Our Lady of Victory or Our Lady of Beauty?:
The Virgin Mary in Early Modern Dominican and Jesuit Approaches to Islam

Rita George Tvrtković
Benedictine University, Lisle, IL, USA
RGeorge-Tvrtkovic@ben.edu

Abstract

Ottoman incursions into Europe during the early modern period prompted reactions from the Dominicans and the Jesuits, both of whom used images of Mary against Islam, though in different ways. Some Dominicans advocated conquering Muslims under the banner of “Our Lady of Victory,” an image that emerged after the 1571 defeat of the Ottomans at the Battle of Lepanto, a victory Catholics attributed to Mary via the rosary. Some Jesuits, however, sought to convert Muslims through “Our Lady of Beauty,” images which stressed the beauty and purity of Mary, who is revered by both Christians and Muslims. Neither approach was very effective in crossing early modern inter-religious divides, yet today Mary continues to be employed both as a bridge and barrier between Christians and Muslims (and Catholics and Protestants), with mixed results.

Keywords

Dominicans – Jesuits – Ottoman Empire – Our Lady of Victory – Mary Mother of God – Islam – Christian-Muslim relations

By the time the Jesuits were founded in 1540, the Dominicans had already been working as missionaries among Muslims for over three hundred years.1 Friars such as Ramón Martí (c.1220–85) in Spain and Riccoldo da Montecroce (c.1243–1320) in Iraq became famous for their learned polemics against Islam, leveraging

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1 Portions of this article are adapted from my book, Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History (New York: Paulist Press, 2018). Used with permission.
both their knowledge of the Arabic language and real-life encounters with Muslims. But the Jesuits were quick to catch up to the Preachers, likely because they too based their missionary efforts on language study and lived experience. By the early seventeenth century, the Dominicans and Jesuits shared another strategy for evangelizing Muslims: the Virgin Mary, an honored figure in both Christianity and Islam. However, the orders diverged in how they used her. With increasing Ottoman incursions into Europe, some early modern Dominicans went on the defensive by promoting Our Lady of Victory, who they hoped would assist them in conquering Muslims through compulsion. Some Jesuits went on the offensive by taking visual and verbal images of Mary with them throughout the world, hoping she would assist them in converting Muslims through beauty and shared devotion.

Not only were these two images used differently (defensively vs. offensively), but their intended audiences were also distinct. The Victory image was inward-facing, while the Beauty image was outward-facing. In other words, Our Lady of Victory was meant for internal consumption, to shore up Catholic resolve in fighting a Muslim foe, while Our Lady of Beauty was meant for a Muslim audience, to attract them to Christianity. It is important to note that these images are not mutually exclusive to either order. Rather, this article simply aims to highlight a distinction between two early modern approaches to Muslims vis-à-vis Mary: Our Lady of Victory tended to be used more by Dominicans (who were instrumental in creating her), while Our Lady of Beauty tended to be used more by Jesuits.2

In the end, however, neither the Dominicans’ Our Lady of Victory nor the Jesuits’ Our Lady of Beauty was very successful in convincing Muslims to cross the interreligious divide. Rather, the images often served to exacerbate intra-religious differences. For example, the Dominicans’ Our Lady of Victory appeared on battle standards raised not only against Ottomans but also Protestants, while Jesuit descriptions of Our Lady of Beauty became yet another reason for Protestant scholars to criticize Catholic interpretations of the saints and the Bible.3 It seems that the Virgin Mary was an ineffective tool for converting Muslims, but that did not stop the Jesuits or Dominicans from trying.

