transition of the old Roman Empire from the political system of Principate to Dominat. He was the first to adopt a theocratic status by calling himself "lord" and "god," as he considered himself to be of divine substance, different from his subjects who were thus likened to "slaves." The emperor, as the absolute master, held all powers, being regarded as the supreme source of law, commander of the military forces, head of the executive and administration, and the supreme judge in both criminal and civil matters.[1]

This mode of government, which was both political and religious, was later reproduced by the Christian Empire in its initial stage of evolution, adapting it with its new religious traditions. Christianity gained its status as the imperial religion with the conversion of Emperor Constantine (280-337) in the year 325. In that year, Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, aimed at restoring unity in the Church threatened by the Arian heresy.[2] From then on, Christianity became the official religion of the imperial state, with privileges granted to the Church as a globalizing spiritual institution. With these powers, the Church gradually, between the 4th and 6th centuries, imposed its political and religious domination and emerged as a parallel power to that of the emperor. Over time, it even acquired the status of the main source of inspiration for reflections on power as well as fundamental questions concerning individual and social life. This domination made it "the sole learned knowledge throughout the early Middle Ages".[3]

The beginnings of this domination, which extended with the fall of the last Roman emperor in 476, had already started with Pope Leo I (440-461), who asserted the fullness of the power of the "Bishop of Rome" and his right to succeed the ancient imperial Rome. By the end of the 6th century, a century later, this control became complete with Pope Gregory the Great, who advocated the idea of a unified and peaceful "Christian society," where secular authorities would naturally come under the jurisdiction of the Church.[4] The pope thus became the universal spiritual authority at the head of a Church whose authority stood above the temporal powers of kings. However, this strong rise of the Church had a devastating impact on European thought. As

noted by historians of political thought, the ascent of the Church and its complete religious and political domination coincided with Europe entering the era of darkness, costing it ten centuries of decline. As evidence of this decline, Philippe Nemo cites Europe's descent into the feudal system, which brought it back to a pre-state stage, with a regression of scientific thought confined to extremely limited circles and the rise of a mentality that can only be described as "magico-religious".[5]

This brief historical overview leads to conclude that the Christian political experience in the Middle Ages can be considered, in a way, as a modified version of the Roman State model. Politically, it inherited a global imperial political system. Religiously, it inherited the idea of deifying the emperor, adapted to Christian religious traditions, with a pope claiming all meanings of holiness and infallibility as God's representative on earth. However, these two characteristics, in demonstrating the superiority of the Church and the imposition of its model of religious authority, also carried the factors of its self-collapse due to contradictions resulting from the duality of temporal and spiritual authority. In this system that marked medieval Europe, European peoples were subjected to two parallel central authorities: the temporal authority of the emperor and the spiritual authority of the pope. The relationship between the pope and the emperor would become tense throughout the history of the Holy Roman Empire, leading to a series of conflicts and destructive wars.

2.2. Refutation of the Moral and Religious Basis of the Theocratic State

Starting from the 12th century, the theological and political system began to be contested and questioned. Europe began to experience a broad intellectual and political movement at that time, generating an increasing awareness aimed at overcoming the religious regime, which was then at odds with the new currents of humanistic thought. Europe, in the era of the Renaissance, entered a new intellectual era with new schools of thought advocating a break with the past based on three principles: The reevaluation of the human being as the sole reference for all reflection; The reevaluation of reason as the favored means of thought and a source of progress and knowledge; The valorization of the principle of freedom, considering that humans are capable, through their own choices, of determining what is good for their existence.[6] During this intellectual movement, initially conciliatory and peaceful, it quickly became more active as the changes induced by the Renaissance allowed Europe to break free from the dominance imposed by the Church. During this period of transition, the moral, social, and political conceptions that dominated Christian feudal society underwent a significant deconstruction, paving the way for new political ideas advocating justice, freedom, and equality of rights outside the authority of the Church.

