Deus Ex Anime:
An Examination of Catholicism in Anime
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ABSTRACT

Despite a low population of Catholics, Japan has countless inclusions of Catholicism and Christianity at large within anime. This paper aims to show that Catholicism is not only the Christianity portrayed and utilized in *shōnen* anime but also that Catholicism is the only Christianity that can fulfill the roles needed by the authors, directors, and animators to tell their stories. It shall do so by placing anime with Catholic themes in historical context with Japanese cinema as well as examine the methods of recontextualization through which the themes transfer from imagination to imagination and across cultural borders. The inclusion of Catholicism in anime also becomes contextualized with other scholars' work on religion in anime and manga. Through this, the relationship between popular culture and interactions of religion within Japan is reconceptualized and the expressions of anxieties and concerns surrounding modern society becomes visible and open to further research.

Introduction

When one thinks of Japanese animation or Japanese storytelling, one would not expect to find the cultural behemoth of European ideology that is the Catholic Church to be so prevalent. However, the Catholic Church and its various forms of imagery and mannerisms appear in many stories told in anime. From outright references by name of the Catholic Church to usage of explicitly Catholic terminology and cross imagery, the Catholic Church becomes a vital plot point and setting device. How, then, does a religion with at best a minor presence in Japan take up such a large portion of representation in Japanese storytelling?

Examining the history of Catholicism in Japan, the history of stories utilizing religion in anime and manga, and how the methods in various religious systems are utilized by the West in relation to Japan, a vibrant tapestry of intercultural utilization occurs that showcases how various memetic forces become ingrained across cultural and linguistic boundaries and are able to be utilized by story-tellers as part of popular culture. The usage of Catholic tropes and themes follows traditions of religious storytelling in Japan and can be further explained by the long history Japan has with Catholicism when compared to other sects of Christianity.

This work is part of a longer history concerning Christianity in Japan and Japanese media, notably work done by Jolyon Thomas and Patrick Drazen. Drazen takes a textual analysis lens to several works of animation, pointing out references to Christianity within numerous works. However, there is a lack of granularity in which version of Christianity is being talked about, with the religion itself blurry

and generalized as a Western influence. This analysis allows for careful consideration and application to other works he did not have the space to cover or had not been produced at the time of writing and creates a tool through which future scholars are able to generate future research. Having written before Drazen on the topic, Thomas focuses more on the history that anime, and its predecessor, manga, have with religion. He notes and tracks the usage of the drawn image in Japanese culture, from the emaki created by Buddhist temples to the manga made popular at the time of the Meiji period to process and morph Buddhism. He argues how the inclusion of religious themes in modern works is simply a continuation of this tradition and showcases numerous works of manga that include religious themes, both Buddhist as well as Christian. Rather than an examination of only a limited number of key works, Thomas selects works for each time period and form, creating a more detailed historiography on how the actual process of utilization of religious themes is undertaken. *Drawing on Tradition* thus becomes a more compelling work focused on highlighting the potentials that such utilization allows for in analysis and presents a compelling tapestry of history that had been ignored before his intervention. Their work is crucial in understanding the roles Christianity has played in Japanese popular culture and highlights an important fact: despite the fact that the majority of contact prior to the Meiji Reformation was with Protestant Dutch merchants, the tropes and representations of Christianity being utilized are Catholic. To a great extent, if one finds an angel within a series, this series is mentioned as containing Christian influences and the matter is

dropped with no examination of the granularity, or differences, found between different Christian practices or how these differences change the themes. In practice, the symbology involved suggests more complicated answers and a richer set of potentials that could not be explored more deeply in Thomas' and Drazen's more ground-laying works.

This paper expands upon these previous works by showcasing how it is because the contact Catholicism had with Japan was during the end of the Sengoku period and tinged with military drama and tensions, Catholicism's role with the occult and other magical and monstrous entities, and the flare for the dramatic and grandeur that Catholicism has that makes it specifically suited for portraying specific ideas. The constant and consistent exposure and usage of Catholicism as the religion of foreigners has created a tradition of utilization that creates a response of exoticness, much in the same manner that the West has utilized an Orientalist past in fictional works such as *Star Wars*. This utilization combines with the historical encountering of Catholicism during the major military conflicts and socio-political shifts of the *sengoku* period, a time period that is the source of numerous tales of drama and heroism for countless works of literature and art, to create a cultural gestalt image of a foreign religion that has roots in the masculinely coded conflicts and aggression of warriors and protectors. As one of the most mystically inclined branches of Christianity, Catholicism also provides traditions that are more easily modified to fit into Shintō and Buddhist cosmologies and eschatologies to create a coherent story.

Ultimately, what this paper shall aim for is to show that Catholicism is not only the Christianity that is portrayed and utilized in *shōnen* anime but also that Catholicism is the only Christianity that can fulfill the roles needed by the authors, directors, and animators in order to tell their stories. In order to do so, this paper will be examining three *shōnen* animes, *Blue Exorcist*, *Trinity Blood*, and *Seven Deadly Sins*, and highlight the various methods that the creators have utilized in order to stress the exoticness of the setting through the grandeur of Catholicism, the occult nature of the story requiring a sense of mediated intercession inherent to the Catholic Church between the natural and supernatural worlds, and the militancy required to overcome obstacles posed. I will also show how various semiotic signs of the Catholic Church have been transformed through a process of recontextualization.

What is Shōnen

Japan has had a long history of telling stories through the usage of images in succession, such as the *emaki* that date back to the Nara period.[1] These scrolls told the story throughout the entire fabric of the scroll, with the reader able to control not only the pace at which the story is revealed but also where the focus is through careful rolling of the scroll. Eventually, woodblock printing became popular and eventually became bound within books that told stories without the supporting calligraphy framing the transmitted meaning during the Edo period. In 1853, with Americans opening relations with the Tokugawa and later with the emperor Meiji,

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[1] Jolyon Baraka, Thomas. Drawing On Tradition: Manga, Anime, And Religion In Contemporary Japan. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012.

Western ideals of art came into contact with traditional Japanese storytelling and became adopted.[2]

As a part of the transmission of knowledge and the modernization efforts of the Meiji government, comics and drawing in the Western style became increasingly common throughout Japan, eventually leading to the creation of numerous magazines to centralize dissemination of popular comic stories and commentaries on contemporary events. As these magazines themselves grew in popularity, the government began to take notice and issued decrees and laws surrounding what can be considered appropriate art. The government censorship and control continued up and through the Second World War, in a comparable manner to the ethics codes that America had instituted for Hollywood during the post-war period, though with more strict enforcement and limits.

In Japan's own post-war period, artists begin to expand their topics once more as the occupying Americans suppressed nationalistic and conservative notions of social propriety, leading to stories similar to the beginning years of the comic magazines. These stories, published in *Manga Shōnen,* a short-lived but influential manga magazine, are marketed to children in general, not merely boys. However, over time, these become split along gendered lines, with a majority of comics in each issue being written for boys compared to girls.[3] As this trend continues, the term

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[2] Schodt, Frederik L. *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics.* Tokyo; New York: Kodansha America, 1997. Page 38.
[3] Schodt, Frederik L. *Manga! Manga!.* Page 67.

shōnen becomes associated with male-oriented stories and *shōjo* arises as a genre in complementary opposition as a genre oriented towards girls.

Where *shōnen* focuses on adventure stories and fantasies in another world, *shōjo* became marketed for girls. Focusing sections on images of various outfits that characters could wear, the magazines oriented towards sales for the female population also generated space for readers to submit their own art of the characters and outfits the reader envisioned their favorite characters to enjoy wearing. In many ways, the culture of interaction by fans of manga and anime began not in the sales of *shōnen* but in the inclusion found in *shōjo.*

What is a Meme?

A meme is a unit of information that exists in the mind of a person and is transferable in the same ways that genes are in biological systems. Each of these units would have identifiable traits that semiotically point back to the same core concept or idea and which are transferred through replication to another person. An example of a meme would be how a new advertisement campaign is identified with a specific jingle and through humming this jingle, a person has now potentially spread the same advertisement to surrounding listeners. A similar example would be the existence of 'ear-worms,' those songs that persist in being stuck in one's mind until something else happens to take precedence. Simply humming one of these can leave that same song stuck in the listener's mind in a more repetitive manner compared to the prior advertisement example.

In terms of popular culture such as what is being argued in this paper, a meme exists in the forms that members of a community, be it local, national, or even international, use to reference moments in culture that are considered formative or influential. Someone who is a fan of Westerns might make reference to the common usage of duels at high noon in the films in order to try and inference a current tension between two co-workers in the office while the same situation might be referenced and comprehended in a completely different manner by those who aren't fans of such works. However, the knowledge that a reference to showdowns at high noon is supposed to reference tension as well as also being indicative of cowboys and a certain type of heroics is something that must be taught and learned, transferred from peers, or inherited through some form of parental or caregiver education.

Memetics, as a field, never truly advances into a science, being likened to how early models of atoms failed to be accurately described or conceptualized as solar systems due to the actual structures not holding up under further scientific endeavors on the model. For example, memes themselves are not living. There is not a self-conscious form of knowledge that actively is attempting to replicate itself between hosts. Instead, it serves as a useful way to envisualize the process in which information is referenced through semiotics and is a useful method through which to explain concepts such as the ideas of the meta-language surrounding signs developed by Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies*.[4] Indeed, the idea of memes itself

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[4] Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Anette Lavers. London: Vintage, 1993.

might be considered as a part of the metalanguage requiring self-realization in order to be effective. Memes then become an effective way for meta-language to describe itself and its process of formation for the process itself to be taught and become naturalized.

