

Exploring Women's Experiences in Far-Right Circumstances – through Theological Assessments
and Test Case: Giorgia Meloni

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Abstract

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This thesis explores women's experiences in far-right societies using multiple theological assessments and prime minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, as the main test case. Elected in 2022 but having held right-wing leadership positions for most of her life, Meloni is opposed to issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and surrogacy, and aims to limit these rights as well as the rights of women and other minorities in Italy with the goal of reverting back to Italy's traditional, Christian lifestyle. This thesis delves into issues such as feminism, fascism, and the far-right – situating and defining Meloni's beliefs and political actions and detailing how they are impacting Italian women's experiences. This research determines if Meloni is adhering to some type of feminism, if her government can be considered fascist, and it pinpoints how much of her politics is taking place online, as well as certain repercussions that come with this. Using a comparative methodological approach, this thesis compares Meloni and her party to other female right-wing politicians in Europe, as well as other right-wing politicians in North America, at present. This research draws on political theology since religion has made its way into her politics. Thus, it is essential to perform theological assessments on Meloni to determine her method as well as if her views are rooted in accurate theological ideas. Here, contextual theology, Lonergan's notion of the human good, and feminist theological approaches are vital. Through these theological assessments, this thesis concludes that Meloni is afraid for her country's cultural identity and believes she is doing good by women and minorities but is allowing for oppression in Italy to continue.

Key words: feminism, fascism, far-right, political theology, experience, Lonergan, ultranationalist, conservative, traditional, Italy, theological assessment, Giorgia Meloni

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Introduction

This thesis will revolve around the question “How are far-right politicians impacting women’s rights and rights of other minorities, and what does this look like through various theological perspectives?” This question surfaced when Italy elected Giorgia Meloni as their new prime minister in October 2022. It was the first time in Italy’s history that a woman had been elected for the position. Still, Italy’s decision came into question once it became known that Meloni was the leader of a far-right party.

1. The Case Study: Giorgia Meloni

Background information on Giorgia Meloni is essential to provide context regarding her present political position and leadership style. Meloni was born on January 15th, 1977.¹ She has been serving as the prime minister of Italy since October 22nd, 2022.² She is the co-founder and leader of the political party Brothers of Italy, which in Italian is Fratelli d’Italia. The Brothers of Italy are Italy’s most right-wing government since World War II.³ Meloni has been involved in politics since she was fifteen, when she joined the Youth Front, which in Italian is Fronte della Gioventù, a neo-fascist political party founded by followers of Benito Mussolini.⁴ From having held prominent, leading political positions from a young age, she co-founded the Brothers of Italy in 2012⁵ and has led the party since 2014.⁶ The party is based on extreme right-wing values, such as ending immigration, preventing women from having abortions and rejecting same-sex unions.⁷ These harsh mandates have been instilled in her from a young age, which I believe is due to the influences she was surrounded by.

As Meloni’s party is rooted in Italy’s fascist history, she has outwardly “expressed admiration for Mussolini” and has based many of her campaigns on similar fascist themes.⁸ Benito Mussolini was the founder of the fascist party in Italy in 1919 and “claimed to be the founder of fascism.”⁹ A key characteristic of fascism and a notion that Mussolini wholeheartedly believed was that humans can only find meaning through community, which is where the

¹ Bernd Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the star of the Italian far right?,” *Deutsche Welle*, September 26, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-election-who-is-giorgia-meloni-the-star-of-the-far-right/a-62604896>.

² Barbara Wesel, “Women Gaining Traction in Far-Right Politics,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 22, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/women-gaining-traction-in-far-right-politics/a-63494861>.

³ Nicole Winfield, “How a Party of Neo-Fascist Roots Won Big in Italy,” *AP News*, September 26, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/elections-rome-italy-6aa9fcb003071c307190a4053f199d98>.

⁴ Angela Giuffrida, “God, Family, Fatherland - How Giorgia Meloni has Taken Italy’s Far Right to the Brink of Power,” *The Observer*, September 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/17/giorgia-meloni-brothers-of-italy-leader-far-right-elections-alliance->.

⁵ Winfield, “How a Party of Neo-Fascist Roots Won Big in Italy.”

⁶ Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the Star of the Italian Far Right?”

⁷ Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the Star of the Italian Far Right?”

⁸ Isaac Chotiner, “‘I’m a Woman, I’m a Mother, I’m Christian’: How Giorgia Meloni Took Control in the Italian Election,” *The New Yorker*, September 28, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/im-a-woman-im-a-mother-im-christian-how-giorgia-meloni-took-control-in-the-italian-election>.

⁹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* 7th ed., (London: Red Globe Press, 2021), 156.

principle of “totalitarianism” derived from.¹⁰ This also meant that human or spiritual values do not exist and have no meaning when apart from the state.¹¹ One would be stripped of their individuality in this regime. Italian fascism, which is based on the “supremacy of the fascist state over the individual [...],” required a personal commitment to Mussolini.¹² Meloni expressed admiration and a sense of understanding towards Mussolini. For instance, in interviews, Meloni described Mussolini as “a complex personality.”¹³ Her empathy towards this figure and her party’s grievances have left many people in Italy and worldwide questioning her leadership and plans for Italy.

Meloni and the Brothers of Italy hold firm grievances towards certain subjects. For instance, Meloni’s stance towards the LGBTI¹⁴ community was scrutinized by other leaders like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.¹⁵ Meloni’s values and mandates were made clear during her campaign and immediately after her election, but the one that specifically affected women around the world was her stance on abortion. Her anti-abortion stance has led me to many questions and concerns. Such as, how could a *woman* feel this way towards abortion? How could a woman want to reduce other women’s autonomy? How could Italy support her? The fact that most of her votes came from Christian women prompted me to question the theological motivations behind their support. Besides being anti-abortion, Meloni’s values and mandates include going back to a traditional, Christian family system, banning same-sex unions, and preventing immigration to Italy. Thus, this thesis involves two critical aspects: experiences of oppression that women and other visible minorities have faced and how they have overcome that up to this point, and how far-right leaders will affect the progress that has already been made and continues to be made. Here, progress refers to the advances women have made in the world, but mainly in Western countries in the form of women’s rights and the efforts other oppressed groups have made regarding human rights.

2. Methodology

Context is highly relevant for my research. More precisely, I am interested in researching diverse contexts and experiences. Scholar Stephen Bevans has created a guide regarding Contextual Theology, which pertains to my main research question since I will explore different forms of oppression, several politicians in today’s society, and other cultures around Europe and North America. In his book titled *Models of Contextual Theology*, Bevans outlines six models of contextual theology, which are to be used as a guide when one wishes to perform theology in a particular context, which, in this case, is through a feminist context, along with a comparative methodology. My goal is that by remaining aware of these models, I will be able to authentically

¹⁰ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 156.

¹¹ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 156.

¹² Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 161.

¹³ Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the Star of the Italian Far Right?”

¹⁴ Here, I use the acronym LGBTI, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, to represent this community. Although there are shorter and longer acronyms, this is the internationally recognized one, which I believe is fitting since I am discussing ideas from various countries.

¹⁵ Nojoud Al. Mallees, “Trudeau Calls Out Italy’s LGBTQ+ Stance During G7 Meeting with Meloni,” *Global News*, May 18, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9710402/trudeau-calls-out-italys-lgbtq-stance-during-g7-meeting-with-meloni/>.

assess Giorgia Meloni's political views and come to a truthful conclusion regarding her leadership and whether she is promoting or undermining women's progress.

Remembering the past and how historical events or figures influence our current contexts is equally essential. For example, regarding feminist theological studies, Rosemary Radford Ruether paved the way for future feminist theologians. Her work from forty years ago, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, has informed much of what feminist theologians today know about feminist events and movements in Christianity over time, how far scholars in this field have come, and how much progress women have made. Other methods, like Bernard Lonergan's method from *Method in Theology*, become necessary since he believed that theologians will be most successful if they remain mindful of the past while fitting their unique research and studies in the present context they are writing and researching. Therefore, contextual theology and Lonergan's method will allow me to remain mindful of my own experiences, other people's experiences, and the context I am researching, all through a feminist perspective.

I will also use a comparative methodology throughout my research when comparing people's experiences and the views of several politicians. Likewise, using a comparative method, I can further analyze politicians' grievances and compare those to certain ideologies they may hold. All this will be done within a feminist framework. By approaching this research as a feminist and looking for ways to define women's experiences and those of other oppressed people, I aim to be guided by a feminist lens. A feminist lens is an approach taken in feminist theology by theologians like Rosemary Ruether. It will enable me to discover the effects that oppressive politicians have on visible minorities' rights and women's roles in far-right societies.

3. Ideologies and Frameworks

In addition to these theological perspectives, my research question is very much political and is based on the grievances and ideologies expressed by Meloni. When looking into the control that politicians have over the rights of women and visible minorities, one must first acquire a proper understanding of political ideologies. Political theorists like Andrew Heywood and Roger Griffin provide clarification and a deeper understanding of certain political ideologies. In Heywood's book titled *Political Ideologies*, he reflects on and questions political ideas and arguments and discusses whether they fit the description of an ideology.¹⁶ He also explores how ideologies can be liberating or oppressive and how they are categorized.¹⁷ There are several ideologies I will explore in my thesis, like conservatism, fascism, and feminism, which Heywood defines factually and without judgment. Also, he places them in different political contexts throughout history while remaining highly relevant in today's political scene.

Roger Griffin remains focused on fascism. In his book *Fascism*, Griffin reflects on fascism through time and offers an overview of the evolution of the idea and what it resembles in our present day. Griffin's primary goal is to clearly define the term for those who wish to understand and identify fascism when they truly see it. My main question includes reflecting on

¹⁶ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 2.

¹⁷ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 2.

experiences of the far-right, but does that automatically imply fascism, and if so, are there different types and ranges of fascism? In his book, Griffin describes fascism as sometimes manifesting into extreme nationalism and racism, along with feeling the need for national and racial revival based on a person's principles.¹⁸ Griffin has coined this idea as "ultranationalism," an aspect of fascism that might encapsulate what Meloni envisions for Italy.¹⁹ Understanding and categorizing fascism in specific contexts will be key in unpacking the actions of far-right politicians and reflecting upon women's experiences in certain situations. For instance, do fascism and ultranationalism relate to the issues of abortion, or does that only concern the far-right realm? Is there a difference between the terms "fascism" and "far-right," or are they interchangeable? There are what seems to be infinite ways to define fascism, so hopefully, Griffin's knowledge on the subject will help solidify the idea.

4. Relevance of the Topic

I chose this topic as a young, liberal, Catholic woman of Italian origin who never really paid attention to politics, especially not foreign politics. Growing up in Montreal, in a liberal family, I figured my place of origin felt the same way I did about women's rights and fundamental human rights. However, learning about Giorgia Meloni in October of 2022 truly changed my perspective and is how my many questions surfaced. From that point on, I was fascinated by her. She is younger than my Italian Canadian mom, yet they differ significantly in their views and beliefs. She is also Roman Catholic like we are and yet clings to traditional religious beliefs that seem to guide her personal and professional life in ways that might be impacting Italy's overall safety. Besides my questions and views towards Meloni, this thesis is highly relevant. Firstly, this research is unique. Not much work has been done on far-right female politicians, so I have an original question and research opportunity. Secondly, this research is being done in real-time. It began as soon as she was elected prime minister, back in October of 2022, and continues in 2025. Every day, new information makes Giorgia Meloni even more interesting. In January, she was at President Donald Trump's inauguration and posted a picture with him supporting his presidency and her excitement to work with him for the next few years.²⁰ It is clear to me that her politics will not only affect Italy but also be linked with views worldwide. Finally, this research is essential. Women's experiences of oppression deserve to be acknowledged and discussed, and my hope for this research is that it sparks change. I hope people can make informed decisions regarding their rights and when it is time to vote for new leadership.

¹⁸ Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*, (Medford, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2018), 5.

¹⁹ Griffin, *Fascism*, 129.

²⁰ Giorgia Meloni, "Auguri di buon lavoro al Presidente Donald J. Trump per l'inizio del suo nuovo mandato alla guida degli Stati Uniti d'America. [...]," Instagram, January 21, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DFDqvHDNTWp/>.

5. Thesis Structure

This introduction has given a brief overview of what this thesis will explore. In Chapter One, I discuss the first important ideology, which is *feminism*. I will begin by situating and defining it since, as I said, context is vital to my research. Then, I will look at my test case, Giorgia Meloni. I will dive deeper into what she is opposing in her politics. Furthermore, I will dissect how her policies play out concerning feminism. Finally, I will conclude whether she is adhering to a particular type of feminism, if there even is one. In this chapter, I explore a variety of significant scholars in the realm of feminism and feminist theology. Scholars such as Rosemary Ruether, Cynthia Crysdale, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Linda Hogan. These will allow me to determine a portion of my research question, which involves women's rights and oppression towards women and visible minorities.

In Chapter Two, I will investigate the following ideology, which is *fascism*, but also the *far-right*. Again, I will situate and define both and discuss whether the terms are interchangeable and if they can be used to describe Italy's political climate at this time. I will then return to Giorgia Meloni and discuss whether her style of governance is fascist and/or far-right. I will also explore how her policies play out with fascism or if there is a more appropriate way to associate them. Finally, I will explore social media and right-wing politicians, as well as the possible connections that are currently taking place between them.

The third and final chapter will be mainly theological. I will perform theological assessments on Giorgia Meloni, but first, I will explain what a theological evaluation is and why I deem it necessary and valuable in her case. I will also explain how it contributes to my research and understanding of Meloni's political views. The different theological perspectives I will pin Meloni against are contextual theology, through the lens of Stephen Bevans, Lonergan's method, which includes his notion of the human good, as well as progress and decline, and feminist theology, which connects the two previous methods, as well as explores other ideas from significant feminist theologians.

This final chapter will also discuss whether Meloni's views are rooted in accurate theological ideas or if her personal views sometimes merge with her political ones. If so, where are they coming from? Could this be a tactic politicians use to garner attention and support? Finally, this chapter will briefly address the implications Meloni's views and actions could have on Italy's families, democracy, and society.

