

Article

Debating the Devil's Clergy. Demonology and the Media in Dialogue with Trials (14th to 17th Century)

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Abstract: In comparison with the estimated number of about 60,000 executed so-called witches (women and men), the number of executed and punished witch-priests seems to be rather irrelevant. This statement, however, overlooks the fact that it was only during medieval and early modern times that the crime of heresy and witchcraft cost the life of friars, monks, and ordained priests at the stake. Clerics were the largest group of men accused of practicing magic, necromancy, and witchcraft. Demonology and the media (in constant dialogue with trials) reveal the omnipresence of the devil's cleric with his figure possessing the quality of a 'super-witch', labelled as *patronus sagarum*. In Western Europe, the persecution of Catholic priests played at least two significant roles. First, in confessional debates, it proved to Catholics that Satan was assaulting post-Tridentine Catholicism, the only remaining bulwark of Christianity; for Protestants on the other hand, the news about the devil's clergy proved that Satan ruled popedom. Second, in the Old Reich and from the start of the 17th century, the prosecution of clerics as the devil's minions fueled the general debates about the legitimacy of witchcraft trials. In sketching these over-lapping discourses, we meet the devil's clergy in Catholic political demonology, in the media and in confessional debates, including polemics about Jesuits being witches and sorcerers. Friedrich Spee used the narratives about executed Catholic priests as vital argument to end trials and torture. Inter alia, battling the devil's clergy played a vital role in campaigns of internal Catholic church reform and clerical infighting. Studying the debates about the devil's clergy thus provides a better understanding of how the dynamics of the Reformation, counter-Reformation, Catholic Reform, and confessionalization had an impact on European witchcraft trials.

Keywords: witchcraft; superstition; magic; counter-reformation; media; Catholic reform; Franconia; Bavaria; Trier; Germany; France; Italy; Spain; Jesuits; priests; monks; Inquisition; exorcism; convent cases; witch-hunts

1. Introduction

1.1. Catholic Clergy as the Devil's Minions—Thesis

Witch-priests were a special category of male witchcraft not in quantity, but certainly in quality. In late medieval and early modern Western Europe, members of the Catholic clergy (parish priests, canons, monks, friars, Jesuits) were accused as magicians, sorcerers and witches.¹ Not all of them

¹ For reasons of linguistic variations, I use the terms "witch-cleric", "witch-priest", "sorcerer-priest", "priest-magician", or "wizard-monk" as synonyms without any inherent textual difference. In German, the term "Hexenpfaffe" or "Zauberpfaffe" appears in the source material—I owe my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for encouragement and comments. Most of all, I like to thank the one reviewer who had lent a helping hand in language editing. My final thanks are going to Marina Montesano for inviting me to write this paper, and to Alison Rowlands for comments and a final language editing.

suffered execution, banishment, or died in custody. Including an obscure number of cases lost in the archives, we can estimate a total of about 120 to 150 witch-clerics, sorcerer-priests, and wizard-monks who had to stand trial under the accusation of ritual magic, necromancy, and witchcraft.² As far as we know, members of the Jesuit order did not share the fate of the executed³, other than in 1731 during the last French witch-trial, when the Jesuit Father Jean-Baptist Girard was condemned to death, but pardoned by the *parlement de Paris* (Kuznicki 2007). During the polemical confessional debates of the 16th and 17th centuries, notably in the Old Reich and its borderlands, members of the *Societas Jesu* were defamed as the devil's sorcerers. In actual witchcraft trials, Jesuits—as other clerics—were the target of denunciations made by condemned witches. The situation grew worse after some Jesuits, working as father confessors of witches in the prison, raised their voices against the cruel procedure of trials and torture. Witch-hunting commissioners from Westphalia accused them consequently of being *patroni sagarum* (protectors of witches) and thus witches themselves. In the different confessional factions, this potentially deadly argument fueled the polemical discourse about ecclesiastical prince bishops who were—according to Luther's concept—spiritual sorcerers and so-called witches' masters (*Hexenmeister*), conducting terrible witch-hunts and shedding the blood of the innocent (Voltmer 2020). Friedrich Spee, finally, joined in the chorus, using the example of witchcraft trials against Catholic priests as a vital argument against further prosecution (1631).

During the so-called convent cases in France, the Old Reich, and their borderlands as well as in Italy, several nuns and female religious figures who, according to Canon law, did not belong to the status of clergy, participated in witchcraft trials as possessed living saints, accusing either their father confessors or other nuns of being witches. (Burkardt 1997; Ferber 2004; Po-Chia Hsia 2005, pp. 144–58; Monter 2007, pp. 97–100).⁴ So far, the total number of nuns and women religious, who were executed as presumed witches, is unknown. Renata Maria Singer von Mossau was the 'last witch' from Franconia, put to death in the Holy Roman Empire in 1749. Several nuns had accused her of having harmed them through demonic possession. The Jesuit Father Georg Gaar published the sermon which he had preached at the stake and in which he defended the necessity of the witch trial (Muschiol 2004, p. 78; Levack 2013, p. 220).

Protestant ministers, on the other hand, lived a safer life until the mid-17th century. With only a few accused of witchcraft, only four of them were executed as witches: John Lowes in Sussex (1645), Kaspar Dulichius in Saxony (1655), Andreas Koch in Lemgo (1666), and George Burroughs in Salem (1692) (Rowlands 2019, p. 9).⁵

In comparison with the estimated number of about 60,000 burnt, hanged, decapitated, or lynched supposed witches (women and men), the number of executed and punished witch-priests seems to

² For example, the total number of clerics, who were accused as necromancers, magicians, and wizards in Italy and Spain, is not known. In both regions, tribunals of the Roman and Spanish Inquisition as well as secular courts prosecuted magic, sorcery, and witchcraft; see (Knutsen 2009, pp. 5–7, and in the present chapter footnotes 17, 20–22).

³ Urbain Grandier, executed in 1634, had not been a Jesuit, presumed by Apps and Gow (2003, p. 57)—A survey of the Capuchin's involvement in witch-hunting has yet to be written; see *pars pro toto* (Tschaikner 2010).

⁴ Johannes Wier reported—together with the story of the witch-cleric from Mirandola—the first cases of demonic possession and witchcraft accusations in female convents. He argued against staged exorcisms, because they triggered the fear of diabolic witchcraft and resulting trials (Voltmer 2016, p. 212). The notorious convent cases of Aix-en-Provence, Lille, Loudon, and Louviers reached wide spreading public attention (Dall'Olio 2006). Additionally, the Lorraine demonical possessed 'living saint' Elisabeth Ranfaing caused the execution of the physician Charles Poirot (1622) as a supposed witch. This case was copied in Cologne, where a possessed 'living saint', the nun Sophie Agnes von Langenberg, accused Katharina Henot as a witch. A witch-hunt started which cost about 24 lives. The network of the Jesuit order played a vital role in transmitting the idea of staging the making of a 'living saint' with the help of exorcism (Voltmer 2018, pp. 160–61; Levack 2013, pp. 145–55)—The Jura region (including the Franche-Comté) "had no bewitched convents or priest-sorcerers" (Monter 1976, p. 195).

⁵ In 2009, I worked out a preliminary survey concerning the figure of the witch-cleric during the European witch-hunts ('Geistliche im Hexenprozess—Versuch eines Überblicks', unpublished conference paper). I shared the paper with my friend and colleague Alison Rowlands to use in her study of witch-clerics in a Lutheran context (Rowlands 2019, pp. 15–16, footnote 79)—The present paper is part of a recent book project.

be rather irrelevant.⁶ This statement, however, overlooks the fact that it was only during medieval and early modern times that the crime of heresy and witchcraft cost the life of so many ordained priests.⁷ Clerics “probably comprised the largest single group of men accused of practicing magic” (Mollenhauer 2006, p. 197). Demonology and the media debated the devil’s clergy during medieval and early modern times in constant dialogue with actual trials.⁸ This omnipresent figure possessed the quality of a ‘super-witch’, labelled as *patronus sagarum*. After the Reformation and during the movements of counter-reformation and Catholic reform, at least four discourses filled with confessional arguments: Protestant polemics about Jesuit-sorcerers seeking global tyranny; Protestant polemics about popish lands teeming with witches; Catholic propaganda about being the last bulwark against witches, Anabaptists, Protestants, and Jews; finally the discourse in the Old Reich about the legitimacy of massive witch-hunts, joined by sceptical Jesuit voices. The figure of the priest-witch appeared prominently in these overlapping debates, which shared arguments and transgressed—where necessary—confessional borders (Clark 1997, pp. 195–213, 526–45). In addition, the trans-confessional anxieties about the heretical sect of the Anabaptists fueled Catholic as well as Protestant suspicions about clerics and ministers baptising their flock in the name of the devil. In Italy, France, or in the Old Reich, the witch-priest sometimes fell prey to campaigns for inner Catholic church reform and clerical infighting, embedded in old and new rivalries. Studying the debates about the devil’s clergy thus provides a deeper understanding of how the dynamics of counter-reformation, Catholic Reform, and confessionalization⁹ had an impact on European witchcraft trials.¹⁰

1.2. Setting the Scene—Catholic Clergy and the Crisis of Priestdom

To analyze the multi-faced figure of the witch-priest, its appearance in discourse, and its impact during the late medieval and early modern witch-hunts, one must take into account that the status of the clergy contained within it a great diversity in rank, social milieu, economic resources, and location (rural/urban).¹¹ Most students at medieval universities were qualified to be clerics. They were ordained to the lower orders and subject to Canon law, but without being priests in the fullest sense. Divided into secular clerics (e.g., canons, parish priests) and regular clerics (monks and friars, post-1560 Jesuits), not every cleric obtained consecration to the highest order of priesthood (Kieckhefer 1990, pp. 153–56). Minor clerics only possessed the lowest ordination. Noble clerics, from canons to bishops, gained a lower ordination only before entering their sinecures. Noble families parked their later-born sons in urban canonries to grant them a secure income and status. Sometimes, canons had to leave the clergy to take the place of a deceased main heir. Others changed profession. In many cases, however, it remained uncertain whether a so-called cleric had received any ordination at all. Canons in colleges lived the worldly life of the nobles or bourgeois elite, rejoicing in clerical privileges and rich sinecures, but neglecting their spiritual duties. For reasons of maintenance, many parents forced some of their later-born children into monasteries and nunneries. For the same reasons, young men together with their families hunted for pre-bends. These positions promised lifelong sustenance for the cleric and his

⁶ A cluster of factors triggered major witch-hunts, including demands from the populace. Recent witchcraft research denies any monocausal explanation. This paper cannot discuss these factors in detail; see pars pro toto (Voltmer 2017b).

⁷ No statistics exist of how many ordained priests, monks, friars, or women religious were executed as heretics during the Middle Ages. The death toll increased during the 15th century, and especially during the Reformation era, including Protestant ministers and preachers. Some sixty-seven Jesuits were executed as martyrs during the religious conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. More Jesuits were killed or martyred in the transatlantic colonies (Rafferty 2017, p. 507).

⁸ A close connection between demonology and witch-hunting existed as a multi-levelled flow of ideas and practices. With the help of the media, and between the elite and popular domain ideas of demonology were negotiated, elaborated, and popularized; see the chapters in (Goodare et al. 2020).

⁹ On reformation, counter-reformation, and confessionalization, there is a still growing bibliography; among other titles see (Mullett 2010; Bamji et al. 2013).

¹⁰ The movements of Reformation and Counter-Reformation exerted a significant influence on witch-hunts in Europe; see for example (Kallestrup 2018; Monter 1976, 1990; Voltmer 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2018b, 2020; Waite 2003b, 2007, 2012)—On the scholarly debate and the call for further research see (Waite 2013, pp.485–487, 504).

¹¹ See for example (Po-Chia Hsia 2005; Thibodeaux 2010; Arnold 2014).

entourage. Most parsons had to share their life with a woman for economic reasons who was able to fulfill the daily duties of housekeeping. It was a common and mostly accepted way of living for a rural parish priest to maintain a concubine, to father children, and—sometimes—to invest a son as his vicar. Many a parson with his clerical magic served his flock with healing, cunning, and detecting witches' mischief (Mollenhauer 2006; de Blécourt 1994). To become a priest in an urban or rural parish, young men had informally to learn the art as an apprentice of an older parson. Vicars, hirelings, and chantry priests had to search for a patron who might invest them with a benefice. It was only after the Council of Trent that the training of priests in seminaries, mostly run by Jesuits, the evaluation of the applicants by specially appointed committees, and the control of their rightful ordination became obligatory. Still, many clerics and priests wandered from diocese to diocese to find an adequate position.