2 For examples of Jesuits who tried both methods, see Emanuele Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam in Seventeenth-Century Europe: War, Preaching, and Conversions,” in L’Islam visto da Occidente, ed. Bernard Heyberger, et al. (Genoa: Casa Editrice Marietti, 2009), 335–40. In this article, Colombo discusses Jesuit missionaries who attempted to harness the attractive power of Our Lady of Beauty, but he also mentions those who took a more traditional polemical stance towards Islam (but not using Mary to do so).
3 For more on the weaponizing of Mary in Catholic-Protestant battles of the early modern period, see Nathan Mitchell, The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention
1 The Dominicans and Our Lady of Victory

The legend of Mary giving the rosary to St. Dominic is well known, but does not appear until the fifteenth century, when the Dominican friar Alain de la Roche (c.1428–75) became the first to link his order’s founder to a new Marian devotion called the *rosarium* (rose garden). The prayer gained traction among the laity, in part thanks to Roche’s establishment of the first rosary confraternity in Douai in 1460. In 1475, another Dominican, Jacob Sprenger (c.1436–95), created a similar rosary confraternity in the city of Cologne which became so popular that within seven years it had over 100,000 members. From there, rosary confraternities—which stressed personal piety—spread quickly throughout the Low Countries. A century later, Jesuits Jean Leunis (1532–84) and Franz Coster (1532–1619), in Rome and Cologne respectively, founded a related organization called the Marian sodality—still with the rosary at the center, but with an added focus on communal practice and corporal life. The popularity of these Marian organizations and their signature prayer, the rosary, grew exponentially; over thirty thousand people joined Rome’s rosary confraternity in 1577 alone.

It was the Dominican Pope Pius V (1504–1572; r.1566–72) who added a new dimension to the prayer by encouraging Catholics to say the rosary for the express purpose of defeating the Ottoman Turks. The idea to use Mary as a weapon against Muslims was not new; Spanish Catholics had called on her in medieval wars against the Moors, and when converting Iberian mosques into churches they often renamed them in honor of Mary, “La Conquistadora.” But requests for Mary’s intercession against Muslims increased during the early modern period, particularly at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, when it was rumored that the commander of the Catholic League, John of Austria (1547–78), kept a statue of the Virgin on his ship for good luck. Furthermore, the Catholic League’s Dominican chaplains actively encouraged all soldiers to pray the rosary. And when the Catholics miraculously defeated their Ottoman foes, it

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4 Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 70.
5 Winston-Allen, *Stories*, 111.
6 Heal, *Cult of the Virgin*, 253.
7 Mitchell, *Mystery of the Rosary*, 32.
8 For more on this topic, see Amy Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old and New Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
was Pope Pius V who proclaimed explicitly and authoritatively that their victory was due to Rome’s rosary confraternities and their fervent appeals to the Virgin.

It did not take long after Lepanto for artists, poets, and playwrights to commemorate Mary’s role in this Catholic victory against Muslims. Examples of such memorials included a new gilt ceiling depicting the battle in Rome’s Santa Maria in Aracoeli church (1571); Paolo Veronese’s (1528–88) painting Allegory of Lepanto (1572), which features Mary in heaven directing the naval battle below, with the Turkish fleet under a black cloud; a fresco at the Dominican Church of Santa Sabina in Rome, depicting Pius V holding his rosary and having a vision of Mary presiding over Lepanto; and even a dramatic play Deiparae Virginis triumphus (The triumph of the Virgin Mother of God) written by Jesuits in 1617 and performed throughout German-speaking lands. This play featured various enemies of Mary, including Protestants and Turks, as well as a complete reenactment of the Lepanto battle.\footnote{Heal, *Cult of the Virgin*, 201.} The Dominicans of Antwerp began celebrating the Lepanto victory annually with an elaborate procession through the city streets, and on the centenary of the battle, the local rosary confraternity commissioned a series of four paintings on Lepanto at St. Paul’s, the Dominican church in Antwerp. The first painting portrays the Dominican tertiary Catherine of Siena (1347–80) praying the rosary; the second depicts battle scenes replete with a Marian banner atop the Catholic flagship and Dominican chaplains holding rosaries; the third shows the aftermath of the battle, with Christian soldiers disembarking their ships to make a celebratory Marian procession; and the last painting features a grateful Pope Pius V kneeling before Mary, thanking her for the victory, rosary in hand.\footnote{The Antwerp painting series was done by the Flemish artist Jan Peeters I (1624–77). Jasper van der Steen, *Memory Wars in the Low Countries, 1566–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 87–89.}

