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Strength Without Force: Redefining Perceptions of Power in Early Modern Bosnian-Herzegovinian and European Catholic Culture

This article examines the value system of early modern Catholic culture through post-Tridentine pastoral literature produced by the Franciscans of Bosna Srebrena, with particular attention to how it conceptualizes the relationship between strength and weakness. At the centre of this relationship is the redefinition of physical strength and dominance, which are challenged and subordinated to a notion of strength grounded in mental and moral capacities. The analysis shows that, in representations of the ideal individual, aggression and appropriation are displaced by self-control and respect for others' rights, while, in representations of the ideal social order, the concept of delegated authority is promoted in place of power established by force. These values are linked to shifts in the religious imaginary: images of God as a powerful king and a just judge, and images of saints, align with the value shift described, whereas images of Jesus and Mary provide symbolic support for compassion, endurance, and the protection of the weak. The findings are interpreted within the broader framework of worldview changes in early modern Western European culture.

Keywords: Catholic renewal, Bosna Srebrena, early modern period, religious imaginary, post-Tridentine pastoral literature, concepts of power.

Framework, Context, and Sources

Orders of power in the exterior collective (social) sphere—and the mechanisms by which they are established (attribution, transfer, resistance, negotiation, and consensus)—have correlates in the interior collective sphere: in the worldviews, belief systems, and values shared by a community. At this inner level, cultural conceptions of what counts as legitimate authority and acceptable power take shape alongside its social forms. This article examines how such conceptions are formed and what role they play in early modern Bosnian-Herzegovinian and European Catholic culture.

The study's framework is Ken Wilber's integral theory, which treats interior and exterior collective reality as two perspectives on the same whole.[1] Wilber approaches reality through four irreducible dimensions—interior/exterior and individual/collective ("the four corners of the Kosmos"[2]). None of these is primary or derived from the others; none causes or explains the others. Every phenomenon includes all four perspectives and can be examined from each of them.[3] Moreover, none of the four dimensions is static: all evolve, tending toward ever deeper and more complex unities. The basic capacities (developmental lines) within each dimension unfold through a series of developmental sequences, which Wilber calls levels, stages, or waves.[4]

At the centre of this study is the interior collective dimension, where capacities such as representational systems, cognitive style, shared values, cultural practices and norms, ethics, language, beliefs, customs, and conceptions of space and time develop (at an uneven pace) through a series of deep developmental levels that Wilber calls cultural worldviews. He distinguishes these deep developmental structures—ahistorical and cross-cultural—from surface structures, shaped by particular historical contexts. A full account, he argues, must keep both in view: deep waves and their historical realizations—vertical and horizontal perspectives at once.[5]

Accordingly, this study reads social structures and cultural systems and worldviews as two perspectives on one reality. It therefore examines the establishment of authority in the social sphere in relation to a community's conceptions of legitimate and desirable forms of power. These conceptions change over time; here they are analysed within post-Tridentine Bosnian-Herzegovinian and European Catholic culture, with attention to both historically specific surface formations and deeper shifts in cultural worldviews.

The article aims to illuminate a major early modern shift in Western European culture: the much wider diffusion of a mental cultural worldview than in previous centuries.[6] In the ecclesiastical culture examined here, this shift is reflected in a clash between two value systems—one grounded in physical, the other in mental and moral capacities—traced through competing conceptions of power and rule in post-Tridentine literature.

More specifically, the study examines how power is conceived and legitimated in religious texts produced by the Franciscans of the Province of Bosna Srebrena between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The

[1] Although its elements had developed in his earlier phases of research, Wilber first presented his integral theory in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (1995), which is also his "magnum opus". BORŠ 2012. p. 31. In numerous subsequent books he elaborated the model's application in various fields.
[2] WILBER 1996. p. 69.
[3] WILBER 1995. p. 121–126.
[4] WILBER 2000. p. 5–32.
[5] WILBER 2002. p. 35–36.
[6] For an explanation of Wilber's model of cultural worldviews and the characteristics of the mental cultural worldview, see: BELJAN KOVAČIĆ 2024a. p. 41–89.

corpus spans key genres of post-Tridentine pastoral writing—catechisms, sermon collections, confession manuals, and other pastoral handbooks—as well as Franciscan historiographical works such as monastic chronicles.

It asks how this post-Tridentine literature—translated and adapted by the Bosnian Franciscans—redefines the relationship between strength and weakness, thereby reshaping notions of legitimate authority and personal strength. The working assumption is that this shift is expressed not only in explicit norms but also in evaluative language: traits such as self-control, endurance, obedience, and mercy are elevated, while aggression, appropriation, arbitrariness, and violence are discredited. Methodologically, the article offers interpretive reading of representative passages across the main pastoral genres, comparing their value logic and recurrent rhetorical patterns.

Yet the phenomenon discussed here exceeds a narrowly Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural-historical frame. Owing to Ottoman expansion, Bosna Srebrena provided pastoral care across a vast territory from the sixteenth century until eighteenth-century provincial reorganisations: Bosnia and Herzegovina, parts of Dalmatia and Lika, parts of Slavonia and the southern Danubian lands, and areas of Transylvania and Bulgaria.[7] In this paper, "Bosnian Franciscans" denotes members of the Province from all these regions.[8] The literature they produced—intended for clergy and laity across this territory—helped shape a shared symbolic and value system among Catholic communities under Ottoman rule.