At the end of this thesis, I hope to conclude not only Meloni's views and beliefs but also what I am personally for and against in politics. I hope to find concrete answers regarding politicians like Meloni and whether they promote or undermine women's progress. Finally, through my theological assessments of this figure, will there be a single, most substantial theological perspective that contributes insight into women's experiences in far-right circumstances? I hope to arrive at truthful conclusions while presenting these situations and this woman as an open inquiry rather than make inaccurate or biased judgements of truth and value.

Chapter 1: Meloni and Feminism

The first chapter of my thesis will deal with feminism, and specifically, what it is or what it means in relation to my research. It is important to situate feminism in the context in which I am researching it and have a clear definition so that I may continue to explore the idea. Once that has been accomplished, I will be able to study my test case, Giorgia Meloni. This chapter will explore Meloni's ideas and beliefs against the backdrop of feminism. It will look at what she opposes in her personal life, which inevitably has made its way into her political life. This chapter will explore how her policies play out in relation to feminism and what the possible ramifications could be. Finally, I aim to research on her and her politics will allow me to conclude whether she adheres to a type of feminism. Then again, it is possible that there is not yet a type of feminism that she adequately fits into. This chapter is an important foundation in my research about women's experiences and Meloni.

1. Situating and Defining the Term Feminism

To begin, what do I think when I think about feminism? When I think of feminism, the first thought which comes to my mind is "protection." Women protect themselves from harm. Women protect other women from abuse. Women protect their gender from inequality and discrimination. Women standing up for and empowering each other. Women raising their sons to be kind to their sisters and one day to their wives. Women raised and surrounded by strong and selfless female role models. These are the women I know. The women I choose to be surrounded by, and the woman I strive to become. I have never known women to be anything else, and I was definitely naïve for thinking that women in today's day and age, would only strive to maintain the same liberations other women have been fighting for centuries.

Linda Hogan provides an explanation in her book titled *From Women's Experiences to Feminist Theology* about an essential step in understanding and analyzing women's experiences is through critiquing and reinterpreting patriarchal theories and traditions.²¹ It is a foundational step in order to fully grasp what a women's life in a patriarchal society looks like, which in many parts of the world, and in many homes around us, is still pertinent.²² This does not mean demanding that women abandon patriarchal traditions, but simply that it is important to note this circumstance that many women face since it captures the context in which many women live and work.²³ It is not only context that is important to recognise, but also the fact that women's experiences have been excluded from these traditions, therefore an actual change in this regard is especially significant for feminists, and all women for that matter.²⁴ Furthermore, there is the idea that women's experiences are linked to feminist theology since the theology is based on "women's experience of oppression under patriarchy and out of engaged action for change."²⁵

²¹ Linda Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 9.

²² Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 9.

²³ Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 9.

²⁴ Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 9.

²⁵ Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 16.

When exploring my test case against the backdrop of different theologies, feminist theology will be extremely relevant.

One might still wonder: what is feminism? Is there a formal definition? Turning to Google, one encounters words such as “movement”, “equality”, “rights”, “ideology”, “belief”, etc. What is clear from that initial Google search is that feminism is many things. It has manifested in many ways over years and years, and many powerful women have emerged through feminist thought and situations. There is, for example, a pioneer of feminist thought called Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Rosemary Ruether was a pioneer in Christian feminist theology and Her 1983 book *Sexism and God-talk* is a classic in the field.²⁶ Ruether was a voice for the voiceless and always felt that women’s experiences were excluded from Christian traditions. This exclusion led to a disinformed image and understanding of God.²⁷ In *Sexism and God-talk*, Ruether explores how women have been portrayed in history, more specifically, how they were used and misused.²⁸ Ruether argues that unraveling the truth about women’s experiences will be the only truthful way to reach a clear and full comprehension about knowing women, knowing ourselves, and knowing the world we inhabit.²⁹ This work was written a few decades ago, but we are still at crossroads all over the world in the way we as women are viewed and we may not yet have reached a true understanding of our role in this life. It is central to recognize that we are still living in chaotic times and women’s experiences look different in the various contexts we apply them to. Acknowledging that women have not been treated fairly and with respect in many circumstances, as when it comes to basic human rights and religion, will enable us to further explore how their experiences continue to shape our societies.

Moreover, does Ruether provide a clear definition of feminism that we can use? According to her, feminism is about affirming women’s full humanity.³⁰ It rejects any notion that women are inferior and less-than men, and that under patriarchy, they should rely on men.³¹ They are not partly human or complementary to men, but are fully their own person and have every capacity that other humans have.³² Furthermore, Ruether establishes clearly that “Feminism is relevant cross culturally [...]” but it is valuable to note that this will look different across different cultural contexts.³³ This means that feminism will look different for Black women than it does for White middle-class women, or different for Muslim women than for Christian women,

²⁶ Grant D. Miller Francisco, “Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936-),” in *The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology*, (1999), https://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/mwt_themes_908_ruether.htm.

²⁷ Amy Daughton, “Oppression, Marginalization and Liberation,” in *T&T Clark Reader in Political Theology*, eds. Elizabeth Phillips, Anna Rowlands, and Amy Daughton, (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 498.

²⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 259.

²⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 259.

³⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?,” *Feminism and Religion*, June 24, 2011, <https://feminismandreligion.com/2011/06/24/what-is-feminism-and-why-should-we-do-it/>.

³¹ Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?”

³² Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?”

³³ Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?”

etc.³⁴ The differentiation is important to outline, but it in no way means that one is more standard than another. Rather, the diversity and vastness are other aspects of the richness of feminism.³⁵

Additionally, we can view feminism from a political perspective. It was developed for politics in the twentieth century, but its usage traces back to the nineteenth century where it was solely used as a medical term.³⁶ As a modern term, it has come to be understood as linked to “advancing the role of women, usually by reducing gender inequality [...] with the wider project of transforming gender relations.”³⁷ Political author, Andrew Heywood, writes that there are a variety of views, political opinions, and goals when it comes to feminism.³⁸ There have been several highlights and movements, but bias between genders has been a significant issue.

After researching some key figures and examining how the term has been used historically, I am defining feminism as women’s experiences and memories. It is women recounting their stories, hardships, abuse, and turning that into fuel for a movement. It is choosing to tell their stories, even though they might be afraid or ashamed, in the hopes that the cycle of oppression can end and that no other women will ever have to endure these hardships. In turn, the expression of these unique and shared experiences will advance women’s roles, reducing, and hopefully one day, eliminating gender inequality.

While defining feminism is crucial, it is also important to situate it in today’s world and in this research. Just like there are many different ways to define feminism, there are also many different types of feminist movements and theories. It is also fundamental to note that feminist theology throughout history has been deemed as privileging white, straight women.³⁹ It is important to acknowledge our struggle, but also the privilege we innately have based on the color of our skin and our sexual orientation.⁴⁰ This alone has meant that solely based on their sexual orientation and skin color, that the voices of straight, white women automatically overpower “the voices of queer people and women of color.”⁴¹

The theory that is most pertinent to my research is Feminist Political Theory, which I will explore shortly. I would first like to discuss other feminist thought that is extremely relevant in the circumstances society is facing at present. One example, Black Feminism. Feminism has been an ongoing movement for centuries, but just like much else, it has been a White-dominated movement.⁴² Women have indeed been fighting for their rights and the rights of all women, but still, unsurprisingly, the rewards of this labor are not always given to every woman. Black feminists have been striving for the same goals, yet they have had to undergo major struggles within the feminist movements in general, within their communities, and between cultures.⁴³ This is extremely pertinent due to the circumstances we find ourselves in in recent

³⁴ Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?”

³⁵ Ruether, “What is Feminism and Why Should We Do it?”

³⁶ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 186.

³⁷ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 186.

³⁸ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 186.

³⁹ Daughton, “Oppression, Marginalization and Liberation,” 498.

⁴⁰ Daughton, “Oppression, Marginalization and Liberation,” 498.

⁴¹ Daughton, “Oppression, Marginalization and Liberation,” 498.

⁴² Kadiatu Kanneh, “Black Feminisms,” in *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, eds. Stevi Jackson, and Jackie Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 88.

⁴³ Kanneh, “Black Feminisms,” 95.

years. I speak of the western world and of the United States specifically, with the events that happened a few years ago surrounding George Floyd, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. I believe it is important to find the balance between empowering women and fighting for equal rights, but not to forget that every woman's experience is different. In the context of feminism, what some women have struggled with will not be the same as other women. I do not believe any is more or less important, therefore, the common goal should be to fight for all women, no matter race, culture, or religion.

Also within the feminist movement are other feminists who have struggled with acceptance and equality in addition to being a woman, and those are lesbian feminists, for which the branch of feminism would be Lesbian Theory. Lesbians have a different place in the women's movement, and it is still unclear to many where they fit in. Like other feminists, they are concerned with inequality, yet some are considered radical in their approaches to feminism. For instance, the group called the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists in the 1980s stated that straight women collaborate with the enemy, meaning men, simply by their sexual orientation and by being in intimate relationships with men.⁴⁴ This branch of feminism became hard to identify, even for the players themselves. What is a lesbian? What was a lesbian's role? Was it a term defined by women themselves or did men make it up for them? It also seeps into the theory of gender, and especially now, gender is difficult to establish. Part of lesbian theory explores gender and claims it is a social construct that begins at birth when a baby's gender is stated.⁴⁵ This branch of feminism is extreme, but nevertheless interesting and worth acknowledging in our current context.

Moving on, the theory that aligns significantly with my research is Feminist Political Theory. Ultimately, this theory consists of understanding and analyzing politics through a feminist lens. Like many other things, political theory has traditionally meant analyzing men and masculinity.⁴⁶ Feminist political theory looks to question gender and expose what has been hidden or left out of political theory.⁴⁷ Engaging in feminist political theory, I argue, is a form of feminism and feminist social activism. It challenges traditional theories and concentrates on women against the backdrop of events and institutions with the goal of altering how women are perceived and the relationships and experiences they can have in the future. Later in this chapter, I begin to focus on Giorgia Meloni whom I believe is an important figure in politics at the moment and someone who is already having a major impact when it comes to women and their futures in Italy. By focusing on the prime minister of Italy, and her actions, through feminist political thought, I can identify instances in which she is altering women's experiences and their advancement in society.

Likewise, another area where feminism aligns with my research significantly is feminist theology. As I said earlier, I am interested in women's experiences, so I turn to a book by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza titled *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. Fiorenza begins by describing her target audience which are women, both

⁴⁴ Caroline Gonda, "Lesbian Theory," in *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, eds. Stevi Jackson, and Jackie Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 117.

⁴⁵ Gonda, "Lesbian Theory," 123.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Frazer, "Feminist Political Theory," in *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, eds. Stevi Jackson, and Jackie Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 51.

⁴⁷ Frazer, "Feminist Political Theory," 51.

from the church setting and from an academic setting, however, she felt this target audience would not be accepted in either place.⁴⁸ Reconstructing women's experiences in Christianity does not solely have to do with writing about women in the Bible or notable female characters in Christianity, but rather exploring the problems women have faced in Christianity, which were brought to the surface by feminist movements in the secular and spiritual realms.⁴⁹

The scholars I choose to analyze throughout my research are ones that I feel are making a difference in this field. This is why I mainly delve into works by female scholars, since they have at least a basic understanding like I do about being a woman studying theology, that most men would not understand. I believe Fiorenza is a strong figure in the realm of feminist theology, and her work has impacted women, and women's history in Christianity. By writing this book, she aided oppressed people in reading the biblical texts from a perspective of equality and empowerment.⁵⁰ It is a text that some would not have been used to, at the time it was written. It was a courageous move to write and publish it, which is a part of the women's experience in and of itself. This research could and would enable change, especially in the way women are treated, as "invisible" and as "others".⁵¹ As I have stated, women's experiences are vital to writers like Fiorenza, and change can only come through this experience.

Additionally, there have been radical feminists, such as Mary Daly, who have chosen to take an extremist approach by shaming Christianity and remove themselves from the Christian realm entirely. However, this radical stance does not mean that change will positively ensue. Biblical texts and traditions, although patriarchal, are a part of our history as Christian women and a part of the western world's story. By disowning them, we are choosing to forget those experiences, when rather, we should be exploring them and reclaiming them as our own history.⁵² Women should take control of their experiences instead of being ashamed or afraid of them. One relinquishes power when they give up control, therefore, the only way to be in control of one's own experiences, is to claim power over them. The ideas alone are strong and hold power. One does not need to resort to extremism, hateful language, or violence in order to spark change.

Radical liberation feminists such as Daly are smart and strong, but they are known to be extreme and have such a distaste for men and religion that it usually ends up turning people away from it and makes reading their works more difficult. It also leaves people with the impression that all feminists are extreme and that women are hysterical, which I argue does not pose well for women and does not make the case that we are intelligent and striving to make a difference in the way we are treated. Figures like Daly believe extreme and radical feminist approaches hold value, and in certain circumstances they can be very effective. For instance, the #MeToo movement that began about seven years ago is a women-led movement that became effective and popular due to its extremism. It began online with thousands of sexual assault accusations against powerful men and manifested in society as protests and rallies supporting women's rights and sexual assault victims all over the world. While this fight, which is still ongoing, has shown

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), xiv.

⁴⁹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiv.

⁵⁰ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xiv.

⁵¹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xvii.

⁵² Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 29.

to be successful, one can also take a calmer, more reasoned, intellectual approach as a way to attack an issue, which might produce more desired results. It is compelling and rational writing, like Ruether's and Fiorenza's, that makes women want to join a movement while still being allowed to follow a religion and have individual beliefs.