In the context of this transformation, we will encounter two of the major thinkers who had a profound influence during this critical intellectual context:Machiavelli in Italy and Hobbes in England. What is of interest here is not delving into the specific details of their ideas but rather understanding the importance of these ideas in their intention to move away from the traditional theological political doctrines.Machiavellianism emerged as a challenge to the false moral idealism of religious political traditions. Niccolò Machiavelli, a contemporary of the early Renaissance (1469-1527), based on his vast political experience, adopted a new thought that reflected the ambitions of the new bourgeois class to which he belonged. His famous work, "The Prince," written between 1513 and 1514, presents in detail his vision of political power devoid of any moral or religious values. The conquest and preservation of power should be achieved by any means, irrespective of moral or religious considerations. Machiavelli was not fundamentally against religion, but he believed that religion only holds value insofar as it serves a beneficial purpose. He directed his criticisms towards the Church of his time as an institution with its sclerotic moral values. He held the Church responsible for the decline of religious sense among the Italian people: "There is no better evidence of their decadence than to see how those peoples closest to Rome, the capital of our religion, are the least religious".[7] He also blamed the Church for the weakness and political division in Italy: "The second cause of our ruin is that the Church has kept and keeps our country divided".[8]

His stance on the politico-religious situation is clear. The ruler must be unburdened by moral virtues: "One must understand that it is not possible for a prince, especially a new prince, to observe all the virtues that make men esteemed as good, and that he is often obliged, for the sake of maintaining the state, to act against humanity, against charity, and against religion itself".[9] Machiavelli's judgment is inspired by the political experiences provided by history, which, according to him, show the necessity of not trusting others: "It is necessary for the one who establishes the form of a state and gives it laws to presuppose first that all men are wicked and disposed to use their wickedness whenever they have the chance".[10]

As for Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), he went even further in rejecting the religious and moral traditions that dominated the political practices of his time. In his famous book "Leviathan," he explores the question of human nature in its relation to politics. Based on his pessimistic view of human nature devoid of any inherent goodness, he formulates his political ideas. Hobbes assumed that nature made individuals equal in body and mind capabilities. From this equality of ability arises an equal hope of achieving our ends. Thus, if two men

desire the same thing that they cannot both enjoy, they inevitably become enemies and will strive to destroy or subdue one another.[11] According to Hobbes, in the state of nature, each man has the freedom to use his own power as he sees fit for the preservation of his own nature, meaning his own life, as well as the freedom to do whatever he conceives, according to his own judgment and reason.[12] It follows from such a condition that every man has a right to everything, even to harm others.[13] In such a state of nature, nothing can be considered unjust; notions of good and evil, justice and injustice lose their meaning. Where there is no common power, there is no law, and where there is no law, there is no injustice. In short, there is a constant state of "war of every man against every man"[14] To overcome this state of natural conflict, Hobbes proposes that the State be the alternative to restrain the chaos and the warlike nature of individuals. The political power, through a sort of social contract, will require the members of the community to relinquish their own power in favor of a force called the Leviathan, which will be in the hands of a sovereign who unites, establishes, and enforces peace among them and ensures their defense against foreign enemies.[15]

Although Hobbes' hypothesis about the state of nature may not align with historical accuracy, it served as the foundation for his contemplations on the sovereign state, establishing him as a prominent figure among those who laid the groundwork for the modern state. The fundamental principle underlying the formation of the state is the social contract among its members.To effectively establish order within the state, the sovereign's authority must be absolute and indivisible. The symbol of this absolutism is portrayed through the concept of the Leviathan, representing a "mortal god" to whom citizens owe their peace and protection under the "immortal God".[16] Furthermore, the sovereign's honor must hold precedence over that of any individual or even all of their subjects, as sovereignty itself is the source of all honor.[17]