This paper, then, is utilizing memes in a more self-aware and inferential manner. Convenient shorthand, memes and the concept of memetic forces will be utilized to showcase in a more natural and less-formal manner the process in which "recontextualization" occurs between actors within and without the same cultures. Where recontextualization is the process and actions that are being taken, memes shall be the pneuma, or breath of life, behind the actions that indicates that these actions are part of transmissions rather than simply stand-alone events.

Recontextualization

Given this pneuma form and interactability, the idea of recontextualization is explored and understood as follows. Operating under the linguist Per Linell's system of recontextualization as laid out in his work *Approaching Dialogue*, recontextualization is divided into three forms: that of the intratextual, that of the intertextual, and that of the interdiscursive.[5] Intratextual recontextualization occurs within a single work, where references are continuously made to previously established semiotic relationships. An example of this relationship is the explanation of the phenomenon in the paper. That is, the idea of intratextual recontextualization is established in this section and becomes available to be

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[5] Linell, Per. *Approaching Dialogue*. Vol. 3. IMPACT: Studies in Language and Society. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998.

referenced later on in further sections. Without the ability to be recontextualized and placed in new locations, discussions and conversations would not be able to survive their immediate existence. Another example that highlights the recontextualization process is how a parent might remind their child of a promise made earlier in the day to clean their room. The promise is recontextualized to not only indicate that there was a bond established earlier but also might have been said in front of the child's friends. The promise becomes not only a bond between parent and child but also a sign that indicates to friends of the child of the trustworthy nature of the child. The promise generates not only obligations to fulfill bonds but also the social fear of appearing unwilling to do so with one's friends will only ensure the child is not able to be trusted if the bond is broken. Later on in life, long after the task of cleaning the room is completed, the promise might become evidence that the child should be trusted with a car or a loan from their parents.

Intertextual recontextualization is more the form that might be expected when one thinks of signs being changed in order to fit a new cultural context. It is the process in which multiple texts and works are referenced and potentially merged to create context for the recontextualized work. Intertextual, thus, is the utilization of specific texts in the creation of new texts, such as if a play utilizes the basic plot of *Romeo and Juliet* but with a new setting and characters such as how *West Side Story* does. The same signs are being utilized and pointed to in order to create meaning for the reader - that is, the meaning of the story becomes known and reliant on the knowledge of the referenced text as well as what is being told

anew. It is through this process that references and traditions and tropes are generated in a genre.

Interdiscursive recontextualization arises when there are references across genres to generate new meanings. An example of interdiscursive recontextualization would be the contextualization and reformulations generated when historical speeches might be turned into scenes in films set during the same time period. The speech goes from being an action of persuasion and charisma into a mode through which the film can be shown to be accurate as well as an invitation for the fictional characters to interact with the real world of the viewer.

Recontextualization and Religion

Supporting these views, there is a long tradition of intertextuality and interdiscursivity within the readings and understanding of media in Japan. Demonstrating this point, Yoshiko Okuyama focuses on intertextuality in *Japanese Mythology in Film*, where each work relies on the works that come before it or that are contemporaries. In order to understand a film, she argues, you must first understand the culture and mythologies being worked into it. Thus, to understand a Studio Ghibli film entirely, one must have background knowledge in Japanese culture. This is not necessary for enjoyment, she adds, but simply to understand every message being included.

In order to acknowledge the role of Catholicism in anime one must consider the ideas of religion as an epistemological construct that can be recontextualized. Religion, studied since the founding of modern universities, is constructed in the

West with a specific structure that creates a hierarchy of access to the divine, prioritizing systems of beliefs which match closest to a monotheistic mold. Universities also are often the location of prestigious seminaries or other theologically oriented sites of learning, though many universities teach religion through a secular lens. However, it is not the theological view of religion that is always important to understanding the work religion does in society. Theology is often tied to internal views each sect might have for itself and its place within cosmology. Instead, to more holistically look at religion, Michael Spiro creates a new paradigm of religious classification in his influential essay, "Religion: Problems of Explanation and Definition.". With this work, Spiro challenges the assumptions of contemporary analysis of religion, showcasing the presumptive and orientalist ways that Western academia has taken to defining and handling religion within research.[6] He focuses on how the tendency arises from the idea that an object in language, such a physical object or a complex social construct such as religion or culture itself, has two definitions, a nominal and real. Spiro then breaks down the previous working definitions of religion and shows how it favors one definition or the other and instead proposes the idea of a new definition which merges the two.

Lionel Obadia takes Spiro's ideas further and begins to actively utilize it as a tool to analyze religion. Lionel Obadia applies this newer and more expressive definition of religion in his analysis of the spread of religion under globalization in his essay "Globalization and Sociology of Religion." Obadia demonstrates how if

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[6] Spiro, Melford. "Religion: Problems of Explanation and Definition." In Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion. 1971. Pages 85-86.

religion is viewed through Spiro's less restrictive lens, each major religion spread

through European imperialism or the trade-routes of India and China, in the case of

Buddhism or Hinduism and eventually even Islam did, allow for religions to not

only to expand from their geographical origins but to also adapt customs and ideas

from the regions that were being actively expanded into. Each religion makes deals

and social contracts with the cultures they come into contact with, aligning

themselves with different politics in different regions based on utility.[7] That is, the

connotation of each religion and where it falls on the political spectrum differs

depending on the region and becomes an active form of recontextualization on the

part of the religion. The Catholic Church, for example, contributed to the

colonization of the Philippines but at the same time opening homeless shelters in

the United States. While the practice and teachings of the Catholic Church never

differ internally, the application of the organization's power shifted to fit each

region. However, it should be noted that while Obadia has a novel approach to

viewing the spread of religion, it sometimes strays into the idea that religions are

disorganized and unaware internally of what the greater organization is doing

differently around the world.

     This metamorphosis of religion for each region is examined and showcased in

Xavier's Legacies, a collection of essays on Catholicism in modern Japanese culture

edited by Kevin Doak. In this collection of essays, it is noted by [name] how St.

Francis Xavier translated the works of the Catholic Church into Japanese almost

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[7] Obadia, Lionel. "Globalization and Sociology of Religion." In The New Companion of Sociology of Religion. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010. Page 478.

immediately upon arrival in Japan, learning all he could of Japanese culture to try and bridge the ideological gaps.[8] A later essay in this collection by [2nd name], "The Theory and Practice of Inculturation by Father Inoue Yōji: From Panentheism to Namu Abba," points to how Inoue Yōji, a Japanese priest, was supported by his seminary teachers in converting Catholic concepts into ones that fit more naturally into Japanese culture, an attempt to reduce the stigma of being foreign as a religion.[9] These are only two examples on how Catholicism is integrated into Japanese history and culture. Other essays in the collection touch on the connection between Japanese fascination with France during the Meiji Restoration to Catholicism as well as Western science; these connections shaped how modernity was viewed in Japan. The tale of Father Inoue does not show the fact that many others wouldn't find the Church in support and its institutional inconsistency towards changes of heterodoxy, 'correct' religious knowledge, and heteropraxy, to be 'correct' religious practice, is not addressed nor does he show how these sweeping changes might exist only because the Vatican isn't fully aware of implications being made in translation and inculturation rather than being a positive action of the Catholic Church towards Japan.

Japan's view of Catholicism differs from the Western, as seen in how the denomination is talked about in monographs. For example, the Japanese view of

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[8] Doak, Kevin. "Introduction: Catholicism, Modernity, and Japanese Culture." In Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

[9] Yamamoto, Yoshihisa. "The Theory and Practice of Inculturation by Father Inoue Yo ̄ji: From Panentheism to Namu Abba." In Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Catholicism is viewable in a Japanese text written by 稲垣良典 (Inagaki Ryosuke) called カトリック入門：日本からのアプローチ (Catholic Primer: Approach out of Japan). This book lists much of the same history that books such as *Xavier's Legacy* in their essays but also goes into great detail on the Catholic Church's relationship with the occult or supernatural as well as explaining figures such as Mary, the mother of Jesus. The broad primer is oriented not only to explain the history of the religion within Japan, but also how it fits into the larger world as a whole through its approach to cosmology, indicating the strong importance of religion in a country where most citizens proclaim agnosticism, a relationship towards belief systems that is largely only being explored as interactions between Buddhism and Shintō rituals and rituals of nation-state. A citizen polled for their religious beliefs may claim to have none but then visit a Buddhist temple for a funeral, a Shintō shrine to pray for economic or academic success, and then be married in a Western wedding that utilizes symbols and rituals from Christianity.[10]

History of Catholicism in Japan

The first contact between the Catholic Church and Japan occurred in 1549 with Francis Xavier beginning missionary work and resulted in quick conversions from Japanese nobles and peasants leading to over a century of missionary contact, what

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[10] Hueston, Dave. "Christian Style Weddings Grow Popular, But Allure is More About Optics Than Religion." Japanese Times, June 23, 2017.
https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/23/national/christian-style-weddings-grow-popular-japan-allure-optics-religion/.

was called a "Christian Century" in reports to the Vatican. At the height of the

missionary fervor, there were supposedly 300,000-700,000 Christians in Japan.[11]

These numbers were most likely highly inflated, based on how daimyos, Japanese

rulers of provinces under the shogunate government, converted their populace if

they converted to this new religion. As conversions often brought trade advantages,

these conversions might not be sincere indications of belief and they often would be

discarded after a tactical advantage was gained.

The sinking of the Spaniard ship San Felipe in 1597 incited the Spanish

captain to threaten the *taikō,* Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and local Japanese authorities

about Spanish invasion *modus operandi* being centered around a weakening of local

control due to Catholic missionaries. Using the Philippines as an example, the

captain painted a picture of invasion where Catholicism arrives, destabilizes local

power structures, and establishes a European-centric model of rulership.

Catholicism, through this threat and the subsequent widespread banning, becomes

a site of fear surrounding violence and invasion from unknowable forces. Driven

underground during the post-Sakoku edicts period, it arises again during the Meiji

period as the various factions of Shintō, Buddhist, and Imperial institutions

negotiate what religious freedom means.

