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DEMARCATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Johan Temmerman (ed.)

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JOHAN TEMMERMAN (ED.)

RELIGIOUS RADICALISM

Demarcations and Challenges

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Preface

This volume represents the result of joint work. In January 2020, researchers from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels presented the results of a project that had been underway for a year to colleagues in Pretoria. During those same intensive sessions, colleagues from the University of Pretoria also shared their findings on radicalization, multiculturalism and violence. The exchange was very fruitful and the resulting harvest forms the backbone of this book.

The initial religious motives and mechanisms of radicalism have been brought to the fore by the researchers who have contributed to this anthology. A growing lack of understanding of religion can be observed in secular policy bodies in the academic world in Europe as well as elsewhere in the world. That is why in this volume we approach the subject 'from within'. The contributions, each valid in their own right, are linked together through the background and experiences of the authors who are all specialists in academic theology or in ancient languages and literature. It is our intention, as experts in religious studies, to provide policy makers with workable tools and a user-friendly method to tackle religious radicalism constructively. The underlying issue is the question of the role of the rule of law in relation to the human rights of religious minorities. This collection of articles aims at an interdisciplinary approach to religious radicalism. Religious studies blend with theology and cultural criticism within it. The underlying research question – to which we present some answers in this volume – is: what instruments can be used to better understand religious experience and sacred texts in order to combat radicalization?

In Part 1, we define and describe the boundaries of religious radicalism. The first article sets out the concept of religious radicalism within the limits of modernity. The contours of radicalism from a religious perspective reveal an anti-scientific discourse. Contemporary developments indicate that this

radical discourse threatens the public debate: radicalism can readily be seen as a reaction to a sense of life encapsulated in, and circumscribed by, technology and economics. Next, Jaco Beyers investigates radicalization in the context of interreligious communication: in the specific post-apartheid context of today's South Africa, this issue needs to be framed in the colonial past. He focusses on the relationship between mission and the diverse cultural backgrounds within Africa. These initial theoretical articles are followed by two practical applications: Ravan Hasanov describes the practice of multiculturalism and religion in post-communist Azerbaijan. The author is deeply rooted in the problem; he pleads for a strong overarching educational and socio-political strategy to combat extremism and radical sects. An advanced society based on international cooperation must be able to turn the threat around, he argues. Eugene Baron tests a gendering of this problem in the specific context of Africa. As a lecturer in practical theology and missiology, he shows that radicalization very often occurs in a situation of dehumanization. He points to a loss of identity as a result of a colonial culture, perpetuated by neo-colonial corruption. He pleads for a 'grassroots narrative', a 'story from the bottom up' as a constructive answer to religious radicalization and violence. After defining the concept and exploring possible ways to combat radicalization within specific contexts, we present a third, reflective part to this volume. Here we explore general questions about the problem of religious radicalism. Elizabeta Kitanovic, professor of Human Rights in Brussels, pleads for the introduction of clear legislation on racism and discrimination: it is the duty of the constitutional state to place human rights high on the political agenda and to provide the necessary instruments for its implementation. Religion plays an opinion-forming role in this and should motivate people to be tolerant and willing to open themselves up to those who think differently. In line with this legal approach, Johann Meylahn tests a philosophical approach: based on Walter Benjamin, 'divine violence' is contradicted by forms of violence that are legitimate in the rule of law, whether state-forming or state-preserving. He argues unequivocally in favour of supplementing a purely 'policing' approach to radicalization with a politics which responds less to symbols and signification than to the poetic power of inclusive openness. The cultural-critical section concludes with an investigation into the theological foundations of violence perpetrated by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Indonesia: Jack McDonald shows that new religious rules of faith after the Reformation underpinned a policy of exclusivism. Making foreigners doctrinally and doctrinairely different appears here as a political instrument of religious radicalism.

In Part 2, Biblical and Quranic scholars are challenged by the demarcations we have formulated. Across four articles we examine a number of ‘holy’ texts and probe for hermeneutical methods to help deal with the tendencies of radicalization and violence that are discussed in them. In a first survey, Arjan Knop analyses the ‘system’ registered in the Hebrew Bible to prevent radicalization: these texts of violence serve as a stimulus not to carry out absolute judgement, which belongs to God alone. This is ‘the system behind the system’ or a theological prevention of radicalization and violence. Next, orientalist and Quran expert Jan Van Reeth analyses the texts treating the question of violence in the Quran. With linguistic precision, he assesses the texts in question, concluding that there are absolutely no literary arguments for reducing the texts to a call to violence. In the same vein, but with a different methodology, Jannica de Prenter discusses the violent passages in the Bible: especially in the Book of Joshua which contains a large dose of war rhetoric. Dr De Prenter tests a recontextualization of these striking texts and seeks a connection with pacifistic reinterpretations from rabbinic sources and the sermons of Origen. This ground-breaking section, in which a renewed contemplation of violence in sacred texts is tested, concludes with a theological reflection on a remarkable passage from the Book of Exodus: the elders of the people who had been led out of the desert by Moses to sit at the table with God. Harry Sinnaghel reads this text as a liturgical guide against the ‘us versus them’ thinking characteristic of religious radical discourse. This passage inspires us to transcend profound differences of opinion – which often occur in interreligious dialogue – around the table in a peaceful manner with a communal meal.

Above all, this collection is an invitation to dialogue. At the same time, we also ask for understanding. We are aware that in today’s polarized cultural climate it is a delicate matter to ask for prejudices to be set aside. There is a tendency to think that the ‘other’ must trust us, and that change applies to those who think and feel differently than we do. Increasing illiteracy is both a cause and effect of religious radicalism. Those who do not feel understood and recognized, and whose identity is systematically discredited, turn against institutional powers that leave the offence unchallenged. In short, radicalism is threatening. However, for those who are completely alien to customs and backgrounds, symbols and behaviour, the unprecedented and unfamiliar are just as much of a threat. This form of radicalism, which is rapidly rising on wings of ignorance, also calls for self-criticism. Our collection aims to stimulate reflection and dialogue about this problematic.

Ongoing research into radicalization does not end with the formulation of demarcations and challenges. We have already set in place the next phase of

the academic scaffolding we are constructing. We will now go deeper into the identity-forming role of religion. Religious diversity and the post-modern cry for meaning will be brought to the fore. That vital research will form a sequel to this collection.

Demarcations of Religious Radicalization

Johan Temmerman

Abstract

Religious radicalism requires demarcation. In order to conduct an academic debate, we need to agree on a number of criteria. What is the difference between a moderate believer and a radical? Is it not the case that so-called 'holy texts' include calls for radical behaviour? In this exploratory article, which serves as an introduction to the book, we look at the hermeneutical debate on religious radicalism. We highlight five approaches: historiographic, anthropological, political, socio-psychological and theological. We also present a number of useful tables to distinguish radical religious views and conclude with a conceptualization of fundamentalism.

Introduction

Religious radicalism threatens peaceful coexistence on the planet, yet policymakers and police institutions are still in the dark about how to tackle it. The debate about radicalism shows its characteristic cultural mechanism on a regular basis: the best intentions are counter-productive. In the political world, the emphasis is on prevention and punishment. The social sector swears by aid and attributes religious radicalism to deprivation and discrimination. Neither approach takes the problems of those involved seriously.¹

First, I cover the thorniest hermeneutic 'pain points' of the study. Religious radicalism is, first and foremost, about cultural-historical developments and the change in values and worldviews that accompanies them. For example,

¹ An example is the reaction of President Emmanuel Macron to the beheading of Samuel Paty in March 2020. Paty, a teacher, showed his class cartoons about Muhammad in a lesson on free speech. A young Chechen man murdered him. The president of France reiterated that 'fear had to change camps' and that 'terrorists are no longer safe'. The indignation was justified although the method of conveying it could be improved upon. Criticism of Macron was expressed from a social point of view, with the president being accused of discrimination and polarization. An open debate about the fundamental problems of religious radicalism remains to this day.

there are countless statements by Jesus in which he adopts a downright radical stance according to contemporary standards. Was Jesus a radical? Or Bernardus of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who, in true jihad style, called for everything and everyone who did not agree with the holy Christian doctrine to be destroyed. Was he radicalized? This cultural-historical determination and appreciation takes place against the background of holy texts such as the Bible and the Koran. Some people want to ban these books but fortunately such iconoclasm lies behind us. Even so, observations that these texts all too often contain messages of hate and incitements to violence far beyond permissible limits are certainly legitimate. What should we do with these ancient foundations of civilization, therefore?

A second cluster of pressing questions regarding religious radicalism is formed around sociological issues and the prevailing 'blurring' of global cultures. Identities fade or shift to a multi-layered concept. We are all formed from different components, with different backgrounds each with their own particular context. World citizens want to belong somewhere, be recognizable to others and vice versa. In today's complex global structure a deep gulf exists between those who have and those who have not. Religion also operates in this area although not solely in a way that perpetuates the current situation. A completely different segment of pressing questions opens up here. Who is a radical? Someone who, during a good financial year, earns more than the national product of a small African country? Or is it someone who cannot find food for his children and relatives and joins a militia that advocates a reversal of the world order? Jurisdiction and human rights should not clash.

A third cluster of questions opens the ethical-theological debate. In line with the appreciation of cultural-historical developments, progress in ethical awareness is noticeable. Over the past few years we have witnessed social movements that have made it increasingly clear that the old patriarchal Western mentality, which brought about the modern world, can no longer continue unabated and without critical assessment. Changes in the areas of equality of gender, origin, sexual orientation and faith, are absolutely necessary and legitimate. But what do we do with the remnants of the past? Today it is possible to consider 'killing in the name of God' absurd and inhumane. Rightly so, however this was not so a few hundred years ago. Science plays a major role in this ethical progression of human consciousness. That is why the major theological challenges lie precisely in this field. Should we not rethink God or Allah? Is 'salvation' today the same concept as it was in Greco-Roman Antiquity?

Paradigm change

The philosophy of science made a new start with T. Kuhn (1922-1996) and M. Foucault (1926-1984) who understood that the conditions for knowledge are historically variable. Before that, reason was still a well-defined concept, one which Kant called 'pure' in its most unchanging core. Kuhn wanted history to offer science a perspective for self-examination. Do we do good by everything we accomplish? The question seemed rhetorical. Only when one learns about the thinking of ancient writers can one understand their insights and knowledge. If we consider writers from Antiquity as a failed preliminary phase in their own time, we are guilty of self-glorification. If we do, we then regard our present-day as the pinnacle of civilization. But growth or improvement is, above all, a qualitative movement, not merely a quantitative one. The acquisition of knowledge takes place in paradigms ('textbook examples'). One learns about the broad outlines and especially the results. The long process and discussions that precede the formation of innovative knowledge are either not seen at all or, at most, as an 'image' of something that has been acquired. Just like 'the conceptual framework', 'worldview' is another term for the word paradigm. This has not changed greatly since Hellenism, however the great scientific steps taken by Galileo and Newton, for example, are the result of careful puzzling through generations of knowledge, rather than an accumulation of it. Paradigm shifts are rare.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault worked out the same conceptual framework but did so differently. He spoke of *épistémè* or mutations in the depths of the structure of knowing. He looked for core structures that often hang together as clusters and on which our human scientific knowledge is based. Foucault talks about 'the things': work, life and language. Since modernity, these *épistémè* have shifted. He saw another shift in the late twentieth century, in which more attention was paid to *discours* or discourse.

With Kuhn and Foucault, we see humanity as we know it coming into being in modernity: an entity that distinguishes itself conceptually from nature and supernature, that distinguishes life and labour and language as ordering principles and that elevates itself to the status of subject with the power of the mind.² It goes without saying that this modern human being has a very hard time with religion. However, the almost complete secularization of a large part of the Western world contrasts sharply with the increasing importance

² Leezenberg, M. en de Vries, G. (2012), *Wetenschapsfilosofie voor geesteswetenschappen*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 124.

of religion in the rest of the world. This also applies to politics. Consequently, a shift in our outlook on religion is needed. Indeed, a paradigm shift is required.

In the classical thesis of the nineteenth century, one saw how an increasingly technocratic modern society had a more and more ‘disenchanted’ effect on the world view. Eventually religion will disappear, was the leading idea. Rational theses replaced beliefs. It was broadly agreed that religion belongs in the private sphere. However, what fits into the private sphere is by definition not religion; religion is precisely based on the distinction between ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’. The private sphere is profane. How people organize the private sphere distinguishes itself from the public sphere. In the latter, values apply that transcend the individual and determine the conditions of society. These values form the basis of religious meaning. Anyone who restricts religion purely to the private sphere deprives it of all meaning. Religion is cohesive in its origin, as the founders of sociology were also aware. Both Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920) understood that religion is a matter of society. A human community represents the organization of the sacred.³ A post-secular model of society was formed in Western Europe along these lines of thought, a society in which religious communities are allowed to exist with respect for traditions and in constant consultation with the rule of law.

The most recent developments show that this liberal and secular paradigm of a civilized society is a Western product. Neo-colonial mentality and white supremacy play an important role in this. It flirts with quick solutions, and dangerous living makes one both dream and makes one blind. It is from this modernism that religious radicalism emerges. We are therefore discussing a modern phenomenon here, one typical of youth culture and linked to a modern lifestyle. This worldview began when modern science took the place of Christian religion in Western culture. The American historian Richard Westfall wrote aptly: ‘In 1600, Western civilization found its focus in the Christian religion, by 1700, modern natural science had displaced religion from its central position.’⁴ It was only when science took over the philosophical helm of religion that resistance arose from a religious point of view. This mainly involved anti-scientific propaganda, in which religious tradition and the Bible were used as weapons at all costs. In that period, some 400 years ago, religious radicalism was born in the Western world.

³ Weber also warned against a new enchantment of science, expecting so-called ‘science goods’ from scientists. Weber, M. (1919), *2 Vorträge: Wissenschaft als Beruf + Politik als Beruf*, e-artnow, 2017. Consulted in the Dutch translation: Weber, M. (1919), *Politiek als beroep voorafgegaan door Wetenschap als beroep* (vertaling en nawoord Hans Driesen), Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Van Tilt, 2012.

⁴ Quoted by Wilson, D. B. (2002), “The Historiography of Science and Religion” in Ferngren G.B. (Ed), *Science & Religion. A Historical Introduction*, Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University, 22.

In concrete terms, this means that it is no use talking about the Bible and Koran in contemporary terms as ‘radical religious’ texts. Alleged statements by saints do not fall into this category either. Religious radicalism is conducting an anti-scientific discourse in an attempt to counter progressive liberal-secular modernity.

Identity boundaries

The second level at which we must define religious radicalism lies in the anthropological sphere. How does modern humanity view itself and its position in the globalized world? Which characteristics do we use to describe ourselves? Origin? Gender? Sexual preference? Political orientation? The complex cultural situation of the global world makes humanity a question mark to itself. As a result, the question of identity is becoming more and more prominent in social debate. From the perspective of the larger frameworks of knowledge theory, we can see how religious traditions are reacting tensely to the rapid development of science, searching for arguments in Scripturally revealed principles. Of the three major categories that we distinguish in the debate between faith and science – the positions of battle, proper separation, and cohabitation – radical Scriptural argumentation occurs only in the first group. The rejection, on religious grounds, of scientific progress about the view of humanity became a wide-ranging action plan with legal complications from the end of the nineteenth century, when a growing segment of believers in the USA wanted to ban the teaching of evolution.⁵ Since then, the anti-scientific argument has also had an impact on the identity debate. Someone might reject the doctrine of evolution in order to express their disagreement with the prevalent liberal secular mentality. But radical views often develop into radical behaviour. The standard by which to measure this is the danger to which one exposes other people. The belief that children should not be vaccinated can have serious consequences for the children concerned. The question, then, is why someone refuses to use modern techniques and applies archaic and very difficult rules of life instead? The biography of the individual, his or her character traits, unprocessed trauma or mental state play a role in this.

⁵ Between 1910 and 1915, the Presbyterian Church in the USA published twelve books called *The Fundamentals*, which openly fought against the ‘degradation of Christianity’ and ‘liberal relativism’. Then, in 1922, the famous Scopes trial took place, directed against the biology teacher who violated the law against the teaching of evolution. Temmerman, J. (2019), *Geloof en wetenschap. Een godsdienst-filosofische verkenning*, Antwerpen: Garant, 29-35.

Numerous academics within the humanities have been working on the question of identity over the past few decades with a broad consensus having been formed about the multi-layered nature of modern identity. People in the global secular world can often not be placed into a clearly defined category, in terms of origin or orientation and the like. This layered identity is diametrically opposed to the image of humanity in traditional religions. Traditional folk cultures, which are usually very closely linked to religion, also find it very difficult to survive in the present-day globalized phase of culture. Change creates resistance. People see their old, familiar lifestyle disappearing and it distresses them. Fear is an important motive. In Zygmunt Bauman's (1925-2017) sociological analysis there is talk of 'fluidity' (liquid modernity), in which both institutions and individual lives are subject to change and do not follow fixed patterns.⁶ The rational straitjacket in which we lock up all facets of life leads to further disintegration of the social fabric and the loss of traditions and values. This is not to say that everything is doom and gloom as a new form of power is emerging, one which is global and transgressive. Bauman's contribution to our subject is the inherent warning that a sense of fluidity does not remove the subcutaneous fear of, and overt resistance to, modernity.

Not insignificant in this debate is the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt's (1923-2010) rare voice of understanding of radicalism. In his concept of 'multiple modernities', in which he sees the world as the constant construction and reconstruction of a multitude of cultural programs, he describes the process of modernization as a constant flow and counter-flow that transcends global institutions. Consequently, what religious radicals do is the same as what secular people do: they (re)define the world.⁷ It is therefore necessary to be constantly alert to the place we assign religion to in the modern world. From a secular point of view, religious beliefs very quickly testify to radicalism, while secular relativism is misleading and false for religious frames of mind. What is more, people do not necessarily hold the same views from cradle to grave. Here, too, we must recognize a shift and plurality.

For these reasons, one speaks of 'identity boundaries' rather than 'identity' as a well-defined concept. Shifting identity boundaries are most visible when we are dealing with others who are not like us. This prompts contemporary anthropologists to remark that if all people look the same and share the same

⁶ Bauman, Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Oxford/Cambridge: Polity Press. Consulted in the Dutch translation: Bauman, Z. (2007), *Vloeibare tijden. Leven in een eeuw van onzekerheid* (vertaald door J.M.M. de Valk), Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Klement, 9.

⁷ Eisenstadt, S. (1999), *Fundamentalism, Sectarism and Revolutions: the Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*, London/New York: Cambridge University Press.

opinion, then there would be no question of identity.⁸ Boundaries do not have to be purely physical; food laws and clothing are also identity boundaries. From a religious perspective, an important identity boundary is the symbolic belief system. This system is usually accompanied by external signs. Whoever wears the signs and adheres to the system separates themselves from others. These boundaries, through which a smaller group sets itself apart from a larger whole, reflect the inner or the 'true' self. The small group thereby considers itself better than the larger whole; they are the lifeline of the 'true' people. There is no outside world to which these symbols point. It can be to purity, to more insight and more thorough knowledge, or to a firmer conviction and a more honest life practice. That is why these religious beliefs can lead to radicalism, because the substantive rules and standards are increasingly strict or are applied more strictly. It can lead to the glorification of 'radicalism', as a kind of badge of honour.

In other words, in the socio-cultural field, and particularly in the identity debate, we should always keep an eye on the plurality of global modernity. This is particularly important in terms of the use of language and appreciation, while the content of religious discourse will have to take account of changeability.

Systemic gaps

On the legal-political level, radicalization is given full range by a number of political mechanisms present in both religious and secular systems. In the Western liberal-democratic system, the rule of law defines violence and anger. By means of democratically approved legislation, only the state is allowed to use violence. The rule of law can be maintained as long as the majority of the population has equal access to the benefits and riches offered by the system. However, the state must constantly account for inequality. When systemic deprivation and discrimination come into play, the accountability of the rule of law based on a democratic majority and an independent judiciary becomes less and less credible. Settlements can be obtained through money and more can be achieved through government with political support. The critical boundary is crossed when the political system tolerates exploitation and discrimination or is itself guilty of these. It is then that resistance becomes 'doing the right thing'. When states operating under the rule of law attack other countries and peoples on the basis of economic interests, they also legitimize violence. It is here that

⁸ Bowie, F. (2000), *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 64.

the key to a better understanding of the waves of religious radicalism emerging in the western world and beyond in the twenty-first century can be found.

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (°1947) observed a shift in political values and actions as the twenty-first century approached. The use of violence, both state and religious, increased noticeably. This forms a line of demarcation for radicalism at the political level. Nussbaum notes that the three most successful upheavals in the twentieth century were non-violent. She talks about Indian decolonization under the leadership of Gandhi, the American civil rights movement with Martin Luther King as its mouthpiece, and Nelson Mandela's South African anti-apartheid struggle. The remarkable thing about Nussbaum's argument is that she rightly notes that Gandhi and M. L. King used religion to instigate non-violence but fell short of the philosophical questions. As a result, they met with fierce resistance from within their own ranks, which led to more violence. It was Mandela who, despite the approval of the limited use of violence, did manage to bring about an all-encompassing zeal for the establishment of a diverse South Africa. She speaks in this context of the 'strange generosity' that characterized Mandela's path to freedom.⁹ Nussbaum analyses Mandela's method and considers his characteristic generosity as resulting from his 'conversations with myself', which gave him a greater degree of understanding of others. In the case of Martha Nussbaum, and in order to demarcate religious radicalism, it is important not to exclude a legitimate struggle for freedom or resistance to the system a priori, and not to dismiss immediately as 'radical' any criticism of government politics or generally accepted values. There is indeed both a need and room for revolutionary justice, according to Nussbaum. Two elements separate religious radicalism from legitimate struggle:

1. Radicals focus on personal gain, prestige, and effect in their actions instead of on inner development.
2. Radicalism demotivates the development of the quality to understand how others think.

This means working to understand why people are angry and frustrated within the framework of prevailing political and legal norms, while at the same time learning to understand why others discriminate and repress. Religious

⁹ Nussbaum, M. C. (2016), *Anger and Forgiveness. Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 226.

radicalism arises from the illegitimate, skewed relationship between power and powerlessness in society.

Religious systems, which were formed within cultural developments, also show violent systemic errors. A not unimportant theme in this respect is one based on the gap that Durkheim created between profane and sacred. Religion has to do with the divine, the sacred. The systemic error occurs when the sacred is profaned. As long as everyone has respect for what the group considers to be divine, there is no problem. As soon as a sacred object is knocked down and people take offence at such 'godlessness,' radicalization and violence loom. It is therefore not unwise to take note of the anthropological findings concerning religion and its perception. The French anthropologist Pascal Boyer investigated the evolutionary roots of religion and quite convincingly made firewood from a number of generally accepted concepts of religion and radicalism, for example, 'theological correctness'. Divergent theological views are common in all religions throughout history; 'heresy' is rampant even when established institutions heavy-handedly impose a certain doctrine through political power. Boyer speaks in this context of the 'tragedy of the theologian' and points to the fact that people are thinking beings, not absorbing facts literally like a database, and will therefore always distort texts and opinions. In fact, the only way to prevent this from happening is to turn faith into a barren and lifeless doctrine, rather than one which stimulates the imagination and encourages changes or improvements.¹⁰ It is therefore high time for theologians to make a number of clarifications in terms of the conceptualization of faith. I mention three that I have distilled from anthropological studies on religion:

1. There is no such thing as a specific domain (the sacred) which can only be considered as part of the sphere of religion.
2. There are no different religions or different religious experiences.
3. Religion has first and foremost a social purpose.

In the first remark it must be made clear that sacred objects do exist and that they differ according to different traditions. Theologians from all traditions would do well to let go of their reticence, explain the mythological meaning of these objects and set them against the concrete reality of that same object. Baptism is a symbolic act, one which provides an image of what 'should be' and not of 'what is'. This requires courage, but just as with political systemic errors,

¹⁰ Boyer, P. (2001), *Religion Explained. The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thoughts*, New York: Basis Books, 283-285.

a critical self-conversation within one's own tradition helps to understand other religions and beliefs. The third point can be interpreted more sociologically than anthropologically. Here the distinction between facts and norms, between mythological references and concrete reality, plays a role. 'Heaven' is not just above us as in fact an expanding universe is unfolding above us which is entirely energetically equilibrated.

The errors within political and religious systems should not tempt us to fight religious radicalism with a similar fanaticism. Some secular philosophers consider radicalism as having to do with 'too much' faith. They accuse radicals of 'superstition', with which they resort to violence as blinded 'warriors of God'. Others look at social structures and notice that religion has an intrinsically good core, but that politics abuses and corrupts that system of meaning. The theological boundary that we must always keep clear is the distinction between norms and facts, as indicated above.

Religion vetted

It is a curious experience to notice that religions all hold unity and peace in high esteem but that, more than non-religious associations, they are subject to schisms and conflicts. All human error is found in religion. Indeed, anthropologists of religion have known this for a long time. Although schisms and ecclesiastical conflicts are usually described on the basis of theological differences of opinion, in his study *The Social Sources of Denomination* (1929) the American historical theologian H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), convincingly demonstrated that the many (Christian) denominations are the product of class differences. With the work of Durkheim and Weber in the background, and on the basis of a refined historical analysis, Niebuhr showed that the less fortunate masses are often the driving force behind religious movements that oppose more established institutions. A religious movement that secedes will be successful if it is integrated by the middle classes, thus creating reasons for new secessions. Consequently, there is a dialectical process, in which established churches continually give birth to new movements that are more and more radical until they end up becoming part of the broad middle stream, after which new sects take their place and so on. Niebuhr's work on the social sources of denominations has remained a standard work in the sociology of religion, indeed Stark and Bainbridge based their high-profile *Rational Choice Theory* on it. They found that radicalization which leads to division is the result of the search for religious compensation. Stark and Bainbridge noted that if people's desires are not met quickly and easily, they are satisfied with

compensation. This mechanism is particularly important for religious desires. These compensations are then seen as rewards or graces. In the context of radicalization, Stark and Bainbridge nuance Niebuhr's original theory by pointing out that it is not so much social class as the general concept of power that plays a decisive role.¹¹ They observed that people who start a new radical movement from within the classical church or mosque often have no position or authority in the outside world, while people with a certain social standing who join a more radical movement, often opt for a modest role in it. This shows that the pursuit of power is an important factor in radicalization, more than theological disputes or class conflict.

A certain degree of tension, whether large or small, often exists between a religious group and the outside world. A person who has joined an institutional church with a low degree of tension, and who is dissatisfied with the state of the world and its direction of travel, will soon leave again. Those who are socially dissatisfied want this dissatisfaction to be confirmed within the framework provided by their religious experience. Radical groups create high levels of tension with the outside world thereby offering dissatisfied people attractive compensation.

These observations are supported by neurology. Our brains are a continuously working machinery of neurons and synapses and the engine room of our brain has many chambers, with each part being responsible for a specific function. Neurologists speak of inference systems that arrange data in templates. Religion works as a meaning template. This is the same for all people because this is how the brain works.¹² We are all looking for meaning and connection but we all do this in our own way and according to character and social needs. In religious radical groups, a high degree of tension is the result of dissatisfaction with social living conditions. In order to confirm and nourish this dissatisfaction, radicalized preachers - who, as has been said, are more interested in power than in theology - employ the image of an ideal mythological past. In this paradisiacal past, believers experienced every good value in a spontaneous way. Radicalization from a religious point of view is therefore a reaction against a global culture in which greed pays, ungodliness is a good thing, and sins are not punished. Radical believers raise the price of sin very high through public confession of guilt and even penance.

Religious radicalism therefore presents an additional hermeneutical problem. Depending on the position of the person concerned, he or she will consider

¹¹ Stark, R. and Bainbridge W. S. (1987), *A Theory of Religion*, New Brunswick/New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 121-123.

¹² Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 40-45.

the professed faith as correct and good. A moderate churchgoer, for example, who attends a traditional Sunday worship service, does not experience their faith and the community as lukewarm or hypocritical because fellow believers do not give everything away to the poor and follow Jesus. In the same way, a radicalized Evangelical Christian, who rejects others because of their sexual orientation, does not experience the inhumanity of his faith, rather he thinks he is doing God a service with his firmness of principle (biblical beliefs). Homophobia is commonplace in radical circles. The radical religious believe that God is just as dissatisfied with the state of affairs in society as they themselves are. Consequently, when delineating radical religion, we must be attentive to the stratification of, and shifts within, the modern concept of identity, and by paying particular attention to the hermeneutic problem that resolutely reverses valuation. That is why I suggest three perspectives which the individual can go through in terms of religious experience and vision according to positioning. Radicalization then describes the arc of tension which evolves from ‘white/black’ over ‘pink’ to ‘red’.

WHITE/BLACK

DISCIPLINE	RELIGION	RADICAL RELIGION
general	binding	divorcing
psychological	calming	restlessness
political	unifying	polarizing
philosophical	inclusiveness	exclusiveness
theological	critical	dogmatic
hermeneutical	contextual	literal
sociological	group dynamics	individualistic
general	cohesion	sectarian

PINK

DISCIPLINE	RELIGION	RADICAL RELIGION
general	connects believers	fighting unbelievers
psychological	brings calmness within	brings restlessness within
political	just war	only peace for believers
philosophical	limited inclusiveness	unlimited exclusiveness
theological	uncertainty	certainty
hermeneutical	changeable	constant
sociological	socially inclusive	diminishing the ‘self’
general	fluid	new beginnings

RED

DISCIPLINE	RELIGION	RADICAL RELIGION
general	distrust	trust
psychological	consuming energy	giving energy
political	in conflict with tradition	in unity with tradition
philosophical	inconsequential	consequential
theological	sinful	pure
hermeneutical	tolerant	unyielding
sociological	unethical	ethical
general	unbelieving	believing

From this overview we can conclude that people’s religious experience radicalizes when they want to escape ‘fifty shades of pink’ and then turn everything red. Classical churches, mosques and synagogues may already connect believers, but their reaction against non-believers is considered too weak. This form of faith is the ‘white/black’ paradigm that most theologians and religious scientists in the West use: religion is good, radical religion is bad. This white/black paradigm spontaneously shifts to pink hues when philosophers and human scientists evaluate religion. At best, believers are ‘naïve’, at worst reprehensible. Modern believers are critical of classical phenomena such as holy war or archaic attire and rituals. They are very tolerant of the precepts. As a result, they mix shades of pink with the white/black religious experience. In order to escape from this, radicals resolutely turn against these ‘lukewarm’ (pink) believers because they believe that tolerance is the devil. The psychological pink hue often places modern believers in a dispersed position. They preach and practice a peaceful way of life, but often find themselves in conflict with modernist customs and morals. A radical experience of religion creates a beneficent peace of mind through clear disapproval and even worldly avoidance. In the same way, a radicalized attitude escapes the slavery of evil. All too often one must endure injustice or is treated unfairly by the judiciary. A radical belief legitimizes the fight against the unjust. In the theological field, radicalism dispels the many shades of pink or lukewarm attitudes by resolutely eliminating all doubt. Creation happened in six days, period. This is a certainty, according to radicals. A radical religious experience knows no tension between scientific findings and religious beliefs, because the former are resolutely rejected as demonic and evil. The ultimate goal of a radicalized believer is to save the world from this evil and to establish a new beginning for humanity, united under the same religious banner. In the future it will

therefore be important for scientific theology to integrate the evolutionary development of religion, which has shifted from fire red to pink to white/black. This means ascribing greater religious value to the adaptation of sacred texts and precepts than occurred in their archaic, preliminary stages.¹³

Legal demarcations

The legal part of this issue has two dimensions. First of all, there is the field of law and order. In addition, there is the problem of the implementation of human rights within the religious worldview. As indicated in the preface to this book, prevention and punishment dominate the legal framework used to combat radicalism in a modern secular context. Normative discourse and the scientific literature focus mainly on the question of how an individual gradually evolves into a radical extremist. How does a normal young person become a murderous terrorist? Contemporary authors such as Arun Kundnani point out that researchers often use the process of a young person assuming extreme thought as *pars pro toto* to considering a religious community as ‘suspicious’. With this approach in the background, they designed the so-called ‘pyramid’ or ‘step model’, which indicates the steps an individual takes to evolve from being ‘normal’ to being ‘radical’. These steps show a gradual development on three different and interchangeable levels: the micro level of individual feelings, the meso level of social connections, and the macro level of political-cultural circumstances.¹⁴

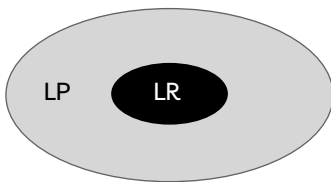
These three levels form an essential context in which fundamental shifts or crises become catalysts for radicalization. A young man who, for example, is at loggerheads with himself about existential choices and who, on top of that, is dealing with problematic friendships, and furthermore does not feel appreciated in society, is susceptible to making urgent and decisive behavioural changes on the basis of ‘ultimate’ goals. Given that most scientific literature focuses on a single level – usually removing social and structural deprivation (the third level) – the analysis of radicalization remains fragmentary, making prevention and jurisdiction partial. Hence, advancing insight into the context of becoming radical must increasingly focus on the coherence of the

¹³ With thanks to Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson, Professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy at the Theological Faculty in Stockholm for initiating this and the next analysis, through her contribution made during a conference in Lisbon in June 2019.

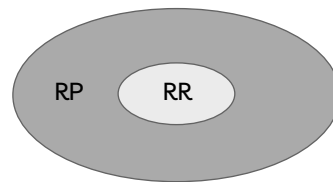
¹⁴ Ravn, S., Coolsaet, R., and Sauer, T. (2019), ‘Rethinking radicalisation: Addressing the lack of a contextual perspective in the dominant narratives on radicalisation’ in Clycq, N., Timmerman, C., Vanheule, D., Van Caudenberg, R. and Ravn, S. (Eds.), *Radicalisation. A Marginal Phenomenon or a Mirror to Society?*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 21-46.

three levels, and on looking for incentives or triggers of radical thinking and acting. We speak of ‘trigger factor models’.¹⁵ The model makes it possible to identify nuances and to indicate how factors from the three levels influence each other. It is possible, for example, that problems at school might trigger a group dynamic of solidarity among friends, after which a sense of not having anyone within the group with the achievements of others in society triggers the group to carry out petty crime which, due to structural exclusion at macro level, can result in violent ‘resistance’ or terror.

We find that these scientific nuances in radicalization research have little or no influence on the legal approach, one that is often stuck in the dominant narrative. This dominant narrative has been strongly incited since the destructive terrorism of the early twenty-first century, which in turn was a reaction to geopolitical developments since the end of the Cold War. In their overview and analysis of the dominant image of Islamic radicalism, Ravn, Coolsaet and Sauer point to the so-called ‘elite-driven popular construction of perceived causation’,¹⁶ with which political and legal frames of thought worldwide immediately seize on a discourse about the danger of Islamic terrorism to explain the causes of attacks. As a result, the amount of time and resources used to monitor Muslim communities is disproportionate to the threat they pose. In 2020 the discussions about the return of two Belgian women and their children who had resided in the ISIS caliphate illustrates this elite-driven popular construction. Because prejudices are very difficult to eliminate from popular discourse, it is therefore necessary to clearly map out the legal boundaries. Thanks to my colleague Susanne Yngvesson, the self-explanatory representations below alleviate the problems of legislation and radicalism.



LP: legally permitted
LR: legally required

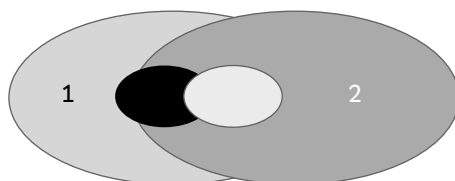


RP: religiously permitted
RR: religiously required

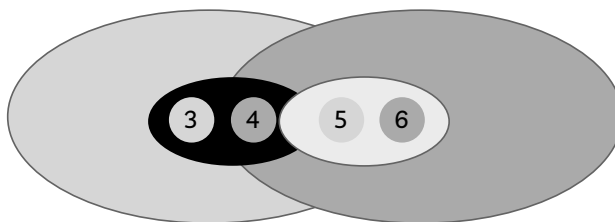
¹⁵ Feddes, A., Nickolson, L. & Doosje, B. (2015), *Triggerfactoren in het Radicaliseringsproces*, Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam (Expertise-unit Sociale Stabiliteit).

¹⁶ Ravn, Coolsaet & Sauer, ‘Rethinking radicalisation’, 24.

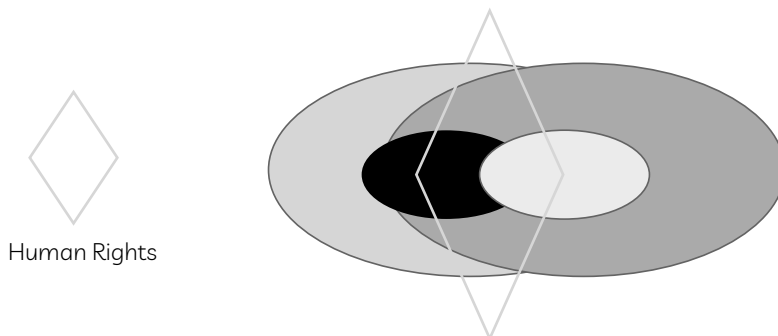
The legal boundaries of religious radicalism start from two overlapping spheres: legislation and religion. Both spheres can be subdivided into what is permitted and what is obligatory. It is clear that these spheres do not fit together seamlessly. Secular legislation, for instance, allows many things that religious precepts forbid and vice versa. Two examples of what is allowed by law but forbidden by religion are abortion and euthanasia (1). Conversely, it is a legal requirement to comply with traffic rules even though religious precepts say nothing about them (2).



In the same way, we can indicate all overlapping areas. For example, it is legally and religiously permitted to smoke in private areas (where (1) and (2) coincide), just as it is legally and religiously forbidden to beat another person to death (where LR and RR overlap). Vaccinations are required by law but religiously prohibited (3), while taxes are required by law and religiously permitted (4). Jewish circumcision is legally permitted and religiously required (5), while unanaesthetised slaughter is legally prohibited and religiously required (6).



In order to complete the diagram of legal demarcations of radicalism, we are obliged to include human rights.



With these legal demarcations in the background, it should be possible to order the diversity of religious expressions objectively and to distinguish radicalism from legitimate perceptions of meaning. It should be possible not to confuse populism and hate speech with identity markers. For example, the free choice of religion and attire is not an expression of radicalization, but is a human right. Having considered and outlined these demarcations we will revisit the problem of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism

In the first paragraphs of this article, religious radicalism was referred to as a consequence of, and reaction to, secular-liberal modernism. The radicalism that we see in religious circles today is directed against a worldview in which a human being is the measure of all things, ethical principles are changeable and subjective, and where a largely white elite has reaped the benefits of globalization and minority groups are threatened with the prospect of poverty and exclusion. At the same time, however, we have found that the legal approach of the rule of law, which initially focused on prevention and punishment, has mainly resulted in social deprivation and the maintenance of law and order. A nuanced approach is urgently needed. This includes an approach to the increasing alienation of new generations of young people in the suburbs of Western cities. They are confronted with a worldview and way of life that is far removed from them. The classical experience of traditional religions is one bathed in an atmosphere of authenticity and purity, facets that have all but disappeared in our post-modern culture. In order to complete our overview of the demarcations of religious radicalism, we are also forced to take a look at the contextual and content-related elements that stimulate an extreme experience of religion. To indicate the contextual demarcation of religious radicalism within religious thought, we speak of 'fundamentalism'.

The second half of the 1970s marked a reversal in research into modernity and religion. Until then it was generally assumed that an advancing secularization heralded the end of religion in the West. However, in the late 1970s a turn of events took place. A conservative pope took the helm of the Roman Catholic Church and propagated a 'new evangelization' of Europe. In the same period in Iran the Western Shah was expelled and replaced by a religious regime. Furthermore, increasing waves of migration strengthened Arab people's sense of identity based on religion. Evangelical Protestantism also grew in the US, in line with the various charismatic movements in Latin America. In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, and Eastern Europe and Russia also saw

a strong increase in the importance of the Orthodox Church. September 11, 2001 marked a turning point in terms of a realisation that religion was back at the forefront of global societies. At the same time a new form of belonging to a religious ideology was emerging, for we are witnessing, on a large scale and across different continents, the increase of generally conservative forms of faith and religion. What we call 'fundamentalism' today is therefore a fairly recent religious phenomenon that appeared after the Second World War together with increasing globalization.¹⁷ The Israeli scholar Lawrence Kaplan has provided an apt definition:

Fundamentalism can be described as a world view that highlights specific essential 'truths' of traditional faiths and applies them with earnestness and fervour to twentieth-century realities.¹⁸

We therefore speak of fundamentalism as a religious reaction pattern which one contrasts with modern globalized reality. Most sociologists interpret a number of causes, which we can divide into three groups:

1. Structural factors: the contextual long-term conditions and changes in which movements of recovery from the past arise.
2. Contingent factors: predictable factors that act as catalysts, such as invasion by a foreign power.
3. Human factors: choices made about politics and leadership.¹⁹

This shows that the origin and development of a certain movement is strongly contextual and can therefore be approached in different ways. This observation also means, however, that the global growth of fundamentalist movements in almost all world cultures since the late 1970s points to a specific evolution in modern times. On the one hand, there is a continuous economic increase in scale due to globalisation, while on the other hand a similar loss of confidence can be observed. In this late-modern climate, not only has the gap between rich and poor widened, but dependence on fossil fuels has increased, causing a proliferation of uncertainties as a result of a pressing ecological problem. Religion has taken on a different role in this atmosphere. It has become an

¹⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century resistance to Darwinism, the historical-critical method, and liberal theology arose in American Christian circles. See footnote 4 above.

¹⁸ Kaplan, L. (ed.) (1992), *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*, Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press.

¹⁹ Davie, G. (2007), *The Sociology of Religion*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, 183-187.

outlet for unease. As indicated above, religious unease was already noticeable in America in the early twentieth century, but simultaneously the changes accelerated by globalization have caused this sense of unease to spread very rapidly throughout the world. What is striking here is the contradictory pressures from the economic and cultural spheres.

To indicate this amalgam of psychological, cultural and religious factors, the aforementioned Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt speaks of the 'crystallization of modernity'.²⁰ The crystallization within modern fundamentalism to which Eisenstadt refers are the values of the Enlightenment and the great revolutions that heralded modern times. However paradoxical this may sound, modern fundamentalists are concerned with freedom of belief and opinion, while at the same time striving for an anti-modern utopia and wanting to achieve this through a rigid social system. In this sense Eisenstadt sees fundamentalism as being representative of the tensions inherent in modernity, between a Jacobin, totalising tendency on the one hand, and a modern constitutive pluralism on the other. Eisenstadt also makes the remarkable observation that fundamentalism is virtually absent in some modern societies giving Japan and Western Europe as examples. It is true that we are familiar with Islamic fundamentalism, but the original Christian form is virtually absent here. For the sociologist of religion, the explanation of this absence must be as significant as that of its presence. That is why the last word on this issue has not yet been spoken. In the context of Eisenstadt's work this points to the plurality of modernity. In the continuing debate on radicalism we must therefore take into account that an underlying tendency towards change in the sense of more justice, equality and leadership stimulates a return to the pure or authentic experience of religion. In this brief overview we hope to have indicated the demarcations of religious radicalism.

²⁰ Eisenstadt (1999), *Fundamentalism, Sectarism and Revolutions: the Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*, 39.

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Radicalization: A Perspective from Mission and Inter-Culturalism

Jaco Beyers

Abstract

In the discussion on inter-religious communication, the notion of radicalization is considered a threat. Religiously motivated violence may be the result of intolerant communities. Discussing the relation between mission and inter-culturalism, three main concepts need expounding: what do mission, culture, and religion signify. These three concepts will be discussed within the framework of colonization, theology and post-modernism. Three immanent features of the relation between mission and inter-culturalism are identified and discussed, namely inculturation, syncretism and secularization. As a possible solution to the challenges faced by the relation between mission and inter-culturalism, the concept of 'konvivenz' is suggested as means to peaceful co-existence and establishing 'shalom' in the world.

Introduction

Embedded in any conversation about inter-cultural conversation, the notion of radicalization becomes a concern. How can religions interact in a way that is mutually accepted as being responsible? How can the Christian message be communicated with integrity while remaining culturally sensitive? This reflection is concerned with the question of what do we need to know about mission and inter-culturalism?

Three concepts are important: mission, culture, and religion. These concepts will be framed within the confines of colonization, theology and post-modernism. These three concepts can be arranged as concentric circles; all are relevant, but some are more central in the discussion. I would like to add three more concepts, which may eventually prove useful in addressing the core of the problem: inculturation, syncretism and secularization.

We start on the periphery of the concentric circles and work our way inwards toward the centre.

What is mission?

Definitions of mission abound. The definition by James Scherer¹ emphasizes the spreading and inviting dimensions of Christian witnessing. Mission is the obedient response of the church to the command of God to spread the message of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:29; Luke 24:20). The emphasis is on God who sends His followers into the world to spread the message through whatever means. The content of the message is the love of God as shown through Jesus Christ. The danger is that a maximal definition of mission can be vague and can result one that is obscure and meaningless. The mission historian, Stephen Neill² warns that if everything is considered mission then nothing is mission. This warning will guide our understanding of what constitutes mission.

This definition of mission is framed by the understanding of *missio Dei*. Georg Vicedom popularized the concept of *missio Dei*, emphasizing the true acting subject of mission as the tri-une God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who sends the church just as God the Father sent his Son and the Holy Spirit. The aim of mission as formulated by the Protestant theologian Gijsbertus Voetius is important: the conversion of 'heathens' and the establishment of the church are important actions in mission, but these only contribute to the main goal of mission, namely the glorification of God.³

The irony is that within this preliminary analysis of the meaning of mission, the seeds of radicalization and potential violence are already lurking. The definition is placed within a discourse that reflects the image of a military leader commanding his followers to conquer the world. Wherever the messengers come they must establish outposts, marking his reign among all those submitting to the rule of God. Christian mission is characterized by the jargon typical of colonialism.⁴ In this regard Stefan Paas refers to the concept of Christendom where mission is understood as the geographical expansion of the world ruled by Christian leaders.⁵ Mission during the eighteenth and early

¹ Scherer, J.A. (1987), *Gospel, Church and the Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 37.

² Neill, S. (1959), *Creative Tension*, London: Edinburgh House Press, 81.

³ Voetius, *De plantationes ecclesiarum in Selectae Disputationes Theologicae*, 1648–1669.

⁴ For a comparison see Bosch, D.J., (1991), *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in the Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis Books, 262.

⁵ Paas, S. (2011), 'Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences,' in *Mission Studies* 28, 12.

nineteenth century has been equated to spreading the Western civilization.⁶ The assumption during this period was that the world could be divided into two ways of believing, a Christian way–, which was considered to be superior and dominant – and a pagan or inferior way. Although it is suggested by Paas⁷ that the concept of Christendom had ended during the eighteenth century, there is evidence of it still existing today. Consider the attitude of missionaries who believe they are doing people a favour by introducing them to a (European) culture by converting them to Christianity. Christian values and principles in African countries still seem to permeate official government policies on how people in society should be treated.