Despite the criticisms that can be directed towards Hobbes' support of absolutism, his theory of the social contract brought about a profound transformation in the understanding of power and its legitimacy. This notion marked a radical shift, as power is seen as a civil agreement between the king and the subjects, breaking definitively with the traditional concept of the theological State, which was believed to derive its legitimacy from divine right. Hobbes' ideas challenged the long-held belief that rulers derived their authority directly from a higher power or divine source. Instead, he proposed that power is derived from the consent of the governed, creating a new paradigm where the legitimacy of authority was based on the agreement and understanding between the ruler and the people they governed. This revolutionary concept paved the way for modern political thought and significantly impacted the development of democratic principles and the concept of government by the people for the people. Consequently, Hobbes asserts that the Church as an assembly without mandate from the civil sovereign is illegal, and such a religious institution, purportedly universal and to which all Christians are bound to obey, does not exist on earth. Hobbes' approach means that Christians, by virtue of their belonging to different states, are subject to several rulers. Therefore, they cannot be subject to the commands of any other person. The Church as an authority capable of commanding, judging, absolving, condemning, or performing any other act is replaced by a civil Commonwealth composed of Christian men, known as a civil state. Any other configuration would lead to a confrontation between the Church and the State, between the sword of justice and the shield of faith.[18]

Historians of political thought indeed differ in their assessments of the extent of Hobbes' influence on subsequent political philosophers over the following three centuries, particularly his contributions to studies related to international relations.In his study of Hobbes' contribution to international thought, David Boucher concluded that contrary to the prevailing opinion that his theory of absolute sovereignty is limited to the domestic sphere, ‘his reflections on international or inter-community relations were not meagre’.[19]Despite this ongoing debate, there is no doubt that Hobbes had a profound impact on shaping the future of European political thought towards secularization of the state and the separation of politics from ethics.His ideas found a powerful resonance in Germany with Christian Thomasius, who followed his approach in neutralizing religious conflicts, considering them as the main cause of civil strife in Germany. This justification led Thomasius to advocate for the re-founding of the state on reason rather than divine revelation and to consider the state as the guarantor of society's security and well-being, rather than religion.[20]

2.3. The Concept of Sovereignty and the Deconstruction of the Imperial State

As mentioned, the emergence of the concept of "sovereignty" as a fundamental aspect of modern European political thought is closely tied to the historical and intellectual developments of the sixteenth century. To comprehend the significance of sovereignty, it is essential to delve into the historical and intellectual backdrop that facilitated its evolution. The Holy Roman Empire, which emerged in the late ninth century, remained entangled in its old customs and political rules, which had become anachronistic over time. Among the eleven characteristics of the empire mentioned by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, I will focus here on what concerns sovereignty, or rather its absence. The political structure of the Empire relied on mutual agreements among its members. Thus, the Holy Roman Empire was a political body composed of heterogeneous members

under the supreme authority of the emperor. However, the emperor, who was supposed to hold all the powers and whose status conferred legitimacy to the entire imperial body, lacked the means to impose his will on the other imperial members, not to mention his own dynastic power base.

Furthermore, the limited political unity of the Empire and the often conflicting interests of its members led to the creation of federal associations and regional or confessional alliances such as the Catholic League, the Protestant Union, and the League of Princes.[21] Indeed, the opposition and resistance faced by the empire from various political forces played a critical role in undermining the authority of the central government. The inability to assert its control and enforce its will over its member states created a political environment where the empire's central authority was weakened. This situation acted as a catalyst for the emergence of the concept of sovereignty.

Since its foundation, the Holy Roman Empire was constantly confronted with wars in addition to conflicts with the church. According to the detailed events of political and religious conflicts cited by Martin Creveld, from the late eleventh to the early fourteenth century, there were hardly any emperors who did not face excommunication at some point during their reign.[22] And during the period between the early thirteenth century and the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the rising European monarchies engaged in a continuous struggle against both the Holy Roman Empire and the Church, which they were able to weaken politically and reduce their ability to impose their dictates.[23] Faced with opposition from these political forces, the empire struggled to assert its authority over its members, which inevitably led to the weakness of the imperial central authority. This political situation of a fragile empire unable to enforce its imperial will was one of the most significant catalysts that contributed to the weakening of the central authority and the emergence of the concept of sovereignty.