A second reason for this broader relevance is that the corpus was largely compiled from Western (Latin and Italian) sources. It arose from pastoral needs faced by local clergy—much like priests elsewhere in post-Tridentine Catholic Europe: regular preaching, confession and sacramental ministry, and systematic catechesis. To facilitate these duties for priests who did not readily use Latin, the most educated members of the Franciscan community devoted considerable effort to producing vernacular translations and adaptations.[9]

The conceptions of power and strength analysed here therefore draw on Western sources, Church documents, and the Tridentine Catechism.

[7] DŽAJA 2008. p. 54–55; KNEZOVIĆ 2016. p. 229–235.

[8] Early modern Franciscan historiography uses distinct labels when indicating a person's origin or describing relations among friars in different parts of the Province. See: BARIŠIĆ 2023. p. 37–38.

[9] In their prefaces, Franciscan authors often lament the low level of clerical education. In the early eighteenth century, Stipan Margitić writes in the preface to *Fala od Sveti* (*Praise of the Saints*): "In the same way one finds priests and monks, and they excuse themselves and say that they have not studied or learned much, do not know many languages, do not understand letters and other things. This, therefore, is teaching that anyone can understand, and by it help himself and others" MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 111. Filip Lastrić makes a similar point, noting that preaching manuals were prepared "for the convenience of pastors who have no time to learn (mostly out of sloth)" LASTRIĆ 1766a. p. III. In the preface to *Od' uza me* (*Vademecum*), the same author notes that he took pains to ease the duties of parish priests, "for the benefit of the souls of the simple folk" LASTRIĆ 1765. p. 3. Such complaints reflect wider European patterns: Jean Delumeau remarks that in the mid-seventeenth-century diocese of Paris many clergy did not know Latin, did not read, and owned very few books. DELUMEAU 1993. p. 308.

Accordingly, the article focuses on the normative and prescriptive layer of post-Tridentine pastoral literature—the ideals and value hierarchies it promotes—without treating these texts as direct evidence of lived practice in any particular community. At this discursive level, the findings may, with due caution, be related to early modern Catholic culture more generally.[10]

Core Themes

The formation of conceptions of strength, power, authority, and legitimate modes of establishing authority in this literature can be analysed on three levels: the individual, the collective, and the sacral. Accordingly, the article examines representations of the ideal person and the ideal community, as well as representations of God and the nature of his power. Across all three domains, an underlying tension emerges between two value systems—one promoted by the Church and another it repeatedly seeks to suppress. At the centre of this tension is a different understanding of the relationship between strength and weakness: what "strength" is, where it comes from, and who possesses it. The following sections outline how pastoral literature redefines that relationship.

Before turning to this question, it should be emphasised that the representations discussed here are not inventions of the Catholic Reformation. They belong to a long Christian tradition: a system of values, virtues, norms, and religious practices formed over centuries in monastic communities through rules and the practical organisation of communal life.[11] Likewise, the Tridentine norms on which the texts analysed in this article rely are, in most cases, not wholly new; they often reaffirm earlier canonical and conciliar traditions.

What is new in the early modern period is the scale of dissemination. In both Catholic and Protestant reform movements, religious instruction and discipline increasingly address ordinary believers of all social ranks, not primarily elites. This expansion is evident at multiple levels. Practices once associated primarily with monastic discipline are reframed as obligations binding on all the faithful: restraining aggressive impulses and "taming" the body, daily prayer, fasting on prescribed days, participation in worship and the reception of the sacraments, as well as reflection on religious texts and the acquisition of basic religious knowledge.[12]

[10] The literature and culture of the Franciscans of Bosna Srebrena provide a useful lens for tracing broader patterns of the Catholic Reformation, as well as the ways in which they were adapted to particular local circumstances.

[11] In this context, I refer to the works of Marko Jerković, who examines the system of virtues and practices developed in medieval monastic communities, articulated in spiritual and normative literature, and serving the stability and cohesion of communal life. See his analysis of Cistercian observance and the programme of radical conversion, JERKOVIĆ 2021. p. 35–60. He also analyses the disciplinary discourse through which these ideals were meant to be translated into practice and common observance preserved. JERKOVIĆ 2019. p. 503–528.

[12] In assessing the reach of Catholic reform in the lives of ordinary people, the historian John Bossy stresses that the practices and obligations in question were not "invented" in the Counter-

While this study examines conceptions articulated in Christian literature and practice long before the early modern period, it focuses on their diffusion through pastoral texts intended for a much wider clerical and lay public. These conceptions now underpin the norms by which all Catholics are expected to live; those norms, in turn, shape concrete disciplinary practices in the external collective sphere.

