

RELIGION AND WAR — *necessary de-correlations* —

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Religion and war have been for a long time, which does not seem to be over yet, in direct relationship. Old soldiers went to battle animated by the thought that God is on their side, without forgetting to bring prayers and sacrifices in order to express their gratitude, and also to maintain the good relationship with God in the future. In tribal cultures (and here the Bible gives us many examples), when a side was losing a war, members of that tribe had to worship the gods worshipped by the victorious side.

The armed conflict in religious doctrines

Most religions refer in their writings to the armed conflict, war, justifying it explicitly and implicitly. Based on historical records, we will open our analysis by those religions which have been called "religions of the book"¹ Paradoxically, these *religions of the book* seem to prove - over time - a strong belligerent character. Therefore, we will identify the issues related to war in these three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and the Islam.

It is true that Judaism and Christianity share not only the source, but also a common tradition, developing in a similar historical context in which the state of war was almost constant: "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its grapes? Or who takes care of a flock and does not drink any of its milk?"(Corinthians, 9:7)

¹ The Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and the Islam - whose teachings are contained in the holy books: the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran.

In this historical context, Christianity is specifically known as a religion of love and universal peace: *"And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."*(Zechariah, 9:10). Examples from the New Testament may be easily added to the ones in the Old Testament. In the New Testament Jesus Christ tells Peter, *" Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."* (Matthew 26:52) or *"... I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Matthew 5:44, 45).

Although the sources of the Bible and the Koran seem to be similar, the doctrine of the Bible is quite different from the one depicted in the Koran. Thus, Mohammed believes that "paradise is under the shadows of the swords", but urges its followers to leave the unbelievers alone and patiently wait for God to punish them, *"Disregard them until they meet the day in which they are struck. On that day, their schemes will not protect them, nor will they be helped. Those who transgress suffer retribution here, but most of them do not know. You shall steadfastly persevere in carrying out your Lord's command - you are in our eyes - and glorify and praise your Lord when you get up."*(Surâh 52:45-48). This approach, consisting in treating the opposition with patience and persuasion: *"You shall invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kind enlightenment, and debate with them in the best possible manner. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best who are the guided ones."*(Surâh 16:126), or *"not equal is the good response and the bad response. You shall resort to the nicest possible response. Thus, the one who used to be your enemy, may become your best friend."*(Surâh 41, 34) - is transformed and verses of forgiveness and mercy are replaced with those of the sword: *"Once the Sacred Months are past, (and they refuse to make peace) you may kill the idol worshipers when you encounter them, punish them, and resist every move they make. If they repent and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), you shall let them go. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful."*(Surâh 9:5).

War can be waged within certain limits, but there are some exceptions: *" The sacred month for the sacred month, and retaliation (is allowed) in sacred things. Whoever then acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you and keep your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty "*(Surâh 2: 194). The message transmitted by this verse is that it allows fighting the religious war in the holy months in which,

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for any other reason, war is prohibited. It also allows religiously justified battles in the sanctuary of Mecca. There are also provisions for those who have *non-combatant* status in the opposite side, *"And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors"*. (Surâh 2: 190). The status of the prisoners is also taken into account: *"So when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, smite the necks; then, when you have overcome them, make (them) prisoners, and afterwards (set them free) as a favour or for ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That... (shall be so). And if Allah please, He would certainly exact retribution from them, but that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He will never allow their deeds to perish."*(Surâh 47:4). According to the Hanafî school, the recommendations contained in these two verses of 47th surâh (*Surâh of Mahommed*) were available only for the battle of Beder. The Shiite tradition considers these recommendations as having a permanent status. Captured enemies may be released in exchange for ransom or in exchange for Muslim prisoners.

Rewards are promised for those who die in Jihad: *"We will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve because they set up with Allah that for which He has sent down no authority, and their abode is the Fire. And evil is the abode of the wrongdoers. And Allah certainly made good His promise to you when you slew them by His permission, until you became weak-hearted and disputed about the affair and disobeyed after He had shown you that which you loved. Of you were some who desired this world, and of you were some who desired the Hereafter. Then He turned you away from them that He might try you; and He has indeed pardoned you. And Allah is Gracious to the believers."* (Surâh 3: 151-152).

Although Muslim surâhs are more explicit in establishing the relationship between faith and war, Christians also found in their doctrine enough arguments during the violent doctrinal religious conflicts in Europe or during the Crusades, as well as in the time of colonial expansions. Throughout history, the Christian view on war has been transformed due to a series of changes. While the early church affirmed a pacifist² view, this will be changed under the rule of Constantine, during the Council of Arles (314 A.D.), when it was declared that prohibiting the right of the state to wage a war means to condemn it to extinction. This was also the moment that urged the elite of Christian's scholars to formulate a doctrine of war,

² This is supported by the writings of the time. Origen said about the Christians that they were not acting as soldiers, and Tertullian reinforced this: "Christians went to war without a sword: because the Lord has broken the sword." Perhaps more representative is the text of Clement of Alexandria: "the one who bears the sword will have to leave it, and if any of the faithful becomes a soldier, he will be removed from the church, because by doing so God will dislike him."

namely the *doctrine of the just war*. In this way the idea was spread that the use of violence and initiation of belligerent actions are justified and warranted if placed in the service of faith in order to defend it. Therefore, violent actions, even wars, were not considered from the start as "bad", labelling them depending largely on the objectives of those actions. This mentality seems to have stood, in fact, for the Crusades, becoming the foundation on which the concept of *holy war* was later developed.