Catholic clergy in medieval and early modern times, however, stood apart from the laity through their legal status, privileges, conduct, and particularly sacrosanctity. At the highest order, an ordained Catholic priest was able to perform the seven sacraments (inter alia Eucharist, baptism, penance, and reconciliation). Due to his consecration, he was empowered to expel devils and demons with exorcism. In preaching, he was the voice of God, and in using the sacraments, he was the mediator between God and humankind. The Council of Trent reinforced the sacrosanct position of the clergy, and its exclusive power to perform the sacraments and the sacramentals, including exorcism (Levack 2013, pp. 96–98; Delumeau 1977, pp. 4–6, 13–15). A pious priest was a safeguard for his flock, a guarantee for its salvation, whereas a diabolic priest, a magician, necromancer, soothsayer, and cunning man, was a wolf amongst the sheep, a false prophet who brought with him the foul danger of the devil's baptism, blasphemy, lechery, and desecration of the sacraments. God's wrath had to come upon those who did not stop the devil's clergy from working their evil mischief. Whatever level of ordination a student, a secular, or a regular cleric had achieved, however, they all possessed the *privilegium fori* (benefit of clergy): A cleric thus had not to stand trial in a secular court nor be tortured, unless his degradation had discharged him from his clerical status.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, ideas about the Apocalypse and the Antichrist gained ground. England and France were still in conflict, with civil wars and peasants' revolts in both countries; the Great Schism split Christendom between Avignon and Rome; heretic sects such as the Lollards and the Hussite movement fought for the renovation of Christendom. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the riders of the Apocalypse seemed to approach Christianity: War, with the advance of the Turks; plague, with the spread of the yet unknown deadly disease of syphilis; famine and death, as consequences of weather disasters, deluge, and drought. Apocalyptic thinking fueled the obsessive clerical idea that certain conspiracies in the service of Satan existed which together formed a secret army to battle Christianity in a final Armageddon (Clark 1997, pp. 346–62). These anxieties partly forwarded harsh anticlerical criticism, which since the 14th century, during the pre-reformation and reformation period had increased against so-called lecherous canons, wandering friars, pseudo-clerics, and idle monks (Stephens 2002, pp. 303–4). The underworld of necromancy, love magic, magical healing, soothsaying, stargazing, and treasure hunting provided a large field of action. At noble courts, in urban as well as in rural parishes, clerics advertised their power in misusing the sacraments, dealing with hosts, re-baptising, and summoning demons (Boudet 2019; Klaassen 2019; Montesano 2018, pp. 170, 180; Cameron 2010, pp. 61–62, 116; Veenstra 1998; Kieckhefer 1990, pp. 151–75).¹²

Demonology brought forward the argument that vagabonds, Hussites, magicians, witches, and heretics multiplied, secretly infiltrating Christian society. Members of the 'clerical underworld', who practiced necromancy and ritual magic, seemingly belonged to this army of the devil (Tschacher 2000; Bailey 2003, 2019). During the Schism, the figure of the sorcerer-pope as an adherent of the Antichrist (or as the Antichrist himself) had already played a vital role in defaming political adversaries.

¹² During the medieval and early modern period, clerics engaged frequently in magical treasure hunting. A notorious trial happened in Lyon (1742–1745), including several priests (Dillinger 2012, pp. 130–34).

This narrative, marking the pope, the Catholic cleric and every papist into sorcerers and witches, gained particularly relevant impact during the confessional debates that were to come (Harvey 1973; Kieckhefer 1990, pp. 155–56; Hillgarth 1996; Cameron 2010, p. 210; Parish 2015; Ficzel 2019).¹³ There were several steps to take from the concept of learned ritual magic (necromancy) to diabolic witchcraft, amalgamating both concepts with the blasphemous crime of heresy, and the adoration of demons at the witches' sabbath (Ostorero 2019; Utz Tremp 2008).

During the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, attempts of Catholic reform and counter-reformation exposed that the papal Church had endured a massive crisis of the priesthood. Anticlericalism, built on political, social, economic, and religious enmities, indeed, had a longstanding medieval tradition. It targeted regular and secular clergy, whilst there was a great deal of infighting amongst the clerical orders themselves: Monks battled friars, observant defamed non-observant branches, Dominicans battled with Franciscans, anti-fraternalism ruled from the advent of the Mendicant orders, and popes were labelled as diabolic necromancers. These polemics increased during the Reformation period, together with the radical anticlericalism of the Anabaptists (Waite 2003a). After 1560, new rivalries grew between the Jesuits, the Mendicant orders and the secular clergy (canons, beneficed rural as well as urban priests).¹⁴

However, counter-reformation worked slowly. Even after the Council of Trent, rural parish priests lived with their concubines and children, neglecting the new pastoral and moral guidelines. Some of them had only sparse knowledge of their spiritual duties, of performing the sacraments, preaching, and teaching their flock the dogma of Catholic Church. Instead, they acted as cunning men, with some becoming famous because of their magical healing powers. Popular anticlericalism thus held parish priests as sorcerers and magicians responsible for bad weather, harvest failure, and impotence (Roelants and Vanysacker 2005; Robbins 1997). In an urban context, the worldly lifestyle of the canons gave reason for many complaints. In the eyes of Catholic reformers, clerical conduct and education needed a firm and groundbreaking redesign to withstand the devil's two-fold challenge, firstly from within by unlearned, wicked priests, and superstitious people, and secondly from the outside by heretical sects (Anabaptist, Protestants, and witches) and Jews who had already fallen prey to Satan (Waite 2003b, 2007, 2012). Against the backdrop of these realities and fears, the figure of the sorcery-priest gained the quality of a threatening danger to Christian society itself. The Catholic witch-cleric thus was not a stereotype developed at the peak of witch-hunting, leading to its breakdown ("crisis of confidence"; Midelfort 1972, pp. 121–63). Influenced by the medieval concepts of apocalypse, heresy, and anticlericalism the devil's cleric had accompanied female and male witches at least since the 15th century (Stephens 2002, p. 5).

However, how was it possible to unmask the false prophets, shielded as they were by their privileges? Demonology and most of all, a new set of Catholic standards delivered the categories to detect witches of all kind, including the priest-witch. During the post-Tridentine campaigns, these standards had been developed and provided by its strike force, the Jesuit order, together with those seminary priests who had been educated at its schools, colleges, and university faculties. In the Old Reich, in the Spanish Netherlands (together with Luxembourg), in Lorraine and Alsace, in Bohemia and Silesia, the ruling houses of Habsburg, Lorraine, and Wittelsbach promoted the establishment of these bulwarks against Protestantism. As nurseries of Catholic reform and counter-reformation,

¹³ In general, accusations "of witchcraft and magic were used against the papal office and against individual popes in order to undermine the reputation of the individual and the respectability of the institution or in the service of political or personal rivalries and ambitions" (Parish 2015, p. 417). For example, and by 1611, the English mathematician and theologian John Napier listed twenty-two popes as necromancers (Parish 2015, p. 416). The Lutheran minister and missionary Hermann Samson, who in Riga battled both Catholics and Calvinists, stated in 1626 that all popes were witches, a fact easily to be proved, because popish lands sheltered more witches than anywhere else. Jesuits however headed his list of witch-clerics, being (allegedly) very prone to witchcraft. In defaming Catholics as witches in general, Samson relied on Luther and Bodin (Schulte 2009, pp. 134–36).

¹⁴ See for example: (Parish 2015; Tronu 2015; Stolarski 2011; Geltner 2012; Voltmer 2010a; Dykema and Oberman 1993).

the Jesuits produced the ideal of an ascetic, pious, and learned priest, ready to fight the enemies of God to the point of martyrdom. These newly created men of God stood in apparent opposition to the highly criticized and ridiculed members of the old, lecherous, corrupt, worldly, unlearned, and idle clergy, suspected of superstition and witchcraft. Thus, at the end of the 16th century, and up to the first third of the 17th century, members of the Jesuit order worked hand in hand with the persecuting ecclesiastical and secular authorities to battle the witch-priest, e.g., in Trier, Cologne, the Eifel region, Franconia, Swabia, Alsace, or Lorraine. However, after 1600, a change of opinion slowly spread in the order, which brought a few Jesuits to think differently about the crime of witchcraft, and about the accused clerics. They joined the empire-wide critical discourse about the legitimacy of massive witch-hunts, which did not respect the lives and souls of the innocent.¹⁵

1.3. *The Witch-Cleric—Research Concerning the Old Reich and Its Border Lands*

A history of the witch-cleric in Europe is still missing.¹⁶ A rather outdated survey concerning Catholic witch clerics in German speaking areas (Holy Roman Empire, Habsburg Hereditary Lands in Tyrol, Carinthia, Styria, and Salzburg) concentrates on the 16th and the 17th centuries, and rejects the concept of social disciplining as explanation (Schwillus 1989; Schwillus 1992). For example, during the witch-hunts in Würzburg with its 43 canons and five alumni executed, well-known unworthy, lecherous priests escaped trial. The first denunciations against the priests arose from urban and rural convicted witches. However, during interrogation under torture, leading questions asked the accused to name his specific accomplices, leading to further denunciations against members of the three collegiate chapters in Würzburg (Schwillus 1989, pp. 70–71). This criminal procedure proves two facts: Firstly, the inquisitors eagerly sought for more witch-canons, and secondly, in answering the questions, the imprisoned canons had no alternative but to give the names of their fellow canons.

A triggering factor in Würzburg might have been social envy against the idle and immoral conduct of (noble) canons. Members of the Jesuit order, who opposed the worldly life of the canons, had taken some lead during the trials. Schwillus, however, denied any special significance of the phenomena, since only a small number of clergymen had fallen prey to the witch-hunts. In 2004, Gisela Muschiol did an initial survey of both religious women and men being involved as victims, witnesses, and perpetrators in witch trials. Members of the clergy seemed to be treated in the same way as members of the laity. On the one hand, parish priests were probably denounced as witches because they shared their daily life in face-to-face communities with other suspected people. On the other hand, Muschiol assumed a connection between Catholic reform, counter-reformation, confessionalization, and witchcraft trials against members of the clergy (Muschiol 2004, pp. 77, 88). In 2005, Nienke Roelants and Dries Vanysacker presented a survey concerning the Catholic clergy in parts of the Southern Netherlands and its attitudes towards superstition and witchcraft. Though local parish priests participated in magical and semi-religious actions, no names of accused clerics were found in the surviving records of Brabant, Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent (1550–1650). Additional documents revealed two cases of parish priests who were punished, but not executed or exiled because of so-called superstitious practices (Roelants and Vanysacker 2005, pp. 769–70, 782, 789–90). However, between 1608 and 1619 some female convents were allegedly infested with demonic possession and witchcraft, for example in the abbey of the Brigittines at Lille (1610) and in the Cistercian abbeys of Valduc (1610), Beaupré (1611), and Notre-Dame-du-Verger (1613–1619). In subsequent trials several nuns were executed as witches, many more had to stay in prison for several years (Roelants and Vanysacker 2005, pp. 778–80).

¹⁵ Jesuits were involved in witch-hunting at almost every level of action, be it as demonologists or sceptics, as exorcists, preachers and father confessors, during prison ministry as well as missionary and visitation travels, as experts at the faculties of theology, or as advisers of princes (Vollmer 2006, 2016, 2020; Sobiech 2019).

¹⁶ The so-called convent cases of France, Italy or Spain are well known; see inter alia (Walker and Dickerman 2001; Ferber 2004; Dall'Olio 2006, 2012; Spence 2009; Watt 2007, 2009; Tausiet 2013, p. 195; Maus de Rolley 2016)—Witch-clerics appear marginally in (Dinzelbacher 2006, p. 179; Schulte 2009, pp. 78, 97, 135, 259; or Apps and Gow 2003, pp. 33, 57, 144).

In 2009, I presented six categories of men charged as witches during the massive and well-documented witch-hunts in the Rhine-Meuse-area: The boy-witch, the witch-hunter, the adversary (political/socially), the rogue (adulterer), the cunning man, and the priest. At least four out of the six had fallen under suspicion because of the Jesuits' missionary work (child-witch, rogue, cunning man, and priest). I divided the latter category into three subcategories: Firstly, some parish priests were accused because they had joined their lives and their beds with concubines who already were tried for witchcraft and infanticide.¹⁷ Subsequently, they denounced their priestly lovers (and sometimes violators) as instigators of the child's murder and as ringleaders of the witches. A second group of priest-witches attracted suspicion because they acted as cunning men, fueling superstitions, and misusing sacramentals. Thirdly, some of these clergymen, who had acted as confessors of condemned witches, were accused as *patroni sagarum*, because they had openly opposed the procedure of witch-hunting (Voltmer 2009, pp. 89–90). In her study on Lutheran witch-clerics, Alison Rowlands worked successfully with the categories to characterize the Protestant witch-cleric. These ministers were charged with witchcraft relatively late in the cycle of early modern witch-persecution. In the rural hinterland of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, two Protestant witch-clerics were accused of having baptised children to the devil (1639: Johann Mauck; 1692: Johann Craft). Rowlands argues for the impact of the media, of pamphlets and leaflets which translated anxieties about the Catholic witch-cleric into the Protestant milieu. She suggests that the denunciation of Jesuits as witches had probably stopped enthusiasm for further trials (Rowlands 2019, p. 21).