Individual Sphere

Against this background, I return to the redefinition of the relationship between strength and weakness—a recurring theme throughout the corpus. I begin with a passage from the popular work *Cvijet od kriposti* (*Flower of Virtues*, 1647) by the Dalmatian Franciscan Pavao Posilović, an adaptation of the medieval compilation *Fiore di virtù*.[13]

Chapter 27 of *Cvijet od kriposti* discusses the virtue of fortitude. "Natural strength" is not counted as a virtue, and courage grounded in it is explicitly denied moral worth: "to be so free as to fear nothing—this is not fortitude, but the bestial folly." True fortitude, by contrast, is the courage "to be free of oneself and to fear no adversity," and to possess "patience and the will to endure every pain and sorrow."[14] Strength is thus relocated to self-mastery—resisting temptation—and to the capacity to bear hardship.

This passage is paradigmatic: throughout the corpus two value orders are set against each other—one rooted in the physical, the other in the spiritual, or more precisely (from a developmental perspective) the mental domain.[15] The latter is expressed in the virtues these texts consistently promote: self-control, restraint, patience, endurance, meekness, obedience to authority, mercy, and compassion for the weak. By contrast, the traits ecclesiastical culture seeks to curb include aggression, forcefulness, arbitrariness, violence, appropriation, deceit, and the exploitation of the vulnerable.[16]

Reformation. They had been prescribed earlier, but their enforcement was constrained by the pre-Tridentine Church's structure: "the Church of the last medieval centuries was not in actual fact a parochially-grounded institution. The disciplinary significance of the Council of Trent and of two centuries of activity on the part of the Catholic hierarchy lie in their determination that it should effectually become so grounded: that the code of parochial observance should be made watertight and universally enforced. This did not require much new legislation, but called for a decidedly new attitude to old legislation." Bossy 1999. p. 88.

13 *Fiore di virtù*, a popular medieval moral-didactic compilation, originated in Italy in the thirteenth century. Alongside early modern sources, Bosnian Franciscans also drew on medieval European literature. As noted above, the representations examined here are not new, but they are now directed to a much broader audience. Posilović's book circulated widely in the area under the pastoral care of Bosna Srebrena and went through four editions—two in Cyrillic and two in Latin script. Kovačić 1991. p. 284.

14 Posilović 2001. p. 225.

15 For explanations of the semantic range of the terms spirit and mind in the analysed corpus, as well as for an interpretation of this conflict between spirit and body as an evolutionary conflict between mental and pre-mental stages, see: Beljan Kovačić 2024a. p. 336–340.

16 The dynamics of the development of these value systems are clarified by the study *Spiral Dynamics* by D. E. Beck and C. C. Cowan, where they are labelled as the red and blue value memes. Beck – Cowan 1996. 219–243.

In a similar vein, the eighteenth-century Dalmatian Franciscan Toma Babić, in his catechism *Cvit razlika mirisa duhovnoga* (*Florilegium of Spiritual Fragrances*) defines the virtue of fortitude as the strength to endure and resist sinful temptations, and to bear adversity for the love of God, salvation, and heavenly glory.[17] Unresentful endurance of hardship—illness, misfortune, suffering—is among the central ideals of this literature. It is also a prominent homiletic theme, as Stipan Margitić's early eighteenth-century sermon collection *Fala od sveti* (*Praise of the Saints*) shows: three sermons praise patient endurance of suffering, exile, and illness as an imitation of Christ's Passion.[18]

The same value order shapes attitudes toward the weak. Religious literature encourages compassion for the sorrowful, the poor, those in distress, and even sinners. These virtues are framed explicitly as an imitation of Christ: "to be touched with compassion for other men's needs, both in heart and in mind" is "to bear the Cross of Christ."[19] Hence serving the helpless—serving Christ in them—is presented as more valuable than fasting and other ascetic works. Catechisms likewise foreground the works of mercy, urging charity toward the hungry, the sick, prisoners, and the dying.[20]

Notably, many of the virtues promoted here would register as weakness within an older value system: to endure suffering and to show compassion, in a regime grounded in physical prowess, marks one as a "weakling." A key task of pastoral writing is therefore to redefine strength and weakness: domination by force is no longer read as heroism but as weakness—a lack of self-rule and a tendency toward wilfulness—set against submission to authority and to God's will.

In a value system grounded in physical strength, illness and bodily infirmity register as weakness. In this literature, however, "strength" is relocated to moral and spiritual attainment, so physical frailty is no barrier to virtue. Church culture thus largely overcomes the limitations of perceiving bodily sickness as mere weakness. Yet the same cannot be said of psychic pain: fear, anxiety, melancholy, and other forms of inward suffering are construed as weakness and sin.

The clearest examples again appear in Posilović's *Cvijet*, where psychic pain is systematically classified as a moral defect and a sin. He distinguishes three kinds of "sorrow": excessive sorrow that exceeds what the occasion "requires"; an apathy in which a man "stands as a dead body," counted as a grave sin; and melancholy as a state of doubt and joylessness, joined with unreason. The latter is "a branch of folly," for it leads to this, that "a man knows not what he does."[21] Fear is treated in a similar key: as groundless fear "in thoughts"; as excessive fear without footing in outward reality, dismissed as the fear of men "of a

[17] BABIĆ 1829. p. 158.
[18] MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 418–423.
[19] DIVKOVIĆ 2016. p. 191.
[20] DIVKOVIĆ 2016. p. 567–572, 756.
[21] POSILOVIĆ 2001. p. 202.

woman's heart"; and as fear arising from "weakness of mind."[22] In sum, such inward pains are interpreted as weakness—either the fruit of sin or diabolical temptation.