The idea that violent actions are not necessarily "bad" was retained over time, as mentioned in different versions of the just war doctrine. Today's international, academic, diplomatic and political-military media have been forced by the harsh reality to accept that in some cases violent actions, like war, can be an essential element in restoring and maintaining peace.

As priorly noted, the Islamic doctrine clearly distinguishes between the situations when war is allowed or, conversely, when there are limitations in this respect. Thus, war can be waged only in the following situations:

- the purpose of defense;
- when other nations are attacking a Muslim nation;
- if a State carries out the oppressing actions on its Muslim citizens, etc.

War must be waged with a minimum requirement for troops, in strict discipline, in order to avoid injuring or killing the non-combatant population. If prisoners are captured, they need to be kindly treated.

Principles for conducting the war were detailed later, in time, by the first caliph, Abu Bakr, who trained his army in this way: army that led the struggle: "Do not betray..., do not cheat, do not defile dead corpses, do not kill a small child, or an elderly, do not cut or burn trees of palm, do not cut fruit trees, do not slaughter a sheep or a cow or a camel except for your nourishment; and you will encounter people who are dwellers of cloisters (i.e. monks and priests) so do not harm. You shall encounter people who will present you with food platters, if you choose to eat from these, mention the name of Allah before doing so". These instructions contain all the rules that the Islam has set to govern the Islamic warfare. In addition to the respect of persons and their dignity, their lands and environment, the letter also contains the guarantee of the freedom of creed and the right to practice religious rituals in the lands of those that Muslims are fighting against."³

In turn, the Jewish doctrine does not condemn the use of force or the waging of war, especially if they occur in order to assert justice. It is accepted to

³<http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/Islamtoday/19/P2.php>;
http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/david_waters/2007/07/why_is_islam_such_a.html

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conduct different types of war, morally justified ones, but, before any type of military action, all possibilities for settling the conflict peacefully must be exhausted. This is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 20:10-12: "*When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it.*"

We conducted this brief analysis of the ideas about war in the major religious doctrines in order to provide a clear idea of the belligerent potential of each of them. Therefore, in terms of religious doctrine, war may be a:

- *wrong* action: in the case of the pacifist religion that excludes any kind of violence directed against a human being, even in self-defense;
- *just* action: where wars can be justified because of the perception that it would be held in support of a law case (in this case there are "moral" rules that allow the waging of a war);
- *sacred* action: the belief that a war can be holy arises when there is perception of the divine command (from a divine authority) to wage war against those who do not share the same religion and are perceived as a threat against its followers.

The Holy War Doctrine

Today, the modern man is facing many contradictions. One of them is, for certain, the idea of *holy war*. The verb that often characterizes the actions of war, *to kill* or *to destroy*, does not appear to have anything sacred about it.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, religion and war have been for a long time, which does not seem to be over yet, in a direct relationship. Old soldiers went to battle strengthened by the thought that God is on their side, without forgetting to bring prayers and sacrifices in order to express their gratitude, and also to maintain the good relationship with God in the future. In tribal cultures (and here the Bible gives us many examples), when a side was losing a war, members of that tribe had to worship the gods worshipped by the victorious side... But not this kind of divinity makes a war *holy*. For a war to be called *holy war*, religion must be the driving force.

In most cases, the religious war is characterized by several elements:

- to meet a religious purpose
- to be authorized by a religious leader
- to provide a moral or spiritual reward for those who chose to become combatants in this type of war.

Religious causes of war. Most researchers of this phenomenon believe that from the point of view of a Christian community, for example, there may be five causes leading to the onset of a *holy war*:

- in order to spread a particular faith (religion);
- to recover the territories which once belonged to communities that share the same religion, even if no follower exists anymore on that territory;
- to save the followers located in the territories in which that religion switched from the majority religion into religious minority being this way subject to oppression from the part of current majority;
- the desire to recover symbolic sacred lands and to cleansing them, considering that other nations are profaning them;
- to take revenge actions as blasphemy, persecution or killing of the same faith, even if it took place long ago.

Legitimate authority for waging a *holy war* does not belong to the government or state – excepting the theocratic states - but to the Church or an organization of the same type, or - as it has frequently happened - an individual who usually is the leader of such religious institutions. Direct authority is not held by the divinity anymore, as in early times - as the writings of the Old Testament are revealing – when God directly transmitted to the community instructions for preparing and conducting a war.

