

How sincere was Leibniz's religious justification for war in the *Justa Dissertatio*?

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This paper is concerned with Leibniz's Egypt Plan, written in 1671 and 1672, when Leibniz was in the service of the Elector of Mainz. Its aim was to persuade Louis XIV to invade Egypt. The circumstances surrounding the composition of this plan are widely known, and so may be sketched in brief: in the autumn of 1671, it was widely suspected in German states that the French would invade Holland in the spring of the following year. This was confirmed in December 1671 when Louis XIV despatched an ambassador to the Elector of Mainz, advising him of his intention to invade Holland, and to request that the Elector use his influence with the heads of other German territories to stop them entering the war. It was at this time that Leibniz began composing the Egypt plan. Scholars have generally supposed that Leibniz's rationale for devising the plan was to divert Louis XIV from his intended war with Holland, and ensure that the French armies were sent not just away from Holland but – crucially – from German territories also.¹ Needless to say, even if the desire to keep Louis' armies at a comfortably safe distance from the Rhine was – in whole or in part – Leibniz's reason for writing the Egypt plan, it was not one that is explicitly stated in the plan itself. Instead, Leibniz identifies a number of political, economic and religious benefits that could be expected if the plan were to be successfully executed; notoriously, the identification of religious benefits prompted Leibniz to characterize the plan as a holy war.² To date, the religious benefits Leibniz identified have received little attention from scholars. Moreover, those who do acknowledge them are often quick to downplay them, supposing that the “holiness” of invading Egypt was little more than a convenient religious motif added to a proposal that was essentially politically-motivated. For example, Ian Almond suggests that the Egypt plan involves “a rather cynical use of Christianity as a slightly superficial decoration, tacked on to an essentially strategic and thoroughly untranscendental project.”³ This tendency to downplay or even dismiss the religious benefits Leibniz claimed of the Egypt plan is undermotivated and stems from a very superficial reading of the plan. As such, it stands in need of correction. Accordingly, one of the aims of this paper is to offer a more balanced and plausible reading of the religious benefits of war that Leibniz outlines in his Egypt plan.

In offering such a reading, I argue that we should take seriously Leibniz's claim that a French invasion of Egypt would bring religious benefits and that, far from being superficial or superfluous features of the plan, these benefits are ones that Leibniz saw as important and intrinsically desirable inasmuch as he believed that the execution of the plan would yield clear ecumenical results. As such, the Egypt plan should be considered one of the earliest forays into the sort of ecumenism with which Leibniz's name would later become

¹ See for example G. J. Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches: A Study of G. W. Leibnitz and His Great Attempt*, London 1927, p. 29; Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge, Mass. 1979, p. 394 and p. 405; Patrick Riley, *Leibniz' Universal Jurisprudence*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, p. 246; Brigitte Saouma, “Leibniz et l'idée de croisade”, in: *Pluralität der Perspektiven und Einheit der Wahrheit im Werk von G. W. Leibniz*, eds. Friedrich Beiderbeck and Stephan Waldhoff, Berlin 2011, pp. 103-120, here p. 112.

² “If Egypt were invaded, the war would be in character, acclamation, and consequence, a holy war.” A IV 1, 274. All translations in this paper are my own.

³ Ian Almond, *The History of Islam in German Thought*, London 2010, p. 16.

synonymous, as “the greatest supporter of Church unity that the world has yet known,”⁴ as one scholar aptly put it.

In arguing for this interpretation, I will focus on the chief document in which the Egypt plan is outlined, the lengthy “Justa Dissertatio,”⁵ which was the document Leibniz ultimately intended for Louis. Indeed, Leibniz was still working on the “Justa Dissertatio” when he arrived in Paris at the end of March 1672, having been sent there by his patron at the court of Mainz specifically to present the plan to the French King. However, events had moved faster than Leibniz could write and travel, and by the time he arrived in Paris the Dutch had already been attacked by the English, who had secretly joined forces with the French, and Louis declared war a week later, on 6 April. There is no evidence that Leibniz was able to present his proposal to Louis or indeed to any member of the French court. Nevertheless, the “Justa Dissertatio” was written for Louis, and as such, any scrutiny of the religious benefits of invading Egypt identified therein needs to be mindful of the fact that the document had a clear diplomatic purpose. Accordingly, we need to consider not just what Leibniz says in this document, but also whether the claims he makes in it can reasonably be taken to represent his own thinking as opposed to being made out of calculated expediency.