Collective Sphere

Turning to the social sphere, the same tension appears: ecclesiastical culture explicitly rejects the claim that the strong have a right to rule. It condemns taking (or approving the taking of) power by force and subjugation and instead promotes delegated authority. Power is not seized by the mighty but received through the transfer of office—by appointment from a higher authority—within a pyramidal order whose source is God.

In the analysed corpus, conceptions of the origin of power and rule are articulated chiefly in the ecclesiastical register, through discussions of the Church's authority and the source and scope of priestly powers. These passages shape a model of hierarchy derived from a single source and transmitted by appointment "from above downwards." God is the supreme authority; Christ confers a mandate upon Peter, read as the foundation of ecclesiastical order: "Saint Peter had all authority from Jesus Christ […] and so it shall be until God's judgement." The pope is presented as Peter's successor and thus "the true vicar of Jesus Christ on earth."[23] Authority then descends through bishops to priests, so that even the lowest office-holder is to be respected as bearing delegated power.[24]

If we set aside the (considerable) problems that follow from this concept of hierarchy, it is important to stress that this conception of power marks a major shift away from a model in which rule is won by force. Delegated authority is set against an order in which "might makes right." This claim concerns an ideal—an articulated value system that, over several centuries, guided discourse and sought to shape individual and collective conduct—rather than a description of actual outcomes.

Within the corpus, the rejection of the claim that the strong have a right to rule is most clearly articulated in Bosnian Franciscan texts that are not compiled from Western sources but are largely original—above all, monastery chronicles. These works are particularly well suited to tracing, on the one hand, notions of power and authority inherited from official Catholic discourse and, on the other, the concrete conditions and real power relations of life under Ottoman rule.

The most valuable chronicles—those by Nikola Lašvanin, Bono Benić, and Marijan Bogdanović—were written in the eighteenth century, when Ottoman rule entered a period of crisis. In the frontier Bosnian pashalik this crisis was reflected in the growing power of local magnates at the expense of central

[22] Posilović 2001. p. 226.
[23] Divković 2013. p. 409–410.
[24] For the principles of this understanding of hierarchy, and their implications for the culture and worldview of the Franciscans of Bosna Srebrena, see: Beljan Kovačić 2024b. p. 163–179.

administration, the decadence and corruption of the state apparatus, and rising banditry and violence.[25]

These developments form the chronicles' main focus. They portray the decay of the Ottoman administration and the everyday coercion exercised by institutions and individuals: from unlawful taxation and extortion through official channels to violence by individuals and Janissary units, often left unpunished. Systematic bribery as a means of survival also figures among their central concerns. Yet the chroniclers do more than record events: they cast them as a lament over injustice, violence, and repression, condemning a social order restrained not by law but by force.[26]

By contrast, compiled pastoral literature—unlike chronicle writing and documents—rarely engages concrete historical circumstances. As noted above, it develops notions about power chiefly within the religious domain, especially through discussions of the Church's authority. Even so, it projects the principle of delegated authority and a pyramidal vision of society into the secular sphere as well, drawing on Western models based on the division of society into distinct social groups and detailed catalogues of the sins associated with them.[27]

At the same time, this literature tends to compress social structure into two estates—clerical and lay—subordinating the latter to the former. This hierarchical optic dominates those sections that discuss ecclesiastical authority, explicitly placing it above every form of secular power. In such passages the Church is often presented simply as clergy and people—"rulers and subjects."[28]

[25] DŽAJA 1971. p. 39–47, 226–227.

[26] Since these themes dominate the chronicles, I do not single out isolated cases but refer instead to paradigmatic passages from Benić and Bogdanović that illustrate the main pressures: excessive and unlawful taxation. BENIĆ 2003. p. 156–163, 281. Coercion by state officials and the extortion of money from monasteries through the manipulation of permits for repairing religious buildings. BOGDANOVIĆ 2003. p. 82–95. The costs of obtaining confirmations of privileges. BOGDANOVIĆ 2003. p. 51–101. Suspicions that monasteries were spying for foreign powers. BENIĆ 2003. p. 137–144, 255–268. And the dangers posed by Janissary detachments when departing for war. BENIĆ 2003. p. 255–256; BOGDANOVIĆ 2003. p. 118–134. For historical analyses that contextualise the problems repeatedly recorded in the Franciscan chronicles see: DŽAJA 1999. p. 183–190.

[27] Divković's catechism *Nauk krstjanski* (*Christian Doctrine*) offers a clear example of the elaboration of estate-based duties and estate-specific sins, including instructions for examining one's conscience and guidance for confessors on how to question penitents about such obligations. DIVKOVIĆ 2013. p. 126, 331–334. These texts also not infrequently present estate hierarchy as a spiritual order, as shown by the following passage from Divković's *Besjede* (*Sermons*): "All the Christian people who are in God's grace are one spiritual body in Jesus Christ. And in this spiritual body not all members have the same function—for some are monks and spiritual rulers, and some are lords and temporal rulers, and some are merchants, and some are labourers" DIVKOVIĆ 2016. p. 460.