David Hesselgrave introduced a different perspective on mission when he placed mission within ‘the Kingdom of God and the establishment of shalom in the world’.⁸ The emphasis on *shalom* is important for our discussion of radicalization. We should understand *shalom* as being embedded in the understanding of the kingdom of God. *Shalom* is the outcome of the mission of God, as the aim of mission is to ‘establish shalom’.⁹ God reigns through ‘peace, integrity, community, harmony and justice’.¹⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff states, ‘We are workers in God’s cause, his peace-workers.’¹¹

The use of *shalom* in the Old and the New Testament is comprehensive as it refers to wholeness, abundant life, completeness, peace, well-being, and salvation. *Shalom* defines the way in which the world ought to exist – a state of peace where no one lacks anything. Communities are characterized by peaceful, just, and harmonious relationships within and among other communities, with God and with creation. *Shalom* implies and envisions a new community where barriers of language, economy, race, gender, and nationality are removed. All exist for the benefit of the Other.

The church is constantly called upon to speak out against injustice and marginalization.¹² This is motivated by the call for all to be equal as humans. Many people around the world face political instability, rising religious

⁶ Paas, ‘Post-Christian’, 12.

⁷ Paas, ‘Post-Christian’, 12.

⁸ Hesselgrave, D.J. (2016), ‘Saving the future of evangelical missions’, in R.C. Scheuermann and E.L. Smither, *Controversies in mission, Kindle edition*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, loc 5090.

⁹ Gelsviken, T. (2003), ‘Missio dei: The understanding and misunderstanding of a theological concept in European churches and missiology’, in *International Review of Mission*, XCI:367, 489.

¹⁰ McIntosh, J.A. (2000), ‘Missio dei’, in Moreau, A.S. (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 632.

¹¹ Wolterstorff, N. (1983), *Until justice and peace embrace*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 72.

¹² Compare with Tveit, O.F. (2018), ‘Perspectives on Migration: Displacement and Marginalisation, Inclusion and justice, an Ecumenical vision’, World Council of Churches (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/perspectives-on-migration-displacement-and-marginalization-inclusion-and-justice-an-ecumenical-vision). Accessed 27/03/2020.

fundamentalism, religious persecution, and socio-economic difficulties. These phenomena are influenced by the global imbalance of wealth and power. To restore harmony and peace, the church wants to continue with mission work while still being culturally sensitive.

So, what is the problem? When is mission truly mission and when is mission conveying a culture or, formulated differently, when does mission work become religious colonialization? More directly: what is meant by the radicalization of mission? During the period of colonialization in the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, mission work consisted of transferring one culture onto another. Christianization was not much different to the westernization of the known world. This is a subtle form of violence. Colonialization is the history of the subjugation of people through the introduction of a new faith.

At times, this violent spread of Christianity did take on forms of physical violence. Compare how Bosch discusses the theological background to the forceful conversion of non-Christians.¹³ Violent conversion was based on an understanding of Luke 14:23 that all should be compelled to believe. ‘Compel’ was interpreted rather more literally than subtle encouragement or a friendly suggestion of a new belief.

There are opposing opinions about whether religion is responsible for violence per se. Karen Armstrong suggests that religions are ‘inherently violent’ especially monotheistic religions.¹⁴ The belief in one God leaves no space for divergent ideas and opposing beliefs. Power lies in God. The Bible becomes an instrument legitimizing power and violence to compel others to believe in God. One ought to agree with and submit to the one and only God.

The Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis, however, believes that religion is not the cause of violence.¹⁵ Violence, according to him, is inherent to human nature. Humans are capable of acts of violence. It cannot be denied that religion can be the fuse leading to violence, but religion does not necessarily cause violence.

An assessment of the way in which other religions are theologically perceived can assist us in trying to make sense of the perceived violent nature of mission.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 219.

¹⁴ Armstrong, K. (2014), *Fields of blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, New York/Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 7.

¹⁵ Achterhuis, H. (2010), *Met alle geweld*, Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 52.

Theology of religions

The continuation of the violent nature of mission is exacerbated by the way in which Christians perceive the existence of other religions (referred to as a theology of religions – *theologia religionum*).

When engaging with other religions, or people with no religion, one has a particular understanding (implicitly or explicitly) of how non-Christian religions are viewed and relate to Christianity. Traditionally there are three models of understanding the existence of other religions.¹⁶ I will not enter into the detail of each model here, rather, I want to emphasize the inadequacy of these models and indicate how the models can contribute to radicalization:

- Exclusivism refers to the understanding that all religions are in fact evil (idolatrous) and can bring no salvation. Salvation is possible only through God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Other religions cannot present any knowledge of God. Salvation is exclusively to be found in Christianity. The result is that believers of other religions are viewed pejoratively as 'heathens' or 'gentiles' in need of deliverance which only Christianity can bring about.
- Inclusivism is the understanding that God wants to save all people. God reveals Himself in different ways to people from different cultures. Other religions can therefore contribute accumulatively to the knowledge of God. Salvation is, however, to be found in Christianity alone. All religions need to be fulfilled in Christianity. The result is a masked form of Exclusivism paraded as one where all religions are included in God's salvific plan, although in fact salvation lies exclusively in Christianity.
- Pluralism is the understanding that knowledge of the divine, as well as salvation, exists in other religions. The divine does not work only in one religion. The one divine power is worshipped in different cultural expressions and known by many different names. The result is respect for the autonomy of religions and agreement that knowledge of the divine is accumulated through joined contributions by all religions.

Jenny Dagers has presented a different model from the post-colonial theology of religions, one that emphasizes giving a voice to religions which were marginalized during colonialism.¹⁷ George Lindbeck presented an alternative

¹⁶ See Knitter, P.F. (2005), *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, New York: Orbis Books and D'Costa, G. (1986), *Theology and Religious Pluralism*. Oxford/New York: Basil Blackwell.

¹⁷ Dagers, J. (2013), *Postcolonial theology of religions: Particularity and pluralism in world Christianity*, London Routledge.

to these models when he discussed inter-religious relations from the perspective of Post-foundational Theology.¹⁸

Lindbeck considers religions from a cultural-linguistic perspective as different idiomatic expressions of reality.¹⁹ This leads to the question of truth. Lindbeck distinguishes between different types of truth, whether propositional (that which one confesses to be true) or ontological (how one expresses what one believes).²⁰ Propositional truths can only be divided into true or false propositions, no degrees of variation exist. Religions can, however, contain a mixture of true and false statements.²¹ Religions may be compared in the way in which they are effectively able to represent and communicate the inner experience of the divine. All religions can function truly in a symbolic sense, but religions differ in the way in which they effectively express their belief.²² For example, a religion may express their particular belief in God, but their belief about God may differ from that of other religions that also believe in God.²³ The belief in God is then true for all, but the beliefs about God can be true for some and false for others.

Lindbeck uses the image of a map to illustrate the way in which religions differ in terms of beliefs.²⁴ Whether the map is a true representation of reality is not the question, rather how the map is followed in order to provide guidance is important. Some maps may be lacking in terms of accuracy and completeness, some may be clear at the beginning of the journey and become vague.²⁵ The point is how the map is used. A good map in the hands of ignorant people is useless. A vague map in the hands of devoted seekers may be useful.

Religions can therefore learn from one another and relate to one another on many different levels. Dialogue between religions does not need to have the conversion of the other as end goal. There are many possible reasons for dialogue.²⁶ Dialogue might have the goal of encouraging other religions to be the best they can be and to make a contribution to society in the best way they can.²⁷ Dialogue can include encouraging religions to convey better expressions of their particular experience.²⁸

¹⁸ Lindbeck, G.A. (1984), *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

¹⁹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 47.

²⁰ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 47.

²¹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 47.

²² Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 47.

²³ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 51.

²⁴ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 52.

²⁵ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 52.

²⁶ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 54.

²⁷ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 54.

²⁸ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 61.

Based on Lindbeck's considerations, Paul Knitter formulated a model which he refers to as the Acceptance Model.²⁹ In short, the Acceptance Model refers to recognizing the absolute autonomy of religions, emphasizing that religions have nothing in common and have nothing to talk about except matters of mutual concern, which mostly results in conversation about ethics and social concerns.³⁰ Interaction between cultures and religions is reduced to nothing more than the sort of polite conversations good neighbours would have.³¹

Based on this analysis of theology of religions it appears that we end up with two extremes on a continuum interpreting inter-religious relations. At one end is exclusivism, where the dominance of Christianity is emphasized, and at the other is the Acceptance Model, based on post-foundationalism, propounding multiple truths, autonomy, and peaceful co-existence of all religions.

This continuum is populated with varied levels of interaction between religions, each variation resulting in a degree of violence or radicalization. Now that we have discussed mission and theology of religions, one last important element remains to be considered, that of culture.

Theology of culture

The debate on what constitutes culture is still a lively one because of the 'multiplicity of its referents' as well as the 'studied vagueness' of the concept.³² There is, however, no shortage of definitions for culture: Max Weber theorized that humans are animals suspended in webs of significance spun by themselves; E.B. Tylor described culture vaguely as a 'most complex whole'; Kluckhohn elaborated in a twenty-seven page-long definition on what culture is; Good-enough included 'heart and mind' as the location of culture.³³ The main elements as to what culture is must be understood as the result of a long line of research culminating in a wide variety of perspectives. Clifford Geertz defines culture as follows:

Culture denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.³⁴

²⁹ Knitter, P.F. (2005), *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. New York: Orbis Books, 173-237.

³⁰ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies*, 181.

³¹ Knitter, *Introducing Theologies*, 183.

³² Geertz, C. (1973), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*, New York: Basis Books, 89.

³³ Geertz, *Interpretation of cultures*, 4, 5, 11.

³⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation of cultures*, 89.

For Geertz, culture indeed reflects the webs Weber referred to.³⁵ Studying culture, however, not only involve the description of these webs, rather it involves a search for meaning.

Our question concerns: the relation between culture and religion and the way in which mission relates to inter-culturalism.

Religion as identity marker

Linda Woodhead differentiates between religion as belief and religion as identity marker.³⁶ Religion as belief refers to a religious interest in dogmas, doctrines, and propositions. Religion as identity marker refers to religion as a source of identity, either socially or as personal choice. Based on Woodhead's differentiation, Kilp indicates how religion is currently excelling at being a cultural identity marker, increasingly so in Europe.³⁷ As so many different factors are at play in determining identity, cultural identity must, however, be seen as being in flux.³⁸ The result is that people become alienated from traditional religious beliefs and practices and turn to cultural-religious identities, which do not necessarily include religious beliefs. One is then identified as member of a group based on religion which overlaps with culture. There is no longer separation between religion and culture, although religion is considered as only one form of expression of culture. Christianity, for one, cannot exist except in a cultural form.³⁹ In such instances where religion becomes a cultural identity marker it becomes possible that we may end up in a scenario Huntington described as the 'clash of civilizations'.⁴⁰ It is not only religions that encounter one another, but also monolithic blocks of cultures that meet.

Challenges in the relation between mission and inter-culturalism

The culture-religion relation presents three challenges: inculturation, secularization and syncretism.

³⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation of cultures*, 5.

³⁶ Woodhead, L. (2011), 'Five concepts of religion', *International Review of Sociology* 1, 119.

³⁷ Kilp, A. (2011), 'Religion in the construction of the cultural "self" and "other"', ENDC Proceedings 14, 212.

³⁸ Vroom, H. (1996), *Religie als ziel van cultuur: Religieus pluralism als uitdaging*: Zoetermeer: Meinema, 118.

³⁹ Shorter, A. (1995), *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, New York: Orbis Books, 12.

⁴⁰ Huntington, S.P. (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of world order*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Inculturation

Inculturation refers to the theological process of presenting the gospel as a culture in terms that are relevant, or as Shorter defines it: ‘the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures’.⁴¹ This implies that the gospel crosses the borders of cultures. The gospel needs to be transposed into a culture.⁴² Inculturation should be distinguished from acculturation which refers to ‘the communication between cultures on a footing of mutual respect and tolerance’.⁴³ Acculturation refers to a sociological process, whereas inculturation is a theological concept.⁴⁴ The concept of inculturation has a Roman Catholic origin, with the equivalent terms ‘indigenization’ and ‘contextualization’ having a Protestant background. Preceding Vatican II, where the use of the concept of inculturation was consolidated, the concepts of ‘accommodation’ and ‘adaptation’ were more commonly used.⁴⁵

Schineller adds a different perspective to inculturation when he defines it as ‘the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular cultural context ... transforming and remaking it (culture) so as to bring about a new creation.’⁴⁶ In sharing the gospel with the world, Christians must make Jesus Christ incarnated, become flesh, in each culture. The argument is that cultures differ, each with their own questions and challenges and that Jesus Christ must become incarnated in each and every particular context, in each particular time and place. This is a never-ending process.⁴⁷

During the 1990s there appears to have been a vibrant debate on the matter of the relation between gospel and culture. This debate seems to have dissipated and has only now recently become necessary and vibrant once again.

What is important to realize concerning the debate about introducing the gospel to cultures, is that the debate is based on the views and understandings of a theology of religions. For example, the concept of the gospel being incarnate in cultures is based on a fulfilment theology.

This becomes clear when Schineller indicates that responsible inculturation takes into account the fact that God has already been working among all cultures.⁴⁸ God has been preparing the ground for the Christian seed. These signs of God’s presence in cultures need to be acknowledged, sought out, and

⁴¹ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 4.

⁴² Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 13.

⁴³ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 8.

⁴⁴ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 10.

⁴⁵ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 11.

⁴⁶ Schineller, P. (1990), *A Handbook on Inculturation*, New York: Paulist Press, 6.

⁴⁷ Schineller, *Handbook on Inculturation*, 8.

⁴⁸ Schineller, *Handbook on Inculturation*, 12.

connected to the gospel. The gospel can never be a finished, complete parcel only to be delivered and accepted to each new culture. The gospel cannot only exist in Western European categories and thought patterns as that would reflect a radicalized position in relation to missionary work. Rather, local communities should be allowed to develop the teaching, liturgy and practice of the local church in such a way that it becomes familiar to the local culture.⁴⁹

I believe the debate on inculturation needs to be taken up again in order to counter radicalized mission work. The gospel needs to be communicated in a culturally non-threatening way.

Secularization

A lot has been written over the past half century on the phenomenon of secularization. Compare the works by Steve Bruce, Craig Calhoun, Mark Jurgensmeyer and Jonathan van Antwerpen and Charles Taylor.⁵⁰ Stefan Paas differentiates between the missiologists and the social scientists reflecting on secularization.⁵¹ Both the perspectives of missiologists and social scientists are important in understanding the phenomenon.

From the onset it is clear that a differentiation between secularism and secularization is necessary. Secularism, according to Jose Casanova, is a worldview or ideology which takes on many forms, for instance the differentiation between state and religion, between science and philosophy or theology, and the differentiation between law and morality.⁵² The meaning of secularization is varied. Some refer to secularization as individual piety as opposed to those who link secularization to the demise of religion in society.⁵³ Secularization describes a social process.⁵⁴ It refers to the changes made in the relationship between the institutional spheres of the religious and secular. In the process of secularization Casanova indicates that over time two distinct theories developed, namely that religion will decline, and that religion will be privatized.⁵⁵ This brings Casanova to define secularization as ‘a process of differentiation

⁴⁹ Schineller, *Handbook on Inculturation*, 18.

⁵⁰ Bruce, S. (2002), *God is dead: Secularization in the West*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; Bruce, S. (2011), *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Calhoun, C. Jurgensmeyer, M. and Van Antwerpen, J., (Ed.) (2011), *Rethinking Secularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Taylor, C. (2007), *A Secular Age*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁵¹ Paas, ‘Post-Christian’, 6.

⁵² Casanova, J. (2011), ‘The Secular, Secularisations and Secularisms’, in Calhoun, C., Jurgensmeyer, M. and Van Antwerpen, J. (Eds.), *Rethinking Secularism*, 54,55.

⁵³ Dobbelaere, K., 2011, ‘The Meaning and Scope of Secularization’, in Clarke, P.B., (Ed.), 2011, *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 599.

⁵⁴ Casanova, ‘The Secular’, 54.

⁵⁵ Casanova, ‘The Secular’, 55.

and liberation of the secular from the religious'.⁵⁶ From the existing material on the matter of secularization, four main theories as to the origin can be formulated.

(i) *Demystification of the world through a process of rationalization*

One of the first enemies of religion is the human tendency to rationalize. This theory, presented by Max Weber, seems to form the core of the traditional theory of secularization. Rationalization takes place as intellectual and economic activity.

Weber differentiates between different classes in society. One of the strata in society he identifies are the intellectuals.⁵⁷ The intellectuals tend to seek through rational ways meaning in reality.⁵⁸ This exercise in rationalism suppresses the belief in magic and causes the world to become disenchanted or demystified.⁵⁹ That which has been regarded as mysterious in the world is explained rationally, leaving the world devoid of mystery and secrets. Weber called this the 'world-fleeing intellectualist religion'.⁶⁰ Through rationalism there is no more room left for the transcendental to operate in the immanent reality. Every mysterious event now has a logical, rational explanation. Religion has become obsolete.

According to Weber's analysis, the Protestant strand of Christianity seems to be more prone to economic rationalism.⁶¹ Wealth and worldly prosperity have been interpreted by Protestant groups to indicate the blessing and grace God has bestowed upon them.⁶² This particularly Protestant love of material and worldly possessions will eventually distract attention from religion and therefore lead to secularization.⁶³ Weber concludes by indicating that Calvinism, a Protestant stream within Christianity, is the seedbed of a capitalistic economy.⁶⁴ Thus, through rationalism and materialism, Protestants will bring about secularization which will lead to the demise of religion or the changed function of religion in society.

⁵⁶ Casanova, 'The Secular', 55.

⁵⁷ Weber, M. (1966), *The Sociology of Religion* (translated by Ephraim Fischhoff), London: Methuen and Co, 124; Weber, M. (1958), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (translated by Talcott Parsons), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 35.

⁵⁸ Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 125.

⁵⁹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 105; Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 125.

⁶⁰ Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 125.

⁶¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 40.

⁶² Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 108, 148.

⁶³ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 40, 42.

⁶⁴ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 43.

The historic process of spreading Christianity through mission must also be viewed through the perspective of the need to increase the economic base in order to increase opportunities for commerce. In this sense Christianity has acted in a radical way by enforcing conversion upon others as means to a selfish, materialistic end.

Weber is correct in the sense that a world explained rationally has no need for the mysterious workings of the transcendental. Where human beings are so in control (economically and politically) there is no need for supernatural assistance or intervention. In a world of material abundance where every commodity is readily available, man has no need for supernatural provision. As for the future of the human soul, the possibility of an existence after this life of superlative luxury provides comfort. Weber is therefore correct in assuming that rationality and capitalism have made this world devoid of the transcendental, stimulating the process of secularization.

(ii) *Stadial Consciousness Theory*

Humans have overcome the irrationality of belief. Underlying this statement is Casanova's Stadial Consciousness Theory, describing the evolutionary development of humans from primitive to modern.⁶⁵ The term 'primitive' denotes the religious notion of humans, while being 'modern' describes the secular notion. Humans develop from the stadium of the primitive, irrational, metaphysical religion to that of a modern, rational, post-metaphysical secular consciousness.⁶⁶ For Casanova the Stadial Consciousness Theory has contributed the most to secularization.⁶⁷ In societies where the Stadial Consciousness is absent, secularization also seems to be absent, although religious revival seems strong in such communities.

The Stadial Consciousness Theory views religion as being intolerant and quite often responsible for creating conflict.⁶⁸ In this discourse, references are often to the religion of others or the religion that someone decided to leave behind. To be secular, then, presents a condition where one is free from religion, thus free from intolerance.

⁶⁵ Casanova, 'The Secular', 59.

⁶⁶ Casanova, 'The Secular', 58.

⁶⁷ Casanova, 'The Secular', 59.

⁶⁸ Casanova, 'The Secular', 69.

Durkheim, after analysing the social order of his time, came to the conclusion that religion is on the decline or in regression.⁶⁹ This was not only true of traditional religion, but also of Christianity.⁷⁰

For Durkheim the organic nature of religion enabled it to be born, to grow, and eventually die. This process was inevitable as it was endless. Durkheim's understanding of what is now referred to as secularization falls under two separate headings: the changing of religion altogether, and the change or decline of religion within society.⁷¹ Regarding the latter, Durkheim acknowledged both the process of religion dying out yet simultaneously acknowledging its perseverance. This reflects Durkheim's description of the situation in his own time but also his understanding of the normative role of religion.

The implication of Durkheim's theory is that the more primitive a society, the more influence religion has on it.⁷² The opposite of course being that the less influence religion has on society, the more modern it has become. This is one of the peculiarities of Durkheim, his suggestion that a society becomes more religious when it regresses to its original form. For Durkheim regression would then be positive as it denotes a return to religious dominance in society.

The decline of religious influence in society is not something new for Durkheim.⁷³ From the first communities where religion was dominant, societies have slowly evolved where religion plays a lesser role. This contention is opposed by Robert Bellah's theory that religion does change by way of evolution.⁷⁴ Change does not eradicate religion, rather it results in different forms or functions of religion in society. Indeed, Durkheim proclaimed that religion would play a diminishing role in social life.⁷⁵ As time passes, social institutions such as politics, economics and science will free themselves from religion, growing into a situation where individual freedom is increased.⁷⁶

(iii) *Subtraction Theory*

Secularism is what remains when religion is removed from society. The secular is considered to be the substratum which remains when religion as

⁶⁹ Pickering, W.S.F. (1984), *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 442.

⁷⁰ Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 442.

⁷¹ Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 442.

⁷² Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 443.

⁷³ Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 445.

⁷⁴ Bellah, R. (2011), *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*, London: Harvard University Press.

⁷⁵ Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 446.

⁷⁶ Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology*, 446.

superstructure is removed.⁷⁷ For Taylor modern unbelief does not, however, equal the absence of belief or even indifference.⁷⁸

For Peter Berger secularization refers to ‘the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’.⁷⁹ Berger’s theory makes more sense in light of Durkheim’s distinction between the sacred and the profane which characterizes the world humans exist in.⁸⁰ The purpose of Berger’s analysis was to evaluate the way in which society understands its own position in the world, the worldview and the position of humanity when not seen from a religious perspective. Durkheim’s distinction, namely the strict separation between the sacred and profane, is disappearing. For some members of society, a number of elements might still be considered to belong to the profane, whereas for other members of society, the same elements might be considered to belong to the sacred. Sundermeier attests to this when he indicates how religion in society went through a process which he calls the ‘erosion of religion’, which not only affected institutional religion, but also the role religion plays in popular culture.⁸¹

The description by Berger makes both the subjective and objective side of secularism clear. Berger professed that the objective side of secularization would be enabled by the loss of organized religion’s influence.⁸² The influence of religion on the public domain would become less visible. Religion would exert less influence on the arts, philosophy and even literature. Sundermeier describes a society where religious influence on social institutions like marriage and education has disappeared entirely.⁸³ Knowledge of religious symbols has dissipated. On the other hand, a subjective side to secularization is to be noted.⁸⁴ Individuals in society no longer exhibit the need for the concept of the transcendental. The understanding of the world, humanity, and ethics are no longer determined by religion. People affiliate less with formal religious institutions, falling back instead on a subjective, constructed universe filled with selected religious elements.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 530.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 269.

⁷⁹ Berger, P.L. (1967), *The sacred canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Books, 107.

⁸⁰ Durkheim, E. (1912), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (translated by Carol Cosman), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 36.

⁸¹ Sundermeier, T. (1999), *Was ist Religion: Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext*, Kaiser Verlag, 12.

⁸² Berger, *The sacred canopy*, 15.

⁸³ Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion*, 12.

⁸⁴ Berger, *The sacred canopy*, 15, 16.

This is what Berger refers to as the ‘privatization of religion’.⁸⁵ Religion is no longer a public matter, but a personal matter. Sundermeier attests to this by indicating how this emphasis on the profane instead of the sacred, does not necessarily mean the end of religion.⁸⁶ The growth of new religious movements, and the resurgence of both fundamentalism and esotericism, merely prove that religion seeks new ways of expression; it is no longer expression in an institutional way, but in a private manner.⁸⁷

(iii) *Disappearance Theory*

The disappearance theory is based on tendencies of decline of religious activities and participation within religious communities, resulting in the dying out of religion. Steve Bruce is an exponent of this view. For Bruce, the Protestant Reformation was the starting point of the large-scale eradication of religion. The Reformation, according to Bruce, contributed significantly to individualism.⁸⁸ The Reformation eroded rationalism. To believe in something is different to being convinced it is true according to Bruce.⁸⁹

For Bruce, religion becomes an individual matter. Religion has become a subjective, selective, ‘pick-and-mix’ of elements preferred by the individual.⁹⁰ He argues that the social relevance of religion is on the decline and will eventually disappear.⁹¹ For Bruce, Christianity exhibits a clear line of gradual regression from congregation to denomination, leading to cult and ultimately to irrelevance. This effect of secularization will remain permanent says Bruce.⁹²

The demise of religion is, however, not due to lack of supply, rather to a decline in the demand for religion. Charles Taylor explains the disappearance of religion being due to a change of frame, the ‘immanent frame’ within which modern man exists but does not make provision for the existence of the transcendental.⁹³ All meaning is retained in an immanent world, causing reality to be devoid of higher values and meaning. The gods have disappeared. Berger referred to the sacred canopy that no longer functions in the way it was intended to.⁹⁴ Due to this view religion cannot but die out and disappear.

⁸⁵ Berger, *The sacred canopy*, 133.

⁸⁶ Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion*, 12.

⁸⁷ Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion*, 13.

⁸⁸ Bruce, S. (1996), *Religion in the Modern World: from cathedrals to cults*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5, 230.

⁸⁹ Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, 230.

⁹⁰ Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, 233.

⁹¹ Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, 133.

⁹² Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, 262.

⁹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

⁹⁴ Berger, *The sacred canopy*.

Faith is only one of many other possible options.⁹⁵ Faith is no longer a logical reaction, rather it becomes another possible way of assigning meaning to reality. Religion is, like so many other possibilities, a hermeneutical key in interpreting reality.

Under a post-modern paradigm with a relative understanding of truth, the implication is that what you believe may be true for you, but it does not mean that it is the only possible option. Indeed, it may be just as valid an option to have no religion at all. This requires a Copernican shift: belief in God is no longer society's logical, rational, obvious assumption. Belief in God becomes just one more possible option.

Schleiermacher accused intellectuals of rationalizing religion to such an extent that all that remained was a consideration of metaphysics and morality.⁹⁶ God was replaced with wisdom of the sages and poets, humanism and nationalism, art and science.⁹⁷ This world has become focused only on the immanent, the material, the corporeal world.⁹⁸ Humans believe they are capable of satisfying their own spiritual needs by reading, rationalizing and contemplating this worldly wisdom. Humans have become self-reliant without the need for spiritual reality anymore. Humans have created a separate universe by filling their reality with self-created and earthly things.⁹⁹ Taylor refers to this as the 'buffered self', human beings that are no longer in need of religion.¹⁰⁰

To be without religion, to be secular, can be considered in a radical way as being superior to those still stuck in a 'primitive' stage of human development and prone to being 'religious'. The 'educated' and 'enlightened' can consider themselves free from the limitations and restrictions of religious prescriptions. Similarly, those practicing religion in a private capacity may consider themselves to be superior and truly 'enlightened' in recognizing the spiritual realm amid a secular and materialistically orientated world. Both attitudes reflect a radical self-presentation of superiority and both these fundamental positions become fertile breeding grounds for radicalism.

Some, such as Peter Berger, argue that the current context is marked by a stage where secularization is considered as something of the past, and a

⁹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 43.

⁹⁶ Schleiermacher, F. (1899). *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. 7th Edition in the edition by Rudolf Otto. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991.

⁹⁷ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 18.

⁹⁸ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 21.

⁹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 23

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32.

process of re-sacralization might be eminent.¹⁰¹ The new energy, vigour, and emphasis on religion is, however, not simply a return to a previous period in history during which religion was all-pervasive in society. Rather, we should talk of the current growth of religiosity or spirituality, something slightly different to religion.

People still have a need to believe in something, however, this need is not expressed in the traditional religious forms. Instead, there is a much greater tendency to create one's own compilation of religious elements deemed useful by the individual. Krüger, Lubbe and Steyn refer to this process as a search for 'alternative spirituality'.¹⁰²

Religion is considered as a cultural expression only where the intricacies of religious practices and beliefs are no longer the main focus. Religion does still exist, but now, more than ever before, it does so as a cultural identity marker. Consequently, within such a view the transcendent as objective power is reduced to symbolic and cultural value. The immanent elements of religion (i.e., rituals, clothing, and dietary requirements) are emphasized in terms of culturally infused expressions of identity.

This focus on material elements may in fact contribute to secularization. Consider the criticism Bruno Reinhardt made of material religion.¹⁰³ According to Reinhardt, the extensive focus on material elements associated with religion detracts attention from the transcendental and enforces the immanence of religion.

Syncretism

Concerns about syncretism arise every time the gospel in a mission context enters a new cultural environment. This is especially the case among those who adhere to the exclusivist model of theology of religions. An exclusivist position requires the absolute truth and sovereignty of the gospel to be protected and defended. The danger of syncretism increases the moment that dialogue between religions is considered: 'Dialogue is dangerous as it may lead to changes in belief and threaten the distinctive character of the Christian message'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Berger, P.L. (1999), 'The Desecularization of the World', in Berger, P.L. (Ed.) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1-18.

¹⁰² Krüger, J.S., Lubbe, G. and Steyn, H.C. (1996), *The Human search for Meaning: A multireligion Introduction to the Religions of Humankind*, Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 294.

¹⁰³ Reinhardt, Bruno (2016), 'Don't make it a doctrine: Material religion, transcendence, critique', in *Anthropological Theory* Vol 16 (1), 76.

¹⁰⁴ Mulder, D.C. (1989), 'Dialogue and Syncretism: Some concluding remarks', in Gort, J.D., Vroom, H.M., Fernhout, R. and Wessels, A., (Eds.), *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 206.

Different views on syncretism do exist, however. We can distinguish between symbiotic and synthetic syncretism.¹⁰⁵ Synthetic syncretism is the conscious selection of religious elements in order to construct a new religious system. Symbiotic syncretism is the gradual and natural growth by consent of a religion existing in close proximity to other religions. Religions are organic and dynamic and prone to both exerting influence and to being influenced. Symbiotic syncretism is likened to inculturation as a natural process of introducing a foreign element into a culture with, over time, the element becoming familiar and acceptable.

Syncretism can easily be the result of relativism which is associated with the pluralist model of a theology of religions. When it is accepted that all religions contain an element of truth, and that they each have some contribution to make to the understanding of the transcendent, what one believes becomes relative. A mixture of elements, then, become not only permissible, but a prerequisite even.

Konvivenz as opportunity

If we end up with the dilemma of the need to convey the gospel to the world, but are faced with the challenges of inculturation, syncretism and secularization, what are we to do? Dialogue between religions is an important option, but there are conditions to dialogue as we have seen from Lindbeck's suggestions.¹⁰⁶

Sundermeier proposes *konvivenz* as way of peaceful coexistence in a multi-cultural and multi-religious world.¹⁰⁷ The concept *konvivenz* originated in a Latin-American context.¹⁰⁸ *Konvivenz* is not merely the act of living together, the coexistence of Christian missionaries with non-Christian cultures, it extends to the existence of the church in the world. Three elements of living together becomes expressions of *konvivenz*: mutual assistance, mutual learning, and celebrating together.

In helping others, Sundermeier suggests the church seek out ways of assisting communities and their needs.¹⁰⁹ The result is that communities maintain their independence and integrity of identity. The church helps with food, shelter, clothing and whatever might be necessary to improve living conditions.

¹⁰⁵ Sundermeier, T. (1996), *sv Synkretismus. Evangelische Kirchenlexikon: Internationale theologische Enzyklopädie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 603.

¹⁰⁶ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 47-61.

¹⁰⁷ Sundermeier, T. (1995), *Konvivenz und Differenz: Studien zu einer verstehenden Missionswissenschaft*, Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission.

¹⁰⁸ Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, 46.

When communities live together they start learning together too and so increase their knowledge of each other. Christians should not view other cultures as ignorant or in need of education, rather Christians are also able to learn from other cultures.¹¹⁰ Learning becomes a reciprocal process based on the equality of humanity. As formulated by Sundermeier: ‘*Konvivenz* is a learning community where all learn from and with one another.’¹¹¹

The final aspect of *konvivenz* is people celebrating together.¹¹² Celebrating the festival of another culture indicates one’s respect for that culture. By celebrating together, all social differences are removed and, albeit only during the period of the festival itself, all participants appear to exist in harmony. Over the centuries Christianity has learned to adopt and incorporate various elements from different cultures. Festivals provide opportunities to fill with new meaning the form of the festival, thus finding new reasons for, and creating new festivals in a culture, may bring about the presence of Christianity in that culture.

The attitude underlying Sundermeier’s concept of *konvivenz* is echoed by others. Tariq Ramadan, in discussing the possibility of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the importance of culture.¹¹³ In the interactions between religions, Ramadan suggests that the principle of integration plays a dominant role.¹¹⁴ When cultures interact, there is no place for isolation, withdrawal and ‘obsession with identity’. Rather, entering into authentic dialogue as equals is necessary as it will eventually lead to mutual enrichment and ‘partners in action’. In the end, the interaction between religions is not about relativizing one’s own convictions and seeking universal neutral principles, rather, it is about acceptance and respect of pluralism, diversity and the belief of the Other.¹¹⁵

Lindbeck states that religions cannot engage with one another if they each consider themselves to represent a superior articulation of the common experience which all religions endeavour to express.¹¹⁶ It is the attitude of superiority that destroys the possibility of open dialogue.¹¹⁷ In this way *konvivenz* contributes to establishing *shalom* in the world.

¹¹⁰ Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, 47.

¹¹¹ Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, 48.

¹¹² Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, 49.

¹¹³ Ramadan, T. (2004), *Western Muslims and the future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 200.

¹¹⁴ Ramadan, T. (2010), *What I believe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5.

¹¹⁵ Ramadan, *What I believe*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 55.

¹¹⁷ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 59.

Conclusion

The relation of mission and inter-culturalism has been presented from the perspective of mission, theology of religions, and culture. Three challenges, namely syncretism, secularization, and inculturation, have been identified. Lastly, an attempt was made to present a solution to the dilemma of the relation between mission and culture by referring to the concept of *konvivenz* which contributes to *shalom* in the world.

The outcome of our deliberations is to determine a theologically responsible response to the possibility of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in order to address radicalization.

The outcome of inter-religious dialogue should not be the ability to convince others to convert. Mulder is able to guide our ongoing endeavour: 'Inter-religious dialogue has as goal to create an attitude of willingness to listen and to learn'.¹¹⁸ Only by gaining knowledge through listening to others can radicalization be tamed.

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¹¹⁸ Mulder, 'Dialogue and Syncretism', 211.

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The Role of a Policy of Multiculturalism in the Struggle against Religious Extremism: The Example of Azerbaijan

Ravan Hasanov

Abstract

Multicultural customs and traditions as well as mutual understanding have predominated in Azerbaijani society which is situated in a geography where, historically, various cultures and religious creeds have merged. Today Azerbaijan has managed to guarantee its multicultural nation completely that embraces the ideology of multiculturalism into the state policy. This article will present the political-legal experience of the Azerbaijani state in comparison with other states in terms of freedom of faith and in the struggle against religious radicalism as well as religious extremism.

Introduction

Religion is a social phenomenon has a vital role which formed the society's belief and it has a system that manages social order. It noted that all religions are based on the principles of peacefulness, humanism and humaneness, and these creeds act as an ideological basis which guides a widely social interactions. It founds that more than two thirds of the world population are the believers of different religions, the relations between religion and state, as well as religion and society, keep the peace from present till future.

Now the freedom of religion is one of the fundamental human rights. Although today religion is viewed through the prism of human rights and national-spiritual values, it also requires a an approach from the perspective of security. In many countries religion is separate from the state, however, the

state must remain responsible for a citizen's religious status and security in a country.¹

To maintain peace, tolerance, and multiculturalism in the world today, there is a great need for distinguishing the freedom of religion from religious radicalism, religious extremism, and fanaticism. The process of deradicalization, and the steps taken by states and societies in this regard, should also be analysed from a scientific perspective to obtain the data from the field. Religious extremism and radicalism pose a threat to the national and multicultural security of any state, and in the struggle against these phenomena, States need to combat these threats through improving their legislative basis in different ways. Because religious extremism can lead to terrorism, particular attention should also be attached to international cooperation in this regard.

Multicultural Azerbaijan society experiences the religious extremist and radical forces. Her experiences in managing the religion radicalism such violation on the social stability, caused religious confrontations, and some have impinged on state sovereignty and stability for their own benefit. Despite this, today Azerbaijan imposes the multicultural society as an important state policy.

This article presents the political-legal experience of the Azerbaijan in comparison with other states in freedom for religion policy and struggled against both religious radicalism and extremism.

The threat to Azerbaijan's national security with regard to the religious radicalism religion has a multi-dimension aspect. It records that some religious-political groups, often materially and morally supported by foreign states. Their collaborative networks frequently functioning without permission, and are notoriously dangerous for national security. Thus in an international report, it shows that such groups are inclined to national and religious extremism and terrorism. Their activities cause the massive danger for the stability of society. Indeed, they can be considered a threat to our national security.²

Azerbaijan and the struggle against religious extremism

Terrorism and extremism, which pose a serious threat to humanity for present national and international security. In many cases these kinds of conflicts occur around ethnic, religious, racial and other lines. Irrespective of motives and reasons for the formation of different terrorist groups, terrorism remains

¹ Gunduz, Ismayilov (2014). *Tolerance: What We Know and We Don't*, Baku: Zaman, 191.

² Religious security is part of national security. The newspaper "Zaman". 17 March 2015 <http://anLaz/down/meqale/zaman/2015/mart/426816.htm>

a manifestation of extremism and the eradication of this danger is one of the most important and basic duties of humanity.³

‘Religious extremism’ often implies aggression derived from religious belief. However, no matter how paradoxical it may seem, religion and aggression are two things that might be simultaneously emerged in the radicalism. Religious extremism clearly has no connection with sacred religious creeds and is an extremely dangerous social phenomenon. Every state combats religious extremism and radicalism in different ways.

When we review the historical experience of human civilization, the interaction between religious extremism and terrorism can be seen. In general, the religious factor is of great importance in the formation of emotional-psychological, extremist behaviour as well as terrorist activities. It can be argued that religious extremist activities carried out under the guise of religion, are the criminal activities of different organizations aiming to change the constitutional structure by force, take over power, instigate religious control and use other acts of violence to achieve political goals.⁴

To strengthen her struggle against religious extremism, the Republic of Azerbaijan regularly improves its legislative, educational, as well as law-enforcement measures, and always consolidates the ideological bases upon which they rest. Data obtained indicates that the ideological differences and non co-existence relationships are responsible for the emerging of new cells of religious radicalism.

On 5 December 2015, the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted a special Law ‘On the Struggle Against Religious Extremism’. By defining the legal, organizational bases of the struggle against religious extremism, this law fixes the rights and obligations of both state organs and citizens in carrying out their fight against religious extremism. The main purpose of adopting this law is to protect the constitutional structure, sovereignty, and multicultural security of the state and strengthen the struggle against armed groups and terrorist organizations formed under the guise of religion. As such groups and organizations present a threat to the entirety of humanity and are trying to recruit young generations into their groups via the non collaborative interactions due to limited knowledge on religion and national ideology. A Law which prevents the growth of new followers of religious deviation.

Furthermore, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan which prevents the growth of religious radicalism l now successfully regulates the relations

³ Mammadov J., Azerbaijan in the Struggle Against Extremism. 4 <http://www.gumilev-center.az/az-rbaycan-dini-ekstremizml-mubariz-d/>

⁴ Hajiyeva, A. (2016), *Religion and Terrorism*, Baku: S.E.P., 27.

between religion and state. The new law makes a distinction between the freedom of religion and religious extremism, radicalism, and fanaticism from the legal point of view.

Certainly, the existence of mono-ethnic and intolerant societies is one of the causes of religious extremism. From this point of view, the basic ideological foundation in the struggle against religious radical groupings is the advocacy and support of the idea of multiculturalism and the model of multicultural society. By turning the policy of multiculturalism into one of the political guidelines, Azerbaijan has created an approach of equality to all religious communities, creeds, and cultures at the state level.

However, in contrast, in many Western societies the notions of religious fundamentalism, religious extremism, and terrorism have thought of these three terms are same and often associated with Islam. It is very unfair if a small part of Islamic communities that manipulate the Islam Jihad to make terrors which often threat the big Islam communities and non Moslem are used to generalize that all Islam fellows are terrorists. This is very dangerous. In other words, a dialogue between Moslem community and Western one need to arrange more to reduce the religious radicalism al over the world. A very interesting research conducted by sociologists from the University of Maryland in 2008, it revealed that 51 per cent of the population of 20 countries completely rejected any association with a particular religious creed.⁵ It found that the misleading of using the religion is associated with terrorism have been rejected by the informants.

It should be noted that the line of development of these dangerous phenomena, which have actually no connections with religion and are beyond religion, is usually as follows:

Religious fundamentalism → religious radicalism and fanaticism → religious extremism → terrorism

It seems that ideology as a main factor in religious radicalism, instead of combination of the favourable socio-political and psychological environment. That is, the existence of religious dogmas, inherited from the past, absolute, unchangeable, and unadaptable. The following conditions trigger the Religious fundamentalism;

- Believers should be managed by unchangeable and absolute religious rules established in the past,

⁵ *The Caucasus and Globalization*, 3 (2-3). https://www.ca-corg/c-g/2009/journal_eng/c-g-2-3/c-gE-02-03-2009.pdf

- These religious rules can be interpreted only in one way, and
- These religious rules should be above the secular rules.

Religious fundamentalism first manifested itself in Christianity and Judaism in the 1900s, whereas in Islam it started to spread extensively at the time when Salafism emerged in the Middle East in the nineteenth century.⁶

In a report by the European Commission in 2008, the notion of religious radicalism was considered together with religious fundamentalism, and it was noted that radicalism is a phenomenon that can pave the way to religious extremism and terrorism by uniting people with similar views and ideas around extremist religious ideas.⁷ It can be concluded that religious extremism is not something that emerges suddenly. Rather, religious fundamental ideas develop along a certain path which leads to religious extremism. The process of radicalization takes a long time. From this arises the question: when does this process of radicalization turn into extremism completely? Can one draw a line of demarcation between these two notions?

In fact, even in everyday life, it is very difficult to differentiate between freedom for religion and religious radicalism. Many scholars also demonstrate the long time of the entire process of transition from devout faith persons to religious extremists. Nevertheless, there is a generally accepted idea that an extremist is a person who tries to gain results through illegal means and by force in order to disseminate his/her ideas.

Although in the early twentieth century terrorism, radicalism and extremism resulted in a serious threat in a number of countries including Azerbaijan, the country's highly educated youth are capable not only of preventing radical terrorism but also of denouncing it openly. The development of education plays an important role in providing solutions to social problems and in the development of the country. Many conflicts in various countries around the world are due to the low level of education in those societies. Equal educational

⁶ Mohammed-Ali Adraoui indicates that the origins of Salafist epistemology can be historically situated as a puritanical reaction to several successive crises in the Middle East during the nineteenth century, going back to the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). Mohamed-Ali Adraoui (2019), 'Salafism, Jihadism and Radicalisation: Between A Common Doctrinal Heritage and The Logics of Empowerment', in Serafettin Pektas, Johan Leman (Eds.), *Militant Jihadisme. Today and Tomorrow*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 19-24. Motti Inbari describes radicalization within Judaism as a reaction to assimilation in the nineteenth century and Zionism in connection with the Holocaust, which resulted in the emergence of an apocalyptic radicalism in orthodox circles during the twentieth century. Motti Inbari (2014), 'Messianism as a Political Power in Contemporary Judaism', in J.J. Collins, *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 391-406. In the first article in this collection J. Temmerman describes Christian fundamentalism in the twentieth century as a reaction to Darwinism.

⁷ The European Parliament, *Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalism*, Briefing, March 2015.

opportunities are created for every citizen in Azerbaijan, irrespective of his/her religion or ethnic identity. Owing to the work and commitment of the Azerbaijani state which attaches particular importance to this sector, over three thousand schools have been built over the last ten years. In addition, over 3500 young people have received an international education through education programmes abroad. Multiculturalism is taught at universities having been incorporated into our country's university curricula.⁸

The 4 December 2015 the law of the Republic of Azerbaijan 'On the Struggle against Religious Extremism', defined the legal and organizational foundations of the struggle against religious extremism in the Republic of Azerbaijan, fixing the rights and duties of both state organs and citizens in carrying out the struggle against religious extremism. In it religious radicalism and fanaticism are conceptualized as follows:

Religious radicalism is behaviour which expresses extreme religious views within the framework of any faith, demonstrating irreconcilable attitudes in terms of determining the exceptional nature of those religious views and is characterized by the use of aggressive methods and means in its dissemination.

Religious fanaticism is an extreme degree of religious belief which excludes any critical approach and is accompanied by a blind observance of religious norms, one of the ideological bases of religious extremism.⁹

Besides, that law reflects the main goals of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the struggle against religious extremism – the guarantee of the foundations of the constitutional structure of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as its territorial integrity and security, the protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, the detection and prevention of religious extremist activities, the minimization of the expected harm resulting from religious extremism, the detection and elimination of the reasons for and conditions of the formation of religious extremism and the implementation of extremist activities as well as the detection and elimination of the cases of financing religious extremism, the main principles of the struggle against religious extremism, the subjects, forms and methods of carrying out special operations against religious extremism, the situation and responsibility arising from the religious extremist activities, also in cases of violation of the appropriate provisions of the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

⁸ The Role of the Youth in the Struggle Against Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalism. [/http://www.dtx.gov.az/news112.php](http://www.dtx.gov.az/news112.php)

⁹ The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan On the Struggle Against Religious Extremism, 2. <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/31509>

Conclusion

It is obvious that as a social phenomenon, religion is a very sensitive and timely theme. The more religion is alienated from its original form, the more it becomes politicized and turned into a tool in the hands of extremist forces to achieve certain goals. Thus, from religious extremism it results in another negative social phenomenon. It makes an opposite stance of religious radicalists to force their ideas to hurt others. In the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan law enforcement bodies are taking consistent, educational, and systematic measures to prevent extremist and radical tendencies in the country. One of the state's main goals is to prevent the facilitation, or disallow the dissemination, of any radical sects or religious extremism in Azerbaijan.

It seems almost impossible in contemporary society to prevent these kinds of problems without the joint efforts of a powerful state, civil society, and international organizations. The existence of both a powerful state and a strong civil society is necessary in order to effectively combat extremism and radicalism.

As a civil and secular state, Azerbaijan has always been opposed to religious extremism, condemned religious intolerance, and has cooperated with other states in this sphere and is continuing to do so today as well. Azerbaijan gives preference to cooperating with the countries which are actively combating terrorism and religious extremism. Legal enforcement bodies are currently taking consistent and targeted measures to prevent the radical and extremist tendencies. The activities of all the radical religious movements in the country have been controlled and the importing of harmful religious literature and its dissemination in the country have been prevented.

