– 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, grammatized 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]

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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 VOC[1]

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 Vereenigde 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 to 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 – Geoctooieerd

[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

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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, Gaastra, 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, Beaufils, 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 Steenbrick & 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 Tuân (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 ziekentroosters 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 ziekentroosters 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 1605[22] (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 Dordt (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,

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[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 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 Driessen*, 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 father[35] 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

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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 Steenbrick & 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]

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[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',

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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).

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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]

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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 Boustan 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 Boustan, Ra'anan 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.

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[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 *mufassirūn* 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 Medina[4].

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 secondary[6]. 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]

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4 M.A. al-Bakhit, 'Tabūk', *EI*[2], 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 Nort Carolina Press, 112.

6 Landau-Tasseron, '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-Tasseron, 'jihād', 37.

9 Landau-Tasseron, '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-Tasseron, '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 jihādin fī sabīlihi*), 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 fi Llāhi ḥaqqa jihādihi* — 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 imāmite 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*, *ṣirāṭ 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 – *fī sabīl 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 a 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 seem[29], 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: Lexinton 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 *ḥēręm* (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 *Neveiim* 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.* Playmouth: 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' (*geḇûl*). 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 (*nāṯan*) 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' (*lāḵaḏ*) 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).

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[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 (*mišpeḥōṯ*) receives its own *gôrāl* (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 *ḥēleq* '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 *ḥērẹm*, 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 *ḥērẹm*-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, *ḥērẹm* overlaps with *qōḏẹš* (holiness) and *ṭōhar* (pure), or with *ḥōl* (defilement/ profane) and *ṭāmēʾ* (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 *ḥērẹm*-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 *ṯôʿēḇâ* 'abomination' (Deuteronomy 7:25-26; 13:14-17; 20:16-18). Because graven images are experienced in Deuteronomy as utterly abhorrent (*ṯaʿēḇ*) and detestable (*šiqqaṣ*) 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' (*kālîl*) for the LORD. Similarly, Deuteronomy prescribes to devote (*heḥẹrīm*) 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 *ḥērem* 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 *ḥērẹm*, therefore, includes the above locutions, all denoting the general idea of something to be separated and removed from the life of the community. *Ḥērẹm*, 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 *ḥęḥęrīm* 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 (*lāḵaḏ*) city after city (Joshua 10:28,32,35,39; 11:10,12). All the kings and living beings (*weʾęṯ-kol-hannępęš*) 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 (*ḥęḥęrīm*) to wreaking destruction (Josh 10:28,35,37,39; 11:11,20). In the book of Joshua, these *ḥēręm*-wars are legitimized by the Law itself as Joshua is depicted as acting in accordance with Gods commandments (*miṣwâ*). In other words, Joshua was an obedient leader who acted in accordance with all the words God commanded to Moses:

[11] For example, *hakkēh ṯakkę̄* 'you will surely smite' (Deuteronomy 13:16) and *haḥarēm taḥarîm* '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, §123*e*1.

> 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 Ricœur called the process of 'decontextualization' and 'recontextualization'. According to Ricœur, 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 Ricœur, decontextualization is an important precondition for recontextualizing a text, see Ricœur, P. (1986), 'La fonction herméneutique de la distanciation', in Ricœur, 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.' Ricœur, '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 *hālaḵ* '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 *ḥēręm*-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, *milḥęmęṯ rešûṯ* and *milḥęmęṯ miṣwâ*.[15] In Mishnah Sotah VIII 7, where the terminology appears for the first time, *milḥęmęṯ rešûṯ* (voluntary, discretionary war) is contrasted with a war as *miṣwâ,* 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 *milḥęmęṯ miṣwâ* as 'obligatory war' (*milḥęmęṯ ḥôḇâ*). 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 *ḥēręm* 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 *miṣwâ* 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' (*milḥęmęṯ liḵbōš*). The Davidic battles in 2 Samuel 8; 10 however, are characterized as expansive wars (*milḥęmęṯ larewaḥâ*). 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 *ḥēręm* 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 *miṣwâ* 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 ʿit 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 rabbi's 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 Girgashites 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 *Caterna on the Octateuch*.[25] A significant aspect in the homilies of Origen is the meaning of the name 'Jesus'. The Hebrew name *yehôšūa* '

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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 Nanzianzus 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 *ḥēręm* 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 *ḥēręm* symbolizes total and complete devotion to God. More specifically, Origen also relates *ḥēręm* to profane things or objects. In the context of the church, he argues, Joshua's prohibition to take from YHWH's

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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 *ḥēręm* – strongly criticized a Jewish literal reading of the Joshua wars. According to Origin, 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 *ḥēręm* 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 *ḥēręm*-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 *ḥēręm* contests that the violent *ḥēręm*-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 uprise of the Babylonians, the *ḥēręm*-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 'programmatic and utopian war theology', that offered a hopeful message for an audience in exile.[33] In his

[31] Origen based his thematization of *ḥēręm* 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 *ḥēręm*-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 *ḥēręm* 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' (*hāʿām 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 (*ḥēręm*), Israel should be 'a holy people' (*ʿam qāḏôš*), diligently observing YHWH's sacred statues 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 (*ḥęsęḏ*) 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).

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[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), 'Landeroberung 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 (*ʾezrāḥ*), 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' (*milḥęmęṯ ḥôḇâ*), 'commanded war' (*milḥęmęṯ miṣwâ*) and 'voluntary, optional war' (*milḥęmęṯ rešûṯ*), the Rabbinic values of celebrating *šālôm* and *piḳūâ nępęš* (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

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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' (*beriôṯ*) and 'all inhabitants of the world' (*bôrē ʾ ʿôlām*), 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 *jihad* 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-daʿwa* '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 Aʿ 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 *tešûḇâ*, that literally means 'to return'. The *tešûḇâ* 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, *tešûḇâ* 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:

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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 *ḥēręm* expresses the complete destruction of what is considered as taboo as well as unholy. As such *ḥēręm* 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 *ḥēręm*-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 *ḥēręm*-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 *ḥēręm*-wars are contextualized in a peaceful way. The halakhic discussions on *ḥēręm* illustrate the peaceful wisdom of the rabbis to interpret the *miṣwâ* to annihilate the other nations from the land as a law that is no longer applicable. Maimonides interpreted the *ḥēręm*-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 *ḥēręm* 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 *ḥēręm*-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 Gospels[2] 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

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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, 0and 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 Aaron[16] who will later be killed by God.[17] The elders play an important role in the entire Exodus story: they confirmed the leadership[18] 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 priests[36] 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.

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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 ordinated 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 aliens[40], or 'them' being the poor and needy.[41]

During the Lord's Support 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 met 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 Verlanghaus, 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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