2. Test Case: Giorgia Meloni

2.1. *What is Meloni opposing?*

Now that I have defined and situated feminism, in relation to my research, I can move on to my test case. I will discuss Giorgia Meloni against the backdrop of feminism. Firstly, I must clarify, what she is opposing.⁵³ Meloni is opposed to “non-traditional” families and lifestyles. This opposition is directed towards the LGBTI community and their quest for equality in their family situations and lifestyles. There are many ways that this takes shape, but Meloni has been openly against and/or trying to limit same-sex adoption, surrogacy, and IVF treatments, among other actions. Her opposition has manifested mainly towards LGBTI members who aspire to get married and have children, as Meloni deems it unnatural. This relates to one of Meloni's bigger plans for Italy where she would like to achieve more “natural families”.⁵⁴ Here, Meloni believes that the only true form of family is one where a married, heterosexual couple, have biological children naturally.⁵⁵

Meloni is pro-family, but is this concept not outdated? Especially in today's context, when many people do not identify as heterosexual, do not get married, and/or are unable or choose to not have children naturally. Would the citizens of Italy not benefit from a more loving idea of family, whereby parents and children feel safe and protected? I argue that this idea should be the major factor to think about when considering having babies or adopting. However, Meloni seems solely focused on the biological aspects of prospective parents which can be neglecting towards the child's needs. Meloni's idea of family is very exact, and it can be seen as an attack towards the LGBTI community.

Besides the familial obstacles gay Italians will face, they will also inevitably endure hate crimes as individuals and as a community. According to an online news article, Meloni is against the punishment of hate crimes committed towards the LGBTI community and is also opposed to the teaching of sexuality in schools.⁵⁶ I argue these ideas go hand in hand, because if a youth is not properly educated on their own or other sexualities, they will never properly understand concepts, such as sexuality. This will lead to confusion and mixed feelings, which usually results in misinformation and disinformation found online, and can result in a youth hating themselves or hating others. Not having proper education on such important and progressive subjects can be seen as an injustice towards Italy's youth, and future generations, because that information will never get transmitted correctly. Additionally, a country's leadership should encourage one to feel

⁵³ Of course, I cannot delve into every conservative view or decision she and her party hold and carry out. For this thesis, I am focusing on the ones for which I think pertain to feminism and fascism.

⁵⁴ Claudia Torrisi, “What Giorgia Meloni's Far-Right Government Will Mean for Italy,” *OpenDemocracy*, September 28, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/giorgia-meloni-far-right-government-policies-christian-right-funding/>.

⁵⁵ Torrisi, “What Giorgia Meloni's Far-Right Government Will Mean for Italy.”

⁵⁶ Torrisi, “What Giorgia Meloni's Far-Right Government Will Mean for Italy.”

safe in their own body and in their society. It is a common sense of community that Meloni may not be considering fully.

What are people saying about Meloni in relation to her views towards family and the LGBTI community? Already surrogate pregnancies are illegal in Italy, but Meloni would like to impose even stricter laws towards the practise.⁵⁷⁵⁸ In early 2024, she said that it is an “inhuman” practise that sees children like products at a grocery store.⁵⁹ In lieu of this, she supports making this a universal crime and says that those who partake in it should be prosecuted, as they are already in Italy.⁶⁰ These statements, and the laws against surrogacy have been seen as targeting LGBTI groups.⁶¹ I propose it can also be seen as targeting anyone who cannot have children naturally, who cannot carry children, and who simply choose not to take part in conceiving children naturally. This affects everyone, and at a certain point, I argue it becomes more than just a feminist issue, it becomes a human rights issue in general. Even from a feminist’s perspective, it affects everyone. When it comes to surrogacy, there is a lack of fairness and equality amongst genders, sexual orientations, and biological conditions.

Also pertaining to reproductive rights, there is the issue of abortion on which Meloni would also like stricter sanctions. To begin, abortion in Italy has been legal since 1978, but only during the first ninety days of pregnancy.⁶² If we compare this to Canada, the abortion laws state that majority of the time, the procedure is performed during the first three months of pregnancy, however, different hospitals will have different limits.⁶³ There are hospitals in Canada that offer abortion services later in a pregnancy.⁶⁴ Of course, it can be extremely dangerous passed the first trimester, but healthcare professionals remain available to discuss a woman’s options. In Italy, the abortion law has become known as Law 194 and it includes allowing the abortion centers to assist women who may want to end their pregnancy.⁶⁵ In early 2024, Meloni made an amendment to the law which would allow protestors access into abortion centers in hopes that women would change their minds about their decision to abort and choose to keep their babies instead. This caused outrage and protest amongst many in Italy, since people felt it was infringing on women’s rights.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Reuters, “Surrogate Parenthood is ‘Inhuman’, Italy’s Meloni Says,” April 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/surrogate-parenthood-is-inhuman-italys-meloni-says-2024-04-12/>.

⁵⁸ As per a Merriam Webster Dictionary, a surrogate mother is “a woman who becomes pregnant by artificial insemination or by implantation of a fertilized egg created by in vitro fertilization for the purpose of carrying the fetus to term for another person or persons.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/surrogate%20mother>

⁵⁹ Reuters, “Surrogate Parenthood is ‘Inhuman’, Italy’s Meloni Says.”

⁶⁰ Reuters, “Surrogate Parenthood is ‘Inhuman’, Italy’s Meloni Says.”

⁶¹ Reuters, “Surrogate Parenthood is ‘Inhuman’, Italy’s Meloni Says.”

⁶² Laura Gozzi, “Spain and Italy Clash Over Abortion Laws,” *BBC News*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68845011>.

⁶³ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Abortion in Canada,” *Canada*, last modified October 11, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/sexual-health/abortion-canada.html>.

⁶⁴ Public Health Agency of Canada, “Abortion in Canada,” *Canada*.

⁶⁵ Gozzi, “Spain and Italy Clash Over Abortion Laws.”

⁶⁶ Jason Horowitz and Elisabetta Povoledo, “Italy’s New Abortion Law is a Lesson in How Meloni Governs,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2024, 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/23/world/europe/italy-abortion-law-meloni.html>.

Prior to this amendment, in September 2022, just one month before Meloni was elected as prime minister, she and several members of her party began to promote the “anti-choice manifesto” which was presented to them by another conservative organization called ProVita e Famiglia, which in English means Pro-Life and Family.⁶⁷ This group uses pressure tactics in order to get pregnant woman to keep their children or at the very least put them up for adoption, instead of terminating their pregnancies.⁶⁸ Women who have been approached by them have been traumatized from the experience, and it usually did not end in them having access to the abortions they sought after.⁶⁹

To further analyze the differences between Italy and Canada’s abortion laws, there are the medical professionals themselves. While most Canadian healthcare professionals respect the law and women’s wishes, many Italian gynecologists refuse to perform abortions. In fact, sixty three percent of them object to the procedure and this increases to over eighty four percent in the southern regions of Italy. Already, there is a very short window to receive an abortion in Italy, but because many healthcare professionals are not willing to conduct the procedure, abortion is scarce and hard to come by.⁷⁰

A connection can be posited between Meloni’s opposition towards abortion and her personal history. Meloni has recounted that the issue is deep rooted for her since her own mother almost aborted her.⁷¹ Through this knowledge, one can understand where she is coming from. Perhaps it is with a sincere heart that she is placing importance on preventing abortions and allowing women access to more options, but can these measures be harmful for some women rather than helpful?

2.2. How do Meloni’s policies play out in relation to feminism?

Thus, how do her policies play out in relation to feminism? They play out as anti-feminist, conservative, and not concerned with women’s advancement in society. If we look at the abortion issue, she promotes organizations, like Pro Vita e Famiglia as she hopes they can encourage women to raise their babies, have more children and increase Italy’s birth rate. However, this pressure can possibly have the opposite affect and can prevent women from pursuing and achieving their goals. For instance, with more children, women might not be financially stable enough to enter the work force, and currently, “[f]our out of 10 Italian women [do not] work”, which could be a factor in Italy’s status as a patriarchal society.⁷² On the other hand, perhaps Meloni believes that her stricter sanctions are aiding in women’s advancement. While many women disagree with this, close to twenty-five percent of women in Italy voted for

⁶⁷ Giulia Blasi, “The Fight for Abortion Access in Italy Continues,” *Politico*, October 2, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-fight-for-abortion-access-in-italy-continues-giorgia-meloni/>.

⁶⁸ Blasi, “The Fight for Abortion Access in Italy Continues.”

⁶⁹ Blasi, “The Fight for Abortion Access in Italy Continues.”

⁷⁰ Horowitz and Povoledo, “Italy’s New Abortion Law is a Lesson in How Meloni Governs.”

⁷¹ Horowitz and Povoledo, “Italy’s New Abortion Law is a Lesson in How Meloni Governs.”

⁷² Gaia Pianigiani and Elisabetta Povoledo, “Giorgia Meloni Could Be the First Woman to Lead Italy. Not All Women Are Happy,” *The New York Times*, September 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/23/world/europe/giorgia-meloni-italy-women.html>.

Meloni and her party in 2022.⁷³ Therefore, there is a significant group that might hold the belief that she will be essential in their advancement.

2.3. *Is Meloni adhering to a type of feminism, if there is one?*

Is Meloni adhering to a type of feminism? I am not certain. She has been called anti-feminist, yet that term may not suit her either. According to one source, “Antifeminism is the countermovement of thought and action that is opposed to feminism.”⁷⁴ While I agree with this definition, I cannot attest that Meloni is opposed to feminism. However, I struggle to understand her actions towards women and women’s rights as not being antifeminist. The understanding of antifeminism has now evolved overtime to including opposing the rights that women have gained.⁷⁵ This, I can argue reflects what Meloni has been doing during her time as prime minister, mainly when it comes to the rights women should have over their bodies and reproductive choices. Therefore, I cannot justify calling her a full-on antifeminist, but she has antifeminist tendencies, and she is certainly not a feminist. Meloni has never claimed to be a feminist, but truthfully, she has not needed to state her stance towards feminism. The fact that she rose to power in a party whose fundamental roots were absolutely anti-feminist says a lot.⁷⁶

Heywood, who I mentioned earlier, describes different types of political feminisms, yet, none of them seem to fit Meloni’s actions. In his chapter on feminism, he delves into the topic of gender. He synthesizes different ideas towards gender based on several perspectives. He describes the feminist perspective viewing gender as distinct culturally and politically, as opposed to biological differences. Furthermore, the divisions between genders manifested from male power. Those who hold this perspective believe that gender differences have created a psychobiological divide between men and women’s characteristics.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the conservative perspective towards gender has traditionally highlighted the importance, both socially and politically, of gender divisions, since those who hold the view believe that “the sexual division of labor between men and women is natural and inevitable.”⁷⁸ Additionally, it is an aspect in our society that allows us to have organic and ordered individuality.⁷⁹ Meloni more clearly fits this conservative perspective. This can be seen, again, from her push towards natural families and her opposition towards abortion. Her need is for traditional parents, where there is a working husband, and stay at home wife and mother who watch over their biological children. Gender roles are clearly among these sentiments.

Meloni’s views and beliefs have always been difficult to categorize, since she tends to give different responses when it suits her most. For instance, some women will claim she is on

⁷³ Rai News, “Chi sono oggi gli elettori di Giorgia Meloni,” October 6, 2022, <https://www.rainews.it/fotogallery/2022/10/il-profilo-dellelettorato-di-fratelli-ditalia-nellanalisi-dellistituto-demopolis-chi-sono-oggi-gli-elettori-di-giorgia-meloni--264299d2-cb42-49ac-a587-ffb1f3ed98c3.html>.

⁷⁴ « Christine Bard », « Antifeminism, » dans *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe*, 22 juin, 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/node/12189>.

⁷⁵ « Bard », « Antifeminism. »

⁷⁶ Sara R. Farris, “Giorgia Meloni Is a Female Face for an Anti-Feminist Agenda,” *Jacobin*, December 19, 2022, <https://jacobin.com/2022/12/giorgia-meloni-far-right-feminism-nationalism-family>.

⁷⁷ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 191.

⁷⁸ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 191.

⁷⁹ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 191.

their side and wants what is best for other women, because she has been known to act that way on occasion. Even I have found myself in the position of defending and agreeing with some of her actions. What many have realized since she has been elected, is that she tends to do this when it benefits her and her party. She will fight for women's rights, when necessary, in order to attack other minority groups, for example.⁸⁰ No matter what promises she has made, and the sympathy she sometimes has for women, it cannot be forgotten that she is the leader of a right-wing, nationalist party, and that is where her unwavering support lies.

This is a strategy that politicians take in order to garner votes and attention. They are very aware of what voters want to see and hear. This is evident in other European countries, such as France, where Marine Le Pen, leader of the French far-right party, National Rally, has used these same women's rights issues to attract female voters to her misogynistic, far-right beliefs.⁸¹ It can also be seen, in the United States, with Donald Trump's use of Evangelical and Catholic language and vague references to the Bible throughout his political campaigns. He is speaking to a specific crowd, and mostly confronting specific individuals and groups who do not fit into this mold.

To conclude this section, as per the evidence and reasoning I have provided, I argue Meloni is not adhering to a type of feminism, at least not one that I have found through my research. Perhaps there is a type of feminism that I have not discovered yet. Something must be said about Meloni's goal of a strong, prospering society. One that includes healthy children, which ultimately stems from a healthy mother. Therefore, I cannot argue that Meloni is antifeminist. She wants what she believes is best for women, and that includes sometimes advocating for traditional gender roles. Her roots are antifeminist, but she is not completely rejecting gender equality. She is rooting for women to prosper, but in a traditional sense, whereby they provide children for her country. I cannot find this term anywhere in my research, but I would name it "traditional feminism".

Traditional feminism is confusing since a traditional feminist is really someone who believes in the basic, "normal" form of feminism, one that advocates for women's rights in all aspects. My version of traditional feminism might not make sense. Therefore, I argue Meloni is conservative instead. She is not advocating for gender equality and when it comes to specific issues, such as reproductive rights, she emphasizes traditional responsibilities and is resisting feminist motives.

In conclusion, this first chapter was essential in expressing how vital it is that we identify, analyze, and begin to respect women's experiences, while remaining mindful of the various contexts in which this might take shape. By identifying different theories which we can use to analyze women's experiences, such as black feminist theories, lesbian feminist theories, and feminist political theories, we are at least acknowledging the various contexts women find themselves in and can understand that every experience is different, therefore there will not be a "one-size fits all" solution to the problem. Every situation must be treated differently, but they should all be examined with kindness and respect of the situation. Furthermore, this chapter defines feminism by combining my own personal thoughts on the matter, as well as putting together thoughts from incredible feminist scholars, like Rosemary Rueher, Linda Hogan, and

⁸⁰ Farris, "Giorgia Meloni Is a Female Face for an Anti-Feminist Agenda."