In parallel with this new order that strengthened over time, monarchies drew inspiration from new ideas challenging the power of both the Church and the Empire to justify their territorial sovereignty. This new trend led to the development of legal writings stemming from the rediscovery of Roman law. In this politico-intellectual context, where the conflicts of monarchies coincided with the revival of Roman laws, new concepts of power and law were generated and reconstructed on rational and secular foundations. Thus, as Olivier Nay pointed out, kings contributed to the rise of scholarly law, which they used as a weapon to assert their temporal legitimacy against the pontifical power on one hand and to extend their authority over feudal lords on the other. Legal scholars increasingly referred to secular and ancient Roman rules rather than the precepts of Christianity. As a result, an arsenal of ideas and norms, stripped of any religious references and inspired by Roman law, was put to use by major secular powers to serve their political ambitions.[24]

The unfolding of these conflicts on one hand and the intellectual evolutions accumulated by the Renaissance on the other hand favored the emergence of new political ideas that emphasized the concept of sovereignty. Jean Bodin, a French political philosopher of the sixteenth century (1530-1596), was one of the founders of this new political and legal thought, which contributed to the reconstruction and development of this concept. His theory of sovereignty developed in the context of political conflicts that occurred during the monarchy in France, particularly the wars of religion between Catholics and Protestants. Jean Bodin made significant contributions to the concept of sovereignty in his seminal work "Six Books of the Commonwealth. For Bodin, one of the main objectives of "sovereignty" was to strengthen the absolute power of the monarchy, which was considered the sole guarantor of peace and stability in the country. This objective was present in Bodin's definition of the term. He asserted, "Sovereignty is the absolute and perpetual power of a Republic".[25] According to this definition, it is an absolute power to which all governed subjects must submit, as laws are imposed upon them. It is both absolute because it is indivisible and cannot be shared with any other power, and perpetual because absolute power cannot be granted for a limited period.[26] This idea resonated with the increasing centralization of power in European monarchies. Bodin argued that the sovereign authority must be absolute, indivisible, and not subject to external constraints. Only the king had the right to exercise power without limits:

"Since there is nothing greater on earth after God than sovereign Princes, and since they are established by Him as His lieutenants to command other men, they must take care to respect and revere their majesty with total obedience, to feel and speak of them with all honor, for whoever despises his sovereign Prince despises God, whose image he represents on earth".[27]

It is evident that this doctrine reaffirms the theory of the divine right of kings. The sovereign prince, as the image of God on earth, remains His sole representative. However, despite this approach, it must be acknowledged that it was through Jean Bodin that sovereignty took on its subsequent meaning as the foundation of civil power. Based on the explanations given about the characteristics of sovereignty, five marks are indispensable for the sovereign prince. The first is the power to give laws to all in general and to each individually; the second is the monopoly to specify the rights of sovereignty, including the ability to declare war or negotiate peace; the third is the institution of the principal officers; the fourth is that the sovereign is the last

and supreme recourse of judicial power; the fifth is the power to grant pardons to those condemned, overriding judgments and against the severity of laws.[28]

For Olivier Nay, the notion of sovereignty is historically older and was known as early as the twelfth century. However, it was Jean Bodin who became the first French philosopher to propose a rational theory inspired by the concern for logical demonstration, which constituted a decisive step in the affirmation of modern Western political thought. He laid the intellectual groundwork for the political philosophy that would prevail in the following centuries.[29] Hence, one can affirm that the genesis of the modern state resulted from a confluence of political and intellectual occurrences. The initial events, primarily centered around organization, were focused on laying the groundwork for a transitional nation-state, exemplified by the rise of monarchies. On the other hand, the subsequent events, primarily driven by ideology, facilitated the formation of a civil state with the goal of diminishing the sway of religion. This was achieved through the separation of religious and political domains, effectively breaking away from the traditions of theocratic states.