Educational work is being carried out intensively in Azerbaijan both by state organizations and civil society representatives. Every year the State Committee for the Work with Religious Organizations develops special programmes on educational work and, in addition, hundreds of civil societies functioning in the country implement projects on religious education and advocacy of multiculturalism.

According to research carried out, it is clear that religious security is truly part of national security. Despite stability in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the peaceful co-existence of its citizens, the threat of religious extremism and radicalism exists for every state. To prevent this, traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism should be maintained, developed, and advocated throughout the whole of society.

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Mission and Missiology: The Quest for a 'Grassroots' Narrative to Address 'Radicalization and Violence' in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Eugene Baron

Abstract

The Christian narrative of 'good news' by missionaries has assisted in the creation of, and breeding the conditions for, radicalization and violence in various countries, including South Africa. Religious narratives were merged with the nationalist ones of colonial and neo-colonial governments which have brought about the dehumanization and loss of identity of the oppressed and marginalized.¹ It is those narratives, adopted within neo-colonial contexts, that have been internalized by people and that have bred frustration and resulted in social isolation, often engendering a process of radicalization and violence. It was the task of the missionaries to convey the 'good news' to various communities and in South Africa missionaries did so through a particular narrative which did anything but deliver this to the majority of South Africans struggling to make ends meet. The 'good news' they proclaimed in most instances supported the oppressive government's narrative, one which only served to aggravate the oppressive conditions under which indigenous people had to live.² This chapter will discuss the relationship between narrative and violence in an African context. Subsequently, it will discuss three African contexts (Algeria, Rwanda, South Africa) and the predominant narratives that have engendered radicalization and violence and destabilized those countries. Then the focus turns to the question 'what kind of narrative should be dominant in South Africa to counter radicalization and violence?' Then finally, a discussion on how missiology should adopt projects of narrative construction.

¹ Mary Doak discusses the use of a narrative approach in public theology. Her discussion of the corpus of Johann Baptist Metz (a Catholic theologian) is relevant for the discussion of the chapter because his approach is to link national narratives with the Christian one, reflecting this chapter's argument of the narrative approach of mission and missiology. He argues that real subjects and their historical experiences should appear in theology. Doak, M. (2004), *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology*, New York: State University of New York Press, 11, 108.

² Ernst Conradie refers to the apartheid as a quasi soteriology. See Coetzee, M. & Conradie, E. (2010), 'Apartheid as Quasi-Soteriology: The Remaining Lure and Threat', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 112-123.

Introduction

The causes of radicalization and violence are myriad. This chapter argues that one of the causes is a national narrative that creates marginalization and oppression. For many centuries there has been a particular narrative, presented and propagated especially by the ‘Zionist’³ movement throughout the world regarding the reasons, conditions, and the legitimization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This narrative has made the geopolitical space in the Middle East almost the epicenter of ‘radicalization and violence’, one that has continued for decades. Irrespective of whether the Zionist movement’s narrative has any merit or not, the counter-narrative of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank receives less funding and is less widely publicized by the media, and nor is it globally supported by the Israeli government. This is not the only context within which a socially constructed narrative produces radicalization and violence. In 2009 the Catholic theologian, Emmanuel Katongole argued that the Rwanda genocide in 1994⁴ was not the result of mere ‘tribalism’, rather the underlying narrative in the social imagination of the Rwandan people was the cause of such a massacre. He contends that the ethnic violence between the Hutus and Tutsis came about because of the narrative constructed by missionaries and internalized by the indigenous people of Rwanda.⁵ He argues that those narratives became the reason why people who had previously been neighbors and friends, sometimes fellow congregants even, came to hate and kill each other. It is clear that in Rwanda the Church did not provide an alternative narrative to that which had been conveyed by colonial and post-colonial states. In fact, Church missionaries in these ‘post-colonial’ contexts, such as in the case of Rwanda, became both actors and complicit in a narrative that imagined violence and power of denomination as a means to prosperity and ‘progress’.

Following Katongole, there is indeed often a close relationship between the narratives of both the Christian Church, colonial and neo-colonial

³ The foundations of Zionism were formulated some three thousand years ago, and they are: (1) The Jews are God’s chosen people. (2). All other peoples are merely two-legged animals (*goys*). (3) The Jews have both the right and the obligation to rule the world.

⁴ He argues that the churches in Rwanda played a significant role in the formation and narration of the two ethnic identities and how they see themselves, and the hatred that developed between the two ethnic groups (Hutus and Tutsis). He consequently argues that before the missionaries came to Rwanda, there was no such intense ethnic rivalry. Katongole, E. (2009), *Mirror to the Church. Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.*

⁵ Katongole (2009: 12) writes, ‘If Christians in Rwanda had been slaughtered by non-Christians, it would have been tragic – but perhaps even easier to comprehend. However, Christians killed other Christians, often in the same churches where they had worshipped together.’

governments, and ‘radicalization and violence’. The Christian Church can either support the government’s narrative of society or provide an alternative one. Nevertheless, the Church’s position in relation to a particular narrative also determines the kind of reaction that will come from society. In contexts of oppression and marginalization, the Church should provide an alternative narrative. It should constitute a narrative that articulates Africans as having human dignity, and forming an integral part of society, and as people who are able to function independently. Through its system and values its narrative should provide prosperity and growth on the continent. The radicalization and violence that emerged throughout South Africa during the years of apartheid, was the result of the ‘masses’ being marginalized through a ‘quasi-soteriology’, aggravated by the living conditions of blacks in South Africa. This apartheid narrative functioned as the backbone of the emergence of radicalization and violence in South Africa. Moreover, it seems unimaginable that such a narrative was in fact condoned by some of the churches in South Africa.⁶

Directly after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and before the first democratic election in 1994 in particular, South Africa was on the brink of a civil war. During that time there was a strong presence of ‘right-wing’ groups that were fully armed in order to impede the 1994 elections. This would have left the country in disarray. After the 1994 conflict, enmity between people of different races and ethnic backgrounds became increasingly intense. Recent newspaper reports on political speeches and comments make clear that the ‘rainbow nation’⁷ ideology has not delivered. Indeed, in the post-apartheid context an even greater divide between people along the lines of race and ethnicity persists, and the narrative about the poor and the marginalized remains unchanged. Poignantly the poor remain poor. Despite the implementation of a new democratic government, there are still people in South Africa who have experienced oppression and marginalization and this continued oppression has the potential to explode into anarchy and become a breeding ground for radicalization and violence in South Africa.⁸

This chapter will focus on three post-colonial contexts (Algeria, Rwanda, South Africa). Through the lenses of three prominent scholars it will dissect

⁶ Elphick states, ‘They [DRC] denied that the Bible advocated racial equality in society or politics, and contended that Afrikaaners’ racial views were natural and God-given products of their history, and in no way irrational or bigoted.’ Elphick, R. (2012), *The Equality of Believers. Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 6.

⁷ See in particular Allen, J. (2006), *Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The Rainbow People of God. A Spiritual Journey from Apartheid to Freedom*, Cape Town: Double Storey Books.

⁸ See Boesak, A.A., & DeYoung, C.P. (2012), *Radical Reconciliation, Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*, New York: Orbis Books.

their understanding of the underlying narrative in each of these contexts and how these narratives relate to continued radicalization and violence. Subsequently, Emmanuel Katongole's fundamental argument in his book *Sacrifice of Africa* (2011) on how to re-imagine violence and radicalization in Africa will be discussed. The chapter will then focus on a potential change of the script in South Africa and how missiology could contribute to this.

Narrative as the cause for Radicalization and Violence

Ranstorp⁹ discusses the causes of and breeding grounds for radical movements within Islam (jihadists) and argues that the process is so complex that there cannot be a single cause for the formation and development of such movements within various societies around the world. Nevertheless, it can be a combination of factors such as 'socio-psychological factors, political grievances, religious motivation and discourse, identity politics' that can collectively cause individuals to move towards extremism. Ranstorp¹⁰ emphasizes that the ostracization of a particular group in society is one of the main causes; such groups are marginalized in a foreign country and feel that they do not belong to either culture or society.

A recently reported case demonstrates that the 'ghosts' of apartheid have not been buried. The well-known Christian 'tele-evangelist', Angus Buchan made a public pronouncement that white Afrikaners' are part of the covenant relationship with God. His statement brought alive the apartheid narrative that God has a covenant relationship with the white people in South Africa only, making God an exclusive God.¹¹ This is not a new phenomenon. Elphick argues that under the 'Dutch East India Company rule, the colony had slowly evolved into a rigid racial order, with whites on top, slaves and Khoisan below. Many whites, drawing from a specific strand of Calvinist thought, attributed their dominant status to a covenant relationship with God.'¹²

Ranstorp argues that radicalization and violence occur as the result of a multitude of factors which sometimes include a 'perception of injustice'.¹³ The thesis of this chapter is indeed moulded around the argument that the

⁹ Ranstorp, M. (2010), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation. Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*. London: Routledge, 6.

¹⁰ Ranstorp, *Violent Radicalisation*, 6.

¹¹ In 2019 the South African online newspaper *news24* reported that Angus Buchan apologized for saying only 'Jewish and Afrikaans people' have 'covenant with God'; see the full article: <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/angus-buchan-apologises-for-saying-only-jewish-and-afrikaans-people-have-covenant-with-god-20191106>

¹² Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 1

¹³ Ranstorp, *Violent Radicalisation*, 6.

narrative should be focused on the conditions of the poor in South Africa and that the *missio Dei* of the Church should address the dire conditions of the poor and the marginalized in a radical way. The narrative should always be based on the ‘injustice’ suffered by the poor.¹⁴

Richard Elphick argues that in South Africa, ‘Missionaries were pivotal to black-white relations, not only on the turbulent frontiers of the nineteenth century, which historians have thoroughly researched, but also in the twentieth-century struggles over industrialization, segregation, and apartheid, where missionaries’ role has been largely ignored.’¹⁵ He further states, ‘Most significantly, and most consequentially, the broad vision of apartheid, designed explicitly to thwart the drive toward racial equality, originated, in part, among missionary leaders of the Dutch Reformed churches.’¹⁶ Elphick goes on to say, ‘Apartheid was indeed a product of twentieth-century thought, but it was not developed, initially, by neo-Calvinist philosophers (or by secular thinkers), but by evangelical missionary leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church who sought to foster ‘development’ among blacks without threatening white supremacy.’¹⁷

According to Elphick, the idea of equality among all people in the Cape emerged when the *voortrekkers* moved to the North and the work of evangelists within the mission schools kindled such an idea. Particularly interesting is the role of the missionaries in terms of an ethos of ‘equality’ and the construction of a different narrative of the God of the Bible. In addition, Elphick also focuses on the work of the black missionaries who fought against segregation.¹⁸

The questions that need to be probed are: How do missiologists construct a narrative in South Africa through their writings? Should missionaries/missiologists focus only on personal salvation and not ‘structural’ conditions in South Africa? How rigorous are their analyses when focussing on the narratives from below? The Church still proclaims the ‘good news’, but does the ‘good news’ narrative encompass everything? Finally, what strategic plans are there to turn the conditions around for the *shalom* of the poor’?

¹⁴ See Cone, J.H. (1997), *God of the Oppressed*, New York: Orbis Books.

¹⁵ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2

¹⁶ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 2

¹⁷ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 6

¹⁸ ‘The new South African parliament embarked immediately on a series of racially discriminatory acts that have led historians to call the years from 1910 to 1948 the “Age of Segregation.” Initially, blacks responded with a moderate African nationalism; in 1912, the direct ancestor of the African National Congress was founded, almost entirely by mission- educated black Christians. For their part, beginning in 1904, missionaries organized themselves on a region-wide basis in the General Missionary Conferences, which would enable them to play a mediating role between whites and blacks in the decades to come.’ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 4.

It is the missionaries, those who did not replace the dominant narrative of 'race' with a one of 'co-existence', 'symbiosis', and 'interculturality', who should reconstruct such a narrative in South Africa by all means necessary. Another way of doing this is to speak in terms of the 'oikos' metaphor.¹⁹

Jonathan Sacks, reflecting on his work *Not in God's Name*, argues that people are and become what they are because of 'metanarratives.'²⁰ He argues that religion has come to the fore because of a vacuum and the existence of the idea that people do not need religion (secularization). However, people are intrinsically part of a group and they see themselves as being part of a group. Sacks argues that religion has provided narratives that lead to violence, referring to this as 'religious narratives.'²¹ These narratives consist of people who do not form part of the story and are always acting in a self-destructive manner – irrespective of whether they are innocent victims or not, something he refers to as the 'dualism narrative'. However, there is also the 'displacement narrative' where a newer religion replaces the old, as when Christianity superseded Judaism and Islam (supersessionist theology). Though these Abrahamic faith traditions base most of their arguments on the Old Testament, he argues that Genesis, though it contains rivalry between brothers, goes beyond that – reconciliation and forgiveness. This is seen especially in Joseph's forgiveness of the brothers that sought to kill him. Therefore Sacks urges, 'There is something deadly about dualism on the one hand and narratives of displacement on the other hand, in an age fraught with the possibilities of mass destruction, we must confront it while there is still time.'²²

Sacks argues that:

the West is still inadequately prepared to understand quite how dangerous some narratives are, especially the master narratives that form the basis of identity... This is not because these master narratives are religious, but because we are human. We are social animals; we find our identities in groups; all groups include and exclude; groups encourage altruism towards insiders and suspicion, fear, and potential aggression toward outsiders. In extremis narratives can dehumanize the

¹⁹ In 2020 Baron & Mangayi wrote a 'Study Guide in Missiology' at the University of South Africa based on the mission of God as God's involvement in the Oikos (Household of God). However, these scholars draw from the work of the Oikos Journey project, the contributions of Ernst Conradie, especially his edited work with Clive W Ayre, 'The Church in God's household. Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology' in Ayre, C. W. and Conradie, E.M. (2016), *The Church in God's Household. Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1-185 is noted.

²⁰ Sacks, J. (2018), 'The Stories we tell', in Burridge, R.A. & Sacks, J. (Eds), *Confronting Religious Violence. A Counternarrative*, Texas: Baylor University Press, 19-34.

²¹ Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 30.

²² Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 33.

outsider as either a force of evil or a sibling rival for the scarce resource we seek, even when that resource is the love of God.²³

Sacks states that there is an inherent connection between narrative and identity.²⁴ In South Africa, there is often a resurgence of different ethnic groups coming to tell their stories. This is precisely because of a search for identity. Khoisan and other indigenous groups, for instance, the so-called ‘coloured people’, have recently been fighting for their story because, as Sacks insists, ‘stories offer meaning.’²⁵ Sacks argues that only stories can tell us the ‘why’, science can only tell us ‘how’, ‘technology can give us power but not tell us how to use it’, and ‘the market economy gives us choices but cannot tell us which choices to make.’²⁶ People seek stories to understand and strengthen their identity, however the danger lies in the story that religion tells. In this way, Steve Biko criticized the story that the Christian religion told people, because blacks are continuing to live the story that was told by Christians, internalised it, and continue to follow the script with different characters.

A narrative that destabilizes three African countries

In this section, the manner in which a particular narrative has caused the breeding ground for radicalization and violence in three African countries – Algeria, Rwanda and South Africa – will be discussed. These examples demonstrate the relationship between narrative and radicalization and violence in the context of Africa. In Africa, radicalization and violence cannot be divorced from the socio-economic conditions of the poor. The close link between the two has been well articulated in the work of Frantz Fanon, Emmanuel Katongole, and Stephen Bantu Biko.

Fanon’s reflection on violence in Algeria

Fanon writes about the conditions for violence in a post-colonial country from his observations on the effects of colonialism in his own country, Algeria. In his chapter ‘Concerning Violence’ he discusses the resurgence of violence as a consequence of the breakdown of a structural system of oppression that was erected through force.²⁷ He argues that, the conditions of submission and ser-

²³ Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 33.

²⁴ Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 34.

²⁵ Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 34.

²⁶ Sacks, *The Stories we tell*, 34.

²⁷ Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin Books, 27-74.

vitude of the colonized mean that the rectification of the structural oppression, one that has become so entrenched, means that violence became the only and natural means of breaking down the historical process of colonization. Fanon argues that this was an intentional process, one constructed by the colonizers to create an atmosphere where most of the ‘natives’ would accept their fate. The narrative is constructed in such a way that the ‘native’ would come to envy the conditions under which the ‘settler’ lives, and their response and reaction to the conditions created by the ‘settler’ would ultimately lead to violence.

It is apparent in Fanon’s account that the colonizer is responsible for the conditions that the ‘natives’ are living in.²⁸ The colonizer therefore needs to be held accountable for the systems that were erected, systems which have functioned as the breeding grounds for radicalization and violence. Radical violence is often framed by the West as a ‘behavioural problem’ of Africa. Besides the narrative that violence occurs because of the oppressive conditions that are created within societies, there is indeed the theory that violence also occurs because of ‘rebellious action’ leading to the blaming of the colonized for not ‘behaving well.’²⁹ It is evident in the arguments of Fanon that it is therefore always the ‘sin’ of the colonized (natives) and they should therefore take full responsibility for all the violence that erupts within the colonies. Fanon’s account captures not only the life of the colonized during the colonial period, but also how, within the neo-colonial context of Algeria, the colonizers’ conditions and narratives continue by proxy.

Katongole’s reflection on violence in Rwanda

In his book *Mirror to the Church* (2009), Katongole argues that it is the narrative imposed upon Rwanda that is the cause of the violence that resulted in the Rwanda genocide in 1994. He says about the cause of Rwanda’s radicalization and violence in 1994, ‘If we stand before the mirror that is Rwanda, it will show us how we become the people we are because of the stories we tell ourselves ... Rwandans became people who were willing to kill one another because of a story they were first told by Europeans and later learned to tell themselves.’³⁰ Katongole argues that the narrative of ‘race’ brought to Rwanda by Europeans is what killed people in Africa.³¹ He argues that before such a narrative, both the Hutus and Tutsis were separated as indigenous groups by their roles and place in society, not by some physical features. When the Europeans came to

²⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 27-84.

²⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 27-84.

³⁰ Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 52.

³¹ Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 57.

the country, however, the Tutsis were considered to be ‘superior’ to their Hutu neighbours in terms of their physical features. This narrative was sustained throughout the years of colonization and continue through post-colonial times and, as Katongole argues, caused hatred and resulted in the 1994 genocide.³² Katongole states, ‘What must be noted again is that all of this was nothing but European anthropology of the worst kind, which Speke and the Western missionaries after him simply accepted, and to which Christianity now supplied a biblical narrative (Ham) to explain the allegedly racial difference between Hutu and Tutsi.’³³ Katongole does not question that the indigenous people were violent in 1994; rather he bases the cause of the genocide mainly on the narrative that was constructed by the Europeans and internalized by the indigenous people (Hutus and Tutsis) of Rwanda.

Biko’s reflection on violence in South Africa

In 1988 Desmond Tutu wrote to the then State President P.W. Botha, ‘We believe that the government, in its action over recent years, has chosen the path which will lead to violence, bloodshed, and instability.’³⁴ Tutu wrote a letter to the Prime Minister B.J Vorster in 1976 to warn him, ‘I am writing to you, Sir, because I have a growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon, then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably. A people can only take so much and no more.’³⁵ However, Tutu decoupled violence from black agency in circumstances of injustice and oppression when he states, ‘... I know violence and bloodshed and I and many of our people don’t want that [violence] at all ... But we blacks are exceeding patience and peace-loving. We are aware that politics are the art of the impossible.’³⁶ However, in his sermon, at the funeral of Steve Biko, Tutu attributed violence in the neocolonial state of South Africa, or the ‘colony’, to white people, ‘We [whites] talk of non-violence but we have the legalized violence that separates husband and father from his wife and family. We have long periods of detention without trial and deaths in detention. We have banings and banishments.’³⁷

The narrative of South Africa during apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa can be analysed in the work of Steve Biko. Stephen Bantu Biko died in 1978 before the emergence of a ‘new’ South Africa, and the abolishment of

³² Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 58.

³³ Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 58.

³⁴ Allen, *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, 10.

³⁵ Allen, *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, 10.

³⁶ Allen, *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, 12.

³⁷ Allen, *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, 20.

apartheid. He argued that South Africa should come to have a more ‘human face’ even though, arguably, this has not yet materialized judging from the violence and human rights abuses that are rampant in post-apartheid South Africa. Steve Biko’s thoughts on the state of South African society is well captured in the collection of his speeches in the book *I write what I like* (1978).³⁸ Steve Biko argued that the black man has to ‘come to himself’ which was the main reason for his and other black students breaking away from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). The black [man] should become conscious of their value and worth, and not expect it from the ‘white man’ he argued. He also questioned the idea of black people seeing themselves as ‘non-white’ as that meant that ‘white’ was the standard of what it means to be human. This in itself was Biko’s request for a new social imagination. However, while many would leave his argument there in terms of the ‘black man’, Biko’s ultimate vision was a ‘human face’.

Nevertheless, Steve Biko argues that the movement towards a ‘human face’ becomes a reality through ‘black’ solidarity and all becoming ‘Africans’. His idea was ‘radical’ and utter (radical) ‘madness’ in a society where the norm was ‘white’ and where multiracial platforms were seen as a move closer to ‘non-racialism’. He changed that narrative. He ascribes the violence, inflicted on black people themselves, and the enmity between ‘black’³⁹ people (Indian, African, coloured) as a lack of their own appreciation of themselves. Violence was therefore not an option for Biko, but rather a ‘self-emptying’ and ‘self-appreciation’ of blacks in South Africa.⁴⁰ Cloete argues that Biko’s black consciousness philosophy is ‘... deeply rooted in an African humanist philosophy that provides the normative context for his critical entanglement with white supremacy in colonial-apartheid South Africa.’⁴¹

These three scholars reflect on the violence brought about as the result of colonization and neo-colonial conditions. In doing so, all three call for a new social imagination, a different narrative in these African countries that would reinvent their future.

In the conclusion of Katongole’s *Sacrifice of Africa* (2011), the distinction between Fanon, and Biko, become apparent when the notions of ‘radicalization

³⁸ Stubbs, A. (fl. 1978) (Ed.), *I write what I Like. Steve Biko. A selection of his writings*, Oxford: Heinemann Publishers.

³⁹ The notion of Black for Steve Biko, was an inclusion of all oppressed and marginalized people under the apartheid government.

⁴⁰ At his funeral he was described by Emeritus Desmond Tutu in his eulogy as, ‘A young man completely dedicated to the pursuit of ... peace ...’ Allen, *Archbishop Desmond Tutu*, 19.

⁴¹ Cloete, M. (2019), ‘Steve Biko: Black consciousness and the african other – the struggle for the political’, *Angelaki* 24(2), 104.

and violence' are engaged. Fanon, Biko and Katongole conflate these two concepts as if radicalization cannot be divorced from violence. Katongole, however, starts with the idea of 'revolutionary madness.'⁴² He argues that an essential component for changing the narrative for Africa, particularly those nation-states considered only to act violently – is to depart from the script that states 'nothing is good in Africa', a narrative which is also in the interest of the general population. He pertinently argues that radicalness has nothing to do with violence, rather with changing the very nature of the Church to becoming a space in which members would live the 'new' story, one that would challenge the nation-state narrative. It would form communities that would live a story which would subvert the neo-colonial narrative. In so doing, Katongole decouples radicalization from physical violence.

It is also evident that these authors make a point of not starting from the default position in relation to violence, in other words, one which is less focused on who acted violently (the physical aspect), than on who created the conditions for radicalization and violence. The interlocutors in this section go beyond the 'victim' and 'perpetrator' discourse, instead they seek a level of human dignity common to all human beings through social re-imagining.

Katongole: Africa and the unchanged script

Changing Africa's narrative

Katongole approaches violence that occurs in Africa in a similar vein, pointing out that it would only continue if the current narrative were sustained in African politics. Africans have bought into a narrative (script) produced by the West because they were made to believe that they do not have a history. He writes, '... nation-state politics performs the same discouraging drumbeat that accentuates Africa's poverty, backwardness and tribalism...our analysis has shown that this discouraging drumbeat is connected to the story of denial – "nothing good out of Africa" – that grounds nation-state legitimacies.'⁴³ The 'nation-state' narrative was to imagine Africa as a state without a history, one that can be exploited. The colonists came and exploited Africa and molested

⁴² In his chapter 'Daring to invent Africa', Katongole suggests three things that would be needed to change the narrative within African nation states: 'intellectual clarity, revolutionary madness, and commitment and sacrifice.' This, Katongole argues, was President Sankara's strategy for the five years rule of the former French colony in Upper Volta, that is, to change the narrative of the African nation state. However, this was also the root cause of his assassination on 15 October 1988 by the former president who argued, '... Sankara jeopardized foreign relations with former colonial power France and with neighboring countries.' Katongole, E. (2011), *The Sacrifice of Africa. A Political Theology for Africa*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: WMB Eerdmans Publishers, 89.

⁴³ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 80.

the continent and the same is being done by the bourgeoisie and ‘nationalists’ in neo-colonial contexts. They are far removed from the ‘general population’ (the social) and their everyday struggles. Katongole believes that as long as Africans buy into this Western narrative, Africa will suffer the same consequences as it did during colonial rule. It will breed violence from the masses. Indeed, Katongole links the violence in Africa directly with ‘nation-state’ history.

Any attempt to abstract it from this story projects the violence as a ‘tribal’ or ‘ethnic’ affair, some kind of bizarre cultural trait of Africans – just the sort of thing Africans do now and again:

Nevertheless, this is misleading, for there are often no cultural, ‘ethnic’, or ‘tribal’ interests at stake. The phenomenon of widespread violence in post-colonial Africa – military coups, civil unrest, state repression, insecurity – must itself be placed in the narrative of the politics of competing for elite interests and power struggles. The nation-state project in Africa has not questioned this story of colonial violence and dispossession, but has in fact, neatly reproduced it, thereby becoming the modern embodiment of King Leopold’s Ghost.⁴⁴

Katongole states that the ‘nation-state’ narrative frames the lives of Africans:

within a telos of ‘nothing is good here’ (hopelessness) and thus shaping expectations of mere survival while producing the very same hopelessness and desperation it assumes. This denial of any transcendental purpose desecralizes the lives of African men and women, making them cheap and easily disposable. Given the fight for political spoils that is the permanent feature of Africa’s elite politics, it is not difficult to see how the masses become easy prey for recruitment into whatever cause – tribalism, warfare, banditry – that advances the self-interests of the elite. In the end, this widespread desperation underwritten by nation-state politics in Africa constitutes the ultimate wastage – indeed the sacrifice of Africa.⁴⁵

The African people themselves start believing a narrative which devalues African lives to ‘nothingness’, a narrative that downgrades Africa’s institutions and their culture, a narrative perpetuated by those that stole real control over their lives from them.⁴⁶

Katongole argues that the violence which occurs in Africa is indeed the result of the ‘nation-state’ narrative and that Africa needs a new ‘story’, a different foundational narrative or narratives that can give rise to new expectations and a new imaginative landscape within which a new future in

⁴⁴ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 79.

⁴⁵ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 83.

⁴⁶ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 82-83

Africa can take shape.⁴⁷ There is a desperate need to search for a new future in Africa, which is also the search for a different starting point for politics, according to Katongole. He makes it clear that the 'nation-state' narrative has not been successful in narrowing the gap between the general population and neo-colonial governments. What is needed instead is one where the general population would be integral to the decision-making processes and be crucial in engaging as partners within the struggle to alleviate poverty.⁴⁸

The role of the Church in changing Africa's script

Africa, which needs this new story, is well-positioned in terms of its biblical narrative to create the space needed for such a narrative to develop, argues Katongole.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Church should also re-imagine its role in order to become an integral part of the social and political sphere. The Church exists not only to comment or contribute to other social and political sciences, rather it should itself allow people to imagine their lives differently in the social sphere through a theological imagination.⁵⁰ He argues that the reason the Church is so far removed from the majority of the population is because of the nation-state narrative it adopts.

Katongole argues that the Church should be the place where a new and compelling story should be offered and practiced.⁵¹ It should not only be concerned with the 'life beyond' but with the Kingdom of God, the 'here and now'. This story is one that has at its centre the struggles of the general population (for example, lack of sanitation, agriculture), who would be able to imagine their social realities differently. A story of 'beginnings' which would allow their present struggles to be perceived through a narrative in which their human lives can become meaningful. The Church must confront the historical narratives and overcome it with a different narrative. However, Katongole cautions:

⁴⁷ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 83.

⁴⁸ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 83.

⁴⁹ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 113.

⁵⁰ Katongole's engagement with the work of John Milbank is interesting. Milbank argues that theology should not just leave engagement with social reality to other disciplines because no discipline engages in a 'dispassionate analysis' as they are themselves 'carriers of political, moral and theological understandings of reality'. It is therefore evident that their accounts of reality can never be neutral and would mostly be done from the perspective of a 'nation-state' narrative. The integral role that theology should play is not merely to add theories from other disciplines to 'reality', rather to be able to provide their own view of social reality. He argues that theology is part of social science and should therefore not give up its privileged position. Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 115-116.

⁵¹ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 113.

... such a search for an alternative history is neither initiated by, nor grounded in, the politics of the nation-state and its ideologies (globalization, new world order, etc.), to which the Church can contribute its social pronouncements or spiritual inspiration...these are ideologies whose top-down structure perpetuates patterns of alienation and dependency. Thus, the search for an alternative history takes place at the grassroots in communities of faith and the ordinary realities of everyday life.⁵²

Katongole argues that the Church should become a space where ‘it opens up and interrupts the hegemonic practices of the “nation-state”’. Examples include gestures of peace to interrupt the constant anticipation of war and people arming themselves, servitude interrupting power and domination, and charity and self-sacrifice interrupting the politics of control and selfish ambition.⁵³ He argues that there should be a shift from the big stories of power and violence in Africa to a story that focuses on the struggles of the ‘small people of God’.⁵⁴ Indeed, those stories require a connection with people on a grassroots level, one not provided by the nation-state narrative. It was one that continued a narrative in which the national elite is so far-removed from the majority of people that their frustration spills over into violence.

Katongole argues that stories in Africa that tell of power as domination and violence should be replaced by different ones. It is clear, therefore, that he does not support physical violence as playing a part in this new script for African’s well-being. Katongole writes, ‘... the challenge for Africa is not simply to achieve sovereignty in order to determine its destiny, but rather to interrupt this vision of power as a denomination with a different account of power and thus a different vision of society and politics.’⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Katongole continues to subscribe to the notion of ‘revolutionary madness’ that would radically change the patterns and the narrative of Africa.⁵⁶ For it to be sustainable, however, a different story about power should be imagined. The Church should provide such a story as embodied through ‘Jesus incarnate’. He argues that the story of the incarnation should be made real to people, through a ‘theology of relocation’ of the Church, where the Church lives and works ‘with a community of people at the extreme margins of society, a people that were completely abandoned by the official establishment’ and through such actions provide them with new meaning and deconstruct the ‘nation-state’.⁵⁷

⁵² Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 109.

⁵³ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 121.

⁵⁴ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 121.

⁵⁵ Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 129.

⁵⁶ Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 131.

⁵⁷ Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 132.

Missiology: changing the South African script

Vosloo cautions that if we (in this case, missionaries and missiologists) do not engage with the past, it might lead to further polarization and violence in South Africa. Therefore, he argues that we cannot run away from the questions of ‘how we remember and how we construct the past’.⁵⁸

Missionaries, as well as some churches both during apartheid and currently in the post-apartheid context, are proclaiming the ‘narrative’ of Jesus of Nazareth in such a way that it does not destabilize the apartheid narrative. The apartheid narrative might have allowed and sustained peace within ‘white’ communities but it simultaneously aggravated the pain and suffering of other (black) communities. The process of radicalization is one of the challenges faced by a non-negotiable narrative aimed at excluding other narratives that might be equally ‘true’. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the practice of mission in society should be an ‘open-ended’ narrative approach in a racially divided South Africa.⁵⁹

The question arises: when missionaries, churches and missiologists respond to the situation in South Africa, to what extent do they create an ‘alternative’ story in post-apartheid? Furthermore, do they suggest a new way of social imagination, one that would subvert the narrative of former colonial powers? The Church and missiologists should provide a new way of interpreting ‘reality’. This means considering theology as a ‘social science’, one that would allow people to imagine the social realm differently rather than only carrying ‘theological contributions’ on the social sciences as Osmer suggests.⁶⁰ Theology (including missiology) and the Church should, therefore, create space in which a new narrative can emerge that will be in the interest of the poor and the marginalized.

During the apartheid years, South Africa had various evangelical outreach programmes among black communities. The focus of these projects was on a diagnosis of sin that placed an emphasis on personal wrongdoing and less of a focus on ‘structural’ sin. The challenge with such an approach is not that people are unwilling to focus on their own ‘personal salvation’, something quite often the focus of evangelism, but that ‘structural’ sin as well as structural conditions have not been central in missionaries’ narratives. This is still prevalent

⁵⁸ Vosloo, R. (2017), *Reforming Memory. Essays on South African Church and Theological History*, Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 66.

⁵⁹ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 66.

⁶⁰ Osmer, R.R. (2008), *Practical Theology. An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. This is also Katongole’s argument in his discussion on the position of theology within the current political and social sphere. See Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 133.

in most 'black' communities and churches that continue within the narrative of 'spiritualizing' the conditions of the poor and the marginalized. It is the 'as long as you go to heaven' narrative that forces individuals to internalize political and social science narratives. The Church does not provide a different narrative for its members, especially through its evangelization projects.

Missionaries and missiologists are at the forefront of sharing the 'good news'. I suggest therefore, that missionaries should intentionally deconstruct and reconstruct the narrative of the past that has been the cause for radicalization and violence in South Africa. People should be able to use their stories of struggle and marginalization to create a story that would foster human dignity. The narrative construction within mission discourse has to do with how missionaries construct the experiences of people within a specific context, whereas within missiology, it has to do with the secondary sources that they select and engage with (interlocutors) to construct a narrative of the 'other'.

Missionaries and missiologists still have the power to 'tell' the story and sustain that story throughout history. The work of Paul Ricoeur is valuable in terms of his discussion on responsible historiography. Missionaries and missiologists present the stories, are the ones that would translate and interpret the stories of the 'other' and should therefore do it responsibly in terms of the narrative it constructs (or reconstructs). Ricoeur, in his book *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2004), speaks about the 'historiographical operation' and the three phases thereof.⁶¹ The first is when the historian collects data (the proof), secondly then interpreting that data, and thirdly 'representing' that data.⁶² However, Vosloo cautions against the idea that a historian approaches historical events and archives without 'bias' and the idea that a historian is 'value-free' is far from the truth.⁶³

Particularly within black communities in South Africa, missiologists should question the narrative that sustains the oppression and marginalization of the poor. In 1990, Dirkie Smit argued for a narrative approach when he responded to the contribution of Nico Smith, a missionary and missiologist.⁶⁴ Smit asserts that the story that strikes him the most in South Africa is that of of

⁶¹ Ricoeur, P. (2004), *Memory, History and Forgetting* (translation by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer), Chicago: Chicago Press.

⁶² Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 19-22.

⁶³ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 22.

⁶⁴ He refers to the storytelling of Nico Smith (a missiologist) that would in his sermons and conversations used stories to illustrate how people were humiliated because of their race and their socio-economic background. This is therefore a narrative that focuses on the structural conditions of the marginalized and the oppressed, which is vital to state. Smit, D. (1990), 'Prof Nico se storie...oor narratiewe teologie, herinneringe en hoop', in Hoffmeyer, M., Kritzing, J. & Saayman, W., *Wit Afrikane? In gesprek met Nico Smith*, Kaapstad: Taurus, 115.

pain, suffering, and the injustice(s) in the apartheid society. It is interesting to note as a 'white' South African he does not articulate the violence in South Africa, which was heightened at the time of his publication before the first democratic elections in 1990.⁶⁵

There are various ways in which missiologists can play a role in constructing a new narrative for social cohesion, and it would address the violence that often emerges from the profound inequality in South African society. Holland and Henriot's (1983) 'pastoral cycle' provides a valuable theological method in the construction of a new narrative, one that would expose the destructive powers of the day and enable the voices of the marginalized and the oppressed to be heard.⁶⁶ It views society from the perspective of 'decolonialism' which takes into account the shaping of society and structures within colonial and post-colonial society. Missiologists such as Kritzinger further develops this method into the praxis matrix, one which aims to change the livelihood of the most vulnerable. This method commences with people's stories, demonstrating solidarity with the most vulnerable and oppressed.

Vosloo's proposal of projects of 'shared historiography' would also take seriously the fact that our (black and white) histories are interwoven with others.⁶⁷ These projects would aim to explore possibilities of 'joint memory work and historiography'.⁶⁸ In a country like South Africa, where missiologists have access to vulnerable communities, bringing those communities' stories together, as well as searching and exploring their interwovenness together with them would be crucial too. Therefore, rather than engaging in narratives of communities in isolation, the interaction between communities in search of a common narrative that would aim at human dignity should be encouraged. Such projects would need to be 'sensitive to the fragile nature of such an undertaking' and missiologists and missionaries should be conscious that 'what would be viewed in one community as ... founding moments, turning points or events worthy of celebration might represent a low point, indeed a wound or a scar, in the memory of another.'⁶⁹

Vosloo also suggests the use and value of 'oral history' projects rather than merely relying on historical and documented evidence.⁷⁰ This would bring more stories within the 'collective' memory of South Africa to the fore, possibly

⁶⁵ Smit, *Prof Nico*, 115.

⁶⁶ Holland, J & Henriot, P (1983), *Social Analysis. Linking Faith and Justice*, Maryknoll: New York: Orbis Books, 5.

⁶⁷ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 24.

⁶⁸ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 74-75.

⁶⁹ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 75.

⁷⁰ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 25-26.

adding some unknown atrocities and painful memories that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not able to capture in its seven published volumes.

In his work Vosloo references Alasdair MacIntyre, particularly his arguments on ‘living tradition’.⁷¹ MacIntyre talks about the ‘storied self’ who cannot be dislocated from a person’s ‘social and historical embeddedness’.⁷² This tradition is ‘historically extended’ (our views are part of historical developments), and ‘socially embedded’ – meaning that our tradition is part of the communities, narratives, practices, and institutions that we are all part of in our respective contexts. Vosloo therefore asserts, ‘the history of our lives is embedded in and made intelligible by the larger and longer histories of several traditions.’⁷³ For missionaries and missiologists, the idea of ‘living traditions’ posited by MacIntyre would mean that narratives should always be written with both the community and the ‘self’, who is very much part of the narratives, to form a collective history.

Vosloo remains critical of those who believe that gathering and collecting ‘primary sources’ would automatically mean they have a complete ‘story’. However, he states, ‘even “sources” do not tell the complete story, and even the best archives offer us a limited window onto the past. Access to archives and primary sources does not absolve us from the task of interpreting the sources in the light of the narrative and rhetorical frameworks that make them intelligible.’⁷⁴ Do missionaries therefore understand the broader story and the skills needed to narrate a story truthfully and with integrity?

He refers to Margaret Miles, who states:

A history of Christian thought must narrate the triumphal story in which a small local cult within Judaism became a world religion and empire. But it must also include the failures, abuses, and violence of the Christian past. In short, it must be both sympathetic and critical. It must be sympathetic to present the vivid beauty of Christian resources of ideas, artworks, and practices. And it must be critical because it is not only a history of the past but also a history of the present.⁷⁵

Vosloo argues that there is much criticism about the lack of church historians engaging with the social sciences, and it is within this vacuum that missionaries should tell the stories of those like Steve Biko and other politicians that interpret the social and political situation in South Africa as part of the

⁷¹ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 56.

⁷² Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 56.

⁷³ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 57.

⁷⁴ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 67.

⁷⁵ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 68.

process of constructing the South African narrative.⁷⁶ There are examples of various esteemed missiologists that look through the social lenses of Steve Biko.

Narrative missiology: A proposal to counter radicalization and violence

Fanon, Katongole, and Biko allow their readers to re-imagine notions of radicalization and violence from a different ‘beginning’ - the story of the poorest of the poor, the masses that have been removed from the center of neo-colonial power. Radicalization and violence will take on a different shape and form from that perspective.

The story of colonization in South Africa is that of a special type (apartheid), one where the colonizer and the colonized shared the same geopolitical space. Missionaries, mission organizations, and missiologists had to proclaim the ‘good news’ within this context. This is almost a replica of the post-colonial conditions in Algeria during the time of Fanon.

One of the main challenges faced in contemporary society is that apartheid was a brutal system implemented by individuals who black people still have to engage with every day without showing their anger. How do they overcome their suspicions if the structural systems (economic, political) are still perpetuating the past? What will the missionaries’ ‘narrative’ be, especially in the post-apartheid situation?

As with the Crusades, it was not the Christian mission that was guilty, rather, it harnessed very effectively an enterprise engaged in violence. Bevans and Schroeder state:

If Phillip Jenkins is correct in predicting that Christianity in the future will tend to take on a more militant attitude, particularly in Africa and Asia, we believe that one of the Christian mission’s most significant challenges will be to help people to understand that the gospel has its roots in shalom, Jesus’ call for non-violence and the Bible’s vision of new heavens and new earth.⁷⁷

Should there be only one narrative? Has mission always been a vehicle for propagating one ‘narrative’? The narrative certainly always tended to favour the one who told the story. Theology, too, has become a site where one predominant narrative has been contested. The story has now been told from a group

⁷⁶ Vosloo, *Reforming Memory*, 69.

⁷⁷ Bevans, S. & Schroeder, R. (2004), *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*, New York: Orbis Books, 375.

perspective. Whether from the perspective of a church (Stanley Hauerwas)⁷⁸ or whether from a marginalized position, a story's details favour the narrator of the story most of the time. The modern missionary is therefore crucial in the message that he/she tells.

Moreover, everyone should be critical of the narrator because he/she will, in most instances, be presented as the hero. One of the main problems regarding the stories that missionaries tell in present-day South Africa is simply, what are they telling and how is the story construed? Who is it that would be crippled and trampled upon today as a result of these stories?

⁷⁸ Hauerwas, S. (1991), *A Character of Community. Towards a Constructive Social Ethic*, London: University of Notre Dame.

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Human Dignity in the Process of Radicalization

Elizabeta Kitanovic

Abstract

This article argues that human rights law is a suitable instrument to combat religious radicalization. To this end, it is necessary to implement human rights in national legislation. Politicization and instrumentalization of international law stand in the way of this process. In order to combat inequality and discrimination, the stereotypes surrounding religious communities will have to change. To this end, diversity must be enshrined in legislation.

Introduction

Everybody has human dignity. That is the understanding of those who believe that human beings are created in the image of God. Human dignity does not have a colour, nationality, race, ethnicity, sex, age, religion or belief. Both perpetrator and victim have the same human dignity that no one can take away from them. It might sound surprising, but there is a sense of good in everyone regardless of the sin one may have committed. What has happened to the human dignity of those who have become radicalized or those drawn into a psychological process of becoming radicalized? What aspects should be considered in the process by which someone is radicalized through religion?

Children and their religious identity

There are many reasons why one might be susceptible to radicalism. An individual may wish to become part of the community and experience a sense of belonging.¹ This feeling of belonging is primarily created within our own

¹ For more see: Final Report Summary - RELIGARE (Religious Diversity and Secular Models in Europe – Innovative Approaches to Law and Policy) <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/244635/reporting> [30.09.2020].

family and in our social or religious community. Belonging to a certain family can be characterized by the sense of love, but also by one of rejection. It can be both a positive and negative experience as is the case for one's social and religious environment. If a child comes from a family with a migrant background, it can experience discrimination and bullying already from an early age. In article 24 of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights,² in describing the rights of a child, says:

1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.
3. Every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests.

Article 24 is a basic precondition, the minimum conditions necessary for a positive start to the development of a child's disposition. The human dignity of a child is very fragile during its physical and mental development. In which cases do life experiences become definitive for a human being? At some point during their lives children may take the wrong path triggered by various events.

Difficult childhoods as a source of radicalization

Because they cannot invoke legislation themselves, children³ represent the most vulnerable group when it comes to human rights. They can be discriminated against on multiple grounds, for example, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, belonging to a particular ethnic group, speaking a certain language, coming from a migrant background, or living in poverty.

Children can face physical and emotional bullying⁴ because of such differences which is often very painful and may cause mental health problems

² The UN Convention on Rights of Child celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> [22.09.2020].

³ Child rights in the EU, *Supporting you, supporting them*, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019 https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-child-rights-in-the-eu_en.pdf [7.10.2020].

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-talk-your-children-about-bullying> [22.09.2020].

and create long-lasting emotional damage for them, their parents and their social and religious environment.

Child-perpetrators usually 'come from a perceived higher social status or position of power, such as children who are bigger, stronger, or perceived to be popular,'⁵ those who feel powerful enough to start abusing other children who usually belong to vulnerable groups⁶ like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, unstable and poor families, children with disabilities, children experiencing uncertainty about their sexual orientation, or those belonging to a religious community that is different from the majority religious identity in a certain educational environment.

There are several signs that are common to child-perpetrators who bully other children: they can experience a lack of attention at home, have difficulty in finding a place within their own family, be exposed to bullying from their family members, or have difficulties dealing with a complex emotions that they may experience without knowing it.⁷

Such situations can lead to a child's deep feeling of anger which, later on, can align with and be expressed through radical religious ideologies. This can happen due to the need to belong to something more sacred, more just, and with the supposition that one is serving a higher cause. If the child is discriminated against primarily on religious grounds at an early age (such as when he or she belongs to a religious minority/migrant minority), and when this is combined with other reasons for discrimination such as race or language, a child might potentially develop ongoing anger against the majority religious identities of their host country or country of residence.

If these children's parents are also ostracized in their workplace due to having a different religious identity, then both can harbour feelings of social rejection. As a result, these negative feelings can be reflected in aggression being displayed towards a dominant majority or minority due to the ongoing fear of not being accepted, often because the right to self-determination⁸ and the right to be different⁹ is not recognized in the society as whole.

Unfortunately, one gets the impression that not all major religious communities - or dominant minor religious communities - accept God's image

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-talk-your-children-about-bullying> [22.09.2020].

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-talk-your-children-about-bullying> [22.09.2020].

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-talk-your-children-about-bullying> [22.09.2020].

⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 19, 1966, art. 1, 'All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> [1.10.2020].

⁹ Hannum, H. (1998), 'The Right of Self-Determination in the Twenty-First Century', *Washington & Lee Law Review* 55(3), 773.

socially and religiously. Parents and children become despondent as they are not accepted, but are instead treated as second-class citizens either because anti-discrimination laws are not implemented, or due to the lack of organizations promoting equality that would help deal with such cases.