In 2018, I published the first critical edition of an almost entire trial record against a Catholic priest under the charge of witchcraft (Voltmer 2018b, pp. 289–322).¹⁸ The case of Father Laurenz Kirsbach from a small Eifel-village presents the extraordinary story of a parish priest who was able to escape to Cologne to avoid a witchcraft trial but was captured and executed in 1631. Not only the records but likewise letters of the secular minor lord, who had persecuted Father Kirsbach, have survived, opening a new perspective behind the scenario. The case shows in detail the significance of a criminal trial against an ordained priest: According to his letters, the lord Bertram Beissel of Gymnich prosecuted Laurenz Kirsbach to save the souls of the priest's flock, whom the latter had allegedly baptised to the devil. Educated by Jesuits, Bertram as a second-born son had obtained lower ordination as a cleric to be invested as a canon in Trier and in Paderborn. After the death of his older brother, he surrendered his canonries to take over the lordship of Schmidtheim. In constant conflict with his not yet retired father, who had been an expert in witch-hunting himself, Bertram unleashed a witch-hunt in the small village of Schmidtheim with the help of the witch commissioner Johannes Moeden, a trained legal expert (Voltmer 2015, pp. 172–79; 2018b, pp. 64–136). From April 1630 to April 1631, 42 supposed witches, women, and men, were burnt, thus almost half of the total adult population. Many of them had denounced the old parish priest Laurenz Kirsbach as the super-witch of the village. In dialogue with the Jesuits of Münstereifel and the vice general in Cologne, Bertram lent a helping hand to hunt down the escaped parish priest. The lord, the Jesuits, and the ecclesiastical administration joined the same post-Tridentine quest to purify Catholic lands of priest-witches, whose baptising into witchcraft and wicked pastoral care had lured simple people into the devil's snare. The prosecuting faction must have thought that they had detected a network of witch-clerics in the northern part of the Eifel with the rural priests Petrus Hildenbrandt († 5 February 1630), Michael Campensis († March/April 1630), and Matthias Hennes († 15 May 1630) already executed as witches, and other rural priests on the run. Bertram claimed that during the trial his former parish priest Laurenz would reveal the identity of

¹⁷ The story of the clerics' housekeepers and concubines, who were accused as necromancers and witches, likewise, has to be written. It is obvious that anticlerical zeal attacked "priestly immorality through their partners" (Waite 2007, p. 75)—In Modena, several concubines of priests offered their service as necromancers and sorceresses (Duni 2007, p. 71).

¹⁸ Most records of witchcraft trials against Catholic clerics are lost. For example, the notorious witch-hunts in Würzburg, in which more than 50 canons and Alumni were denounced, left over only three records. No trial records from witchcraft trials involving clerics in Westphalia, Trier, or in St Maximin survived. Beyond the trial records of Father Kirsbach, only fragments have survived concerning the Eifel territories.

many more witch-clerics in the service of Satan. The lord's prophecy became true: Kirsbach named eight more parish priests as his accomplices, conducting at the witches' sabbath black masses and baptism in the name of the devil. The post-Tridentine impact of the involved Jesuit Fathers from Cologne and Müntstereifel (missionary work, sermons, exorcism) emerged as a most relevant factor triggering the prosecution of witch-clerics (Voltmer 2016, 2018b).¹⁹

2. The Witch-Cleric in Catholic Political Demonology

2.1. Examples

Since the high Middle Ages and with the legend of Theophilus making a pact with Satan, a priest as Arch-Faustus had already entered the scenery of medieval liturgical drama (Bauer 2018, pp. 14–20; Baron 2019, pp. 6–7, 135). Monks and priests belonged to the first targets of diabolic seduction attempts according to medieval exempla (Brakke 2006; Kieckhefer 1990, pp. 172–75), primarily because the devil almost and always tried to ensnare the most pious men and women. Secondly, in thinking within transcendency there existed only a very thin line between sacrosanct powers of healing and conversing with saints and angels on the one hand, and necromancy or communicating with demons, on the other hand. Clerics and inquisitors—with their persecuting experience and obsessed with the omnipresence of demons, devils, and the threat of heresy—developed new demonological concepts (Utz Tresp 2008, pp. 411–40; Bailey 2001). At the beginning of the 14th century, Pope John XXII instigated trials against clerics (and laymen) who had used ritual magic with the invocation of demons as instruments of conspiracies and assassination (Utz Tresp 2008, pp. 406–16; Boureau 2004; 2006, pp. 16, 18, 21–25, 37–39, 59, 82).²⁰ From the 1320s onwards several magician-clerics, classified as heretics, were incarcerated or executed (e.g., the bishop of Cahors Hughes Gérard in 1317).

In the 15th century, more and more stories circulated about Catholic clerics who had been recently executed as witches. Theological and legal thinking about the devil and his minions thus gained sublime evidence. The figure of the devil's clergyman obtained almost omnipresence in Catholic demonology. In 1453, the Benedictine monk, preacher, and Master of Theology Guillaume Adeline was charged by the inquisition of belonging to the diabolic sect of witches. Rumors and accusations had flown about him since the 1430s, mostly because in his sermons, he had argued against the reality of the witches' sabbath and their supposed flight. The inquisition sentenced him to lifelong incarceration. Adeline died four years later. For many later demonologists (e.g., Nicolas Jacquier, Pierre Mamoris, Jean Bodin, Martin Delrio) the defamatory narrative about this clerical *patronus sagarum* proved the serious dangers of the new witches' sect which was infiltrating Christian society (Ostorero 2003). In general, Jacquier counted clerics as prominent attendees of the witches' sabbath (Schulte 2009, pp. 97–98). We find the witch-cleric likewise in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Rowlands 2019, pp. 4–5).

In Italy, the *Malleus Maleficarum* influenced the work and writing of Dominican inquisitors such as Giovanni Cagnazzo, who in Bologna campaigned against necromancy and witchcraft. The trials, which targeted women and men, cost inter alia the life of a priest and a friar (Herzig 2011).²¹

¹⁹ In the county of Manderscheid-Blankenheim together with the small lordship of Schmidtheim (both in the Eifel region), four parish priests were executed as witches. In the duchy of Westphalia and in the electorate of Cologne, we know about at least four parish priests tried as witches (1591–1630). Many denounced priests from Westphalia and Cologne fled by using clerical networks. Four monks of the Augustinian monastery of Dalheim (in the prince-bishopric Paderborn) were accused of witchcraft in 1600; one died in custody, the others were freed; see (Decker 1978, p. 326; 2003, pp. 165–66; 2000; Schormann 1991, p. 157; Voltmer 2018b, pp. 117–24; Sobiech 2019; Decker, Rainer. 1981/1982. Die Hexenverfolgungen im Herzogtum Westfalen. Westfälische Zeitschrift 131/132: 339–86, pp. 358, 368).

²⁰ In early modern Papal Rome, the Inquisition fought necromancers and magicians (Decker 2008, pp. 132–44). For example, in 1635 a conspiracy had tried to assassinate Pope Urban VIII by ritual magic. The involved clerics and friars were condemned to execution or to the galleys (Rietbergen 2006, pp. 336–75).

²¹ Rivalries between the Mendicant orders surfaced during the campaigns of Dominican inquisitors. Necromancy and invoking demons were part of Renaissance culture in Bologna, joined by priests and friars as well as male and female lay people. Cagnazzo triggered a more severe punishment of these members of the clerical underworld—Tribunals of the Roman Inquisition and the Spanish Inquisition accused many clerics as necromancers and magicians, but condemned only a few to

In 1522/23 a witch persecution occurred in the small lordship of Mirandola (Northern Italy), where seven of the ten executed persons were men, inter alia the parish priest Don Benedetto Berni (Montesano 2018, pp. 214–15; Stephens 2016; 2002; Maggi 2006, pp. 25–65; Herzig 2003; Costa 1990). Several other priests were denounced as members of the witches' sect. Benedetto became the prototype of the lecherous witch-cleric. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's tract *Strix* (published in Latin in 1523) rejoiced in the story of the old parish priest, seemingly addicted to his demon lover. Subsequently in 1525, the narrative was copied down in the very influential demonology of Paolo Grillando, a papal judge, first acting in the district of Rome, later in Arezzo. He had led and supervised several witchcraft trials, a first-hand experience, which he included in his treatise, where he presented a plausible explanation for his writing: The witches' sect infested society, deluded and seduced the simple folk successfully, most of all because its ringleaders and prominent members were clerics (*religiosi*). Grillando not only provided cases for his readers, but likewise legal advice on how to proceed against clerics who had in their diabolic deeds (including love magic) misused the host, the sacraments, and baptism (Lea 1939, pp. 395–412). After the re-organization of the Inquisition and with the impact of the Council of Trent, the persecution of clerical necromancers and wizard-priests increased remarkably. In Italy, clerics accused as necromancers or magicians, were charged more often, but not punished severely (Duni 2007, pp. 71–72).²²

In 1580, Jean Bodin, including the example of Father Berni, referred frequently to Satanic priests misusing the sacraments for ritual magic, dealing hosts to witches, baptising toads, and feeding them with the Host (Schulte 2009, p. 259; Bodin 2011, pp. 132, 138, 215–16). For Bodin, the sorcerer-priest was the most horrible and blasphemous witch. He referred to a curate of Soissons, who according to Froissart, had been burnt alive because of ritual magic and sorcery.

Like Pico, Grillando, and Bodin, the suffragan bishop of Trier (Treves), Peter Binsfeld, in the second edition of his tract (1591) referred to actual witchcraft trials against ordained priests. In line with his peers, Binsfeld tried to weaken John Wier's argument that only mentally disturbed old women were wrongly accused of witchcraft. On the contrary, argued Binsfeld, recent witchcraft trials against rich and learned men, including members of the clergy, proved that the devil's minions had undercut Christian society. Even the sacrosanct status of the clergy had already fallen prey to the devil (Voltmer 2001).²³

Martin Delrio, SJ, bolstered the argument to battle the witch-*religiosi* in his *Disquisitiones magicarum libri sex*, recommending how criminal courts must treat monks, nuns, and clerics charged with witchcraft (Maxwell-Stuart 2000, pp. 216, 235–36). The story of the monk Jean Delvaulx of Stavelot-Malmédy, executed in 1596 as a witch, was on top of Delrio's list of prominent male witches.²⁴ It became one of the prominent examples of a devil's cleric in demonology (Boutcher 2017, pp. 191–98; Machielsen 2015, pp. 248–9; Maxwell-Stuart 2000, pp. 5–7, 190, 213–14). Most noteworthy, Delrio labelled the Catholic priest and theologian Cornelius Loos as *patronus sagarum* who was forced to revoke his sceptical thesis about the reality of witchcraft in 1593. According to Delrio, Loos then relapsed into this heresy twice (Voltmer forthcoming).

be executed; see for example (Monter 1990, pp. 176–79; Duni 2007, pp. 71–72; Herzig 2011, pp. 60, 68–69, Herzig 2011, pp. 1052–53; Tausiet 2013, pp. 35–57, 203).

²² For example, the Inquisition condemned the “fearsome Wizard-Priest: Don Guglielmo Campana” (1517) as heretic to lifelong imprisonment in the city of Modena as prison. However, the Apostolic Penitentiary absolved the priest of all his errors (Duni 2007, pp. 85–94).

²³ In Trier, its hinterland and in the nearby ecclesiastical territory of Saint Maximin, canons, parish priests, and abbots were denounced as witches. We know about the execution of at least three parish priests (1589, 1592). One canon died at the stake (1592), two in custody. The episcopal fiscal was executed or died in custody. Some escaped, many others were suspected, but not accused in a formal trial. Even the provost of the Cathedral chapter was denounced as a witch (Voltmer 2001).

²⁴ Delrio drew his cases from actual witchcraft trials in using the network of the Jesuits and the *republique des lettres*. He referred to Dietrich Flade, the former bailiff and judge from Trier (executed 19 September 1589), the so-called werewolf Peter Stump (executed in 1589 near Cologne), and to the Pappenheim family (executed 1600 in Munich). From Binsfeld, Delrio cited more than once the story of Hans Cuno Meisenbein, a prominent boy-witch from Saint Maximin (near Trier), and his mother Anna, a female head of the witches' sabbath (Voltmer 2016, pp. 219–26).

The *Compendium Maleficarum*, compiled by the Ambrosian monk Francesco Maria Guazzo and printed in 1608, is one of the last great handbooks of demonology. It relied heavily on Grillando, Binsfeld, Rémy (who had nothing to say about witch-clerics²⁵), and Delrio. In contrast to Bodin, Binsfeld, and Delrio, Guazzo had participated in a witchcraft trial. John of Lank, an elderly priest from a small village in the archdiocese of Cologne, was charged with having bewitched the insane and childless Duke John. The priest committed suicide in prison with Guazzo claiming in his *Compendium Maleficarum* that he had seen John's corpse while it was still warm (Voltmer 2018a, p. 429).

