

# Ethics of Holy War

Marcel–Leon TREICA

*PhD (c), "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania, marcu3k@icloud.com*

**ABSTRACT:** In the context of the war in Ukraine, the concept of "holy war" has come to the fore. In fact, the enemy turned against the victim precisely for reasons of spiritual purification, at least in a declarative way. This paper aims to present the concept of holy war and its ethics, not from the Christian conception but from the Islamic conception, where war and fighting have been a *modus vivendi* throughout the ages. For Muslims, war has been the chosen way they used from the beginning to proliferate the Islamic movement. It has also been used as a form of defense for one's own faith or even culture. Can war, at some point, be part of the solution no matter what problem arises? This paper aims to present the concept of war in the Islamic religion.

**KEYWORDS:** ethics, war, holy, Islam, jihad

## Introduction

A condition of human development throughout human history has been the protection of one's values against the attempt to conquer or annihilate them by certain political, social, economic or religious circumstances. In the context of the religious survival of a tradition, war or more advanced thought and culture have been means of survival. In other cultures, these means have been replaced by economic and social development, which has allowed the transmission of values and their enrichment over time for many generations. Each particular culture depends on a set of traditions, religious, social, economic, and cultural, which are protected and enriched by passing them on to the next generation and defending them from assimilation in the event of clashes between cultures (Rotaru 2021, 87-92). The concept that more clearly defines this protection of religious values that are shared by a group or groups that form a people may be called holy war. In this context, holy war is a war that has religious connotations (Contamine 2000, 99).

## Moral Problem

Considering the importance of the moral direction in which the subject is framed, one can highlight several patterns from which one starts to achieve the goal, which in turn is influenced by the lens through which it is viewed. Ethics and virtue, utilitarianism, hedonism and other patterns of thought can change the trajectory as well as the end point of the discussion. One of today's fashionable issues is terrorism, which tends to become the most effective way for certain groups to achieve their goals. In most cases, these revenges are based on the idea of just revenge for a previous violation of rights. What is the solution when looking at things from an Islamic perspective or is there perhaps something in the Islamic tradition that could give guidance on how to respond to a terrorist attack?

Dr. Farid Esack, professor and specialist in Islam at Union Theological Seminary, emphasizes that, similar to Christianity, Islam also parallels the concept of just war. As opposed to the particular case of responding to a terrorist attack, the Islamic position would be a long-term look at the causes that induced this destructive effect, which does not necessarily come close to an immediate and unconditional response to the attack. The question arises as to how we can hope to create a more just and peaceful world in the long term versus how you can have a particular victim in a particular space or state of affairs (Religion 2005, 23).

## **Consideration of Factors**

The need to defend one's own culture comes as a response to the cultural and religious invasion that nowadays has as an ally, the highly developed system of communication and transmission of information. The generally highly developed West has the power of assimilation but not indefinitely and an uncontrolled openness to the import of information leads to saturation and even domination. At the other extreme, a country situated at the confluence of great cultures may be subjected to a flood of information, and the need for development may be assimilated. If there is no possibility of protection, it can lead to cultural war, closure, and repression.

Defending justice (Rotaru 2014, 61-63) can often cause ethically correct war but with devastating consequences beyond repair. Since any violation of justice constitutes immorality, why does it take another immorality to stop one already committed, or how far is one willing to go to the evil of revenge through war to protect justice and morality? The need for freedom is the issue generally evoked by those who are in favor of war, but considering that the war once won designates a victor who will claim some rights violates the very principle for which the conflict was started.

## **Tradition, Creation and Natural Law**

In the context of creation, war did not exist on Earth until man committed the first sin. From that moment, life was invaded by holiness, and the person of God found no pleasure in the actions of sinful man; in view of this fact in the pre-creation context, there was a war between Satan as a rebel against the reign of Yahweh. Because of the rebellion, man lost his prerogatives as master steward over God's creation and nature was no longer as before - subject to positive human actions (Contamine 2000, 110). In the context of tradition, war also had a religious connotation, all the more so as the interpretation of a victory was closely linked to the god of the victorious people. Scripture, the Old Testament, the covenant, the law, the prophets all speak of the context of the covenant between God and man, the war which involved God's defense of justice and this not infrequently meant the use of the pagans for the Trinity's discipline of the Jewish people, but also the other way around if we refer to the occupation of Canaan after the exit from Egypt, God used Israel as an agent of the application of His justice. (Waldo 1988, 142).