⁸¹ Farris, "Giorgia Meloni Is a Female Face for an Anti-Feminist Agenda."

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who have dedicated their work to improving the lives of women and fighting for their rights and experiences.

Finally, I examined Giorgia Meloni and explained how her opposition to subjects such as abortion, surrogacy, and same-sex marriage, is impacting women's rights and altering women's experiences for the worse in Italy. I described that through a feminist lens, her attitudes towards these matters are leaning towards being antifeminist and are preventing the advancement of women. However, I am also open to the idea that she herself might not see it that way and that perhaps she believes her actions are advancing the role of women in her society. Therefore, I cannot pin-point her actions as antifeminist, but I argue she is exhibiting antifeminist behaviour and her feminism, if one can call it that, is on the more traditional and conservative side. The next chapter will continue to explore Meloni, but against the backdrop of another ideology and circumstances which are fascism and far-right societies, to see if and where she fits into these ideas.

Chapter 2: Meloni, Fascism, and the Far-Right

This second chapter will dissect the notions “fascism” and “far-right”. As it was important to do with feminism in the previous chapter, it will be equally important to define these terms and situate them in the contexts in which I am researching them. I aim to answer vital questions in this chapter such as “Is there a difference between the terms “fascism” and “far-right” or are they interchangeable?” along with “Does ‘far-right’ automatically imply fascism, and if so, are there different types and ranges of fascism?” Once a clear understanding of the terms has been established, I will analyze my test case, Giorgia Meloni, against the backdrop of fascism and the far-right. I will establish how her policies play out in relation to fascism and arrive at a conclusion of whether her style of governance is actually fascist and/or far-right, or if there is another term that is more appropriate. This will allow me to evaluate what a women’s experience might look like in a fascist and/or far-right society.

I would also like to note that since my research is taking place in real-time, it has been a struggle to pin-point and define Meloni’s exact strategies. It has led me to question whether she is portraying a clear image of her beliefs, both her personal and professional ones. Additionally, how do news outlets portray her? How does she present herself on social media? I will take some time to explore this side of her and other right-wing politicians and how they curate their online presence, since it is highly pertinent in our present day. Knowing what I do about Meloni thus far, I believe it is essential to discuss her, and other right-wing politicians since they are powerful figures in societies around the world.

1. Situating and Defining the Terms Fascism and Far-Right

Never having had personal experiences under fascist leaders, nor have I lived in a far-right society, these terms were unknown to me. Terms such as “fascism” and “far-right” can be defined in variety of ways. For example, a common dictionary⁸² defines fascism as follows:

“a populist political philosophy, movement, or regime [...] that exalts nation and often race above the individual, that is associated with a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, and that is characterized by severe economic and social regimentation and by forcible suppression of opposition [...]”⁸³

In this definition, the idea of “populist” is used. The same dictionary defines populism as an idea or movement that aims to represent ordinary people against established order.⁸⁴ This can manifest as anti-government or anti-corporations, for example.⁸⁵

⁸² Here, I am using a popular dictionary definition as a comparative element to more specialized sources.

⁸³ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Fascism,” Accessed November 25, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fascism>.

⁸⁴ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Populism,” Accessed November 25, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/populism>.

⁸⁵ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Populism.”

Therefore, according to this dictionary definition, the fundamental idea behind fascism is that one should be loyal to their community, ethnicity, religious beliefs and traditions. All of which encompass a nation.⁸⁶ Therefore, fascism can be defined as absolute loyalty to one's nation. Fascism can take many forms, and throughout history, it has played out differently in various societal circumstances. For instance, Italian Fascism and German Nazism both emphasized loyalty to a nation, yet they had significant differences between.⁸⁷ In Italy, fascism took form as being absolutely loyal to a totalitarian state while in Germany, Nazism was based on racist theories.⁸⁸

It is important, however, to look at specialized sources when it comes to definitions, to make sure that one captures the nuances and complexities of the concepts studied. Political author, Andrew Heywood, in his book titled *Political Ideologies*, explains how the concept of fascism derived and the differences between various kinds of fascist ideas and movements. For Heywood, fascism only acquired a clear ideological meaning after the First World War when Benito Mussolini, the fascist ruler of Italy from 1922 to 1943⁸⁹, used it to describe Italy's military.⁹⁰ Heywood defines fascism similarly to the dictionary definition in which the theme of fascism is of an organic, unified nation, where the individual is not important in comparison to the community.⁹¹ He goes on to explain that fascism is essentially a revolt and can take form in many ways such as anti-liberal, anti-conservative, and anti-communist, for instance.⁹²

Another political theorist, Roger Griffin, who, in his book *Fascism*, reflects on fascism through time, offers an overview of the evolution of the idea, and describes what it resembles in our present day. Griffin describes fascism as sometimes manifesting into extreme nationalism and racism, along with feeling the need for national and racial revival based on a person's principles.⁹³ This aspect of fascism is known as "ultranationalism".⁹⁴ Heywood also writes about ultranationalism and describes fascism as having embraced this extreme form, most notably in Italy, France, and Germany.⁹⁵ Fascism, in this form, places full importance on national pride.⁹⁶

Griffin provides this one-sentence definition of fascism: "Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism."⁹⁷ There are five key components that Griffin discusses in his definition in order to dissect it so that people who are new to the field and/or concept can properly understand it and remain mindful of them. Firstly, he explains that "generic fascism" should be regarded equally with other political ideologies, in terms of movements, regimes, or actions that are driven

⁸⁶ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Fascism."

⁸⁷ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "Fascism."

⁸⁸ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 148.

⁸⁹ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 156.

⁹⁰ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 148.

⁹¹ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 148.

⁹² Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 148.

⁹³ Griffin, *Fascism*, 5.

⁹⁴ Griffin, *Fascism*, 129.

⁹⁵ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 157.

⁹⁶ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 157.

⁹⁷ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

by the vision of an idyllic society based on political and cultural values.⁹⁸ Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that fascism can manifest in a variety of ways and can develop as diverse versions of the ideal type.⁹⁹ Thirdly, only when these diverse versions are understood as relating to a “core utopian myth” of an ideal group or society that is being put into practise, will the true logic behind fascism as a generic concept surface.¹⁰⁰ Fourthly, Griffin refers to the “core myth” as a ‘people’ in crisis who form an ‘ultra-nation’ in order to be saved, from their present crumbling situation, by those who are aware of the threat and are prepared to fight for them.¹⁰¹ Lastly, at its core, generic fascism embraces an ideology that centers on the idea of mobilizing “populist energies of renewal (palingenesis)” so that rebirth of an ultra-nation may ensue which will initiate a revolutionary and civilized order.¹⁰²

Each of the definitions of fascism are valuable, yet, Griffin’s idea of ultranationalism has the most impact in relation to my research since it is how I view fascism emerging through Meloni and in Italy’s current political climate. Also, when radical right sectors have been analyzed, nationalism emerges as a major concern for far-right supporters.¹⁰³

As for the idea of “far-right”, Heywood defines it as:

“[a] right-wing ideological stance that is characterized by ethno-nationalism, *laissez-faire* capitalism (anti-socialism) and ultraconservative or reactionary moral values.”¹⁰⁴

It is the middle ground between conservative values and extremely fascist ones.¹⁰⁵ Earlier, I asked if there was a difference between the terms “fascism” and “far-right” or if they can be interchanged. Knowing where the far-right rests on this political spectrum, I argue the terms fascism and far-right are not interchangeable, as they embody different levels of right-wing values. Heywood provides this figure for the different views of the nation, so as per his explanation of the term, far-right would lie somewhere between ‘conservatism’ and ‘fascism’ here:

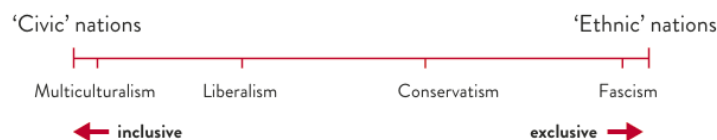


Figure 1¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

⁹⁹ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

¹⁰² Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

¹⁰³ Olyvia R. Christley, “Traditional Gender Attitudes, Nativism, and Support for the Radical Right,” *Politics & Gender* 18, no. 4 (2022): 1142, doi:10.1017/S1743923X21000374.

¹⁰⁴ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 181.

¹⁰⁵ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 181.

¹⁰⁶ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 132.

They are nonetheless deeply connected and are rooted in many of the same ideas. Furthermore, politicians and voters of the far-right are concerned with ideas surrounding fascism and nationalism, so there is very little difference between the two terms. In my understanding, if one is a supporter of the far-right, then they tend to support *some* fascist ideas. These are not always necessarily extreme, but they are usually in support of right-wing attitudes on immigration, nationalism, and traditionalism. Therefore, if I posit the question “Do fascism and ultranationalism relate to issues on abortion or does that only concern the far-right realm?” my answer would be yes, they do relate to issues on abortion, since the two terms encompass traditionalist views such as being anti-abortion or pro-life.

The connection between fascist and ultranationalist views concerning abortion in far-right societies can be made using Griffin’s idea of palingenesis, or rebirth of a nation. This idea of the regeneration of a nation, according to Griffin, can only be accomplished using violence.¹⁰⁷ Heywood also describes fascists as having a negative outlook on history and aim to make progress through violence, and in extreme situations, war.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, extreme, ultranationalist changes to a nation cannot take place and cannot be considered *completely* fascist unless drastic, violent steps are taken. This means that Meloni’s idea of a pure, traditional nation will not be fulfilled, unless she and her government intend to proceed using violent measures.

2. Test Case: Giorgia Meloni

2.1. Is Meloni’s style of governance fascist and/or far-right?

Is Meloni’s style of governance fascist and/or far-right?¹⁰⁹ I argue through the lack of evidence that Meloni does not intend to lead Italy into such extreme circumstances. I have not found evidence to suggest she would use violent tactics in politics. In fact I would say the opposite is true due to her unwavering support for Ukraine during their time of crisis in the last few years as well as her visible sadness when she gets compared to extreme political figures like Hitler and Putin.¹¹⁰ Therefore, I conclude that Meloni *is not completely fascist* and does not desire to lead a fascist regime, however, she has never particularly positioned herself to be against fascism.

Meloni factors history into her beliefs and her party stems from fascist roots that she does not seem to want to change.¹¹¹ Although, Meloni is on the quest *for a pure nation* by limiting immigration, for instance, which corresponds with fascist themes and explains why some people fear that fascism will once again dominate Italy. As I have explained, this pure nation will not be realized unless Meloni intends to include violence in her pursuit, which again connects to Griffin’s palingenetic idea. Nevertheless, I argue she is striving for the opposite of a multi-

¹⁰⁷ Marlene Laruelle, “So, Is Russia Fascist Now? Labels and Policy Implications,” *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2022): 150, doi: 10.1080/0163660X.2022.2090760.

¹⁰⁸ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Here, I am drawing on work I did for a graduate seminar on political theology in Winter 2023.

¹¹⁰ Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the Star of the Italian Far Right?”

¹¹¹ Riegert, “Who is Giorgia Meloni, the Star of the Italian Far Right?”

cultural society in her preferences for a strict monocultural one, which is how most fascists and conservatives view their ideal cultures.¹¹²

Therefore, I have arrived at the conclusion that Meloni's style of governance is not fascist yet incorporates *certain* fascist themes. Can we then say that her style of governance is far-right? Through Heywood's definition of far-right alone, I can argue that yes, Meloni governs in a far-right manner and her policies are ultraconservative and based on her reactionary moral values.

2.2. How do Meloni's policies play out in relation to fascism?

My original question for this section asked how Meloni's policies play out in relation to fascism? Although I concluded that she is not a fascist intrinsically, I will say that some of her policies resemble what could be fascist ideologies, and there are others that feel the same. Recently, a neo-Nazi group intended to assassinate Giorgia Meloni based on her political intentions, or rather their interpretation of her intentions.¹¹³ They felt she was "a fascist until she rose to power" but now denies being one which they believe makes her a traitor.¹¹⁴ This is just one example of how Italians view her and the danger she could be in since her politics has fascist tendencies.

Furthermore, it is evident in her quest for ultranationalism, as I have explained, but it can also be seen in instances of extreme racism. While Italian fascism has traditionally not been based on race, but rather the complete control a state would have over an individual, fascism has often overlapped with and has derived from racist ideas.¹¹⁵ There is a form of underlying racism that describes Meloni's actions best, and that is conservative nationalism. This belief imagines a "stable and successful societ[y] [that is] bound together by a common culture and shared values."¹¹⁶ This is evident in other European countries, like France, when it comes to their immigration goals. Since the 1980s, France's government has opposed "non-white" immigration with the argument that it goes against the traditions and cultures of the community.¹¹⁷ Marine Le Pen in France continues to oppose this type of immigration, and Meloni in Italy is doing so as well.

Part of Meloni's more "traditional" vision of Italy would be to have an increase in traditional families and pure Italian genes.¹¹⁸ It can be understood that she is against illegal immigration; however, she has not introduced a promise about a policy regarding legal immigration.¹¹⁹ A journal article discussing Meloni writes that she is opposed to allowing

¹¹² Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 232.

¹¹³ Elena Salvoni, "Giorgia Meloni 'assassination plot' foiled: Police arrest 12 neo-Nazis who 'planned to shoot Italian PM in the head from a hotel room and spark civil war'," *Daily Mail*, December 6, 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14165699/Giorgia-Meloni-assassination-plot-police-arrest-neo-Nazis-shoot-civil-war.html>.

¹¹⁴ Salvoni, "Giorgia Meloni 'assassination plot' foiled."

¹¹⁵ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 161.

¹¹⁶ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 162.

¹¹⁷ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 162.

¹¹⁸ Once again, I am drawing on work I did for a graduate seminar on political theology in Winter 2023.