The Tokugawa *bakufu*, or shogunate, cracked down on Christians in Japan

after the Shimabara Rebellion, a rebellion by farmers that lasted from 1637-1638

that is believed to have been led by several devout Japanese Christians; other

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[11] Boxer, Charles Ralph. *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

explanations for the government crackdown have been laid out by several Japanese Studies scholars—particularly Kiri Paramore, who wrote extensively on the relationship between Japan and Christianity— for example, the shogunate's response was due to meddling by the Protestant Dutch to weaken Catholic holdings in Asia.[12] The ban on Christianity led to several long inquisitions that saw the hunting down of believers; much of the tradition went underground and hid behind Buddhist practices. By claiming to practice Buddhism and disguising Christian idols as Buddhist ones, Christianity survived without contact with the Vatican or any other source of Western theology until the Meiji Restoration.

The Meiji Restoration helped re-establish contact with Europe and soon many of the hidden Christians (隠れキリシタン kakure kirishitan) were able to safely come out of hiding and interact with a new generation of Catholic priests. However, the numbers were small and new conversions were, and still are, rare. It is estimated that there are one million Catholics in Japan as of a 2009 Japanese Times article on the subject.[13]

Thus, with such a small number of the population identifying or being identified as Catholic, it is unlikely that any specific anime creator is Catholic. Instead, Catholicism is an alien concept, perhaps at best heard about from a friend. 1.5% of the 127 million people of Japan are Christian with one third – roughly

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[12] Laver, Michael S. The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Hegemony. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011. Page 62.

[13] Kato, Mariko. "Christianity's Long History in the Margins." Japanese Times, February 24, 2009. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2009/02/24/reference/christianitys-long-history-in-the-margins/.

600,000 people – being Catholic. Nonetheless, Christianity is a recurring theme in Japanese animation and film.

Christianity in Japanese Cinema

Christianity has been a part of the Japanese film tradition from at least the third decade of the craft in Japan. In 1930, *Nani ga kanojo o sō saseta ka*, or *What made her do it?*, was directed by Shigeyoshi Suzuki. Focused on a school-aged girl named Sumiko, the movie follows her misadventures and misfortunes. Beginning with her journey to an aunt and uncle after being sent away by her father, she suffers upon her arrival as her family realizes she cannot read and that the note she had been carrying from her father was a suicide note that left his wealth to her caretakers. As her family lies and promises her a life of ease, she allows herself to be tasked with laborious chores, eventually causing her to run away to a circus. Here though, she is once more mistreated. Eventually escaping and joining an orphanage run by Christians, she is forced to renounce her actions and accept Jesus into her heart. However, at the end of all of this abuse, she renounces the Church instead and burns it to the ground.

A year later, in 1931 the Catholic Church co-produced *The 26 Martyrs*, a dramatic retelling of the events surrounding the famous twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki. Utilizing a *benshi*, or narrator, the film follows the introduction of the Franciscans in Kyoto near the end of the *sengoku* period. As they struggle against the already established Buddhist priests, as well as being blamed for several disasters in the region, the priests and their converts are punished severely by

Toyotomi Hideyoshi. This interaction of punishment and distrust continues, with the film jumping to the eventual martyrdom of the twenty-six Catholics as well as their eventual canonization.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Christianity became associated with a counterculture movement, where it is useful as symbols of modernity and oppression. In 1964, *Gate of Flesh* was directed by Seijun Suzuki and distributed by Nikkatsu. Focused on a group of prostitutes surviving in a post-war Occupied Tokyo, *Gate* includes several scenes of a Catholic priest trying to 'rescue' one of the main characters, Maya, after she falls in with the core group. This group of prostitutes has a series of rules that bind them together as equals and ensure that no one betrays the group. After an ex-soldier, Shintaro Ibuki, joins the group in order to hide from the American GIs that he had assaulted, the group begins to fall apart as each girl in turn falls in love with him. Maya begins to see him as a replacement for the brother she lost during the war and eventually shares a night with him. Prior to this night together, in order to learn what love is, which is the only force strong enough to have any of the girls betray the group and spend the night with a man for free, Maya had also seduced the priest who had been pursuing her. After a double cross from the gangs that had been controlling the territory that the group of women had been living and working in leads to Shintaro's death, the movie ends with Maya being ostracized for her actions and back alone on the streets.

A decade later, in 1974, *School of the Holy Beast*, directed by Suzuki Norifumi, was released by Toei. Much more focused on the sexual and perverse, *Holy Beast* follows the story of Maya Takigawa as she infiltrates a nunnery in order to discover the truth of her mother, a former nun who had died in childbirth eighteen years prior. She is woken in the middle of the night to a num performing self-mortification in a blissful state. As she discovers from the records the truth of her origins and the secrets of the covenant, she is stripped naked and whipped with rose thorns. After she survives the tortures that the mother superior had inflicted on her, she ends the film a lover of a lecherous priest.

By 1981, Catholicism and through extension, historical representations of Christianity in Japan, have become tied to ideas of magic and the supernatural. Samurai Reincarnation, or *Makai Tenshō*, by Fukasaku Kinji was released in 1981 and follows the resurrected soul of Shiro Amakusa, one of the leaders in the failed Shimabara rebellion. Dramatically facing a cross and accusing God of being uncaring towards His followers, Shiro Amakusa declares that he is abandoning his faith and instead pleads to the forces of evil to grant him the powers that he requires to enact vengeance on the Tokugawa government. He assembles a party of famous contemporary figures, such as Hosokawa, a Catholic convert wife of a famous samurai, and Miyamoto Musashi, rumored to be the most dangerous swordsman alive who has been undefeated in single combat. Preying upon both of their desires and regrets to fuel their rebirths as ghosts, Shiro Amakusa pledges them to his cause. These interactions become recurring throughout the film as the

group gathers strength and enacts their plan. Every major character is offered a place amongst their ranks upon their defeat by the ghosts, with even Yagyu Tajima-no-kami Munenori, the father of the protagonist, eventually joining them. Eventually the party of villainous ghosts encounter Yagyu Jubei, the protagonist, and enact a rebellion amongst peasants over increased taxes in order to masquerade as heroes and place themselves amongst the Tokugawa court. Eventually leading the rebellious peasants to the capital, Hosokawa goes mad once more and begins to threaten the Shogun as he realizes she is not the woman who he had fallen in love with. Shiro springs his plan and reveals himself to be the ghost of the slain Christian leader and that he seeks the destruction of the Tokugawa. Eventually Jubei defeats Shiro in combat, though Shiro disappears after a promise to return as long as humans have evil intentions.

This history of representation in cinema becomes interesting as it slowly converges on the same themes examined in this paper while highlighting the methods in which Catholicism is thought of in terms of storytelling. Originally an outside force representing oppression and non-Japaneseness, with the religion being present for tragic acts or as a force that is a step too far in the mind of the characters, Catholicism is utilized as a tool through which the dominant culture is destabilized. Eventually this destabilization is turned against the Christian imagery itself, where the Western hegemonic hold over the idea of modernity is not only acknowledged but also represented through the Cross. To resist Western influence or oppressive governments is to attack this imagery itself and bring the

destabilization in the background. Representing both a non-native impositonal force as well as the institutional nature of government at large, Catholic imagery becomes entangled with counterculture as a subject of hypocrisy and hegemonic structures.

In *Holy Beast*, this entanglement is showcased through the introduction of the priest who commits heinous sexual acts on the nuns and yet is treated as a figure with immense spiritual and organizational power and respect. The structures of power and respect that are inherent to the Catholic Church are being pushed and pulled at. Such power is also alienating. The mother superior, nuns, and the priest all are corrupted both by the power they wield and the responsibility to a larger system that it entails. Their own actions are positioned by images of the selfless God they are supposed to serve as ways to invite contemplation by the viewer. In *Gates*, the priest is tied to the GIs that the Americans have running the country and providing security after the end of the Second World War. His presence is tied to that of a paradoxical righteousness that can be tied to the morals of the occupying forces. Rather than criticize the American forces, it becomes a corruptible Catholic priest that can be lampooned and shown as imperfect. While the GIs are forces that are unassailable, with Shiro dying eventually due to his injuring of one earlier in the film, the priest is who can be coerced. Further tied to a moralistic hegemony, his pursuit of Maya allows for her to turn the tables and utilize his compassion as a stand-in for the apparent love she sees in her fellow group member's tryst with a married man.

Eventually this disruptive nature of Catholicism is brought into the fantastic through a narrative turn, where it gains traction through familiarity to fulfill the same roles in the fantastical that Buddhism and Shintō had provided prior. Interactions with demons and ghosts become tangible under the guise of being sources of magic and deities. In *Samurai Reincarnation*, Shiro Amakusa draws his power from Beelzebub, a demon, and is directly answered by the evil forces of his belief system rather than those of Buddhism or Shintō. By providing an alternative to either system, Christianity - and Catholicism in specific due to the nature of who would be converted in the time period Shiro lived in - becomes a source of disruptive forces and one able to rival native systems of power.

By transitioning from an external alien force that disrupts normative culture in Japan and is a threat to current social structures an alternative source of empowerment and fantastical, Catholicism becomes the grounds through which anime directors and screenwriters can thematically transfer memetic ideals of power and hypocrisy into the storytelling of anime. These cinematic works reflect current societal worries and anxieties about Christianity back onto the viewers and slowly pushes the social through creative interpretations and presentations. They themselves are part of the transfer of memes surrounding Catholicism and enable the inclusion of Christianity as a generalization of Catholic originating rituals in manga and anime.