The plan of the remainder of the paper is therefore as follows. In section 1 I shall outline the religious benefits of the Egypt plan that Leibniz identifies in the “Justa Dissertatio.” Having detailed these benefits, in section 2 I shall then consider the extent to which they can be said to represent Leibniz’s own views. I shall argue that the content and context of certain aspects of them – specifically those concerned with ecumenism – are a fair reflection of Leibniz’s own views, and should not be dismissed as mere expediency or diplomacy. Let us start, then, by examining the “Justa Dissertatio.”

1

The “Justa Dissertatio” is a sprawling and meticulously-researched document, filled with quotations from travel reports to support the various claims Leibniz makes in it about Egypt’s geography, defences, and people. In this text, Leibniz offers a suite of reasons in favour of an invasion of Egypt, claiming that it is the most efficacious way for the French to attain supremacy,⁶ that it is easy,⁷ safe,⁸ timely,⁹ and – most importantly of all – just.¹⁰ The plan is a just one, Leibniz explains, because it involves the Most Christian King training his fire on Christianity’s eternal foe, the Turks. Leibniz explains that Egypt is the key to the whole Turkish Empire,¹¹ and if it falls into Christian hands then the Turkish Empire would be ruined. His rationale is that since the wealth of the Turks is channelled through Egypt, seizing the country would bring about the impoverishment of the enemy,¹² and accordingly “to occupy Egypt ... [would be] the beginning of the certain downfall of the Turks.”¹³ He thus suggests that the plan “is in the interest of the human race and the Christian religion and, which comes to the same thing, because it is in conformity with the divine will, is just and pious,”¹⁴ which leads Leibniz to repeatedly describe it as a “holy war.”¹⁵

⁴ Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 31.

⁵ A IV 1, 267-382.

⁶ A IV 1, 273-279.

⁷ A IV 1, 279-367.

⁸ A IV 1, 368-376.

⁹ A IV 1, 376-378.

¹⁰ A IV 1, 378-382.

¹¹ Leibniz calls Egypt the “heart of Mahometanism” (A IV 1, 269).

¹² A IV 1, 310.

¹³ A IV 1, 280. See also A IV 1, 300.

¹⁴ A IV 1, 272.

¹⁵ See for example A IV 1, 267 and 274.

The religious benefit Leibniz has in mind here – that his plan would spell the doom of the Turks, and for that reason should be undertaken in the interests of Christianity¹⁶ – was of course, a stock theme in Christian calls for holy war with Muslims both inside and outside the crusader tradition. For example, in his fourteenth century work calling for a new crusade, Marino Sanudo Torsello explains that the proposal is made “for the common good of the whole of Christendom, present and yet to come,” because it involves “crushing and annihilating the principal enemies of the Catholic faith.”¹⁷ And John Foxe, in his *Acts and Monuments* (1583), after building a case for war with the Turks, begs God to

graunt to thy Church strength and victory against the malicious fury of these Turkes, Saracens, Tartarians, againste Gog and Magog, and all the malignant rabble of Antichrist, enemies to thy sonne Iesus our Lord and Sauior. Preuent their deuises, ouerthrow their power, and dissolue their kingdome, that the kingdome of thy sonne so long oppressed, may recouer and flourish ouer all.¹⁸

In each case, the justification for war is the glory of Christianity through the destruction of its enemy. As we have seen, some scholars have supposed this form of justification to be nothing more than a convenient (and highly unnecessary) religious motif added to what was essentially a politically-motivated proposal, and they condemn Leibniz accordingly.