¹¹⁹ Chotiner, "I'm a Woman, I'm a Mother, I'm Christian."

children of immigrants to become citizens in Italy.¹²⁰ This article also emphasizes that Meloni's policies are going against "EU human rights legislation" which makes clear that anyone has the right to ask for asylum when they arrive on European soil.¹²¹ Instead, Meloni has requested the deportation of people entering Italy illegally, even if they have gone through the steps of requesting asylum status.¹²² I argue then that she is against all immigration, legal or illegal.

Why does she feel this way towards immigration?" It is due to the image she is trying to maintain in Italy. Meloni has discussed the immigration issue by saying she does not want Italy to turn into "Europe's refugee camp".¹²³ Many have commented on these remarks as showing signs of blatant ignorance and selfishness, and I am compelled to agree. Immigrants are attempting to find refuge in Europe in order to flee the horrible and unsafe conditions in their countries of origins. Italy, like most other countries, will not survive without immigration. They require immigrants in the workforce, which in turn means a racially diverse and more multicultural society.¹²⁴ I argue these racist plans are stemming from Meloni's personal beliefs and oppositions, which will ultimately harm Italy's community-oriented principles, as well as their economy.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Meloni's ultraconservative views are also oppressing those who identify as LGBTI. This is seen through her quest for natural families, limiting same-sex adoption, and not enforcing stricter laws when it comes to hate crimes and discrimination against individuals identifying as LGBTI. Then there is the issue of accessibility of IVF treatments and Italy's surrogacy ban, which also overlaps with injustices towards those who identify as LGBTI. Ultimately, it is not only one person or one group that will be affected by these policies. Multiple experiences will be tainted. It will leave its mark on the human experience in general.

In some instances, fascism in history has been based on religious ideas.¹²⁵ I am positing that there is a portion of Meloni's ideas which stem from personal, religious traditions, and are also originating from her party's beliefs and ways of government. Meloni does relay the image of being a devote, Christian woman, but she does not display her beliefs to the public.¹²⁶ However, she clearly takes inspiration from Christianity when she sides with the Catholic church's "traditional moral values".¹²⁷ In spite of this, for many years, Pope Francis has been commended

¹²⁰ Barbie Latza Nadeau, "Femme Fascista: How Giorgia Meloni Became the Star of Italy's Far Right," *World Policy Journal* 35, no. 2 (2018): 18, doi: 10.1215/07402775-7085556.

¹²¹ Nadeau, "Femme Fascista," 19.

¹²² Nadeau, "Femme Fascista," 19.

¹²³ Nadeau, "Femme Fascista," 19.

¹²⁴ Chotiner, "I'm a Woman, I'm a Mother, I'm Christian."

¹²⁵ We could interpret Hitler's fascist ideology as religion based. For example, his worldview has been described as *Manichaeism* which comes from Manichaeism: A Persian religion from the third century that viewed the idea of conflict as being between good and evil. This is how Hitler understood the racial struggle between Germans and Jews. Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 165.

¹²⁶ Lorenzo Prezzi, "Can Giorgia Meloni and Pope Francis Get Along?," *Le Monde*, October 19, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/religions/article/2022/10/19/can-giorgia-meloni-and-pope-francis-get-along_6000903_63.html.

¹²⁷ Prezzi, "Can Giorgia Meloni and Pope Francis Get Along?"

for his striving to bring unity amongst minority groups and the Catholic church. Pope Francis and Meloni do not agree on immigration policies, for instance, since he does not want to turn away people who are seeking refuge.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, they are very much in agreeance regarding policies such as surrogacy, but as I have argued, this is more of a conservative issue rather than a fascist one.¹²⁹

Through identifying the problematic components of Meloni's political actions and grievances, the issue of gender arises. This is an ongoing issue in politics, specifically among far-right groups and leadership. I mentioned Marine Le Pen earlier, former leader of France's far-right National Rally, who like Meloni, has stirred up controversy because of her sex and political beliefs.¹³⁰ Due to their gender, far-right female leaders, and in this specific case, Marine Le Pen, faces different media coverage than other women and radical right leaders.¹³¹ Far-right women appear "softer" in media coverage and their strict agendas are masked by their feminine appearance and "typical" ideas of gender roles. Concerning Meloni, it becomes difficult to identify her motives or oppositions, because her female image masks the underlying ultraconservative and populist tones. I argue people will not take women as seriously as they do men, yet women are managing to secure vital leadership roles in far-right European countries.¹³² Since they are sometimes not taken seriously, female leaders like Meloni and Le Pen have a difficult task of getting people to like them or vote for them, and part of it is because they are women.

As I have shown, Meloni is strong in her beliefs and in her self-presentation. In a video of one of her most famous speeches, her vocal intensity and the anger she displays remind one of Mussolini. In Italian, she cries "I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian, you won't take it [away] from me!"¹³³ In this setting, Meloni portrays a different side of herself. It captured the crowd and influenced Italians to vote for her as prime minister. While the speech does have undertones of fascism and nationalism, the way she expresses herself is more surprising. However, it is possible that this was the only way to get people to listen. Perhaps the only way a woman would become prime minister in Italy was by being part of a right-wing party and expressing herself in a way that goes against the soft demeanor women are

¹²⁸ Rafael Bernal, "Pope Francis: 'To repel migrants ... is a grave sin,'" *The Hill*, August 29, 2024, <https://thehill.com/latino/4853707-pope-francis-migration/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIn%20the%20time%20of%20satellites,our%20civilization%2C%E2%80%9D%20Francis%20said.>

¹²⁹ APNews.com, "Pope Urges Italians to Have Babies as a Measure of Hope for Future," May 10, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/vatican-demographics-meloni-pope-67a727125061a948d29af57186748e93>.

¹³⁰ Alexandra Snipes, and Cas Mudde, "'France's (Kinder, Gentler) Extremist': Marine Le Pen, Intersectionality, and Media Framing of Female Populist Radical Right Leaders." *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 2 (2020): 438. doi:10.1017/S1743923X19000370.

¹³¹ Snipes, and Mudde, "'France's (Kinder, Gentler) Extremist,'" 438.

¹³² Andrea S. Dauber, "The Increasing Visibility of Right-Wing Extremist Women in Contemporary Europe: Is Great Britain an Exception?," in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, eds. Renate Bitzan, Michaela Köttig and Andrea Petö (Cham: Springer Nature, 2017), 50.

¹³³ EU Debates, "Giorgia Meloni: Italy's far-right wins election and vows to govern for all! I am Giorgia!!!," posted September 26, 2022, by EUdebatesLIVE, YouTube, 2 min., 47 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXocFMRtBQk>.

typically thought to possess. The number of women in leadership positions in far-right parties is slowly increasing¹³⁴ and this is because through history high-powered women, like Meloni and Le Pen,

“have been depicted as less marginal, scary, and dangerous than the typical image of right-wing extremists, [which is] a handy portrayal for far- right parties that seek support from the political mainstream.”¹³⁵

Ultimately, far-right politicians are having an increased impact when it comes to the oppression of minority groups, and as I have alluded to, women are at the centre of this struggle. Köttig has commented that, in Germany at least, women “are not only followers but also activists in crucial positions and perpetrators of extreme right violence [...]”¹³⁶ I argue this remains true in other countries in Europe as well, as Le Pen and Meloni have been and will continue to be extremely successful in their right-wing political leadership.

2.3. The phenomenon of right-wing politics online

An interesting phenomenon is taking place now in politics, but more specifically, it is taking place online when it comes to right-wing politics.¹³⁷ Social media is being used as a political strategy with right-wing political discourse emerging online. Politicians are online and are posting and interacting directly with voters. Why use this strategy instead of traditional campaigning and limiting interactions to live, in-person events? Partly because anyone and everyone has access and is on some social media platform. It is an easy way to make oneself and one’s political platform known. Another reason is that it is a modern political strategy to appear more authentic.

Just like celebrities, when politicians post on social media, they become real people to every user on the platform. There is no longer a barrier or a hierarchy between regular, everyday people and politicians. They put themselves on the same level as their voters in order “to appear more connected and authentic.”¹³⁸ Through their everyday use of social media, and the broadcasting of their individual personalities and personal lives, politicians are more accessible than ever, and this is how they appeal to the masses. This technique was extensively used in the United States by now elected President Donald Trump during his 2024 campaign.

¹³⁴ Diana Z. O’Brien, ““Righting” Conventional Wisdom: Women and Right Parties in Established Democracies,” *Politics & Gender* 14, no. 1 (2018): 27. doi:10.1017/S1743923X17000514.

¹³⁵ Katherine Blee, “Similarities/Differences in Gender and Far- Right Politics in Europe and the USA,” in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, eds. Renate Bitzan, Michaela Köttig and Andrea Petö (Cham: Springer Nature, 2017), 196.

¹³⁶ Silke Baer, Oliver Kossack, and Anika Posselius, “Gender Might Be the Key. Gender- Reflective Approaches and Guidelines in Prevention of and Intervention in Right-Wing Extremism in Europe,” in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, eds. Renate Bitzan, Michaela Köttig and Andrea Petö (Cham: Springer Nature, 2017), 351.

¹³⁷ Here, I am drawing on work I presented at a conference titled “Democracy in Crisis” which took place at Concordia University on October 30th, 2024.

¹³⁸ Jeremiah Morelock, and Felipe Ziotti Narita, *The Society of the Selfie: Social Media and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, (University of Westminster Press, 2021,) 14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv282jfv5>.

Many of his posts were aimed to highlight his goofy and funny personality, such as when he shared pictures of himself working at McDonald's.¹³⁹ Another example is the jokes that emerged from the 2024 presidential debate between himself and former President Biden, which depicted them as regular people. In the past, politicians were often reluctant to share details about their personal lives due to the potential for scandal. Today, however, they have more control over the information they wish to disclose, even if it differs from what voters are accustomed to seeing. Voters get to see who their future leaders really are, or at least the image they want to present to the public.

On social media, users are projecting a desired version of themselves and of their professional identity.¹⁴⁰ This can be seen on Trump's social media profiles, for instance, but also on other politician's pages, like Giorgia Meloni's. Traditional news outlets, like newspapers and TV news, will provide clear information regarding Meloni and her political policies. These outlets are fact checking, researching, and ensuring that the information they are releasing to the public is clear and truthful. They make her grievances clearly known, but one would not know this through her social media platforms. Her personal Instagram profile portrays a softened image of an otherwise strict politician.¹⁴¹ This is problematic for people like myself, who discovered politics and politicians like Meloni on social media but did not realize that the image they were portraying to the public was masking the conservative, and some would think, potentially fascist ideologies and beliefs used to govern their country.

These are examples of two very conservative politicians, yet it makes the most sense coming from right-wing parties since in order to appeal to voters, it works to hide the rougher side of one's professional identity. I argue this tactic is most beneficial on social media, since most users and voters will take it as facts and base their political decisions solely on the social media posts they come across on their feeds. With this knowledge, I question if sites like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram are aiding in concealing the truth about right-wing politics? We are currently seeing far-right politicians benefitting from social media sites because they can alter their online identities and are not censored, as they would be on traditional media outlets.¹⁴² Leading up to the 2024 U.S. elections, and ongoing even afterwards, the owner of X, Elon Musk, is allowing and encouraging this exact phenomenon to continue. X has become "a far-right social network", and users do not even realize they are engaging with far-right politics because it is masking as a regular, free social media site.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Donald Trump, *Instagram*, October 20, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBW4b62y10D/>.

¹⁴⁰ Morelock and Narita, *The Society of the Selfie*, 11.

¹⁴¹ Giorgia Meloni, "Finché avremo il sostegno dei cittadini [...]," *Instagram*, October 21, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBYI6eHNU7M/>.

¹⁴² Jen Schradie, "Behind French Election Tweets, the Far Right is Hidden in Plain Sight," *The Conversation*, April 8, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/behind-french-election-tweets-the-far-right-is-hidden-in-plain-sight-180819>.

¹⁴³ Schradie, "Behind French Election Tweets, the Far Right is Hidden in Plain Sight."

Additionally, Meloni has clarified her support and friendship with Musk and Trump on her social media.¹⁴⁴ In her most recent post with Trump, she states, in Italian, that she is “ready to work together.”¹⁴⁵ On sites like X, there is a definite advantage to this type of political engagement. I argue any political discourse is beneficial, as long as it does not promote or encourage hate. Yet, most of what we are seeing in terms of political discourse online is leading to and fueling cruelty and injustice. Musk has no problem with this behaviour on his site, since he bought it with the intention of “apply[ing] free speech principles to the platform [...]” which he felt was lacking amongst social media sites.¹⁴⁶ Thus, I argue this support that Meloni has outwardly shown towards Musk and other far-right politicians online, is portraying the idea that this type of behaviour online is acceptable. In addition, this level of hate, as we know, does not stay online. It eventually manifests itself in-person, whether it is through conversation, political debate, or protests. Nonetheless, I argue there is no place for it, in whatever shape or form it takes as it is not promoting any sort of good.

Social media has become a place for social activism and for people to learn about their rights and responsibilities. Politicians are using these platforms to enhance their personal and professional identities in order to gain attraction, but they are also publishing posts that are meant to draw hate towards their adversaries. Many users do not realize the hidden messages behind the posts and interactions they are coming across online, as well as the possible falsities, misinformation, and disinformation.¹⁴⁷ I argue that any engagement in political discourse is beneficial if, it does not amplify hate and cruelty. People must remain cautious of the information they are taking in and what they themselves are releasing, because once it is online, it is there forever. Furthermore, like all of us, politicians must remain mindful of what they post online and how they interact with followers on social media, since it has become evident through their followings that they have a strong presence and people are noticing.

Even so, I question what online and social media engagement in politics will mean for the future of politics, and more specifically, right-wing politics. As I have argued briefly, it is becoming increasingly easy for right-wing politicians to mask their harsh agendas online and influence voters this way. Will this lead to an increase in right-wing supporters thanks to social media? Yes, this is occurring, as we are already witnessing an increasing amount of right-wing engagement online, even unknowingly. By unknowingly, people are engaging in political discourse in various ways. It is not only occurring by writing a post about politics, but also by

¹⁴⁴ Giorgia Meloni, “Nelle scorse ore ho sentito l’amico Elon Musk [...],” *Instagram*, November 7, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DCD68VvNeVv/>.