[28] ANČIĆ 1679b. p. 106. Ančić explicitly stresses that the clergy stands above secular (royal) authority and above secular courts, to which it cannot be subjected. ANČIĆ 1681. p. 28–29, 75.

Sacred sphere

The value system described above is mirrored in representations of God and the saints, and in prevailing conceptions of the holy. Such imagery is a sensitive indicator of cultural ideals: where divine figures are carnal and violent, meekness and restraint can hardly function as a developmental horizon. Here, these representations are approached also in terms of their transformative force: they orient recipients toward an ideal, shape inner dispositions and outward conduct, and activate the capacities they embody—functioning, in Wilber's terms, as "symbols of transformation."[29]

It matters, therefore, which representations of God and the saints prevail in the corpus. One of the most frequent is God as Father. At times the texts encourage an intimate relationship with a paternal deity, as in Divković's catechism: "Our Father—this is a name, a name of love and a name of grace," for God "loved us so greatly that he willed to be called our Father, and likewise wills that we be called his sons."[30] Overall, however, "Father" here tends to resemble the figure of a strict patriarch more than a tender, affectionate parent.

Consistent with this is the single most common divine title in the corpus: Lord. God is portrayed as an omnipotent king enthroned—owner of land and life, strict and just ruler, and lawgiver who demands and rewards obedience, protects the good, and calls the wicked to amend their ways. Surrounded by servants and a courtly retinue, he appears, in short, as Lord and Master: a powerful yet benevolent feudal lord.

Judge is another frequent title and a central function within this imagery of divine rule. As Lord (the feudal master), God is also judge over his domain: just, yet also fearsome and vengeful. He is "merciful to the merciful and unmerciful to the unmerciful," good toward the weak and crushing toward the mighty.[31]

This image of God stands in contrast to representations of powerful yet capricious deities whose favour shifts with circumstance.[32] Post-Tridentine literature instead stresses God's justice and consistency and frames the relationship in covenantal terms: fidelity elicits mercy, breach elicits punishment. "If we present ourselves before God humble and merciful toward the poor, and loving of our neighbour, God will be to us gentle and merciful. If we present ourselves proud, wrathful, and unmerciful, so will God present

[29] WILBER 2002. p. 142–146. It is important to stress that the representations analysed here are not treated as random or arbitrary. Integral theory holds (i) that none of the four perspectives is hierarchically prior to the others and (ii) that deep developmental structures set limits to cultural construction; it therefore rejects extreme cultural constructivism and its claims about the arbitrariness and radical relativity of representations. WILBER 1997. p. 27–28; WILBER 1995: 29–30, 38–40. Since the representational world is central to this study, I foreground its role in transformations of the interior collective dimension of reality.

[30] DIVKOVIĆ 2013. p. 202.

[31] DIVKOVIĆ 2016. p. 130.

[32] In presenting the "red" value meme, Beck and Cowan describe the gods typical of this value system as individualised deities with unpredictable behaviour: the gods "acquire human foibles; they are spiteful, demanding, jealous, and whimsically beneficent." BECK – COWAN 1996. p. 216.

himself to us."[33] As an image of divine law, this representation fosters order, obedience to hierarchy, and a logic of just exchange: reciprocity and measure become central to the figure of God as the world's just judge.

Human exemplars—the saints—are presented as embodiments of the virtues promoted in this culture: restraint, patience, endurance, humility, obedience, and mercy toward the weak.[34] In this connection, historian Jacques Le Goff notes a major shift in Western Christian ideals of sanctity from the thirteenth century onward: mercy and poverty increasingly replace the display of exceptional holiness through extreme ascetic feats, which he associates with early medieval sanctity.[35]

In the analysed corpus—drawing on medieval and early modern sources—both ideals remain fully present: help for the weak and needy appears in saints' lives as frequently as ascetic exploits. Saints are held up as models of service to the poor and abandoned, thereby serving God, "loving him not only in himself, but also in his creature," namely in the poor and needy, "whom the Saviour calls his least brethren."[36] Yet saints are not only supports for virtues such as endurance, obedience, and compassion; they are also portrayed as instruments of God's power, strength, and justice—manifesting both his mercy and his severity.[37] They are further conceived as representatives of the "Militant Church", and accounts of their deeds not infrequently employ military language.[38]

Le Goff detects this shift in the religious imaginary—an emphasis on mercy and compassion rather than force—most clearly in changing representations of Jesus. From the twelfth/thirteenth centuries onward, Western Christian iconography and devotion increasingly foreground Christ as man and sufferer rather than triumphant victor.[39] At the same time, he argues, the cross shifts from a symbol of victory and military triumph to one of contrition and suffering.[40] This representation aligns with the value shift analysed here: patient endurance of hardship is elevated above conquering and forcefulness,

[33] MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 396.