In 1609, the French judge Pierre de Lancre led a commission to conduct witch trials in the Basque Lands of Labourd. In his apologetic treatise, first published in 1612, de Lancre dealt in length with the topic of the devil's clergy with reference to the Gaufridy-case. He claimed that he had interrogated twelve witch-priests, with at least three of them condemned to death at the stake for witchcraft. With those freshly won confessions from actual trials, de Lancre bolstered his argument that witchcraft happened to be the most prominent crime of the satanic infested priesthood, whose members as heads of the witches' sabbath led their flock to black masses and fornication (de Lancre 2006, pp. xxx–xxxvi, 4, 59–60, 83, 95, 136, 148, 160–61, 192–194, 206, and more often).²⁶

In 1609/1610, two nuns of an Ursuline convent in Aix-en-Provence accused the parish priest Louis Gaufridy of having harmed them with diabolic possession. Whereas the exorcism, applied at first by a Jesuit Father, showed no effect upon the possessed, the called in Dominican inquisitor Sebastian Michaëlis, an expert in witch-hunting, was able to conquer the demons, and to charge the suspected cleric. Gaufridy was executed in 1611. With Michaëlis' tracts on exorcism and witchcraft, the fate of Gaufridy gained a prominent place in the sample of narratives about the devil's clergy. These tracts gave advice on how members of the reformed Catholic Church must battle these horrible super-witches (Ferber 2004, pp. 70–88; Walker and Dickerman 2001). The case of Gaufridy reveals the clerical infighting between the Dominican Michaëlis as agent of post-Tridentine Catholic reform on the one side, and the benefited secular priest as symbol for the old corrupted church on the other side. Insofar, the trial "was part of a campaign for internal church reform" (Spence 2009). The Gaufridy case provides, furthermore, a striking example of the well-known rivalry between the Jesuits and the Mendicant order, this time claiming the victory for the Dominicans.²⁷ In its French, German, and English afterlife, Gaufridy (one may say, a reborn Theophilus) appeared as a Faust-figure, a labelling, which had already happened during his trial (Maus de Rolley 2016).²⁸

The 'convent cases' in Lille, Loudon, or Louviers virtually copied the Gaufridy-case. In Lille, again Sebastien Michaëlis was invited to exorcise the possessed nuns. This time the accused canon Jean Leduc was declared innocent in 1614, after the papal nuncio and the Holy Office had intervened (Roelants and Vanysacker 2005, p. 778; Po-Chia Hsia 2005, pp. 155–56; Decker 2008, pp. 114–16).

²⁵ In the city of Toul, a cleric was tried for witchcraft in 1617. In the French speaking-parts of Lorraine, we know about one parish priest, Dominique Gordet from Vomécourt, being charged with witchcraft (1630). It remains unclear if he was executed. In 1631, the wealthy canon Melchior de la Vallée, with close ties to the ducal house of Lorraine, was burnt as a witch at the stake, condemned during a political trial: The priest-witch was thought not to have baptised the later duke's wife properly. The duke's marriage thus was invalid and ready to be annulled (Briggs 2007, pp. 188–89, 364–65; Monter 2007, pp. 113–15).

²⁶ The prominent "teen wolf" Jean Grenier claimed to be the son of a priest (Voltmer 2015, pp. 162, 167; Machielsen 2019)—In addition to the examples provided by De Lancre and the convent cases, in Normandy (1598–1647) at least six priest-sorcerers were executed, one was given a life sentence in the galleys, and some more were banished from the kingdom of France. In Provence, (1598–1625) two priests were hanged, two others sentenced to the galleys because of sacrilegious magic. In Paris (1604–1609) four Catholic clerics were executed, in Grenoble a Franciscan friar was hanged (1606), and Dijon saw the hanging of two priests (1613, 1625). In Rouen, between 1594 and 1620, over twenty priests had to stand trial because of forbidden magic, and five of them were sentenced to death. During the 1640s, in Brittany two priests were executed under the same accusation (Monter 1997, pp. 582–83; 2002, pp. 42–43).

²⁷ For the long-standing rivalry between the Mendicant orders and the Jesuits see for example (Stolarski 2011; Tronu 2015).

²⁸ Whereas the Gaufridy case proved to Catholics the need of post-Tridentine reform, to Protestants it revealed the wickedness of popish clerics who were in the devil's snare. The Swiss reformed minister Bartholomäus Anhorn († 1700), who believed in the realities of witchcraft and wrote a warning concerning its dangers, was still repeating the Gaufridy-case in his *Magiologia* (printed 1674) (Brunold-Bigler 2003, pp. 42–43, 125, 313). In addition, the story of the French priest-witch was translated into English pamphlets and at least in one ballad (Maus de Rolley 2016).

The cases of the two other clerics, accused of witchcraft by seemingly possessed nuns, ended with deadly consequences, however: Urbain Grandier was burnt alive as a sorcerer-priest in 1634 and Thomas Boullé was burnt in 1647, together with the bones of Father Mathurin Picard, deceased but still accused of witchcraft (Ferber 2004, pp. 89–112). Another convent case occurred in the duchy of Modena (1636) with the most notable religious house in the town infested with demonic possession. Under the exorcisms, performed by five secular priests, the possessed nuns accused the former father confessor Fra Angelo Bellacappa as the witch, who had caused their harm. However, the Congregation of the Holy office in Rome “dismissed witchcraft charges and blamed the exorcists for much of the panic”. (Watt 2007, p. 129; 2009). In France, the cases about female possession, exorcisms, sorcery-priests, or witch-nuns found a wide echo in the media, especially during the confessional debates between Catholics, Huguenots (Calvinists), and Lutherans (Blackwell 2000; Levack 2013, pp. 176–77, 194–95; Del Olmo 2018). Probably the last Catholic witch-priest was executed after a most cruel procedure in Silesia in 1684; he still was accused of lechery and devil’s baptism (Lambrecht 1995, p. 30).

2.2. The Relevance of the Priest-Witch and the Devil’s (Re-)Baptism

At the latest since the 15th century and in Catholic demonology, the witch-priest played a prominent role as a (presumed) ringleader of the witches’ sect. Actual trials seemingly proved the menacing reality of diabolic priest-witches who presided over the witches’ sabbath, conducted black masses, misused sacramental powers and baptised children to the devil. The figure of the witch-cleric served well the urge to promote witch-hunting, demanded in political demonology (Pearl 1999). Its first major promoter was the Spanish Jesuit Juan Maldonado, together with his spiritual followers Pierre de Lancre, Paul Crespet, Jean Boucher, and—implicitly—Peter Binsfeld. Jean Bodin argued in a similar vein. Martin Delrio included Maldonado’s apocalyptic attack against heretics and witches in the prologue of his own *Disquisitiones*. It seems noteworthy that since 1453 with the case of Guillaume Adeline the devil’s cleric and *patronus sagarum* was not a mere theoretical problem, but a fact, proved in a few but prominent actual witchcraft trials. Political demonologists legitimated extensive witch-hunting across all boundaries of age, gender, and status. In following their call, princes, magistrates, and judges were obliged to establish a godly state (Votmer 2015, pp. 163–68). They should declare war against the enemies of God, against witches, Anabaptist, heretics, adulterers, dissenters, and deviant people of all kinds, seen as the disorderly ‘others’ who must be disciplined to the fullest extent of the law—and the witch-priest was thought to be the most horrible acolyte of the devil, charging the fortresses of the Catholic Church from within. In appearance, the devil’s clergy acted as pious men of the cloth, but they infested the body politic with sin, causing spiritual and corporeal death. These wolves in sheep’s clothing had to be picked out to avoid the satanic infiltration of the whole body of Christian society. Jesuits like Father Johannes David from Courtrai promoted around 1600 these anxieties in labelling the sorcerer-cleric as the evilest witch (Roelants and Vanysacker 2005, p. 790). During his mission campaigns in Brittany (1631–1650), Father Jules Maunoir, relying on his fellow-Jesuit Martin Delrio, still was looking for the witches’ crime. His questioning found confessions about the witches’ gathering, where local parish priests had allegedly played a leading role (Lebec 1997, pp. 10, 130–31, 139, 165).

Since the advent of the Reformation and the Anabaptists, anxieties about false baptism and re-baptism fueled the demonological discourse (Waite 2007, pp. 98–102; 2012). To Martin Delrio and other campaigners of counter-Reformation, “the priests’ control over the supernatural realm through the sacraments” (Waite 2007, p. 99) had to be reinforced, because Anabaptist, Calvinist, and witches abused the Catholic Church’s sacraments and sacramentals. In fighting off the Anabaptists, any form of re-baptism, thus, was labelled as heretical, blasphemous, and diabolic. For demonologists the devil performed the re-baptism in scratching away the chrism, giving the acolyte a new name, and marking him or her with the devil’s mark (Waite 2007, p. 100; Spence 2009). The demonization of re-baptism amalgamated with anxieties about midwives and priest-witches, who performed the infant’s baptism falsely in the devil’s name, which, however, did not include either the consecration into witchcraft or making a pact with the devil. Such a false baptism left infants outside Christianity

without any armament against the fiend. Catholic theology had to find a way out of the dilemma, because post-Tridentine dogma forbade any re-baptism as heretical. Thus, false baptism was marked as a defect and invalid performed sacrament. Another baptism could be performed *sub conditione*.²⁹ However, a witch, who had renounced her or his baptism in making a pact with the devil, could not be baptised anew, because this would have meant re-baptism. In conclusion, a proper baptism left a mark on the human soul, which even the devil could not remove (Waite 2007, p. 101–2; 2012).

According to demonology, it happened to be the parents, mostly the mothers, or other witches who consecrated children to Satan at their sabbath. During many trials, child-witches confessed that their mothers or old hags had brought them to the witches' gathering to play the music or to be dedicated to the devil or married to a demon (Vollmer 2016). Sometimes these children—according to the trial records—lacked a proper baptism. Hans Morhaupt from Bamberg received his *Teufelstaufe* (consecration to the devil) from the female ringleader at the witches' sabbath. A witch-canon was present—but he had nothing to do with this kind of 'baptism' (Gehm 2000, pp. 138–42). A clear distinction between improper baptism, the consecration to witchcraft, and the Devil's re-baptism blurred in popular and demonological thinking. Two further points have to be taken into account: First, the discussion about the post-Tridentine dogma of *liberum arbitrium* (the free will), according to which a Christian always and almost had the possibility either to withstand the devil's seduction or to subdue voluntarily to Satan (Fuchs 2019). In theology, therefore, the improper devil's baptism, performed by a witch-cleric or a midwife, was a step in the wrong direction, but it did not ultimately hand over the human soul to the devil. Secondly, discussion aroused whether a Christian could ever revoke the eternal bound God had made with him or her by baptism. For example, in 1684 and to quieten a witch panic in Calw (duchy of Württemberg), the faculty of theology in Tübingen stated that God would never dissolve the covenant, made by baptism. Even a full renouncement of baptism, made by a witch, with the grace of God was irrelevant (Weber 1996, pp. 26–27). It still needs discussion how the popular and learned trans-confessional discourse about false baptism, the consecration to Satan at the witches' sabbath, the devil's re-baptism, the *liberum arbitrium* dogma and the Godly covenant of grace made by a proper baptism emerged and changed in the period of witch-hunting. The link between the demonization of the Anabaptists and the devil's re-baptism at the witches' sabbath is obvious since the lucid studies of Gary K. Waite. In Protestant media, these diversities and differences between the invalid devil's baptism, administered by midwives and witch-clerics, the consecration to the devil by parents and other witches, and the devil's re-baptism were smoothed away to invoke anxieties about the devil's clergy coming originally from popish lands.

In comparing the omnipresence of the witch-priest in demonology with the rather small quantity of trials all over Europe, the two-folded quality of the clerical 'super-witch' has to be emphasized: Firstly, because of the baptism of the flock to the devil, it needed only one priest-witch to lead a community or region in the devil's snare. Secondly, apart from the lecherous and superstitious sorcerer-priest, the clerical *patroni sagarum* were labelled as the most dangerous witches, who questioned the reality of the witches' crimes, who helped the accused, and who brought to daylight the cruel procedures of trial and torture. *Patroni sagarum* thus exacerbated the allegedly sacred work of witch-hunting. Massive witch-hunting seemed to be necessary to defeat these empowered devil's minions, either to unmask the witch-priest or to detect the other (male and rich) members of his diabolic flock.³⁰

²⁹ After the Council of Trent and in battling the heretical sect of Anabaptist, baptism could only be performed once. In obscure cases, a valid baptism was administered under the condition (*sub conditione*) that the first one had been invalid, for example if a midwife had performed an emergency baptism with unclean water, or if a priest or a minister had not used the proper ritual, or had baptised (allegedly) in the devil's name—For Lutheran discussions of re-baptism and baptism *sub conditione* see (Rowlands 2019, pp. 18–9; Hill 2015; Seebaß 1966).

³⁰ For example, in the city of Trier, the denunciations of two already convicted witch-priests were needed to overpower Dietrich Flade, the prominent and wealthiest member of the urban elite. In the course of the Jean del Vaulx case, a great witch-hunt occurred in the territory of Stablo-Malmedy.