3. Religious Wars and the Outcomes of the Treaty of Westphalia

The Wars of Religion were a series of conflicts that took place in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. These wars were primarily motivated by religious differences and power struggles between various Christian denominations. The Thirty Years' War was not the first religious war. Such conflicts had begun long before 1618 and continued to occur even after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. However, the significance of the Thirty Years' War lies in its particular political and religious consequences, as it played a role in transforming the imperial political order in favor of the modern state. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Holy Roman Empire was exposed to intense religious conflicts between Protestant princes who feared the loss of their ecclesiastical properties and the Catholic Church. The terrible nature of this war resulted from the fact that it erupted not only between enemy princes or countries but also between religious allies: the Protestant Union formed in 1608[30] against the Catholic League formed in 1609.[31] These alliances reflected the depth of religious schisms in medieval Christian Europe. The politico-religious wars were the logical result of the confessional divisions and theological conflicts waged by Protestant and Catholic spiritual leaders against each other. The alliances forged based on religious division even transcended the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire and infected other European countries already involved in religious conflicts, not to mention the role of the political factor and the ambitions of conflicting monarchies seeking expansion.

3.1. Religious Consequences: The Secularization of Politics

The objective of sanctifying the Holy Roman Empire was to provide a stable political order for all Christians and defend them against heretics and infidels. For this purpose, the emperor was supposed to act as the principal protector of the Pope, who headed a single Christian church considered universal. This mission, seen as divine and bestowed by God, favored the possibility that the emperor and the Empire themselves were endowed with a sacred status.[32] Paradoxically, the Thirty Years' War resulted in consequences completely opposite to this objective. One of the outcomes of the Treaty of Westphalia, which had a gradual impact on the future of the state in Europe, was the weakening of the political and religious presence of the Empire and the Church, which lost a significant portion of their political and spiritual power on the European continent. The existing monarchical regimes began to adopt increasingly secular attitudes. The bloody wars fought in the name of religion had led to the loss of credibility and the ability of religion to govern political life. The consequences of the Thirty Years' War were heavy and destructive. Religion had become intertwined with the stench of bloodshed throughout the territory of the Holy Roman Empire and even beyond its borders, sowing misery, death, famine, and homelessness for an entire generation. According to a study conducted by German scholar Gunter Franz, the urban population in Germany decreased by a third, and the rural population by 40% as a result of these wars.[33] While these figures may be subject to some debate, they remain a relative indicator of the devastating and deadly nature of these wars.

Other historical sources confirm that the destructive aspect of the Thirty Years' War remained deeply ingrained in the popular consciousness of several European generations, who immortalized this tragedy through popular, literary, and romantic accounts. These writings vividly describe the blind and needless violence that European peoples suffered for decades, with acts of barbarism, rape, mutilation, and torture, depicting nightmarish scenes of scorched and ravaged lands.[34] It was natural that the solution had to be found by sidelining religion. In this regard, some historians and political scientists consider the Treaty of Westphalia as a historically significant turning point towards the establishment of the secular nation-state. However, this view is not shared by all historians, some of whom question the exaggerated role attributed to the Treaty of Westphalia in the evolution of political regimes in Europe. Despite this objection, these critics acknowledge that with this treaty, Europe was increasingly moving towards a secular order based on more equal sovereign states.[35] The subsequent evolution of religious and political thought would confirm this trend, with European monarchies

increasingly embracing secularism, even as the Church continued to retain a modest presence.As per Leo Cross' perspectives, the Treaty of Westphalia had a profound influence on international law, being regarded as the starting point for the development of contemporary international law and universal constitutional law.[36] Although certain scholars like Lesaffer[37] may raise doubts about this assertion, Cross maintains that this historical event undeniably played a crucial role in promoting the secularization of international law by removing any specific religious influences.[38]

Regarding religious tolerance, it is certain that the treaty played a decisive role in its establishment, but it was not the first. Indeed, there were intellectual efforts led by some European thinkers in response to the religious wars that dominated the geopolitical scene of Europe during the 16th and early 17th centuries. These efforts preceded the treaty and were aimed at promoting religious tolerance.[39]Within this broader context that aimed to mitigate the negative effects of religious wars on the social and political levels, the treaty introduced the concept of religious pluralismand the principle of mutual religious tolerance in the relations between previously warring religious sects, setting aside religion in conflict resolution based on secular principles.[40] By establishing a set of criteria to guarantee religious tolerance, the treaty represented a major change in the history of the Holy Roman Empire, rightly described by some scholars as an event that marked the official end of the Empire as a totalitarian Christian entity and the rise of a multi-confessional realm.[41]