The three anime under examination in this work are series that have centered the three aspects of Catholicism mentioned earlier: the grandeur of

Catholicism, the mediated intercession between natural and supernatural, and militancy. While not always called by name the Catholic Church, or even necessarily identified as Christian in context of the settings they create, as is the case with *Seven Deadly Sins*, they contain the core elements and are able to more accurately describe generalizations at large in the anime community. They span the last two decades, consisting of works that are most easily viewable through streaming services as well as release on DVD and Blu-Ray, where the impact and indexicality of the stories being told would be greatest.

Trinity Blood

The first anime, *Trinity Blood*, was aired in 2005 on Wowow, a Japanese broadcast station, and directed by Hirata Tomohiro. Centered on the war between 'Methuselahs,' a vampiric long-lived race of genetically modified humans sent to colonize Mars and returned after Earth suffers an Armageddon-level event of nuclear wars, and the Roman Catholic Church, Father Abel, a secret Methuselah who has been alive since the Methuselah's return to Earth nine hundred years prior, must work to stop the efforts of a secret organization intending to intensify the war and bring about the death of all humanity.[14] In doing so, he must face his own origins, role in the current crisis, and connections to the friends and allies he has made. Sister Esther also must learn to exist with herself and her own faith

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[14] Figure 1 in the Index is of Father Abel.

after killing the man who murdered a local priest. She must balance her own identity as a nun, and thus a devoted pacifist, as well as the human being that she is who had lost her close friend and mentor and had been given an opportunity to potentially become an avenger.

A much grittier and darker tale than the other two series under examination, *Trinity Blood* uses these identities and the drama interwoven between the characters to paint a picture of what the limits of humanity and emotion might be. Even with real monsters that are violent and destructive, the idea of humans being monsters as well or even the primary monsters in the foreground. After all, one of the most shocking scenes takes place when a Cardinal pushes for the beginning of a war that would kill hostages that the Methuselah have taken.[15] The words chosen by the Cardinal mimic those in verse 14 of the Book of Revelations[16] This Cardinal, Francesco di Medici, is a half-sibling to the new sitting Pope, Alessandro XVIII, as well as to another high-ranking Cardinal, Caterina Sforza. With the new Pope being fourteen, as well as related by blood to other high-ranking Clergy, it brings into question how political the actual Church of this series is, where dynasties can rise to power and rule, considering the previous competition for the seat was their shared uncle. It is reminiscent of the historical Borgia family's control of the Papacy during the 15th century and highlights a consistency and sense of historical realism being brought into the series. This fictional Vatican and Papacy is not just the Catholic Church but also a future iteration where the power

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[15] Tomohiro, Hirata. "Trinity Blood." Wowow, April 28, 2005.
[16] Revelations 14:9

plays and diplomatic relations of the early-modern era are brought to life with the destruction of modern nation-states in the nuclear inferno. While nominally set in a future, it relies on historical imaginings and realities in order to shape the reality the characters inhabit.

Almost immediately in the first episode, it can be seen that the anime focuses on the grandeur of the church.[17] We are introduced to the new Pope of the Catholic Church as well as his two Cardinal advisors.[18] One, Cardinal Francesco di Medici, is clamoring to begin the aforementioned Crusade and utilizes millennia old claims to the supremacy of God as well as appeals to the righteousness of their cause. As all the characters are in full clerical uniform, their roles and importance within the church become clear. Each character is wearing full chasuble, both cardinals wear coats in the signature red of their office over theirs, associated with their rank, along with stoles, while Alessandro XVIII has his Papal crozier signifying his role as shepherd.

Each piece has meaning, a signification of the power invested in them inherently by the structure they become a living representation of. The grandeur itself becomes a way of highlighting the corruption and disconnection that the characters have with the commoners of this world. While they wander beautiful halls and gardens in intricate robes, the common folk are struggling to make ends meet and live in ever increasing squalor. To sustain these positions, the Church is forced to continue rituals and calls for violence, where the governance of the people

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[17] Tomohiro, Hirata. "Trinity Blood." Wowow, April 28, 2005.
[18] Figure 2 in the Index is Cardinal Caterina and Pope Alessandro XVIII as well as a priest.

itself becomes a performance and everything becomes tied to matters of appearance in terms of proper leadership. It must also be noted that during the various shots, it is seen that Caterina and Francesco both have their own thrones in front of and only slightly below that of their young half-brother, indicating that the petitioners are making their case to the sibling cardinals as well as to the head of the Church. Their position visibly cements their power as being the powers, ironically, behind the throne. The thrones of all three are made of gold, a level of decadence that appears at odds with the relatively spartan appearance of the lower-ranking clergy who wear their clerical black uniforms, but which is fitting with the rest of the decor of the Basilica the scene takes place in. The walls are decorated in the Renaissance style, full of pillars and carved domes that highlight mosaic floors and stained-glass windows. The structure of the room itself, the meeting point of three separate hallways, does not match the historical throne room of the Pope in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, however the usage of Renaissance architecture in the domes and pillars brings the same thematic grandeur and weight of importance as viewers enter the space through the camera lens. The act of deciding policy becomes, then, a play being told through the setting and clothing. These are influential figures that wield enough power to not only hold onto a vast majority of wealth but also can afford to display it openly in such movements and moments of grandeur. The wealth of humanity is centered here and projected forward into the world through the actions the three clerics decide.

Looking back at Linell's definitions earlier, it becomes clear that these are all intertextual and interdiscursive recontextualizations. To create this characterization of the Catholic Church, it becomes imperative that these visual and theatrical representations of the actions and settings of the historical Church be recognized. To understand the desires and weight behind the words of Cardinal Francesco, an understanding of the history of Crusades by the Catholic Church adds more depth. It exposes the argument that Francesco is tapping into, that there is an imperative need to commit complete and utter warfare against the opponents of the church and that it will not go against the moral and ethical desires of the church to do so and indeed is part of the theological imperative of a Church that is struggling through the apocalypse it references in calls back to the apocalyptic text of Revelations. It becomes a matter of continuing a tradition found throughout history and a rhetorical tool. These references make it possible to 'read' this subtext as a viewer and still understand the intentions on a base level. Yet the metaphorical comparison between the Cathars of the Albigensian Crusade and the Methuselah of the present day within the story becomes muddied and the rhetorical thrust and sense of urgency to the conflict is weakened to becoming merely an example of extremism showcased by one character.

The referent transcends both temporal and genre divides to be recontextualized and brought into new ground that demands that the referent make sense and be coherent with the narrative, being transferred from a biblical text over two thousand years old to make sense of a conflict outside the realm of the original

author's imagination. The dynamics of power, as mentioned earlier, are also referencing the dynasties that arose within the historical Papacy. Transferring from history to a fictional context, the genre switch turns the dynasty politics from a matter of recounting facts into a dynamic cast of contemporary actors. Rather than a retrospective examination of the legacies and aftermath of the actions of specific individuals, the referent becomes one of fluid story, where actions are dynamically created, and the effects of such actions are brought into focus as the shockwaves of each action traverse through space. Past configurations are utilized in new surroundings to draw new effects and generate new meanings without changing the specific sign that is being referenced. The usage of referents becomes then not one of merely borrowing or lack of creativity but rather a complicated and intricate dance of inferences and contexts that is required for specific stories to become understandable and recognizable by the viewer. It becomes through the transference of the ideas an active and living process, the very essence of memes as how ideas are generated and created across mental landscapes. It is complicated by the fact that it is not the ideas but the process that plays the critical role, as the ideas are shaped actively by the process and are inert replications otherwise.

The idea of the intercessional nature of Catholicism arises from the premise of the conflict itself. The vampires are seen as otherworldly monsters, undefeatable by any besides trained vampire hunters of the Church. The Church, and its relationship with God, become tied with being able to effectively fight monsters and anything not considered mundane. While the country of Albion is seen as an

effective force and able to hold its own against the Methuselah threat, it is only the Catholic Church that launches the offensive at the beginning of the series. Albion is brought in as a site of conflict, where the open seat of the throne of Albion becomes a site of contention between various Church and Methuselah forces.

Trinity Blood also relies on stories that are not merely referencing history and philosophical themes in order to bring external memes into conversation. For example, Abel Nightroad exposes himself as a vampire to the Methuselah assailant who has captured the airship he is traveling on, an example of Linell's idea of intratextual contextualization.[19] The assailant makes reference to how a human cannot survive the stresses that Abel has and infers that this ability to survive must mean Abel is a fellow Methuselah. However, Abel uses this inference to make reference to how vampires and humans exist within a food chain, highlighting how the nature from animal to human to vampire also allows for something more: a vampire that feeds off of his own kind.

Not only is the intratextual contextualization required for the Methuselah agent to understand the logic inherent in Abel's speech but it is required to understand the relationship vampires and humans have: vampires are apex predators theoretically at the top of their food chains as sapient hominids. Without this relationship, the inference then that if vampires are more powerful than humans due to the human's position as food would be unable to be established and thus Abel's increased power as a vampire who feeds on the power of vampires in the

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[19] Tomohiro, Hirata. "Trinity Blood." Wowow, April 28, 2005.

same manner would fall flat. While there are three others of Abel's kind, he is the only one on the human side and specifically as the servant of the Catholic Church in this conflict. Once more the Church becomes a force that contains the non-human even when in direct conflict with those same forces. Indeed, the Church becomes able to contain the powers of those greater than the non-human forces they are opposing. The Church, through its relation to God, becomes tied to domination over all that exists in the world, both mundane and supernatural.

Even this utilization is a recontextualization of the Bible, where Jesus is granted dominion over demons and is able to perform exorcisms. Through intertextual and interdiscursive recontextualization, this dominion becomes a purview of the Church and then is transferred into fiction through situations such as Abel's. First, the claim of dominion is made in a text format and becomes dispersed via this text. Reutilized by Papal Bulls and other Church documents, the historical Catholic Church thus uses the claims as evidence for its own temporal powers and rulership over land and populations. While the existence of demons or supernatural entities is debatable or outright unbelievable in the real world, these documents and recurrent claims allow fertile ground for an organization that exists in fiction and thus becomes pushed across genres from the real to the fictional in an interdiscursive manner.