But this is to move too quickly. For in the “Justa Dissertatio” Leibniz identifies two further religious benefits of a French invasion of Egypt, namely its ability to secure peace among the Christian nations of Europe, and its ability to bring about cooperation between Christians from all over the globe. These are typically neglected by commentators, and so are worth considering in some detail.

First of all, let us consider Leibniz’s claim that the Egypt plan would bring about peace in Christian Europe. The claim is made after he draws a very bleak picture of what would likely happen if France were to invade Holland as Louis intended: because of the pre-existing alliances and sympathies between its member states, Leibniz suggests that Europe would probably split into two great factions, with England, Portugal, Sweden and some of the German territories supporting the French, and Spain, Denmark and other German territories (along with the Emperor) siding with Holland.¹⁹ The prospect was that of a long, bloody and ultimately unwinnable war that would pitch Christian nation against Christian nation. In contrast with this, Leibniz explains, a war against the Turks “is rightly in the interest of France, Austria, Italy, Spain, England, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, the Empire, Europe, and the Church,”²⁰ such that “the interests of Christian Europe can be put in harmony with the interests of France.”²¹ Holland would be the lone exception to this unified front, because an invasion of Egypt would threaten her trading interests in the East. Consequently, should France invade Egypt, her actions would win approval from almost the whole of Christian Europe, with only the Dutch expected not to rally behind the French, which Leibniz suggested would be no great loss given the poor reputation of the Dutch among other European nations. Hence Leibniz writes, “The invasion of Egypt would be fatal to the Turks, and would be applauded by Christians, so long as the Dutch alone are dispossessed,”²² and as such “the expedition against the Turks will be regarded not as satisfying its [France’s] own

¹⁶ Leibniz also identified side-benefits of this, namely that defeating the Turks would free the Christians of the East who had been long harassed by Muslims (A IV 1, 379), and make it possible to “bring the Christian religion to the furthestmost limits of the world” (A IV 1, 279).

¹⁷ Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*, trans. Peter Lock, Farnham 2011, p. 22.

¹⁸ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, London, 1583, vol. 6, p. 773.

¹⁹ A IV 1, 363.

²⁰ A IV 1, 367.

²¹ A IV 1, 371.

²² A IV 1, 360.

particular desires but as being for the benefit of Christianity.”²³ Peace in Christian Europe would therefore be the likely outcome of the execution of the Egypt plan.

This benefit of the plan is worthy of note. While it was commonplace in the medieval and early modern mindset to connect European peace with holy war against the Turk, the order of the two was typically the reverse of that presented in the “Justa Dissertatio.” From the eleventh century onwards, it was often argued that there should be peace in Europe in order to make war on the enemies of Christianity. In his speech which launched the First Crusade (1095), Pope Urban II is recorded as urging that truce between European neighbours be kept in order to focus efforts on retaking the Holy Land.²⁴ In the centuries that followed, European peace came to be seen as a precondition of a successful war with the Turks. Accordingly, to assist with the prosecution of the Fifth Crusade, the 71st decree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) gave the following order:

But, since for the success of this undertaking [i.e. the Fifth Crusade] it is above all else necessary that princes and Christian people maintain peace among themselves, we decree with the advice of the holy council that for four years peace be observed in the whole Christian world, so that through the prelates discordant elements may be brought together in the fulness of peace, or at least to the strict observance of the truce.²⁵

Similar thoughts were expressed in 1305-1307 by Pierre Dubois,²⁶ in 1575 by Thomas Newton,²⁷ and in 1638 by the Duke of Sully,²⁸ each insisting that the European states should stop their in-fighting so that they could turn their gaze back to their traditional enemies – the barbarian and infidel. Hence, from the advent of the Crusades all the way to the seventeenth century, peace in Christian Europe was proposed in order to wage war with the Turks. Conversely, Leibniz’s plan proposes war with the Turks in order to make peace in Christian Europe. As such, Leibniz turns the old crusader logic on its head. He does this by supposing that a holy war with the Turks would galvanise the leaders of European territories into putting their differences aside and working together, spurred on by public opinion, which would be overwhelmingly in favour of such a war. France is therefore assured that its operations against the Turks would not be unilateral for long, as Leibniz all but promises that the other European territories would support it once its designs are clear.