The Treaty of Westphalia, explicitly laid out the right for followers of specific sects to reclaim their churches and ecclesiastical properties, and to freely practice their religion, whether in their places of worship or in their homes. It carried the responsibility for all participating parties to safeguard and promote an environment of peace, devoid of any discrimination based on religion. The treaty acknowledged the principle of equality among different sects and significantly expanded the scope of religious liberties for their adherents.[42]According to the provisions outlined in the articles of the Treaty of Westphalia, numerous modern scholars argue that it effectively established the principle of religious tolerance. By granting equality to both Protestant and Catholic countries and offering specific protections for religious minorities, the treaty affirmed the right of these groups to freely practice their respective religions, regardless of whether they differed from those of their rulers. It also allowed them to establish their places of worship and raise their children according to their beliefs.[43] Given its historical context, where religious conflicts were often resolved through violence, this level of tolerance can be considered quite advanced for its time.

This religious tolerance, strengthened by the Peace of Westphalia, led to a weakening of sectarian bigotry in Europe in favor of recognized religious pluralism among independent monarchies, despite their formal subordination to the empire. It is worth mentioning that one of the significant changes resulting from this treaty concerned the reorganization of the individual's relationship with the State. It was the first time in European political history that individuals disengaged their loyalty from the Church in favor of the State to which they were subject. As a result, the correlation between religious loyalty and political power, as it existed in the past and was a significant factor in the persecution of sects that did not adopt the religion of their state, was no longer relevant in the new order. This made it possible to recognize, to some degree, religious pluralism, which can be considered one of the foundational principles of freedom of belief as recognized in the modern secular state.

3.2. Political Consequences: Independence of Monarchies and Strengthening of Sovereignty

As previously noted regarding the religious consequences, some historians indeed confirm the historical significance of the Treaty of Westphalia as a foundational basis for the concept of modern state sovereignty as known in current international relations. However, others challenge this view, arguing that, in practice, and before the second half of the 20th century, the link between sovereignty and the Treaty of Westphalia was not widely recognized. These historians maintain that despite the signing of the treaty by warring states, their relations were not always entirely stable. They also argue that if the claim of sovereign states established by the Treaty of Westphalia implied independence from any higher authority, the Holy Roman Empire paradoxically continued to exert influence over these nation-states, including even the most powerful ones at the time, such as France and Spain.[44]

Historically, it is true that these countries remained formally subordinated to the empire while recognizing its supreme sovereignty, but it was evident that this was merely a formal and partial sovereignty. The power of both the Church and the Holy Roman Empire had been greatly eroded, paving the way for the strengthening authority of kings, which had begun even before the Treaty of Westphalia. Some researchers argue that the theocratic federation had become an outdated option, especially as the Church had to cede temporal power to monarchies. The dominance of the nation-state on the European political map can be considered to have started as early as 1500 for several reasons: It controlled a well-defined and continuous territory; it was relatively centralized; it differentiated itself from other organizations; it strengthened its claims by tending to monopolize the means of physical coercion within its territory.[45]

Cross noted that as political changes took place during this time, nationalism continuously challenged the supreme authority claimed by the pope and the emperor. Neither the pope nor the emperor were capable of effectively countering the tendencies toward greater autonomy of these states.[46] According to the events described by Martin Creveld, the Holy Roman Empire as an institution survived the treaty, but as a power, its decline, which began in the second half of the 13th century, had become pronounced. One of the main factors responsible for the empire's weakness was the steady growth and ascendancy of the national entities it claimed to govern and their struggles against the Church.[47] Regarding the consequences of the Peace of Westphalia, the treaty, which ended the war in 1648, marked the triumph of monarchs over the Empire and the Church. In this context,Creveld presents various evidence for this claim. Western and Central Europe became divided among secular and sovereign potentates. And even those who had remained within the Empire had practically all the privileges of sovereignty, including the right to have their own armed forces and the right to enter into alliances among themselves and with foreign powers, as long as they were not directed against the emperor.[48]