[34] In the analysed corpus, the best sources for examining how these elements relate within representations of saints are the sermon collections *Fala od sveti* (*Praise of the Saints*) by Stipan Margitić (1708) and *Svetnjak* (*Saints' Calendar*) by Filip Lastrić (1766).

[35] In short, the "new" saint becomes less tense—more smiling, open, and affirmative in his virtues. LE GOFF 1998. p. 469.

[36] LASTRIĆ 1766b. p. 138. The shift toward mercy does not, of course, entail the disappearance of asceticism from the saintly ideal: the topos of "taming the body" appears in every saint's portrayal in this literature. Saints are also credited with extreme ascetic practices (paradigmatic examples in MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 249–250, 363–366).

[37] In *Fala od sveti*, each sermon emphasises that the saints' deeds manifest God's power and strength rather than their own. MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 173–174, 177, 225, 271, 281.

[38] Margitić also frequently portrays saints as "soldiers of Jesus Christ, soldiers of the Catholic faith," and "soldiers of God's honour and the holy faith". MARGITIĆ 2015. p. 148. Similar martial imagery of saints and angels appears in Lastrić as well; the Archangel Michael in particular is cast as a "commander, standard-bearer, and captain," leading the angelic host in war against the devil, unbelievers, and heretics. LASTRIC 1766b. p. 152–153.

[39] LE GOFF 2010. p. 99.

[40] LE GOFF 1998. p. 219.

while mercy and care for the weak become pleasing to God insofar as they are framed as imitation of Christ. Having crystallised in the high Middle Ages, this Christological imagery becomes, in the post-Tridentine period, an important vehicle for disseminating an official system of values, norms, and obligations among ordinary Catholics.

In texts produced by the Franciscans of Bosna Srebrena between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Jesus is presented as a sufferer and merciful redeemer. In contrast to his divine omnipotence, the literature repeatedly stresses gentleness, quietness, and an unassuming manner: "Jesus Christ was poor, meek, humble, patient, quiet, kindly, God-loving in all things spiritual." The opening chapter of Divković's influential catechism *Nauk krstjanski* (*Christian Doctrine*) presents Christ's life as the foundation of poverty, humility, and endurance: "Jesus Christ lived in great poverty, in great meekness, in great lowliness, in great patience, in great quietness, in a kindled and burning love which he bears for the sake of our salvation."[41] His death is interpreted as the summit of humility: "So deeply did he humble himself that he would die the most shameful death. In those days the most shameful death was to die upon the cross."[42]

Yet this image of the gentle Christ is consistently balanced by Christ-the-Judge, who at the end of time will call the world to account and demand satisfaction for the suffering he endured. This figure recurs in chapters devoted to the end times, the Last Judgement, and Christ's second coming—his coming as Judge, not as Sufferer. The Judge is righteous yet wrathful toward sinners, resolved to establish final justice, and in judgement "unyielding and without mercy." Then all nations will behold him "clad in a garment of justice, and not in one of mercy; girded […] for vengeance […] with eyes of fire full of anger; with feet trampling sinners into the fire; with a dreadful voice, like the roar that overwhelms sinners with its suddenness."[43] As with God the Father, Jesus is thus presented in both capacities: merciful and compassionate, yet also righteous and terrifying in condemnation and punishment.

The only saintly figure in the corpus without this duality is Mary, Jesus' mother. She is never presented as a strict, punitive power; rather, she shelters sinners from God's wrath.[44] Le Goff therefore places special weight on the emergence, in the high Middle Ages, of the image of Mary as Mother. The spread of Marian devotion in the West, especially from the twelfth/thirteenth century onward, reflects a shift in religious sensibility and a "feminisation of Christianity."[45] These images also enter the corpus analysed here and, in the

[41] Divković 2013. p. 122.
[42] Divković 2013. p. 123.
[43] Margitić 2015. p. 306.
[44] In this role, Mary most often appears in miracle stories and exempla. In Divković's collection of miracles *Sto čudesa* (*Hundred Miracles*, 1611), an adaptation of a work by the Dominican J. Herolt, there are several examples in which Mary prevents Jesus from destroying the sinful world. Divković 2013. p. 516–519.
[45] Le Goff 2010. p. 99–102.

era of Catholic reform, become part of the piety promoted among broad social strata.

In the corpus, Mary is named not only as Mother and Virgin but also as Queen—an exalted heavenly sovereign. This role is linked to her most common title here, Our Lady. Within the image of the spiritual world as a feudal court—with God as Lord—Our Lady (*Gospa/Gospoja*) is among the most frequent designations for Mary alongside Virgin and Mother.

As Mother and Queen, Mary most often appears in this religious literature as a protector. Even a cursory look at the groups placed under her patronage shows that Mary embodies the new sensibility, a shift in the value order and in the very understanding of weakness and strength. Under her protection are the powerless: the physically and mentally ill, the socially vulnerable and marginalised—those branded as "weaklings" in value order grounded in physical strength and dominance.[46] The clearest expression of the value shift promoted by this culture is Mary as motherly guardian of the weak, holding them in her lap or sheltering them beneath her mantle.[47]

Norms, Prohibitions, and Obligations

The representational system outlined above does not remain confined to the inner sphere of belief. It grounds a regime of norms, prohibitions, and obligations that, in the post-Tridentine era, came to encompass Catholics of every social estate. These norms also underpin disciplinary practices, where correlations between inner dispositions and outer collective realities become visible. The prohibitions themselves can be traced across the same three domains used above: the sacral, intersubjective, and subjective.