In the historical context, holy war meant protecting Christian values, which also required political exercises such as the liberation and protection of the country of Israel by Christian Europeans. For many, however, adherence to this form of enforcing justice had a purely economic motivation, escape from poverty, e.g., the Children's Crusade, in which most participants left the plough and the cattle, in the context of medieval life torn by discontent, poverty, and despair (Contamine 2000, 62-4).

## **Early Church Century**

If, in the context of the Old Testament, war was an expression of the fulfillment of God's justice as well as justice in human relations, in the New Testament, things are different. The Bible is, at first glance, contradictory with regard to God's instructions to people about war. The following verses can be taken as an example: "But as for the cities of these people which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you must not leave alive anything that has breath. You must annihilate them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do all the sinful things that they do for their gods..." (Deut 20:16-17).

On the other hand, some verses are often quoted in defense of the pacifist position. "You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other." (Matt 5:38-39). Defending justice or exterminating evil are both causes that have led to many more or less holy wars. The concepts are found in the Bible in different circumstances and, therefore, need to be understood contextually. For example, in the case of Joshua, these concepts have played an important role in many religions. The Crusades are the best examples in Europe, while in Islam, the concept is called Jihad; wars that prioritize religion second or third are not generally defined as religious (Britannica.com 2005).

### **Under the Protection of Sanctity and Tradition**

With the development and expansion of Christianity, the war was waged between non-Christian peoples, who were not necessarily pagans, and those who fought under the sign of the cross. Since the state and the church were very close as institutions and even merged in some cultures, political wars were also religious wars and religious wars were also political wars. The example of the persecution of the Mennonites in the Low Countries is a real fact. All those who did not agree with the religious discipline of the state church could only be enemies of the state and therefore had to be eliminated (Gill 1985, 219). In the international context, the wars against the Jews in the first place and in the second against the Muslims, defined as crusades, showed what man can do under the cover of the name of Christian and "In the Name of God.". The non-Christian peoples' image of Christians is seen through the lens of the non-Christians' conquest and the Christians' exploitation of the wealth of the conquered, in the case of the Spanish conquistadors. What guidance can tradition offer about responding to something as horrific as a terrorist attack?

Dr. Lisa Cahill, Professor of Ethics, Department of Theology, Boston College, says that the solution of violence should be the last of those adopted and that in the case of Christianity the response to war would be rather negative (Vicini 2020, 65). Thomas Aquinas asked in the 13th century, "Is it always a sin to start a war?" The tradition of the justness of war developed because of the exception that can be made for self-defense. One of the most important directions in the war against terrorism is the adoption of war as a last resort.

Another issue raised is whether more harm will be caused by the methods by which the good is to be achieved and what is the reasonable expectation of success. If the goal is clear and can be achieved, what is worth considering is the criterion of non-combatant immunity, civilians should not be subject to direct attack. In terms of the Christian tradition, says Professor Cahill, it is not known whether it specifically refers to terrorism as a traditional problem, but the view of most religious thinkers is focused on the need to clearly define who the enemy is, in a way that is separate from other enemies who are more vaguely mentioned, having some kind of clear and persuasive evidence that the adversary we identify is really guilty of the crimes of which he is accused (Religion 2005, 124).

### **Other Opinions**

What does international law have to say about war? Dean Michael Young of George Washington University Law School says that international law recognizes the inherited right of self-defense and really links this to notions like proportionality and the needs of a nation. This must be necessary, and actions must be proportional to the risk to be eliminated or the action to be stopped. If what international law says about this situation is important, says Dean Young, it is certainly important in two senses:

1. we want to continue to build an international society in which each country acts in a way that international law considers appropriate and does not act simply by virtue of the power it possesses.
2. in particular, this war will require enormous cooperation between allies. The legitimacy of how this is done will matter to those who are against the allies (Religion 2005, 125).

## **Alternatives and Choices**

### **Christianity versus Islam**

The apparent violence of Islam in relation to other cultures and religions is rooted in its historical, but not its religious, foundations. The rupture between Christianity and Islam occurs at the very moment of its foundation. Jesus reached the height of his popularity when he preached to 5000 people and performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Then the Galileans wanted to make him their king, welcoming him as a king at the entrance to Jericho, but Jesus refused the people's offer, just as he had previously refused the devil's offer in the desert - to be master of the world. In the end, Jesus chose the way of the cross. Contrary to this, when Mohammed suffered persecution in Mecca, the city of Medina offered him a throne, an army and a kingdom. Mahommed said YES to this offer.