Thus, this political situation, referred to as "decentralization," was further reinforced at the constitutional level with the Treaty of Westphalia. States were officially recognized as separate entities through a written constitution. This constitution formalized the existing political segmentation, the establishment of autonomous states, the mutual recognition of these entities by each other, and the maintenance of their formal subordination to the Empire. Such political changes were endorsed by the treaty texts, some of which stated that "To prevent any future differences arising in the political State, all and each of the electors, princes, and States of the Empire are thus established and confirmed in their ancient rights, prerogatives, liberties, privileges, free exercise of territorial law, both ecclesiastical and political lordships, regalities, by virtue of this transaction: that they cannot or should never be molested by anyone under any pretext whatsoever".[49]Article LXVII also guaranteed the right of regimes to "retain their regalities, customs, annual revenues, liberties, privileges to confiscate, levy taxes, and other rights, legally obtained from the emperor and the Empire." Similarly, concerning foreign policy, Article LXV guaranteed the right of states to decide for themselves "to make alliances with foreigners for their preservation and security."

The importance of these texts lies in the fact that they allowed the consecration of a political reality that had previously prevailed on the ground, endorsed consensually by the treaty signatories. It can be considered that the Treaty of Westphalia truly marked a historical turning point towards the birth of the modern state. In the aftermath of the treaty, it was clear, considering the events and testimonies cited that the political autonomy that kings had seized had greatly weakened the authority of the Holy Roman Empire and eroded its former prerogatives and power to intervene in the internal affairs of the increasingly powerful and independent monarchies. Undeniably, these monarchies had become more potent and autonomous.The conclusion that can be drawn from these testimonies is that the political autonomy that kings had seized had greatly weakened the authority of the Holy Roman Empire and its ability to effectively intervene in the internal affairs of the increasingly powerful and independent monarchies. This undeniable weakness resulted, on the other hand, in the remarkable growth of monarchic powers, further reinforcing their sovereignty over their territories. It should also be noted that the term "sovereignty," although not explicitly used in the treaty text, was strongly present in its conceptual content. The evidence is clear from the preceding texts and subsequent historical and political facts.

4. Conclusion

In summary, this overview of a period rich in events has allowed us to highlight their impact on the unique evolution of the concept of the nation-state, whose emergence and development deserved a revisiting of its stages. On one hand, the religious link weakened, putting an end to the abuses of papal tutelage over subjects who were now subject to kings, and contributed to the growth of a secular local national consciousness. On the other hand, with the official recognition of the independence of regional states, monarchies formed a solid core that would accelerate Europe's trend towards the nation-state, a form more in line with the development of humanism and nationalism.Faced with this turning point, it is clear that the development of European political thought unfolded in a series of diverse and non-homogeneous shifts. The period of the Renaissance brought forth regenerative and revolutionary political concepts that emerged as a response to challenge the unethical aspects of religious practices.

It is crucial to highlight that the development of the modern nation-state, which has now become a global phenomenon, cannot be fully understood without considering the politico-religious context that unfolded in Europe from the thirteenth century onward. This realization prompts us to ponder how a phenomenon initially confined to Europe could eventually attain universal significance, with the nation-state model prevailing and supplanting previous political structures worldwide. The European political experience, centered on the establishment of independent sovereign states free from higher authorities, exerted a profound influence on all human societies, leading to the widespread adoption of the nation-state concept. Just as the disintegration of the

Roman Empire gave rise to nation-states in Europe, the dissolution of empires in other regions of the world also paved the way for the emergence of independent states that embraced the nation-state model as their preferred form of governance. However, it is important to note that this concept did not originate from the development of political consciousness in non-European societies.

Endnotes

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[7] Nicolas Machiavel, *Discours sur la premiereDecade Tite-Live*, in *Machiavel, Oeuvres*, transl. anded. Christian Bec (Editions Robert Laffon, Paris, 1996), 216.
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[27] Ibid., 95.
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