3. The Printed Media—Confessional Debates

3.1. *Witch-Priests, Jesuit-Witches, Patroni Sagarum, and the Trier “Superhunt”*

The role of the media in transmitting and mixing elite and popular ideas about both demonology and witchcraft has recently been emphasized (Voltmer 2020; 2017a). The discourse about magic, witchcraft, and sorcery left its trace in almost every genre of historical source material, whether text or image.³¹ The reception of printed media, however, changed in the differing historical, social, legal, cultural, and political contexts.³² The narrative of the witch-cleric claimed a prominent place in the discourse. In the printed media, the figure started a career in 1575, when Ruprecht Ramsbauer, parish priest in Bramberg (Salzburg), and his concubine were executed at the stake, after both had been charged with witchcraft (Schwillus 1992, pp. 288–337; Rowlands 2019, pp. 5–6).³³ The surviving trial records and the pamphlet, which promoted the case to the public, have little in common, however. Apart from trials targeting clerical necromancers in Italy or Spain, Ramsbauer seems to be one of the first ordained priests executed as diabolic witch after the Italian Mirandola trials in 1522/1523 and after the cases concerning banished, incarcerated, or relegated priest-witches provided by Grillando. In the pamphlet, the story about the devil’s priest and his concubine unfolds in a literary style, with Ramsbauer denying the baptising of children in the name of the devil but negotiating with the fiend about a proper price for performing weather magic. The pamphlet was printed in Vienna; it thus stemmed from a Catholic background. No confessional polemics can be detected in it, but it evoked the interest of Johann Jakob Wick, Protestant preacher and minister in Zürich who included the pamphlet in his collection of printed news.³⁴

Obviously, the narrative about Catholic priest-witches executed as blasphemous heretics suited Lutheran and Calvinist parties well in their polemical debates. The discourse about Catholic witch-clerics interlinked with polemics against the Jesuit order. In the year of Ramsbauer’s execution, a Lutheran preacher declared Jesuits as an evil sect of sorcerers (Janssen 1910, p. 457). A pamphlet, stemming from a Lutheran milieu took up the propaganda in 1579 and told sensational faked news from Dillingen where a Jesuit had been put on trial because of witchcraft and murder with his fate still unknown (Paintner 2011, pp. 427–32). Allegedly, the Jesuit had made a pact with the devil, and had learnt the occult art from an old witch to conjure several tempests to take vengeance on his enemies, the Lutherans. The weather catastrophes thus struck only Lutheran lands. This shocking news got as far as Pomerania, where a Lutheran noble noted it in his private diary (Janssen 1910, p. 457). The narrative about Jesuits as the natural born allies of Satan was elaborated during the confessional debates of the 16th century. Polemics defamed the order as a sect or a conspiracy, which aimed at nothing less than global tyranny.³⁵ In 1595, a pamphlet propagated the news that Jesuits had turned the crime of heresy into the crime of witchcraft to instigate false trials against wealthy men. For this purpose, they wrongly accused the rich of having won their fortune with the devil’s help. In using the denunciations of deluded old women, the Jesuits allegedly called for rapid procedure, harsh torture, and a major share of the confiscated money to fill their pockets (Janssen 1910, p. 455).³⁶ The Lutheran minister Melchior

³¹ “Rita Voltmer points out that overall explanations have to consider a daunting variety of historical sources, including: manuscripts, printed tracts, decrees and proclamations, trial records, newspapers, pamphlets, learned treatises, fictional literature, poetry, travel accounts, chronicles, plays, songs, encyclopedias, almanacs, planetary books, polemical literature, sermons, and more. Each genre presents its own unique challenges.” (Robisheaux 2018, p. 1).

³² A survey concerning witchcraft and witch trials in the European media, yet, has to be written; recent studies are: (Voltmer 2020, 2010b; Warfield 2017; Behringer 2009; Gibson 2006, 1999).

³³ Ramsbauer had fallen prey to a trial because of his concubine, who at first had been accused and because he had tried to defend her.

³⁴ The “Wickiana” is a 24 volumed collection of broadsheets, pamphlets, prints, handwritten texts, and drawings from the 16th century.

³⁵ For the long-standing history of religious propaganda and anti-Jesuit polemics see in general (Waite 2013, pp. 493–95; Worcester).

³⁶ Anonymus author, *Wahre abconterfeyung/der schädlichen und erschrocklichen Sect der Jesuiten/mit angehenckter warnung/andie löbliche teutsche Nation/sich vor irer vorborgnen list/und giff zu hüten*, 1595, pp. 25–26; see (Paintner 2011, pp. 362–70).

Leonhard claimed in 1599 that Jews, witches, and Jesuits all belonged to the same vermin. In a sermon, he stated that Jesuits “are very apt to interest themselves in witches and sorcerers and to be full of mercy towards this devil’s crew, for no other reason than that they hope thereby to escape falling themselves into the hands of the torturer.” (Janssen 1910, pp. 460–61). *Libelli famosi* defamed even leading Fathers of the society as Pierre Coton or Robert Bellarmin as sorcerers, sodomists, or fornicators (Paintner 2011, pp. 338–49; Franz 1980). The concept of Jesuits as *patroni sagarum* was thus born before the turn of the century. It labelled the *Societas Jesu* as a secret conspiracy of heretics. The open enemies of the order (Protestants as well as Jansenists) blackened the Jesuits’ schools and seminaries as nurseries of witchcraft and sorcery. The fictitious polemics and paper wars interacted with facts, because from the first third of the 17th century, pupils of the order were denounced as witches. In the schools, hysterical accusations spread, causing the Society to implement severe orders to stop the rumors. In Würzburg, at least five seminarians were burnt at the stake and some were held in custody for nearly two years. In the long run, the polemical narratives about the Jesuits being instigators of witch trials, *patroni sagarum*, and sorcerers themselves were rooted in the Trier witch-hunts, where the Jesuits together with the suffragan bishop Peter Binsfeld had given children and juveniles a prominent role as accusers in trials against high ranking men and clerics (Voltmer 2016).

Accusations against priests and canons arose at the latest from the 1589s onwards during the exceptional witch-hunts in the city of Trier, its surrounding districts, and in the nearby territory of the Imperial abbey of Saint Maximin.³⁷ Here, the figure of the priest-witch finally gained a prominent position both in confessional debates and in anxieties, transmitted through the networks of Catholic clergy (Voltmer 2001, 2003). In 1589, two parish priests were executed as witches. They had denounced Dr Dietrich Flade, a judge in the electorate’s High court and the most wealthy and powerful man in the city of Trier, as their accomplice. A high-ranking canon of the College of St Simeon, who held the office of a sealer of the ecclesiastical court, likewise, was denounced as a witch. He fled to avoid a trial. In 1592, another parish priest and a canon of St Simeon were killed at the stake. It is noteworthy that Peter Binsfeld held the office of provost in the College of St Simeon. In March 1593, the Dutch exile and theologian Cornelius Loos, who lived and taught at the Benedictine Imperial abbey of St Maximin near Trier, had to stand before an ecclesiastical tribunal to renounce his heretical arguments, written against the Trier witch-hunts (Voltmer 2001, forthcoming).³⁸ The papal nuncio Frangipani feared that the never printed book of Loos would have troubled the maintenance of Catholic Church. In December 1593, Frangipani reported to the Pope about the multiplying witches’ sect in the archdiocese of Trier, where even the provost and canons of the Cathedral chapter had fallen under suspicion of witchcraft. The noble court of the prince elector, likewise, was thought to be infested. Between the lines, the nuncio evoked the fear that with the reigning prince elector being a sick man, who might die at any moment, the diabolically infiltrated Cathedral chapter might vote for a new archbishop, who himself secretly belonged to the devil’s sect, threatening the safety of the whole archdiocese. The Trier witch-hunts thus won a dubious reputation, inter alia with the tract of Peter Binsfeld (*Tractatus de confessionibus maleficorum et sagarum*), published firstly in 1589 in Latin, and appearing in two German translations in

³⁷ A register from between 1586 and 1594 lists the names of 1300 women and men from Trier and the territory of St Maximin, who had been denounced as witches; it includes about 40 clerics (friars, monks, canons, and parish priests), mostly from the city of Trier (Muschiol 2004, pp. 84–85; Voltmer and Weisenstein 1996, pp. 313–81).

³⁸ Martin Delrio published the recantation in his handbook *Disquisitiones magicarum* and defamed Loos as *patronus sagarum*. The similarities between Guillaume Adeline and Cornelius Loos are obvious. The fate of both so-called protectors of witches would have fallen into oblivion, had it not been for the fact that their adversaries—Jacquier and Delrio—included the triumph over the fellow-clerics in their respective tracts.

1590 (Trier) and twice in 1591/1592 (Munich).³⁹ The impact of the Jesuits, involved in detecting canons and parish priests as witches, seems obvious.

As early as 1589 news about the “first superhunt” (Monter 2002, p. 23) in Trier circulated in the printed media. The Fugger handwritten newsletter passed on probably for the first time the information that in the lands of Trier a group of priest’s housekeepers (in the meaning of concubines) had been executed. In Cologne, the Austrian nobleman Michael Aitzinger published his first news journal, including horrible stories from the Trier electorate, where Dietrich Flade had been executed as a witch to scare off any other member of the witches’ diabolic conspiracy (Voltmer 2010b, pp. 124–25; Behringer 2009, p. 229). The reporter added a vital piece of information: Many clerics were suspected as witches, including two parish priests, who had administered pastoral care. Probably lacking more detail, he reported that the two priests were degraded, but said nothing about their execution. The printer Nicolaus Schreiber (Cologne) published at least two pamphlets in 1589 and one in 1594, listing witchcraft trials all over Germany, including the prominent cases of Flade and of the so-called werewolf Peter Stump. Schreiber did not mention a witch-cleric. However, I assume that since a lost pamphlet had circulated which added the example of a witch-cleric to the narratives about Flade and Stump. It was translated from German into Dutch in 1589, and in 1591 into Danish (Voltmer 2017a, p. 17; 2017b, pp. 127–28).⁴⁰ Both pamphlets told the story of a priest from a village nearby Trier—presumably from the vicinity of St Maximin—who had denounced his faith face-to face to a female demon, with whom he committed lechery. He was executed as a witch after his degradation. There can be little doubt that both pamphlets transmitted the idea of Catholic lands being infested with lecherous werewolves, diabolic magistrates, and blasphemous witch-priests into predominantly Protestant regions. The news about witch-priests from Trier and Maximin thus spread rapidly, and was noted down in diaries, journals, chronicles, and newsletters.⁴¹

During the witch trials in Trier, a certain Father Paulus, called the rector of the Jesuits, was denounced once as a witch in 1592. Since such a person did not exist, it had no consequences at all. In 1596, the Jesuits’ annual report (*litterae annuae*) told the story of a man accused of witchcraft who had named members of the order and of the criminal court in Trier as accomplices. To avoid further witchcraft trials, the Jesuits allegedly persuaded the man to revoke his allegations, but despite their intercessions, he was executed. This narrative has not left any trace in the archive, and therefore it should be treated with the greatest methodological care (Voltmer 2001, pp. 103–4). In 1629, the high court of St Maximin asked three Jesuits from Trier to write a theological opinion concerning a man from St Maximin who had confessed to sodomy and witchcraft. The Fathers did not show any anti-demonological thinking in their three opinions which still relied inter alia on Martin Delrio. They advocated execution rather than mercy (Sobiech 2019).

The Protestant faction commented eagerly on the news coming from popish lands. The Hessian superintendent Georg Nigrinus, a personal enemy of the Jesuits, in his translation of Goedelmann’s sceptic tract (1592), accused the witch-hunting prince bishops as the worst of sorcerers, because as fanatical persecutors they burnt many innocent people together with indeed real witches, of whose presence Nigrinus was convinced. Blinded by Satan, these ecclesiastical princes were unable to recognize the Lutheran confession to be the true Christian faith. On the contrary, these eager

³⁹ The treatise saw two extended versions in Latin (1591, 1596, followed by reprints); in 1591, Binsfeld published his second treatise on witchcraft, magic, and superstition the *Commentarius in titulum codicis lib. 9 de maleficis & mathematicis* of the Justinian code, as an appendix to his revised *De confessionibus*. In reaction to the sceptical arguments of Cornelius Loos, Binsfeld published a considerable expanded version of the *Commentarius* in 1596, again as an appendix. His plan of publishing it as a third revised book of its own never came to fruition (Voltmer forthcoming)—On the cover illustration of the Bavarian print, one of the witches, dressed as a wealthy bourgeois woman, is paying homage to the devil, probably disguised as a cleric. The figure is clothed in a long cassock with a white collar, carrying a goblet or chalice in one hand.

⁴⁰ The pamphlet’s importance in the context of the Danish witchcraft trials is discussed by (Kallestrup 2018, pp. 140–42).