At the same time, the choice of vampires as the entities being faced and overcome is not an idle one. Rather, it harkens to the European ideas of horror and monstrosity that can only be contained by the holy—in a European context, the

power of Christ. As an institution with direct connections to Jesus, the Catholic

Church would make for a natural foe of such monstrosity. This dynamic between

the Catholic Church and European vampires turns a mundane conflict between

humanity and a monstrous Other into one predetermined by the nature of both

participating organizations.

In this way, the Church becomes essential in the way that the story of

Trinity Blood can be told. The monsters must be vampires in the European tradition

rather than from the various vampiresque monsters of East Asian traditions. For a

vampire, tied in Western imagination, and thus much of the world due to the spread

of Western literature to Count Dracula, the only weakness is the Church and the

various institutions of the Western world. As such, the world created after the

apocalypse in the story must mimic that of the old world, with a dominance of

European traditions and power-structures, such as the Catholic Church, over the

rest of the world in order.

Because Japan itself is not mentioned in the world of this narrative, it is shut

off from the focus of the story and Europe becomes the center. The Catholic Church

was formative to Europe's culture, absorbing the local traditions of the people it

converted over the centuries leading up to and proceeding from the Roman Empire,

creating a common culture for the disparate peoples of Europe, and utilizing the

myths and fairy tales of the people to do so. A mixture of all three forms of

contextualization put forward by Linell became utilized and created a cultural base

for Europe. It is this creation of a cultural base through transference of ideas that generate the basic ideas of memetic movement.

The term for a vampire of vampires used by *Trinity Blood*, Krusnik, itself is created from these same roots of myth-absorption. This idea of a Krusnik is understandable by Western European powers due to these absorbed myths being transferred. The absorbed myth transfers from person to person until the idea itself has moved geo-spatially from Eastern Europe to the entirety of the continent. Krusnik are themselves intimately connected to the tradition of vampires, coming from the Slavic regions of Eastern Europe as they became Christianized. The etymology of the name itself is contested, originating from several potential etymologies involving shamanistic traditions, a Slavonic deity of the same name, or the root *krst*, meaning "cross", that is also used as the boundaries between villages and wilderness.[20] However, the term invites recontextualization surrounding these competing identities and the tensions found there within, presenting a term and idea that becomes useful in order to generate narrative play around what might make monsters fear the dark as much as the humans that are being terrorized.

Militarism in *Trinity Blood* centers directly on the plot and the earlier mentioned call for a crusade. Crusades in the Christian world orbit directly around the Pope and the authority he contains as the direct representative of God on Earth.[21] While wars focused on enforcing Christianity onto non-Christian cultures

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[20] Šmitek, Zmago. "Kresnik: An Attempt at Mythological Reconstruction." Studia Mythologica Slavica 1 (1998): 93–118.
[21] Tyerman, Christopher. The Crusades. Sterling Publishing Company, 2009.

have existed in various forms, the term Crusade is tied directly to the Catholic church and the wars of the 10th through 13th century. The Crusades became a major marker for the Catholic Church in culture. From jokes made on the internet to references made in popular fiction, the Crusades become an example of the overreach an organization like the Church can contain as well as the extent of the power it can and potentially might wield in the future. They are also a fertile ground for ideas on how the Catholic Church might designate itself against threats, where organizations of dedicated martial warriors are created and made separate from the Church proper but act as sanctioned defenders. From this imagining of the Catholic Church, the idea of the priests who wield pistols can be discursively generated. The warrior-monks of the Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic orders all arise historically as clerics and holy men who are called to also wield arms against those who threaten the Church and its goals, the priests becoming no different. All that occurs in *Trinity Blood* is the transfer of this concept from history and non-fiction to the realm of fiction and futuristic what-ifs.

Where the ideas of Crusade become the link between a justification for war and the representation of the leadership of the Catholic Church is an example of intertextual recontextualization in the structure that Per Linell devises, with the genres of historical retelling being shifted to a call for legitimacy in a work of fiction. Through a direct reference to actual history, the fictional story becomes more natural, becoming believable and requiring less suspension of disbelief for the story to be plausible. Recontextualization becomes methods of sanctioning and

naturalizing not only violence but of specific utilization of an organizational response to perceived threats. The process of sanctioning the violence works along the obvious lines of the fictional Catholic Church being justified in its efforts to protect humanity but it also signals to the viewer methods in which power is distributed and handled. Violence becomes a force that requires authorization before being utilized effectively. This authorization cannot originate from Cardinal Francesco, who is the source of desired violence either. Instead, such violence must become mediated along ideas of a third party, omniscient and omnipotent, that can be interpreted to approve of such actions. That is, that an authority that cannot be challenged must intervene and become attached to the claims for violence in order for the violence itself to become justified. The structure of the Catholic Church bears this intervention as movement along its internal power structures, extending outward towards the deity that is worshiped, the motivation for violence becomes ideological rather than that of personal ambition. The exoticness, non-Japaneseness of this organization allows for such a process to be shown without risk of being identified as rooted in any scandalous local efforts of legitimization of violence.

Such safety through contextualization is seen in *Star Wars*. The Jedi Order, identified as warrior-monks in external sources, practice a religion that has no name beyond the name of their order, and which posits a relationship with the surrounding world similar to Buddhism. Eschewing attachment and drawing power from connection to the world around them, the Jedi are able to portray religiously oriented violence against the State and private citizens without raising anxieties of

the audience. Bringing in familiar tropes of Buddhism and creating legitimacy for the fictional belief system through such utilization, the Jedi avoid at the same time connections to the Western anxieties of Christian- or Muslim-tied acts of religious violence such as those found in the current crises in the Middle East, or the relatively recent clashes between the Irish Republican Army and British forces, where religion becomes a site of conflict and difference between groups. This anxiety surrounding religious violence and how religions handle violence and construct the modern world becomes a larger concern in *shōnen* anime. Where *Trinity Blood* has the violence and actions of the Catholic Church occur in a far future already doomed by the actions of humans, the next two works, *Blue Exorcist* and *Seven Deadly Sins* transition their settings chronologically backwards, returning to the contemporary modern and to a fantastical past.

Blue Exorcist

Next, chronologically produced, is the anime *Blue Exorcist*, which was first released in 2010 by A-1 Pictures and released on Shueisha's *Jump Square* website and directed by Okamura Tensai for the first season and by Hatsumi Koichi for the second season. The series is set in an alternate reality Earth, where demons and Hell are real, with Satan as king. After a mass possession of major priests throughout the world as a show of his power that becomes known as The Blue Night, Satan leaves behind two children: Rin and Yukio.[22] Rin Okumura, the son of Satan considered most likely to be a threat, decides to become an exorcist after his

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[22] Figure 3 is of the effects of The Blue Night. The Blue Flames indicate possession by Satan.

powers activate and Satan kills his adoptive father, a priest of the international Order of the True Cross. Rin must deal with the prejudice that the Order, an organization headquartered in the Vatican and the central organization working against Satan, has towards him and must learn to control his demonic powers he gained from his *in-utero* possession. The first season's first half followed the story of the manga by the same name with the second half of the first season actually diverging and wrapping up the season along a different narrative path. A second season, *Blue Exorcist: Kyoto Saga*, was released in 2017. This second season returns more closely to the story of the source manga, with Rin still being feared as the son of Satan and considered untrustworthy by his friends - essentially a soft reboot of much of the second half of the first season. Sent on a mission to Kyoto to prevent the utilization of a demon relic by a possessed former exorcist, Rin and his friends once more discover conspiracies and betrayals within the Church surrounding the incursion by Satan on the Blue Night and the absorption of most faiths into the Order of the True Cross. Defeating the revived Impure King who had created the artifacts the group of exorcists had originally been tasked with protecting, Rin once more learns to control his powers as in the first season and become something more than merely the demon Satan had intended him to be.

To begin with, the grandeur of Catholicism is on display in the opening shot of the first episode. An assembly of robed devotees are muttering hymns and directed by a priest clad in the red robes of a Catholic Cardinal.[23] As they are

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[23] Tensai, Okamura. "The Devil Resides in Human Souls." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 1. JNN, April 17, 2011.

consumed by blue flames, the Cardinal urges them to return to their hymns despite warnings from his attendants to flee. Only after he himself becomes consumed by the flames that the shot then changes to show that this scene is taking place in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. The blue flames represent demonic possession and the chaotic nature of the flames jumping from person to person is done as a theatrical show of force by the demons to showcase their power. It is not merely enough that they can possess the priests, it becomes a game to showcase how the faith that is believed to be a shield isn't useful. It pushes back against the theatricality of the Catholic Mass, where the call and response nature allow for a representation of faith that is eternal and made immutable through its scripted nature. The structured performance of the Catholic Church becomes a method of showcasing the struggle central to the world the story takes place in. While other traditions are shown as also fighting the same demons, only the Catholic Church can encompass the struggle in this specific manner.