As noted above, in the “Justa Dissertatio” Leibniz identifies a further ecumenical benefit of the Egypt plan, namely that the invasion would lead to the close co-operation of Christians of different nationalities and sects, not just within Europe, but also in Africa and even Asia. Here, Leibniz envisions Christians across the Turkish Empire rising up against their oppressors, and consequently assisting the French against the infidel.²⁹ This was not token assistance either, as Leibniz believed that Christians formed at least a third of the Turkish Empire of his day.³⁰ He explains that the French troops which seized Cairo would be supported by the local Christians, “who fill at least half of the city.”³¹ Moreover, once the

²³ A IV 1, 369.

²⁴ See *Sources for the History of Western Civilization, Volume I: From Antiquity to the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, ed. Michael Burger, Toronto 2015, p. 338 and p. 340.

²⁵ Translation from H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, St. Louis 1937, p. 295.

²⁶ See Pierre Dubois, *De recuperatione terre sancte*, Paris 1891, p. 3.

²⁷ See Thomas Newton, *A Notable Historie of the Saracens*, London, 1575, preface [no page number].

²⁸ See Maximilien de Béthune duc de Sully, *Sully’s Grand Design of Henry IV*, trans. David Ogg, London 1921, pp. 34-35.

²⁹ A IV 1, 336.

³⁰ A IV 1, 333.

³¹ A IV 1, 297.

invasion is complete, “Christians subject to the Turks, along with neighbouring Ethiopians, Numidians, and Arabs hostile to the Turks, will join with us.”³²

Developing the theme, Leibniz goes into considerable detail identifying Christian populations in the wider region, e.g. in Bulgaria, Greece, Bosnia, as well as in the East, such as in Syria, Mesopotamia, Kurdistan etc., presenting them as likely allies to the French.³³ He explains, for example, that the Christians in Albania – although belonging to a different branch of Christianity – would follow the French in rising up against the Turks.³⁴ The picture Leibniz paints, then, is of a potential Christian army spread across mainland Europe, Africa and Asia that just needed the catalyst of a French invasion of Egypt to band together and fight as one. Although the thought that a French invasion of Egypt would trigger widespread co-operation and collaboration among Christians, both of Europe and the East, is a motif that recurs throughout the “*Justa Dissertatio*,” it is not a traditional theme in the Christian holy war tradition, and may even be peculiar to Leibniz. While it was not uncommon for Christian authors who called for holy war with the Turks to mention Christian populations in Turkish lands, they typically did so in order to call for the liberation of these populations rather than see them as potential recruits to a broad Christian army.

It is notable that in the “*Justa Dissertatio*,” Leibniz’s vision is entirely focused on the short-term, inasmuch as he says nothing at all about how the anticipated unity between Christian nations and populations could be maintained after the Turkish Empire had been defeated. Given the different denominations involved, and their history of mutual suspicion and enmity, this might seem a very peculiar oversight. But Leibniz himself may not have thought so, for even in his youth he was overly optimistic about the prospects of harmonising the denominations. Where others saw chasms, he saw narrow gaps, and it would not be incorrect to say that, in his mind, the religious differences between the different branches of Christianity were neither big nor insurmountable. Indeed, in the years preceding the composition of the Egypt plan, he had been working on the so-called “Catholic Demonstrations” project that was designed to eliminate disagreement amongst Christians in matters of doctrine.³⁵ The fact that the “*Justa Dissertatio*” says nothing about how the newly-united Christian nations and groups could maintain their unity after crushing the Turks may therefore have owed as much to his confidence in the powers of the “Catholic Demonstrations” as it did to any constitutional difficulty he may have had in acknowledging the depth of the divisions between them.