⁴¹ For example: Fugger trading company (Nuremberg, 1589), Hermann Weinsberg (magistrate in Cologne, 1589), Martin Klöckner (merchant in Paderborn, 1589), Peter Cratopolius (Franciscan friar in Cologne, 1592), Johannes Reckschenkel (Carthusian monk in Cologne, 1598) (Voltmer 2003, pp. 242, 251–57; 2010b, pp. 124–26).

ecclesiastical witch-hunters tried to prove their wrongdoing as right in prosecuting Protestants as heretics, and witches as enemies of God, not realizing that they were shedding innocent blood on both sides (Voltmer 2020). Around 1600 (and printed twice in 1604/1605), the Lutheran preacher David Meder promoted the battle against witchcraft and popish superstition (Schulte 2009, pp. 131–34). With similar arguments, he mentioned the horrible witch-hunts in Catholic territories (Trier, Mainz, Cologne) to prove that the devil targeted mostly the superstitious papists who did not follow the true Lutheran faith. Meder enumerated the examples of wizard-monks and priest-sorcerers, executed in abundance. He referred to pamphlets from Trier and Cologne, which contained stories about wicked witch-priests: Wizard-monks from Trier had misused confession to detect witches and to lure these women into even more diabolic services; two witch-priests from Cologne had baptised with a Latin formula more than 300 children in the name of Satan (Voltmer 2020; Meder 1605, fol. 37v–38, 46). Meder had seemingly exaggerated his polemical argument, since regional studies have not found any evidence about an executed witch-cleric in the electorate of Mainz. However, even in Mainz, anxieties about priest-witches surfaced: In 1593, a certain canon from Aschaffenburg had trouble defending himself against an accusation (Pohl 1998, p. 222).⁴²

Probably the greatest impact in confessional debates about the devil's clergy made a broadsheet, called the Trier witches' sabbath, published on its own or together with a tract (printed twice in 1593, once in 1594 and probably in 1603). Both promoted the horrible news that Satan had erected his realm in the archdiocese of Trier. My close reading and decoding of the iconography of the image allows the suggestion that the author of the tract, Thomas Siegfrid, and the anonymous engraver stemmed from a Protestant milieu. Both used the topic of a Catholic major hunt to declare witchcraft as a horrid crime related directly to popery and performed most notably by members of the Catholic elite, monks, nuns, and clergy. According to the figures in the image, the latter practiced ritual magic and sorcery, whilst according to the Calvinist Siegfrid, Catholic men of the cloth had always been the worst sorcerers. Siegfrid, moreover, had drawn the examples of diabolic priests from Bodin. The message was clear: Protestants, as the true Christians, should not fear diabolic attacks or witchcraft (Voltmer 2010b). The Calvinist minister and member of the consistory in the Palatinate, Marcus zum Lamm, included the broadsheet in his 33 volumed collection of news, leaflets, and pictures. The witchcraft news bolstered his Protestant worldview:

“This horrible sorcery and diabolic witchcraft happened some years ago in the electorate of Trier and its surroundings, where a priest had been unmasked who had baptised the children in the devil's name and who had enacted many unspeakable abominations. These are the strong errors, marvelous fruits and powers of darkness routed in pagan popedom. The bishop of Trier ordered the execution of all inhabitants of a village, men and women, except three innocent women, together with the priest who had baptised more than 100 children in the devil's name.”⁴³

The discourse about the witch-hunts in the electorate and city of Trier as well as in the territory of St Maximin focused on the fact that they had transgressed any boundaries of gender, age, and status. Protestant polemics as well as Catholic anxieties emerged around the figure of the witch-priest, baptising generation upon generation to the devil, and symbolizing the horrors of a Christian society infested with evil from within. The battle of the post-Tridentine Church together with its strike force, the Jesuits, against heresy, superstition, necromancy, and witchcraft appeared as a life and soul saving attempt. The examples of Guillaume Adeline, Johannes Wier, Johannes Goedelmann, or Cornelius

⁴² The pamphlets described by Meder, so far, are unknown. Trial records or other source material concerning the presumed monk-wizards in Trier or priest-witches in Cologne, who were accused of devil's baptism in the 16th century, have not survived. However, Meder's narratives might not have been mere inventions, since in 1617 the faculty of theology at the university in Mainz delivered a legal opinion on how to deal with two priest-witches, who had baptised in the name of Satan (Pohl 1998, p. 152; Sobiech 2019).

⁴³ I have slightly abridged the comment of Marcus zum Lamm; see (Harms 1985, p. 316).

Loos have shown that any critic of witch-persecution was labelled with almost deadly consequence as *patronus sagarum*, whichever confessional faction he came from and whether he was a cleric himself or not.

Around 1600 the tide though slowly began to shift. In Bavaria, the party of zealous witch-hunters lost influence at the court with their political adversaries blocking any further major witch persecutions (Behringer 1997). However, whereas Protestants could link their sceptical views on massive witch-hunting with defamations against Jesuits, ecclesiastical prince electors, and in general, against papists, it remained difficult for Catholics to utter any harsh criticism after the recantation of Loos. Catholic clerics, notably, had to be very cautious with their arguments. Clerics, canons, and priests were members of an European-wide network, built up through shared education, benefices, friendship, and (noble) family ties. With the help of correspondence, they were well informed about the massive assault against their status group. Likewise, the Jesuits were tied together in their own global network of education, training, studying, travelling, and exchanging information in letters and reports. None of the clerical status groups developed a homogenous attitude concerning witchcraft and its persecution. In the Jesuit order, there existed on the one hand a majority of eager promoters of witch-hunting. On the other hand, a minority of Fathers developed a growing scepticism concerning trials, denunciations, and torture. Some Fathers underwent their conversion in the dungeons, facing daily the unspeakable horror of human misery.

Polemical Protestant pamphlets defamed Jesuits as *patroni sagarum*. With a similar attitude the Jesuit Martin Delrio, master of demonology, labelled Flade a ‘patron of witches’ to explain why a sacrosanct judge such as Flade was charged with witchcraft himself.⁴⁴ We can assume a similar labeling approach in cases of so-called witch-clerics, since the role model *patronus sagarum* provided a legitimation for degrading and executing ordained priests as witches. The mere label, however, is not evidence enough to prove that all witch-clerics harbored sceptical thinking.

In 1603, however, a prophecy appeared which from a Catholic perspective provided both a defence of the Jesuits, and of the witch-clerics (Janssen 1910, pp. 443–44).⁴⁵ The author, claiming to be an eyewitness, lamented that in many places the witch-hunts had forced people to avoid Catholic mass as well as any open demonstration of piety or devotion, “because otherwise they might easily fall under the charge of sorcery.” (Janssen 1910, p. 443) The same suspicion would befall pious priests who did not dare to offer the Holy Sacrifice every day, but to do it in secret. Such pretences remained necessary, because witches were believed to mask themselves as devout people, visiting the Holy Mass as often as possible to steal the Host for their evil sorcery. The author called these superstitions “a craze beyond all crazes”. Furthermore, he praised the Jesuits who ministered in the prisons, hearing confessions and bringing consolation. The anonymous author uttered no disbelief in witchcraft, but he criticized major witch-hunting, especially in ecclesiastical territories like the electorate of Trier, whose prelates had not restrained the trial procedure done by cruel secular witch-hunters. Even the clergy did not intervene, “for if they speak they are themselves in danger of the rack, as experience has sufficiently shown, especially in the archdiocese of Treves, where they have burnt alive as sorcerers by sentence of the judges” (Janssen 1910, p. 444). The pamphlet corresponds with news from the Jesuits’ annual report (1601) about the people rejoicing at the end of witchcraft persecution, because by now they were able to approach the sacraments without falling into suspicion of being witches (Janssen 1910, p. 442). The set of arguments stemmed certainly from a Catholic, possibly a cleric, maybe even a Jesuit. The pamphlet labelled witch-priests, indeed, as *patroni sagarum*, but in the full sense of a positive meaning: According to this narrative, none of the executed priests in Trier had been a witch, but on the contrary, they

⁴⁴ Outdated research had taken this verdict for truth, modelling Flade into a critic of witch-hunting. Yet archival evidence shows that he had been no heroic opponent of the witch trials. On the contrary, he had presided over at least eight witch trials (1577–1588), in which he tried to force the accused women to confess (Voltmer 2001, pp. 77–85; 2003, pp. 251–57).

⁴⁵ Witchcraft research has missed this very important pamphlet. So far, the original print is lost. We rely on the few sentences to which Janssen referred.

were adversaries to cruel witchcraft trials, and therefore had been suspected to be the devil's minions. However, since the trial records of executed priest-witches from the electorate of Trier and St Maximin are lost, this specific labelling cannot be cross-checked with additional source material. The anonymous author was shocked, because the high prelates had allowed secular jurists (witch commissioners!) to conduct cruel trials against clerics. Religious princes had not listened to the warnings of their fellow clerics, nor had these princes protected the clergy against false witchcraft accusations and murderous executions. As far as we know, until the *Cautio Criminalis* in 1631 no other pamphlet or tract discussed these arguments.

3.2. Witch-Priests in Swabia, Franconia, and Cologne

The "Trier superhunt" ended around 1596. The second phase of witch-hunting (during the first third of the 17th century) in the electorate of Trier and its surroundings never gained any public attention, mostly because no pamphlet provided sensational news about it. Instead, the prosecution in the prince-priory of Ellwangen (1611–1618) under its provost Johann Christoph of Westerstetten claimed to occupy the first place in publicity. Due to a Protestant pamphlet (1615), the provost had instigated these well-known witch persecutions without any respect to status, gender, or age. The pamphlet told the story of three witch-priests and an organ-player (who might have had some minor ordination) being executed as witches. In a sensational, polemical way the pamphlet rejoiced in cruel details about the degradation of the culprits before execution. Again, the narratives of baptising in the devil's name activated anxieties (Voltmer 2020; Rowlands 2019, p. 6). Unlike the pamphlets of 1579 and 1595, this one reported indeed facts, since the execution of the clerics had taken place (Mährle 1998, pp. 389, 394–96, 410, 424–25). Probably because the provost Westerstetten encountered difficulties with the Cathedral chapter concerning valid procedure in questions of confiscation, no further cleric had to stand a witchcraft trial in Ellwangen. However, Westerstetten made his career as prince-bishop in Eichstätt, where with the zeal of the counter-reformation and the help of the Jesuits the witch-hunts went on from 1617 to 1631.⁴⁶ Not one pamphlet has survived which commented on prosecutions in this small ecclesiastical territory, but there are testimonies concerning the Jesuits preaching about the devil's baptism (Schwillus 1992, p. 159). The witch-cleric, especially ordained priests and clerics with pastoral care duties, apparently, became one of the main targets.⁴⁷ This intent is revealed in an anonymously and undated *Consultum super Crimine Veneficii*, written presumably by a legal expert which evaluated the validity of denunciations made by convicted witches. The memorandum included six legal advices concerning clerics under suspicion of witchcraft to quicken their arrest and torture:

1. Denunciations against clerics need no further requirement than those against lay people.
2. In trials against clerics not more denunciations to apply torture are needed than against lay people.
3. In case of *crimen excepta*, clerics and ordained priests can to be tortured.
4. Clerics shall not be tortured to a lesser extent than lay people.
5. Clerics who administer pastoral care or who are ordained priests have to be arrested and tortured more rapidly than other people, if sufficient evidence is provided.
6. Clerics can be tortured by lay people with the bishop's consent (Schwillus 1992, p. 88).

With the memorandum at hand, and during the ongoing prosecution, more than 40 clerics and canons were denounced as witches, including several high-ranking canons from the Cathedral chapter. The convicted witches from Eichstätt (and its vicinities) with the help of questioning and interrogatories,

⁴⁶ From 1590 to 1631 (with a peak between 1617 and 1631) at least 260 people, mostly women, suffered execution as witches (Durrant 2007, p. 3).

⁴⁷ The witchcraft trial against the parish priest Reichard is mentioned only on the margins in (Durrant 2007, pp. 4, 6, 20, 21, 26, 67, 77, 78, 83, 182, 192, 251). Durrant neither discussed the denunciations against clerics nor the *Consultum*, probably because he was unaware of Schwillus' research.

elaborated colored narratives about the sabbath, including black masses, and desecrations of the host. The princely witch commission was engaged with the preparation of denunciation extracts against some of the denounced witch-clerics. In 1624, Johannes Reichard, an urban and wealthy parish priest, went to jail. His brother and mother had already been executed, the latter because of witchcraft. Of course, Reichard's interrogation and torture included questions concerning the devil's baptism, but he could not be brought to a confession. He died after 20 years in custody. Perhaps the commission had thought to extract from him valid denunciations against his fellow clerics in Eichstätt. However, he remained steadfast, and could not be broken. Perhaps to avoid further trouble, Westerstetten and his commission refrained from hunting down other witch-clerics (Schwillus 1992, pp. 122–203).⁴⁸ Probably two Jesuits Fathers, including the Cathedral preacher, had been denounced as witches, but none of them was tried. These denunciations of Jesuits did not stop the witch-hunting in Eichstätt.

The notorious witch-hunt in the neighbouring prince-bishopric of Bamberg cost the lives of almost 1000 persons, with a peak between 1626 and 1630 with more than 600 victims (Gehm 2000, p. 268). At least three clerics were charged with witchcraft in 1627 and 1628. The accusation of devil's baptism once more played a vital role (Gehm 2000, pp. 140–41; Schwillus 1992, pp. 208–14). Two clerics suffered degradation and execution. The baptisms of one of them, which he confessed to have done in the name of the devil, had to be performed *sub conditione* (under condition). The third cleric remained in custody; he won his freedom in 1631. Convicted witches had named at least twelve clerics as their accomplices. Denunciations against priest-witches reached very high-ranking men. According to a letter from Bamberg to a priest in Cologne, the prince bishop himself was denounced as a witch nine times (Schwillus 1992, pp. 207–8). Condemned witches, likewise, named the Cathedral provost together with the suffragan bishop Friedrich Förner as accomplices. To free Förner from any suspicion, the prince bishop himself wrote letters, addressing in November 1628 two high-ranking Jesuits: Wilhelm Larmormain, father confessor of the Emperor, and Adam Contzen, father confessor of the Bavarian duke. The defence of Förner stressed his eager and relentless battle against witchcraft and the devil's machinations in the name of counter-reformation (Smith 2005). Indeed, in his sermons (published in 1625) Förner had emphasized that witches multiplied the most where at first Jews and Protestants had been driven away, because in a final assault Satan tried to conquer the last bulwark of post-Tridentine Catholicism. Catholic princes in general and ecclesiastical authorities in particular had to eradicate the enemies of true religion. In one of his sermons, Förner reported from the witches' confessions, made in 1615, that Satan had seduced them to desecrate the seven sacraments. In the chequered clothing of a heretical preacher, the demon allegedly celebrated a black mass by distributing fiery hosts made of tar and gave inverted sermons at the witches' sabbath. The fiend thus seduced the perverted flock of witches even deeper into the crime of crimes (Förner 2011, p. 73). However, after Förner had been denounced for witchcraft himself, and in the aftermath of this affair, no further executions of priest-witches occurred in Bamberg.⁴⁹

The witch-hunts in the prince bishopric of Würzburg, conducted under the reign of Philipp Adolf of Ehrenberg, achieved the highest death toll of witch-clerics. The dynamics of counter-reformation still played a role, even after the outward process of re-catholisation had ended (Smith 2008). Nevertheless, the canons of Würzburg still lived a non-reformed life with concubines and a noble lifestyle. Whether political or economic reasons took the greatest impact (Rowlands 2019, p. 13), whether the canon's lifestyle caused envy and hatred in the populace, whether the dynamics of questioning produced so many denunciations, these and other factors triggered the persecution from 1627 to 1630. In the media,

⁴⁸ (Schwillus 1992, pp. 87–89), links the undated memorandum to Reichard's trial. I presume that the witch-hunting commission planned an assault against witch-clerics and needed the legal opinion in advance. It failed, however, to prove its usefulness in the Reichard case.