One of the first religious wars can be considered the one that took place about 312 A.D. when the Roman Emperor Constantine had a vision of a cross in the clouds, on which these words appeared: "*in hoc signo vices*" (under this sign you will conquer). As a result, the soldiers' armors were engraved with the sign of the cross and even if his troops were far outnumbered, they were victorious in confronting an army which, according to the chronicles, was using pagan rituals.

Later, when the Crusades started, we can talk about an entire series of religious wars conducted between 1095-1291 A.D. Their purpose was to recapture the *holy places* from the Muslim rule. That is why the Crusades were seen as a correction of an injustice directed against Christianity.

The First Crusade was initiated by Pope Urban II in 1095 in response to the capture of holy places and the bad treatment applied to the Christians in the region by the Muslim rule. The declared purpose of this campaign was to strengthen Christianity. Therefore, in the Pope's view, the armed conflict gained divine support. "*Let this then be your war-cry in combats, because this word is given to you by God. When an armed attack is made upon the enemy, let this one cry be raised by all the soldiers of God: It is the will of God! It is the will of God!*"⁴ ...

⁴ <http://www.donparrish.com/EssayPopeUrban.html>

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“Whoever, therefore, shall determine upon this holy pilgrimage and shall make his vow to God to that effect and shall offer himself to Him as a, living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead or on his breast”⁵. With these words the Pope indulged past or future sins of those who took part in the Crusade. The result of this first expedition was the conquest of Jerusalem after heavy battles, violence and slaughter against locals committed by the Christian conquerors. Moral principles were infringed, creating a precedent for future wars. Violence thus remained in the collective memory of Islam, influencing its political direction.

The just war doctrine

Often seen as a method of assessing military actions in time of war, the just war doctrine is a set of ethical rules on the justified use of force. Although identified with Catholicism, the source of the just war doctrine can be initially found, as priorly mentioned, in the Jewish religion too.

Throughout time, since the Middle Ages, there has been a trend to define the ethical limits of war. The Christian world of that period founded its view of moral justice in international relations on several principles: love for the nation and fatherland, understanding the needs of other peoples, achieving own good only by moral means. Around them the just war doctrine has been developed by many Christian theologians and philosophers. The major contribution to the concept of the just war was brought by St. Augustine⁶ (354-430 A.D.) and Saint Thomas d 'Aquino⁷ (1225-1275 A.D.).

Today, in a security environment characterized by fluidity and great complexity, where peaceful resolution of conflicts often fails, the just war doctrine

⁵ *Ibidem*

⁶ In *Summa theologiae* St. Augustine claims that the only reason that justifies war is the desire of peace, criticizing other reasons such as "the desire to do evil, cruel revenge, desire to master". The purpose of war is to do what is strictly necessary to achieve peace, "that you need to kill enemy warrior, you will not. Augustine also refers to the need for fair treatment of captured, prisoners and civilians, indicating that the conquered side should be treated with compassion, especially if there is a threat to peace.

⁷ Thomas d 'Aquino focuses his writings on war defining the doctrine of the just war and the major reasons underlying the decision to start war. For there to be war the fulfillment of three conditions is necessary: to be declared by a legitimate authority, to be initiated under the auspices of a just cause and based on "good will", that is to "do good or avoid evil".

provides a moral⁸ framework built in order to limit the consequences of actions involving the use of force:

- war must be the last resort in resolving a conflict. Before the outbreak of war one must be sure that he exhausted all peaceful attempts to resolve the conflict;
- war may be possible only by decision of a legitimate authority. Even if there is a legitimate reason, to wage a war cannot be decided by individuals or groups of persons who are not legitimate in this regard;
- war may be waged only under the imperative of good intentions. The only acceptable objective in this case is that of reducing or eliminating a created injury. Defensive war, for example, is regarded as having a just cause;
- the ultimate goal of waging a war is the restoration of peace;
- war cannot be waged in case of a small or zero chance of victory. Losses of human life during an action with no chance of success would not be morally justified;
- the means used in fighting the war must be strictly dimensioned in proportionality with the objective to be achieved. Parties engaged in the battle are prohibited to use the disproportionate force or means in order to achieve their objectives;
- The actions taken during the war and the types of weapons used during the courses of actions must be appropriate in order to avoid murdering non-combatant civilians.

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We conclude this article by mentioning that the three monotheistic religions that formed the basis of our analysis are not the only religions whose doctrine states the conditions under which a war may be initiated and conducted. There are also other religions which do not apply any austerity policy when it comes to finding doctrinal justifications for violent confrontations, therefore no significant differences are between the views on war in the main religious doctrines of the world. What is for certain, however, are differences emerged in terms of their interpretation and application.



⁸ Currently, according to experts, the most complete and clear statement of the doctrine of the just war is to be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. There are rules on the outbreak of war, legitimate defense by military force and the responsibility of decision.