II

In the “*Justa Dissertatio*,” then, Leibniz identifies three religious benefits of the Egypt plan, namely that it would (a) enhance the glory of Christianity through the defeat of its foe, (b) secure peace in Christian Europe, and (c) bring about cooperation between Christians all over the globe. In addition to the desideratum of destroying the Turks in a holy war, there is thus a clear ecumenical streak discernible in the text.

But while all three claims can be found in the “*Justa Dissertatio*,” it is not yet clear that any or all of them faithfully coincide with Leibniz’s own beliefs. Indeed, one might suppose that taking Leibniz’s remarks at face value is highly problematic, not least because the diplomatic aims of the Egypt plan may have prompted him to make claims that were not his own, in an effort to ensure the plan would be warmly received by the French king. Patrick Riley takes this line when he writes:

³² A IV 1, 307.

³³ A IV 1, 335.

³⁴ A IV 1, 337.

³⁵ See A VI 1 489-559.

A strange piece, the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*! It wavers between antique violence and Christian charity in a way that can be explained only by its immediate practical purpose—to flatter Louis XIV into imitating Alexander [the Great] while not completely forgetting Christ.³⁶

The dangers of taking the Egypt plan as a reliable indicator of Leibniz's views have been highlighted by Daniel J. Cook, who points out that the plan contains a number of bigoted remarks about the Dutch which are not found elsewhere in Leibniz's work.³⁷ This suggests, according to Cook, that Leibniz was prepared to make claims he himself did not accept in order to ingratiate himself with the French King, whom Leibniz could reasonably expect to harbour anti-Dutch sentiment given his desire to invade Holland. This might make us wonder whether the claimed religious benefits of the Egypt plan were cut from the same cloth, that is, whether they were weaved into the plan only in order to increase Louis' receptiveness to the proposal contained therein.

There is some evidence that this may have been the case. When writing the Egypt plan Leibniz certainly assumed Louis' piety, and sought to exploit it. Nowhere is this clearer than in the text "On the best advice that can be given to the most powerful king in the present circumstances" (January 1672), which is written in the form of a narrative, and was most likely intended as an inspiring postscript to the "Justa Dissertatio" (in the end, Leibniz decided to use an inspiring poem as a postscript instead).³⁸ The story begins with Louis and his ministers debating the political/military/economic rationale for invading Holland. Realising that the risks of a Dutch war are great, Louis postpones the discussion, and wanders into a church dedicated to his crusading ancestor, Saint Louis. Inspired by the example set by his ancestor, Louis decides to make a vow to God to use his power for the benefit of Christendom and the salvation of the human race. That same night, Louis dreams that he is commanding a fleet of ships against the Dutch but, before he can engage them, a storm tosses him out on the open sea. His boat then drifts, until eventually arriving at a distant land. On the shore, Louis meets a strangely-dressed old man, who tells him that God has directed him there. The old man explains that previous attempts to conquer this land were unsuccessful, but that a fresh attempt would be propitious because it would have heaven's blessing. The name of the land is not given, but from the description a seventeenth century reader would easily identify it as Egypt.³⁹ When writing this curious document, Leibniz clearly assumed that Louis' piety was sufficiently strong that it could motivate an invasion of Egypt, if only Louis could be convinced that the invasion was desired by God, and carrying it out would be an act of piety. The story was designed to do just that. Although Leibniz elected not to use it in the "Justa Dissertatio," he did employ similar devices, for example describing the Egyptian enterprise as holy and just and in accordance with God's will, all of which could be expected to inflame a reader of great piety, as Leibniz believed Louis to be.

In a similar vein, in the "Justa Dissertatio" we find Leibniz suggesting that should Louis be successful in his efforts against the Turks, "The golden age of Christianity will return, and we shall draw near to the primitive Church. And we shall begin the most true millennium, without all the folly of the Fifth Monarchists."⁴⁰ As Cook and I have noted in a previous paper, the millenarian thinking here is not to be found in any of Leibniz's other

³⁶ Riley, *Leibniz' Universal Jurisprudence*, p. 250. Going even further, Paul Ritter once warned that "one should be cautious before utilizing Leibniz's political writings as sources for his views." Paul Ritter, *Leibniz' Aegyptischer Plan*, Darmstadt 1930, p. 149 note 2.