Aside from all the art, the Mary-contra-Islam connection was cemented liturgically by Pius V, who created the new feast day of Our Lady of Victory, to be celebrated in perpetuity every October 7, the anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto. In a 1572 encyclical establishing the new feast, he wrote: “By virtue of her prayer and petitions, a decisive victory, which must never be forgotten, was gained over the Turks on October 7, 1571.”\footnote{Salvatoris Domini nostri (1572).} The pope was convinced that Our Lady of Victory could help Catholics defeat any enemy, from Turks to heretics to Protestants. In fact, in an earlier encyclical declaring the Dominican order’s version of the rosary (fifteen decades and 150 Hail Marys) standard for the worldwide church, Pius V begins by comparing his own sixteenth-century fight against Muslims and Protestants to Dominic’s thirteenth-century fight against
the Albigensians, and retells the legend of Dominic using the rosary to defeat heretics. The very next year (1573), Pope Gregory XIII (1502–85; r.1572–85) changed the name of the feast from Our Lady of Victory to Our Lady of the Rosary, but the date and intention stayed the same: Catholics would ask Mary to help them defeat Muslims and other “godless” enemies, either through conversion or the sword. In 1716 (after another Catholic victory over Muslims; this time at Peterwardein, Hungary), Pope Clement XI (1649–1721; r.1700–21) was inspired to extend the feast to the entire church. To this day, the Catholic Church still celebrates the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary every October 7, although not many know the history of its origins in a sixteenth-century battle against Muslims.

The idea that the Virgin Mary could help Catholics defeat Muslims by the sword seems to run counter to traditional Western Christian titles for her such as those found in the Salve, Regina: “clement,” “sweet,” “mother of mercy.” Yet, the image of a military Mary fighting all kinds of non-Christians—be they heretics, barbarians, communists, or Muslims—has deep roots in early Eastern Christian imagery. For example, the famous fifth-century Akathistos hymn describes the Theotokos as a guardian against heresy, while later Orthodox texts depict her standing on the walls of Constantinople to protect the city against Avar, Russian, and Arab sieges. The older patristic idea of a military Mary was taken up by early modern Dominicans as they faced the foes of their day, both Muslim and Protestant.

One of the most shocking images of Mary being used as a weapon against Muslims in this period can be seen in the image emblazoned on the cover of a seventeenth-century pamphlet from a Dominican rosary confraternity in Cologne. The image features Mary holding baby Jesus and standing on top of a headless man. The viewer is meant to conclude that the headless man is a Turk, because his turban has rolled to the side. Baby Jesus is holding the dead man’s bloody, decapitated head, while Mary is wielding a sword encircled by the rosary. Writing around her body implores her not to Ora pro nobis (pray for us) as is normally the case, but Pugna pro nobis (fight for us). Around the sword and aligned with the rosary is the line “shield of Christians,” while in the background one can make out the sinking Ottoman ships of Lepanto. And finally, just to be clear, the image (and pamphlet itself) is entitled in all caps Triumphus

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12 Pius V, Consueverunt Romani pontifices (1569).
13 Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2006), 61–67. See also Stephen Shoemaker, Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).
14 Triumphus SSmi Rosari Mariae, seventeenth century, Cologne. The image is located in the archives of the Kölnisches Stadtmuseum.
Sanctissimi Rosarii Mariae (The triumph of the most holy rosary of Mary). We do not know how this pamphlet was received by rosary confraternity members in Cologne—did it attract or repel? In any case, it seems clear that the idea of using the rosary as a tool for mission among Muslims, initiated by the Dominican Pope Pius V in the sixteenth century, had now taken hold strongly in the seventeenth century, at least in the minds of the Cologne Dominicans who commissioned this pamphlet.