Another form the grandeur of Catholicism takes in the story is at the trial of the main character Rin after he is exposed to be the son of Satan. Brought before a council of judges known as the Grigori, or watchers, he is subjected to a grand trial.[24] The camera pans over the grand assemblage of clerics of the Church of the Cross. Here, at the center of their power, the Church is extremely formalized and theatrical. No matter what the outside world does, within the walls of the Church, one is expected to look and dress a specific way. The Grigori are wearing full

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[24] Tensai, Okamura. "The Wager." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 16. JNN, April 17, 2011.

ceremonial robes and so are the rest of the Order of the True Cross members that are present. The robes create an architecture of formality to the proceedings that separate the trial from the other Church rituals and highlights the importance. Compared to the realistic architecture of *Trinity Blood*, the architecture here becomes more fantastical, focused more on what would look grand and exquisite rather than any accuracy to what a Church in Rome might look like. Full of arches and pillars, the space of the Church becomes one of a magical temple, designated as where the power of Light holds sway among edgings of gold and shining white walls.[25] These color schemes mimic that of the Catholic Church calling upon white as the color of innocence and purity and light as well as gold as the divinity and wealth of God.[26]

This sense of grandeur stands almost diametrically opposed to the grandeur found in *Trinity Blood*. Rather than bringing in ties to historical forces and senses of legitimacy that fueled the power of the Catholic Church in their Crusades against the Methusalahs, in *Blue Exorcist* the grandeur becomes ways to signal the lack of aptitude and complacency the Order of the True Cross exorcist's exercise. Rituals are where the old ways are being shown as failed. The recitation of the Mass, and the chanting of prayers are shown as limited in their tangible effect on the demons they are designed to combat and become a method through which Church officials become corrupted and dangerous. Grandeur is a memetic idea that is constantly

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[25] Figure 4 in the Index is of Rin being put on trial at the headquarters of the Order of the True Cross.

[26] Tensai, Okamura. "The Wager." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 16. JNN, April 17, 2011.

recontextualized, as seen in *Trinity Blood,* but it is divergent in how it becomes utilized.

The intercessional nature of the Catholic Church becomes apparent when it becomes shown that all of the religious traditions seen in *Blue Exorcist* are subordinate to the Church centered in Rome. For example, one of the main characters, Ryuji Suguro, is a Buddhist Bon, or priest, yet he is being trained by the Church in order to effectively fight demons. These separate traditions in the real world are placed within a hierarchy that prioritizes the Roman Church in combating otherworldly threats. Once more, just like in *Trinity Blood*, *Blue Exorcist* has the magical world contain a special relationship that only the Church can handle. Rather than a playing field of sorts that favors agents who interact with the supernatural equally, it becomes rather focused on how the only true boundary-crossing organization is the Catholic Church with its Order of the True Cross.

Another way this imagining can be read is that instead of utilizing demons from Buddhism and Shintō traditions, it is specifically Christian demons that interact with the world in *Blue Exorcist*. Buddhist prayers are able to affect and slow down demons but it is only by reciting the Bible that they are truly banished.[27] The threats of Buddhist cosmology do not threaten the world, instead they play a subordinate role in a Christian cosmological conflict. As in the world inhabited by the viewer, this world has the supremacy of a Christian supernatural dictate the terms and conditions under which the theologies of other religious and supernatural

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[27] Tensai, Okamura. "Memories." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 9. JNN, April 17, 2011.

systems can exist. While the main characters are all Japanese, Christian supernatural entities become in the first series an external problem that needs to be solved, where the exotic Church has not only failed but been corrupted by the very monsters it was meant to contain. The climax of the first season, which is retconned in the second season to return the story closer to the *manga* it originated from, involves the leader of the Order of the True Cross actively trying to sacrifice Rin in order to bring Satan into the human world.[28] Earlier, the same leader had been issuing out special ammunition for the guns and other technological weapons that the Order uses. The idea of the intercessional nature of the Catholic Church is brought back into the story as being the true root for any of the progress made by the organization existing solely as a cover for magic to be utilized as means of containment of the supernatural as expected to exist outside of the mundane. The two intersect only under the guise of the exorcists of the Order.

This universality itself is tied to the Church in its self-view, where the Creed that is repeated by its adherents during every Mass adheres to the idea of a singular church that covers all.[29] Indeed, this idea of universality is actually one of the dictionary definitions of the term catholic, that the referent of the adjective is universal or broad-minded. Recontextualized into a story that necessitates the usage of Abrahamic or Christian mythological entities, this universality becomes a convenient shorthand through which all other organizations can be brought into communication with one another. Instead of a divided world based on individual

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[28] Tensai, Okamura. "Demon Hunting." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 22. JNN, April 17, 2011.
[29] "What We Believe". 2022. USCCB. https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe.

beliefs, the Catholic Church becomes an executive level organization that runs interference for the smaller organizations. It also mimics the strong connection that the Catholic Church has with numerous countries leading up to and past colonialism, such as Western Europe and the Anglosphere as well as the Philippines and French Africa. In a post-colonial world, the main forms of diplomacy and the geo-political stakes of Catholic universalism remain centered on a hegemonic structure and its aftermath that was established by the Anglosphere and Western Europe at large. The Catholic Church becomes the means through which the tension surrounding the real can be resolved and explicitly so through ideas of corruption and ineptitude surrounding the supernatural. The real world becomes threatened and helpless under the threat of the supernatural both through and in opposition to the Catholic Church or West. Placing the organization of the Church at the center as *Blue Exorcist* does allow for the presumed order of the world to both be reinforced but at the same time pushes against the self-imposed narrative boundaries. The Japanese protagonist, Rin, becomes central to this world order and through it centralizes the world order back around an understandable world. The intercessional nature of the Church becomes not only the unifier but indeed almost a translation matrix

This translation matrix relationship can be viewed as the idea of writing that Richard Okada expanded upon in *Figures of Resistance*. Here, Okada positions writing, or in this case the creation of a viewable media, as being a complete subject

at the point of creation and itself creating a separate subject by being observed.[30]

Internally within *Blue Exorcist*, the Order of the True Cross operates essentially as

a reader of the interactions between the human world and the supernatural,

generating a meaning through the modes in which the organization operates. By

viewing Demons as enemies, the nature of the Demons or any inherent naturalness

and belonging that they might have in a larger metaphysical sense becomes lost.

There is at the root a sense of otherness and loss of interconnectedness and

potential for non-structured interactions. By creating the format and methods

through which Humanity interacts with Demons, the Church creates specific and

limited interactional events.

The Church in *Blue Exorcist* becomes a sign that is tied to authority and thus

how proper responses to threats should be handled. Its symbols are utilized in all

exorcist matters and it is to be consulted in all actions and responses to demon

threats. Generating legitimacy through omnipresence, the idea of the Order of the

True Cross, and indeed the Catholic Church that houses it, become signs that

indicate the extensiveness of any supernatural events. As mentioned above, the

Church is self-perpetuating, creating events that only it can handle and then

recursively declaring that the event itself was inherent and unavoidable. The actual

truth of the event, the reality in which the interactions were taking place, is

brought under the hegemony of the Order's understanding, and placed in a web of

connections with other such events.

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[30] Okada, Richard. Figures of Resistance: Language, Poetry, and Narrating in The Tale of Genji and Other Mid-Heian Texts. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Militarism is showcased, like grandeur, in the first episode of *Blue Exorcist*. The Cardinal, when urged to flee, challenges his allies, asking without them who would defend the world.[31] The Church thus sees itself as a bastion against the forces of evil, fighting an endless and potentially hopeless fight. As the only ones who can do so, it is their fight alone to endure and one that must not be shirked. At the university where new exorcists are being trained, they are trained in methods of fighting both through faith as well as physical weapons.[32] The fight against demons never becomes merely a spiritual one. Actual demons, many of them also sons of Satan, physically assaulting unnamed exorcists of the Order as well as the protagonists and to overthrow the world as humanity knows it, leading to a long and bloody campaign that centers around numerous battles. The weapons mentioned earlier in fact actually fully destroy the demon, leading to an ultimate goal to destroy all demons rather than to merely contain them or protect humanity from the excesses of the demons. The Church is recontextualized away from the agent of conquest that they represented throughout history and regains an agency in fiction to become willing agents of these conquests. Indeed, with both Rin and his brother being convinced that the conquest of Gehenna by the Order is the only way to become fully human, the violence becomes normalized through the eyes of the protagonists. There is no other option and indeed the role of violent defender is the only role that the Order of the True Cross *should* play.

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[31] Tensai, Okamura. "The Wager." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 16. JNN, April 17, 2011.
[32] Tensai, Okamura. "Brothers." Blue Exorcist, Season 1, Episode 3. JNN, April 17, 2011.

Recontextualized, this militaristic nature serves as a method through which ideas of crisis and individuality can be handled. In *Trinity Blood*, this idea of a military relationship possessed by the Catholic Church is a memetic transfer of organizational structure and purpose of the Church in order for it to be capable of combating the monsters that exist outside of humanity. This idea in *Trinity Blood* also points to the Church itself as compromised and as potential monsters that rely on violence. A similar idea of inherent corruptibility is reflected in *Blue Exorcist* as those who have become monsters themselves through their interactions with the otherworldly begin to push for increasingly drastic actions. Individual ideals of the moral stance of violence are subsumed into the greater whole of the Church. Membership in the Order of the True Cross indicates that the individual in question has to enforce the official policy of the Order, whether they agree or not. In other words, this membership becomes a sign of the member that references various sub-ideologies where being a Buddhist Priest or Shintō shrine priest becomes only a marked modifier to a base sign of being a True Cross Exorcist. To support the violent methods indicates that any demon is a threat to humanity as well as unworthy of existence even if the demon in question is not harming anyone, a way of signaling an ideology of ranking and supremacy. The exorcist, in turn, becomes an enactor of the ideology, reinforcing the ideologies of anthro-centrism that mimic those found in *Trinity Blood*. As in *Trinity*, the sign is tied to actions, generating a semiotic motion that creates shifts in the relationship between signs and static referents. Tying this motion into the Church also utilizes the weight of the Church

as an external force outside of the fiction, showcasing disruptions that have been tied historically to the Church throughout visual media as shown in the progression mentioned in the contextualization in cinema section earlier. In a direct manner of speaking, the Church serves as a metaphor for the direct utilization of violence in response to threats, replacing ideas of a secular military as the organization that has monopolistic control over violence in a Weberian model.