Inequality and discrimination as source of radicalization

When an individual has negative feelings such as anger and hatred within them, they tend to isolate themselves. They also have a tendency to look for answers themselves to heal their soul and release the internal spiritual pain which they are experiencing, a pain which is very difficult to overcome. This kind of frame of mind provides fertile ground for a religious, community, or political leader to sow and increase feelings of insecurity in someone and to convey the need for justice and revenge. If the social, religious, cultural, and linguistic identity of the community is threatened and constantly exposed to humiliation and degradation, the possibility to recruit people from that community into terrorist activities is much higher.¹⁰

New recruits to terrorist groups believe that they will achieve a sense of justice and relief.¹¹ They believe that despite taking part in terrorist activities, they are walking on the staircase to heaven. They also believe that there is a reward to their martyrdom. Promotion of this sort of idea, justifying terrorist acts as an act of serving God, cannot be either theologically or legally justified. From a theological perspective, God has graciously given life to all human beings and therefore taking life away from anyone is the biggest sin imaginable. Legally, the right to live¹² is protected by law which can be found in article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, a religious minority not in a dominant position in society might reject social assimilation into a secular society if it is steered in one direction only. This means that only this religious minority must adapt to the major religion, social culture, and language.

When the identity of a religious minority is not accepted, there is an even greater fear with regard to assimilation, something which often does not feel right. This feeling can develop even if a person is making an effort to becoming

¹⁰ For more on this see Kielgard, Mark D. and Julian, Tam Hey Juan (2018), 'Stopping terrorism at its source: conceptual flaws of the deterrence-based counterterrorism regime and committing to a pre-emptive causal model', *Journal of Law & Policy* 26(2), 1.

¹¹ Kielgard & Julian, *Stopping terrorism*, 4.

¹² European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf [1.10.2020]

integrated. In this case there will most likely be feelings of rejection and rebellion and if there is constant pressure, the anger of both the individual and community grows.

People who identify with a religious minority, often a vulnerable position to be in, can ask the question: where do I really belong for I am also created in the image of God? It is difficult to keep going and pretending to be part of a society which doesn't accept differences, one often created on the principle of 'one size fits all' despite talking about unity in diversity.

If a certain religious identity is treated unfairly, humiliated for easier economic exploitation, regarded as second class and never given the chance to reach its true potential, then anger and feelings of revenge will provide suitable ground for the sowing and acceptance of radical ideas. The threat of possible exploitation, the feeling of inferiority, and inequality are all factors that can potentially fuel anger in a context of unfair treatment and lack of certainty. Those whose identity is exploited will feel immediate acceptance when confronted of idea of social change. That social change tends to be of radical nature.

Populism as source of radicalization

Populist ideas (espoused by both the Left and Right) and propaganda including the notion that 'others' and 'people who are different' are not welcomed in society ('they take our jobs' is a familiar populist accusation) often have the effect of bringing people towards accepting radical ideas. Ideas which call for action and give purpose to the existence of certain religious communities, precisely through their religious identity.

If a religious leader spreads messages of hate against a certain group of people during a sermon, listeners (the faithful) can become hooked to the idea that God is related with hate and, given God's human characteristics, can come to think that God really does hate people from other religions and social backgrounds.

Unfortunately, hatred against people from other religious communities is often preached through labelling the other as 'heretical' or as 'infidels', and through spreading the hate messages against other human beings with the intention of fostering a stronger attachment to the religious identity of that particular religious group.

Spreading hate messages not against sin, but against ‘sinners’¹³, has led to many criminal acts - believers being inspired to go to war, commit suicide and take the lives of other people in the process. It is also sometimes the case that the ‘faithful’ who attend religious services do not necessarily live by the principles of their religion’s doctrine.¹⁴

The faithful can be both active in terms of attending religious services yet at the same time not be a ‘good messenger’ or live by the principles interpreted positively from Holy Books.

It should not be forgotten that it takes a great deal of spiritual effort for a human being to create both spiritual integrity and religious identity.

The religious identity of a migrant who comes from the context where one’s religion is dominant to suddenly being regarded as minority – in the numeric sense – in an entirely different context is a situation that can provide the motivation for radicalized behavior.

If people are discriminated against for more than one particular reason, then the emotional pain and anger is much greater. It took a long time for the principle of multiple discrimination¹⁵ to be accepted in the human rights legal system. Now discrimination on more than one counts is considered more serious than discrimination only one count.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states in article 1 that human dignity is inviolable and that it must be protected and respected and, in its article 3 (1), that a human being has the right to the integrity of the person and that everyone has the right to respect his or her physical and mental integrity.

The most secret and meaningful thing that God has given is life. Life is sometimes easy, sometimes the path we take in trying to reach our goals is thorny. In order to reach our life goals, religions provide the guidance of religious texts to us and ideas which can serve to bring people closer to God. The messages that we find in religious texts, if well interpreted, are timeless. However, these messages can also be interpreted in a dangerous way, one which sparks religious hatred and targets innocent people and which can lead to physical aggression and verbal disputes.

¹³ The meaning of ‘sinner’ depends on the theological interpretation of the preacher who has a target audience of faithful in front of him/her.

¹⁴ Stephen R. Covey, S.R. (1989-2004), *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – powerful lesson in personal change*, GPI Group UK, 125.

¹⁵ Uccelari, P. (2008), ‘Multiple discrimination: How Law can Reflect Reality’ in *The Equal Rights Review*, Vol. One, London: Equal Rights Trust, 24.

How do we change stereotypes about religious communities?

Religious identity is usually very closely linked to cultural and linguistic identity. Religions have their habits, rituals, and traditions that people follow. The fundamental right to express one's cultural identity is very well stipulated in article 15(2)¹⁶ of the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It states that everybody has the right to have and preserve a cultural life, in terms of 'conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.'¹⁷

Accommodate diversity

In reality, it means that states which have ratified the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights should have part of their budget directed to developing these cultural rights. This work would help decrease ignorance about the integral identity of religious minorities or, more generally, vulnerable groups who should have the right to access cultural goods and services and the fundamental right to develop their cultural and religious identity. In order to empower vulnerable groups, it would be important that the integration process works both ways, in other words that the host country offers a new language and lifestyle while also showing a readiness to accommodate the diversity of the newcomers and accept their cultural and religious habits. This would work on the principles of welcoming the stranger and loving the 'migrant' neighbour who could be Jewish, Muslim, a vulnerable family member, Roma, or indeed from any other belief, social or ethnic background.

The integration of vulnerable groups and the acceptance of the equality of the human dignity is required from both sides and follows the principle of 'it takes two to tango', as opposed to the contrary view of 'us against them'. For the majority of society, it is not always easy to accept the concept of equality in our humanity.

Genesis 4.9 reads: 'Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know", he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"'¹⁸ So, our 'brother' is any human being that God has created in his image and likeness. In Galatians 3.28 we see 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'¹⁹ This message is mirrored in the present-day EU anti-discrimination directive.

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> [24.09.2020]

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> [24.09.2020]

¹⁸ <https://biblehub.com/genesis/4-9.htm> Genesis 4.9 [24.9.2020]

¹⁹ <https://biblehub.com/galatians/3-28.htm> Galatians 3.28 [24.09.2020]

We can see that Jesus introduced the principle of social and religious security in order to eradicate religious and social discrimination.

Unfortunately, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is not so explicit in its aim. Article 15.2 only obliges UN state parties ‘to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.’²⁰

Avoid stereotypes and generalizations

The spreading of negative ideas and stereotypes and of scapegoating via media about certain religious communities in addition to the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories all bring bitterness to our daily reality which results in suffering.

An antidote to these new and extensive developments would be the cooperation of civil society as a whole, academia, youth organizations and religious communities in order to convey an accurate picture and reduce ignorance about ‘the other’.

Discrimination, intolerance, racism, and xenophobia against religious communities are all factors that can lead to radicalization. People who direct those behaviours against others are often not aware that by discriminating and being intolerant they are causing hurt and creating fertile ground for revenge, self-harming thoughts, actions and more pain.

The way out of this negative perception lies in the acknowledgement of other human beings’ pain. Such an approach needs to be handled carefully, avoiding competition about who is the bigger victim along with comparisons about different situations. Any discrimination experienced on either religious grounds or race needs to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and the principle of ‘one size fits all’ should be avoided.

In some societies, religious leaders who flirt with populists do not realize that they are putting their community, indeed society at large, in danger and that the political gain is very small compared to the damage they can potentially do.

Understand human vulnerability and weakness

There is not a moment when, somewhere, a human being does not commit some sort of sin, whether these are sinful thoughts, words, or deeds. In training to reach maximum spiritual potential, one needs to try to reach a higher

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx> [09.04.2021]

level of spirituality and come closer to God, feeling his love and mercy and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual education in the religious community can be a great help in decreasing social and political tensions among communities. Religious leaders should be the first to help decrease scapegoating and to help young people change their behaviours and attitudes, preventing them from adopting a vengeful mindset and developing a picture of a common enemy.

When the faithful are exposed to messages of hate within a community, the faithful should be responsible for creating alternative narratives with positive content, ones which are essentially loving towards other human beings.

Even if we are taught to hate sin within our religious communities, we shouldn't lose our spiritual integrity if we love the sinner who publicly or privately confesses the sin.

When a person chooses to sin, or when they make mistakes, it is often considered to be spiritual, mental and physical weakness that has somehow violated a person's dignity. It is precisely these people who need our special attention, help, and love. They need to be supported by their social and religious communities to help them move forward and not being rejected.

Even if religious books constantly talk about love, it can be hard to continuously practice it in our family, workplace, social and religious community. We can at times become bored of being right and kind all the time. Practicing a spiritual way of life is fascinating, albeit without doubt difficult to do every second of every day. Doing our best is the way forward.

Protect the vulnerable from hate speech

The greatest attention needs to be directed to vulnerable groups like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, children, divorced mothers and fathers, and more generally families going through traumatic experiences in our society. When vulnerable groups are exposed to hate speech in their religious or social communities, the duty of the worshipper is to report²¹ that hate speech because it has the potential to lead to hate crimes. In this regard religious majorities and minorities can both be affected by hate based on religious, ethnic, or racial grounds.

Through reporting hate crime,²² which takes place not only within religious communities, but more publicly too, humanity has the chance to make progress in working towards more and better prevention mechanisms.

²¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign/reporting-hate-speech> [24.09.2020]

²² <https://www.osce.org/odihr/human-dimension-mechanisms> [30.09.2020]

Strong religious identity is the key to engaging with other people of different faiths and participating in progressive interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The stronger religious identity is, and attachment to God's mission to love one's neighbour, the easier it will be to work with each other in mutual recognition of religious identities.

Religious identity is strongly linked to the rights of religious minorities. Religious majorities also have religious identity, but these communities more often retain a dominant position in society.

When we think of religious minorities there are certain stereotypes linked to such communities. This is detrimental as ignorance can exist where there is a lack of understanding of the religious identity another human being. At the heart of becoming closer as fellow human beings, both a legal and theological point of view, depends on respect for the equal, dignity, and rights for all people and equality before the law.

Promote dialogue and education

If we want to ensure the eradication of religious radicalization more dialogue is needed among various religious communities. Despite differing political, cultural, and social realities, people remain people and basic needs are very much common to all human beings. Strengthening religious identity has a positive influence on others as well as bringing about the historical recognition of culture in terms of religious art, philosophy, morality, and ethics.

Promoting education in the area of religious and cultural diversity can help to reduce discrimination and intolerance as well as strengthening cultural respect and understanding while at the same time retaining one's own religious identity. In working on the prevention of religious radicalization, it is important to avoid generalities about religious communities to become aware of cultural and religious differences in order to avoid stereotyping. It is not enough to merely hope that when we notice a threat of religious radicalization to hope that the problem will simply go away, as it is very unlikely to do so. We need to be aware that challenges exist in order to be worked through and to make us stronger and help us avoid falling into the trap of ignorance. God has provided enough for everybody because of His love for created things. Human greed is the biggest problem of this world and because of it we fail to see God's image²³ in others. God is gracious and therefore everybody has something to give.

²³ Genesis 1:27.

Conclusion

Clear anti-discrimination and anti-racism regulations in the field of employment, housing, and education, as well as access to good services is key to preventing religious radicalization. In this area there is a task for everyone, regardless of whether a person is poor or rich, vulnerable or not. All of us can give love and spread positive messages in our own particular way. Treating others with respect, kindness, and compassion allows us to avoid attacking people and instead accommodate religious identity in all spheres of life.

If the state would ensure the implementation of human rights, radicalization and terrorist activities would almost certainly decrease. Acts of war in the name of democracy, human rights and rule of law or everlasting peace are the instrumentalization and politization of these values. There is lack of political coherence in justifying violence for their promotion.

This is the reason why many people do not trust international systems of human rights, democracy, and rule of law. The abuse of international legal systems might make some individuals richer, but humanity is made poorer by it. It is the vulnerable population who pay the highest price. The task of every human being is to work and protect its own dignity and the task of the state is to guarantee a legal framework for the equal treatment and effective implementation of laws to protect the human dignity of all people equally. The image of God in every human being is protected by both secular and God's laws. It is up to society as a whole to start implementing this effectively. This is the task not only for God or the law and policy makers, but for every human being.

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Radicalization and Divine Violence

Johann Meylahn

Abstract

This chapter was presented as a paper as part of a research project on violence and radicalization. It can be argued that radicalization can often be linked to identity politics and a certain political status quo, therefore the chapter will focus on divine violence in relation to the subject (identity) of radicalization. The idea of divine violence will be contrasted with the ideas of religious (fundamentalist) violence and ideological violence in the context of Benjamin's (1996) critique of violence, from his essay, 'Kritik der Gewalt'. Following Benjamin, divine violence will be contrasted to the two other forms of violence, namely: state-preserving and state-forming violence. Benjamin brings divine violence into conversation with 'Life', one could argue with 'mere life' or 'bare life', and therefore thereby demonstrating a link to the 'death drive', especially to Freud's concept of the death drive as interpreted by Lacan. This chapter will focus mainly on the presiding European Union's understanding of radicalization and on bringing that interpretation into conversation with the notions of divine violence and the death drive, via Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics versus police. This chapter will conclude by arguing that there is a need for politics, as what is currently being offered is a police construction of radicalization, one which does not address the underlying 'signifying stress' or 'symbolic misery' that is experienced, and which could be a contributing factor in the rise in radicalization.

Benjamin's Kritik der Gewalt

In his 1996 essay, 'Kritik der Gewalt', Walter Benjamin posits that the task of his essay is to expound the relationship between law and justice.¹ Violence is firstly a force or rather a cause or a means that consequently becomes violent only when it enters into a moral relationship and it is justified by one moral law or another. For example, the force that is used to kill somebody, or even to kill

¹ Benjamin, W. (1996), 'Critique of violence', in *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, (edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, translated by Edmund Jephcott), Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 237.

a group of people, can be interpreted as just and therefore morally acceptable on certain occasions, and yet, at other times, it is condemned as a heinous crime against humanity. These arguments used to justify murder are not only found in the context of the pro and contra arguments concerning the death sentence, but also in the context of ‘just war’ theories, and most recently the war on terror. The idea of being able to wage war on terror has recently justified wars globally, and police violence nationally, in various Western countries. The idea of waging war on terrorism is a form of violence that is justified in the name of those elusive concepts such as ‘humanity’ or universal human rights and democracy, which supposedly provide the basis (and moral high ground) for the governments who have granted themselves the right to wage this war on terror. Divine violence of the death drive can also be brought into conversation with the demos as interpreted by Rancière and thus democracy (the power of the demos).² However, such an interpretation of democracy is not a one understood as a governmental or state system, rather as the power of the demos: the people. In the present day, force used to kill is justified from a Western perspective either in the name of human rights and ‘democracy’ or it is condemned as being terrorism. If one considers a recent event, for example, the murder of the Iranian General Qassem Soleimani on the 3rd of January 2020 in Bagdad Iraq, it becomes clear how force used to kill can be interpreted as ‘just’ or ‘justified violence’. It is believed to be a necessary force (violence) committed in the name of universal human rights and as a result of the idea of promoting democracy. More importantly than the relationship of such an act to morality, are the questions: Who is it asking the questions concerning what is or is not moral? And who believes him or herself to have the moral high ground to make such judgements? Is it Fox News, CNN, or other news agencies who interpret the force used to kill as a means within the context of certain ends or within the context of certain givens as causes? A certain end or cause seems to either justify certain means or condemn them, just as the origin can also be used to justify, for example, an essentialist understanding of humanity and therefore the belief in inalienable universal human rights, or a certain understanding of God’s eternal Will or Law. Indeed, what is the difference between the attack on Bagdad International Airport by a US drone and the 2001 New York, 2004 Madrid, or 2005 London attacks? What they have in common is that they were lethal. They involved the killing of individuals or of numerous people justified by one party and condemned by the other.

² Rancière, J. (2019), *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics* (edited and translated by Steven Corcoran), London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Are we not left, once again, with that persistent and problematic postmodern relativism?

In his essay Benjamin is trying to understand the question of what justifies violence. Yet he asks this question within the context of strike action, and more specifically in the context of the question of a general proletarian strike. A general proletarian strike, one could argue, is the rising up of the demos, the uncounted (the unaccounted for), the non-political. He comes to the conclusion that all violence used as a means is either state or law-preserving violence on the one hand, or state- or law-making violence on the other, except in the case of a democratic irruption of a proletarian general strike.³ For Benjamin, the only force (means) excluded from these two types of violence is the force (means) of a general proletarian strike. The general strike exists beyond these two categories and is in that sense non-violent, yet one can argue that it is truly political, in Rancière's understanding of political. Benjamin says:

For it takes place not in readiness to resume work following external concessions and this or that modification to working conditions, but in the determination to resume only a wholly transformed work, no longer enforced by the state, an upheaval that this kind of strike not so much causes as consummates. For this reason, the first of these undertakings is lawmaking but the second anarchistic.⁴

This was also Marx's argument, that the purpose of the revolution was never the creation of some kind of lawmaking utopia.⁵ Benjamin then continues by interpreting 'mythic violence', which is the violence of the Gods, the manifestation of their wills, and thus is closely related to lawmaking violence.⁶ Mythic violence should not be confused with divine violence, but it is the ultimate justification of violence either in the name of law/state making or law/state maintaining violence. Divine violence for Benjamin is carried out in the name of justice, if indeed it is in the name of anything. Divine violence opposes mythic violence, just as one can interpret the God of the Bible opposing mythic gods and idols. However, this violence is never justice in the name of a particular utopia, in other words a law which would make it law-making or law-maintaining. Rather, it is an infinite justice, one that is always yet to come, as Jacques Derrida would argue,⁷ and this justice calls one into an infinite responsibility. It therefore cannot be justified by any state- or law- making or

³ Benjamin, 'Critique of violence', 243.

⁴ Benjamin, 'Critique of violence', 243.

⁵ Benjamin, 'Critique of violence', 246.

⁶ Benjamin, 'Critique of violence', 248.

⁷ Derrida, Jacques (1994), *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (translated by Peggy Kamuf), London, Routledge, 74, 82.

maintaining morality or ideology. ‘Lawmaking is powermaking, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of violence. Justice is the principle of all divine endmaking, power the principle of all mythic lawmaking.’⁸

Benjamin therefore contrasts divine violence with mythic violence:

This very task of destruction poses again, ultimately, the question of a pure immediate violence that might be able to call a halt to mythic violence. Just as in all spheres God opposes myth, mythic violence is confronted by the divine. And the latter constitutes its antithesis in all respects. If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood.⁹

In this sense, divine violence can be related to mere life and therefore to the death drive in Freud and Lacan’s understanding thereof:

For with mere life, the rule of law over the living ceases. Mythic violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake; divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice; the second accepts it.¹⁰

In Todd Phillips’ film of 2019, *Joker*, there is the scene where Arthur Fleck is on the subway after having been fired from his job as a clown. He has just heard from his social worker that due to the austerity measures in place resulting in funding for social services being cut, he will no longer be receiving the ‘help’ he had been receiving until now, that is the medication. The only other passenger is a young woman quietly reading her book in the subway compartment. At the next stop three wealthy, young, professional men, probably from the financial world, enter the subway. The three men, slightly drunk and arrogant, start harassing the girl. Arthur, a few metres away, witnesses this harassment which makes him uncomfortable and nervous and triggers his uncontrollable laughter (a medical condition, for which he normally carries a card that explains the condition). He is still wearing the clown outfit and this, together with his uncontrollable laughter, attracts the attention of the three young men and the situation becomes very tense. Arthur automatically

⁸ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 248.

⁹ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 249-250.

¹⁰ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 250.

searches for his card but to no avail as, in a previous scene, the mother on the bus did not return the card to him.

The system is failing him, the checks and balances previously in place to secure his place in the ontology of the state are failing him. The three men attack him by violently kicking and hitting him. After being violently abused for some time and not responding, he eventually responds. His response is not premeditated, rather it is as if through this crack in the system – the lack of his card, him falling out of the system – a destructive force erupts and he begins to shoot at the men, eventually killing all three. He has been reduced to nothing, he is unemployed and not even the social service recognizes him anymore. He is a nothing, *nepěš*. The ‘symbolic’ and ‘imaginary’ have both failed him, and he is left with nothing but ‘the real’. Out of this nothing erupts a force which kills the three young men. Who would dare call it justice? Who would name it terrorism? What morality, or rather whose morality, could be in a position to call it, name it: justice or terrorism or violence? Both news agencies and the mayoral candidate (Bruce Wayne’s father) describe the act as unnecessary violence and cowardice. The crowds, on the other hand, rise up as a popular movement inspired by this act of violence under a populist slogan: ‘Kill the rich!’ The violence which has been perpetrated has been named as evil in the name of state maintaining or it is a call to arms by those who want to create a new state:

Once again all the eternal forms are open to pure divine violence, which myth bastardized with law. Divine violence may manifest itself in a true war exactly as it does in the crowd’s divine judgement on a criminal. But all mythic, lawmaking violence, which we may call ‘executive’, is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving, ‘administrative’ violence that serves it. Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch, may be called ‘sovereign’ violence.¹¹

In liberal democracies, ‘signifying stress’ has perhaps reached a breaking point, and where it breaks – where the symbolic and the imaginary fail – violence or life erupts.

When bringing radicalization and religion into conversation with each other, religion, in the dominant interpretation, is seen to be on the side of the radicals. In the dominant understanding, radicalization refers mainly to Islamic Jihadists, however, it equally has to do with Christian fundamentalists, who burn down abortion clinics or murder the doctors and nurses working in them

¹¹ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 252.

in the name of their interpretation of God's Will. The state, for example the United States and its war on terror or the European Union's counter terrorism measures, are considered to be the exact opposite of religion and, God forbid, any form of religious fundamentalism. I would like to challenge this secular versus religious dichotomy and follow Simon Critchley when he, in reference to Carl Schmitt, argues that the consensus seeking of liberal democracies are deist and therefore also religious.¹²

Carl Schmitt argued that all significant modern concepts relating to the theory of the state are in fact secularized theological concepts.¹³ It is in this context that Schmitt critiques liberal democracy when he argues that the liberal-constitutional state can be interpreted as a triumph of deism, a theological vision that unifies reason and nature by identifying the latter with divinity.¹⁴ This is the sense in which Critchley speaks of holy violence and holy war when he describes our contemporary liberal democratic world. The holy war exists not only on the side of the Jihadists, the war on terror and the counterterrorism of the European Union is similarly a holy war. This holy war should not be seen as being the same as Benjamin's divine violence, rather it should be equated with mythic (ideological) violence that justifies the law or is justified by a law.

Critchley therefore interprets the current Western world as waging a holy war, where politics, religion, and violence have formed a triangle and thereby an unholy alliance:

This situation can be triangulated around the often fatal entanglement of politics and religion, where the third vertex of the triangle is violence. Politics, religion and violence appear to define the present through which we are all too precipitously moving: the phenomenon of sacred political violence, where religiously justified violence is the means to a political end.¹⁵

It should be remembered that Critchley's article was not written during Trump's time in office, but during the year Obama became the 44th president of the United States, after the Bush years.

The liberal West, specifically under Obama's eloquent rhetoric, believed the modern liberal state to exist without violence, having convinced itself that everything is decided via peaceful reasoning, namely 'civilized' debate and

¹² Critchley, S. (2009), 'Mystical Anarchism', *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social theory* 10 (2), August 2009, 272-306.

¹³ Schmitt, C. (2006), *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (translated George Schwab), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁴ Critchley, 'Mystical Anarchism,' 273.

¹⁵ Critchley, 'Mystical Anarchism,' 272.

consensus, and that this ‘civilized’ striving towards consensus has the moral high ground in the world. Benjamin criticizes the forgetfulness of the violence that is present in such a consensual approach, especially when this approach is used to police the state and, in the case of the USA and its European allies, to police the world. Clearly Benjamin was not writing about our contemporary world, but in the context of Europe in the previous century. He says about these consensual statesmen and women:

They lack the sense that they represent a lawmaking violence; no wonder they cannot achieve decrees worthy of this violence but cultivate in compromise a supposedly nonviolent manner of dealing with political affairs. This remains, however, a “product situated within the mentality of violence, no matter how it may disdain all open violence, because the effort toward compromise is motivated not internally but from outside, by the opposing effort, because no compromise, however freely accepted, is conceivable without a compulsive character. ‘It would be better otherwise’ is the underlying feeling in every compromise.¹⁶

Benjamin further argues that, ‘When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears, the institution falls into decay.’¹⁷

It might be useful here to also bring in Jacques Rancière’s differentiation between police and politics, specifically in the context of Benjamin’s interpretation of the decay of institutions, with the focus on the absence or lack of politics:

The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living. *Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible.* I call ‘distribution of the sensible’ a generally implicit law that defines the *forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed.* The partition of the sensible is the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of the people (*du monde*), the *nemein* upon which the *nomoi* of the community are founded. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that *which separates and excludes*; on the other, as that *which hallows participation.* A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (*un commun partagé*) and the distribution of the exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. This latter form of distribution, which by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of part and shares (*parties*),

¹⁶ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 244.

¹⁷ Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, 244.

itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot.¹⁸

What really deserves the name of politics is the cluster of perceptions and practices that shape this common world. Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, or the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow), some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world.¹⁹

I mention this because I believe it is important in terms of how one understands radicalization. I will argue that the term radicalization, and how it is used in the context of the European Union, is part of the police function and therefore the dividing up of the sensible. It is about deciding what is allowed to be visible, who can partake, and who is invited to the ‘peaceful’ consensus table.

For the purpose of this chapter, I would like to interpret radicalization in the context of Benjamin’s interpretation of violence, as well as Rancière’s differentiation between police and politics by bringing in another term from Eric Santner, one he developed in relation to both Benjamin and Rosenzweig, namely ‘signifying stress’.²⁰

Santner’s concept of signifying stress can be used to understand something of the global situation as interpreted by the West. One could say that signifying stress exists on various levels. Firstly, in the context of the theme of this volume, there is the signifying stress caused by the various terror attacks: such as in September 2001 New York, in March 2004 Madrid, and in July 2005 in London. Then there is signifying stress that exists prior to these attacks,

¹⁸ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 44. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 160.

²⁰ Santner, E. (2013), ‘Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the matter of the neighbour’, in Žižek, S., Reinhard, K., and Santner, E., *The Neighbor: Three inquiries in Political Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 92. It is this never-ceasing work of symbolization and failure of symbolization, translation and failure of translation, that constitutes what I have referred to as ‘signifying stress’. We have here, then, something of a tragic cycle: my signifying stress is called forth – ex-cited – by my efforts to translate the signifying stress emanating from the other indicating, in its turn, the other’s ‘addiction’ to his/her own enigmas. Or, as Laplanche puts it, ‘Internal alien-ness; external alien-ness, in turn, held in place by the enigmatic relation of the other to his own internal alien.’ In Laplanche, J. (1999), *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher, London: Routledge, 80. In the view I have outlined here, a ‘miracle’ would represent the event of a genuine break in such a fateful enchainment of unconscious transmission. Santner, ‘Miracles Happen’, 92.

signifying stress that in a sense is depicted by the movie *Joker*. The movie begins with a news broadcast in Gotham City. Yet, the news broadcast could have been any news broadcast in any of the major cities of the Western world. It addresses unemployment, failing social systems, the disintegration of communities and thus the decay of the social fabric, an absence of values, and the fact that the problems are only increasing and starting to become overwhelming. How must all this decay – this combination of economic, social, political, and environmental challenges - be interpreted and understood? In a subsequent scene Arthur is speaking to his social worker and says, ‘Is it just me or is the world getting crazier?’ To which the social worker responds, ‘It is tense out there!’ The world is suffering from signifying stress, the stress of not knowing how to meaningfully make sense of the current world and its overwhelming challenges. The interpretive tools of the past are failing – policing (the symbolic constitution) is failing. When we consider the recent elections in Europe and the rest of the world, it does indeed indicate the presence of signifying stress. This is because the symbolic constitution is failing, traditional political parties do not seem to be able to offer meaning and sense to current socio-economic-political and environmental ‘crises’, and thus people are searching elsewhere or are not participating in elections at all.

Critchley does not refer to signifying stress, but instead speaks of a general feeling of disappointment, which he unpacks further as being religious and political disappointment. Critchley argues that ever since Kant, philosophy is no longer a response to awe, rather it has its beginning in disappointment.²¹ For Critchley:

Religious disappointment provokes the question of meaning (what is the meaning of life in the absence of a transcendent deity who would act as a guarantor of meaning?) and opens the problem of nihilism; political disappointment provokes the question of justice (how is justice possible in a violently unjust world?) and provokes the need for an ethics.²²

Before exploring the infinite ethics offered by Critchley, the idea of signifying stress currently being experienced will be explored, as well as generalized proletarianism and symbolic misery as Bernhard Stiegler refers to it, which could offer an interpretation for increased radicalization as well as the rise

²¹ Critchley, S. (2007), *Infinitely demanding: Ethics of commitment, politics of resistance*, London: Verso, 38.

²² Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 38.

in populism.²³ Critchley argues that, within such contexts of general disappointment, only two options seem to be left: passive and/or active nihilism:

The passive nihilist looks at the world from a certain distance, and finds it meaningless. He is scornful of the pretensions of liberal humanism with its metaphysical faith in progress, improvement and the perfectibility of humankind, beliefs that he claims are held with the same dogmatic assurance that Christianity was held in Europe until the late eighteenth century.²⁴

The passive nihilist concludes that we are simply animals, and rather nasty aggressive primates at that, what we might call *homo sapiens*, rapacious animals. Rather than acting in the world and trying to transform it, the passive nihilist simply focuses on himself and his particular pleasures and projects for perfecting himself, whether through discovering the inner child, manipulating pyramids, writing pessimistic-sounding literary essays, taking up yoga, birdwatching or botany, as was the case with the aged Rousseau.²⁵

In the face of the increasing brutality of reality, the passive nihilist tries to achieve a mystical stillness, calm contemplation: 'European Buddhism'. In a world that is all too rapidly blowing itself to pieces, the passive nihilist closes his eyes and makes himself into an island. The active nihilist also finds everything meaningless, but instead of sitting back and contemplating, he tries to destroy this world and bring another into being.²⁶

It is in this context of signifying stress and active nihilism that one might be able to interpret the terror attacks in New York (2001), Madrid (2004) and London (2005).

Yet, signifying stress is also experienced by the powers that be, who seek to police this world and cannot accept this kind of stress, as it disturbs both the consensus and the ontology constituted by the dominant symbolic.

Governments encountering such signifying stress attempt to interpret and contain these events, that is, to police them. These events and the people that have caused them do not fit into the policed ontology of the liberal democratic West. The term 'radicalization' is thus the European Union's various governments' policing response to contain and once again normalize the ontology of Europe.

²³ Stiegler, B. (2014), *Symbolic Misery: Volume 1: The Hyperindustrial Epoch*, translated by Barnaby Norman, Cambridge: Polity Press; Stiegler, B. (2015) *States of Shock: Stupidity and knowledge in the 21st Century*, translated by Daniel Ross, Cambridge: Polity.

²⁴ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 4.

²⁵ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 4.

²⁶ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 4-5.

The concept of radicalization in relation to terrorism has no long-standing scientific pedigree. It was born as a political construct, first raised within European police and intelligence circles, boosted by the 9/11 attacks and finally embraced in May 2004 in an internal EU counterterrorism document.²⁷

In Rancière's terms it is not a political construct, rather it is a police construct.

The conversation within this volume, is a North-South one (a conversation between Brussels and Pretoria). However it needs to be pointed out that the term 'radicalization' as portrayed in the conference literature which this volume is a result of, is very much a European and European Parliament (Strasbourg) construct. The European Commission defines radicalization as '[t]he phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to terrorism, and is closely connected to the notion of extremism.'²⁸

It is a hyped word that emerged in Europe in response to the 9/11 attacks.

One could say that 'radicalization' is a police word, in Rancière's sense of police, that was created in Europe as part of the policing of a shared world and the people of that shared world. It is a word that polices what in that world is allowed to be visible, sayable, and thus acceptable at the table of consensus:

Radicalization has a twisted history. At every turn, it gained a new meaning without shedding the existing one. In the beginning, 'radicalization' meant Muslims espousing an anti-Western, fundamentalist stance, with Iran as the epicenter of a global Muslim insurgency. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, it started to be loosely used as a synonym of 'anger'. A number of Muslims were said to become increasingly angry as a result of a wide variety of 'root causes'. But almost simultaneously, it became intertwined with 'recruitment' by foreign extremists, who tried to persuade these angry individuals to join foreign war zones. In 2004, another layer was added when 'self-radicalization' became the buzzword, since it appeared that one could also develop into a terrorist through kinship and friendship networks. That year, the EU officially embraced the concept. Myriad models and studies were financed to try to clarify the long, step-by-step process through which an individual radicalized into a terrorist. But, in a new twist, by 2015–2016 it became obvious that radicalization didn't require a long process after all. 'Flash' or 'instant radicalization' was introduced to elucidate how some literally in a moment jumped into jihadi terrorism without any previous phase of, well, radicalization. In the meantime, by 2018, the culprit behind the global Muslim insurgency had crossed the Gulf. Saudi Arabia was now seen as the villain that, through its

²⁷ Coolsaet, R. (2019), 'Radicalization: The origins and limits of a contested concept,' in Fasil, N., de Koning, M., & Ragazzi, F. (Eds.), *Radicalization in Belgium and the Netherlands: Critical Perspectives on Violence and Security*, London: I.B. Tauris, 30.

²⁸ European Parliament Briefing March 2015, *Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-briefing-551342-Religious-fundamentalism-and-radicalization-FINAL.pdf>

multi-billion-dollar promotion of a newly coined 'Salafi-Wahhabism', has perverted the minds of millions of Muslims worldwide into a rejectionist, anti-Western stance.²⁹

The attacks in London in July 2005, and those in Madrid two months previously, pushed the concept to centre stage in EU counterterrorism thinking and policies. Unlike the perpetrators of 9/11, these attackers did not come from abroad but were individuals who grew up in Europe, often having been born there. How did they come to resort to terrorism and turn against their own countrymen? Why were they attracted to extremist ideologies? What made them vulnerable to recruiters? Something, it was argued, must turn a person from a 'normal' individual into a terrorist. Untangling this process became the essence of radicalization studies and the holy grail of European (and later worldwide) counterterrorism efforts.³⁰

It is a constructed term, which – as with all constructions – is context-bound. For example, in South Africa the word radicalization does not necessarily have this negative connotation. It is certainly used with regards to students and the radicalization of students, but it is also positively loaded, for example, there is a children's ministry programme called Radikids which has built its entire programme on this idea of radical.³¹

Coolsaet continues:

The same questions are still being asked today: What exactly do we understand by radicalization? What are its drivers? How do we reverse or stop it? Are radical ideas a conveyor belt to radical action? How does religion relate to it exactly?³²

This volume, and the conference from which it has resulted, has exactly this as its focus: How exactly does religion relate to the notion of radicalization – both positively and negatively?

The church and radicalization

Should the church partake in the police function, or should it perhaps seek to respond creatively to the underlying signifying stress that is being experienced generally? Or as Stiegler argues, there is a generalized proletarianism or symbolic misery, that is, people who are excluded from symbolic imagining

²⁹ Coolsaet, 'Radicalization', 29.

³⁰ Coolsaet, 'Radicalization', 30.

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Radikids-Childrens-Ministry-South-Africa-224456194235866/>

³² Coolsaet, 'Radicalization', 30.

– again a cause of stress – where nihilism seems to be the only answer.³³ Perhaps the church should get involved in a more radical symbolization process, in other words a political process, by addressing the root of this signifying stress, rather than seeking to police and contain it. The church can offer an alternative to active or passive nihilism, namely a theology of the cross, which certainly speaks to nihilism, yet transforming it into a political-ethical event of the resurrection.

There is indeed a crisis, but the crisis is not radicalism, it is a crisis of liberalism, as Simon Critchley argues referring to Carl Schmitt's argument that liberalism is anti-political.³⁴ In Rancière's understanding liberalism is a police system in a sense because for the liberal every 'political' decision must be rooted in a norm, must be rooted in a given ontology, which is carried out by the constitution. This is why the highest political authority in a liberal state is the Supreme Court or its equivalent. Allowed and justified political action is subordinated to juridical interpretation.³⁵

I suggest that the film *Joker* by Philip Todd seeks to express something of this signifying stress and the consequent eruption of life beyond the imaginary and symbolic constitution (maybe divine violence) and how various groups seek to capitalize on this violence. There is a crisis in liberalism and constitutional democracies, a crisis in meaning making in the sense of Santner's signifying stress. This is not the case in relation to the terror attacks, rather in relation to daily existential life – everyday life, that no longer finds meaning and expression in the world (ontology) governed by a liberal constitutional democracy. This daily existential life, which seeks a miracle, erupts as divine violence – which the myth of deism, constitutional democracy, wants to reduce and thereby police by containing it with terms such as: terrorism, populism, and radicalization. But this will not solve the problem. There is a crisis – life or the threat to life can no longer be named or contained within the current ontology governed and policed by liberal constitutional democracies within a system of global financial capitalism. The European parliament and government, in

³³ 'By symbolic misery I mean, therefore, the loss of individuation which results from the loss of participation in the production of symbols. Symbols here being as much the fruits of intellectual life (concepts, ideas, theorems, knowledge) as of sensible life (arts, know-how, mores). And I believe that the present state of generalized loss of individuation can only lead to a symbolic collapse, or the collapse of desire – in other words to the decomposition of the social as such: to total war' in Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, 10. 'Cut off from psychic individuation as from collective individuation, knowledge, grammaticalized through technical individuation, becomes flavorless because it leads not to absolute knowledge but to total destruction of knowledge, that is, to its unlearning to dis-apprenticeship and proletarianization – and as generalized proletarianization' in Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, 118.

³⁴ Critchley, 'Mystical Anarchism', 273.

³⁵ Critchley, 'Mystical Anarchism', 274.

fact all liberal democratic governments, must realize that what is needed is not police, but politics: a new literature that paints a new world giving voice once again to life – where the demos can speak. This eruption of ‘raw life’, eruption of the demos, of the death drive, divine or sovereign violence, will always be highjacked by one or other state-founding myth in the sense of a holy war, or state-maintaining violence, even the myth of terrorism or radicalization, in an attempt to contain or channel it.

I will refer to the document, *The Coming Insurrection*, written anonymously by The Invisible Committee, in order to address why it is that I have argued here the current existence of signifying stress?³⁶ Although I do not subscribe to their proposals, they do offer an important interpretation of the crisis, which I refer to as signifying stress together with Stiegler’s generalized proletarianism or symbolic misery. The document begins by arguing that Europe, specifically France, is experiencing a crisis. Although crises are not problematic as such, governments thrive on crises and it has become problematic because it has developed into a form of conflict, ‘and positions have been taken up, that are no longer manageable’.³⁷ The no longer manageable signifying stress is caused not only by the terror attacks already alluded to, but a general crisis: a crisis in the education system, ‘... its dwindling production of workers and citizens, even with the children of the middle class as its raw material. There is the existence of a youth to which no political representation corresponds, a youth good for nothing but destroying the free bicycles that society so conscientiously put at their disposal’.³⁸ One witnesses this destructive nihilist violence. It is not only the youth that pose a challenge to society, there is also the financial crises, booming unemployment, et cetera, an overall sense of crisis that is well illustrated in the film *Joker*. Gotham City is depicted as experiencing an economic, social, environmental, and thus political crisis. It is difficult to argue against this description fitting the current state of the Western world. The Invisible Committee writes within the French context arguing that the French state is regarded by many as being the guarantor of universal values and thus the last rampart against the immanent disaster. The same was said of Angela Merkel after Trump won in the US elections and the UK voted for Brexit. She was described as the last defender of liberal democracy by the New York Times on the 12th of November 2016.³⁹

³⁶ The Invisible Committee (2009), *The Coming Insurrection*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e) intervention series 1.

³⁷ Committee, *Insurrection*, 10.

³⁸ Committee, *Insurrection*, 10.

³⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/world/europe/germany-merkel-trump-election.html>

The fiction that liberal democracy is the only defence against the rising tide of disaster is a pathological one, The Invisible Committee argues, that is very difficult to undo.⁴⁰ For too many the only hope and belief that the world can still be saved is if the heroes – liberal democratic heroes – of the past return.

If one links *The coming insurrection* to Benjamin's two forms of violence, both seem to argue that both forms of violence (state maintaining and state forming violence) have had their day in Europe (and the West):

The sphere of political representation has come to a close. From left to right it is the same nothingness striking the pose of an emperor or a savior, the same sales assistants adjusting their discourse according to the findings for the latest surveys.⁴¹

In other words, the emperor trying to maintain the power of the state or system, and the saviour figures presenting themselves as messiahs who have come to save the world, are two sides of the same coin. Both these forms of violence (maintaining and forming) have been reduced to nothingness. One knows that the flight lines offered by the saviours are ultimately only integrated into an ever-growing rhizome. Or as Critchley argues:

We have begrudgingly come to admit that recuperation is the fate of all forms of avant-gardist revolutionary detournement, whether aesthetic or political. So, rather than evolving toward a revolution that would take us beyond it, one might say that capitalism capitalizes – it simply produces more capitalism.⁴²

The 'invisible committee' identifies various circles of estrangement where, I argue, signifying stress exists. For example, in their 'first circle' is individualism the whole ideology of the individual, the idea that 'I am what I am', is losing its meaning and its sense.⁴³ The more an individual seeks to be 'me', the 'me' that is presented via social media as the successful and happy 'me', the more that individual feels empty. The Invisible Committee speak of the 'Hysterization' of contact. The more I want to be me, the more I feel an emptiness. The more I express myself, the more I am drained. The more I run after myself, the more tired I get.⁴⁴ The ideology being sold to individuals is the idea that the self is something permanent, however the experience of emptiness is becoming ever more persuasive which explains the rise in depression, suicide,

⁴⁰ Committee, *Insurrection*, 12.

⁴¹ Committee, *Insurrection*, 23.

⁴² Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 98.

⁴³ Committee, *Insurrection*, 12 onwards.

⁴⁴ Committee, *Insurrection*, 29.

and other psychological problems. Even the American Psychiatric Association's DSM 5 (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) cannot keep up with the ever increasing and so-called new mental disorders according to their fiction of what is believed to be normal. Perhaps the increasing dislocation caused by global capitalism is what is not normal, if one can speak of normality at all.⁴⁵

Divine violence and Christ *poiēsis*

In some ways, the ever-increasing dislocation caused by global capitalism is a good thing:

The dislocatory power of capitalism must be affirmed and not resisted by retreat into some sort of Rousseauesque and ultimately reactionary romantic anti-capitalism. On the contrary, the more dislocated the ground upon which capitalism operates, the less it can rely on a framework of supposedly natural or stable social and political relations. Capitalist dislocation, in its ruthless destruction of the bounds of tradition, local belonging, family and kinship structures that one might have considered natural, reveals the contingency of social life, that is, its constructed character, which is to say, its political articulation.⁴⁶

This nothingness, this destruction of what is believed to be natural, this emptiness and contingency of construction, is also the empty space for the creation of the new, the new resurrected life after the crucifixion. The call to create, to construct, to create the political: the political *poiēsis* of the crucified Christ.

Critchley's response in his book *Infinitely Demanding* is an infinitely demanding ethics that divides the subject. However, rather than the super ego forcing the subject into heroic self-sacrifice, humour is turned to, with the super-ego helping to ridicule and find irony rather than becoming the tragic hero. This infinitely humorous demanding ethic can be developed into a politics in Rancière's sense whereby literature has the ability to create a new world, a new democracy, never as state-preserving or state-making one, but at a distance from the state.

I believe that the Christian tradition, not only the story of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, but also many of the theological constructs such as the two kingdoms can be useful metaphors in the *poiēsis* of this new

⁴⁵ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 99 on.

⁴⁶ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 100-101.

political world of true democracy. A true democracy in which the demos, those who do not count, who are not counted by or visible to the police, disrupt the consensual policing of the city – a city that is open to all by grace alone, a new Jerusalem, and not some law or other that can police the city walls.

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The Dutch East India Company: Strict Protestantism and Intolerance

Jack McDonald

Abstract

There is a vast literature on the history of the most famous, and possibly the richest, company in history, the Dutch East India Company (known in Dutch as the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), 1602-1800). So too on the dominant strand of seventeenth century Dutch Reformed Protestantism codified by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Yet the links between these two phenomena have scarcely been considered in the historiography. We maintain that the VOC was not just administratively influenced by the Synod of Dort, but that the deterministic theology of Dort influenced both Protestant church practice and attitudes to Islam in Indonesia, replacing open Renaissance approaches with a doctrinaire 'othering' and rejection of outsiders.

The origins of the VOC¹

The Dutch East India Company – the VOC – is one of the most singular and remarkable phenomena in human history.² Often cited not just as the largest trading and shipping company in history, but as the first public limited

¹ This article is written in English but will assume some familiarity with Dutch language and terminology.

² We shall refer to the Dutch East India Company by its universal Dutch acronym 'VOC', short for *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (in seventeenth century Dutch usage), or *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (in modern Dutch usage). VOC is a Dutch acronym regularly used in English-language history. See for example chapter 5 of Lambert's magisterial analysis of maritime imperial powers: Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, London, Yale University Press, 2018, where the term VOC is employed throughout. We note in passing that Lambert considers the Dutch, along with the Athenians, the Carthaginians, the Venetians and the British, as the principal seafaring imperial powers in the whole of history.

company and the first conglomerate in the world.³ In 2003, the archives of the VOC were inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World register, giving the VOC permanent historical recognition at United Nations level.⁴

Setting aside for a moment the intense and fully justified recent debates concerning the imperialist and colonialist character of the VOC,⁵ it is nonetheless possible to recognize the VOC as an immense achievement of Dutch enterprise. Its origins lie in the search for new markets by the European powers towards the end of the sixteenth century. Since their discovery in 1492 by the Italian Christopher Columbus (1451-1506), who was working for the Spanish, the Americas had been the center of European commercial adventure and activity, with the Spanish, French and English all vying for influence and control. In addition to their earlier trading activity in the Indian Ocean, which had begun with Vasco da Gama's (1460-1524) expedition to India in 1498, the Portuguese were also active in South America. The established presence of the four principal Western European powers in Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean trade in the sixteenth century left little room for a fifth player, such that the only way for the Dutch to enter into this trading network was to displace one of the other trading powers. The Dutch Revolt, the formation of the Dutch

³ A public limited company is a company financed by publicly traded and publicly owned shares. A conglomerate is a multi-industry company usually operating internationally, with different industries operating under a single parent banner. Amongst many other commodities, the VOC traded in Arabian coffee, Indian cotton, Indonesian spices, Chinese silk, South African wine and Japanese porcelain: its scope was always transnational.

⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-1/archives-of-the-dutch-east-india-company/>

⁵ The literature on the colonialist (properly seen as the policy of one country to people another country with its own citizens) and imperialist (properly seen as the policy of one country to dominate another country to the extent of including it within its own sphere of control and influence) aspects of the VOC is huge. For an example of how the VOC was involved in cultural clashes with Indonesians, see Hellwig, T. and Tagliacozzo, E. (Eds.) (2009), *The Indonesia Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, London: Duke University Press, chapter 3. For an example (from amongst a vast literature) of how the VOC, personified in its fourth and sixth governor-general, Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629), was a barbaric and genocidal criminal organization, see the pages devoted to 'De Zaak Coen' on the Westfries Museum site: <https://wfm.nl/coen>. This article does not primarily concern itself with the genocidal and violent aspects of the VOC, although this does not in any way diminish this deeply regrettable aspect of European commercial activity in South-East Asia. Issues of colonialist bullying by the Dutch East Indies government in the period after the closure of the VOC are not only covered in a huge range of academic literature, but have been the subject of a remarkable literary treatment too. The latter includes two of the most famous novels in Dutch, both of them searingly critical of Dutch colonialist mentalities: Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker), *Max Havelaar* (1860, multiple editions in Dutch as well as translations in English) and Louis Couperus, *De stille kracht* (1900, multiple editions in Dutch and translations in English). The fact that even tourist guides to modern Indonesia do not shy from explicit condemnations of Dutch violence that took place during the colonial period is to be applauded: see for example Dusik, R. (2017), *Indonesië (Wereld Reisgids)*, The Hague: ANWB, 51-55.

Republic, and a rising sense of national consciousness all fueled the country's thirst for a place at the trading table.

But how did the Dutch Revolt contain the seeds for the foundation and conduct of the VOC? In the late Middle Ages, the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands had been controlled by the Duchy of Burgundy. When Burgundy was absorbed by the Kingdom of France in 1477, the royal houses of Valois and Habsburg tussled for control of the Netherlands. Charles Habsburg (1500-1558) became lord of the Netherlands in 1506, then king of Spain in 1516, and Holy Roman Emperor in 1530. The Netherlands grudgingly accepted his rule, however relations soured not only because Charles levied stiff taxes, but because he saw himself as the guardian of Catholic orthodoxy in Europe and began to combat German Protestant princes, expecting the Dutch to finance and staff his army even though a majority of the Dutch had embraced Calvinist Protestantism by 1560. When Charles V was succeeded by his son Philip II (1527-1598) in 1556, Spanish enthusiasm for vanquishing Protestantism had an even keener champion: Philip attempted to import the Spanish Inquisition into the Netherlands and to turn Catholic Brussels into the effective capital of the Netherlands. All it took was a poor harvest and famine in 1565 to push the Dutch to revolt. Early Spanish victories and renewed anti-Protestant persecution triggered open war from 1572, with the Dutch being assisted financially by Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603). The Act of Abjuration in 1581 marked the de facto secession of the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands from the Spanish Netherlands. Whilst Dutch independence was not formally recognized through a treaty until the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the territorial integrity of the United Provinces was not significantly threatened after the death of Philip II in 1598.⁶

The foundation of the VOC can readily be seen as an exporting of the Dutch war of independence overseas. The Spanish held enough sway in continental Europe – as well as holding the Portuguese crown from 1580-1640, together with the Portuguese colonies – to prevent the rebellious Dutch from trading effectively and to close European markets off from them. The only way for the Dutch to conduct trade, therefore, was to do so aggressively, in open and bellicose competition with the Spanish. It was this that drove Dutch activity in South Africa and Asia via the VOC from 1602, and in West Africa and the Americas via the Dutch West India Company (the GWC – Geoctooid)

⁶ This is a somewhat sketchy and very compressed history. For a fuller account of the Eighty Years War, see especially van der Lem, A. (2014), *De Opstand in der Nederlanden 1568-1648: de Tachtigjarige Oorlog in woord en beeld*, Nijmegen: Vantilt. The best comprehensive account in English is Israel, J. (1998), *The Dutch Republic: its Rise, Greatness and Fall 1477-1806*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Westindische Compagnie) from 1621, a natural extension of their European war for independence.⁷

It was in this context that the first Dutch expedition to the East Indies was organized under Frederik de Houtman (1571-1627) in 1595. He sailed to Banten in west Java hoping to buy pepper. Half his crew died en route, but on his return a profit of 400 per cent was recorded, thus enabling a second expedition under his brother's command in 1598.⁸ De Houtman identified a problem affecting any European trading power in Asia: local Javanese traders acting as middlemen, buying pepper and spices from farmers and selling them on to the Dutch at grossly inflated prices. The commercial logic was therefore not just to eliminate the Portuguese (and increasingly also English) warships which harried the Dutch newcomers into the East Indies market, but to eliminate the Javanese middlemen and seize the whole trade and its profit for the Netherlands.⁹ De Houtman therefore identified the need for Dutch trading expeditions to have military support, which in turn implied significant financial investment.

Providing ongoing military support and infrastructure to ad hoc trading expeditions was scarcely possible. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch practice was to organize single-issue trading companies, where capital

⁷ Alternative interpretations to my thesis that the origins of the Dutch colonial empire lay in the war of Dutch independence exist. These coalesce around two theories. Firstly, that the foundation of the VOC was a natural consequence of the spirit of discovery and exploration which hit Europe in the century or so after Christopher Columbus: see Gerritsen, A. (2019), 'Deshima, base du commerce des Hollandais au Japon' in Bertrand, R. (Ed.), *L'Exploration du Monde : une autre histoire des Grandes Découvertes*, Paris: Seuil, 244-248; also Calafat, G. (2019), 'Abel Tasman à la recherche du continent austral' in Bertrand, *L'Exploration du Monde*, 249-253; also Fauvelle, F.-X. (2019), 'Les Néerlandais s'installent au Cap : chronique d'une mort annoncée' in Bertrand, *L'Exploration du Monde*, 264-267. Secondly, that the foundation of the VOC was a consequence of the unique vibrancy of Dutch culture in the Golden Age: see the classic defence of this view in Schama, S. (1987), *The Embarrassment of Riches: an Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 338 onwards.

⁸ Most of the literature on the VOC also discusses the expeditions undertaken, such that of Frederik de Houtman, which were the immediate forerunners of the VOC. See for example chapter 1 in, Gastra, F. (1992), *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, Zutphen: Walberg Pers with multiple re-editions. For an attractive popular edition, see, Guleij, R. & Knaap, G. (2017), *Het Grote VOC Boek*, Zwolle: WBooks, especially chapter 1.

⁹ Many historians still subscribe the common received idea that the Dutch, unlike other European colonizing powers, were uninterested in territorial conquest and were simply pursuing commercial profit. See for example, Beaufuls, T. (2003), 'Le colonialisme aux Indes néerlandaises' in Ferro, M. (Dir.), *Le livre noir du colonialisme: XVIe-XXIe siècle: de l'extermination à la repentance*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 314. Menno Witteveen, however, has shown the VOC's basic programme of aggression from the second decade of the seventeenth century, with a threefold aim of founding the city of Batavia (modern Jakarta) by force, establishing Batavia as the principal trading-post anywhere in South East Asia, and establishing a complete Dutch monopoly of the spice trade, and that once these aggressive policies had been adopted, the commercial affairs of the VOC improved hugely. See chapter 7 in Witteveen, M. (2011), *Antonio van Diemen: de opkomst van de VOC in Azië*, Amsterdam: Pallas Publications.

was privately raised, ships built or hired, fitted out and manned, as well as the journey to and from the East Indies undertaken for a single voyage, and – assuming a safe return – the resultant profits shared upon the dissolution of the company. A system that would be manifestly more cost-effective in operational terms was one where a company was chartered to operate into the long-term future; still better if that company could operate with a monopoly, preventing rivals from outcompeting it, and with formal governmental support, thereby encouraging greater levels of private investment as the company was less likely to fold as a result of such support. Still better would be if the purview of the company included the right to defend its traders through force and to sign treaties with local rulers. These were the factors which led to the chartering of the VOC in 1602 and which augured its success. The result was a company with huge financial resources, one which benefitted from the Dutch public's confidence in it, one empowered to wage war locally (since communications between the Indian Ocean and the North Sea were very slow in the seventeenth century), a company which had a single trading structure covering all Dutch trading-posts and which was led by a governor-general who had no rivals.

Little surprise then that the VOC amassed immense wealth and power during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Having displaced the Portuguese in the East Indies through force, it controlled the trade in commodities such as nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, cloves, coffee, tea, silk, teak, and porcelain from East Asia to Europe, employing at its height some 25,000 people and possessing capital around ten times that of its British rival, the East India Company, founded a year earlier in 1601.¹⁰

A gap in the VOC historiography

The VOC merits serious academic study in its own right and the historiography on it is vast. The archive material that survives, even more than two centuries after the VOC ceased trading, must be measured in kilometres of archive shelving needed to house relevant original documents: 2.5 km in Jakarta, 1.2 km in The Hague, 450 m in Cape Town, 310 m in Colombo, 64 m in Chennai.¹¹ The inventory, simply the index, of archival material relating to the VOC in the Nationaal Archief in The Hague stretches to 1,170 pages.¹² The

¹⁰ See William Dalrymple (2019), *The Anarchy: the Relentless Rise of the East India Company*, London: Bloomsbury, 12, where Dalrymple cites the levels of capital upon both companies' foundation as 68,373 pounds for the EIC and 550,000 pounds for the VOC. Dalrymple also mentions that the VOC was able to award its investors dividends of up to 3,600%.

¹¹ See Guleij & Knaap, *Het Grote VOC Boek*, 8.

¹² See <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02>.

online VOC-Kenniscentrum lists a staggering array of literature relating to the VOC.¹³ For once, Wikipedia is instructive: its article ‘List of works about the Dutch East India Company’ lists 43 pages in small print of academic works concerning the VOC, divided into the following categories: general; economic history; science, technology and culture; military and political history; maritime history; historiography; VOC people; VOC in Europe; VOC in Africa; VOC in south and west Asia; VOC in southeast Asia; VOC in east Asia.¹⁴ The sheer scope of the VOC and of writing its history is massive.

Yet this scope does not stretch to include a large amount of material on the religious aspects of the VOC, where there is a remarkably small historiography. Excellent recent collections on Dutch colonial history lack any reference to religious content, influence, or factors.¹⁵ The principal contemporary historians of the VOC who discuss religion are few: Gerrit Knaap,¹⁶ Karel Steenbrink,¹⁷ Jan Sihar Aritonang,¹⁸ Yusak Soleiman,¹⁹ and Barbara Watson Andaya.²⁰

Moreover, the contemporary historiography tends to concentrate on the phenomenology of religion during the VOC period, which in itself is of course perfectly valid as such material is of fundamental interest. For example, Yusak Soleiman explores in detail the situation with regard to Dutch Protestant clergy

¹³ See <https://www.voc-kenniscentrum.nl>

¹⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_about_the_Dutch_East_India_Company

¹⁵ See for example Antunes, C. & Gommans, J. (2015), *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks, Institutions 1600-2000*, London: Bloomsbury, a first-rate collection of essays which contain only passing references to religion, including in the Further Reading section. See also Clulow, A. and Mostert, T. (eds) (2018), *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, another excellent collection of essays which pass over religion in silence. The final essay in this volume is Andrade, T., ‘The Dutch East India Company in global history: a historiographical reconnaissance’ in Clulow & Mostert, *Dutch and English*, 239-256, a fine historiographical overview of the VOC which omits all reference to religious influences. This omission is the norm in standard histories of South East Asia. See for example Nordholt, H.-S. (2016), *Een geschiedenis van Zuidoost Azië*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, where a brief treatment of the VOC and its Calvinist Protestant mistrust of Islam and of Roman Catholicism on pages 93-96 gives way to standard economic remarks about the VOC on page 130 onwards.

¹⁶ See Knaap, G. (2004), *Kruidnagelen en christenen: de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon, 1656-1696*, Leiden: KITLV, 2004.

¹⁷ See Steenbrink, K. (2006), *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950* (trans. Jan Steenbrink & Henry Jansen), Amsterdam: Rodopi.

¹⁸ See Aritonang, J.S. & Steenbrink, K. (2008), ‘The arrival of Protestantism and the consolidation of Christianity in the Moluccas 1605-1800’ in: Steenbrink, K. & Aritonang J.S. (Eds.), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Leiden: Brill, 99-133.

¹⁹ See Soleiman, Y. & Pangumbaran, I. B. W. (2012), *The Dutch Reformed Church in Late 18th Century Java*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.

²⁰ See Watson Andaya, B. (2016), ‘The globalization of Christianity in early modern Southeast Asia’ in Ooi Keat Gin & Hoàng Anh Tuấn (Eds.), *Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350-1800*, London: Routledge, 233-249. We also note historiographical contributions on the VOC’s religious policy by H.E. Niemeijer and G.J. Schutte.

and ziekenroosters in Java in the first decades of VOC occupation. We learn that the early VOC was obliged to undertake the pastoral care of its own employees, their families, servants and slaves, and that it therefore dispatched Protestant chaplains and ziekenroosters to the East Indies, whose salaries were charged to the VOC directors in Amsterdam.²¹ The early VOC experienced some difficulty in recruiting chaplains for the simple reason that the clergy were often reluctant to take on the considerable personal risks involved in travelling to the East Indies and in working there. Nonetheless the VOC directors were in the position to send six Protestant chaplains to Java in 1605²² (even though there had in fact been no mention of religion or of religious responsibilities in the VOC's first charter of 1602), a figure which rose to 635 chaplains by the time the VOC ceased trading in 1800.²³ Jan Sihar Aritonang conveys similar observational truths: he furnishes us with detailed evidence of the number of Protestant chaplains employed by the VOC and the locations where they worked. In addition, he examines the Protestant chaplains' training and implantation in various parts of the East Indies such as Ambon, Banda, Ternate, Sangir-Talaud, Timor, Batavia, and north Java.²⁴ This research is a very important addition to the history of religion and worth pursuing further.

Even so, the detailed phenomenology of the VOC's religious activity in the East Indies does not quite answer the question of how religious outlooks in the Netherlands, and in particular the Protestant outlook as well as the composition of the VOC leadership there, influenced religious practice and mission on the ground in the East Indies. Even after reading the phenomenological studies, we are left wondering what the theology of this history might be, which theological ideas in the Netherlands exerted influence and shaped religious action, dialogue, mission, conversion, and church life in the East Indies. We know this to be a legitimate question because a perceptible shift in VOC religious policy in the East Indies following the Synod of Dort can be detected.²⁵

²¹ Soleiman, Pangumbaran, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 37.

²² Soleiman, Pangumbaran, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 40.

²³ Soleiman, Pangumbaran, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 44.

²⁴ Aritonang & Steenbrink, 'Arrival of Protestantism', 104 onwards.

²⁵ This synod is discussed more fully below. In Dutch it is known as the Synode van Dordrecht or the Synode van Dordt, usually referred to as the Synod of Dort in English. Dordrecht is a city in the province of South Holland in the Netherlands.

The Synod of Dort and the VOC

We know that the VOC sought and obtained two significant religious verdicts from the Synod of Dort in 1619.²⁶ We also know that, following the Synod of Dort (which met 180 times in Dordrecht between November 1618 and May 1619), the VOC included clauses concerning the defence and practice of religion in its second charter from the Staten-Generaal van de Nederlanden in 1623.²⁷

Before examining these verdicts in more detail, some explanatory remarks about the Synod of Dort are necessary, since this synod and its debates and decisions shaped Dutch religious history permanently. It also, I argue, had a significant knock-on effect on the religious history of Indonesia.²⁸

There had already been a national synod of the Dutch Protestant churches in Dordrecht in 1578, so the event we now commonly call the Synod of Dort is more precisely in fact the Second Synod of Dort. Ostensibly, the issue at stake in the synod was a theological dispute between the followers of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) professor of theology at Leiden, who had taken issue with some of the classic doctrines of Calvinist Protestantism, and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), also professor of theology at Leiden, who was a defender of a strict Calvinism. The Arminians remonstrated with what is considered to be the classic Dutch formulation of Calvinism, the Belgic Confession of 1559 (hence they were known as the Remonstrants). They advocated various systematic beliefs which were considered radical in the Dutch Protestantism of the day: conditional election (that God chooses people for salvation based on their own free choice of the gospel, albeit that God knows in advance what they will choose), unlimited atonement (that Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was made not just for the saved elect but for all people), resistible grace (that people are able – through the exercise of their free will – to reject God's offer of salvation) and the possibility of apostasy (that people who had accepted

²⁶ See Soleiman, Pangumbaran and Aritonang & Steenbrink, 'Arrival of Protestantism', 102. This approach followed a question put to the consistory by A. Hulsebos, chaplain in Batavia, and passed on to the Synod of Dort. The original correspondence between the Heren XVII (the governors of the VOC, based in Oost-Indisch Huis in Amsterdam) and Jan Pieterszoon Coen (then the governor-general of the VOC), and between the secretariat at the Synod of Dort and the Reformed Consistory in Amsterdam at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague merits further study.

²⁷ Aritonang & Steenbrink, 'Arrival of Protestantism', 99.

²⁸ As is the case with the VOC, the historiography on the Synod of Dort is enormous. The best recent treatment is arguably Goudriaan, A. & van Lieburg, F. (Eds.) (2011), *Revisiting the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)*, Leiden: Brill.

the gospel and numbered themselves among the elect could nonetheless subsequently reject it according to their free will).²⁹

Essential for understanding the Synod of Dort is to grasp that the Arminian position came to be generally regarded in the Netherlands as pro-Spanish, whereas the Gomarist position of strict Calvinism was commonly seen as patriotic and Dutch. In the febrile atmosphere of the Netherlands during the Eighty Years War, the association of Arminian ‘laxity’ with negotiation, considered treasonable, with king Philip IV of Spain was a disastrous one. This assumption of a link between Arminianism and treason was so widespread that many allege that the canons (formal doctrinal verdicts) of the Synod of Dort had been decided upon in favour of the Gomarists before the synod had even met. The canons, whether or not pre-determined, found largely – but not wholly – in favour of the strict Calvinism of Gomarus, and yielded what has been handed down to anglophone Reformed Christianity as its ‘tulip’ acronym – an affirmation that essential Christian systematic theology materially includes: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the elect – that is, the opposite of everything the Remonstrants taught.³⁰ Dort also triggered the writing of a new Dutch translation of the Bible, the *Statenvertaling*, eventually completed in 1637.

One political consequence of Dort was the arrest, kangaroo-court trial, and summary execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), the doughty campaigner for Dutch independence and the last *landsadvocaat* for Holland (in effect the prime minister of the province), who had defended the Arminians. Oldenbarnevelt was, very significantly, also a founder of the VOC, one of the original *Heren XVII* in 1602. This connection between the Remonstrants,

²⁹ These Arminian doctrines might strike the twenty-first century reader as almost self-evidently true (assuming the presuppositions of Christian theism), however each of them was intensely disputed in the classical Reformed Christian scholasticism which dominated the theological discourse in the Netherlands (and to an extent in Anglican Great Britain) in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Protestant reception of biblical texts relating to salvation, along with, or opposed to, traditional Catholic sacramental theology relating to the same issue, was at stake. In the Anglican Church, this debate surfaced especially in seventeenth century debates concerning the nature and efficacy of baptism: does baptism have a spiritual efficacy, effecting salvation in the person baptized (a salvific ‘bullseye’), or does baptism have a sacramental efficacy, exhibiting a sign of salvation (a salvific ‘arrow’ but not a bullseye)? Arminians tended to favour the ‘bullseye’, Gomarists the ‘arrow’. For a very full discussion, see chapter 5 in Collier, J. (2018), *Debating Perseverance: the Augustinian Heritage in Post-Reformation England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. The point here is that apparently recondite and obscure points of theology appeared urgent and crucial to the intellectual world of Northern Europe in the seventeenth century, as they represented possible answers to questions of personal freedom and choice, as well as of eternal metaphysical destiny.

³⁰ Despite this simple-sounding English acronym, there is no doubting the intellectual seriousness of Reformed orthodoxy. For a sophisticated analysis of key figures, see Goudriaan, A. (2006), *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625-1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht and Anthonius Drriessen*, Leiden: Brill.

Oldenbarnevelt and the VOC is often (and naturally) used by historians to indicate a clear split between the VOC leadership and Dort. As Jan Sihar Aritonang puts it, ‘... the Dutch Heren XVII or the seventeen commissaries of the VOC were mostly broad-minded aristocrats rather than orthodox Reformed leaders’.³¹

But the sad and unjust case of Oldenbarnevelt did not prevent the Synod of Dort from nonetheless exercising a strong theological gravitational pull on the VOC, such that – whatever the alleged differences in social background of the Heren XVII and the delegates at Dort – the VOC assumed and communicated Dort’s theology in its policies in the East Indies.

A key theological idea here is that of election.³² We have seen that the Arminians favoured a doctrine of conditional election, according to which God chooses eternal salvation for those he foreknows will exercise their free will to respond positively to God’s offer of universal grace in Jesus Christ. The Gomarists, who were essentially victorious at Dort, favoured unconditional election, according to which God unconditionally chooses – as an act of saving grace – certain people for eternal salvation, even though they are all unworthy, sinful, and have done nothing to merit God’s grace. Setting aside for now the twin nuances of unconditional election,³³ in unconditional election we have the expression of a doctrine that God’s choices are exercised independently from any human choices, based on God’s sovereign and independent will, not based on any foreseen, or per impossibile unforeseen, acts of human beings. We might see in this doctrine of unconditional election a whiff of fatalism: Dort’s moral and metaphysical universe is thoroughly deterministic, with a lack of moral agency relevant to salvation on the part of human beings. The journey from this deterministic belief to a possible atmosphere of moral indifference, even cynicism, laziness, and cruelty, is clear: if human actions cannot in principle influence divine decisions taken on principle entirely

³¹ See Aritonang & Steenbrink, ‘Arrival of Protestantism’, 101.

³² Without commenting on the truth or otherwise of Christian systematic theology, footnote 29 above acts as a reminder that apparently obscure theological doctrines such as election seemed compellingly urgent in the seventeenth century.

³³ Briefly, supralapsarian unconditional election holds that God made his choice of those destined to eternal salvation before the Fall of Mankind in the Garden of Eden – this was the ‘super-strict’ version of unconditional election taught by Jean Calvin’s (1509-1564) deputy and successor Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605) and espoused too by Gomarus. The canons of Dort veer more towards infralapsarian unconditional election, according to which God made this choice after the Fall. Infralapsarianism is considered a ‘softer’ doctrine than supralapsarianism because supralapsarianism appears liable to making God himself responsible for the origin of sin, since God decides the elect’s salvation before sin ever occurs in the world, and what a sovereign God decides must come to pass. We note that neither form of unconditional election appears generally congenial to the modern mind, including the modern practicing Christian mind.

independently of individual human considerations, then human actions lose their moral seriousness.³⁴

We see these ideas at play in the two pieces of advice handed to the VOC or to one of its chaplains by the Synod of Dort. The first originally came as a question from Pastor A. Hulsebos to the Reformed Consistory in Amsterdam concerning the baptism of children born to a VOC-employee father³⁵ and an Indonesian mother. The decision of Dort was that children in Dutch Reformed Church families were baptized in the context of an active Christian family within the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, whereas the children of Dutch Reformed fathers and non-Christian mothers in Java were not raised in this context and therefore could not be baptized until they had studied Protestant catechism to a suitable level.³⁶ The second piece of advice concerned the need for VOC chaplains to learn Malay, which was, even before the arrival of the Dutch, the *lingua franca* of East Indies trade.³⁷

This injunction from a formal church synod not to baptize children where only one parent is a practicing Christian will seem most peculiar to the average modern observer conversant with standard Christian enthusiasm to recruit new Christians and to mark their entry into the Church by baptizing them. As Aritonang puts it, ‘The strongest restrictions against a dynamic missionary spirit [within the VOC in the East Indies] came from the strict theologians at the national Synod of Dordrecht ...’³⁸ We also note that this Calvinist absolutist position was fiercely contested not just by the defeated Remonstrants, but by orthodox Calvinists, most notably Justus Heurnius (1587-1652) who as a Dutch Reformed pastor wrote *De legatione evangelica ad Indos capessenda admonitio* (1618), a manual of evangelization dedicated to the Heren XVII which advocated active Protestant mission in the East Indies on the grounds that Catholic mission there had failed. From 1624 to 1639 Reformed congregations

³⁴ This theological determinism in Calvinist systematic theology has historically pointed in two opposing ethical directions. Either towards the moral puritanism of those hopeful of seeing in their ethical behavior signs of those who have been chosen as God’s elect, or towards a moral indifference which has little trouble in adopting highly selfish behaviours on the grounds that God’s choice is independent of such behaviours. This dichotomy is lucidly explored in relation to another historical example of this theological determinism in chapter 1 in Palmer, T. (2018), *Jansenism and England: Moral Rigorism across the Confessions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁵ One would be wrong to imagine that the VOC employed only Protestants. On the contrary, whatever the politics inside the Netherlands, the VOC was content to employ not just Reformed, but Lutheran Protestants, as well as Catholics and non-Christians. However, in terms of Pastor Hulsebos’ question, the putative father of the child was a Reformed Protestant working for the VOC in Java.

³⁶ See Soleiman, Pangumbaran, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 42.

³⁷ Malay is linguistically very close to contemporary Indonesian. As with Dutch and Afrikaans, a conversation between a Malay-speaker and an Indonesian-speaker is largely mutually comprehensible. Soleiman, Pangumbaran, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 42.

³⁸ See Aritonang & Steenbrink, ‘Arrival of Protestantism’, 102.

in the Netherlands financed his mission in the East Indies, although it should be noted that the VOC authorities in Batavia did everything in their power to thwart and undermine his missionary efforts in the Javan Chinese community.

Dutch approaches to Indonesians before and after Dort: De Houtman and Coen

Heurnius apart, we see a distinct shift in Dutch attitudes towards non-Christian Indonesians before and after the Synod of Dort. To illustrate this best, we will examine two emblematic figures already mentioned above, Frederik de Houtman and Jan Pieterszoon Coen.

As we have already seen, Frederik de Houtman led the first Dutch expedition to the East Indies in 1595 and also travelled on the second, which was led by his brother Cornelis, who was killed in a sea-battle in Aceh in north Sumatra. The sultan of Aceh imprisoned Frederik, who spent his two years of captivity (from 1599 to 1601) learning Malay and in making advanced astronomical observations. Extensive and bullying attempts were made by the sultan to convert De Houtman to Islam, but he did not relent and was eventually released unharmed.³⁹ He went on to lead a VOC expedition to the west coast of Australia in 1619, dying in Alkmaar back in the Netherlands in 1627.

We see in De Houtman's experience in Indonesia what Karel Steenbrinck describes as follows, 'Among the accounts of these first voyages we do encounter a few which are unprejudiced and display a mixture of admiration, interest and astonishment at practices which appeared to be bewildering ...'⁴⁰ Frederick de Houtman was a man of the Renaissance, curious about other cultures and willing to enter into dialogue and debate with those who were different, who saw Muslims and other non-Christians in the East Indies as misguided and heretical, but not sinister, depraved, or evil in any way.

In Jan Pieterszoon Coen, we see both a different life story and a different approach to the non-Christian Indonesians.⁴¹ Coen was born in Hoorn in 1587

³⁹ See Steenbrink, K. (2006), *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950* (trans. Jan Steenbrink & Henry Jansen), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 29-33 for an entertaining account of De Houtman's captivity, which also contains bibliographical information. There is surprisingly little biographical literature on Frederick de Houtman.

⁴⁰ Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism*, 35.

⁴¹ In contrast to Frederick de Houtman, there is an extensive literature on Coen. van Goor, J. (2015), *Jan Pieterszoon Coen 1587-1629, Koopman-koning in Azië*, Amsterdam: Boom, crowns this body of literature. A biography of 575 pages, it is unparalleled in its detail and is unlikely ever to be surpassed. Another recent publication which discusses Coen extensively is Hagen, P. (2018), *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië: vijf eeuwen verzet tegen vreemde overheersing*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 115 onwards.

and raised a strict Calvinist. He enlisted with the VOC in 1607, travelled to the Banda Islands in the East Indies and witnessed a massacre of 50 Dutch traders and soldiers by the local population. He worked his way up the hierarchy of the VOC, becoming accountant-general in the East Indies in 1613, then governor-general of the East Indies in 1618 during which he was notorious for the strict enforcement of the contracts signed between the VOC and local sultans. His initial aim was to secure Dutch monopolies on the trade in cloves in the Moluccas and in nutmeg in Banda. Karel Steenbrink calls him 'the architect and organizer of Dutch power in the East Indies'.⁴² In 1619, he destroyed Jacatra in Java and re-founded it as Batavia, thereby founding a new capital for the Dutch East Indies which Coen hoped would become a new Amsterdam in the East.⁴³ He then spearheaded the Dutch conquest of the Banda Islands, during which between 2,000 to 14,000 local people were killed in acts of such savagery that Coen was reprimanded by the Heren XVII for his immoderation. He was in the Netherlands in 1623 when a massacre of both Indonesians and English was perpetrated by Dutch troops on the island of Ambon following a dispute over spice trade rivalries. An attempt to extend the VOC's influence to China was unsuccessful, but Coen did establish the beginnings of the VOC's presence on Formosa. He died of dysentery in Batavia in 1629.

We see in Coen a man of the Calvinist Reformation, a man whose firm Protestantism served as a reinforcement for his policies of colonization. Coen saw Islam not in an anthropological way as De Houtman did, but as a dangerous heresy. Consequently Coen justified the Dutch colonization of the East Indies for religious reasons as well as commercial ones: the time of indulging superstitious heretics was over and Christians were justified, he argued, in mistrusting local Muslim rulers who were bound to be unreliable. There are clear signs that Dort influenced Coen's policies: he both despised Islam, which he saw as fanatical and dangerous, and yet he remained wary of converting the Muslims to Christianity as it could bring about political unrest and potentially jeopardize Dutch political and economic interests in the East Indies. Through this optic, he sought stable relations with local Muslim princes. Conversion to Christianity was more appropriate for animists than Muslims, indeed Coen

⁴² See Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism*, 60.

⁴³ There is an excellent account of the violent founding of Batavia in Burnet, I. (2013), *East Indies: the 200 year Struggle between the Portuguese Crown, the Dutch East India Company and the English East India Company for Supremacy in the Eastern Seas*, Dural (Australia): Rosenberg, 111-121.

regarded Islam and Christianity as being engaged in a competition to convert animists.⁴⁴

When we consider De Houtman and Coen, there is a contrast, not just in personality, but in the level of force used against Indonesians, and in their approach to the exclusive truth-value of the doctrinal claims of Protestant Christianity as exemplified by the conclusions of the Synod of Dort. Both the VOC and the Synod of Dort were developed in a political hothouse embodied by the struggle for Dutch independence, national security, and recognition, which resulted in a particular mentality of intransigence on the part of the emerging nation. The Synod of Dort furnished the VOC with a certain impatience in relation to approaching the East Indies as a locus of exploration and discovery, accompanied by an attitude of national Dutch Protestant supremacy flowing from guaranteed theological truths. The belief that they were spiritually elected by God himself implied a socially superior rectitude on the part of the Dutch colonizers, but a rectitude untroubled by moral content. That is, Dort taught the VOC how to despise the inhabitants of the East Indies and how to justify acts of immense violence such as the foundation of Batavia and the conquest of Banda, all with an easy conscience.⁴⁵ The contrasting approaches and behaviours of Frederik de Houtman and Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the East Indies illustrate this theological evolution well. Despite this, contemporary historians tend to neglect religion entirely, attempting to understand VOC policies and practices in the East Indies without any reference to theological or religious considerations. But this approach fails to convey a complete picture of the people involved, of their motivations, and of their growing intolerance of non-Protestants.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The essential sourcebook for Coen's extensive correspondence is Colenbrander, H.T. (Ed.) (1921-1934), *Jan Pietersz. Coen, Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië (6 vols)*, 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1921-1934, extensively cited in both Karel Steenbrink op.cit. and Jur van Goor op.cit.

⁴⁵ The foundation of Batavia in 1619 involved the complete destruction by the Dutch of the existing Javanese city of Jacatra by fire, resulting in an unknown number of casualties.

⁴⁶ This article is a summary of a much longer and more fully referenced monograph currently being prepared about the theological influences on VOC policy.

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Part 2: Challenges

The Radical System in the Hebrew Bible

Arjan Knop

Abstract

There are many laws and rules that have been drawn up in the Hebrew Bible by YHWH for the people of Israel. Together these commandments and prohibitions form a cluster of provisions that are referred to as a 'system' in this article. This word refers to a set of rules that functions as a unity. These rules and laws are presented as unchangeable, absolute, and ones that are to be obeyed to the letter. Discussion about or reflection on the system is not asked for, and therefore it does not invoke one's own responsibility. Man is at the mercy of the system and one must submit oneself to it. For these reasons, we call the body of laws and regulations in the Hebrew Bible a 'radical system', one which in many cases leads to violence. When the system is challenged, not complied with, and thus threatened, the subordinate finds it necessary to intervene, often with excessive force.

Having said this, there are very few examples of violence in the Hebrew Bible, in the rabbinic Jewish tradition, and in the history of early and late Judaism generally. This is noteworthy and we ask the question why the sacred texts have been followed only very sporadically in this context. We venture to argue that 'escape valves' were constructed within the Hebrew Bible, which allowed too much ideological pressure to drain away, with the consequence that radicalism never really gained a foothold in rabbinic thinking. These valves or 'exits' are very subtly and paradoxically present within the heart of the radical system.

Definitions

Researchers seldom agree entirely about what exactly is meant by 'violence'. Does it refer only to the infliction of physical damage or are there also other elements that fall within the boundaries of the definition? Another question concerns the object of violence: to what or whom can violence be directed? We are dealing with an all-encompassing concept, the boundaries of which need to be defined time and again. The following quotation lists the challenges that a researcher faces in defining the concept of 'violence':

There are many definitions of violence. Narrowly defined, violence only occurs when a body is physically injured. The most severe form results in dismemberment or death. Without denying other forms, narrow definitions restrict what is and is not violent, often focusing on the objective nature of violence. On the other end of the spectrum, a broad array of behaviour is classified as violent. It could result from an act or from a failure to act. Violence can also be psychological, theological, legal, systemic, economic, linguistic, sexual and emotional – even when no physical mark has been left. (...) In addition to the debate over what violence is, scholars disagree over who or what can be object – the environment, animals, sacred space, a foetus.¹

However interesting, this is not the place to elaborate on this discussion and Seibert's definition of 'violence' will be used in this article because of its brevity and clear classification:

I consider violence to be physical, emotional, or psychological harm done to a person by an individual (or individuals), institution, or structure that results in injury, oppression, or death.²

As far as radicalism is concerned, a definition is even harder to present. In his report for the ICCT (*The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*), Schmid points to the existence of a multitude of definitions that are 'ill-defined, complex and controversial' and to the impossibility of finding a common denominator in them.³ The only thing the researchers seem to agree on is that 'radicalisation is a process'.⁴ Schmid, in an attempt to define 'radicalism',

¹ Rowley, M. P. and Wild-Wood, E. (2017), 'Religion, Hermeneutics and Violence: An Introduction', *Transformation* 34(2), 77-90 (quote p. 84).

² Seibert, E. A. (2012), *The Violence of Scripture. Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 9. See further Klawans, J. (2007), 'Introduction: Religion, Violence, and the Bible', in Bernat, D.A. and Klawans, J. (Eds.), *Religion and Violence: Proceedings of a Conference held at Wellesley College and Boston University, February 19-20, 2006*, Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 6-7. There is also discussion as to whether violence is an intrinsic trait existing within people or whether it should be considered 'abnormal'. In his research into the causes of genocide over the centuries, Docker (Docker, J. (2008), *The Origins of Violence. History, Religion and Genocide*, London: Pluto Press, 2) takes the first position and says the following about this, 'In this book I consider the sombre implications of Lemkin's reconceptualization of history: rather than violence being abnormal, it is an intrinsic characteristic of human activity. The history of humanity is the history of violence: war and genocide; conquest and colonization and the creation of empires sanctioned by God or the gods in both polytheism and monotheism; the fatal combination of democracy and empire; and revolution, massacre, torture, mutilation, cruelty.' See also Eisen, R. (2011), *The Peace and Violence of Judaism. From the Bible to Modern Zionism*, Oxford: University Press, 11-13; Juergensmeyer, M. and Kitts, M. (Eds.) (2013), *Violence and the World's Religious Traditions. An Introduction*, Oxford: University Press, 2-3.

³ Schmid, A. P. (2013), *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review 1*, The Hague: ICCT.Schmid, (quote from Rik Coolsaet).

⁴ Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation*, 1.

nevertheless examines the historical background of the term and refers to its adjectival use in the nineteenth century for those political parties that were trying to bring about social change. He also notes that what was then understood to be ‘radical’ could differ for each group or changed circumstances and that we are therefore dealing with a ‘relative concept’.⁵ In his conclusion conveying what he understood by ‘radicalism’, Schmid points to two things: firstly, that it is about pursuing political change, born out of the conviction that the current social situation is unacceptable, and that the means to bring about this change can be either ‘non-violent and democratic’ or ‘violent and non-democratic’.⁶ Radicalism thus turns out to be a difficult concept to define, but what is clear is that for most researchers it is about the violent pursuit of (political) change. This is also evident from publications that mention ‘radicalism’ in the same breath as ‘terrorism’ and ‘extreme violence’ and have even incorporated this into their titles.⁷

In this article the term ‘radicalism’ is not used as a dynamic concept, quite the opposite in fact, as the end point of a process. It is not the pursuit of change that is central, but the preservation of the *status quo*. It refers to a way of thinking (although ‘thinking’ is not very apt here), in which one assumes the existence of an absolute truth. Putting this truth into perspective is impossible, as is understanding (the opinion of) the other. We now come to the following definitions:

- **Radicalism** is (the end point of) the process in which one’s own opinion (ideas, system of thinking) is perceived as absolute, unchangeable, and uncontested.
- **Radical violence** is the use of violence (any sort) against persons or institutions that question and/or challenge a person’s radical opinion.
- **Religious radicalism** is the end point of the process by which one’s own opinion (ideas, system of thinking) is based on some form of divine revelation and perceived as absolute, unchangeable and uncontested.
- **Radical religious violence** is the use of violence against persons or institutions that question and/or challenge a person’s radical opinion. This violence is hereby regarded as sanctioned or even ordered by the deity

⁵ Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation*, 7.

⁶ Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation*, 8.

⁷ Jayakumar, S. (Ed.) (2013), *Terrorism, Radicalisation & Countering Violent Extremism. Practical Considerations and Concerns*, Singapore: Springer Nature; and Ranstorp, M. (Ed.) (2010), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation. Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, London/New York: Routledge.

considered responsible for the revelation on which the radical opinion is based.⁸

Clarification of the definitions

Religious radicalism is based on an authority that originates from outside the person or group ('God says', 'the prophet says', 'the book says', ...). This transcendent legislator offers a 'closed system' of rules and laws, which is considered unchangeable and indisputable. The radicalised person considers himself as being subject to this system without the need to think critically about its content. Personal responsibility for arriving at (ethical) decision-making has been transferred to this system. In doing this, the person becomes a kind of 'servant' of the system, a slave so to speak. When the radicalised person subsequently believes that the system is under attack, he will want to defend it, because in fact he is defending himself. This can be done with words, but one can also resort to violence.⁹

In other words, radical (religious) violence is about a deliberate attack on others who do not subscribe to the same 'revelation values'. The use of force and violence is believed to have been approved or even requested by the deity. Man is an accomplice of his god to eliminate resistance on earth.

We must further distinguish between radical views and radical violence. Not every radical view has to lead to violence.¹⁰ Radical violence, however, is always conditional on having radical views.

Summary

- An absolute system of laws and regulations originates from outside a person and is seen as indisputable and unchangeable.
- A human being must accept this system in its entirety and submit to it.
- The system must be protected against external attacks.
- The defence of the system can lead to violence (ordered or not, but often sanctioned by the system itself).

⁸ More about the definition of religious violence, see Rowley & Wild-Wood, *Religion, Hermeneutics*, 80-82. See also the following quote from Klawans, 'When the scriptures come into the hands of single-minded literalists hell-bent on war, the results are likely to be violent. Frankfurter allows that violent fantasies may have served originally to deflect or channel the rage that could otherwise lead to real violence. But once these fantasies are canonized, they may find their way into the hands of groups who accept without question their own self-righteousness and their enemies' evil nature. When such a group feels threatened on the one hand and empowered directly from God on the other, here too we find a deadly mix.' Klawans, *Introduction: Religion*, 14. See further the discussion on Hassner and Aran in Juergensmeyer & Kitts, *Religious Traditions*, 84.

⁹ Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation*, 6.

¹⁰ Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation*, 8.

The radical law of YHWH

We can hardly deny that the Hebrew Bible (according to our definition) is a radical 'book'. Nowhere is it stated that people are allowed to follow their own rules or that they must think for themselves about what is good or evil. In fact, one of the first stories in the Hebrew Bible is precisely about the issue of whether people can, or indeed may, possess divine knowledge. It is the story of the 'stolen fruit' and the distinction between good and evil: Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from all the trees, but not from the 'Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil' (Gen 2: 16-17).

The ability to distinguish between what is good and what is not, what is permitted and what is not, seems to be a quality that is of divine origin. From the ban on eating from the tree, we can conclude that man cannot, or should not, know this distinction and must therefore follow God's rules without question: After all, He knows what is good/bad and what is permitted/not permitted. It is nonetheless striking that Eve and then Adam were not able to obey this one simple rule and did in fact eat of the fruit. As a result, they were driven out of Paradise and a rift arose between the divine world and the human world.

The question that then arises is whether Man took the 'stolen knowledge' with him out of Paradise. It would seem so, since YHWH establishes that 'Man has now acquired knowledge of good and evil', after which he was sent away into the world (Gen 3:22-24). Headlam, in an article on the similarities between Prometheus and the Paradise story, notes the following, 'As the Serpent had foretold, Adam and Eve do not die, though God had said they should, nor is the stolen treasure taken away - from that time forth they are as the gods, knowing good and evil, only with the added penalty of labour and sorrow and pain'.¹¹ As long as man lived in the Garden of Eden, in an idyllic primeval state, he didn't need any knowledge of what is good and evil. However, this knowledge is necessary if he is to go out into the world and find his own way in the midst of all the good and evil that a human life has to offer.

It is clear from the paradise myth that the human world and the divine are two separate domains that cannot be entangled. God and man are essentially different from each other. In Paradise they 'walked side by side through the garden' (Gen 3:8), but that does not make them each other's equals. Man took hold of the divine domain, breaking through the separation between him and God. After this event, physical boundaries were placed between them (Gen

¹¹ Headlam, W. (1934), 'Prometheus and the Garden of Eden: Notes for a Lecture by the Late Walter Headlam', *The Classical Quarterly* 28(2), 63-71 (quote p. 66).

3:24). The ‘Tree of Divine Knowledge’ stands for a ‘system of rules’ that is as concrete and tangible as the very fruit that Adam and Eve ate.

In short, knowledge of rules and laws that people must follow (being able to distinguish between good and evil) originates from YHWH. He planted the ‘Tree’ and declared it to hold divine knowledge (‘Man has now become as one of us, knowing good and evil’, Gen 3:22). Man has stolen this knowledge and taken it into the world. But even though Man has this knowledge, it is essentially separate from him. He cannot change anything about its contents and has to attune his whole life to it.

The Hebrew Bible contains a total of 613 commandments and prohibitions which the Israelites must follow to the letter. There is no trace of doubt when, for example, rules concerning purity, food, sexual intercourse, or sacrifices are proclaimed. God gives clear commandments through Moses and the later prophets, ones to be followed precisely. ‘Thus God says’ and ‘as YHWH had commanded Moses’ are phrases we encounter regularly in the Torah (see for example Exod 9: 1, 13 and 39: 1, 5). Again, there is no trace of doubt as to the correctness of the rules and of the ‘system’ as a whole. God determines the laws; He demarcates the boundaries and man must obey.

To further illustrate this fact, a text from the Hebrew Bible can be quoted, namely the call of YHWH to Moses and the people to make a covenant in Exodus 24. All the elements that point to a radical system of laws and rules, which have been established in our discussion of the definitions above, are present in this text: A transcendent authority (YHWH) offers an absolute set of rules and laws (tangible in the form of two tablets of stone) that exist independently of man and to which the people must submit. A few verses from this chapter are cited here:

³ Moses came and told the people all the Lord’s words and all the case laws. All the people answered in unison, ‘Everything that the Lord has said we will do’.
⁴ Moses then wrote down all the Lord’s words. He got up early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He set up twelve sacred stone pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁷ Then he took the covenant scroll and read it out loud for the people to hear. They responded, ‘Everything that the Lord has said we will do, and we will obey’.
⁸ Moses then took the blood and threw it over the people. Moses said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord now makes with you on the basis of all these words’.

12 The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. I'll give you the stone tablets with the instructions and the commandments that I've written in order to teach them'.¹²

It is evident that the Hebrew Bible does indeed contain a system of laws and regulations that can only be accepted in its entirety by the people of Israel. We will come back to this later, but first we will have to discuss briefly whether this radical system has led to violence in the Hebrew Bible.

Radical violence in the Hebrew Bible

Did the radical system in the Hebrew Bible lead to violence? Much has been written about the subject of violence in the Hebrew Bible,¹³ but the simplest answer must surely be 'yes'. It is impossible to ignore the texts in which (physical) violence is commanded or practised against people who, for one reason or another, do not obey the biblical system of laws.¹⁴

A few examples taken from many illustrate the violence in the Hebrew Bible. These examples have been chosen to show that this violence is presented as 'necessary': people who disobey the rules and laws of YHWH must be destroyed, whether they are foreign or members of their own people:¹⁵

¹² All translations are taken from the *Common English Bible*.

¹³ Firestone, R. (2010), 'Divine Authority and Mass Violence: Economies of Aggression in the Emergence of Religions', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 26, 220-237; Sacks, J. (2015), *Not in God's Name. Confronting Religious Violence*, New York: Schocken Books. Sacks; Juergensmeyer and Kitts, *Princeton Readings*; Bernat and Klawans (*Religion and Violence*) discuss some of the leading works on violence and the Hebrew Bible and the relationship between violence and religion on 2-6; Bekkenkamp, J. and Sherwood, Y. (Eds.) (2003), *Sanctified Aggression. Legacies of Biblical and Post Biblical Vocabularies of Violence*, New York: T&T Clark; Docker, *Origins of violence*, 113-144; Eisen, *Peace and Violence*, 15-65; Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*; Meyer, E. E. (2011), "The Role of the Old Testament in a Violent World", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(2), 1-8; Juergensmeyer and Kitts, *Religious Traditions*, 83-140; Boustan, R. S. and Jassen, A. P. (Eds.) (2010), *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Leiden: Brill; Niditch, S. (1993), *War in the Hebrew Bible. A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, New York/Oxford: University Press.