Our Lady of Victory was deployed not only against Muslims, but also Protestants. One example of this can be found in the Lepanto series of paintings at the Dominicans’ Antwerp church discussed above, which add an anachronistic element: one image depicts enemy ships flying not only Ottoman flags but also North Netherlandish (Protestant) flags. The seventeenth century saw other Catholics besides Dominicans taking up Our Lady of Victory as a tool for war and/or mission. For example, during the Thirty Years’ War, the Bavarian Catholic Duke Maximilian I (1597–1651) flew a Marian flag while fighting Protestants in the 1620 Battle of White Mountain, and attributed his victory to her. And in his efforts to get German Lutherans to return to the Catholic Church, the Jesuit Peter Canisius (1521–97) employed every Marian tool he could, including the rosary, confraternities, and sodalities. In fact, Canisius told his fellow Jesuit Coster that the main purpose of the Marian sodalities Coster founded was to “preserve the Catholic Church in Germany.” And in Brazil, Our Lady of Victory was used in yet another way: Portuguese Dominican missionaries created numerous Marian societies expressly for slaves and free blacks. These societies were inspired by a tract on Our Lady of Victory that was written in 1573 by the Portuguese Dominican Frei Nicolau Dias (c.1525–96), a book so popular in Portugal that it went through eight editions in ten years. While Dias’ Our Lady of Victory was employed in the traditional manner against the Moors back in the Old World, in the New World the idea of Mary helping to convert Muslims and Protestants had evidently been expanded to include the assimilation of slaves and free blacks into Brazilian society.

The Dominicans’ Our Lady of Victory endured well beyond the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the 1890s, Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903; r.1878–1903) referred to her explicitly and frequently in his rosary encyclicals. For example,
In the quote below, he exhorts late nineteenth-century Catholics to employ their rosaries against modern-day enemies, just as sixteenth-century Catholics had used it to defeat Turkish Muslims:

The efficacy and power of this devotion [rosary] was also wondrously exhibited in the sixteenth century, when the vast forces of the Turks threatened to impose on nearly the whole of Europe the yoke of superstition and barbarism [...]. Therefore, it is clearly evident that this form of prayer is particularly pleasing to the Blessed Virgin, and that it is especially suitable as a means of defense for the Church and all Christians.21

Here, Leo was talking as much about fighting the modernists as he was about Muslims or Protestants. A few decades later, Pope Pius XII (1876–1958; r.1939–58) also called upon Our Lady of Victory, this time in the church’s fight against communists. In the Marian year of 1954, not only did Pius XII encourage Catholics to pray the rosary for Catholics living in communist countries, but he also commissioned a mosaic that depicts Pius V, a rosary, Mary, and Lepanto’s sinking ships.22 The link Pius XII made was clear: the rosary and Mary’s intercession could now be employed against the communists, just as it had been used against the Ottomans at Lepanto. While there is little evidence that Our Lady of Victory ever helped early modern Dominicans (or any other Catholic missionaries for that matter) to be victorious in their evangelization efforts against Muslims, she did manage to inspire new generations of Catholics in their fight against all manner of non-Catholic foes, be they Muslims, Protestants, modernists, or communists.

2 The Jesuits and Our Lady of Beauty

The Jesuits were not immune to using the Dominican Our Lady of Victory, not only against Muslims but also against Protestants (as evidenced by Canisius’s work to promote the rosary in Lutheran Germany) and heretics (as evidenced by the prominence of Our Lady of the Rosary in Jesuit sermons against heretics in Brazil).23 However, the primary focus of sixteenth-century Jesuit

21 Leo XIII, Supremi apostolatus officio (1883), §4–5.
22 See Jonathon Herzog, The Hammer and the Cross: America’s Holy War against Communism (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
23 Joan Meznar, “Our Lady of the Rosary, African Slaves, and the Struggle Against Heretics in Brazil, 550–1660,” Journal of Early Modern History (August 2005): 371–97, argues that Our Lady of the Rosary was encouraged by Jesuit sermons as a means to fight against heresy.
missionaries—especially those who had experience living in Muslim lands—was using Mary to attract Muslims to the Christian faith, not compel them. While some Jesuits did write polemical tracts against Islam, early Jesuit superiors general including Diego Laínεz (1512–65) and Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615) discouraged missionaries in the Muslim world from debate or other traditional methods of proselytism. Instead, Jesuit missionaries around the globe were supposed to focus on serving the spiritual needs of local Christians and on employing other, more benign methods of engaging with Muslims, even if their ultimate goal was still conversion. Two examples of these benign methods involved using artistic images of Mary to attract Muslims to Christianity in Mughal India and highlighting visions of Mary as effective means of conversion in conversion narratives. In this article, I will call this Jesuit Mary “Our Lady of Beauty” in contrast to the Dominican “Our Lady of Victory,” keeping in mind that these images were never mutually exclusive to either order.