³⁷ See Daniel J. Cook, "Leibniz's use and abuse of Judaism and Islam", in: *Leibniz and Adam*, eds. Marcelo Dascal and Elhanan Yakira, Tel Aviv 1993), pp. 283-297, especially pp. 290-291.

³⁸ See A IV 1, 381-382.

³⁹ See A IV 1, 240.

⁴⁰ A IV 1, 380.

writings, before the Egypt plan or after, though one would expect it to be if Leibniz possessed any millenarian sympathies himself. Cook and I therefore concluded that

Leibniz's extravagant claim about Louis instigating (or at least hastening) the onset of the millennium was a calculated one, intended to ensure a warm reception for the Egypt plan from a man who might reasonably be expected to respond to promises of glory (and in a sense immortality) by playing a key role not just in earthly history, but cosmic history.⁴¹

There is little doubt, then, that the "Justa Dissertatio" was written to appeal to – and exploit – Louis' piety and presumed religious leanings. As such, it is tempting to conclude that Leibniz's claims regarding the religious benefits of war were made merely to motivate Louis to execute the plan, rather than as genuine reflections of Leibniz's own views and leanings. I suggest, however, that we would be entitled to such a conclusion only once we have considered the different kinds of religious benefit that Leibniz identifies, and determined the extent to which these cohere with the views found in Leibniz's broader oeuvre. Such an analysis will show that while some of the claimed religious benefits arguably do not coincide with Leibniz's own views (namely his call to defeat the Turks in a holy war), others do (namely the ecumenical claims about securing peace in Europe and fostering cooperation among Christians worldwide). Demonstrating this will be the task of the remainder of the paper.

As we will recall, in the "Justa Dissertatio," Leibniz stressed the importance of destroying the Turks in a holy war. The first question we should ask is whether it is reasonable to think that in that text Leibniz deliberately sought to emphasize the aim of destroying the Turks in a holy war because that is precisely what he thought would motivate Louis into executing the plan? I submit that it is. As it happens, Leibniz had grounds to suppose that Louis harboured animosity towards the Turks. For Louis had been happy to take up arms against them when it suited him: in 1664, when Emperor Leopold asked him for assistance against the Turks in Hungary, Louis provided 4000 foot soldiers, and 2000 on horse. Leibniz was well aware of this, making an explicit reference to it in an early draft of the Egypt plan.⁴² Plausibly, then, Leibniz's suggestion that the Turks should be destroyed in a holy war was motivated by an unfortunate overestimation of the King's animosity towards the Turks, an overestimation based on Louis' willingness to engage them in a limited fashion almost a decade beforehand.

As confirmation of this, we should note that nowhere else in his voluminous writings did Leibniz suggest that the Turks should be destroyed or that a holy war should be fought against them. He did from time to time express the desire that European powers engage the Turks on the battlefield, though these appeals were made when the Turkish threat to Europe was at its greatest (for example, during the siege of Vienna in 1683).⁴³ Moreover, his remarks at these times were motivated by a desire to stop the threat to Europe rather than by a desire to wipe out an entire religion and its peoples; hence he never suggests that offensive action be taken against the Turks in their own territories, only that defensive action be taken to protect European lands. And at the times when the Turkish threat had receded, Leibniz did not call for military action against them at all. Indeed, as others have noted, in peacetime, Leibniz emphasized his universalistic belief that all humans – Turks included – were made in God's image,⁴⁴ a belief that in 1697 led him to describe himself as "neither a phil-Hellene nor a

⁴¹ Daniel J. Cook and Lloyd Strickland, "Leibniz and millenarianism," in: *Pluralität der Perspektiven und Einheit der Wahrheit im Werk von G. W. Leibniz*, eds. Friedrich Beiderbeck and Stephan Waldhoff, Berlin 2011, pp. 77-90, here p. 88.