This raises the question that must be considered throughout examinations of these anime: How might grandeur or these other traits be utilized in similar manners for exactly opposite purposes. Does the contextualization become the grounds through which the meaning shifts and which allows for mutation in the transference of the memetic ideals, or is there an inherent trait that differentiates grandeur in how it can be utilized within various contextualizations? To examine this, the final piece. *Seven Deadly Sins* will show how changing settings away from a modern or modern appearing Earth can illuminate the contextualization process.

Seven Deadly Sins

Seven Deadly Sins was aired on JNN stations in 2014, and was directed by Okamura Tensai, the same director as the first season of *Blue Exorcist*. Following the adventures of seven exiled Holy Knights of Britannia that are known as the Deadly Sins and have powers and flaws related to the traditional deadly sins of Christianity, the series explores the ideas of corruption and how the nature of good and evil might not only be subjective but corruptive at either extreme. The world of Britannia is stuck in the aftermath of a war between the Demon and Goddess races,

consisting of essentially devils and angels respectively. These lesser Goddesses are led by four Virtues who draw their names from the Bible. Indeed, one named Tarmiel has three heads, a trait that is close to the four heads of Cherubs in the Bible.[33] The Demons are led by a group of ten Demons named the Ten Commandments. Meliodas, the leader of the Sins and the Sin of Wrath, is himself a former Ten Commandment and the heir to the Demon King who is cursed to wander the world and lose the love of his life every time she is reborn due to her status as a Goddess and daughter of the Creator Goddess.[34] Slowly going insane from the grief, he fights to keep her and humanity safe from the machinations of his former people and those of the Goddess race.

The major themes of *The Seven Deadly Sins* lend themselves to recontextualizing the intercessional nature of the Catholic Church in numerous ways. While often drawing on Celtic mythology in order to depict the land of Britannia, an analogue to the island of Great Britain in the real world, the Catholic tales of King Arthur and the Holy Grail fill in numerous gaps. For example, the Holy Grail is the source of magic for the Fairy race in Britannia, guarded by the princess of the Fairies, the younger sister of one of the Seven Deadly Sins. She is seen as a holy saint, pure enough to exist around the holiness radiating from the relic. In this manner, she mimics the saints of Catholicism, who are believed to be superhuman in their own rights and inherently more worthy than humans for

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[33] For a visual representation, Figure 6 in the Index is a screenshot of Tarmiel.
[34] Figure 5 in the Index is a screenshot of all the major protagonists. Meliodas is the blonde man in the center while the white-haired woman to the right is his lover, Elizabeth.

worship and loyalty.[35] At the same time, the inclusion of the Seven Deadly Sins as not only the name of the group of rogue knights but also the format in which their faults and powers originate arise from a Catholic imagining. The sins themselves existed before Christianity, arising in Greek philosophy, but the current list from which the titular characters draw their names were formalized under the Catholic Church and spread into various Protestant faiths that retained many of the traditions of their former theological ancestor. [36] The Sins gain power through their faults and at the same time are consumed by them. Throughout the series, it becomes clear that in order to gain the power needed to defeat the Demons that plot to take over the world the characters need to resolve the issues that generated the sins and feelings of unworthiness in the first place that plague them. An example would be Harlequin, the King of the Fairies, who not only goes by King in reference to his rank but also as the Sin of Sloth. He takes this name on as he finds his own slothfulness to be what caused not only the downfall of his people but also the death of his sister at the hands of a Demon many years ago. Instead of taking on his responsibilities, he holds himself back and embodies the idea of laziness, becoming inactive and passive in life. Overcoming this fault relies on re-earning his peoples' loyalty and realizing the humanity within himself as being worthy of care as well as his people. The characters with magical powers who are not a part of the titular group of the seven Sins are all either non-human species or are strictly a part of the

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[35] Tensai, Okamura. "The Fearsome Pursuer." The Seven Deadly Sins, Season 1, Episode 8. JNN, 2014.
[36] Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologica. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1925.

Holy Knights that protect the realm. As the only organization containing magical powers, it falls upon the Holy Knights to defend humanity, by interceding between humanity and the non-human worlds. They are the ones who are called upon to protect the villages and towns of the kingdoms of Britannia, strengthening local garrisons of soldiers and militiamen.

This sense of intercessional nature differs from both *Trinity Blood* and *Blue Exorcist* in the fact that there are no alternatives to the Church in the world of *Seven Sins*. Within the world of *Trinity Blood*, the Catholic Church serves as the head of humanity's resistance to the Methuselah yet also must engage with non-Church nations of humans. It merely enjoys a privileged position as the primary organization separating and interacting with the non-human. Within *Blue Exorcist*, the Order of the True Cross is the organization which oversees and manages all of humanity's efforts to combat demons. Like *Trinity Blood,* the Church is merely in a privileged position. Within *Seven Sins*, this is not the case. Instead, it is the only organization that connects the human world to the supernatural. When the Goddesses, who despite their title in English are presented in both masculine and feminine forms, are brought back into the world they are interacting directly only with the Holy Knights.[37] Rather than a more personal connection with the divine that is at the core of a post-Reformation Protestant Christianity, it is the directly organizational and intercessional form of the Catholic Church that is invoked. Semiotically, the Holy Knights/Church is placed between the human and divine in

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[37] Tensai, Okamura. The Seven Deadly Sins, Season 4. JNN, 2014.

every context that they are referenced. Humanity cannot interact with the supernatural otherwise, with death and chaos involved in every interaction.

This establishes the Holy Knights into the same role that Catholicism had within Europe. Positioned in a role of interpreting the signs of the divine and supernatural, the Knights and Church both ensure that the supernatural enforces the status quo. In the world of the *Seven Sins*, the titular group is itself a threat to the Holy Knights by the nature of their interactions with their own powers and the dynamic growth that is required of them. Serving metaphorically a similar role to Luther and Calvin, members of the privileged class that pushed back against their own positions, the Seven Sins are dynamic and generate ideas of resistance to interceded interactions between the human and divine. That is, individuals become intercessors for themselves in their own personal salvation.

The intercessional nature of the Church is therefore disrupted by this dynamism offered by the characters. Rather than presented as a positive trait, where the Church can provide the semiotic interpretation of supernatural signs, the semiotic relationship between divine and mortal becomes disrupted and diverted to the interpreter along a more direct route. The signs become interpreted instead through the direct moral compasses of the interpreter, the meaning becoming reliant on what is considered important by the individual. A further example of this would be when Harlequin is sent back in time and realizes that one of the Ten Commandments, a Demon-aligned group similar to the Sins, is shown to kill a human because the human injured the Commandment's sister. The rage that

corrupts both Harlequin and the Commandment becomes interpretable directly. Rather than seen as the sin that society and the Goddesses and Demons alike view as damning, the rage and subsequent realization of hidden truth as the situation loses ambiguity becomes a site for growth and interpretation. The experience is a crossroad where choice determines the future, where the meaning of the reality pointed to as a referent is prone to binary understandings and invites both the character of Harlequin as well as the viewer to consider how information itself is presented and how only those involved are able to truly make decisions. Only by experiencing these moments of decision can a person actually understand the reality itself. This repetition of experience breaks the cycle of control over information and interaction that the Holy Knights have over history and the world, the stories, and truths they have constructed being able to be pulled apart.

Militarism and grandeur become intertwined in the entities of the Holy Knights themselves. Tied not to any single religious center, as the holy orders of Europe are, the Holy Knights tread a thin boundary between merely being what might be called ordinary knights in other media and specifically religious warriors. The uniform of many of the knights early on are reminiscent of those worn by Crusading knights. Of note, the red "crusader's cross" of the Templars is recontextualized from a historical uniform and context of representing the Templars' roles in protecting pilgrims and instead becomes a stand-in for representing a holy warrior in the fantasy setting of Britannia. The reasoning of the utilization of a cross is not mentioned and has no historical reasoning in the

narrative universe as rather than a singular God, there is a Deity who created a Goddess race. The meaning of crosses representing holiness thus becomes transferred, along with the biblical spirits that accompany it, however the actual figures that are being referenced as holy through these other signs are removed and replaced instead with a more fantastical and unique creation.

This grandeur and militarism are distinct from *Blue Exorcist* and *Trinity Blood* because they exist also outside a direct link to a Catholic Church named as such in the series. The absolute aesthetics of the Church are preserved, for example the crosses and militarized holy warriors as well as the positionality of the holy within daily life, yet it becomes tied to a completely fictionalized religion. Distancing itself from the specific tenets of any religion, *Seven Sins* becomes able to recreate metaphors and allusions to numerous stories found throughout European folktales in order to generate commentary and meaning within the story. By strategically referencing objects such as the Holy Grail, which is tied in reality to Jesus as the cup he drank from during the Last Supper, ideas of divinity from sources external to the story are pulled into the world of the narrative utilizing Linell's interdiscursivity. The story of the Holy Grail, with healing powers and divine associations, is brought from biblical apocrypha into a world of fantasy and film, where it can be metaphorical for the power of the Goddesses and the purity of its Fairy guardian.

As a source of eternal life, the Grail also creates value in the story to fuel the desire of Ban, the Sin of Greed. Originally the Grail is the source of his desires, Ban

instead falls in love with the Guardian.[38] Returning over and over in an attempt to take the Grail, he showcases his devotion to the Guardian. As they become closer and closer, the shift in his desires from one of greed to that of love comes when the tree that is fed by the Grail is placed under attack by a Demon. Ban and the Guardian both fight the Demon but she fatally blocks an attack from the Demon. She dies for Ban's sin of greed through these actions and metaphorically becomes a Jesus figure for Ban.