Active in Mughal India beginning in 1580, Jesuit missionaries attempted to use artistic images of Mary to convert the local Muslims. They focused their efforts on father and son Emperors Akbar (1542–1605) and Jahangir (1569–1627), since both men had hosted interreligious discussions at court and seemed interested in learning more about all world religions, including Christianity. These heterodox emperors decorated their palaces with Christian iconography, possessed icons of Mary and Jesus, and in some instances even venerated them. Akbar wore a reliquary with an image of the Virgin on it, and celebrated the Feast of the Assumption with the Jesuits in 1590. Jahangir’s official seal featured an image of Mary and Jesus, and his love of Christian images “became almost embarrassing,” according to one early Jesuit missionary working in Mughal India.

The Jesuits were assisted in their use of Mary as a tool for mission among Indian Muslims by these Mughal emperors who founded and financed an art studio that created devotional icons of Mary for wider consumption. In fact, up to half of the Marian miniatures produced by the studio were made specifically

24 Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam,” 327–28.
25 As reported by the Jesuit historian Du Jarric in his early seventeenth-century account, Akbar and the Jesuits, and quoted in Edward Maclagan, The Jesuits and the Great Mogul (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1932), 54. Akbar and Jahangir are considered heterodox for these and other practices, including the encouragement of interreligious dialogue at their court of Fatehpur Sikri, and the founding of a new syncretistic religion, Din i Ilahi.
26 Du Jarric in Maclagan, Jesuits and Mogul, 48, 54.
27 According to a 1608 letter by the Jesuit missionary Jerónimo Xavier, as quoted in Maclagan, Jesuits and Mogul, 69–70.
for devotional use by Muslims, according to some Jesuit sources. The studio’s artwork featured a new hybrid style that combined classical Persian and Italian Renaissance artistic traditions. But evidently it was not only the heterodox emperors and their elite artists who appreciated the Marian images. According to an account by the Jesuit Fernam Guerreiro (d.1617), a Marian icon displayed by the Jesuits during the 1602 Christmas season attracted thousands of local Muslims, rich and poor, some of whom reportedly wept at the sight: “Truly, even to these infidels, the Virgin showed herself a mother of consolation, seeing how consoled, contrite, and touched by the sight they were.”

In addition to the art school, Emperor Akbar commissioned an illustrated life of Christ featuring twenty-seven images of Jesus and Mary. This book, *Mi-rat al Quds* (The mirror of holiness), published in 1602, is considered the first biography of Christ written by a Christian at the request of a Muslim. It was written in Persian by the Jesuit Jerónimo Xavier (1549–1617), the grandnephew of the famous first Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier (1506–52). The head of the Jesuit mission to Mughal India at the time, Jerónimo Xavier had already written another apologetic tract, *The Truth-Revealing Mirror* (1597), which included not only a dialogue between a Muslim, a Christian, and a philosopher, but also an entire chapter about the veneration of icons, including descriptions of the faces of Mary and other saints. These descriptions are reminiscent of the verbal portrayals of Muhammad and other saints found in the Islamic genre called *hilya*. Xavier was apparently trying to show his Muslim audience that the Christian veneration of Mary is similar to the Muslim veneration of Muhammad (571–632), again with the goal of attracting Muslims to Christianity. Xavier’s *The Mirror of Holiness* also has a Marian focus. Although ostensibly a “life of Christ,” the book contains nine illustrations featuring Mary exclusively, while a large part of the book entitled “On Christ’s Infancy” gives more details about Mary’s infancy than Christ’s. Included in this section are accounts of the annunciation of Mary’s birth to Anne, Mary’s nativity, her seclusion in the temple as a young girl, and her virginity. *The Mirror of Holiness* contains

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28 Gauvin Bailey, *The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissance Art at the Imperial Court of India, 1580–1630* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1998), 46–47.