⁴² Namely the "Regi Christianissimo" (December 1671): "Some time ago Your Majesty adopted nobler plans ... by sending auxiliary forces into Hungary." A IV 1, 223.

⁴³ See for example A IV 2, 451-502.

⁴⁴ Saouma, "Leibniz et l'idée", p.116.

philo-Roman but a phil-anthropos,”⁴⁵ that is, as someone who loves all human beings. So far as we can glean from Leibniz’s broader oeuvre, then, it seems he did not personally desire the destruction of the Turks, or that a holy war be fought against them.

We might plausibly suppose from this that the plan laid out in the “Justa Dissertatio” was pitched as a holy war because Leibniz felt that such language could stir Louis’ passions and spur him to invade Egypt. But as we have seen, the religious benefits identified in that text had distinct ecumenical elements as well. Were these also included to make the proposal appealing to Louis, or are they more plausibly a reflection of Leibniz’s own tastes and predilections? In this case, the latter seems most likely. Certainly there is little reason to suppose that Leibniz would have considered Louis to have strong ecumenical leanings, not least because of the French king’s persecutions both of the Jansenists and the Protestants throughout the 1660s, which were widely known outside of France. On top of that, the ecumenism discernible in the Egypt Plan accords with that to be found in Leibniz’s other work. Although his ecumenical activities are well known, they are worth rehearsing in brief. As already noted above, in the years preceding the composition of the Egypt plan, Leibniz had been working on the “Catholic Demonstrations” project (1669-1671) that was designed to show the central doctrines of Christianity “to be thoroughly holy and thoroughly rational,”⁴⁶ making it a truly universal religion acceptable to all humans *qua* rational creatures. If successful, the Catholic Demonstrations would have had the potential to unite all Christians, philosophically and doctrinally, and thus eliminate sectarianism. Leibniz revisited the project in the late 1670s and again in the mid-1680s.⁴⁷ From the 1680s onwards he contributed to the church reunification efforts which sought to unite Catholic and Protestant. Leibniz’s input in the reunion effort was initially limited to behind-the-scenes advising and counselling, and attempting to generate support for the enterprise through his acquaintances and correspondents. But as efforts floundered, he took on a more active role in the 1690s, pressing the case for reunion through his correspondences with Paul Pellisson (1624–1693), the court historian of Louis XIV, and the Bishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704). From 1697 to 1706 Leibniz was engaged in talks aimed at reuniting the Lutheran and Reformed churches, which he saw as involving mutual civic understanding, then ecclesiastical toleration, and finally doctrinal agreement.⁴⁸ And in the last decade of his life, Leibniz directed his ecumenical impulses eastwards, seeing the opportunity of a religious meeting ground between Christian Europe and the peoples of both China and Russia.⁴⁹ Thus whenever he saw the opportunity to do so, Leibniz keenly promoted ecumenism in various ways, both before the composition of the Egypt plan, and long after.

Put in this context, then, the ecumenical sentiments Leibniz espouses in the “Justa Dissertatio” reflect a consciousness on the issue that flowered often throughout his career, both before and after the composition of the Egypt plan. And it is testimony to the strength of his ecumenical impulses that he managed to give an ecumenical twist to what might seem, on the surface, a project that would afford scant opportunity for one. This would suggest that even if the principal motivation for the Egypt plan was to divert Louis from war with Holland, it is unlikely to be the only motivation that Leibniz had for advocating the plan during the time in which he did so.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ A I 14, 622-623.

⁴⁶ A II 1, 758.

⁴⁷ See for example A II 1, 750-759 (late 1670s); IV 3, 226-233, and VI 4, 2313-2327 (mid-1680s).

⁴⁸ See A I 14, 690-691.

⁴⁹ For more details, see Jordan, *The Reunion*; Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, pp. 392-410.

⁵⁰ I would like to thank Daniel J. Cook, Jason Roche, and Paul Lodge for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.