¹⁴ Eisen, *Peace and Violence*, 24v.

¹⁵ Firestone (*Divine Authority*, 224) writes the following about this: 'These are cases of religion functioning as a means of organizing human behaviour and controlling human passions that are beyond the acceptable for maintaining the community. A goal of religion is therefore the realization of social community harmony. This includes organizing humans in a way that will minimize unacceptable behaviours. But mass violence is certainly one among a number of acceptable tactics that are employed even within the group for that purpose.' For a detailed discussion of the violence in the Hebrew Bible, see Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*, 27-43 and Juergensmeyer and Kitts, *Religious Traditions*, 86-89.

Numbers 33

50 The Lord spoke to Moses on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho: 51 Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 52 you will drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. You will destroy all their carved figures. You will also destroy all their cast images. You will eliminate all their shrines. 53 You will take possession of the land and live in it, because I've given the land to you to possess.

55 But if you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, then those you allow to remain will prick your eyes and be thorns in your side. They will harass you in the land in which you are living. 56 Then what I intended to do to them, I'll do to you.'

Joshua 7

10 The Lord said to Joshua, 'Get up! Why do you lie flat on your face like this? 11 Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the things reserved for me and put them with their own things. They have stolen and kept it a secret. 12 The Israelites can't stand up to their enemies. They retreat before their enemies because they themselves have become a doomed thing reserved for me. I will no longer be with you unless you destroy the things reserved for me that are present among you. 13 Go and make the people holy. Say, 'Get ready for tomorrow by making yourselves holy'. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Israel! Things reserved for me are present among you. You won't be able to stand up to your enemies until you remove from your presence the things reserved for me.

15 The person selected, who has the things reserved for God, must be put to death by burning. Burn everything that belongs to him too. This is because he has violated the Lord's covenant and has committed an outrage in Israel.'

I Kings 18

39 All the people saw this and fell on their faces. 'The Lord is the real God! The Lord is the real God!' they exclaimed. 40 Elijah said to them, 'Seize Baal's prophets! Don't let any escape!' The people seized the prophets, and Elijah brought them to the Kishon Brook and killed them there. 41 Elijah then said to Ahab, 'Get up! Celebrate with food and drink because I hear the sound of a rainstorm coming'.

Isaiah 1

27 Zion will be redeemed by justice, and those who change their lives by righteousness. 28 But God will shatter rebels and sinners alike; those who abandon the Lord will be finished.

Much has already been written, as stated before, about the significance of the violence in the Hebrew Bible and religious readers today, in particular, have great difficulty in interpreting these texts. After all, if the Hebrew Bible is regarded as a 'holy book', a collection of texts that has been inspired by God, the reader cannot then simply dismiss these violent text and pretend that they do not exist. The most important question is whether God wants so much violence?¹⁶ Seibert writes the following in his book about this disturbing legacy of biblical violent texts:

(...) the Old Testament's troubling legacy is intricately connected to its many violent texts. It is difficult to read the Old Testament for very long without bumping into passages that depict or describe violence in some way. Many of these passages portray violence positively and sanction various acts of violence. Tragically, many of these texts have been used to inspire, encourage, and legitimate all sorts of violence against others over the years.¹⁷

In our chapter, however, we cannot elaborate on this important hermeneutic issue. We only point to two issues in connection with the texts of violence in the Hebrew Bible. Firstly, that violence in the Hebrew Bible occurs frequently and that in most cases it has been ordered by YHWH, or at least sanctioned by him. This violence has everything to do with defending or maintaining an absolute system of laws imposed by God. Secondly, it is remarkable that all stories about violence, about cities being taken and burned down, the expulsion or extermination of other peoples, about the criminal laws regarding (minor) transgressions, and about a God who punishes and beats the people when they are not listening and so forth, have ultimately not led to more (radical)

¹⁶ Bennet, C. (2008), *In Search of Solutions. The Problem of Religion and Conflict*, London: Equinox Bennet, 197-215; Klawans, *Introduction: Religion*, 12-14. The issue closely related to this is whether the texts of violence are 'historically' accurate. If one answers positively to this question, one is more inclined to regard the violence as 'approved by God', which in turn has consequences for the interpretation of these texts in one's own context. See on this subject Eisen, *Peace and Violence*, 26-29, especially p. 32 where we read the following: 'If the Israelites should imitate God, does it mean that they should take initiative and act violently towards God's enemies even in the absence of an explicit divine command? Not only does God command the Israelites to commit specific acts of violence against foreigners, but his character is at times angry and violent, and given that the Israelites are supposed to imitate him, it would seem that they too would be expected-or at least permitted-to act violently against God's enemies when they see fit.' In this context, see also Meyer's article (*The Role*, 7), where he states that even if a text of violence does not deal with a historical 'fact', this text still affects the reader of the Hebrew Bible (quite apart from the question why violence is spoken of at all as an act approved by God, see p. 4). Boustan & Jassen, *Violence, Scripture*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*, 3. See in particular chapter 2 on the influence of biblical texts (and especially of the texts of violence) on the relationship between people (the texts can motivate and sanction certain actions) and 49-51 on 'virtual violence' that makes contemporary violence acceptable.

violence in the history of Judaism. The question we then have to ask ourselves is how can it be explained that a radical system of laws and regulations in the Hebrew Bible has led to a multitude of violent texts, but that these texts only play a marginal role in later Judaism?

The absence of violence

There are several possible answers to the question of why violence plays only a very marginal role in rabbinic Judaism. Two explanations recur regularly, one of which has to do with the political circumstances of post-exile Judaism and the other with a certain hermeneutical conception of the biblical texts of violence.

Throughout the period from 587 BCE onwards, the state monopoly on violence lay with foreign rulers (Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Seleucids, and Romans). An independent state of Judea existed for only a short period of time (from the revolt of the Maccabees in 167 until 63 BCE), one that had the power to use violence against lawbreakers.¹⁸ Apart from these special circumstances, the Jewish people have not had any form of constitutional power dating from the destruction of the First Temple until the foundation of the state of Israel more than 2500 years later. A people without political power and the corresponding possibility of using force will look for other means to protect its self-definition. Texts about the application of violence in a distant past when Israel was (also) a political entity, obviously no longer play a significant role. Firestone expresses it as follows:

Through two hermeneutical instruments that were applied to the familiar war-verses of the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud manages to exclude war from the active political repertoire of post-biblical Judaism. Divinely commanded war from the Hebrew Bible had simply become too dangerous for the rabbis of the Talmud, who, like their Christian brethren and competitors, barely survived Rome. They couldn't erase divinely commanded war, because it is in holy scripture. (...) So they treated the topic hermeneutically. Through certain interpretive procedures, they managed to place 'holy war' on the back shelf of the library of Jewish political options. They couldn't abrogate holy war, but they could make it virtually impossible to engage. Divinely authorized war had simply become too self-destructive to be used, so it was effectively eliminated. Divinely sanctioned war always remained a theoretical option for Jews, but it remained only theoretical throughout Late

¹⁸ Compare Bennet's following quote in his book on religion and conflict, 'both Christianity and Islam started as non-violent, pacifist religions. The change occurred once they had acquired power.' Bennet, *Search of Solutions*, 193 (see also the further elaboration of this theme on p. 193-196). See also Klawans, *Introduction: Religion*, 13.

Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period, until the last half of the 20th Century, when it was revived among some Jews in the establishment of the State of Israel and the wars that accompanied it.¹⁹

In addition to ‘the political argument’, the following answer is also given to the question of why violence plays such a minor role in rabbinic Judaism: since texts of violence from the past have no basis in the present (in other words, at the time of the rabbis of early Judaism) due to a lack of possibilities of enforcing laws and regulations, these texts had become detached from current affairs.²⁰ To put it simply: these texts were not compatible with everyday life. Nevertheless, rabbis were confronted with these texts since they constitute part of the holy Torah. Their hermeneutic solution is that these texts are ‘historical reports’ and that, as such, they have no eternal value. God’s command of violence was given to the people of Israel within a certain historical context and not to ‘believers of all times’. Rabbis did not deny the existence of violence in the Hebrew Bible, rather they explained it as having served a function at some point in the past.²¹ As a result, violent texts of were only viewed retrospectively

¹⁹ Firestone, *Divine Authority*, 230-231.

²⁰ Firestone (*Divine Authority*, 231) puts all this in perspective in what follows from this, ‘But let me stress that if divinely authorized mass violence would have been considered advantageous to the communities of believers in early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, you can bet that their leaders would have learned that God had desired it. You can see in history how, when circumstances changed and Rome not only stopped persecuting the Church but became the Church, Augustine authorized the notion of “just war” to sanction mass-violence against the enemies of the Christian Byzantine Empire.’ See also Bennet, *Search of Solutions*, 194. Hassner and Aran discuss some cases in which in the long, non-violent history of 1,800 years of Judaism, violence among Jews has occurred, particularly in relation to enforcing certain laws. According to Juergensmeyer and Kitts (*Religious Traditions*, 106), ‘This violence relates primarily to rabbinical rulings designed to penalize deviants in the community by means of humiliation or excommunication.’

²¹ Firestone (*Divine Authority*, 229) also recognizes the role of the political situation in the emergence (or absence) of texts of violence, ‘My point is simple. The Hebrew Bible tends to express violent emotions in terms of war because it could. The Hebrew Bible emerged in a tribal world, which was a mostly even playing field of tribal religions in competition with one another. The God of Israel could authorize war because war was one of many options in the political repertoire of a people in the ancient world that was attempting to carve out a space for survival – a ‘safe haven’ – in a specific territorial area.’ He contrasts this statement with a description of the experiences of the first Christians, who under Roman rule had no chance to use violence (if they wanted to) and thus naturally preached non-violence. ‘The Christian NT, on the other hand, emerged in a world that was dominated by the great empire and military might of Rome. It would have been suicidal to suggest that the violent reaction to Roman persecution could be expressed through martial activities. So mass violence in the NT tends to be expressed in apocalyptic terms - in terms of fantasy. And those Jews who believed that Jesus was Christ observed their brethren slaughtered by Rome when they attempted to rebel. Should it be surprising that Christian scripture would de-emphasize talk of mass violence?’

and any connection to the future was broken. The texts became isolated, petrified, and were thus rendered harmless.²²

These two brief answers to the question of why Judaism has had encountered so little violence in its long history, while the Hebrew Bible is full of radical texts of violence, are plausible and, of course, there is much more to be said on the subject. However, what we want to address now is the question of what was at the root of the rabbis' choice. How was it possible to escape the coercion of a radical system? A system that led to so much violence within texts was in fact 'demined' in the rabbinic tradition. This has to do to a large extent with the way the system is presented in the Hebrew Bible. In a subtle way 'valves' were built into the system, through which too much pressure could escape. These ways out allowed a radical system to be transformed into a tradition of peacefulness, as we have briefly discussed above. We will now discuss two of these 'ways of escape', which paradoxically form part of the system of laws and regulations themselves.

The first way out: For whom is the Bible radical

An important question we need to ask ourselves is for *whom* is the Hebrew Bible radical? We have established that the Hebrew Bible holds a radical system of laws and rules that originated directly from God, is absolute and unchangeable and must be strictly observed by the Israelites. Is obedience to this system also required of other nations than the people of Moses? The answer may seem trivial, but it offers a first way out of an overly radical system within Judaism.

It is clear that all commandments and prohibitions, rules and orders, come from God in the Hebrew Bible and are presented as a 'system' to the people of Israel. There is even a story from the Talmud (which, although of much later

²² How this was done is explained in a sublime way by Sacks using some examples from Mishna and Talmud and can be summarised in the following sentence, 'R. Kahana can no longer understand that when a psalm refers to a sword it actually means a sword. For him it was self-evident that it means "words", teachings, texts. With what else does the Jewish people defend themselves, if not its sacred merits achieved by devotion to religious learning? The idea that Jews might fight battles, wage wars and glory in their victories is absurd, unthinkable. Jews do not seek honour on the battlefield. They spend their time in the house of study.' Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 177-183 (quote p. 181); Eisen, *Peace and Violence*, 69-97; Juergensmeyer and Kitts, *Religious Traditions*, 89-91, 95-97 and 104-106 (with a discussion of the theory that within traditional Judaism the concept of 'victimisation' was developed, which could be another reason why Jews, especially in the Middle Ages, did not feel addressed by texts of violence). In her contribution to the book of Boustán and Jassen, Berkowitz writes about the passivity of rabbis in legal matters as an example of how texts of violence in the Jewish tradition were rendered harmless. Berkowitz, B. A. (2010), 'Reconsidering the Book and the Sword: A Rhetoric of Passivity in Rabbinic Hermeneutics', in Boustán, Ra'anán S. and Jassen, Alex P. (Eds.), *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Leiden: Brill, 145-173.

date, is very illustrative of the point we want to make) which tells that YHWH had offered the Torah to all the great nations of the world, but no nation accepted it. YHWH then held Mount Sinai over the people of Israel and threatened to drop it if the Jews would not accept the Torah. They accepted it.²³ In this midrash an image is used that is very appropriate to describe the system of rules and laws in the Hebrew Bible. This system (the Torah) is associated with a mountain, or a huge boulder held over the heads of the Israelites. The only two choices the Jews had was either to accept the system or be crushed by it.

The image shows what a radical (religious) system is all about. It is the metaphor of a concrete block hanging over people's heads. This block 'consists' of a mixture of laws, brought together by a transcendent authority and is completely 'hardened'. It is these laws that human beings must accept in their entirety, with no compromise possible. In this way the Hebrew Bible offers a concrete system of rules, derived from YHWH, which is perceived as unchangeable and absolute and to which people must subordinate themselves. It is a system that originates from outside of human beings ('hanging over their heads'). The responsibility for following this system lies with man, but its content comes from God. The Israelites had to choose to become slaves, obedient to the rules of God.

On the other hand, despite the absoluteness of the 'hanging block', there is no divine command in the Hebrew Bible ordering people to bring others into the system. There will be, however, a time in the future when all nations will worship YHWH on Zion, as is sung in Psalm 67:

1 Let God grant us grace and bless us; let God make his face shine on us. 2 So that your way becomes known on earth, so that your salvation becomes known among all the nations. 3 Let the people thank you, God! Let all the people thank you! 4 Let the people celebrate and shout with joy because you judge the nations fairly and guide all nations on the earth. 5 Let the people thank you, God! Let all the people thank you! 6 The earth has yielded its harvest. God blesses us—our God blesses us! 7 Let God continue to bless us, let the far ends of the earth honour him.

This text demonstrates the belief that all people will worship YHWH at some point in the future, but also that there is no command to force other nations (now or in the future) to prostrate themselves before YHWH. In this fact lies a way out of radical thinking: only people who *choose to* commit themselves

²³ Shabbat 88a. See the discussion of this midrash: Blidstein, G. J. (1992), 'In the Shadow of the Mountain: Consent and Coercion at Sinai', *Jewish Political Studies Review* 4(1), 41-53.

to the system are bound by it. The law/system proposed in the Hebrew Bible is therefore only for the Israelites: it is offered to them and there is no mandate to subject other nations to it.

In addition to the choice the people of Israel had as a unity, separately every human being could also make the decision of whether to be obedient or not. Of course, according to the Hebrew Bible, following the system leads to prosperity and is therefore recommended, but it is not enforced upon the individual. Had this been possible, there would not have been so many prophets repeatedly pointing out to the people the (wrong) choices they are making and neither would there have been the need to tell them to obey the Law (see e.g., Joel 2:12-13). Moses, in his farewell speech, also points to the Israelites' free choice. In Deuteronomy 31 he gives the Levites the law of YHWH in a book. From this chapter we read verses 24-26:

²⁴ Once Moses had finished writing in their entirety all the words of this Instruction scroll, ²⁵ he commanded the Levites who carry the chest containing the Lord's covenant as follows: ²⁶ "Take this Instruction scroll and put it next to the chest containing the Lord your God's covenant. It must remain there as a witness against you.

The law that Moses is talking about is the absolute system that is now being presented as a book. It is tangible and exists independently of the people. It comes from YHWH and is placed next to the Ark as a sign of the covenant that God made with his people, whereby the Israelites promised to abide by all the rules and commandments that are now in the book.

Then Moses continues (28-29):

²⁸ Assemble all of your tribes' elders and your officials in front of me, so I can speak these words in their hearing, and so I can call heaven and earth as my witnesses against them, ²⁹ because I know that after I'm dead, you will ruin everything, departing from the path I've commanded you. Terrible things will happen to you in the future because you will do evil in the Lord's eyes, aggravating him with the things your hands have made.

There are clear laws that, together, form a system called a book or a 'song' by Moses. People can choose whether or not to abide by this set of rules. The fact that they have a choice to submit themselves or not is shown by the Moses'

prediction that in the future people will not obey the Law. Things will end badly for them as a result.²⁴

In Nehemiah 10 the Covenant is renewed. After the return of the Israelites from exile and their realisation that they had brought disaster upon themselves by disobeying the laws of YHWH, they now choose once again to submit themselves to the system of rules established by their God. The renewed contract is even literally signed by priests, the Levites, and the people's leaders (Neh 10:1-27). After this we read the following (28-29):

²⁸ The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples to follow the Instruction from God, together with their wives, their sons, their daughters, and all who have knowledge and understanding. ²⁹ They join with their officials and relatives, and make a solemn pledge to live by God's Instruction, which was given by Moses, God's servant, and to observe faithfully all the commandments, judgments, and statutes of our Lord God.

Considered altogether, three things can be concluded:

- The Law of YHWH is presented to the people as a radical system.
- The people have the choice of submitting to the system or not.
- Prosperity or adversity depends on whether or not the laws and rules of this system are obeyed.

The way out of this manifest radical system lies in the presentation of the Law to the Israelites as a *choice*. Of course, the people will have to choose to obey the Law in order to be blessed, but they do not *have to* (see also Amos 5:14-15). They have the freedom to obey the Law or not, just as Adam and Eve had a choice to eat from the 'Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil': after all, the Tree was not fenced in, it stood in the middle of the Garden. Man had to choose whether or not to eat from it. The result of obedience was life in Paradise. Disobedience, on the other hand, led to removal from Paradise and

²⁴ Exodus 19:5-8 contains a similar statement after Moses' return from Mount Sinai and his meeting with YHWH: 'So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites. So Moses came down, called together the people's elders, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all responded with one voice: "Everything that the Lord has said we will do." Moses reported to the Lord what the people said.'

misfortune, pain, and death. Not a good future, but nevertheless the result of a choice made in freedom.

Because of this *relative freedom* within a radical system, the road to violence to defend the system is blocked. After all, every human being makes the choice to submit to the system or not. This fact makes the system less coercive and absolute.

The second way out: The system behind the system

In addition to the free choice of whether or not to obey an absolute system, there is another important theme in the Hebrew Bible that offers a way out of radical thinking. That is, the book of Job, that peculiar and opinionated story from the Hebrew Bible that we also refer to as ‘wisdom literature’. Job is, of course, the example of a man who does not simply accept the rules of God.

We know what happened to Job. In short he lost everything and called God to account for it. According to him, there was no reason for him to lose everything. After all, he had always obeyed all the rules that God had given man. There are a few principles that underlie this story:

- Everything a human being receives comes from God.
- When something bad happens to a human being, it is the result of an offence against the human being.
- A man who obeys all the rules can only be blessed (Job and his friends all think so, only Job knows he has done nothing wrong. His friends say that he must have done something wrong anyway, otherwise bad things would not have happened to him).
- There is a clear set of rules given to humankind by God.

Job goes against God, for why does evil happen to him if he has always obeyed the rules that God has given to man? His friends still believe in the honesty of the system: evil only happens to those people who have done something wrong (see for example Job 18 and 22). Job, however, knows that he has always obeyed the rules and asks God: why does this happen to me? In his eyes the divine system no longer functions (Job 31).²⁵

The author of the story also has no answer to Job’s question and it is precisely here where a second way out lies, an escape valve for overly radical views.

²⁵ More about the system of retribution in Job and other texts of the Hebrew Bible, see the following article: Botha, P. J. (1992), ‘Psalm 39 and its Place in the Development of a Doctrine of Retribution in the Hebrew Bible’, *OTE* 30(2), 240-264.

Why do bad things happen to good people? The system should be clear (see e.g., Job 22:21-23, 27:13-17), but too often it happens that bad people have a good life and good people have a bad life. The author's answer comes in a long monologue from YHWH: He asks Job a whole series of questions (38-41), pointing out that He had created the world and holds everything in his hands. If this God is so powerful that He can command even the wind and the lightning (Job 38:24-25), how could a man ever know his motives? How could any human being know why YHWH does the things He does? His ways are indeed 'unfathomable'.

Job's story is ambiguous with regard to the radical system: on the one hand, the author (and thus the people of his time) assumes the existence of a system of rules established by YHWH. These rules are not questioned and must be obeyed. On the other hand, the author says (from experience that the system does not work in real life, compare Eccl 4:1-3) that we cannot know the real administration of YHWH. In Job 37:23-24 Elihu therefore concludes his long argument with the following words:

²³ As for the Almighty, we can't find him - He is powerful and just, abundantly righteous - He won't respond. ²⁴ Therefore, people fear him; none of the wise can see him.

What the author is actually doing in answering Job's questions about divine justice, is replacing a system of rules for people with another system hidden behind it. Job's accusation that, due to his misfortune which he finds completely unjustified the known system of cause and effect proves to be incorrect, is not contradicted. It does, however, point to a 'system behind the system' that is responsible for what happens to people (Job 33:12-13, 38:18). God controls everything, thus witness his entire creation, and we humans are not able to know his motives, as we can read in Job 42:1-3:

¹ Job answered the Lord: ² I know you can do anything; no plan of yours can be opposed successfully. ³ You said, 'Who is this darkening counsel without knowledge?' I have indeed spoken about things I didn't understand, wonders beyond my comprehension.

The 'system behind the system' or the impossibility of knowing God's real intent with the world, however, does not give human beings a licence to do whatever they feel like; divine rules given to human beings are still there to be followed. The author certainly does not advocate total freedom, as we read in Job 36:10-12:

10 He opens their ears with discipline and commands them to turn from wrong.
 11 If they listen and serve, they spend their days in plenty, their years contentedly.
 12 But if they don't listen, they perish by the sword, breathe their last without understanding.

Some tension exists in the book of Job between the set of rules which people have to live with and obey, and the idea that YHWH rules the world according to a law of its own that people cannot fathom. The laws given are not the real laws by which God directs the world, but they do guide life, as Ecclesiastes states at the end of his argument (11:9): 'Rejoice, young person, while you are young! Your heart should make you happy in your prime. Follow your heart's inclinations and whatever your eyes see, but know this: God will call you to account for all of these things.' How this tension should be resolved, according to this author, is an extensive subject that we cannot go into now.²⁶

What must be emphasized, however, is that – just as with the 'first way out' – here too we are dealing with a paradox. While the author has a rock-solid confidence in the existence of a divine and absolute system, some form of relativization has simultaneously crept in. After all, YHWH rules in his way and we human beings know nothing about the reasons for God's decisions or the real system on which they are based. We must clearly follow the given rules, however they are not actually absolute as there is another system that lies behind them. It was not possible for this view to lead to anything but an anti-radical position: nothing can be said with certainty.

The relativization of absolute truth (the hidden system) is reinforced by the certainty that God controls everything, and that man has no say in it whatsoever. God in fact becomes thus the 'guardian of uncertainty'. Absolute values belong to God, as in any radical system, but man cannot know these truths. True laws and rules lie out of man's reach. The apple hangs from the 'Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil', to use this imagery again, however it is not at eye level this time, rather somewhere far away, high up in the tree, hidden from sight. By making the absolute system inaccessible, a free space has been created in the world of people. A space in which laws are given to be obeyed although they are not actually the 'real' rules, meaning that the known system cannot be 'absolute'. This means that within this space man is, to a certain extent, free to discover, to investigate, and to question with the result that he has become more than just a slavish follower of a radical system.

²⁶ See for example Kynes, W. (2014), 'Follow Your Heart and do not say it was a Mistake: Qoheleth's Allusions to Numbers 15 and the Story of the Spies', in Dell, Katharine and Kynes, W. (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, New York: T&T Clark, 15-28.

Conclusion

The Hebrew Bible contains a system of rules and laws – which we have called ‘radical’ because they are presented as ‘absolute’ and ‘unchangeable’ – to which the Israelites must submit. As confirmed by numerous stories in the Hebrew Bible, deviation from these rules often leads to violence. The death penalty, war, and genocide are either sanctioned by YHWH or directly ordered by him. In spite of the many texts in which violence plays a large, and for the contemporary readers often disturbing, role, a doctrine of peace has been developed in rabbinic Judaism whereby the violence within the inherited tradition has one way or another been rendered harmless. A few reasons have been given for this, which, in summary, can be reduced to the fact that, due to the political circumstances, the use of violence was not (or no longer is) an option.

We then posed the question of what underlies the rabbinic success of being able to encapsulate the divinely sanctioned violence in the Hebrew Bible into a ‘completed past tense’. We pointed to the presence of ‘escape valves’ that lie at the heart of the radical system itself, through which ‘too much’ radicalism could escape. The first way out was found in the fact that every Israelite was free to accept the system or not, and in the absence of a command to bring every nation on earth under the same set of rules and laws. A man’s well-being depends on his obedience to the system, but this remains his own choice.

The second way out is to be found in the book of Job. It is about the lesson that Job had to learn, namely that as a human being he cannot ever know the true motives of YHWH. This means that man has been given rules to follow, but at the same time cannot know the hidden divine laws that lie behind them (how everything functions in creation). Because of this ‘system behind the system’ there exists a certain free space for man to ask questions, to investigate, and to find his own way on earth. This is a subtle distinction, but no less important. After all, if man is never sure of the real rules by which God decides what is good and what is evil, there remains a degree of uncertainty about the system of laws that man has been given. It is this core of uncertainty that gives the surest guarantee that laws and rules will not be in danger of developing into a radical system.

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Peace, Violence and Holy War According To The Qur'ān

Jan M.F. Van Reeth

Abstract

In this contribution we argue that the Qur'ānic notion of *jihād* is completely different from the classical concept of holy war as developed during the flowering-time of the Islamic Empire. It can by no means provide a justification for aggression. We base this argumentation on a linguistic and exegetical analysis of a number of key texts

It is often argued that in order to bring about a more tolerant and moderate form of Islam, and correspondingly a modern interpretation of Qur'ānic texts, one needs to contextualise them, to interpret them as they functioned originally in their historical environment — the environment of the emergence of Islam in the days of the Prophet — before applying them again to present-day modern societies.

This is only partially true, as this contextualisation should be implemented and considered inversely. Indeed, the starting-point ought to be the Prophet and his religious community; they were supposed to contextualize, in other words to faithfully execute what had been professed and proclaimed in the Revelation received by the Prophet and communicated to his followers. It was the community of believers who had to apply the divine instructions to their daily lives and endeavours.

Another challenge concerning the idea of contextualisation exists, however, one that is even more problematic. Almost everyone is inclined to understand the origins of Islam as forming one coherent and continuous unity with the conquests realized during the reigns of the orthodox caliphs (the *murāshidūn*), their Umayyad and even Abbasid successors, as if this expansion was historically inevitable and already implied in the actions of Muḥammad, as a logical and necessary result of the prophecy contained in the Qur'ān.

This is, however, far from certain and should in any case be substantiated by solid historical arguments. Was it Muḥammad's intention to conquer the world? This presumption is not entirely self-evident; it supposes a kind of providence that is not necessarily implied in Qur'ānic doctrine. Of course, the first caliphs did everything they could to legitimize their actions and to make sure that the *sharī'a* they were developing was consistent with the doctrine of the Qur'ān, but this does not automatically mean that their expansionist policy had been intended by the founder of the community, by the Prophet himself. It is quite possible that generations of *'ulamā*, at the service of their political masters, designed a coherent doctrine about holy war as a way of converting and/or subduing infidels, including all kinds of Christians and Jews. They founded their ideology on Qur'ānic phrases torn from their context, whereupon they projected their elaborations back into the founding legend concerning the campaigns of the Prophet. Indeed, generations of exegetes living after the Prophet "understood the Qur'ānic verses on war as legislation regarding the Islamic duty of jihād (...) for which the context was to be found in the tradition rather than the Qur'ān itself."¹ In order to re-establish the Qur'ān in his original setting, we must therefore put aside the entire history related to the conquest of the Islamic empire and return to the simple facts about the political achievements in the days of Muḥammad.² Such an approach is also advocated by a number of Muslim historians, theologians, and contemporary specialists of the Qur'ān, such as the famous Tunisian scholar and philosopher Youssef Seddik.

Indeed, the Prophet Muḥammad apparently concerned himself solely with the unification and pacification of the Arabic peninsula. We cannot determine historically if he would ever have intended to cross these limits, the only possible exception being that he seems to have tried to advance towards Jerusalem with the intention of conquering it.³ He organized and sent a military expedition in the year 9 H/630 AC for that very purpose, apparently for

¹ Crone, P. (2006), 'War', in Dammen McAuliffe, J. (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 5, Leiden: Brill, 459; see also E. Landau-Tasseron, E. (2003), 'jihād', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 38.

² This is the general flaw in the otherwise interesting article 'guerre et paix' by M.-T. Urvoy in Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (2007), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 372-377, who continuously intermingles Qur'ānic statements and precepts with elaborations stemming from the classical *mu-fassirūn* and lawyers.

³ Some historians cast some doubt as to the historicity of the episode – a question into which we shall not enter here.

religious reasons. Muḥammad's army advanced as far as Tabūk at which point the Prophet ordered his troops to retreat in an orderly way to Medina⁴.

When we look more closely at what the Qur'ān actually says, it appears that the number of verses that could be interpreted as appealing directly to some sort of religiously motivated violence are quite limited. Most verses containing the notion of *jihād*, generally translated as 'holy war', should very likely be understood otherwise. By this we do not mean the kind of spiritual *jihād* as propagated by mystical (*Sufi*) authors, the so-called 'greater holy war', consisting in a struggle with the lower instincts and evil inclinations of the soul,⁵ a metaphorical interpretation of the notion of *jihād* that is clearly secondary⁶. Rather the original meaning is referred to here, defined by Bravmann as a 'war-like effort for God and his prophet', implying defiance of death and eventually self-sacrifice,⁷ in order to 'prove to the deity their worthiness for divine reward (...) by enduring various kinds of hardships and self-mortification.'⁸ Such effort does not necessarily refer to violence in the form of military action,⁹ rather just as when we say: 'this politician has been fighting for social justice,' we are not trying to convey that he has been involved in some physical engagement with his opponents. Nevertheless, in the context of Arab society, in which the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad is situated, the striving demanded by Qur'ān cannot be other than both physical and spiritual.¹⁰ This explains how it is possible that the term *jihād* in the Qur'ān could imply some sort of violence, something it originally and fundamentally did not have in pre-Islamic times.¹¹

⁴ M.A. al-Bakhit, 'Tabūk', *EP*, vol. 10, 50 ; see Van Reeth, J.M.F. (2017), 'L'Hégire et la fin du monde' in *Oriens Christianus* 100, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 216-219. It has recently been argued, in the footsteps of Patricia Crone, that the Prophet Muḥammad was still alive at the time of the conquest of Palestine and participated in it, by Shoemaker, S.J. (2012), *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, chapter 1 and 104-113. See however the critical remarks by Neuenkirchen, P. (2016), *Studia Islamica* 111, Leiden: Brill, 318.

⁵ Schimmel, A. (2011), *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 112.

⁶ Landau-Tasserion, 'jihād', 37, strongly emphasized that such a spiritual sense is completely absent in the Qur'ān.

⁷ Bravmann, M.M. (1972), *The spiritual background of early Islam. Studies in ancient Arab concepts*, Leiden: Brill, 8.

⁸ Landau-Tasserion, 'jihād', 37.

⁹ Landau-Tasserion, 'jihād', 36.

¹⁰ Donner, F.M. (1991), 'The sources of Islamic conceptions of war', in Kelsay, J. & Johnson, J.T. (Ed.), *Just war and Jihad. Historical and theoretical perspectives on war and peace in Western and Islamic traditions*, New York-Westport-London: Greenwood Press, 47.

¹¹ Landau-Tasserion, 'jihād', 36.

Let us now look at some passages from the Qur’ān.¹² Even if there are more places in the text where a word is used derived from the same stem, the word *jihād* as such occurs only in four occasions and each time it is not clear at all if the concept of holy war is intended:

- Q9:24: Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your wives and your clan, and properties which ye have acquired, and trade which ye fear may grow slack, and dwellings which please you are dearer to you than Allah and His messenger and striving in His cause (*wa jihādīn fī sabīlīhī*), then wait until Allah cometh with His affair.

This verse is very reminiscent of a famous text of the Gospels; it is almost a comment about it – Luke 14:26-27, ‘If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.’

- Q22:78: Strive for Allah as He is entitled to be striven for (*jāhidū fī Llāhī ḥaqqā jihādīhī* — see further).

- Q25:52: Do not obey the disbelievers, but strive against them with it strenuously (my translation).

Obviously, the Revelation is meant by ‘it’, as it is already stated two verses before, where we read: ‘We have explained it to them, so that they might be reminded,’ clearly referring to the Qur’ān. As it is unthinkable that someone would brand the Qur’ān as a weapon on the battlefield, it is only possible that what is meant here is that the message of the Qur’ān is to be used in discussions with disbelievers in order to convince them of its truth.

- Q60:1: If ye have gone forth because of zeal for My cause (*kharajtum jihādan fī sabīlī*).

Once again, the following verse (‘they will stretch forth both hands and tongues against you for evil; they would like you to disbelieve’) indicates that this kind of *jihād* is to be situated in a context of apologetics: a dispute in the form of a discussion.

¹² All quotations are from Bell’s translation unless otherwise indicated.

It can therefore be concluded that the concept of holy war, as expressed by the word *jihād* (which later became its specific, technical term, during the conquest of the Islamic empire), is not yet present in the Qur'ān.

When we examine further the verses where a form of the stem *jahada* appears, in only ten cases does it have something to do with warfare.¹³ In many other instances it appears in the context of an endeavour in a more general sense and forms of *jahada* are most often linked to the notion of the 'path' as is the case at the end of the aforementioned verses Q60:1 and Q22:78. Here, to 'struggle for God' is a righteous struggle, one that 'clearly does not refer to warfare, but to other forms of effort made by way of obedience to God' as the context of the verse clearly refers to Abraham and his religion.¹⁴ Likewise, we read in Q4:74, 'So let those who barter this present life for the Hereafter, fight in the way of Allah (*falyuqātil fī sabīli Llāhi*); upon whomsoever fights in the way of Allah and is killed or overcomes, We shall in the end bestow a mighty hire' and in Q2:190 and 194: 'Fight in the way of Allah (*fī sabīli Llāhi*) those who fight you, but do not provoke hostility – if any make an attack upon you, make a like attack upon them.' In this case verse 191 seems to be unequivocally violent, 'Slay them (*waqtulūhum*) wherever ye come upon them and expel them from whence they have expelled you; persecution is worse than slaughter.' Once again however, it is clear from the following verse (Q4:75) that the only reason the Muslims were allowed to fight by the Qur'ān and the Prophet, was to defend themselves against 'aggression directed against them, expulsion from their dwellings, violation of Allah's sacred institutions and attempts to persecute people for what they believe.' Generally, the Qur'ān rejects any kind of coercion in order to convert people by force, indeed such a conversion would be considered invalid.¹⁵ Killing opponents is sometimes allowed, as in the case of oath-breaking (Q9:4-6,36), but always for defensive reasons, so that the remorseful and those who remain faithful to the treaty are spared;¹⁶ nowhere in the Qur'ān can any permission be found for the execution of prisoners or their physical harm.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, the Qur'ān (2:256) unequivocally states that

¹³ Landau-Tasseron, 'jihād', 36.

¹⁴ Landau-Tasseron, 'jihād', 38; Azaiez, M. (2019), 'Sourate 22. Al-Hajj (Le Pèlerinage)', in Amir-Moezzi, M.A. & Dye, G., *Le Coran des Historiens II*, Paris: Le Cerf, 840.

¹⁵ Peters, R. (1977), *Jihad in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 37-38, 41-46 (this citation from 45).

¹⁶ Landau-Tasseron, 'jihād', 39-40; Crone, 'War', 456. One should remark that text of Q9 is problematic, see Pohlmann, K.-Fr. (2019), 'Sourate 9. Al-Tawba (Le repentir)' in *Le Coran des Historiens II*, 383-385, 393-394, but this is not the place to enter into these complicated textual problems.

¹⁷ Landau-Tasseron, 'jihād', 42; see also the scandal caused by the behaviour of Khālid b. al-Walīd — Ouardi, H. (2019), *Les Califes maudits 2. À l'ombre des sabres*, Paris: Edition Albin Michel, 52-65.

“there is no compulsion in religion.” This phrase has been very accurately analysed by the late Patricia Crone when she recounts how in the Arabian society of the time of the Prophet ‘converts had to be won by persuasion; fighting over religion was regarded as morally wrong, so that war, when it came, required much justification. Both Christianity and Islam began as freely chosen systems of belief about the nature of ultimate reality.’¹⁸ If there was any violent action by the Prophet or his followers therefore, it was usually carried out as an act of self-defence or a reaction against intolerable wrongdoings which endangered the survival of the community.

There is an important fact that should be kept in mind when considering this topic. The battles undertaken by followers of the Prophet Muḥammad during his lifetime were not wars of conquest and they were not directed against foreigners. In fact, Muḥammad never left the Arabian Peninsula. When he waged war, it was against fellow countrymen who tried to overcome him, who wanted to get rid of his movement of what they considered to be troublemakers. The faithful supporters of the Prophet therefore had to fight with other Arabs, with their compatriots from Mecca in the first place. This is the reason why the exhortations in the Qur’ān for steadfastness and courage in battle are directed to his disciples – the *muhājirūn* – who followed him on his departure from Mecca to Medina. They are always somehow related to the *hijra*, as Ella Landau-Tasseron has rightly remarked: ‘Strangely, there is no Qur’ānic reference to the military contribution or warlike attributes of the Helpers (*anṣār*), i.e. those Medinans who helped the émigrés; such references do, however, abound in the historical and ḥadīth literature.’¹⁹ Why? We think there is a very simple explanation. The Qur’ān (Q4:77; 8:15-16; 9:42; 47:20) regularly conveys some kind of aversion to the combat which believers are expected to deliver. Also, in Q8:17 it is stated, ‘No, it was not you who killed them [the enemies], but it was Allah who killed them’ (my translation). This can be understood in two ways. It could be an exhortation to fight: God is backing you! But it could also be a form of consolation: we know that the fact that battling with your kinsmen, the fact that you were forced to injure and even to kill some of them, is saddening you, but God is taking the burden of your regret and remorse from your shoulders; God is taking the responsibility of what was inevitable and

¹⁸ Crone, P. (2009), ‘No compulsion in religion. Q. 2:256 in mediaeval and modern interpretation’ in Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (a.o., Ed.), *Le shī’isme imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, Turnhout: Brepols, 169. For some alternative interpretations of this verse, see Segovia, C.A. (2019), ‘Sourate 2. Al-Baqara (La vache)’ in *Le Coran des Historiens II*, 108. Segovia does not express any preference, however Crone’s explanation is in our mind far preferable.

¹⁹ Landau-Tasseron, ‘jihād’, 37.

necessary for a cause that is basically just. This second way of understanding this verse is probably the better one.

This leads us to ask the fundamental question: what is it that the Prophet had to defend so unconditionally? What was the 'way' he had to follow and for which he and his followers had to be ready to give their lives? This path he embarked on, appears to be the one that was initiated by the *hijra*. One encounters the image of the 'way', the path of the right direction (*sabīl*, *ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm*) on numerous occasions in the Qur'ān. It often has an eschatological connotation.²⁰ It would be wrong therefore to look upon the *hijra* as a kind of 'flight'; it was not out of fear that the Prophet decided to evacuate Mecca with his followers, it was not even a tactical retreat. According to Q2:218, those who emigrated *are* the ones who believe, they *are* those who have striven for God's cause (*jāhidū fī sabīli Llāhi*). The retirement, the *hijra*, is therefore a religious obligation, 'He who emigrates in the way of Allah will find in earth many a place to retire to.'²¹ This emigration is temporal in this sense that it prepares for the final migration which is nothing other than the way to Paradise: eternal joy is the reward for those who have surrendered themselves to God. It is the spiritual struggle in which every human being has to engage himself, 'Allah hath bought from the believers their persons and their goods at the price of the Garden for them. (...) And who is more faithful to his promise than Allah?'²² The struggle embodied in the notion of *jihād* is an eschatological one, as many classical Muslim theologians have rightly observed, it can only come to an end at 'the final completion', with the End of Time.²³

Each time in sacred history, the migration, the exodus, has been linked to an effort (*jihād*) to abandon polytheism and idolatry.²⁴ Abraham had to leave Babylonia, he had to oppose king Nimrud (Q2:258)²⁵ and deny the gods of his father (6: 4-83 and so forth); Moses had to get away from Pharaoh (*Fir'awn*) and now Muḥammad had to conduct also his exodus, his *hijra*. Eventually he also would have to strip the Temple of Mecca of its idols at the end of his life, after his final victory.²⁶ The purpose of the migration and of *jihād* is therefore

²⁰ Van Reeth, 'L'Hégire et la fin du monde', 189.

²¹ Q4:100; Cook, D. (1996), 'Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihād', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20, Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 80; Van Reeth, 'L'Hégire et la fin du monde', 190-192, 207.

²² Q 9:111; Cook, D. (2005), *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 9.

²³ Casanova, P. (1911-1913), *Mohammed et la Fin du Monde. Étude critique sur l'islam primitif*, Paris: Geuthner, 51; Madelung, W. (1986), 'Has the Hijra come to an end?', *Revue des études islamiques* 54, 227-235.

²⁴ Van Reeth, J.M.F. (2019), 'Sourate 27. Al-Naml (Les fourmis)' in *Le Coran des Historiens* II, 1011.

²⁵ Segovia, *Le Coran des Historiens* II, 108.

²⁶ Van Reeth, 'L'Hégire et la fin du monde', 207; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 15.

an act of purification. It is intended to purify the community of believers from evil, to extirpate idolatry from the Arabian soil. The city of Medina acts as a prefiguration of the eternal Temple in heaven, as long as the retirement of the community of the Prophet lasted, before it could be represented on earth by the purified *Ka'ba*.

When Muḥammad emigrated to Medina, engaging himself on the path of God – *fi sabil Allāh* – he undertook exactly the same spiritual journey as Moses did when he undertook his Exodus from Egypt. Just as Moses did so many centuries earlier, Muḥammad acted as the spiritual leader who had to accompany his people to the promised land of paradise. His mission was not so much political, it was paradigmatic in so far as it was temporal and therefore eschatological. It accomplished the fundamental mission of every prophet. The main purpose of his *jihād* was the protection of his people, their struggle to survive, their victory over the forces of evil.

What precedes does not imply, however, that no discourse about violence or battle exists in the Qur'ān. Such a conclusion would, of course, be completely false.

Only in a few cases does the Qur'ān make use of what could be called the secular term for 'war' in Arabic: *ḥarb*.²⁷ Sometimes it is used for a war that infidels are waging on God, on his Prophet and the religious community (Q5:33; 9:107). Most instructive is Q8: 56-57, 'Those of them thou has covenanted, and who then violate their covenant (*'ahd*) every time, showing no pity. So if thou comest upon them at all in war (*ḥarb*), then by their fate scatter in fright those who are behind them, mayhap they will take warning.' This text clearly shows that *jihād*, as well as peace in its religious sense (like *salām*), is something other than *ḥarb*, which is war in a secular sense, the end of which may either result in the defeat and subjection of the enemy or a truce (*'ahd* – see also *salm* of verse 61). This kind of armistice does not imply real peace however: it will always remain a temporal agreement, as long as a sincere religious commitment is not involved. Such a lasting commitment in the mind of the Prophet and of the Qur'ān can only be *islām*.²⁸

In the Qur'ān there are many verses about battle and slaughter: *qitāl* or *qutl*. The objective of such battles was the survival of the community. It may be ferocious and bloody, but this is inevitably what *ḥarb* is about, even if in

²⁷ Donner, 'Sources of Islamic conceptions of war', 46.

²⁸ See Van Reeth, J.M.F. (1994), 'Paix spirituelle et *Pax Romana*', *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 9, Brussels: Société belge d'études orientales, 79-82, another term for this kind of temporary peace agreement being *ṣulḥ* in Arabic, related to Aramaic *məṣalḥā*.

some cases it may be incidentally a form of *jihād*, as it appears from one of the most violent passages from the Qur'ān, Q 47 : 4-5: 'So when ye meet those who have disbelieved let there be slaughter until when ye have made havoc of them, bind them fast; then either freely or by ransom (*fidā*), until war (*ḥarb*) lays down its burdens. That is the rule.' However explicitly violent this text may seem²⁹, it nevertheless refers at the same time to the possibility of concluding a kind of treaty in order to end hostilities. This is also the reason why according to the Qur'ān, war must always be justified and why the Prophet often hesitated before resorting to violence, awaiting divine permission, as is explicitly stated in Q 22: 39-40: 'Verily Allah will ward off enemies from those who have believed (...). Permission is granted to those who fight because they have suffered wrong.'

As stated from the beginning, the original concept of the *jihād* should certainly be distinguished from the 'greater holy war' of the later Sufi tradition. Nevertheless, this spiritual transformation of the concept of *jihād* is much closer to the intentions of the Prophet and the Qur'ān than its instrumentalisation by later ideologues for the sake of political masters wanting to consecrate their military achievements and give their empire some sort of theological foundation. Muḥammad's first goal was not so much to conquer and establish a dominion, he fought an ultimate battle against the forces of Evil, a battle for conversion, purification, and religious submission to the divine destiny. In those distant times of eternal tribal conflicts, the instauration of such a new society, anticipating its eternal perfection in Paradise, could only be achieved by way of the conjugation of a spiritual and a physical battle at the same time, one waged for the survival of the Muslim community: 'the Prophet and the early Muslims may actually have seen themselves as the avenging forces that would punish the unbelievers, that is, as part of the eschatological event itself.'³⁰ The purification of the soul had to be joined to an apocalyptic combat against the hosts of Evil, but this was only because Muḥammad had been forced to do so by his opponents.

The conclusion that can be drawn from our analysis is that the Qur'ānic notion of *jihād* is entirely different from the classical concept of holy war as developed during the highlights of the Islamic empire. It can by no means furnish a justification for aggression or intolerance: 'there can be no compulsion in religion' (Q2:256), for such a war would not be holy at all.³¹ Q22:40

²⁹ Donner, 'Sources of Islamic conceptions of war', 47.

³⁰ Donner, 'The sources of Islamic conceptions of war', 48.