29 See Punam Madhok, “Christian-Islamic Relations in the Court Art of Mughal India,” *International Journal of the Arts in Society* 4, no. 6 (2010): 67–78; Milo Beach, *The Grand Mughul: Imperial Painting in India* (Williamstown, MA: The Clark Institute, 1978); and Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580–1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

30 Guerreiro, as quoted in Maclagan, *Jesuits and Mogul*, 229–30.

31 Gauvin Bailey, “The Truth-Showing Mirror: Jesuit Catechism and the Arts in Mughal India,” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John O’Malley, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 380–401, at 395.
both artistic and verbal descriptions of Mary’s physical characteristics. For example:

Mary was a girl of middling height and olive complexion, with a long face. Her eyes were large and tending to blue. Her hair was of a golden color. Her hands and fingers were long and well-formed. In every feature she was well proportioned. Her speech was extremely soft. Her gaze was modest and unassuming. The words from her lips were humble and pure, but so much greatness and magnificence were apparent in her countenance that any distressed sinner who chanced to gaze at her fact would pull himself together and become a different person in righteousness.32

Once again, Xavier is mimicking the Islamic tradition of hilya (verbally describing a saint’s physical characteristics). But he takes matters a step further with this line: “any distressed sinner who chanced to gaze at her would [...] become a different person in righteousness.” This suggests Xavier’s hope that Muslims who venerated or even just glanced at a Marian icon might convert to Christianity. Indeed, he seems to be explicitly inviting his Muslim readers to do just that.

But Xavier’s Life of Christ soon attracted other readers besides Muslims. A Latin translation of Xavier’s original Persian text was published by the Protestant Orientalist Louis de Dieu (1590–1642) in Leiden in 1639.33 De Dieu believed that the Catholic Xavier had gotten many details about Jesus and Mary incorrect, as is evidenced by his book’s subtitle, “multis modis contaminata” (corrupted in many ways). De Dieu’s translation of Xavier’s book includes a long appendix of over one hundred pages in which he takes issue with what he sees as Xavier’s improper biblical exegesis, misuse of extrabiblical sources, and overemphasis on Mary. In the preface, de Dieu criticizes not only Xavier but the entire Jesuit missionary project, remarking: “They preach Mary more than Christ.”34 Not surprisingly, de Dieu is more critical of what Xavier says about Mary than anything else. Even though the section on Mary is just one fourth of Xavier’s book, de Dieu’s argument against it takes up half of his critical appendix. He disputes the claim made by Xavier that the presentation of Mary in the temple on November 21 was on a Friday (the Muslim holy day), asserting that

32 Jerome Xavier, The Mirror of Holiness, trans. Wheeler Thackston, in Pedro Moura Carvalho, A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 145.
33 Ludovico de Dieu, Historia Christi Persice, conscripta simulque multis modis contaminata (Leiden, 1639). Print book consulted at Loyola University Chicago archives.
34 De Dieu, Historia Christi, “Iesuitas Mariam magis quam Christum praedicasse,” 5. Translation is mine.
neither the date nor the day can be found in Scripture or even in extra-biblical sources such as the *Protevangelium of James*, which in any case de Dieu calls *mendacissimum* (very mendacious). De Dieu believes that Xavier has taken too many liberties with scripture, so much so that he interjects his otherwise restrained rebuttal with random insults: calling Xavier’s book nonsense, accusing him of impiety, and even questioning his belief in God.\footnote{De Dieu, *Historia Christi*, 581, 582, 632.} De Dieu ends his entire critique of Xavier’s *Life of Christ* by charging the Jesuit with idolatry.\footnote{De Dieu, *Historia Christi*, 632.} Just as was the case with the Dominican Our Lady of Victory, it seems that the Jesuit use of Mary as a mission tool among Muslims often impacted Protestants as much or more than the intended Muslim target. Indeed, it has been suggested by some scholars that the Jesuit mission in India was “a fantastic and extravagant failure,” despite their best attempts to lure the Mughals to Christianity via shared figures like Jesus and Mary.\footnote{For a discussion of higher numbers of converts, see for example S. Bono, “Conversioni di musulmani al cristianesimo, in *Chrétiens et musulmans à la Renaissance*, ed. Bartholomé Bennassar and Robert Sauzet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), 429–45.} However, more recent studies of early modern conversions suggest that more Muslims may have converted to Christianity at this time than was once thought.\footnote{Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit: Baldassarre Loyola Mandes (1631–1667),” in *Journal of Early Modern History* 17, nos. 5–6 (2013): 479–504.} Whether any of these conversions were attributable to Mary is hard to know.