In the sacral domain, offences are tied directly to images of the heavenly deity and to conceptions of the sacred discussed earlier. Catechisms and manuals insist on a strict ban on attributing supernatural power to objects or ordinary people; hence idolatry and magic figure centrally in expositions of the First Commandment.[48] In line with Tridentine guidance, the veneration of saints is likewise regulated: belief that saints themselves possess supernatural power is explicitly forbidden, and they are framed only as a medium of God's power.[49]

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[46] In Divković's *Sto čudesa* (*Hundred Miracles*), Mary helps children, widows, poor girls, women in danger, sailors and travellers, the sick (physically and mentally), and also all sinners who flee to her for help.

[47] This image is especially vividly articulated in the Marian songs by Pavao Posilović, which he inserts into *Naslađenje duhovno* (*Spiritual Delight*). POSILOVIĆ 2021. p. 132–154.

[48] DIVKOVIĆ 2013. p. 236–239; POSILOVIĆ 2021. p. 221; MATIJEVIĆ 1630. p. 48–49. Consistent with the ban on attributing power to anyone but God, all manuals condemn wilfulness and prescribe submission to ecclesiastical authority and to God. The Fourth Commandment—formally concerned with relations to parents—is also extended to Church authority: the Church and its ministers are one's "elders," and disobedience to them is treated as sin. POSILOVIĆ 2021. p. 222.

[49] Divković's catechism *Nauk krstjanski* (*Christian Doctrine*) therefore insists that believers do not venerate the saints "as the Lord God but as God's friends and servants, for God's saints give us nothing of themselves" DIVKOVIĆ 2013. p. 237.

The literature also forbids attributing power to fate and rejects belief in the influence of stars and planets on human will and action. Confession manuals therefore ask whether one has "believed that the heavens, the moon, and the other stars can compel our will and make us sin against our own choosing."[50] Such prohibitions rest on free will and thus on personal responsibility: one must not claim that something "was fated" because of the star under which one was born. Divković's sermons put it succinctly: "The evil and the good that we do are not by fate nor by the stars, but by our will and by our own choosing."[51]

A particularly elaborate system of norms is developed in the intersubjective domain. Here the texts single out strict bans on endangering another person's physical well-being—above all murder, incitement to murder, and any form of participation in it, as well as all forms of physical assault. They also prohibit condemning the righteous to death or judging the accused without witnesses.[52]

Alongside these bans, the corpus sets out a detailed catalogue of prohibitions governing violations of property rights. It condemns seizure and theft—not only direct theft, but every form of fraud and deception aimed at appropriating another's goods.[53] In this context, commerce receives especially close attention—both here and in Western Christian literature more broadly—remaining for a long time under sustained ecclesiastical scrutiny.[54]

The literature's insistence on respecting others' rights extends beyond bodily safety and property to emotional and moral integrity. Confession manuals therefore prohibit forms of domination that cause such harm—defamation, gossip, slander, deceit, lying, verbal aggression, and deliberate offence.[55]

A further and extensive set of norms concerns the subjective domain. Here, acceptable "strength" is recast as self-governance: the texts repeatedly seek to curb aggression, impulsiveness, and wilfulness, while recommending practices for cultivating desired traits.[56] Catechisms, confession manuals, and sermon collections promote sustained self-monitoring, the governance of impulses, personal responsibility, and also love and compassion toward the weaker.

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[50] Posilović 2021. p. 221.
[51] Divković 2016. p. 227.
[52] Lastrić 1766a. p. 140–141; Matijević 1630. p. 63; Divković 2013. p. 243–244; Posilović 2021. p. 223.
[53] Divković 2013. p. 133; Lastrić 1766a. p. 156–160; Babić 1829. p. 98–99.
[54] On Western ecclesiastical attitudes toward commerce, see: Delumeau 1986. p. 330–341. Various forms of cheating in trade are listed among sins in all the confession manuals and catechisms in the corpus. Divković 2013. p. 133; Posilović 2021. p. 223–224; Babić 1829. p. 98–99.
[55] Divković 2013. p. 249.
[56] In this context, wrath is treated as an inner disposition that issues in violence. Anger at another, wishing them ill, and desiring revenge are presented as states that precede outward acts of harm. From wrath (the inner state) arises "war and strife", the outward state. Posilović 2021. p. 205. Pride, at the other hand—given extensive attention in this literature—is often construed as wilful self-assertion: exalting oneself above others and feeling superior. Posilović 2021. p. 225–226; Divković 2013. p. 419–422; Lastrić 1766a. p. 160–164, 326–329.

Within this cluster, temperance—understood as self-control—holds a central place. Posilović's *Cvijet* (*Flower of Virtues*) defines temperance as "the mastery of the natural will": it is self-mastery, "gaining oneself," whereas its opposite—"lack of restraint"—means surrendering to every impulse.[57] Hence the repeated call to guard the inner life: vigilance over thoughts, desires, and needs, and deliberate reflection on one's actions.