³¹ Landau-Tasseron, 'jihād', 42; Van Reeth, 'L'Hégire et la fin du monde', 225-226.

indeed mentions all the servants God protects and they are not only Muslims, 'for Allah's warding off the people, some by means of others, hermitages and churches and oratories and places of worship (*masājid* – mosques) in which the name of Allah was had in remembrance would have been destroyed in numbers. Surely Allah will help those who help him; Allah is strong, sublime.'

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Contextualizing Holy War: The Rabbinic and Patristic Theology of the Joshua Wars as a Counter-Theology to Religious Radicalization

Jannica de Prenter

Abstract

In this contribution the 'recontextualization' of the violent war rhetoric in the book Joshua in Rabbinic sources and the homilies of Origen is examined. Both hermeneutic traditions are characterized by a pacifistic reinterpretation and are important sources for religious conflict resolution and the prevention of religious extremism.

Introduction: religious radicalization, extremism, and violence

Religious radicalization is a growing problem in modern society, as it prompts people to disrupt existing social structures and often threatens the democratic order. Both Belgium and the Netherlands have been confronted with the return of radicalized individuals from Syria since the civil war in 2011. In schools and through youth work, prevention and deradicalization programmes have become a necessary means in the struggle against religious radicalization, especially in deprived neighbourhoods. Religious radicalization can be viewed as a process in which individuals or groups develop increasingly radical ideas in opposition to the political, social, or religious status quo. Religious radicalization is also strongly tied to a dualistic and often extremist ideological framework of ideas and values characterized by a sharp dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. Negative othering goes hand-in-hand with hostile, derogatory,

and the inferior depiction of out-groups,¹ and a fundamentalist reading of Holy Scripture. Religious radicalization expresses itself in both violent and non-violent forms.

It is a widespread misconception that religious radicalization automatically leads to terrorism. Ramon Spaaij, a leading authority on the sociology of terrorism, defines religious radicalization as ‘the process of adopting or promoting an extremist belief system for the purpose of facilitating ideologically based violence to advance political, religious or social change’.² An example of an individual or lone act of terrorism is the murder on Yitzhak Rabin on November 4th, 1995. Yigael Amir based the justification for his actions on Jewish theology and biblical examples. Amir believed that his actions were in accordance with ‘Jewish Law’ (*Halakhah*) and stated that he ‘acted alone on God’s orders’.³

Not all forms of religious violence are, however, interpreted in society as acts of terrorism or extremism. Narratives of (holy) war and violence can also become ‘normalized’ by ideological discourses. A well-known example is Israeli nationalistic discourse. Much research in sociology and discourse studies has shown how the present-day media in contemporary Israel often builds on narratives of identity formation and land claims, and a discourse structure that is typified by the use of war-normalizing metaphors. As Gavriely-Nuri and Peled-Elhanan have demonstrated, such war-normalizing discourse is often partially rooted in an obviously selective and uncritical interpretation of biblical and Talmudic sources.⁴ A similar dynamic can be observed in modern discourses on the ‘war against terrorism’, in which ‘preventive’ and

¹ As has been demonstrated in Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Identity Studies, ideology is characterized by a process of social categorization in terms of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, resulting in a dichotomy between in-groups and out-groups.

² Spaaij, R. (2011), *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*: New York/Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 47. Concrete personal experiences, kinship, friendship, as well as group dynamics and a deep sense of injustice, exclusion and humiliation, often trigger a process of religious radicalization that becomes violent, see Spaaij, *Understanding*, 47-48.

³ Spaaij, *Understanding*, 42.

⁴ Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2012), ‘War-Normalizing Dialogue’, in Berlin, L.N. and Anita Fetzer, A. (Eds.), *Dialogue in Politics (Dialogue Studies 18)*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 221-240; Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2013), *The Normalization of War in Israeli Discourse 1967-2008*. Lanham: Lexington Books; Peled-Elhanan, N. (2008), ‘The Denial of Palestinian National and Territorial Identity in Israeli Schoolbooks of History and Geography 1996-2003’, in Dolón, R. and Todolí, J. (Eds.), *Analysing Identities in Discourse, (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture 28)*, Amsterdam: Benjamins; Peled-Elhanan, N. (2012), *Palestine in Israeli Schoolbooks: Ideology and Propaganda in Education (Library of Modern Middle East Studies 82)*, London: Tauris.

‘just war’ is legitimized by war-metaphors and other rhetorical strategies.⁵ Much of its terminology, however, is at least reminiscent of the biblical language of holy war.

A radical interpretation of Scripture is an important factor in religiously motivated violence. What is often overlooked in the contemporary debate on religious violence, however, is that religion may also have a positive role in preventing violence and radicalization. At the heart of every religion there are also practices of peace and reconciliation. Using the book of Joshua as an example, this contribution takes a fresh look at the biblical ‘holy war tradition’ and its recontextualization in Rabbinic and Patristic theology. The violent rhetoric in the conquest narratives in Joshua 1–12 and its theology of complete destruction will be focused on in particular. In this regard, special attention will be devoted to the biblical concept of *ḥēreḡm* (the ban). Moreover, this examination will illustrate how the Joshua-wars were re-interpreted in a peaceful way in the Rabbinic and Patristic tradition. Drawing on the work of Marc Gopin and Katrien Hertog,⁶ I will also argue that a critical reading of problematic biblical texts and its hermeneutic reception in Jewish and Christian traditions, must have a central place in religious peacebuilding practices and the prevention of radicalization.

The book of Joshua and the language of conquest and destruction

‘Holy warfare’ lies at the heart of the book of Joshua. The first book of the ‘prophets’ or *Neveim* narrates Israel’s conquest and settlement in the promised land. After years of desert wanderings, the Israelites may finally set foot on sacred soil and inherit their land. God’s promises to Moses to bring them to ‘the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey’ (Exodus 3:17),⁷ is fulfilled in the Book of Joshua. Alongside other texts, Josh 1–12 belongs to Israel’s ‘holy war’ tradition, often referred to as ‘YHWH-War’, a form of sacred

⁵ For critical studies on the discourse of war against terrorism, see Lakoff, G. (1992), ‘Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System used to justify War in the Gulf’, in Pütz, M. (Ed.), *Thirty Years of Linguistic Evolution: Studies in Honor of René Dirven on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 463–481; Hodges, A. and Nilep, C. (2007), *Discourse, War and Terrorism (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture 24)*, Amsterdam: Benjamins.

⁶ Gopin, M. (2000), *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Gopin, M. (2002), *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion can bring Peace to the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Hertog, K. (2010), *The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis*, Plymouth: Lexington Books.

⁷ The Bible quotations in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version. Additionally, I also use an own work-translation in some cases (this will be indicated in the main text).

warfare in which YHWH is said to fight alongside Israel, granting them victory.⁸ An important theological concept in the tradition of YHWH-War is 'land' as sacred space. It is no coincidence then, that the book begins in Josh 1 with a speech by God, in which the land appears as a God-given 'territory' (*gebûl*). Every place that Joshua touches with 'the sole of his feet' is granted to him by God himself (Joshua 1:3-4):

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory.

The land is thus conceptualized as a 'gift' that is given (*nāṭan*) to them by God (as seen in, for example, Deuteronomy 1:21; 4:1; 6:10,23; 31:7). The sacredness of taking possession of the land is also expressed by a number of ritualized events and observances that take place when the Israelites set foot on the land: in a sacred procession, the Ark of the covenant moves through the Jordan river, when its banks are miraculously pulled back (Joshua 3:1-17); Joshua circumcises the new generation of Israelites, rolling away the reproach of Egypt (Joshua 5:1-9) and celebrates the first Pesach festival in the land of Israel (Joshua 5:10-12).⁹ In the conquest narratives that follow land is frequently conveyed as a space that suffers from warfare, the land is 'struck' (*hikkâ*) and 'taken' (*lākad*) from hostile enemies (Joshua 10:40; 12:7; 10:42; 11:16). Only after the division of the land, can the earth finally rest from warfare (Joshua 11:23).

⁸ For an excellent overview of the research on YHWH-War in Old Testament Studies, see: Schmitt, R. (2011), *Der 'Heilige Krieg' im Pentateuch und in deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk: Studien zur Forschungs-, Rezeptions- und Religionsgeschichte von Krieg und Bann im Alten Testament (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 381)*, Münster: Ugarit Verlag; see also Vermeylen, J. (2010), "Sacral War" and "Divine Warrior" in Ancient Israel: Its Reception and the Present State of the Question; in Liesen, J. and Beentjes, P.C. (Eds.), *Yearbook 2010: Visions of Peace and Tales of War (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook)*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1-34; Trimm, C. (2012), 'Recent Research on Warfare in the Old Testament', *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 2, 171-216; de Prenter, J.A. (2016), *Language, Ideology and Cognition: A Critical Discourse Approach the Concept of Divine Warfare to Joshua 9–11 (doctoral thesis)*, 15-55. Leuven: University Press.

⁹ A related concept is the 'land as rightful possession', one that appears frequently in Joshua 13–22, in other words the chapters dealing with the division of the land in tribal allotments. Each tribal family (*mišpēhōt*) receives its own *gōrāl* (Joshua 15:1; 16:1; 17:1; 18:11; 19:1,10,17,24,32,40; 21:4), an entitlement to land that is especially identified by divine lot casting. A key concept here, is *naḥalâ* (e.g. Joshua 13:7,8; 14:2-3; 15:20; 16:5; 17:4), the divine entitlement, which is attached to each allotted territory. The term *naḥalâ* is a legal concept and its frequent association with the verb *ḥālaq* 'to divide', 'to allot' (Numbers 26:53,56; Joshua 13:7; 18:2; 19:51), and its nominal form *ḥēlēq* 'lot', 'portion' (Joshua 18:7; 19:9), suggests that the *naḥalâ* does not signify a possession that is 'handed down from generation to generation', but rather an 'entitlement or rightful property of a party that is legitimated by a recognized social custom, legal process or divine character', see: Habel, N.C. (1995), *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies (Overtures to Biblical Theology)*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

These conquest narratives in the Book of Joshua are characterized by an extremely violent rhetoric of ‘complete destruction’. A key-concept is the biblical term *ḥēreṃ*, that functions as a *Leitwort* in the climax of the conquest narratives (Joshua 6:17-18,21; 8:26; 10:1,28,35,37,39,40; 11:11,12,20,21). As I argued elsewhere, the core meaning or ‘*Grundbedeutung*’ of the root *ḥrm* is ‘taboo’, ‘forbidden’ or ‘prohibited’. In general, the *ḥēreṃ*-concept denotes something taboo and separated from the life of the community. This general sense of *ḥrm* includes two related denotations: something may be either taboo because it belongs to the category of holiness or the category of defilement.¹⁰ Depending on the context, *ḥēreṃ* overlaps with *qōdēš* (holiness) and *ṭōhar* (pure), or with *ḥōl* (defilement/ profane) and *ṭāmē*’ (impure). In the book of Joshua, the root *ḥrm* refers to the tabooed status and complete destruction of conquered cities and their inhabitants. As much research on Joshua demonstrated, the so-called *ḥēreṃ*-wars in the Book of Joshua were strongly influenced by the Deuteronomistic laws of warfare. In Deuteronomy, *ḥrm* appears in the semantic field of defilement and collocates with *ḥillēl* ‘to pollute’ and the term *ṭō ‘ēbā* ‘abomination’ (Deuteronomy 7:25-26; 13:14-17; 20:16-18). Because graven images are experienced in Deuteronomy as utterly abhorrent (*ṭa ‘ēb*) and detestable (*šiqqaš*) objects, Deuteronomistic Law instructs to destroy them by burning (Deuteronomy 7:25-26). Similar laws apply to people who serve other gods. As such, an Israelite city that is fallen into apostasy shall be a ‘burnt-offering’ (*kālil*) for the LORD. Similarly, Deuteronomy prescribes to devote (*ḥeḥerim*) all the cities of the peoples of the land to destruction when the Israelites take possession of the land (own translation):

When the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, **you must certainly devote them to destruction**. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. (Deuteronomy 7:2)

You will not keep anything that breathes alive, for you will certainly devote them to destruction: the Hittites, Amorites and Canaanites, the Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. (Deuteronomy 20:16b-17a)

¹⁰ See de Prenter, J.A. (2012), ‘The Contrastive Polysemous Meaning of *ḥēreṃ* in the Book of Joshua: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach’, in Noort, E. (Ed.), *The Book of Joshua (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium 250)*, Leiden: Brill, 473-488; de Prenter, *Language, Ideology and Cognition*, 200-202. See also Malul, M. (1995), ‘Taboo’ in van der Toorn, K., Becking, B. and van der Horst, P.W. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Leiden: Brill, 1564-1565: ‘The semantic field of *ḥēreṃ*, therefore, includes the above locutions, all denoting the general idea of something to be separated and removed from the life of the community. *Ḥēreṃ*, however, seems to be neutral in terms of value, for it could signify [...] both positive (consecration) and negative removal (destruction and defilement).’

In these Deuteronomistic texts, the verb *hēḥerīm* signifies a complete and utter destruction of the enemy. This is also expressed by the verbal forms that are used. In all three texts, a paranomastic infinitive construction (infinitive abs. + *yiqtol*) appears, that communicates the absolute command to destroy these cities and kill its inhabitants.¹¹ The same language of total destruction also appears in the book of Joshua. Similarly to Deuteronomy 13:16, the cities of Jericho, Ai and Hazor are burned, and all its inhabitants – including children and women – are killed:

Then **they devoted to destruction** by the edge of the sword **all in the city**, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys. (Joshua 6:21)

The total of those who fell that day, both men and women, was twelve thousand – all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the sword, until **he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai**. (Joshua 8:25-26)

And they put to the sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire. (Joshua 11:11)

With their emphasis on a complete destruction of the enemy, the war narratives in the book of Joshua echo the Deuteronomistic laws of warfare. This becomes especially apparent in Joshua 10 and 11, the battle reports where the word *kol* ‘all’ functions as an important keyword. Joshua and his army conquer (*lākad*) city after city (Joshua 10:28,32,35,39; 11:10,12). All the kings and living beings (*we’ēt-kol-hannepēš*) in the city (Joshua 10:30,32,35,37) are struck down (*hikkâ*) with the edge of the sword. Joshua ‘leaves no survivors’ (10:28,30,37,39; 11:8,14) and everything that breathes is devoted (*hēḥerīm*) to wreaking destruction (Josh 10:28,35,37,39; 11:11,20). In the book of Joshua, these *ḥerem*-wars are legitimized by the Law itself as Joshua is depicted as acting in accordance with Gods commandments (*mišwâ*). In other words, Joshua was an obedient leader who acted in accordance with all the words God commanded to Moses:

¹¹ For example, *hakkēh takkē* ‘you will surely smite’ (Deuteronomy 13:16) and *haḥarēm taḥarīm* ‘you will certainly devote to destruction’ (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17). The paranomastic use of the infinitive often communicates a deontic affirmative nuance, especially when the infinitive continues a *yiqtol* or imperative. In such cases, one should translate ‘you shall surely’ or ‘you must certainly’; see Joüon, P. and Muraoka, T. (2011), *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Third Edition with corrections* (*Subsidia Biblica* 27), Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, §123e1.

So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, **as the LORD God of Israel commanded.** (Joshua 10:40)

They did not leave any who breathed. **As the LORD had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.** (Joshua 11:14b-15)

In the Book of Joshua YHWH not only commands war; He also fights with Israel. All the cities are given 'into their hands' by God himself (Joshua 6:2; 8:1; 10:8; 10:30,32; 11:8). Accordingly, it is God himself who hardened the hearts of their enemies (Joshua 11:20) and throws stones on them from heaven (Joshua 10:11), thus fighting for Israel (Joshua 10:14, 42; 23:3).

The critical reception of Joshua in rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity

In both Judaism and Christianity, the Book of Joshua belongs to the canon and is considered as 'holy Scripture'. The Book of Joshua, therefore, confronts us with the hermeneutic task of interpreting the Joshua-wars in a responsible and ethical manner. An uncritical reading that identifies people with 'Canaanites', can easily give rise to an ideology of oppression and even violence against the 'other'. A critical reception of the Joshua wars is typical of both the Rabbinic tradition, as well as early Christianity. Both traditions reflect a creative recontextualization and spiritualization of the violent war-texts in the Book of Joshua and are examples of a creative theology that re-interprets Joshua in a peaceful way.¹² In this section, both Halakhic as well as Haggadic interpretations of the Joshua-wars are discussed, as well as Origen's allegorical interpretation in his homilies on Joshua.

¹² The Rabbinic and Patristic interpretation of the Joshua-wars are perfect examples of what Paul Ricoeur called the process of 'decontextualization' and 'recontextualization'. According to Ricoeur, the purpose of reading is to incorporate a text into a 'new discourse'. The act of reading means the original context of a story is dissolved by introducing the story into a new context through the new meaning that is given to the story by the reader. For Ricoeur, decontextualization is an important precondition for recontextualizing a text, see Ricoeur, P. (1986), 'La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation', in Ricoeur, P., *Du texte à l'action: Essais d'herméneutique*, Paris: Seuil, 101-117. Specifically he says, 'Bref, le texte doit pouvoir, tant du point de vue sociologique que psychologique, se décontextualiser de manière à se laisser récontextualiser dans une nouvelle situation: ce que précisément l'acte de lire.' Ricoeur, 'Fonction herméneutique', 111.

Rabbinic Peaceful Interpretations

Rabbinic Judaism is characterized by a theology of storytelling and free, creative interpretation. After the devastation of the temple in 70CE, Rabbinic Judaism arose from the school of the Pharisees.¹³ The rabbis developed a new hermeneutic interpretation of biblical texts, by bringing different stories and biblical concepts in dialogue with another in a creative, new way. Both in Palestine, as well as in Babylonia, a period of hermeneutic creativity flourished with the emergence of the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud. Rabbinic hermeneutics departed from the hermeneutic principle to interpret the Torah from the Torah. Rabbinic exegesis is constituted by the *Haggadah* with its beautiful narrations (*Haggadah* is derived from *higgid* ‘to explain’, ‘to tell’) and the discerning *Halakhah* that explains the Torah as the righteous path to life (*Halakhah* means ‘path’ and is derived from the verb *hālak* ‘to go’). In Rabbinic thought, both *Haggadah* and *Halakhah* are strongly intermingled and they evoke and complement one another. As Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it poetically:

Halakhah represents the strength to shape one’s life according to a fixed pattern; it is a form-giving force. Haggadah is the expression of man’s ceaseless striving that often defies all limitations. Halakhah is the rationalization and schematization of living; it defines, specifies, sets measure and limit, placing life into an exact system. Haggadah deals with man’s ineffable relations to God, to other men, and to the world. Halakhah deals with details, with each commandment separately, Haggadah with the whole of life, with the totality of religious life. Halakhah deals with the Law, Haggadah with the meaning of the Law. Halakhah deals with subjects that can be expressed literally; Haggadah introduces us to a realm that lies beyond the range of expression. Halakhah teaches us how to perform common acts; Haggadah tells us how to participate in the eternal drama. Halakhah gives us knowledge; Haggadah gives us aspiration.¹⁴

Rabbinic exegesis emerged as an answer to the new challenges that faced the Jewish people after the fall of Jerusalem: defining a new identity for a people without a land, without a king, and without a temple. Confronted with this new context, the rabbis developed a radical peaceful interpretation of the biblical holy war tradition.

The Halakhic discussions on the biblical *hēreḡm*-wars reflect the wisdom of the rabbis in discontinuing this violent biblical tradition. Deeply rooted in Halakhic sources on warfare is the rather technical discussion about two types

¹³ Strack, H.L. and Stemberger, G. (1992), *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (translated by Markus Bockmuehl), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2.

¹⁴ Heschel, A.J. (1992), *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Religion*, New York: Noonday Press, 337.

of warfare, in other words, *milḥemēṭ rešūt* and *milḥemēṭ mišwâ*.¹⁵ In Mishnah Sotah VIII 7, where the terminology appears for the first time, *milḥemēṭ rešūt* (voluntary, discretionary war) is contrasted with a war as *mišwâ*, whereby all people – even ‘a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her bridal pavilion’ (Joel 2:16) – are commanded to march to war. Rabbi Yehuda, however, defines such *milḥemēṭ mišwâ* as ‘obligatory war’ (*milḥemēṭ ḥôbâ*). The question of which wars these categories relate to specifically is only resolved in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud (Palestinian Talmud Sotah 23a; 8:10; Babylonian Talmud Sotah 44b), where the rabbis conclude that Joshua’s wars were obligatory, thus limiting the violent *ḥērēm* wars to the period of Israel’s settlement in the promised land under Joshua’s leadership. The Davidic wars are typified in the Palestinian Talmud as *mišwâ* wars. Within the minority position of Rabbi Yehuda however, voluntary war relates to preventive warfare, while obligatory war is typified as a defensive type of warfare. A further systematization can be discerned in the Babylonian Talmud, where the war narratives in the book of Joshua are characterized as ‘wars of conquest’ (*milḥemēṭ likbōš*). The Davidic battles in 2 Samuel 8; 10 however, are characterized as expansive wars (*milḥemēṭ larewahâ*). By delimiting obligatory and commanded war to Israel’s distant past, any contemporary re-invention of the biblical holy war tradition is comprehensively dismantled.¹⁶ The conquest wars of Joshua are thus interpreted as a unique moment in Israel’s history, never to be repeated. Likewise, voluntary war is no longer operational since it requires an Israelite king or Sanhedrin (Mishnah Sanhedrin I 5a).

The Rabbinic interpretation of the biblical commandment to exterminate the ‘seven nations’ from the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17) is characterized by a similar pacifist exegesis. According to the rabbis, the *ḥērēm* laws in Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17 are no longer applicable. When Sennacherib scattered the Jewish people across the earth, intermarriage and cultural assimilation made it impossible to distinguish between Israel and its neighbouring people (Mishnah Yadayim 4:4; Tosefta Qiddushin 5:4; Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 28a). Maimonides draws a similar conclusion in his ‘Book of Commandments’ (positive commandment 187), where he states, ‘the seven nations are no longer in existence [...] they were finished and cut off in the days of David, when the remainder was dispersed and intermingled with the nations to the extent that

¹⁵ Firestone, R. (2012), *Holy War in Judaism: The Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 74. See also Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 68–69.

¹⁶ Elßner, T. R. (2008), *Josua und seine Kriege in jüdischer und christlicher Rezeptionsgeschichte (Theologie und Frieden 37)*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 129 onwards; Firestone, *Holy War*, 77–89.

no root remained'.¹⁷ Maimonides, however, also developed a deeply spiritualized interpretation of Deuteronomy 20:17. For Maimonides, the seven nations are universal symbols of idolatry, or as Maimonides puts it, they are the 'root and original foundation of idolatry'. The *mišwâ* to blot such evil from the world, must therefore be regarded as a command 'for all generations'.¹⁸ All people are called to honour the first commandment to 'love God with all their heart and soul' by conquering the temptation of the human heart to bow down to idols and graven images.

At the heart of Rabbinic exegesis is a radical peaceful orientation to life. In classical Rabbinic sources, the term *šālôm* occurs 'more than twenty-five hundred times'.¹⁹ The Babylonian Talmud underlines the important role of the scholars in 'increasing peace in the word' (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 64a), and almost all Jewish blessings or prayers (for example, the Amidah prayer, the Kiddush, the Priestly Blessing or the Grace after meals), end with a strophe about peace.²⁰ In *Perek ha-šālôm*, the chapter on peace in the Babylonian Talmud, numerous peace-making strategies such as forgiveness, subtle diplomacy, and friendly gestures are mentioned. The rabbinic emphasis on the importance of peaceful negotiation, even in the struggle for the land of Canaan, is strongly expressed in the Haggadic tradition around Israel's entrance in the promised land. Both the Palestinian Talmud (Palestinian Talmud Shebi'it 6:1,20) and the Midrashic elaborations in Leviticus and Deuteronomy Rabbah (Leviticus Rabbah 17:6; Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:14), picture Joshua as a peace-oriented leader. He sends three letters to the land of Canaan, leaving the inhabitants with the choice of either leaving the land, accepting peace, or waging war

¹⁷ Chavel, C.B. (Ed.) (1881), *Maimonides Book of Commandments, with the Commentary of Nachmanides (Hebrew)*, Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 227.

¹⁸ Firestone, *Holy War*, 105, 123. A problematic issue in Rabbinic literature about warfare are the references to Amalek. The tribe of Amalek is most famous for its cowardly attack on Israel's weakened rear-guard at Refidim (Deuteronomy 25:18; Exodus 17:8-13). The Israelite-Amalekite hostility is especially expressed in Deuteronomy 25:19; see also Exodus 17:14, and 1 Samuel 15, where YHWH commands king Saul to exterminate Amalek from the earth. Even Haman, who devised a plan to kill all the Jews, appears as a late descendent of Amalek (Esther 3:1). Within Rabbinic literature, the Amalekites are construed as a mythic enemy symbolizing the evil forces aimed at weakening Israel. While the majority of rabbis conclude that Amalek refers to the evil inclination within the heart, the mythic typology gives rise to the opinion existing among some orthodox circles, that the Amalekites still exist and can be identified by the Palestinians. See Firestone, *Holy War*, 100 onwards for an overview.

¹⁹ Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 77.

²⁰ Rabinowitz, L.I. (2007), 'Peace in the Talmud', in Skolnik, F. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Judaica*, Vol. 15, London: Macmillan, 701-702; see also Leviticus Rabbah 9:9.

with Israel.²¹ The quote obviously illustrates the rabbinic emphasis on seeking peace, as a way of preventing warfare and violence:

For Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman said: Joshua sent three orders to the land of Israel before they entered the land: 'Those who want to evacuate, should evacuate; those who want to make peace, should make peace; those who want to go to war, should go to war'. The Gergashites evacuated, believed in the Holy One, praised be He, and went to Africa. 'Until I come and take you to a land like your land' (2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 36:17), that is Africa. The people of Gibeon made peace, [...] 'that the inhabitants of Gibeon made peace with Israel' (Joshua 10:1). Thirty-one kings went to war (Joshua 12) and fell.²²

Origen's allegorical interpretation of Joshua

A Christian example of a peaceful recontextualization of the violent Joshua-wars is to be found in Origen's (ca. 184 – ca. 253) homilies on Joshua. Origen's interpretation of the book of Joshua consists of an allegorical exegesis and a deeply spiritual and symbolic theology. Origen's theology had a major impact on important theological figures such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of Nazianzus.²³ Origen's symbolic theology of the book of Joshua, therefore, marks the beginning of a new hermeneutics that dominated Patristic theology for the next several hundred years.²⁴ Origen wrote 26 homilies on the book of Joshua. These homilies, however, are only transmitted in Latin, with the exception of a few Greek fragments found in *the Philokalia* of Origen and Procopius's *Catena on the Octateuch*.²⁵ A significant aspect in the homilies of Origen is the meaning of the name 'Jesus'. The Hebrew name *yehôšūa* '

²¹ Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, 150 onwards. While the tale of Joshua's three letters is basically identical in all three Rabbinic sources, the context of the discussion differs. The Palestinian Talmud (Palestinian Talmud Shebi' it 6:1) discusses Joshua's letters in relation to the regulations regarding the Sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:2 onwards), where YHWH appears as the only rightful owner of the land (Leviticus 25:23). In Leviticus Rabbah, the narrative is quoted to explain how the Israelites took possession of cities 'filled with good things' (Deuteronomy 6:11), while Deuteronomy Rabbah uses the tale to portray Joshua as a true successor of Moses, who sent messengers with 'words of peace' to the Amorite king of Heshbon (Deuteronomy 2:26), see Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, 167-168.

²² Guggenheimer, H.W. (2001), *The Jerusalem Talmud – First Order: Tractates Kilaim and Seviit (Studia Judaica 20)*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 500-501.

²³ Gregory of Nazianzus called Origen 'the whetstone of us all'. Athanasius, quite similarly, refers to Origen as a 'labour-loving' man who argued for the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, see: John Behr, J. (2017), *Origen: On First Principles, Vol 1*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, XVI.

²⁴ Chenoweth, M. (2019), 'Origen's Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua', *The Christian Libertarian Review*, Vol. 2, 91-115, 92-93.

²⁵ The English translation of Origen's homilies on Joshua are taken from Cynthia White, C. (Ed) (2002), *The Fathers of the Church: Origen – Homilies on Joshua (translated by Barbara J. Bruce)*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press. As Bruce explains in her introduction, the Latin texts of Origen's homilies on Joshua are generally regarded as faithful and quite literal translations of the Greek original in Patristic studies, see 'Introduction', 17.

is translated in the LXX as Ἰησοῦς – a rendering that was also adopted by the Gospels. In English, there is a difference between Jesus and Joshua. But in Greek and Hebrew there is no difference, but a complete identity of names.²⁶ This ‘name-identity’ strongly determined Origen’s theological understanding of the Book of Joshua. Origen therefore begins his series with a homily on the meaning of the name ‘Jesus’ (Homily Joshua 1). For Origen Joshua and Jesus are almost identical figures. What is true for ‘Jesus the son of Nun’ (Homily Joshua 1:1), must also be true for ‘Jesus the son of the Father’. The battles of Joshua are also the battles of Jesus.

Origen’s language of ‘war’, ‘battle’, and ‘struggle’ is deeply pacifistic. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen states how Jesus taught his disciples that there is no justification for murdering ‘a man even if he were the greatest wrongdoer; no longer do we take the sword against any nation, nor do we learn [the art] of war anymore, since we have become sons of peace through Jesus who is our leader’ (*Contra Celsum* 3.8/ 5.33).²⁷ Origen understands the wars in the book of Joshua in a spiritual sense, as an internal battle of the soul. In his fifteenth homily on Joshua, Origen underlines the importance of reading the violent Joshua wars spiritually, ‘unless the physical wars bore the figure of spiritual wars, I do not think the book of Jewish history would ever have been handed down by the apostles to the disciples of Christ, who came to teach peace, so that they could be read in churches’. (Homily Joshua 15,1). The violence on the battlefields relates to the inner soul of every person. The Canaanites, Perizzites, and Jebusites, says Origen, ‘are in us’ (Homily Joshua 1,7), and are thus symbolizing the sins and demons every person must fight:

Within you is the battle that you are about to wage; on the inside is that evil edifice that must be overthrown; your enemy proceeds from your heart. (Homily Joshua 5,2)

When Joshua shouts, that the LORD has given Jericho into the hands of Israel and that the city and ‘all that is in it’, must be devoted to destruction (Joshua 6:16), we too are called to battle. In Origen’s theology of Joshua, hostile cities are clearly understood as symbols for the human heart. For Origen, Joshua’s voice refers directly to ‘the voice of Christ’, for he told his disciples that evil

²⁶ Ballhorn, E. (2011), *Israel am Jordan: Narrative Topographie im Buch Josua (Bonner biblische Beiträge 162)*. Bonn: V&R Unipress, 333; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, L. (2012), ‘Josua 6 und die Gewalt’, in Noort, E. (Ed.), *The Book of Joshua (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium 250)*, Leuven: Peeters, 433-471, 469. The distinction between ‘Jesus’ and ‘Joshua’ in both English and other modern languages dates back to the Latin Vulgate which distinguishes between *Josue* and *Jesu*.

²⁷ Chenoweth, ‘Origen’s Interpretation of Violence in the Book of Joshua’, 110.

intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, and slander, all dwell in the heart (Matthew 15:19). According to Origen, such evil thoughts are precisely the enemies that must be fought and destroyed completely.²⁸ What must be torn down are not the literal walls of Jericho, but the walls of jealousy and hate. In his contextualization of the Joshua wars, Origen based his spiritual understanding of warfare strongly on the apostle Paul. As Origen explains, Paul understood military language metaphorically, as becomes evident from the epistle to the Ephesians. When Paul says, 'Put on the armour of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the cunning devices of evil' (Ephesians 6:11), standing firm does not relate to 'physical wars', but to 'the struggles of the soul' against spiritual adversaries (Homily Joshua 15,1). In his fifth homily, Origen quotes Paul extensively, to underscore his argument that the Old Testament wars must be understood in a spiritual sense:

Do not learn from me but again from the Apostle Paul, who teaches you saying, 'For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in the heavens' (Ephesians 6:12). For those things that were written are signs and figures. For thus says the apostle, 'For all these things happened to them figuratively, but they were written for us, for whom the fulfilment of the ages has come' (1 Corinthians 10:11). If therefore, they were written for us, come on! Let us go forth to the war. (Homily Joshua 5,2)²⁹

Origen also understood the biblical concept of *hēreḡm* in a spiritual sense. The term 'anathema' appears for the first time in Origen's seventh homily on Joshua in which, at the beginning of his homily, he quotes Joshua 6:18.³⁰ For Origen, the biblical concept of *hēreḡm* symbolizes total and complete devotion to God. More specifically, Origen also relates *hēreḡm* to profane things or objects. In the context of the church, he argues, Joshua's prohibition to take from YHWH's

²⁸ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Josua 6 und die Gewalt*, 469; Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, 240ff.

²⁹ In his homilies on Joshua. Origen – being unaware of the Rabbinic discussions on *hēreḡm* – strongly criticized a Jewish literal reading of the Joshua wars. According to Origen, a literal reading of Joshua leads to 'war and strife' (Homily Joshua 14,1). In his fourteenth homily Origen strongly contrasts this reading of '*ante adventum quidem Domini Iesu Christi*' with the reading '*postea [...] presential domini*' (Homily Joshua 14,1). At times Origen comes close to an anti-Jewish sentiment, as becomes evident in his homily on the destruction of Ai (Joshua 8), 'When the Jews read these things they become cruel and thirst after human blood, thinking that even holy persons so struck those who were living in Ai that not one of them was left "who might be saved or who might escape". They do not understand that mysteries are dimly shadowed in these words and that they more truly indicate to us that we ought not to leave any of those demons deeply within' (Homily Joshua 8,7), see Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, 248 onwards.

³⁰ Already in the LXX the Hebrew noun *hēreḡm* is translated with the Greek term ἀνάθεμα 'ban', 'devoted thing'.

property (Joshua 6:18), relates to the taboo of bringing sins and worldly things into the church, ‘Take heed that you have nothing worldly in you, that you bring down with you to the Church neither worldly customs nor faults nor equivocations of the age. But let all worldly ways be anathema to you. Do not mix mundane things with divine; do not introduce worldly matters into the mysteries of the Church’ (Homily Joshua 7,4).³¹

Recontextualization of Joshua’s wars within the Hebrew Bible

Both Origen’s and the Rabbinic interpretation of the Joshua-wars are beautiful examples of a critical-hermeneutical recontextualization of ethically problematic biblical texts. The Hebrew Bible itself, however, must be seen as an ‘ongoing history of salvation’ (as in Bultmann’s *forschreitenden Heilsgeschichte*). Biblical texts consist of multiple layers and redactions in which history is continuously reformulated and re-interpreted. One can already discern a mitigation of the violent Joshua wars within Scripture. As has been argued above, the *hēreṃ*-wars in the book of Joshua were strongly modelled after the Deuteronomistic laws of warfare in Deuteronomy 20. The present Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 20 however, reflects different redactional layers. Within the critical exegesis on Deuteronomy, it is generally assumed that the obligation to offer peace in verses 10-14, belongs to a pre-Deuteronomistic layer. In a much later exilic redaction (verses 15-18), the conditions of peace were limited to cities ‘that are very far (*rāḥōq*) from you’ (Deuteronomy 20:15), and the laws to exterminate all the nations from the land were inserted into the text (verses 16-18). Much critical research on *hēreṃ* contests that the violent *hēreṃ*-wars as described in Deuteronomy and Joshua were ever put into practice. According to Weippert, who argues that the Deuteronomistic scribes were highly influenced by the destruction of the Northern kingdom in 731 BCE and the threatening uprising of the Babylonians, the *hēreṃ*-accounts were constructed as a positive message for a people without a homeland.³² Rüdiger Schmitt quite similarly interpreted Deuteronomy as a ‘counterfactual’ document of memory-making. In this sense, Deuteronomy 20 appears as a ‘programmatically and utopian war theology’, that offered a hopeful message for an audience in exile.³³ In his

³¹ Origen based his thematization of *hēreṃ* as a distinction between ‘holy’ and ‘prophane’ especially on Rom 12:2, see Elßner, *Josua und seine Kriege*, 245-246.

³² Weippert, M. (1997), “Heiliger Krieg” in Israel und Assyrien: Kritische Anmerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des “Heiligen Krieges im alten Israel”, in Weippert, M. (Ed.), *Jahwe und die anderen Götter: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel und ihrem syrisch-palästinischen Kontext* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 18), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 71-97, 94-95.

³³ Schmitt, *Der ‘Heilige Krieg’ im Pentateuch und in deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, 54-55.

'*Krieg und Frieden*', Eckart Otto developed an interpretation that echoes the traditional Rabbinic view on the *ḥēreṃ*-laws in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and 20:15-18, Otto argues, stem from a late post-exilic redaction that was formulated during a period when Canaanites were no longer living on the land. The command to doom all the inhabitants of the land to destruction is a literary fiction. The Deuteronomistic concept of *ḥēreṃ* symbolizes Israel's monotheistic relationship with YHWH, thus signifying a 'new Israel' that demolishes its polytheistic past.³⁴

The Deuteronomistic laws of warfare also reflect a sharp contrast between Israel and the nations in terms of 'chosenness'. YHWH has singled out Israel as his 'chosen' (*ḥā 'ām bāḥar*) people from 'all the peoples of the earth' (see Deuteronomy 7:6,7; 14:2), to be his 'treasured possession' or *seḡullâ* (Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15; 14:2,21; 26:18-19; 28:9; see also Psalms 33:12; 89:20). Divine election is also coupled in Deuteronomy with a status of holiness. In contrast with the 'seven nations', who are doomed to destruction (*ḥēreṃ*), Israel should be 'a holy people' ('*am qāḏōš*'), diligently observing YHWH's sacred statutes and ordinances (Deuteronomy 7:11). Such a strict separation between Israel and the 'seven nations' is challenged in Joshua 2 and 9. Ironically enough, it is not Joshua, but the inhabitants of Gibeon who follow the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy 20:10-11 by offering the Israelites terms of peace (Joshua 9:6). Rahab, quite similarly, showed kindness (*ḥeṣeḏ*) to the Israelite spies (Joshua 2:12) and saves them from the king of Jericho. Both Rahab and the Gibeonites, moreover, confess to YHWH's name, his might 'on earth as well as in heaven' (Joshua 2:11; 9:9a) and his mighty deeds in Egypt (Joshua 2:10; 9:9b-10). The harsh Deuteronomistic imagery of the Canaanite 'other', that will lure Israel into apostasy, is thus softened in Joshua 2 and 9.³⁵ While Rahab and the Gibeonites are included within Israel, they remain marginalized outsiders. Rahab and her family are brought to a place 'outside the camp' of Israel (Joshua 6:23), and the Gibeonites will live as servants, cutting wood and drawing water for the entire congregation (Joshua 9; Deuteronomy 29:10).

³⁴ Otto, E. (1999), *Krieg und Frieden in der hebräischen Bibel und im Alten Orient: Aspekte für eine Friedensordnung in der Moderne (Theologie und Frieden 18)*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 105-106.

³⁵ Similar forms of mitigation are reflected in Deuteronomy. A well-known example is the Moses speech in Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20. In vv. 29:7-8, when Moses looks back upon the defeat of King Sihon and Og, the language of 'leaving no survivors' (Deuteronomy 3:3) is deliberately avoided. Likewise, in Deuteronomy 29:1-27, with its references to the future catastrophe that will strike the land, the distinction between the generations of Israelites and foreigners disappears (Deuteronomy 29:21). Deuteronomy 30:5 on the other hand, appears as a critical reflection of Deuteronomy 7:1. While *yāraš* relates to destroying the nations from the land in Deuteronomy 7:1, the same verb is used in Deuteronomy 30:5 in relation to returning exiles. See Lohfink, N. (1997), 'Länderoberung und Heimkehr: Hermeneutisches zum heutigen Umgang mit dem Josuabuch', *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 12, 3-24, 17-19.

A more inclusive approach to foreigners is to be found in Joshua 8:30-35. This small story –placed between the conquest of Ai (Joshua 8:1-29) and the Gibeonite ruse in Joshua 9 – tells of the covenant renewal on mount Ebal. In the presence of all Israel, with all its elders, judges, officers, priests, and Levites, Joshua reads from ‘all the words of the Torah’ (*kol-dibrê hattôrâ*) that were written in the ‘Book of the Law’ (*sēpēr hattôrâ*) to all the people of Israel. Both strangers and sojourners (*gēr*), as well as born Israelites (*’ezrāh*), are blessed and hear God’s words of grace and righteousness and are included in the community with this covenant renewal.

All Israel, alien as well as citizen, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark in front of the levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at first, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward **he read all the words of the law**, blessings and curses, **according to all that is written in the book of the law.** (Joshua 8:33-34)

A similar theology is reflected at the end of the book in Joshua 24 in the story concerning the covenant renewal at Shechem. After a long prophetic speech that illustrates YHWH’s graceful intervention in Israel’s history (Joshua 24:1-14), Joshua challenges the Israelites to choose (*bāḥar*) YHWH as their God, when he tells them, ‘choose now, whom you will serve [...] but, as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD’ (Joshua 24:15). As Habel argues, this second covenant renewal in Joshua 24 introduces a model of ‘ancestral household’ theology that turns Deuteronomy 7:6 on its head: every Jewish household should ‘actively choose’ (*bāḥar*) YHWH, rather than ‘passively’ accepting the ‘tradition that YHWH has chosen them as a people (Deuteronomy 7:6) and given them the land as their entitlement’.³⁶

A profound characteristic in biblical ‘land theology’ is the dialectic between receiving and losing the land. In biblical thought, the land is both a gift and a threat.³⁷ The biblical landscape is filled with objects that remind Israel of a previous culture. As such, Israel receives a ‘land with fine large cities, that you did not build, houses filled with all sort of goods that you did not fill, hew cisterns you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves you did not plant’ (Deuteronomy

³⁶ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 68; see also Koopmans, W.T. (1990), *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 93). Sheffield: JSOT Press, 429.

³⁷ See Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 45; Brueggemann, W.A. (2003), *The Land: Place of Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (*Overtures to Biblical Theology*). Second edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 50 onwards.

6:10-11; cf. Joshua 24:13). The altars, pillars, and idols, confront Israel with the continuous temptation to worship other gods, made by human hands of wood and stone (Deuteronomy 4:28; 7:5,25; 12:13; 28:36,64; 29:16). Even the sun, moon and the stars, the animals on earth, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea (Deuteronomy 4:18-19) are potentially dangerous when Israel forgets that YHWH is their creator. Serving other gods is specifically understood in Deuteronomy as a form of self-exaltation, causing Israel to 'forget the covenant' (Deuteronomy 4:23; 6:12; 8:11,14,19). The threatening reality of the land is probably most vividly described in the divine speeches in Leviticus 18:25,28 (see also Leviticus 20:22), where YHWH tells his people that the land will vomit out its inhabitants. Like the nations, Israel will lose the land, for defiling it – a reality that is also strongly expressed in the prophetic speech in Josh 23:13.

Know assuredly that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the LORD your God has given you." (Joshua 23:13; see also Exodus 23:33; 34:12; Deuteronomy 7:16; Psalms 106:36).

Ultimately, the land belongs to God as expressed in the laws regarding the sabbatical year in Leviticus 25, where YHWH is conceptualized as the only rightful owner of the land. As God's people, the Israelites are sojourners and tenants, who may live in God's vineyard (Leviticus 25:23). Land is not a possession that can be sold or ransomed; land is granted to Israel as the soil of life, with fields and crops that require careful stewardship. Like the cattle on the fields which are relieved from their hard work on Sabbath day (Exodus 20:10; 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14), or the bird's nest that is cleared out so that the mother may have new young ones (Deuteronomy 22:6-7), after six years of harvesting the land will rest from being cultivated in order to prevent depletion (Leviticus 25:1-7). As such, the book of Joshua tells that after years of battle, the land may finally rest (Joshua 11:23). As its creator, YHWH is the only rightful landowner – a deeply profound spiritual insight – that is also beautifully expressed in Rashi's commentary on the Talmud.

So if the peoples of the world say to Israel, 'You are robbers because you took the lands of the seven nations,' Israel can reply to them, 'All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When God wished, He gave it to them; and when God wished, He took it from them.'³⁸

³⁸ Adopted from Firestone, *Holy War*, 112.

The importance of religious peacebuilding

The book of Joshua can easily take on an explosive meaning when the book is read in an uncritical and typological sense. As illustrated at the beginning of this paper, a well-known example is the terrorist attack on Yitzhak Rabin by Yigael Amir. Amir's violent actions were clearly inspired by an ideological reading of the biblical tradition of conquering and inheriting the land. Amir saw the Oslo accords as a direct violation of the biblical laws against covenants with the other nations (Exodus 34:12; see also Exodus 23:32; Deuteronomy 7:2).³⁹ After his arrest, Amir told news reporters that the Israeli government was surrendering the 'heritage of the Jews and betraying settlers in the West Bank'. Identifying the Palestinian people with the biblical 'inhabitants of the land', Amir believed that agreeing to the Oslo accords and giving Palestinian authority to the once-occupied territory, was wrong in the eyes of biblical Law. The Palestinians would become 'a snare' (Exodus 34:12) that will put Israel in danger, 'Maybe physically I acted alone, but what pulled the trigger was not my finger, but the finger of this whole nation, which for 2000 years yearned for this land and dreamed of it.'⁴⁰

This example clearly demonstrates the importance of religious peacebuilding practices, especially within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What is especially needed is a form of religious peacebuilding that centres on ongoing dialogue between all religious groups – even conservative and radical ones – and invites them to discover the depth of biblical attitudes to war and peace. A scholar who pioneered such a critical framework is Marc Gopin. In his 'Between Eden and Armageddon' and 'Holy War, Holy Peace', Gopin developed a critical framework for religious conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Gopin's method is strongly based on Jewish and Islamic attitudes to war and peace and the various normative and communally accepted myths, symbols, texts, rituals, norms, and values. While conservative and fundamentalist religious groups pose the most severe challenge to Gopin's peace hermeneutics, Gopin strongly argues against eschewing them from the debate on peace in the Middle East. According to Gopin 'all religious communities', including conservative ones, 'are capable of prosocial practices and peaceful paths'.⁴¹ Central to Gopin's approach is a critical analysis that demonstrates how the reception of biblical

³⁹ Lohfink, 'Landeroberung und Heimkehr', 7.

⁴⁰ Spaaij, *Understanding*, 42-44.