⁴⁹ We do not know who denounced Förner as a witch. (Gehm 2000, pp. 169–72), argues that these accusations must have stemmed from high-ranking men rather than from convicted witches. Probably Jesuits from Bamberg, who were already voicing warnings against the cruel persecution and helping suspects to escape, had spread the accusations against Förner. However, evidence is missing about this supposed Jesuit anti-witchcraft conspiracy against the witch-persecution.

the Franconian witch-hunts were perceived as a combined set of actions, ordered by the two prince bishops in Bamberg and Würzburg as allies in their personal Armageddon. At least two pamphlets (1629/1630) were printed, claiming to be published on orders of the respective bishops and chapters. Both texts lamented about the evil deeds of the witch-clerics. Close reading and contextualization, however, provide good argument that both pamphlets were the products of a Protestant milieu. They belong to a sample of at least eight pamphlets dealing with the witch prosecutions in Franconia. With one voice, they repeated the message of diabolic witchcraft infesting the lands of ecclesiastical princes, and popedom in general (Voltmer 2020). The narrative about the devil's baptising played its well-known role, this time further sensationalised with an alleged baptismal formula and the news about monks and priests being executed as witches. However, neither in Würzburg nor in Bamberg did monks or friars fall prey to the witch trials. According to Schwillus, the surviving records from the witchcraft trials against canons have nothing to say about baptising in the devil's name. The absence of the devil's baptism results probably from the fact that most canons did not have any duties in pastoral care. However, Protestant media coverage did not respect these details.

Whilst the ecclesiastical princes in Swabia and Franconia allowed massive witch-hunting from 1615 to 1630, on the Mosel and in the northern Eifel territories persecution cumulated either in small ecclesiastical territories such as St Maximin or in minor secular lordships such as Schmidheim or in the Manderscheid counties (Voltmer 2018b, pp. 35–49). In Westphalia the first execution of a witch-cleric had occurred in 1591.⁵⁰ The hunt for witch-clerics started again probably around 1617, when the Cologne vice-general together with the Jesuits identified a rural parish priest who seemed to be notorious for superstitious actions as well as magical deeds (Sobiech 2019). In the same year, the Mainz faculty of Theology issued an expert opinion, written inter alia by the zealous Jesuit Adam Contzen, on how to deal with two witch-priests. It recommended re-baptism *sub conditione* which had to be done in any case of an executed witch-priest who had administered pastoral care, and who was thought to have baptised his flock in the name of the devil.⁵¹

Father Peter Roestius, SJ, the later adversary of Friedrich Spee, demanded the procedure even in the case of a strongly suspected parish priest who in February 1631 was still on the run (Sobiech 2019).⁵² We know for certain that in the case of four executed parish priests from the Eifel, Father Heinrich Rhincopius from Münstereifel, likewise a former colleague of Friedrich Spee, conducted the re-baptisms.⁵³ For the Schmidheim flock, the re-baptism was ordered in July 1630, after Father Kirsbach had been captured and questioned, but was not yet executed. Due to the plague the holy ceremony had to be postponed. Finally, on 21 March 1631 and after catechetical instruction, Father Rhincopius re-baptised 63 men and 82 women in Schmidheim. Due to the devastating witch-hunts and the plague, the former godfathers and godmothers were mostly missing. Another high cleric and the noble lady of the house acted thus as godfather and godmother. Afterwards, Rhincopius heard the life confessions of the freshly baptised members and performed the sacrament of penance.⁵⁴ Together with sermons, exorcism, theatre, and popular mission, this and similar events belonged to the tools of new post-Tridentine Catholicism, staged dramatically by Jesuits and Capuchins (Rowlands 2019, p. 7; Voltmer 2018b, pp. 21–26; Waite 2013, pp. 493–95; Levack 2013, pp. 88, 97).

I assume that similar to Kirsbach the clerics on the run sought anonymity in the free city of Cologne with its many religious institutions, and with many a chantry priest, vicar, and hireling in

⁵⁰ See footnote 19.

⁵¹ In the case of a witch-priest, it was entirely uncertain when he had started the devil's baptising and whether he had done it properly from time to time. Thus, a re-baptising *sub conditione* was allowed.

⁵² Maybe the advice was talking about Peter Cullener or Hilger Trierscheid, two parish priests from the Northern Eifel who were denounced as super-witches. Both had fled to avoid trial and execution. As far as I know, they were never captured.

⁵³ The Kirsbach case remained unknown to Rowlands (2019, p. 7). Her question about the procedure in re-baptising is answered now.

⁵⁴ The witch-hunts did not end in Schmidheim with the execution of Kirsbach (17 August 1630); during December 1630 and January 1631, another four women were burnt, followed in March and April 1631 by eleven executions (seven women). After one burning in 1633 (a man) and five in 1635 (women), the prosecution came to an end (Voltmer 2018b, pp. 175–61, chart).

search of new benefices. In the eyes of Cologne's ecclesiastical prince Ferdinand of Bavaria and his privy council, the magistrate of the free city acted as *patroni veneficarum*, because they granted many supposed witches shelter and security (Voltmer 2018b, p. 30). The illusion of peace, however, had already been shattered by the execution of Katharina Henot in 1627, denounced as a witch by an apparently possessed nun. A chain of 33 witchcraft trials followed with 24 women executed.⁵⁵ Some clerics in the city, however, asked for more trials. Heinrich Glimbach, canon of St Severin, published a pamphlet (*Lamentatio animae suspirantis ad Deum pro extirpatione magiae*) with the beginning year of 1630, lamenting about the holy city of Cologne being beleaguered by and infested with witches. In his fantasy, clergy as well as laity, men and women, old and young, had been seduced into witchcraft. He demanded widespread denunciations and severe punishment. The canon had been inspired by fears about a city-wide conspiracy of witches, whilst he had cared in Winter 1629 as father confessor for Christina Plum, a young girl claiming to be possessed. She accused many members of the urban elite and the high clergy as accomplices, including the suffragan bishop Otto Gereon, who found himself defamed of baptising children into the devil's snare. Furthermore, Plum affirmed that she had seen inter alia a certain Jesuit at the witches' sabbath. Glimbach took her denunciations very seriously, walking her around the Cathedral, where the Jesuits were hearing confessions so that she might point at the wicked Father (Voltmer 2018b, p. 122; Sobiech 2019). However, Christina Plum had to endure another interrogation, held by two more priests, one a Jesuit. Her denunciations were suppressed as fraud, but nonetheless she was burnt as a witch on 16 January 1630. Some members of the high clergy (including Glimbach), who acted on the side of the ecclesiastical juridical administration in the cases of Henot and Plum, had joined in the witchcraft trials against the rural parish priests in the Northern Eifel. Dean Adolf of Pempelfurt, for example, demanded the application of more severe torture in the case of the rural parish priest Matthias Hennes, and most of them had signed the degradation charter of Laurenz Kirsbach (Voltmer 2018b, pp. 120, 122).

3.3. *The Testimony of Heinrich of Schultheiß in 1634—Witch-Priests and Jesuits as Patroni Sagarum*

The exceptional witch-hunts in Bamberg and Würzburg, transgressing borders of age, gender, and status, established an empire-wide critical discourse about its legitimacy, reaching from Franconia to Cologne and Westphalia. I was able to match together some puzzle pieces of this almost forgotten discourse which, apart from oral communication, included secret and open letters, notes in diaries, lists of victims, manifests, pamphlets, and tracts, transmitted partly in the networks of clerics and Jesuits. Ultimately it reached the Diet of the prince electors in 1630, the Imperial Aulic Court and the Imperial Chamber Court, whose verdicts discredited massive witch-hunts and made them almost impossible. During this discourse, the Würzburg authorities had been accused to the wider public in the Old Reich of shedding the blood of innocents, and thus acting like tyrants. The degraded, tortured and executed, or still imprisoned priests and clerics topped the list of these martyrs. Some Jesuits and some members of the secular elite in Bamberg as well as in Würzburg seem to have participated in this discourse, seeking to attract the attention of the Emperor and his supervising courts to stop further bloodshed in Franconia (Voltmer 2020).

An important eyewitness for this empire-wide discourse is Heinrich of Schultheiß, the notorious witch commissioner of Westphalia and Cologne, whose testimony has been largely forgotten, although he had published it in his apologetic tract (1634).⁵⁶ Along with Licentiate Kaspar Reinhard, Dr Johannes Moeden and Dr Franz Buirmann, Schultheiß belonged to the group of Witch Commissioners (*Hexenkommissare*) who played a pivotal role in the sentencing to death of hundreds of people during the witch-trials that occurred in Electoral Cologne, particularly during the severe persecutions in 1626–1631. Educated by Jesuits and gaining low ordination to obtain a canonry, he then studied law

⁵⁵ See footnote 4.

⁵⁶ Alison Rowlands at first (2019) has referred to Schultheiß and his comments about the executed witch-clerics in Würzburg.

at the University of Cologne and Würzburg (1603). He subsequently left the clergy and step by step started his career as a witch commissioner, already active in 1616/1617 and 1621. Around 1630 he participated in the severe persecution of witches in the Duchy of Westphalia which claimed between 650 and 1000 victims. Around 1632/1634 Schultheiß was ennobled: A clear indication of his rapid social rise. He had to flee to Cologne in 1633 as a result of the effects of the Thirty Years War. Obviously, Schultheiß wrote the tract to defend his work against the growing discourse which labelled massive witch-hunting nothing but shedding of innocent blood (*Eine Außführliche Instruction Wie in Inquisition Sachen des grewlichen Lasters der Zauberey [...] ohn gefahr der Unschuldigen zu procediren [...]*)⁵⁷). He justified his own role in the trials, called for further persecution, and offered a guide on how the guilt of alleged witches could best be proven in court. The tract aimed at nobles and minor lords, since, in consequence of warfare and of imperial intercession in the electorates of Cologne and Mainz as well as in the bishoprics of Franconia and Swabia, the witch-hunts had ceased. Inter alia⁵⁸, Schultheiß blamed the devil, the witches' sect and their favourites, the *patroni sagarum*, of having spread insulting rumours about the witch trials in Würzburg. These rumours, according to Schultheiß, culminated in the argument that the wrath of God had punished the prince bishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Würzburg for their tyrannical blood justice with the loss of their territories during the war.

According to Schultheiß, the erroneous claim made by the *patroni sagarum*, that Jesuits had been executed as witches in Würzburg, had scared members of the Society. Schultheiß, still having good connections with the privy council in Würzburg, relied on its freshly won testimony that in the prince bishopric neither monks nor Jesuits had been arrested or executed. The witch-trials against the canons had been allegedly conducted with the greatest caution and with respect to every clause of ecclesiastical and secular law. Schultheiß tried hard to defend in general the Franconian witch-hunts, and particularly the trials against clerics. This defence fits with his general attack against the sceptical voices of Adam Tanner, SJ, (whom he named personally), probably Paul Laymann, SJ, and Dr Cornelius Pleier, a freshly converted Catholic (referring to his treatise). Those Jesuits, who had joined the public discourse against the shedding of innocent blood during the witch-hunts in Franconia (and implicitly in Westphalia), had to stand the most vicious counter-argument of Schultheiß: They had been deluded by false rumours made by *patroni sagarum* and the synagogue of demons and witches. For Schultheiß, however, the clergy need not be blamed because of the witch-priests, since even the Apostles had one Judas amongst them.

The testimony of Heinrich of Schultheiß proves the existence of a widespread discourse about the legitimacy of massive witch-hunts which did not spare high ranking men and their families, together with parish priests and canons. However, it is remarkable that the witch commissioner, who tried so hard to devalue every argument in this discourse, mentioned the *Cautio Criminalis* only on the margins, without naming its title (Decker 1996, pp. 1052–53). Perhaps Schultheiß had not read the book, according to his remarks. It seems, however, more likely that Schultheiß intentionally avoided a difficult discussion of Spee's well set arguments which defamed sharply the witch-trials conducted by ecclesiastical princes against their fellow clerics.

4. Friedrich Spee and the Priest-Witch—Final Arguments

The life and work of the well-known Jesuit Friedrich Spee has been recently studied thoroughly, laying emphasis on his embeddedness in the order's networks. Spee either had heard first-hand information about the procedure of the witch-trials or he had eye witnessed them during his stays in Trier, Mainz, Cologne, Paderborn, Fulda, or Würzburg (Sobiech 2019; Hellyer 2003). In 1631, he published anonymously the first edition of his *Cautio Criminalis*, addressed to princes and authorities,

⁵⁷ "Detailed Instruction, on how to proceed against the dreadful crime of witchcraft ... without any danger to those innocent of the crime".