There were a few documented successes, however. Other Jesuits did manage to use Mary as an effective tool for mission, at least according to their own accounts. One important example is Baldassarre Loyola Mandes (1631–67), a Muslim prince from Fez who converted to Christianity and became a Jesuit.\footnote{Emanuele Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit: Baldassarre Loyola Mandes (1631–1667),” in *Journal of Early Modern History* 17, nos. 5–6 (2013): 479–504.} In retelling his own conversion story, Mandes describes Mary appearing frequently to him. For example, he claims that it was a vision of Mary that convinced him to join the Society of Jesus over other orders.\footnote{Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 489.} Also, he says that Mary continued to appear to him after he joined the Jesuits, encouraging him to stay the path he had chosen. For example, he describes a vision he had of her while washing dishes in the Jesuit novitiate: “She told me, laughing, wash Baldassarre, wash, because I used to wash the dishes when I was in the world, and Jesus helped me.”\footnote{Baldassarre Mandes as quoted in Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 486.} This friendly Mary, who seemingly appears solely to encourage a Muslim convert and former prince to persevere in the daily drudgery of his new life, is a far cry from the sword-toting Our Lady of Victory on the
cover of the Dominican rosary pamphlet. Mandes was so convinced of the Virgin Mary’s effectiveness in converting him to Christianity and keeping him there, that he went on to use her as a tool in his own mission work among Muslim slaves in Genoa and Naples. In fact, his desire to serve as a missionary among Muslims was apparently sparked by yet another vision of Mary, in which she encouraged him to go to Mughal India to convert his former coreligionists. Mandes never made it to India; instead, he evangelized among Muslim slaves rowing Genoese and Neapolitan ships. In his preaching to the slaves in nearby Jesuit churches, here too he relied on images of Our Lady of Beauty to attract Muslims to Christianity, just as he had been attracted by visions of her.

Later Jesuits would exaggerate the role Mary had in Mandes’s conversion: the Jesuit who gave his funeral sermon affirmed that “es toda de María su conversión” (his conversion was entirely due to Mary). The centrality of Mary in Mandes’s conversion was celebrated by a play that was later written about him by Calderón de la Barca (1600–81) and performed at Jesuit colleges all over Europe; in this play, Mary’s role as a bridge between Christianity and Islam is highlighted. With this play, the Jesuits spread the idea that an attractive Mary, “Our Lady of Beauty,” had the power to entice Muslims to become Christians. And in their eyes, the case of Mandes was proof positive of her effectiveness as a mission tool.

3 Conclusion

This article has highlighted two distinctive images of Mary which were deployed against Muslims the early modern era: the Dominican Our Lady of Victory, and the Jesuit Our Lady of Beauty. Carving out this neat dichotomy (perhaps too neat) is not to say that the Dominicans never saw the possibility of Our Lady of Beauty. After all, thirteenth-century Dominican missionaries such as William of Tripoli (c.1220–73) wrote about, and expressed surprise and pleasure at, the existence of Marian verses in the Qur’an, and also described Marian devotion among Muslims—seeing both as possible bridges between Islam and Christianity in the patristic, medieval, and early modern eras, see Rita George Tvrtković, Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History (New York: Paulist Press, 2018).