⁴¹ Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 10-11. In essence conflict resolution is about transformation, see Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 110: Conflict resolution is 'a truly transformative and elective [...] practice, which never assumes that any group is incapable of transformation'.

and Qur'anic 'holy war texts' in the normative tradition already portray a critical hermeneutic re-interpretation of the text. As such, Gopin points to the halakhic discussions on 'obligatory war' (*milḥemet ḥōbâ*), 'commanded war' (*milḥemet mišwâ*) and 'voluntary, optional war' (*milḥemet rešût*), the Rabbinic values of celebrating *šālôm* and *pikûâ neṣṣêš* (the preservation of life), and the non-violent re-interpretation of biblical texts that conceptualize YHWH as a warrior in Rabbinic sources.⁴² Gopin also refers to numerous parallels in Islamic tradition: next to military *jihād*, there is also the later distinction between 'state *jihād*' and 'religious *jihād*',⁴³ and the theological reflections on 'quietism' and 'waiting' or postponing war. The Mahdi tradition – a messianic figure that appears in Hadith sources – reflects both violent and peaceful versions, and much like Rabbinic theology, Ahmadi and Sufi Islam are strongly characterized by pacifist and neo-pacifist traditions and values.⁴⁴

In his more recent work 'Holy War, Holy Peace', Gopin developed an insightful analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which he traces Israel's difficult and complicated relationship with the Palestinian people to the 'Abrahamitic family myth', in other words, the biblical and Qur'anic narratives about Abraham's lineage. A key text is the biblical narrative of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:8-16, and its reception in Rabbinic and Qur'anic sources. The reason for Hagar's expulsion is extensively discussed in Rabbinic sources. According to Rabbi Akiba, Sarah saw how Ishmael brought idolatry into Abraham's house, while Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai claims that the argument was caused by the attention that was given to Isaac, while Ishmael – given his position as Abraham's eldest son – felt equally entitled to the double inheritance

⁴² The *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* on Exodus 15:3 (*Mekhilta Shirata* 4) is a clear example of a rabbinic recontextualization in which the military description of YHWH as a 'man of war' is interpreted in a non-violent way. By bringing Exodus 15:3 into dialogue with other biblical texts (Exodus 34:6; Psalms 65:2) and the Rabbinic importance of compassion for 'all creatures' (*berîôt*) and 'all inhabitants of the world' (*bôre' 'ôlām*), Rabbi Judah portrays YHWH as a God who violently punishes the guilty and listens simultaneously to prayers of all the creatures in the world, see Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 67-68.

⁴³ The term *jihād* is often mistakenly reduced to 'holy war'. The basic meaning of the classic Arabic root *jhd* is 'effort', 'exhaustion', or 'strain'. Well-known peaceful ways of striving are *jihād al-lisān* 'striving with the tongue'; *jihād al-da' wa* 'striving by propagating faith', and *jihād al-tarbīya* 'striving through education'. Only in ten Qur'anic verses does the term relate to armed struggle on behalf of the Muslim community. See: Landau-Tasseron, E. (2003) 'Jihād', in Dammen McAuliffe, J. (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Leiden: Brill, Vol. 3, 35-43; Stephen B. Chapman, S.B. (2013), 'Martial Memory, Peaceable Vision: Divine War in the Old Testament', in Thomas, H.A., Evans, J. and Copan, P. (Eds.), *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality, an Old Testament Problem*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 47-67, 48ff. For helpful comparative studies, see also Schreiner, K. and Müller-Luckner, E. (2008), *Heilige Kriege: Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung. Judentum, Christentum und Islam in Vergleich (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs 78)*, München: Oldenbourg; Firestone, R. (1996), 'Conceptions of Holy War in Biblical and Qur'anic Tradition', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1, 99-123.

⁴⁴ Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 66.

(Deuteronomy 21:17). The predominant view in Rabbinic sources (see Genesis Rabbah 53:11), is that the expulsion of Ishmael necessarily prepared Isaac, God's truly chosen son, to become the patriarch of God's people.⁴⁵ The same brotherly rivalry is expressed in the Qur'anic tradition. The Qur'an regards Ishmael as the ancestor of the Arabic people, who followed his father in worshipping Allah (Q Al Baqarah 125, 127; Maryam 54-55). While the Qur'an acknowledges that the children of Isaac inherited a prophecy from Moses (Q Ghâfir 53), Israel is severely criticized for not accepting the true, authentic faith in Allah (see Q Al Baqarah 40 onwards; Al A' râf 161-171). The Isaac-Ishmael rivalry is expressed especially in the traditional Islamic interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice. The Qur'anic narrative in As Shaffât 99-113 is ambivalent. The name Ishmael is not mentioned, whereas Isaac is only mentioned at the end of the narrative. In traditional Islamic views, the biblical narrative is often regarded as an invalid tradition. Ishmael is the older son, even in the biblical tradition. The biblical narrative is therefore commonly understood as a falsifying account.⁴⁶

The Abrahamitic family myth can therefore be viewed as a 'mythically based conflict' that expresses a struggle over who is God's chosen people. Gopin believes, however, that Judaism, Christianity and Islam can contribute to peace-enhancing processes by transforming patterns of Abrahamitic exclusion and incrimination into patterns of 'Abrahamitic reconciliation'. A key category for Gopin is the Rabbinic concept of *tesûbâ*, that literally means 'to return'. The *tesûbâ* process is a powerful process of healing and atonement, that includes a number of necessary steps, such as regret, cessation, confession, and a commitment to a future relation.⁴⁷ When followed correctly, *tesûbâ* may be used as an important step in transforming the hostile and violent relation between the children of Isaac and Ishmael into a relation of brotherly love and understanding. Gopin's approach to religious conflict resolution is thus based on both prevention of violence, as well as reconciliation practices. Drawing on Gopin's approach, Katrien Hertog defines religious peacebuilding more specifically as:

⁴⁵ The Rabbinic discussions on Genesis 21:8-16 clearly express the tragic relation between two brothers. As Gopin puts it, Isaac and Ishmael 'compete over who is idolatrous and who is authentic, and they compete for the love of the father, embodied in the double portion of the inheritance', see Gopin *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 9.

⁴⁶ Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 9-12.

⁴⁷ Gopin, *Eden and Armageddon*, 187 onwards; Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 117-129. In many respects, the Nes Ammin project with its focus on dialogue and working on reconciliation between Jews, Christians and Muslims based on study programs and volunteering experiences, can be seen as a practical application of Gopin's pioneering approach to religious conflict resolution.

Religious peacebuilding centers on indigenous religious leaders who develop, from their own tradition and with understanding of the specificities of the conflict situation, effective and appropriate concepts and practices with a short-term aim to reduce violence or resolve conflicts, and with a long-term aim of building a culture of peace, justice and non-violence which encompasses conflict prevention and reconciliation, and which can be sustained by themselves in cooperation with other actors.⁴⁸

Religion can make its own unique contribution to peace-enhancing practices by developing strategies for preventing violence, conflict, and radicalization. As Hertog argues, religions have a unique position in terms of preventing violence. Religious traditions not only encompass ‘peace-enhancing values, concepts and principles, but also have a set of spiritual practices and guidelines to discover these values [...], to nourish them and internalize them’, such as mediation, prayer, surrender, practicing awareness, silence, singing and fasting.⁴⁹ Gopin’s approach also demonstrated that knowledge of the complex meaning of religious peace and war practices in sacred Scripture and its reception in religious normative traditions is also an important element in preventing violence. A central aspect of religious peacebuilding, therefore, is empowering religious groups to train their religious leaders to raise awareness of the importance of developing a critical hermeneutics of holy texts, and to teach about the complex reality of war and peace practices in religious sources and traditions, in education, public events, dialogue, and spiritual formation. The recontextualization of the violent war-texts in the Book of Joshua in Rabbinic Judaism and Origen’s homilies on Joshua are powerful examples of a peaceful transformation of problematic religious texts that fit perfectly into such preventative educational programmes.

Conclusion

The war-texts in the Book of Joshua are characterized by an extremely violent rhetoric. In the book of Joshua as a whole, the biblical concept of *ḥēreḡm* expresses the complete destruction of what is considered as taboo as well as unholy. As such *ḥēreḡm* refers to objects and people that are associated with apostasy. The strong intertextual relation with the Deuteronomistic laws of warfare (Deuteronomy 7:2-5, 25-26; 20:16-18) suggests that the *ḥēreḡm*-wars in the book of Joshua – at least in their final redaction – originate from the exilic

⁴⁸ Hertog, *Complex Reality*, 96.

⁴⁹ Hertog, *Complex Reality*, 106.

period and were modelled on Israel's struggle with monotheistic faith that confesses complete obedience to the LORD as the One true God. As Patrick D. Miller puts it, the *ḥēreṃ*-wars are 'rooted totally in the First Commandment, and the book of Joshua confronts the reader with the threat to the First Commandment that is perceived to be found in easy alliances with those who do not serve the Lord'.⁵⁰ Within the book of Joshua, this radical theology of destroying the tabooed 'other', is mitigated in numerous ways. As such, the book of Joshua represents a theological learning process from conquest and destruction to coexisting with the other in the land that God has given Israel as an inheritance. In both Rabbinic and Patristic theology, the *ḥēreṃ*-wars are contextualized in a peaceful way. The halakhic discussions on *ḥēreṃ* illustrate the peaceful wisdom of the rabbis to interpret the *mišwâ* to annihilate the other nations from the land as a law that is no longer applicable. Maimonides interpreted the *ḥēreṃ*-wars in Joshua in a spiritual sense and argued that the nations function here as symbols of idolatry that must be fought by every generation. Origen developed a similar theology in his homilies of Joshua and interpreted the Joshua-wars as a spiritual war: the battlefields relate to the believer's own heart and soul in which an ongoing war is waged with demons and evil thoughts.

The contextualization of the Joshua-wars in Rabbinic sources and Origen's exegesis are powerful examples of a critical hermeneutic process in which the original violent meaning of *ḥēreṃ* is transformed from a radically pacifist spirituality. As such, they fit perfectly into religious practices of peacebuilding that are directed at preventing religious extremism and violence on the one hand, and practices of peaceful reconciliation on the other. The Book of Joshua remains a violent and problematic text, one that challenges and confronts modern readers with the hermeneutic task of developing a critical understanding of Joshua's wars aimed at redefining and discovering new layers of meaning. When both the historical background of the *ḥēreṃ*-texts, as well as its hermeneutic transformation in Rabbinic and Patristic theology, are taken into account it becomes clear that the book of Joshua relates to the human struggle to love the One true LORD – blessed be his Name – completely, or as the *Shema Israel* puts it:

⁵⁰ Miller, P.D. (2004), 'The Story of the First Commandment: The Book of Joshua', in Miller, P.D. (Ed.), *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 39)*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 80-90, 85-86.

Hear, O Israel:
The LORD is our God,
the LORD alone.
You shall love the LORD your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your might.
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

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‘They Beheld God, and They Ate and Drank’: A Theological Reflection on Exodus 24:11 from the Perspective of the Dialogue between Judaism and Christianity

Harry J. Sinnaghel

Abstract

Does a correlation exist between the banquet with a theophany after the Covenant ceremony in Exodus 24 and the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples and other followers? Both narratives resulted in a different evolution: Judaism and Christianity have a different image of God, both banquets had a different impact on the liturgy, as well as on how to deal with holiness albeit in different ways. The pericope also underlines the importance of having communal meals, as eating together indicates how we are connected to each other and to God. The danger is, however, that this could also result in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality.

Introduction

The fresco by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City depicts the Bible story in Genesis where God breathes life into Adam.¹ God is represented here as an old white man, however, can and should we even portray God? We will rarely find images of God in either Jewish or Calvinist contexts as the prohibition of images of God is considered irrefutable. We cannot portray God because we cannot see Him as a person. Moreover, it is stated in the Bible that no one can see God and remain alive:

¹ ‘Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.’ (Genesis 2: 7)

Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' (Exodus 33: 18-20)

How can this verse be reconciled with the following passage about Moses and the elders of the people who hold a banquet together with God on the mountain?

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank. (Exodus 24: 9-11)

This is a question that has been on my mind for quite some time. When, as an ordained minister, I was allowed to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the first time, I was looking for a text describing a meal with God for my sermon. Then the above passage from Exodus 24 came back to mind, and I wondered whether the ordinance of the Last Supper in the Gospels² was related to this text. To answer this question, I consider the following in sequence in this contribution: how did people consider this issue from a theological perspective? What does the Torah and what do the Gospels indicate, and what relevant theological reflection can be developed? In other words, can one see God and eat and drink with him? In the conclusion this will be placed in the context of the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity.

The image of God

Can we portray God? In this brief historical-theological overview, a number of Christian and Jewish theologians' or philosophers' description of their image of God will be considered. The Church Father Augustine (354-430) discusses God's appearance in the Sinai in his great work *De Trinitate* as a characteristic part of the Torah in which the distinction between letter and spirit is obvious. In this work he plainly states that God's figure extends from one end of the horizon to the other and that it should not be thought that He has stood on a specific location on earth. God does not shrink now to expand again later.³

² Matthew 26: 26-29, Mark 14: 22-25 and Luke 22: 17-20.

³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, II, 15, 25, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130102.htm> [20-Feb-2020]

Augustine sets the tone for the teaching of medieval theology that God's infinity is revealed in His works.

John Calvin (1509-1564), following Martin Luther who was particularly influenced by Augustine, stated that God presents Himself (or is merciful and gracious) to whom and when He wants. Calvin declared that it would be pretty presumptuous to impose any restrictions on God, or on the choices He makes. God reveals himself to whom and when He wants, but also not to others.⁴ In the first four of the 'Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith', Maimonides (1138-1204) tried to formulate the reality of God.⁵ These first four beliefs were included in the *Yigdal* prayer.⁶

According to Spinoza (1632-1677), God says in Exodus 33 that He cannot be seen, not because He would have no shape, but because God reveals himself according to the possibilities of the imagination of Moses and the prophets. God does not object, rather if one does not believe that God can be seen, God adjusts to this opinion.⁷

In the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), the face of the other is the way in which the Infinite becomes visible and speaks to one. Through the ethical appeal that comes from the face of the other, and in spite of one's responsibility, the idea of the Infinite does not remain external, but through this idea the Infinite penetrates into one's intimacy, without losing its transcendence.⁸ The Jewish journalist and historian Sylvain Brachfeld (1932) described the transcendent God of Israel thus: 'Israel believes in a purely spiritual form

⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 15, <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Calvin%20Institutes%20of%20Christian%20Religion.pdf> [15-Feb-2020]

⁵ The first four of the 'Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith' are as follows:

1. Belief in the existence of the Creator, who is perfect in every manner of existence and is the Primary Cause of all that exists.
2. The belief in G-d's absolute and unparalleled unity.
3. The belief in G-d's non-corporeality, nor that He will be affected by any physical occurrences, such as movement, or rest, or dwelling.
4. The belief in G-d's eternity.

The Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith, Official homepage for worldwide Chabad-Lubavitch movement that promotes Judaism, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/332555/jewish/Maimonides-13-Principles-of-Faith.htm [18-Feb-2020]

⁶ 'Yigdal': 'may he be magnified'. A prayer that starts with this word and contains the *Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith* of Maimonides. The Yigdal prayer starts as follows:

Exalted be the Living G-d and praised,
He exists - unbounded by time in His existence.
He is One - and there is no unity like His Oneness. Inscrutable and infinite is His Oneness
He has no semblance of a body nor is He corporeal;
nor has His holiness any comparison.

Jewish Prayers: Yigdal, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yigdal> [18-Feb-2020]

⁷ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* 1, 19 & 2, 40, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1669.pdf> [22-Feb-2020]

⁸ Kuypers, E. & Burggraeve, R. (1998), *Op weg met Levinas*, Garant: Leuven-Apeldoorn, 172-179.

of divinity, superhuman and unlimited in time and space, without beginning or end, without anthropomorphic qualities, one and only, one and only in its nature.' [author's translation]⁹

What we see in this brief historical-theological overview, is that from time immemorial theologians and laymen have struggled with the image of God. The outcome of this struggle is linked with the cultural period and this in a dialectical manner: the more the worldview is fragmented in that period, the more weight is placed on the oneness or uniqueness of God.

Biblical analysis of Exodus 24: 11

The pericope about Moses and the elders of the people who hold a banquet together with God on the mountain is part of a slightly longer text describing a Covenant ceremony including a banquet.¹⁰

⁹ Brachfeld, S. (1987), *Uw Joodse Buurman*, Antwerpen: Uitgeverij C. de Vries-Brouwers, 24.

¹⁰ 'Then he said to Moses: "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank' (Exodus 24: 1-11).

This text consists of three parts.¹¹ The text begins with an invitation from God to Moses to go up the mountain with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders (verses 1-2). There is apparently no immediate response to this invitation, because a Covenant ceremony is being performed (verses 3-8). This ceremony is not a preparation for the invitation (this ceremony is not a purity ritual, for example). After the ceremony, at the invitation of God, action is taken, and a banquet is held with a theophany (verses 9-11). We can group these three parts into two separate stories. The first story describes a theophany during a banquet (verses 1-2 and 9-11), the second story is a Covenant ceremony (verses 3-8). This text is therefore related to a Covenant ceremony in which the theophany is legitimizing as well as being considered the climax. This means that, in order to legitimize the covenant, an anthropomorphic image of God is constructed. The *Imago Dei* is solemnly built as an instrument of political and theological power.

This theophany is completely different to the first one which consisted of thunder, lightning, smoke, and a thick cloud.¹² Rather, God is represented here anthropomorphically because of the indication that under God's 'feet

¹¹ The Torah is a composition based on different sources. There are several hypotheses identifying these sources. The 'Documentary Hypothesis' by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) identified the sources as follows: source 'J' uses the name of God 'Yahweh' (or YHWH); source 'E' uses the name of God 'Elohim'; source 'D', or the Deuteronomist, is a series of sermons about the Law; source 'P', or the Priestly codex, emphasizes the role of the priesthood; and 'R', or the Redaction, would have merged these sources into the final Torah. There are several problems with the 'Documentary Hypothesis'. The major one being that 'E' uses God's name Elohim, however God introduces himself to Moses as Yahweh. At that time, it was also difficult to distinguish between the sources 'J' and 'E'. The 'Additional Hypothesis' starts from a single source, with later additions or deletions: source 'D', or the Deuteronomist, was first written in the 7th century BC, prior to the exile; source 'J', or Jahwist, further expanded 'D' during exile by making use of oral and written traditions and stories; source 'P', or the Priestly codex, finalized the work during the Second Temple Period. There is no 'E' source; therefore source 'J' is sometimes referred to as the 'JE' source. There is no 'R' because the redaction was performed by 'P'. The 'Fragmentary Hypothesis' holds that many fragments were merged during many editions. All contemporary Biblical scholars acknowledge that the Torah was not written by one author, and that the Torah is in fact a compilation of separate sources, composed by different schools with their own religious opinions and objectives. 'P' and 'D' are now almost universally recognized as independent sources. So how we call these sources (for example, 'P', 'J', 'E', 'JE', and 'D') does not matter. There will always be differences in the way Biblical scholars distribute these sources (documents versus fragments, etc.). The hypothesis for this research is based on the following: 'D' and 'P' are independent sources where 'D' focuses on the written Law and 'P' on priestly rituals, on the tabernacle, and on the Temple. The other sources are not identifiable and are grouped together under the name 'JE'. I do not take into account where and when these texts were written. It resulted in the following structure: vs. 3 and 4b-5 as 'JE', vs. 4a and 7 as 'D', vs. 6 and 8 as 'P' (part of the Covenant ceremony) and 1-2 and 9-11 also as 'P' (the theophany during a banquet). This research is therefore a substantive analysis of a Biblical text, not a historical reconstruction.

¹² Exodus 19: 16-19.

there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone'.¹³ The pericope does not indicate whether or not God ate with the invitees. In other Bible texts, God is sometimes also represented as anthropomorphic, for example when God is walking in the garden of Eden.¹⁴

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders, go up the mountain. These are the most important figures in the Exodus story. Aaron is the brother of Moses.¹⁵ Nadab and Abihu are the two oldest sons of Aaron¹⁶ who will later be killed by God.¹⁷ The elders play an important role in the entire Exodus story: they confirmed the leadership¹⁸ and the authority of Moses,¹⁹ they were loyal to Moses during the confrontation between Moses and the Pharaoh,²⁰ they celebrated Passover at the beginning of the exodus,²¹ and they acted as judges.²² The elders later played an even greater role when they received a part of the spirit of God that rested on Moses, and thereby became scribes.²³ The historical-critical analysis also indicates a pronounced liturgical character, whereby the Temple of Jerusalem is mirrored in advance:²⁴ just as only the high priest (Moses), at the very top, converses with God during which the Holy of Holies becomes visible, the priests (elders) are only allowed partial access to where God shows himself (in the Holy), and the people remain at the foot of the mountain (the courtyard).

Hermeneutical reflection

This research allows us to make a theological reflection on this appearance of God during a banquet. Firstly, we list some parallels in the Old Testament, secondly, we also approach the Lord's Supper in the New Testament as a theophany during a banquet, thirdly, we look at how we can deal with holiness followed by a brief reflection on having communal meals in the New Testament,

¹³ Exodus 24: 10. 'Sapphire stone' in verse 10 refers to the clear blue type of stone 'lapis lazuli' used in the Temples of the ancient Middle East. The color blue symbolizes the connection between heaven and earth. The prophet Ezekiel used the same words (Ezekiel 1: 26 and 10: 1). 'Like a pavement of sapphire stone' gives an indication of how the Temple will look like.

¹⁴ Genesis 3: 8.

¹⁵ Exodus 6: 14-27.

¹⁶ Exodus 6: 14-27.

¹⁷ Leviticus. 10: 1-2.

¹⁸ Exodus 3: 16 & 18.

¹⁹ Exodus 4: 1, 5, 8, 9 & 31.

²⁰ Exodus 5: 1-21.

²¹ Exodus 12: 21-27.

²² Exodus 18: 1-12.

²³ Numbers 11.

²⁴ Vermeylen, J. (1989), *Het geloof van Israël. Theologie van het Oude Testament*, Brugge/Boxtel: Tabor/KBS, 305-306.

and finally we end with an analysis of the possible danger of these banquets resulting in an 'us' versus 'them' mentality.

Eschatology

In the eschatological vision of the prophet Isaiah, God gives a banquet on Mount Zion.²⁵ Not only are some delegates from the people of Israel invited to this banquet (as with the pericope from Exodus), but all nations are invited. The book of Song of Solomon sings about the relationship between God and Israel as a love affair between a shepherd (God) and a shepherdess (Israel). In this context we can consider the theophany during a banquet as a wedding banquet: the formal part (the Covenant ceremony) is concluded with a banquet.

The New Testament also refers a few times to an eschatological banquet.²⁶ The most obvious parallel is the Last Supper. At the end of Jesus' life, the night before his death on the cross, Jesus is in the upper room of a house with his disciples and a few followers. During this Last Supper of Jesus, Jesus gives a farewell speech.²⁷ According to Christianity, Jesus is the Son of God. According to some traditions, Jesus is the reincarnation of God and is therefore the anthropomorphic representation of God par excellence. For Christians, the teachings of Jesus are the new covenant.²⁸ This new covenant is concluded with a ceremony (the farewell speech of Jesus) and with a banquet (the Last Supper). According to the Christian tradition, this banquet is also presided by God in Jesus.

In Judaism, no further attention is paid to this theophany during a banquet from Exodus. It has no festival connected to it. The anthropomorphic representation of God does not relate to the transcendent representation of God in the Jewish tradition. The theophany during a banquet did have a major influence on the liturgical actions in the Temple, with specific responsibilities for the high priest, the priests, and the congregation. In Christianity, the Covenant ceremony with a banquet in the New Testament is very important and was founded as a sacrament (the Lord's Supper or Eucharist). Depending on the tradition, this sacrament is held weekly, monthly, or only on holidays. The Divine presence of Jesus is interpreted either physically ('this is my body [...]

²⁵ Isaiah 25: 6-8.

²⁶ Luke 14: 15; Luke 22: 30; Revelation 3: 20; Revelation 19: 7-9.

²⁷ John 13-17.

²⁸ I want to emphasize clearly here that this new covenant does not replace the existing covenant between God and Israel.

my blood')²⁹ or as an act of remembrance with the presence of the transcendent ('Do this [...] in remembrance of me').³⁰

Holiness

The theophany during a banquet also suggests a way of dealing with holiness. The sacred and the profane are separated in different ways: ontologically in space (the holy is in heaven, the profane on earth); in time (for six days we are occupied with the profane, and on the seventh day – the Sabbath – with the holy, with God); and biologically, physically, and liturgically (the difference between pure and impure). If the sacred and profane come into contact in space, the elements of nature are the first to react: thunder, lightning, smoke, and a thick cloud.³¹ In order to approach the divine, this pericope, as already indicated, also has a liturgical character: a high priest, priests, and cultic rituals are needed when the holy comes into contact with the profane (such as was the case during the Temple service in the 'holy' Temple). One must also be pure to have contact with the holy. This purity can be achieved through one's way of life, for example by following purity and dietary laws, and by observing certain ethical behaviour.

During the theophany at a banquet, the holy comes into contact with the profane. The elements of nature do not respond however, and this is a clear indication that the holy is not dangerous if one follows liturgical regulations and carry out acts of purity. The same liturgical rituals and acts of purity are also carried out in the Christian church during the Lord's Supper or Eucharist: the minister or priest initiates the service of the table, the bread and wine is often distributed by deacons, and purity is obtained through the forgiveness of the sins before participating in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. As already indicated, the holy is present during the service of the table.

An additional element in this pericope is the emphasis on a communal meal. Eating together is also very important in the New Testament. The Gospels contain a few stories wherein Jesus attends a meal, each of them results in an important ethical reflection.³² In addition, in various parables, the meal is central to the coming Kingdom of God.³³ In Acts, Luke describes the first

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 11: 24-25.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 11: 24-25.

³¹ Exodus 19: 16-19.

³² The meal at Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7: 36-50) deals with sin and forgiveness. The meal with Martha and Maria (Luke 10: 38-42) is about making room for what is necessary and important. The meal with sinners and publicans (Matthew 9: 9-13) is about integrating the marginalized and people in the lowest social level into the society.

³³ A banquet for which all invitees apologize and where the poor, blind and crippled are finally able to join (Luke 14: 16-24). A banquet during which the prodigal son returns home (Luke 15: 11-32).

Christian community where such a meal was very much part of church life.³⁴ In this way the first Christian community celebrated their mutual connection in Christ. In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul describes a meal in Antioch where both Jews and non-Jews ate together.³⁵ When delegates came from Jerusalem, however, the Jews separated themselves. Paul became angry when this happened because the solidarity that surpasses differences was broken. Eating together also indicates how we are connected, connected to each other and connected to God.

Radicalization

The theophany during a banquet, having the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, and eating together are all team-building activities. The purpose of team building is to create or to improve mutual cooperation, social bonding, trust, group dynamics and efficiency within a group of people. But team building can also have a negative effect: the creation of the 'us' (the people belonging to the group) versus 'them' (the people outside the group) mentality. In the theophany during a banquet, God created two different groups: a selected group of people went up the mountain for the theophany during a banquet; those remaining had to stay at the foot of the mountain and did not participate. Later in Exodus, Aaron and his sons were appointed as priests³⁶ and their descendants performed all the liturgical activities in the Temple;³⁷ the descendants of the people who remained at the foot of the mountain had to stay in the courtyard of the Temple. This resulted in a 'we', the priests who were responsible for the Temple activities versus 'them', those who had no role in the Temple liturgy. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, this 'us' versus 'them' concept in Judaism disappeared.

³⁴ 'Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts' (Acts 2: 46).

³⁵ Galatians 2: 11-14.

³⁶ Exodus 28: 1, Exodus 28:40 - 29:9.

³⁷ Only Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron, went up the mountain and participated in the theophany during a banquet; the two other sons, Eleazar and Itamar, remained with the others at the foot of the mountain. Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly, all four sons of Aaron were ordained as priests even though Eleazar and Itamar did not participate in the theophany during a banquet. Later, Nadab and Abihu were killed by God because they had made an error during a sacrifice (Leviticus 10: 1-2). Because God killed Nadab and Abihu, the priestly descendants of Eleazar and Itamar did not inherit the experience of the theophany during a banquet. The Samaritan Torah provides an interesting solution. All four sons of Aaron went up the mountain along with Moses, Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel and participated in the theophany during a banquet. When God subsequently kills Nadab and Abihu, the heritage of the experience of the theophany during a banquet is thereby continued through the descendants of Eleazar and Itamar.

When reading the story of the tower of Babel,³⁸ God created much a much greater amount of diversity based on different languages. In addition, during the miracle of Pentecost, no attempt was made by those listening to make uniform the differences encountered when each apostle spoke in their own language.³⁹ The Tanakh opposes the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, for example, ‘them’ being aliens⁴⁰, or ‘them’ being the poor and needy.⁴¹

During the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist, only a select group of people are able to participate. Depending on the tradition, the participants should either have been baptized and/or have affirmed their faith and/or accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. This can also result in a ‘we’ versus ‘them’ mentality: ‘them’ being the non-Christians, non-believers, or the people who do not believe as ‘we’ do. It is both amazing and worrying that a sacrament is sometimes used to differentiate or segregate people. A sacrament is a window between the real world and the transcendent, it is a religious act based on the Bible, the same Bible that tells the story of the tower of Babel where God created diversity. Moreover, this differentiation and segregation of people can become very radical, fanatical even. In the history of Christianity, ‘they’ were often the Jews and this resulted in anti-Judaism and later in antisemitism, with the Shoah as a dramatic apotheosis. Antisemitism continues today, and the concept of ‘them’ is now also evolving towards other religious minorities like Muslims. The ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality also occurs within the same religion, for instance between Roman Catholics and Protestants (as seen in Northern Ireland) or between Sunnites and Shiites (as seen in Iraq and Yemen). I have personally witnessed radical and fanatical behaviour during the baptism of an infant. When the service started, those people who only supported adult baptism left the church and came back once the infant baptism had finished.

Eating together can also result in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality. Often people with the same opinions or lifestyles have meals together. It is rather unusual to have people of different cultures, races, religions, or sexual orientation at the same table. Things can also become very radical or fanatical when people do not want to join in or if they leave the table when someone from a different culture, race, religion, or sexual orientation is present.

³⁸ Genesis 11: 1-9.

³⁹ Acts 1: 11.

⁴⁰ ‘You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt’ (Exodus 23: 9).

⁴¹ ‘Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, [...] you push aside the needy in the gate’ (Amos 5: 11-12).

Conclusion

The pericope of the theophany during a banquet from Exodus is an interesting text to discuss in relation to Jewish-Christian interaction. The banquets analysed here (the theophany during a banquet from Exodus, and the Last Supper) have different meanings and importance in both religions and have evolved liturgically in completely different ways. The two religions also have a different image of God and a different experience of meeting the holy.

The pericope from Exodus also indicates that eating together has its advantages. Eating together creates solidarity (with each other, and in our text also with God, or with Jesus); it is a social event where events can be discussed; it is a way of putting ideas and proposals, but also prejudices, concerns, and reservations on the table and discussing them; eating together is a way of deliberating how to proceed, and what the next steps will be. After the Covenant ceremony, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy of Israel's elders have much to discuss in terms of how to proceed and the meaning of what they have experienced. God has offered them the beautiful and useful possibility of a banquet to facilitate this discussion. Jesus also had much to discuss with his disciples and a number of followers: what does his teaching mean and how do we progress?

One of the roles of religion is to teach people how to handle diversity. Diversity is often seen as intrinsically problematic, but we have seen that God created diversity (the story of the tower of Babel) and confirmed diversity (the miracle of Pentecost). The construction of the tower of Babel is an attempt by man to impose an artificial unity on a diversity created by God. Diversity is not a danger, but a blessing, a precious gift from God: out of diversity arises unexpected creativity and makes the range of human possibilities much greater. We must value diversity as an opportunity, we must continuously and repeatedly learn how to deal with it, through trial and error. The objective of fanaticism is to break this precious gift from God and, as such, is un-Biblical.

I have attended the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ)'s annual four-day conference several years now which always includes a number of participants from the International Abrahamic Forum (IAF). It is possible to have kosher food in addition to the set buffet meals on offer. We always eat together: Christians, Jews, and Muslims at the same table, each according to their own religion's food regulations and with respect for the traditions of the others. After all those centuries of antisemitism, it always feels to me that we have been invited by God to his banquet, in connection with each other and in connection with Him.

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A Plea for Hope: About the Contribution of Religious Education to Respectful Citizenship

Leendert-Jan Parlevliet

Abstract

This contribution explores the possible answers to the question: what can religious education contribute to respectful citizenship? This could be a long-term solution in a society where increased contradictions exist in many areas. Teaching new generations at school how to respect diversity within society would make society more peaceful and limit instances of radicalization developing. The answer to this question is different for every society due to varying traditions and history. The socio-economic makeup of the population and the place of religion within a society are often also very varied. Nonetheless, in this contribution I will try to answer the question as generally as possible because, I argue, there are a number of basic educational rules that are the same everywhere. My Dutch background and my work in Belgium naturally play a role in this approach and I will give examples from actual experience without going into too much detail about the didactic consequences of the main points I outline. After exploring the different issues raised by this question, I will discuss three aspects of my underlying question. The first is the place of such an approach within the broader education: the classroom, the school, and the context of the school. The second aspect deals with the conditions necessary for the dialogue, and the third is the need for an alternative. After this exploration I formulate a number of conclusions.

Religious education as part of society

There is perhaps no field where results can vary so greatly as in religious education. School can either contribute very little to respectful citizenship or school can make a tangible difference to the lives of children and young people when

it comes to respectful citizenship.¹ In short, there is every reason to think about it carefully across the whole breadth of society.²

Expectations for the role of schools are usually very high. When there is a crisis in a society, schools are always also pointed to as the place where young people should be educated with regard to a desired form of citizenship. For example, in response to terrorist attacks, schools are instructed by politicians to concern themselves with knowing about different religions. Such educational policies are often implemented on a national basis, with the differences between schools often being put aside. However, the environment of a school, and the extent of a school's facilities make a big difference as to how they are able to implement such policies. Schools are always a reflection of the society of which it is a part. Either the neighbourhood it is in determines the school population or there is a subgroup that does so. The point of departure for religious education should take into account what a normal experience is within a neighbourhood or group as well as what pupils' home experience is like, in terms of what their parents and family might say or do.

The basis and purpose

The composition of the class and the children's background is the first thing a teacher will have to take into account. A teacher's relationship with their students and the mutual relationships that exist within a classroom determine the quality of the education.³ Indeed, that relationship with pupils must be aimed at a sense of connection so that mutual relationships can also arise. In the educational literature this is called a 'pedagogical climate'. If trust exists within a group of students, the result of education will improve considerably. That does not mean they should all like each other or be friends, rather as between colleagues: there must be a good atmosphere in which to work together, one where everyone counts and has input and where clear agreements make mutual communication possible. This is an essential condition, especially for religious education in which respectful communication is the goal. Creating a good pedagogical climate is a respectful exercise in itself and is something that will be returned to later on.

¹ Jackson, R. (2004), *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy*, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

² Biesta, G. (2017), *The Rediscovery of Teaching*, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 35-45.

³ Deci, E. & Ryan, R. (1985), *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour*, New York: Plenum.

Both the school environment and population determine teachers' possibilities and it is therefore important for a school to have a clear vision of religious education. This vision must be based on the boundaries set by society at the micro, meso, and macro level. The objectives that the school must achieve often form a field of tension, because society makes demands that cannot be realized. Teachers are generally willing to commit themselves to the well-being of their students, but they are often limited in terms of time and options. Enabling them to jointly pursue realistic goals also means having them work together in a school team based on a shared vision. In concrete terms, this could mean that if society continues to secularize, schools cannot ensure that pupils become religiously literate.⁴ Religion should therefore ideally be a very central subject at school. After all, the world of religions is colourful and diverse and has many age-old traditions that come together in our multicultural society. Such a development is, however, very unlikely. Everyone understands that religion remains one of the more minor subjects in the current school curriculum for schools follow society. This means that lower goals must be set. Another facet of this tension between desired objective and achievable outcomes is that a school must decide what is central. If students need to appropriate knowledge, including through repetition and rehearsal, then lessons should focus on that. If the goal is to be able to conduct respectful dialogues, then exercises in listening and formulating should be introduced into the curriculum across the year groups. In the absence of clear objectives, a frequent occurrence in many schools, a small amount of attention is paid to many different aspects of religious education and that can lead to only some of the goals being achieved.⁵

The cabinet of curiosities

In our post-secular society in which a worldview is considered important and in which religion is allowed again, citizens are able to pick and mix their own beliefs from the ideological buffet. Logical coherence is not necessary for this. Believing without belonging is a unifying belief.⁶ The younger generation does not want to be classified in terms of their belief because they think that nothing good has come of this division into groups and beliefs.

⁴ Mendl, H. (2011), *Religionsdidaktik Kompakt. Für Studium, Prüfung und beruf*, München: Kösel, 68-71.

⁵ Bertram-Troost, G. & Visser, T. (2017), *Godsdienst/levensbeschouwing, wat is dat voor vak? Docenten Godsdienst/Levensbeschouwing over zichzelf en hun vak, nu en in de toekomst. Onderzoeksrapport grootschalig empirisch onderzoek naar het vak godsdienst/levensbeschouwing*, Woerden: Verus.

⁶ Davie, G. (2015), *Religion in Britain, A Persistent Paradox (second edition)*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 225.

Religious institutions have been forced to the margins of society and the field of religion is largely private, only to be entered into by authorized persons. In the opinion of the majority, the public domain is neutral because it is no longer shaped by one institution, as the church did for centuries. This neutrality is complex and creates a great deal of openness to the diversity of cultures, however, it pays little attention to the need to pursue humane principles for our societies. The desire to live together in a respectful way requires a choice, a choice that also requires learning to be conducted through dialogue. Such an approach to the worldview makes it necessary for education to provide students with insight into aspects of all worldviews so that they gain insight into the connections that exist between their own beliefs and those of others. If this connection is not made, a form of religious education is carried out of the sort that is prevalent in schools.⁷ I label that form of religious education a ‘cabinet of curiosities’. Pupils come into contact with different ideological traditions at school and become acquainted with some of their external characteristics. However, the connections with their own way of being in the world are omitted meaning that these lessons (or excursions or guest lessons) do not have a real practical impact.

Promising didactics

It is generally accepted that knowledge about each other makes a society more tolerant and open. That knowledge must be personal knowledge however, otherwise it will contribute very little to respectful citizenship. Various didactics have been developed in recent years to meet these insights. A few that are in the spotlight in the Netherlands and Belgium will be mentioned here with the intention of illustrating the above.

Philosophizing with children focuses on the development of opinion as well as logical thinking and reasoning. The Socratic conversation is a means of encouraging students to think critically and to compare their own beliefs with those of others. Theologizing with children is a major movement in German-speaking countries.⁸ This approach starts with children’s life questions and from there different answers from storytelling traditions and from scholars themselves are discussed and compared. Pupils are encouraged to learn their own lessons through these explorations. Practising, listening, and comparing are part of this joint search for answers. In England a method has

⁷ Westerman, W. (2001), *Ongewenste objectiviteit*, Culemborg: Van Duuren Media, 207-221.

⁸ Büttner, G. & Freudenberger-Lötz, P. (Ed.) (2014), *Handbuch Theologisieren mit Kindern, Einführung, Schlüsselthermen, Methoden*. Stuttgart: Calwer/Büttner.

been developed that also aims to bring to the fore the connections between the students: conceptual enquiry.⁹ In this method, students, under the guidance of their teachers, strip religious phenomena down to the level of collective concepts. During the process of investigation, commonality is discovered in what initially seemed strange.

Schools' contribution: the basics and language

The first – and perhaps the most important – thing that a school can contribute to religious education is a basic level of trust.¹⁰ A class is like a mini-society enabling students to experience what is possible between people. Precisely with regards to respectful dialogue a school can become the place where people practice active listening through concentrating on what someone else wants to say. The next step is to formulate a question that matches what someone else is saying. Questions that are exercises in empathy with the other position or person. Based on such questions one can learn to formulate one's own opinion, tell one's own story, and experience people listening. Children and young people experience what peaceful coexistence is where that happens and that creates a state that takes practice. Indeed, such experiences can be at odds with what is normal within their own homes. Experiencing an alternative way of living together at school will not necessarily change behaviour because loyalty to parents is far too strong for that, however, it will become part of their tool kit for the rest of their lives. The idea that 'It can also be done differently' is a source of goodness that should not be underestimated. Practising collaboration based on trust in this way contributes to the pedagogical atmosphere of the class. It strengthens the conditions needed for good education in which pupils develop broadly. Thus, the basis for good education is also the basis for good religious learning.

The second thing that a school can contribute to religious formation is the teaching of a language for discussing life questions with others. Every person has a story that is constructed from building blocks that have remained which, in religions, often consist of stories. Such traditional stories in societies often require updating and adapting to reflect and incorporate current affairs. For the most part, these are not conscious processes. Education is not a storytelling supermarket where a child can take whatever appeals to them. Fortunately,

⁹ Erricker, C. (2010), *Primary Religious Education - A New Approach. Conceptual Enquiry in Primary RE*, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

¹⁰ Jackson, R. (2004), *Signposts. Policy and practice for Teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education*, Brussels: Council of Europe.

it is not so easy that forming a belief is a matter of choosing what works best at the moment. Based on loyalty, we take on the stories of our parents and grandparents as well as the joy and pain that comes with them. However, because of the influence of many significant individuals on our journey in life, the elements become more and more our own.

Religious education can make an important contribution to this point, that is, learning to connect stories from home with stories from various traditions. In addition, learning to recognize, in the general life questions, the particular life questions one will have to deal with as well as recognizing in those of someone else, the beliefs that you yourself live with. By doing this as a scholar it is possible to learn other languages, all of which form the basic patterns of multicoloured existence.¹¹ One language in addition to your own language field is already an enormous enrichment.

The alternative

In addition to providing a basic level of trust and a language, a school can also contribute to a future to live for. Nowadays, children often already have certain expectations and a confidence in the future which goes hand-in-hand with their connection with daily life. Children have the future ahead of them and their ability to wonder is invariably praised by adults. Surprisingly, in education this rarely results in people thinking critically about sharing the prospect of a bleak future. Especially older children and young people are faced with what appears to be a realistic vision of the future: the downfall of human life on earth. A vision which is often combined with a call from the teacher to commit to improving the environment. This is both understandable and absurd, because why would a teacher do such a thing? What is a child or young person to do with such a message? Does it reflect the dissatisfaction of the teacher him- or herself? Is this a form of action? Is this appeal to the responsibility of his or her pupils intended for their parents? What does it bring pupils? It certainly does not bring about social change. It does, however, cause a great deal of unrest in the souls of many children. In young people it evokes an aggressive willingness to take action, but just like depression it is something to be concerned about. For a school that wants to contribute to a better world for its students should share a vision of that future with them and nurture hope and convey optimism rather than despair. This could contribute

¹¹ Schweitzer, F. (2011), *Kindertheologie und Elementarisierung. Wie religiöses Lernen mit Kindern gelingen kann*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 216-221.

to an openness and tolerance that no programme for good social emotional development or citizenship curriculum could compete with.

This plea does not ask for irrationality in the world, nor does it invite teachers to stop sharing their despair about society and the future with students. Rather, this plea proposes that schools and their teachers share in the optimism inherent in children.¹² Sometimes slightly more short-term considerations should be embraced because there are always unexpected changes in societies. It invites teachers to leave their adult realism at home. It proposes to put the questions of responsibility for environmental pollution to the generations affected by it. That question of responsibility does not apply to the younger generation who already have to deal with the consequences. It appeals to adults to take action again, those who have caused the pollution. It encourages teachers to share their wonder about everything that makes life worth living with their pupils. For example, children and young people will be invited to share their optimism and wonder with their teachers and these conversations will naturally also include room for questions. This is not a plea to ignore bewilderment and make room for the sharing of despair and sorrow, rather it is a plea to share in the lives of pupils. Teachers need to have a good relationship with their pupils and by extension children and young people should be taken seriously in that relationship. A school lead by a team that knows how to bring that common spirit to the fore also becomes a pleasurable place to work. A generally positive attitude creates a sense of job satisfaction that radiates to everyone they have to deal with and it will rub off positively on students too. Being positive about the future could yield much more than just a healthy pedagogical climate. Indeed, a shared hope for a sustainable, just future also offers students the motivation to become proficient in dialogue, in practising listening, in sharpening the ethical imagination, and the empathy needed to accept the strange other.

Conclusion

Schools can make a significant contribution to strengthening a respectful society, but it is something that requires choice and effort. It is important for a school to consider the limits of its capabilities. These boundaries are determined by the immediate environment and the composition of the school population. These limitations do not mean that a contribution can be made

¹² This insight is inspired by Janusz Korczak, see Korczak, J. (1986), *Hoe houd je van een kind*, Utrecht: Bijleveld.

only if the circumstances are right, but that the contribution must take into account what is feasible. Within the boundaries that exist, the school as a 'mini society' can be a place where dialogue and living together respectfully are practiced.¹³ In this way schools can also contribute to the further lives of its students which may not immediately be perceptible in the short term, but as an alternative in the tool kit for adult life. In addition, the school can distinguish itself by focusing on knowledge of the other's worldview by choosing appropriate didactics. In addition, a real level of diversity within a school class provides added value because then real stories are present.

Besides the conscious choice a school can make in terms of different forms of education, they can also contribute something much more important and fundamental to the lives of its students: the future. All things considered, religious education that does not take on this aspect will not motivate its students. I have pleaded for a reversal of roles: pupils come to school with a sense of optimism with regard to the future ahead of them and it is up to the school to cherish and share this contribution. This does not involve an immature, short-term vision for there is only room for possibilities. When that space is created, a strong basis for dialogue within a respectful society exists.

¹³ Loobuyck, P. (2018). *Samenleven met overtuigingen. Levensbeschouwing, democratie en wetenschap*, Antwerpen: Pelckmans.

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List of contributors

Eugene BARON is Lecturer within the Department of Practical and Missional Theology at the University of the Free State (UFS). He is also the Editorial Administrator of the Southern African Missiology journal.

Jaco BEYER is Associate Professor in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology of the University of Pretoria.

Ravan HASANOV is acting Executive Director of the Baku International Centre of Multiculturalism Republic of Azerbaijan.

Elizabeta KITANOVIC is Professor Human Rights at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels.

Arjan KNOP is responsible for Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels and is currently working on a doctoral dissertation. He is also Director of e-learning at the Faculty for Protestant Theology (FPTR).

Jack McDONALD is chaplain-president of the Central Committee of the Anglican Church in Belgium, and Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels.

Johann MEYLAHN is Professor in the Department of Theology of the University of Pretoria and teaches Philosophy and Religion.

Jan M.F. Van REETH has a PhD in Linguistics and Literature (Latin and Greek) and teaches History of Religion and Islamic Theology.

Leendert-Jan PARLEVLIE is Professor of Practical Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels.

Jannica DE PRENTER has a PhD in Theology and Religious Studies from the Catholic University of Leuven and works as a pastor for the Protestant Church in Bruges (Belgium).

Harry J. SINNAGHEL is a pastor in the Protestant Church in Denderleeuw (Belgium) and president of the Belgian Council for Christians and Jews. He is undertaking research for his PhD on Jewish-Christians relations and antisemitism in the Bible.

Johan TEMMERMAN is Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels. He teaches Religious Studies and is specialized in the Philosophy of Religion and the dialogue between science and religion.