¹⁴⁵ Giorgia Meloni, “Bella serata con Donald Trump [...],” *Instagram*, January 5, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/giorgiameloni/p/DEc33qpC6rn/>.

¹⁴⁶ Rob Wile, “A Timeline of Elon Musk’s Takeover of Twitter,” *NBC News*, November 17, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/twitter-elon-musk-timeline-what-happened-so-far-rcna57532>.

¹⁴⁷ Misinformation is “false or inaccurate information.” Disinformation is “false information which is deliberately intended to mislead.” American Psychological Association, “Misinformation and Disinformation,” Accessed November 25, 2024, <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/misinformation-disinformation>.

liking, commenting on, and sharing political posts, as well as by sending funny videos and memes to friends and family.¹⁴⁸

In conclusion, in this chapter, I defined and differentiated the terms fascism and far-right. A brief description of fascism is being completely loyal to one's nation while the far-right is more of a right-wing ideological stance. I included Griffin's advanced definition of fascism, which at its core, are variations of "a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism."¹⁴⁹ I explained that his definition is an ideological idea of fascism that is focused on the palingenesis of a nation, which means the rebirth of a nation.¹⁵⁰ This idea relies on violence in order to be fulfilled.

I deduced that the ideas of fascism and far-right should not be interchanged since they rest on different points of the "right-wing spectrum". Once I identified the terms, I was able to situate them in different contexts, mainly in Europe's current political realm. At this point, I began to analyze Giorgia Meloni, her political party, and her political actions and concluded that Meloni is not necessarily fascist yet does have fascist tendencies. However, I argue she is more of an ultranationalist and ultraconservative, which does categorize her as far-right. Furthermore, since she does not intend to take violent measures, Griffin's palingenetic idea will not be realized.

After coming to a conclusion regarding Meloni's style of governance, I began to question how her policies play out in relation to her far-right government. By examining some of her policies on immigration, I conclude that she is harming Italy's traditional community-oriented beliefs and oppressing visible minorities' rights in Italy. Other far-right politicians in Europe have similar views towards such minority groups, like Marine Le Pen in France. I analyzed Le Pen's situation and her quest for leadership as a far-right politician, and concluded that she and Meloni are similar in the way they govern and portray themselves. In addition, this is due to the fact that they are women attempting to gain control in far-right societies, which can be extremely difficult. Therefore, they sometimes must govern in a harsher way, solely because of their gender.

Finally, I analyzed another realm of politics that we are seeing an increase of at the moment, which is the presence of politics online and on social media. I arrived at the conclusion that several significant right-wing politicians are on social media and are using their platforms as political strategies in order to mask their harsh agendas and appear more benign to users. Much of what is posted online is increasing hate and cruelty towards oppressed groups across the world, and only gets amplified when it moves to an in-person situation. Therefore, politicians should be cautious and mindful of how they interact with others online, since they clearly have a strong influence. In my next chapter, I will take the evidence I have gathered regarding Meloni in relation to feminism and fascism, and I will perform several theological assessments, since I do question whether her views are rooted in theological ideas.

¹⁴⁸ Memes are funny or interesting items that are typically spread on social medias. *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "Meme," Accessed November 25, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>.

¹⁴⁹ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ Griffin, *Fascism*, 46.

Chapter 3: Theological Assessment of Meloni's Ideas

The previous chapters situated and defined two vital ideas: feminism and the far-right. It also explored Giorgia Meloni's political ideals through these frameworks. Now that I have explored those ideas, I may move on to my final chapter, which will focus heavily on theology. I will present theological assessments of Meloni, which will ideally lead me to a conclusion about whether her views are rooted in theological ideas and, if so, whether these ideas are accurate. However, this can only be accomplished by explaining a theological assessment, why it is valuable, and how it contributes to my research.

Once established, I will examine Meloni from different theological perspectives. There are many theological perspectives, but the three I will focus on and which I believe to be the most pertinent, are Contextual Theology through the lens of Stephen B. Bevans, Bernard Lonergan's notions of the human good and progress and decline, and finally, Feminist Theology. While determining the accuracy of Meloni's religious beliefs through a theological lens is essential, these assessments will also allow me to reach a conclusion regarding the implications of Meloni's views and mandates on family, democracy, and society in Italy at this time and what it could mean for the country's future.

1. Theological Assessments: Why are they necessary and valuable, and how do they contribute?

Through my research, I have discovered that theological assessments usually manifest as discernments of an individual student's educational journey. It can be used to measure one's theological education when attempting to achieve deeper levels of understanding and enlightenment.¹⁵¹ In respect to this thesis, there is a portion of the theological assessment that applies to me. I am attempting to develop a deeper level of understanding regarding feminism, fascism, and theology as it pertains to my life and my community, as well as the societal situations I am noticing around the world. With respect to my research, however, this theological assessment will focus on gaining a deeper level of understanding regarding a specific individual, Giorgia Meloni.

I did not pick this person randomly, and I believe theology is always present thus anyone can have a theological assessment performed on them. However, I chose to assess Meloni specifically because her politics have theological implications. I noticed this when I first heard her speech, in which she exclaimed, "I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian, you won't take it from me!"¹⁵² After hearing that she is Christian, I knew that her personal beliefs were seeping into her politics, but I did not know to what extent, and I still do not, which is why I am writing this thesis today. I am curious to discover how much of her

¹⁵¹ Greg Henson, "Trustworthy Assessment in Theological Education," *Kairos University*, 1, <https://kairos.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Trustworthy-Assessment-in-Theological-Education.pdf>.

¹⁵² EU Debates, "Giorgia Meloni: Italy's far-right wins election and vows to govern for all! I am Giorgia!!!," posted September 26, 2022.

politics is based on religious beliefs, and whether those beliefs are accurate, or based on fiction or assumptions.

A theological assessment is necessary to establish the level of a person's understanding of the religious ideas they may hold and accurately point out where these ideas stem from. Is there any accuracy to an individual's religious claims? In Meloni's case, I deem it necessary since her views could have severe repercussions in Italy, some of which I have already pointed out, like her stances towards abortion and same-sex parents. Furthermore, a theological assessment is not only valuable when determining an individual's level of understanding, but also in evaluating and analyzing one's actions, words, and beliefs from a theological perspective. I am not looking to judge her actions or her beliefs, but through a theological assessment I am looking to better understand and interpret Meloni's views and find truth and the 'good' behind what she says and does.

This contributes to my research since I have shown that Meloni, and other leaders like her around the world, are impacting people's individual rights and freedoms through their politics. Therefore, a theological assessment can help me come to a conclusion about whether this is happening because of Meloni's religious beliefs, and if so, how this comes across in her work. Finally, by performing theological assessments using several perspectives from various scholars and theologians, I believe the assessment will be complete and concrete, since I do not know yet which theological perspective matches Meloni's case best. In the next section, I will assess Meloni's actions through the lens of contextual theology, as per Stephen Bevans. Then I will evaluate if Meloni is contributing to the human good using Bernard Lonergan's theological method. Finally, I will analyze Meloni's political beliefs through a feminist theological framework.

1.1. Test Case: Giorgia Meloni – through a contextual theological perspective

The first theological perspective I will explore is contextual theology, since context is extremely relevant in my research. More precisely, diverse contexts and experiences. Likewise, context is where one should start when attempting theological reflection.¹⁵³ A significant source that allows one to truly understand the role of the Christian religion in today's culture is by Stephen Bevans and is titled *Models of Contextual Theology*. My topic and the main questions I am asking all pertain to context, since I explore the different forms of oppression I am witnessing in Italy, and worldwide, various prominent politicians in the present day, and different cultures and customs around Europe and North America. According to Bevans, contextualizing theology means "attempt[ing] to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context [.]"¹⁵⁴ Everyone's understanding of God is different, and one's cultural and historical contexts impact that understanding and how one expresses their faith and beliefs.¹⁵⁵ Importantly, Bevans points out that the Christian scriptures and traditions are products of human beings and an individual's

¹⁵³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Revised and Expanded Edition), *Faiths and Cultures Series*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 18, EBSCO.

¹⁵⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16.

own context.¹⁵⁶ Meaning, the scriptures and practices were developed from someone's perspective and interpretation of the religion. Just like now, how will each follower of Christianity interpret the sacred texts and follow the traditions in their own way? Bevans reminds readers that every one of us is developing our understanding of the religion, based on *our own* contexts.¹⁵⁷ Applied to Meloni, it is vital to remember that she has her own interpretation of Christianity and its traditions. Her beliefs are being expressed through a unique perspective, that is, through an upbringing that has shaped her and through the context she finds herself in at this point in time.

Meloni can be vigorous when she speaks of her beliefs. I am once again alluding to her famous speech where she identifies specific points about herself, like being a woman, an Italian, a mother, and a Christian. I argue she is forceful because she is frightened of losing herself and her identity because of the current context she finds herself in. Meloni believes that individual liberties are at stake.¹⁵⁸ She fears progressive, anti-Catholic left-wingers are a threat to the traditional notion of family she wishes to keep alive in Italy.¹⁵⁹ In a 2019 speech, she outlines certain concerns and fears she has in relation to identities. She says she wants to “defend the value of [...] every single human being [from those that are attacking] national identity, religious identity, [...] gender, [...] and family [...]”¹⁶⁰ According to Meloni, attacking these values are those that attempt to homogenise human beings through political correctness and cancel culture by removing beautiful and honorable human behaviours.¹⁶¹ Meloni, who grew up during the reign of Pope John Paul II who she refers to as “a great man, a saint”, is ultimately afraid of losing herself and all she has ever known. She believes that Italy must regain control over their national and religious identity.¹⁶²

Bevans' book can also be used as a guide to navigating and adapting to societal changes while respecting people's beliefs and traditions.¹⁶³ Meloni's fears add to Italy's lack of freedom of beliefs and values. Bevans also urges readers to notice how culture interacts with Christianity's core themes and messages.¹⁶⁴ A common but important example is love. Contexts are constantly evolving, and Meloni mentions those who participate in “cancel culture”¹⁶⁵ as a threat to human identities, but there are many who feel Meloni is a threat to human identities. It all depends on perspective, and ultimately, when someone is attempting to oppress one's identity, that is going against Christianity's messages of love. For example, a biblical verse from the first

¹⁵⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16.

¹⁵⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 16.

¹⁵⁸ Gavin Ashenden, “What do we know about Giorgia Meloni's Christian faith?,” *Catholic Herald*, September 27, 2022, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/ch/what-do-we-know-about-giorgia-melonis-christian-faith/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ashenden, “What do we know about Giorgia Meloni's Christian faith?”

¹⁶⁰ Ashenden, “What do we know about Giorgia Meloni's Christian faith?”

¹⁶¹ Ashenden, “What do we know about Giorgia Meloni's Christian faith?”

¹⁶² Ashenden, “What do we know about Giorgia Meloni's Christian faith?”

¹⁶³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 8.

¹⁶⁵ According to a popular dictionary definition, cancel culture is “the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling [...] as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure [...]” *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “Cancel culture,” Accessed January 6, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cancel%20culture>.

letter according to John states that “[...] those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” (1 John 4:21)¹⁶⁶ In relation to Bevans’ view, when Meloni places importance on her religion through her speeches and interviews, culture and religion are interacting, but when her actions and policies go against a fundamental Christian value, like the importance of loving everyone, no matter what, it causes conflict.

In his book, Bevans creates a guide that theologians may follow if they wish to perform theology in a particular context. He presents six models of contextual theology. Each model can be used independently but are still interconnected and rely on each other. Bevans’ assertion is that one’s theological research is more complete when using all of the models, circumstances permitting. The most conservative of the models is the countercultural model, which understands that context is a significant factor, but does not deem it sacred or powerful.¹⁶⁷ The translation model takes experience and culture into consideration but emphasizes fidelity in scripture and tradition.¹⁶⁸ The synthetic model is placed in the middle of the others and attempts to balance out the other models.¹⁶⁹ The praxis model emphasizes the importance of social change in terms of one’s faith. The anthropological model, which is the most radical, emphasizes cultural identity as more relevant to theology compared to scripture or tradition.¹⁷⁰ The transcendental model, according to Bevans, “floats above all” because it is not as concerned with theological content, but rather with the subject.¹⁷¹ Bevans provides this map of the models which allows one to visualize their place in contextual theology with ease:

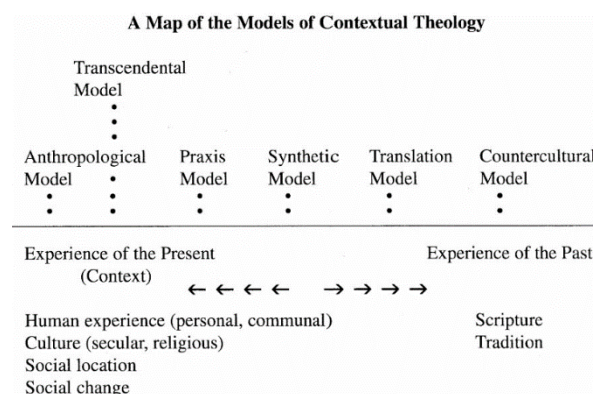


Figure 1¹⁷²

As I engage in this theological assessment of Meloni, it seems she is operating on several levels. Currently, it looks like Meloni is operating through the anthropological model since she places more importance on cultural identity in relation to theology, while scripture and tradition

¹⁶⁶ When including specific biblical passages, I will be using *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible*.

¹⁶⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

¹⁶⁸ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

¹⁶⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

¹⁷⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37.

¹⁷² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 37.

do not seem as important to her, or they only get mentioned in certain contexts. However, at times, she places great importance on tradition and neglects context, meaning she can also be very conservative and operate through the countercultural and translation models. In a way, she could also be seen as operating through the praxis model since she demands social change from a faith perspective, but this has only occurred in some instances. In terms of the subject, in this case Meloni, the transcendental model should allow one to “express one’s faith in an authentically contextual manner.”¹⁷³ When Meloni has freely expressed her faith through her politics, I am not certain that she took into account the authenticity of her words. Her views and actions have been questioned, for ethical reasons; therefore, she may not be reflecting on how she expresses herself or the effect her words have on those listening.