42 Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 499.
43 Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 499–500.
44 Pedro Francisco Esquex, as quoted in Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 490.
45 Colombo, “Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 490, 497. For more on Mary as a bridge (and barrier) between Islam and Christianity in the patristic, medieval, and early modern eras, see Rita George Tvrtković, Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History (New York: Paulist Press, 2018).
the two religions. Nor is it to say that the Jesuits never made recourse to Our Lady of Victory in attempts to convert or outright defeat Muslims or other non-Catholic groups. Jesuits did employ militaristic images of Mary, but not until the later seventeenth century. For example, in 1683, Jesuits responded to the Ottoman siege of Vienna in the same way that Dominicans responded to Lepanto in 1571: by explicitly connecting Christian missionary and military endeavors. The Jesuit Niccolò Maria Pallavicino (1621–92) described this link in an anti-Islamic book written soon after the Vienna siege: “The topic of my book is religious, even though it speaks of war; indeed, the aim of this war is the defeat of Islam.” Pallavicino described Muslims as the enemy of Mary in another book, La grandezza della Madre di Dio. In short, Mary was a flexible tool, used in different ways by different orders at different times in their encounters with Islam. The images were never mutually exclusive to one order or the other.

However, it is clear that Dominicans played a central role in shaping Our Lady of Victory in the sixteenth century. Despite the work of earlier Dominican missionaries living in the Islamic world in the thirteenth century (Riccoldo da Montecroce, William of Tripoli, Ramón Martí), many of whom stayed for years in Muslim lands and knew enough about Islam to acknowledge some similarities between it and Christianity (one God, resurrection of the body, judgment day, good works like prayer and fasting, etc.), by the time the early modern period dawned, Dominicans living in Europe had taken a more defensive posture towards Islam, due in part to fear over renewed Ottoman incursions into the continent. Most sixteenth-century Dominican promoters of the rosary, Marian confraternities, and Our Lady of Victory did not live among Muslims nor did they know Arabic or the Qur’an. Few seemed aware that Sura 19 is named after Mary, or that many Muslims venerate her as the virgin mother of Prophet Jesus. This ignorance, plus the new political situation in Europe with the Ottomans, meant that most were unable or unwilling to see how Mary might have attracted Muslims to Christianity. Instead, they focused on her power to compel and conquer, and drew on that in their fight against Muslims.

Likewise, the Jesuits played a central role in creating and deploying Our Lady of Beauty as a means to attract Muslims to Christianity. The Jesuit missionaries

46 See Rita George-Tvrtković, “Bridge or Barrier?: Mary and Islam in William of Tripoli and Nicholas of Cusa,” Medieval Encounters 22, no. 4 (2016): 307–25.
47 Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam,” 328.
48 See Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam,” especially 318–21.
49 Pallavicino, Le moderne prosperità (1688) as quoted in Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam,” 319.
50 Colombo, “Jesuits and Islam,” 325.
who used this more positive Marian evangelization strategy either lived for an extended time in Islamic lands (Xavier in Mughal India), or had once been Muslim themselves (Mandes). They knew Mary’s potential power as a shared figure, and creatively used new hybrid art forms and stories of visions as a way to entice Muslims to Christianity. Even medieval Dominican missionaries like William of Tripoli, who was aware of and wrote about Mary’s attractiveness to Muslims, didn’t think to use her explicitly in this way. Later readers of William, the most famous being Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), did—but only rhetorically, not actually.51

Despite the popularity of these two images of Mary in the early modern era—the Dominican Our Lady of Victory and the Jesuit Our Lady of Beauty—neither was especially effective in converting masses of Muslims, as noted above. Yet both images of Mary remain alive in the Catholic imagination, continuing to affect how some approach Muslims even today. A Google search of Our Lady of Victory or Lepanto will lead to multiple traditionalist websites and blogs that still encourage Catholics to pray the rosary to defeat specific groups of Muslims—usually terrorist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda. Likewise, a version of Our Lady of Beauty is alive and well among Catholics engaged in interreligious dialogue today. They consider Mary—who Muslims and Christians revere as the pure, chosen, courageous, and faithful virgin mother of Jesus—to be a shared figure with real potential: not to lure Muslims to Christianity, but to bring Muslims and Christians together in friendship and conversation. And early modern Dominicans and Jesuits played a key role in shaping both these enduring images of Mary.

51 See Nicholas of Cusa’s plea to Mehmet II to declare Mary to be Theotokos throughout his empire, as a means to convert everyone to Christianity. *Cribratio alkorani*, 111.17.