⁵⁸ For Schultheiß and his comments about the major witch-hunts in Westphalia, Würzburg, and Bamberg see in detail (Voltmer 2020).

followed in 1632 by the second edition. Relying on Adam Tanner and criticising sharply Peter Binsfeld and Martin Delrio, Spee focused on the criminal procedure and the impact of torture. He advocated stopping the injustice of witchcraft trials, but avoided discussing the belief in witchcraft. To Spee, several groups of perpetrators kept the bloody machine of witchcraft trials running, including clerics and father confessors, jurists and witch commissioners, and the populace. In general, authorities, who allowed massive trials, acted like tyrants shedding the blood of the innocent.

It has slipped attention that rather frequently Spee referred to cases of tortured and executed witch-priests, although without revealing names or dates. He complained bitterly about ecclesiastical princes, who allowed their inquisitors to lay hands on ordained priests and clerics in disrespect of papal bulls and ecclesiastical privileges, but based on weak evidence. If justice failed in criminal procedure against clerics, “what do other, common souls have to hope for” (Spee 2003, p. 61). Implicitly referring to the witch-trials in Ellwangen, Eichstätt, Bamberg, and Würzburg, Spee expressed his horror at criminal trials in which even priests had to endure the humiliating procedure of being shaved by the hands of the infamous torturer (Spee 2003, pp. 127, 217). He could not understand ecclesiastical princes who gave the secular witch commissioners free reign to ask leading questions about whether the accused women had seen “any parish priests or churchmen at their sabbaths” (Spee 2003, p. 81). Spee knew about a princely prelate who had recently “forbade one of his inquisitors to ask about churchmen either in general or in particular”, because the prince had been advised that these women under torture might name not only ordinary priests but likewise high-ranking prelates (Spee 2003, p. 81). Maybe this example referred to Bamberg, where trials against clerics had stopped after the suffragan bishop Förner had been denounced himself. Another example stemmed from a “well-known place in Germany where almost everything burned to ashes” (Spee 2003, p. 196). Spee told the story about a table talk between an ecclesiastical prince and one of his clerical advisers about whether the witchcraft trials were conducted properly and whether innocent people had been accused falsely. The zealous regular priest defended the bloody justice with the argument that God never would allow the shedding of innocent blood. At the end of the dispute, the prince confronted the Father with the fact that no less than fifteen convicted witches had confessed that they had seen him at their sabbaths. Thus, the Father had condemned himself as a witch. This story has been identified as a dialogue exchanged between the prince bishop of Eichstätt and the Cathedral preacher, the Jesuit Joachim Megglin (Schwillus 1992, p. 121).

Spee demanded that priests, whose arrest had been based on weak evidence, should be granted writing implements for their defence (Spee 2003, p. 67). Spee was well informed that in one case an ecclesiastical prince had forbidden an incarcerated cleric from sending out a supplication, although the regular order of the arrested cleric had plead for the latter. This story seems to refer to the four monks of Dalheim who had been arrested as witches in 1600. On another occasion, Spee complained more about this monastery case (Spee 2003, pp. 62, 187; Decker 2000, p. 235). The cruel inquisitors of ecclesiastical princes had even sent a Catholic priest to the stake who had endured torture several times without any confession of witchcraft (Spee 2003, pp. 211, 217). Spee and others expressed a lack of understanding about why prelates and ecclesiastical princes had not complained about the mistreatment of the clergy and the disregard for ecclesiastical privileges during the witch-trials (Spee 2003, p. 61). With similar arguments to the Catholic pamphlet of 1603, Spee listed the damage done by witch-trials, disgracing the Catholic faith, because pious Catholics avoided showing devotion openly in saying the rosary or praying in church, since this behaviour would bring them immediately under suspicion of witchcraft. In an unnamed nearby territory, everybody protected himself “as diligently as possible against displaying any sign of piety”. (Spee 2003, p. 24). Spee goes on: “Even priests who used to celebrate mass daily have now either ceased completely or say it only in private with the church locked up, lest people begin to spread rumors of magic” (ibid.). In doing so, Spee bitter affirmed, witch-hunts in ecclesiastical territories paved the way for atheism.

It seems clear to me that Spee, through the Jesuit’s network, knew very well about the empire-wide discourse which reached from Bavaria and Franconia to Westphalia, and was carried inter alia by Jesuits,

concerning the legitimacy of massive witch-hunts, especially in ecclesiastical territories. His arguments were based on Adam Tanner who may have known the pamphlet of 1603 and its author, a presumed Jesuit. Furthermore, I assume that these arguments were circulating around 1600 at least between those members of the Jesuit order who were developing a growing scepticism against the procedure in witch-trials. Spee used the figure of the witch-cleric thus to exemplify the massive irregularities going on during the trials, the injustice and cruelty of torture, the blindness and ruthlessness of ecclesiastical princes who handed ordained priests to secular inquisitors. Spee's last hope happened to be the Emperor who certainly would be disgusted "if he hears that in his empire even ecclesiastical persons have perished" through false sentences in the witch-trials (Spee 2003, p. 97). Finally, and again in using the figure of the witch-cleric, Spee brought forward a strong confessional argument: "It will be much more shameful if it is heard that this same satanic testimony has such strength among Germans that it is even accepted as evidence against ecclesiastical persons. This will cause the greatest contempt for the Catholic faith among heretics [Protestants]. Nevertheless such testimony has been accepted in this way under Church princes" (Spee 2003, p. 210). Implicitly and explicitly and together with his complaints against zealous clerics and relentless father confessors, who belonged to his order, Spee thus uttered a massive criticism of the Church in the Old Reich, which was not able or not willing to shield ordained priests from prosecution.⁵⁹ This counter-argument targeted vigorously the argument of Catholic overzealous promoters of witch-hunting such as Binsfeld, Delrio, and especially Förner who with a twisted logic had strengthened the idea that every conquered and convicted witch proved the ultimate truth of post-Tridentine Catholic faith. To Spee, the ruthless witch commissioners and inquisitors (and one may say, their masters, the ecclesiastical princes themselves), indeed, were the worst witches. In here, Spee's critic echoes arguments of the Protestant Nigrinus.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

1. In Western Europe, only few territories saw clusters of trials against witch-clerics, although many friars, monks, and secular priests had a notorious reputation as necromancer, sorcerer, and magician. Several factors prevented or triggered deadly trials against clergymen, such as legal centralization and scepticism (e.g., under the auspices of the Spanish Inquisition), counter-reformation and Catholic reform (e.g., in the ecclesiastical territories of the Old Reich), or the enthusiasm of witch-hunters (e.g., Sebastian Michaëlis, Pierre de Lancre, or the witch commissioners of Westphalia and Cologne).
2. Patterns of accusations shifted during different patterns of trials. The convent cases in France or Italy with one or two charged witch-clerics followed a different pattern in comparison with the witch-hunts in Franconia and its massive assault against canonry. Protestant polemics again smoothed away the differences, propagating that many tried priests and monks had engaged in devil's baptism, a charge, which cannot be proved with the surviving trial records.
3. Popular and learned anticlericalism fueled the discourse about the devil's clergy, and bolstered accusations against Catholic clergymen (and their housekeepers or concubines).
4. The figure of the witch-priest played a vital role in campaigns for Catholic reform and in clerical infighting. Dominican inquisitors in Italy or France proved their outstanding expertise in battling necromancers and witch-priests in competition with Jesuits or other branches of the Mendicant orders, whereas Jesuits with their new post-Tridentine concepts of clerical standards uncovered worldly living urban canons and rural parish priests as the devil's minions.
5. The persecution of the Anabaptist and the demonization of re-baptism strengthened anxieties about the devil's baptism, performed by witch-clerics, and mixed with fantasies about consecrating children to the devil, done by the mothers (and sometimes fathers), and the devil's re-baptism at the witches' sabbath.

⁵⁹ Research has not noticed this specific part of Spee's criticism; see for example, (Sievernich 2005).

6. Demonology and the media debated the devil's clergy during late medieval and early modern times in constant dialogue with actual trials. The persecution of Catholic clergy played at least two significant roles in political demonology and in the media. For Catholics, the figure of the witch-cleric proved that Satan was vigorously assaulting post-Tridentine Catholicism, the only remaining bulwark of Christianity; for Protestants on the other hand, the news about the devil's clergy proved that Satan reigned in popedom. Secondly and from the start of the 17th century, the prosecution of clerics as the devil's minions fueled the general debates about the legitimacy of witchcraft trials in the Old Reich. For advocates of witch-hunting, executed witch-clerics proved the omnipresent dangers of witchcraft and the satanic infiltration of Christian society, whereas for sceptics like Friedrich Spee, the same narratives proved the witch-trials to be the work of tyrants, shedding the innocent blood of martyrs.
7. The new standards of post-Tridentine Catholic faith, transmitted by the Jesuit role model, brought forward tools of how to unmask the witch-cleric. In the figure of the witch-cleric, counter-reformation, Catholic reform, and witch-hunting amalgamated. In the Old Reich, Jesuits together with ecclesiastical princes and their administration were eager to detect superstitious, lecherous priests, and canons in the name of Catholic reform. It happened to be Jesuits, whose exorcisms, devoted processions, theatre, and mission campaigns, transmitted the idea of diabolic omnipresence to rural parishes as well as to the urban milieu. However, there existed no order-wide strategy to extirpate the priest-witches. Every Jesuit Father had to decide for himself, how much and in which way he engaged in favour of witch-trials.
8. Already in the 16th century, demonologists and propagandists attached the label *patronus sagarum* to Jesuits and Catholic clerics to discredit them as witches themselves. Some of them indeed had been protectors of accused people. Witch-hunters, likewise, used the label as a strategic argument of legitimation. After the turn of the century and with increasing experience as father confessors, more and more Jesuits (although still the minority) developed sceptical views, demanding a care for innocents and to hinder further bloodshed. However, the Jesuit order never propagated a consistent opinion towards the belief in witches, and the procedure in trials. It remained difficult for many fathers as members of the strike force of counter-reformation to accept the view of Spee and others.
9. No Jesuit was executed as a witch, as far as we know, but some of them frequently were denounced as witches, and their students had to stand deadly trials. Witchcraft accusations against Jesuits or their presumed executions did not stop further witch trials. Heinrich of Schultheiß circulated this polemical argument to ridicule and defame the Jesuits' sceptical voices as being the mere result of satanic delusion. Nor did trials against witch-clerics stop the zeal of (ecclesiastical) witch-hunters. Würzburg with its nearly 50 executions seems to be an outstanding exception, as long as we do not take into account that in Eichstätt, Bamberg, and Cologne more trials against the devil's clergy were in preparation, but stopped because of the steadfastness of one parish priest (Eichstätt), or because of the fact that accusations began to reach very high-ranking clerics. With the suffragan bishops of Cologne (Otto Gereon) and Bamberg (Friedrich Förner) denounced as witches, indeed, a "crisis of confidence" occurred.
10. In following Spee's argument, ecclesiastical princes in the Old Reich had failed entirely to shield the clergy. On the contrary, they had ordered secular inquisitors to inquire explicitly for seemingly suspicious clerics. If the Imperial courts had not blocked the Franconian and Cologne witch-hunts, there is little doubt that more clerics would have fallen prey to them.
11. The history of the devil's clergy mirrors the great diversity of clerical rank, economic resources, and location (rural/urban). For example, anxieties about the devil's baptism mainly targeted parish priests in rural and urban milieu. Vicars, chantry priests, monks, and canons without any duties in pastoral care, had to have less fear of these accusations, whilst canons and monks fell into suspicion more frequently because of their supposed idleness, and lechery. Rural priests

- were accused of diabolic superstition and magic. Protestant polemics, however, smoothed away these vital differences and created indeed the stereotype of the Catholic witch-cleric.
12. Demonology and the media had marked the witch-cleric as a super-witch, driving a flock, or a convent into the devil's snare. Social history, however, should put the witch-cleric back into his respective milieu to gain better insight into the dynamics of how and why certain Protestant ministers and Catholic priests, together with their family and kin, were suspected of witchcraft. Many of their partners (be they concubines or wives), kin, and family, be they Catholic or Protestant, had fallen prey to witch-trials. Like other housefathers, clerics headed so-called witches' families or witches' households (Voltmer 2016, pp. 218–26; Rowlands 2016; de Blécourt 2007).⁶⁰ Witchcraft slander suits would be useful for gaining insight into the emergence of accusations against clerics. Likewise, we should not forget about the accused, incarcerated, and executed nuns and women religious. The history of the witch-cleric should focus not only on the executed or punished men but should try to identify those who were denounced but not tried or executed or who were able to take to the road. Any discussion thus about the alleged small number of executed clerics is misleading.
 13. We should identify the clerical networks, whose members were either promoters of witch-hunting, or victims, or both or who developed scepticism. Cornelius Loos and Friedrich Spee, defamed as *patroni sagarum*, were only the tip of the iceberg.

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⁶⁰ To give one example: In the village of Fell (St Maximin), the parish priest suffered execution as a presumed witch in 1589. Four members of his former household shared his fate (1591–1595), including his two daughters, his son-in-law, and his female servant (Voltmer and Weisenstein 1996, p. 404).

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