1.2. Test Case: Giorgia Meloni – through the perspective of Lonergan’s notion of the human good and progress and decline

I would like to begin this section by describing what I believe is a truly good leader. I think a good leader is someone who is always striving for a better community for their citizens. It is someone who actively listens and respects people’s personal views and beliefs. Furthermore, it is someone who not only accepts, but encourages diversity in a community and who treats everyone equally. I sometimes experience the opposite in my mainly francophone community because French is not my native language. Montreal is a melting pot, and when individuals are forced to adhere and assimilate to a leader’s vision of their ideal community, much of their individuality is stripped away. I am lucky that I can easily adapt to these strict mandates, but I work in a community with less fortunate citizens.

For instance, those newly arrived in Montreal and have never spoken French have a very difficult time gaining access to resources and understanding their and their families’ rights. They and their children are forced to assimilate to our language and culture as quickly as possible, but it is a major culture shock and not a very successful method since Quebec has had problems integrating newly arrived individuals into the workforce.¹⁷⁴ Also, students in Montreal drop out more than any other city in the province, and many of these students come from poor and/or immigrant families.¹⁷⁵ The intents of Quebec’s leaders may be good, but from what I see, from working with youth from underprivileged communities, the intentions do not always resemble what is good.

Furthermore, there is the ongoing problem of oppression towards Indigenous communities in Canada. A pertinent example, which is often used but effective since it demonstrates the severity of the situation, is the residential schools, where Indigenous children were sent and stripped of their religious and cultural identities. While those who established these schools and those who taught there believed they were doing good by maintaining “the purity of [their] French-Canadian origins, the religious, moral, heroic and idealistic character of

¹⁷³ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 36.

¹⁷⁴ Frédéric Tomesco, “Quebec’s economic competitiveness stable despite dropout rates, report says,” *The Montreal Gazette*, December 1, 2022, <https://www.montrealgazette.com/business/article116345.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Réseau réussite Montréal, “Montreal’s context,” *Réseau réussite Montréal*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.reseautreussitemontreal.ca/en/perseverance-in-montreal/montreal-s-context/>.

[their] ancestors [,]" but in reality, the schools were sites of abuse that led to a cultural genocide.¹⁷⁶

These are two relevant examples based on the context we are living today. Through them, I attempt to demonstrate severe instances where some leaders thought they were doing good by preserving their communities' traditions, but what may be good for some may not always be good for others. I keep coming back to whether Meloni is undermining women's progress through her actions. I believe Canadian theologian, Bernard Lonergan can help me conclude this matter.

Bernard Lonergan contributed immensely to the methods of philosophy, economics, and theology.¹⁷⁷ His 1972 work *Method in Theology* is meant to identify a series or pattern of operations that theologians can follow in order to perform any theological task.¹⁷⁸ Through attentiveness to these operations, Lonergan intended that theologians would also discover a moral structure within themselves, which I take to mean, a heuristic guiding one to discover truth and value.¹⁷⁹ Lonergan begins his chapter on "The Human Good" by stating that it is risky to try and define "the good" since it could misinform readers.¹⁸⁰ That is why, at the beginning of the section, I explain what constitutes a good leader rather than offer an abstract definition. Lonergan's chapter allows one to provide evidence and rationale in order to judge something as good. He breaks down and explores the components that constitute the human good, such as, skills, feelings, values, beliefs, cooperation, progress and decline. This is what I am attempting to do concerning Meloni's religious and political beliefs, as well as her assertions and their inevitable impact.

In addition, Lonergan develops eight functional specialties in *Method in Theology*. These specialties are a way of organizing one's investigation of a particular subject and were designed for theologians but can really be applied to any discipline. First, there is research which means data should be gathered when attempting to perform a theological investigation.¹⁸¹ The second is interpretation, meaning making sense of the data that has been gathered while understanding the context.¹⁸² The third is history, which could mean basic things like places or people, or it could be special cultural movements, or more general as an ideal.¹⁸³ Next is dialectic which usually aims to understand conflicts, for example, in Christianity.¹⁸⁴ The fifth is conversion (foundations)

¹⁷⁶ Jonathan Montpetit and Benjamin Shingler, "Quebec's residential school system started later than most in Canada — and also has history of abuse," *CBC News*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-residential-schools-1.6053558>.

¹⁷⁷ "About Bernard Lonergan," *Lonergan Research Institute*, <https://www.lonerganresearch.org/about-bernard-lonergan/>.

¹⁷⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan Method in Theology*, eds. Robert M. Doran and John D. Didosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3.

¹⁷⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 4.

¹⁸⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 28.

¹⁸¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 123.

¹⁸² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 123.

¹⁸³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 124.

¹⁸⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 124-5.

which involves transforming a subject and their world.¹⁸⁵ The sixth are doctrines which describe judgements of fact and value.¹⁸⁶ Then there is systematics which is concerned with and attempts to understand the judgments that arise with doctrines.¹⁸⁷ Finally, there is communications which Lonergan deems the most important specialty, it “is concerned with theology in its external relations.”¹⁸⁸

I will focus on this last functional specialty since it aligns most with my research and the answers I seek through my test case. While unpacking the phenomenon of far-right politics in Italy and women’s roles in far-right societies is vital, it is also important to understand and communicate the impact of that phenomenon. What will be the ultimate impact on women and on the progress that has been made for many oppressed groups? What are the consequences women will have to handle in far-right sectors? Not only is communications concerned with external relations, but for Lonergan, it is also about being attentive to who the audience is. It is situated in the second phase of Lonergan’s specialties; mediated theology, which is the “knowledge of God and of all things as ordered to God [...]” as he is known mediately (indirectly) through Christ and His followers.¹⁸⁹ Communications is an ongoing process of affecting communities, actions, and situations. Meloni, alongside other figures I have discussed throughout this thesis, such as Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump, will have a lasting impact on various communities. These individuals are responsible for the effects they have on people’s rights and lives.

Lonergan makes clear that society is community.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, one might ask, are these individuals being responsible leaders of the society they govern and the world they live in? It goes against what Lonergan calls the moral principle if they are not. By moral principle he is referring to individuals being responsible not only for themselves, but also for the world they inhabit.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, if they are using God’s message to their advantage and interpreting His words in a certain way so that they may oppress others, they are going against Lonergan’s understanding of the religious principle. The religious principle is God’s love which establishes the foundation of dialogue between all representatives of religion.¹⁹² By not respecting these principles and the idea of the “common good,” communities and societies will not survive. Communities are imperfect and complex, and because of this complexity, problems occur.¹⁹³

In continuation, Lonergan discusses the idea of progress and decline. Perhaps Meloni believes she is creating opportunities for women that enable progress in the way of women’s experiences. She might believe she is doing good, but in the long term is she really? Lonergan

¹⁸⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 125.

¹⁸⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 127.

¹⁸⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 127.

¹⁸⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 127.

¹⁸⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 129-130.

¹⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 332.

¹⁹¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 332.

¹⁹² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 332.

¹⁹³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 332.

writes that just like individuals, societies suffer breakdowns.¹⁹⁴ What does it even mean to promote women's experiences? Lonergan states that progress does not occur at once but is a continuous improvement.¹⁹⁵ Progress can also produce decline if subjects disregard what Lonergan identifies as the transcendental precepts, which are to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.¹⁹⁶ Promoting progress and the common good calls for self-transcendence and self-sacrificing love which Lonergan believes can transform decline and restore progress.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, Meloni has some good intentions for Italian women, like wanting them to have babies and families to restore Italy's birth rate, which in her view, promotes progress and would be good for the country. However, while this may be good for some women, it does not imply that it is good for all women. For example, when Meloni is pushing stricter abortion laws, which she believes is promoting progress, the countereffect promotes decline for women and families who do not want children or cannot financially support children. Hence, what might be good for Meloni and some women is not adding to the common good of the whole society. In this sense, she is disregarding the transcendental precepts.

1.3. Test Case: Giorgia Meloni – through a feminist theological perspective

The final theological perspective I will explore is feminist theology, which, through my research, has become intertwined with Bevans' contextual theological approach and Lonergan studies. I argue that there are definite correlations between Lonergan's works and feminism. For instance, his notion of the human good is what I believe feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether was striving for through her work. Furthermore, context is extremely significant in feminist theology and effects women's experiences, so contextual theology is also pertinent in this regard. As I discussed in my first chapter, there have been many feminist movements and there will be many more, so the contexts are constantly changing.

Several points need to be raised in evaluating and analyzing Meloni's actions through a feminist theological perspective. Firstly, Italian women are motivated and desire change. An example of this can be seen through the protests they hold regarding abortion. Many Italian citizens feel women deserve the rights to terminate a pregnancy.¹⁹⁸ Although, there are also groups in Italy who are pro-life and protest abortion.¹⁹⁹ When it comes to feminist theology, this field is dependent on women's motivation for liberation in their communities.²⁰⁰ Hence, whatever side women are fighting in this fight, both believe they are promoting good for themselves and society. Meloni, as a woman, believes preventing abortion is the best choice for all women. She believes she is doing good by women, so, can that be viewed as an act of

¹⁹⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 51.

¹⁹⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 52.

¹⁹⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 54.

¹⁹⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 54.

¹⁹⁸ Angelo Amante, "Abortion rights activists heckle Italy's family minister at conference," *Reuters*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-abortion-activists-heckle-italys-family-minister-conference-2024-05-09/>.

¹⁹⁹ Euronews, "Around 5,000 pro-lifers protest in Rome against abortion," *Euronews*, June 23, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/06/23/over-a-thousand-pro-lifers-protest-in-rome-against-abortion>.

²⁰⁰ Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 162-3.

feminism? Yet, others will say that by restricting abortion, Meloni is undermining women's progress which is the exact opposite of feminism. Ultimately, feminist theology is based on liberation from oppression.²⁰¹ Therefore, from a feminist theological perspective, Meloni is continuing the oppression of women, is promoting decline and is not adding to Italy's common good.

The connection between feminist theology and Bevans' contextual theology can also be drawn. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, Meloni fears losing her identity and Italy's cultural identity. For Bevans, cultural identity is an issue in contextual theology since it might idealize a non-existent or former culture, which can harm existing cultural norms and identities.²⁰² An article describes Meloni and her party as a combination of "neo-traditional" and "modern-traditional," meaning she attempts "to combine traditional views with modern elements" like integrating women in the workforce and developing initiatives so that women can work while raising children.²⁰³ However, there are other issues that she has a more traditional view on, like equal pay between men and women and gender roles that depict women as the primary caregivers of their children.²⁰⁴ In line with this, I argue she is concerned with Italian women losing a sort of "gender role identity." What is a woman if they are not keeping house and caring for their husbands and children? Therefore, from a feminist theological perspective, Meloni's views are not aligned with Italy's current context, and her fear of cultural, traditional, and national identities being stripped away is becoming a reality due to her unrealistic and traditional mandates and beliefs. They simply do not fit with Italy's reality and the needs of Italian women and minorities at this point in time.

2. Are Meloni's Views Rooted in Accurate Theological Ideas?

The term "family values" encompasses the views I believe Meloni holds.²⁰⁵ In order to analyze if family values in Meloni's politics is coming from a place of religious belief, I will be referring to a chapter from *The Bible in Political Debate* titled "The Bible and Family Values" by Andrew Klumpp and Jack Levison. Firstly, Meloni is focused on sustaining a pure Italian image, which means pure Italian babies, born to heterosexual couples, which does not include immigrants, but no where in the Bible is there the idea of a "pure" family. In fact, Klumpp and Levison write that there are many "biblical texts that attest to a very different experience of family values."²⁰⁶ Is it possible that Meloni is misinterpreting Christian scripture and tradition, maybe even unknowingly, and it is then making its way onto her political platform?

Additionally, in another chapter from the book, written by Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, titled "Ending a Life that has Not Begun – Abortion in the Bible," Peerbolte writes that many

²⁰¹ Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, 163.

²⁰² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 25 & 31.

²⁰³ Elisabetta De Giorgi, Alice Cavalieri, and Francesca Feo, "From Opposition Leader to Prime Minister: Giorgia Meloni and Women's Issues in the Italian Radical Right," *Politics and Governance* 11, no. 1 (2023): 115, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i1.6042>.

²⁰⁴ De Giorgi, Cavalieri, and Feo, "From Opposition Leader to Prime Minister," 115.

²⁰⁵ In this section, I am once again drawing on work I did for a graduate seminar on political theology in Winter 2023.

²⁰⁶ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 26.

politicians let their voters know they are basing their mandates on “traditional Christian views and values” in order to gain more votes and support from conservative Christians.²⁰⁷ I argue this is what Meloni is successfully doing, which is evident through the major support she has from conservative Christian Italians. In addition, I believe she is choosing specific information from Christianity’s history in which she also believes, so that it may fit her traditional family image. She can be seen doing this when expressing that she is pro-life, which many Christian politicians do.

However, it is crucial to remain mindful of the fact that many assume the Bible discusses abortion, or they misinterpret the scripture or the tradition.²⁰⁸ Peerbolte posits two important questions, asking if the Bible discusses abortion and how much authority it should have in politics if it does.²⁰⁹ He quickly concludes that all human life is sacred, but then comes the question of when life actually begins.²¹⁰ There is conflicting information on the matter, so he concludes that the Bible is not specific enough on the topic.²¹¹ I believe Meloni is basing her grievance towards abortion on her religious beliefs, which is her right. Still, she must be very careful about how she chooses to speak about and reinterpret this issue to her followers, which Peerbolte warns of.²¹² A similar book titled *The Bible Now* also includes a chapter on abortion and writes that the modern-day definition of abortion, as we know it, is not discussed in the biblical texts.²¹³ Therefore, politicians are relying on biblical texts that somewhat have to do with abortion, but oftentimes, could have nothing to do with it at all.²¹⁴ They are interpreting it for their benefit so that they may run a successful campaign.