This selflessness was anathema to his prior personality and this story recontextualizes the story of Christ dying on the cross, where eternal life is gained in exchange for sins in one large metaphorical sweep. With the Grail representing the divine, Ban pushes against ideas of devotion solely focused around the divine and reorients what is considered important back to the personal connections generated between others. This characterization occurs utilizing the very stories that Catholicism has utilized in its construction of an ideology and the large narrative of Catholicism becomes itself subverted and relegated to merely one part of a larger narrative.

This larger narrative contains, also, a recontextualization of the star-crossed lovers of Shakespeare and the War in Heaven of Abrahamic mythology. Rather than the strict similes and direct representations of the other two anime, this grandeur becomes a tale of metaphors that invite the viewer into understanding a wider range of European and Catholic myths and stories, generating motion between

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[38] Tensai, Okamura. "The Fearsome Pursuer." The Seven Deadly Sins, Season 1, Episode 8. JNN, 2014.

various traditions in novel ways and allowing not only Catholic signs but also signs from Celtic mythology and French folk tales to generate meaning and provide a transfer of memetic ideas surrounding what divinity and righteousness mean.

What Does it Mean?

As mentioned throughout this examination of the anime, Catholicism becomes more than merely a religion referenced or utilized strictly for aesthetics. When popular culture such as anime are read only casually, such themes as Christianity or war appear on the surface to be merely something intriguing and enticing for viewers to be entertained by. However, even this brief analysis above showcases how such a casual reading can be misleading. While Foucault's Death of the Author must be acknowledged, and while it is futile to assign a fixed meaning to anything written or created, a coherent reading can be made of the role of Catholicism in *shōnen* anime.

What the readings generated by this paper showcases are that there is never a casualness to the inclusion of Christianity in anime and that indeed it becomes an extremely specific form of Christianity - Catholicism and the surrounding motifs and ideologies - that is adopted. It is a process that continues the mobilization of Catholicism begun in the works of cinema produced from 1930 onwards in Japan, combined with the long history of religious-oriented storytelling illuminated by Jolyon Thomas. Behind everything, it is a continuation of processes inherent in the creative traditions of Japan and a coherent transference of tropes between the Catholic and non-Catholic ideologies.

In the same manner that Buddhism becomes mobilized in America and Europe as the Force and Jedi within *Star Wars*, the mobilization of Catholicism in anime is a part of the intercultural exchange that has arisen out of the capitalistic intertwining of economies on the global scale. In order for capitalism to thrive, innovations and consolidations of capital are constantly demanded. Boundaries are broken down between traditions and even the meanings of signs because of pressures to generate value. At the same time, these drives to generate value also push back against these drives that created the "original" meaning and question the motives that society operates under. It is this tidal movement of meaning that is the core then of the mobilization of Catholicism.

By utilizing Catholicism, the three selected anime are reinforcing common conceptions of what Catholicism is and what it can do. While not necessarily a belief system that is actively bought into, with declarations of belief or of personal alignments of morals based on a Christian model, Catholicism is instead a system that has become tied not only to supernatural problems such as those that arise in *shōnen* anime but also tied to ideas of modern solutions to these problems. One might argue here that in *Seven Sins* this modernity is not possible due to the medieval technological setting of the narrative world, however doing so overlooks that these Catholic analogues are arising in modernity after a cataclysm in the past. That is, rather than being archaic, the Holy Knights are a conservative organization that arises to fulfill the needs of Humanity in a hostile supernatural world. This dynamism is the same requirement that allows the Vatican to rise to

power in *Trinity Blood,* with humanity having been shattered and needing an organization that is not tied merely to the mundane. It becomes tied again to a rejection of the past and an embracing of the modern before becoming wrapped again into conversation of rejection and renewal as the Church itself becomes the status quo. This cycle from Catholicism being a modernizing force into one of regression is also found in the Order of the True Cross when it represents the status quo in *Blue Exorcist.* This cycle highlights this final connection of modernity and Catholicism in the narrative eye of anime. This modernity is never a static state of having arrived, rather it is something that has already occurred and now isn't desirable in its current state.

However, Christianity itself is diverse and the understanding and usage of the various tropes within is more complicated than simple adoption or mimicry. Christianity, through endless fracturing, has become increasingly diverse and niche. In America, such diversification has led to numerous Christian traditions decrying others as non-Christian or somehow outside of the belief system proper. Reading mobilizations of Christian tropes as generically Christian rather than stemming from histories of contact and previous utilization serves only to obfuscate how diverse Christianity is within media as well as the efforts of the media creators. All three of the selected anime as well as the cinematic works traced over 50 years in Japanese cinema rely on these Catholic ideas of Christianity to set up their narrative and establish the stakes of their work. The narratives, touching upon ideas of corruption and grandiosity, lend themselves to and are easily

influenced by the Catholic Church with the Church's long history informed by numerous coups by influential members and families as well as the rituals and wealth that the organization surrounds itself with. This is only a part of a long history of reconceptualization that occurs between Japan and the rest of the world

This easily lent nature serves as only one direction of a conversation between creatives between Western countries and Japan, a conversation that does not necessarily require direct calls and responses but rather that of constant adoption and adaptation of varying elements. An example outside of television would be the adoption of Christian weddings in Japan. Utilizing the memetic ideas of faithfulness and devotion that originated in Christianity - from Catholicism and then through a parallel system in Protestantism as well - these rituals are contextualized again into an alignment of being a member of the modern international world. However, these adoptions in rituals within the private sphere are not one-sided with Japan being only an adopter of Western memes. Instead, the ideas of Buddhist traditions such as Zen arrive in America and Europe and are transformed outside of the metaphysical and become instead tied to modes of resistance to the capitalist modes of production as well as tools through which to lessen the ennui of shifting relationships between labor and product. It is through these kinds of contextualizations, often the interdiscursive variety of Linell's system, where the energy of resistance can be generated.

This resistance is generated through the inclusion of the exotic to also alienate the known. By bringing in Western memetic ideas of religion and

metaphysics, the anime becomes a commentary safe to critique the societies and realities that produce it. It breaks down the ideological barriers that society creates in order to construct and replicate itself through presenting alternative memes for replication. By changing a trait of society, the trait becomes a 'what-if,' a new part of society that can be accepted or rejected without change to the entire structure and exists completely as potential. Only after becoming internalized and fully contextualized does the 'what-if' solidify and become a self-replicating and supporting structure in the ideology. However, this process cannot begin completely internally, with the existing structures as they are, due to the self-supporting nature they contain. This sharing and movement of ideas then is necessary for Society to engage in growth and retain energy.

Therefore, the movement of ideas between cultures is the root of the importance surrounding the inclusion of Catholicism in *shōnen* anime. This movement takes the memes of both Japanese popular culture as well as Catholicism as a belief system and encourages both to re-imagine the various tenets and sub-systems inherent and generates the 'what-if.' This movement becomes a method through which a new possibility can be imagined and considered as being viable or not. That it is potentially invisible or decentralized is inherent to the process. Centralization or overtness relies then on the current status quo and supporting institutions to determine what can be viable and is thus incompatible with actual long-term reformation. To escape cyclical loops of self-generation, the process becomes one of fantasy, of constant personal creation and imagination at the edges

of respectability within the structure of entertainment. These movements are natural and outside of direct human control, with only individual choices allowing for problematic or incompatible potentials being pruned at the moment of creation in narratives.

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Fig 2. *Cardinal Caterina Sforza and Pope Alessandro XVIII*. Trinity Blood. Wowow, 2005.

Fig 3. *The Blue Night.* Blue Exorcist. JNN, 2011.

Fig 4. *Mephisto Bargains for Rin's Soul.* Blue Exorcist. JNN, 2011.

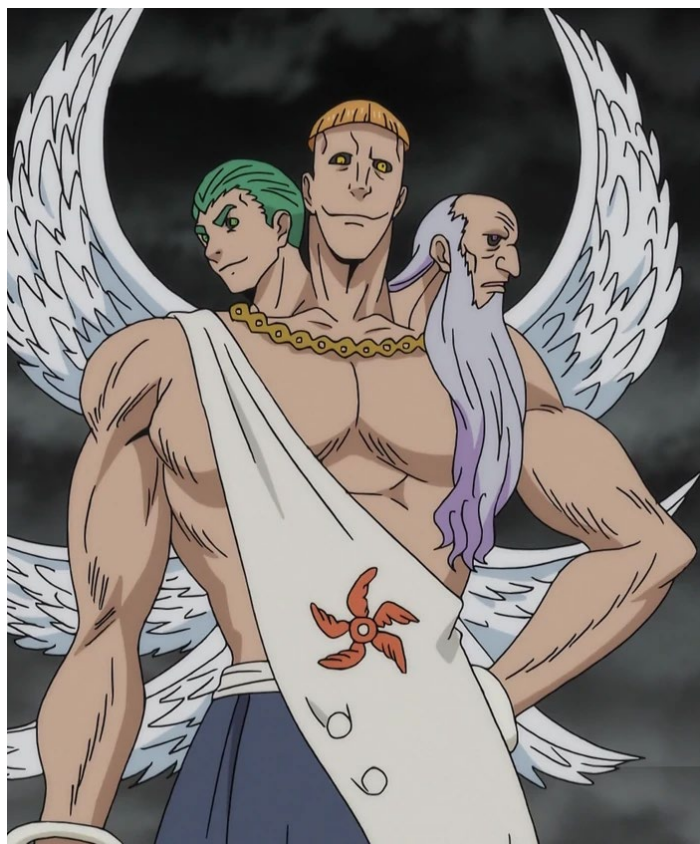Fig 5. *Opening Group Shot*. The Seven Deadly Sins. JNN, 2014.

Fig 6. *Tarmiel*. The Seven Deadly Sins. JNN, 2014.