Another major difference would be the denial of the dignity (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) that the Christian Bible gives to women. Also, Islamists see marriage and sex as only procreation, children as a measure by which manhood and wealth are judged, and the idea of love is barely mentioned in the Koran.

Yet we would be hypocrites if we judged Muslims for these seemingly bizarre, hostile or counterproductive things. Christians are no strangers to deviant behavior either. Let us remember the year 1054 when a schism occurred between the Church of the Western Roman Empire and the Churches of the Eastern Roman Empire, degenerating into what we now call Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and also into the diplomatic rift between the kingdoms of Europe at that time, which subsequently allowed further degeneration of the shadow of the former empire, and in the future the final conquest of Constantinople by the Muslims, and even later - the rise of Russia's influence and cancer it always managed to spread over Eastern Europe (Chapman 2002, 98).

Also, the crusades were not always a form of defense against Islamic fanaticism. These things must be considered a natural social phenomenon, because the emergence of sects and religious derivatives is only a form of manifestation of the desire to diversify. However, splitting the difference four ways loses its essence. But the masses of people will never keep track of the essence of things, as can always be seen.

### **Jihad**

This word is often used in the media. Whether Christians or Muslims, most are under the impression that "JIHAD" means holy war. Jihad does not mean holy war but rather represents an individual path, the spiritual quest of every Muslim. A solitary quest. Jihad can be understood as the use of all energies and resources to establish the Islamic system of life, in order to obtain the favor of Allah - hence the impression that this is the Holy War, an obvious mistake, in the context find is about the individual and not the society.

Jihad is an Arabic word that means to test your own limit. It is a continuous process. In its first phase, a Muslim learns to control his own evil desires and intentions. He has to strive hard to achieve this. This Jihad is within the individual and is the basis of the deeper Jihad, which involves establishing Maruf (righteousness) and the removal of Munkar (evil) from the lives of individuals and then from society.

Thus, individuals skip the most important stage - cleaning the evil from their souls – and set about cleaning the evil directly from society. A kind of - "Washing the glass on the outside." More hastily, the term "Intifada" comes closer to what Muslims call Holy War. Muslims are now experiencing what Christians went through hundreds of years ago. Following this analogy, we could say that they will have passed this stage by the time their political system is separated from the religious one. If a few hundred years ago, the Christians made crusades in the name of God or the Pope, with an excommunication, could overthrow a king, being a kind of king of kings; in the same way, the Muslims fight now in the name of Allah, and not long ago the Imam could overthrow a sultan with a fatwa (a kind of religious decree) (Musk 1997, 143).

Looking from a broader perspective, it is inconceivable the similarity between all major religions, which are nothing but social formulas, or rather institutionalizations of the religious instinct existing in each individual. Islamism and religions in general are a more complex problem than I try to present here, but in the end, the problems always come from the mediocrity of individuals, their lack of education, their indoctrination. I am talking about the REAL problems, namely the harmful consequences that religion can have on human society, and the individuals of which it is composed.

It is not the fault of Muslims, it is not the fault of Christians, it is not the fault of divinity – it is just the fault of man who, lacking sufficient integrity, needs society to guide him, to exist, to make sense of the apparent nonsense of reality. Individuals who feel empty inside, who feel lost in existence as in an ocean, seek to grasp something, to identify with something, to give a meaning to their existence - and for them ,there are always religions, represented by churches, and controlled by people.

## Conclusion

Finally, based on what has been written above, we see the need to live in justice (Rotaru 2019, 269-271), and for man, this state of affairs is defined more as an ideal than an accomplished fact. Attempting to solve the problem of the spirit in a physical and terrestrial way is a mistake from the start; the results are visible and easy to understand. The only one who can give an objective and reliable answer to this problem is God. The only one who has the right and fights a holy war is God and those who are in His camp are at war with a corrupt cosmos in which, for the moment, a fallen angel wants to be the boss. The last word, as is to be expected, as well as the first will be given by the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the only truly just judge who can decide the spiritual, moral and physical good of mankind.

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