As I have alluded to, Meloni’s take on homosexuality and immigration in Italy also adds to her idea of traditional family units and values. What does the Bible say about these two grievances and how are they typically used in politics? Once again turning to a chapter from *The Bible in Political Debate* titled “Culture Wars, Homosexuality, and the Bible” by Jonathan L. Jackson, it could be argued that Meloni is removing basic human rights from homosexual and immigrant communities, which is typical of far-right politicians.²¹⁵ In the 1970s, homosexuality was not only considered a sin from a religious viewpoint but also as a disease and as abnormal.²¹⁶ The way Meloni talks about gay people and her refusal to give them the right to start families could be taken as her believing that they are not normal and that there is something they lack which prevents them from taking care of children. Furthermore, she is unsympathetic to those who cannot conceive naturally or choose not to. For instance, she calls surrogacy

²⁰⁷ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 47.

²⁰⁸ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 48.

²⁰⁹ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 48.

²¹⁰ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 52.

²¹¹ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 55.

²¹² Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 58.

²¹³ Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

²¹⁴ Friedman and Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, 42.

²¹⁵ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 87.

²¹⁶ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 89.

“uterus-for-rent schemes.”²¹⁷ This is a cruel statement, not only to same-sex couples, but to anyone of any gender or sexuality who are unable or choose not to have children naturally. As I have demonstrated, many feel Meloni can be disrespectful. As she is a woman who has gone through childbirth, many feel she should understand their struggle.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the way sexuality is written about in the Bible describes sex acts, not actual love between people.²¹⁸ There are specific laws about this found in Leviticus, stating clearly that “male homosexual acts are prohibited.”²¹⁹ So, many sexual acts are frowned upon and even forbidden in the Bible, but there is never talk about relationships and identities.²²⁰ That being said, I believe Meloni’s stance towards homosexuality has to do with a couple’s biology, and I argue she is forgetting the love people can have for one another, just like any heterosexuals can have. Could her religious beliefs conceal Jesus’ principal message, which always concerned love? As for love, the Bible can be ambiguous when it comes to homosexual marriage, so if Meloni is using this “traditional Christian value” to solidify her views on same-sex unions, she could be misinterpreting scripture or could be misinformed since it does not exist in the texts.²²¹ It also makes me question if she even knows scripture.

The topic of immigration is very prominent in politics, and certain politicians will use the Bible to discuss how they should address immigration, especially when it comes to illegal immigration.²²² Referring to another chapter from the same book titled “Diasporas “R” Us: Attitudes toward Immigrants in the Bible” by Hector Avalos, a common theme in the chapter is empathy, which I think Meloni rarely shows towards any minority group. However, empathy may not be enough since there are certainly instances in the Bible where empathy is not shown towards immigrants, such as the Canaanites.²²³ One can argue that we are all made in God’s image, and should all be treated equally, but the Canaanites were not treated with respect. Nevertheless, it is a lesson we can learn from, and I believe, Meloni should show love and compassion towards all of her citizens, or possible citizens. Therefore, there are instances where the Bible demonstrates negative views towards immigrants, but that does not mean we should be replicating these actions in our present day.

I will conclude this section by stating that Meloni is controversial because she claims to want to keep her experiences with God to herself, yet her speeches include powerful phrases such as “I am Christian [and we] will defend God, the fatherland and the family [...]”²²⁴ In addition, in her first speech as prime minister she said that Italian citizens are the heirs of St.

²¹⁷ Nadeau, “Femme Fascista,” 18.

²¹⁸ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 97.

²¹⁹ Friedman and Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, 9.

²²⁰ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 97.

²²¹ Friedman and Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, 40.

²²² Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 34.

²²³ Flannery and Werline, *The Bible in Political Debate*, 43.

²²⁴ Gerard O’Connell, “Giorgia Meloni is a Christian and a Right-Wing Nationalist. How Will She Relate to Pope Francis?,” *America Magazine: The Jesuit Review*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/10/14/pope-francis-giorgia-meloni-243965>.

Benedict, who was an Italian, Catholic saint.²²⁵ Most recently, she posted a picture of Pope Benedict XVI on the second anniversary of his death and wrote, in Italian:

“[...] we pay tribute to a Pontiff who left a profound imprint not only on the Church, but also on the culture, philosophy and public reflection of our time. A theologian who managed to speak to the minds and souls of people. His life and his teachings tell us how faith and reason are complementary dimensions that illuminate each other. Even today his spiritual message is alive and powerful and the legacy of his Master remains an inspiration. For the Church and for society as a whole.”²²⁶

I argue Meloni is underlyingly trying to get Italy its Christian identity back since by including these bits of her faith into her platform, she is only speaking to people who can identify with her and her religion. She excludes those of different religious backgrounds, which is something politicians should not be doing. When Meloni and Pope Francis met in January of 2023, they discussed her platform which “support[s] traditional families, national identity, and the country’s Christian roots”, so clearly the Vatican is aware of her intentions, but may not agree with everything she has planned.²²⁷

Finally, are her views rooted in accurate theological ideas? As per the evidence I have provided, they are not. Her beliefs are littered with misinformation, and her political statements contain hints of disinformation intended to mislead and sway her Catholic supporters. Her ideas resemble those that right-wingers and fascist leaders often use to promote far-right ideas through the church. I argue she is also clinging to personal beliefs that informed her childhood and upbringing in Italy and is unwilling to adapt to changes or respect differences in worldviews.

3. Implications for Family, Democracy, and Society

What impact will Meloni, her party, and her views have on family, democracy and society?²²⁸ Families are being told they are not natural and not pure enough. Democracy is reverting back to its fascist roots in Italy, as well as mingling with religion, when church and state should remain separate. This affects Italians who are not Christian and other Italians who are not right-wing, or it involves some Italians who are both not Christian and right-wingers. Finally, how does this impact society? Meloni’s actions are affecting people’s experiences as citizens of Italy and as citizens of surrounding countries. It is becoming an increasingly tense society where people are getting progressively restless and torn as to what they should believe when it comes to their leadership.

The outcomes of each of these ideas influence the other. Family impacts an individual’s behaviour, which will then affect their actions in society. Democracy depends on the engagement of its citizens, and citizens are usually shaped by their family values and home environment.

²²⁵ Roberto De Mattei, “Giorgia Meloni: ‘We are the Heirs of St. Benedict,’” *The Catholic Thing*, October 29, 2022, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2022/10/29/giorgia-meloni-we-are-the-heirs-of-st-benedict/>.

²²⁶ Giorgia Meloni, “Nel secondo anniversario della scomparsa di Papa Benedetto XVI [...],” *Instagram*, December 31, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/giorgiameloni/p/DEPZrk7susF/>.

²²⁷ Brockhaus, “Pope Francis meets Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.”

²²⁸ This section was inspired by a text generated through ChatGPT on December 17, 2024.

Lastly, society puts in place the structure that families and democracies depend on. Therefore, the implication of each element is intermingled and constantly influencing and shaping the other. So, Meloni's impact on any of these elements will directly affect the other two. It is evident how important her leadership is and how much power she possesses.

In conclusion, through various theological perspectives, this chapter analyzed major personal and professional beliefs and actions that Giorgia Meloni has presented during her leadership. Using Stephen Bevan's model for Contextual Theology, I concluded that Meloni is frightened of losing herself in today's world. She is also afraid of Italy losing its cultural identity and traditions based on the context in which they live. In accordance with Lonergan's notions of the human good and progress and decline, I argue that Meloni thinks that she is doing good for women in Italy, and all citizens of Italy. She believes she is promoting women's progress and creating opportunities for them and other minority groups. Some agree and also believe she is doing good, but many do not. Finally, through the perspective of feminist theology, I concluded that many women and minorities are losing their rights and choices in Italy. This is occurring because Meloni is not advocating for women's rights, she is allowing the oppression of women and minorities to continue, and she is not being attentive or responding to their needs.

Instances of Bevans' contextual theological approach and Lonergan's studies are visible through this feminist perspective. Through Meloni's preference for traditionalism rather than adapting to the context of the present day and through her insistence that her goals are good for all women, she does not leave room for women to make their own choices regarding what they deem good and right for themselves and for the context they live.

Should we embrace these views? No, we should not, as I do not see how this conservative and traditional mindset would benefit women and/or minority groups. Can they even be embraced? Yes, they can be welcomed, but by embracing them we would not be promoting good, nor would we be promoting progress. Instead, we would be promoting decline. For Italy, maybe birth rates would increase, since they are extremely low,²²⁹ but people's mental health would suffer, which takes away from a person's overall well-being. Meloni is worried about Italy's future but needs to be just as concerned and responsive to Italy's present. To the issues Italians are currently facing.

After gathering evidence and analyzing Meloni through multiple lenses, I better and more accurately understand what I am for and against. I can better answer questions like: Is a politician like Meloni promoting or undermining women's progress? Also, which, if any, is the strongest theological perspective that contributes insight into women's experiences in far-right circumstances? These questions will be answered in the following conclusion to this thesis.

²²⁹ Giorgia Orlandi, "Italy's falling birth rate is a crisis that's only getting worse," *Euronews*, May 10, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/10/italys-falling-birth-rate-is-a-crisis-thats-only-getting-worse>.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I was mainly concerned with the question: “How are far-right politicians impacting women’s rights and the rights of other minorities, and what does this look like through various theological perspectives?” I focused on one prominent leader of a far-right society who is making significant strides in Italy, both as a conservative politician and a devoted Christian woman, Giorgia Meloni. This research was essential to determine the possible outcomes a politician like Meloni could have in far-right societies and what this could look like for women and other oppressed groups, like people who identify as LGBTI, immigrants, and families who are deemed “unnatural.”

In Chapter One, I explored different theories to analyze women’s experiences. I studied black, lesbian, and political feminist theories to acknowledge women’s various experiences and point out that each experience and perspective is unique. This chapter also combined my thoughts and experiences with ideas from other significant scholars in this field, like Rosemary Ruether and Linda Hogan, which further solidified the notion that women’s experiences will vary but are all important.

As the test case throughout my thesis, I analyzed Giorgia Meloni’s political oppositions in Chapter One through a feminist lens. I arrived at the conclusion that when it comes to issues such as abortion, surrogate pregnancies, and same-sex unions, Meloni is impacting women’s rights and preventing the advancement of women in Italy. Her actions can be described as antifeminist, traditional, and conservative, even if she believes she is doing right by women.

The second chapter identifies and defines another ideology: *fascism*. I concluded that, to be fulfilled, fascism relies on violence, which led me to the conclusion that Meloni cannot be deemed a fascist, yet she and her party tend to exhibit instances of fascism. Furthermore, I questioned whether *fascism* and *far-right* were interchangeable terms but concluded that they rest on different points of the “right-wing spectrum” and, therefore, should *not* be taken to mean the same thing.

Once again, using Meloni as a test case, I analyzed her politics, her party, and her actions and concluded that along with her fascist tendencies, her politics are ultranationalist and ultraconservative, which matches her far-right leadership style. Concerning her government, when it comes to immigration, for instance, I concluded that she is oppressing visible minorities’ rights in Italy and that other European politicians, such as Marine Le Pen, are exhibiting the same kind of oppression. This realization led to another conclusion that perhaps far-right female leaders *must* govern in this strict manner to maintain their status as strong leaders amongst a sea of male politicians.

I then explored how social media affects politics today and how much online politics is dominated by the far-right. I concluded that social media is enabling strict, conservative leaders like Giorgia Meloni and Donald Trump to appear more likeable and benign online compared to in real life. Importantly, people should be wary of what they are consuming online since much of

what is appearing online is adding to the oppression of women and visible minorities in far-right societies, and politicians are using this to their advantage.

My final chapter utilized the data I collected in the previous two, allowing me to engage in theological assessments on my test case. Using various theological perspectives, like Stephen Bevans' models of contextual theology, Bernard Lonergan's notions of the human good and progress and decline, and feminist perspectives from myself and other scholars, I arrived at several conclusions. Firstly, Meloni is frightened that she and Italy are losing their cultural identity and traditions because of the rights all are gaining and the context in which she finds herself. Secondly, I argued that Meloni truly believes she is doing good for women and visible minorities in her country, and in other countries, she demonstrates support for them. Thirdly, through a feminist theological perspective, I concluded that Meloni is allowing the cycle of oppression towards women and visible minorities to continue.

I ended this chapter by stating that for the reasons explored throughout my thesis, Meloni's views are problematic on several levels and should not be embraced, for they are *not* promoting progress or any good. Based on my evidence, both Bevans and Lonergan contribute tremendous insight into women's experiences in far-right circumstances. Humans need to respect other people's experiences as much as they do their own and take responsibility for themselves and their communities to ensure "good" in every context.

This thesis focused mainly on women's experiences and some experiences of visible minorities. The main takeaway should be that all experiences are essential and that experiences of oppression must be taken seriously. All forms of oppression should end because no one has the right to infringe on another human being's fundamental rights. No one has the right to tell a woman what she can or cannot do with her body, and no woman has the right to do that to another woman. By doing so, we are regressing and declining. Therefore, I have concluded that I am against oppression, which I believe I already knew beforehand, but I was not able to describe what it meant to me.

Furthermore, I have concluded that I favour responsible leaders who promote progress rather than decline. Leaders who make decisions based on the needs of their citizens because that is their true responsibility. Leaders searching for "good" and "truth" in their society make it their mission to bring that out in their politics.

When I wrote this thesis, I concluded that a politician like Meloni undermines women's progress through her politics, actions, and relationships. There is a definite need and room for improvement on her part. Italian women, minorities, and citizens deserve it.

Although I have tried to answer all of the questions I had at the start of this thesis, I am still left with so many since, as I said, this research is taking place in real-time. Giorgia Meloni is on the news every day, posting online daily, and she is still the leader of a society that I hold close to my heart. It pains me to witness the relationships she has formed with other far-right leaders who intend to harm women like myself when it comes to the rights we have over our bodies and minds. It pains me to know that there are currently so many Italian citizens who are undergoing some sort of oppression as a direct result of Meloni's harsh policies. The primary

question I am left with is, “What will Italy’s future be with Meloni as their leader?” I can speculate all I want, but I just hope that she realizes people’s lives are at stake and that she has the power to make significant changes for herself and all women.

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