As regards the normative system traced across the sacral, intersubjective, and subjective domains, this article concentrates on ideals rather than on the concrete outcomes of ecclesiastical measures. The relation between ideals and social reality is complex; in practice, such programmes met with resistance and uneven implementation—not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but across catholic Europe.[58]

In early modern Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ideals promoted by post-Tridentine religious literature and practice were not fully internalised even among the catholic elite, the clergy. Disciplinary measures and recurrent concerns recorded by Church authorities point to long-term struggles precisely with the traits discussed above: arbitrariness, greed, pastoral negligence, despotic attitudes toward the faithful, irresponsibility in church affairs, neglect of learning and teaching, and entanglement in secular matters.[59] Efforts to discipline laypeople reveal an even broader range of issues, and suggest that, in some areas, the values promoted by Church clashed with local popular mentalities.[60]

This, however, does not mean that the system of ideals and values was marginal or confined to texts. The correlation with disciplinary practices suggests that such ideals act as a driver of change: over time, individuals and communities gradually align both inner dispositions and outward conduct with them. Historians of Catholic Reformation note that these programmes met sustained resistance among clergy and laity, yet in the long run they produced discernible shifts.[61] The same can be said of the changing perceptions of strength and power analysed here.

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[57] POSILOVIĆ 2021. p. 231–233.

[58] Studies of reform efforts—especially those aimed at reshaping popular religiosity—show that their results were only partial. See: FORSTER 1999. p. 163–197.

[59] Summarised from DŽAJA 1971. p. 152–153 and BELJAN KOVAČIĆ 2025. p. 267–276. It is important to stress that in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context this is not merely a matter of individual excesses, but of the coexistence of two priestly ideals: the official Tridentine model and a local heroic mode. BELJAN KOVAČIĆ 2025. p. 272–274.

[60] See: BELJAN KOVAČIĆ 2025. p. 326–367.

[61] Assessing the reach of the Council of Trent, the historian Jean Delumeau notes that it inaugurated a reform that reshaped the Church's entire structure, not merely isolated initiatives as in the pre-reform period. Trent marks the point at which reform was backed and coordinated from the top, enabling a far-reaching renewal of religious life—both institutional and spiritual. The process unfolded over centuries: it was neither rapid nor smooth, met with inertia and other forms of resistance among clergy and laity alike, yet gradually produced change. DELUMEAU 1993. p. 49, 82–85.

Discussion and Conclusion

What change in early modern Western European mentality is reflected in the representations examined here? The analysis suggests that post-Tridentine religious literature produced by the Bosnian Franciscans—largely compiled from Western sources and adapted for a wide clerical and lay public—redefines strength and weakness by rejecting the legitimation of power grounded in physical domination. "Strength" is relocated to inner discipline and moral capacity: fortitude becomes self-control, patience, and freedom from aggressive impulses, while mercy and compassion toward the weak are elevated to central virtues.

At the collective level, the same logic appears in the ideal of delegated authority: power is not seized by force but received through the transfer of office within a hierarchical order whose ultimate source is God. At the sacral level, the value shift is reinforced by images of God as just judge and lawgiver and by portrayals of saints, Jesus, and Mary—representations that anchor mercy and the protection of the weak within the religious imaginary.

This development can be read as part of what Ken Wilber describes as the differentiation of the noosphere from the biosphere: a value order grounded in physical superiority gradually loses its self-evident status, while an order grounded in mental and moral capacities emerges as an ideal. Wilber captures the contrast succinctly: whereas in the biosphere "might makes right," in the noosphere "right makes might."[62] He sees this separation as a demanding, multi-stage process and argues that, within the Western European context, one of its key phases unfolds in the early modern period.[63]

It is crucial to stress that the representations and values analysed here are not an invention of the Catholic Reformation in the sense of wholly new content. What is new in the early modern period is the scale of dissemination. Practices and norms long cultivated above all within monastic settings are now addressed to—and expected of—ordinary believers across all social ranks. In both Catholic and Protestant reform movements, religious instruction and discipline increasingly target the laity, and pastoral literature becomes a key channel through which a value order of "inner strength" is disseminated and reinforced. In this sense, Wilber's shift toward a "mental" value order becomes socially expansive: it is no longer confined to small groups, but is promoted as a broad cultural norm.

Finally, it should be emphasised that this article addresses primarily the normative and symbolic layer of post-Tridentine literature—the ideals these texts articulate and disseminate—rather than their full implementation in practice. The relationship between ideals and social reality is not straightforward: among both clergy and laity, older value matrices persisted, and disciplinary sources point to slow, uneven, and contested enforcement. Yet precisely the correlation between the ideals articulated in pastoral writing and

[62] WILBER 1995. p. 386.
[63] WILBER 1995. p. 160.

disciplinary practices suggests that this representational system did not remain confined to books: over a longer period, it functioned as a driver of change, gradually orienting both inner dispositions and outward practices within Catholic communities under Ottoman rule.

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