

June 2019

Three Theorists on Religious Violence in an Islamic Context: Karen Armstrong, Mark Juergensmeyer, and William T. Cavanaugh

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Three Theorists on Religious Violence in an Islamic Context:
Karen Armstrong, Mark Juergensmeyer, and William T. Cavanaugh

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Religious Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 21, 2019

Keywords: Religion, War, Secularism, Politics, Jihad

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Turkan and Abdulkadir Camur. Without your love, encouragement, and faith in me, I do not know how I could have done all that I have done over the past two years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To begin with, I would like to thank Dr. Michael DeJonge, the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies and my advisor, who was beyond helpful and supportive of me and my efforts throughout my time at USF and in writing my thesis. His wealth of knowledge and experience, and his mentorship helped me immeasurably.

I would also like to thank Dr. Adib Farhadi, the most important mentor during my master's degree. He helped pave my path in the world of academia -- introducing me to new resources and providing me with valuable skills and assets that I will continue to use throughout my career. My gratitude for him is boundless.

Also, I would like to express my gratitude for the Turkish government and the Ministry of Education for providing me with the financial resources and opportunity to pursue my degree in Religious Studies.

I would like to thank the University of South Florida and the Department of Religious Studies for being my home over the last two years, their support and regard for my education and development means the world to me. They also presented me with the opportunity to meet one of the prominent thinkers I included in this abstract, Mark Juergensmeyer.

I would like to thank my siblings Rukiye Kaya, Semra Yerli, Elif, Sumeyye, Halil and Ismail Camur for their immense support during my master's study despite residing in Turkey. Their encouragement, guidance and endless support helped me to completing this thesis.

Here, I would like to extend a special thanks to my dear friend Beyza Gultekin, who, despite the hecticness of her life, supported me throughout my time at USF. Even during the

times where she was preparing for a major entrance exam, she was omnipresent with her helpfulness and emotional support -- she became a sister to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends for their endless support and all the fun times we had together. Gul Sari, Zehra & Ahmet Karatas, Inanc Karagoz, and Yasemin Tasci. You guys were with me through the good and rough times -- thank you for making these two years some of the best in my life.

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ABSTRACT

Religion is often invoked as a driving force behind violence, disentangled from political, social, and economic reasons. In this thesis, we will be exploring the viewpoints of three prominent religious thinkers in investigating the principal causes behind what is called religious violence. The works of Karen Armstrong, Mark Juergensmeyer, and William T. Cavanaugh are considered as theoretical frameworks for understanding violence in an Islamic context. While Armstrong argues that the root cause of violence can be traced back to economic, political, and cultural reasons, Juergensmeyer contests that religion is the most important cause underlying all violence. In their analyses, both thinkers rely heavily on a distinction between religious and secular violence. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, regards such a distinction as itself a legitimation of secular forms of violence that obscures the real causes of what we call religious violence.

INTRODUCTION

According to The World Health Organization, violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”¹ Violence has been studied in many contexts -- historical, political, sociological, psychological, and especially in religious. This thesis focuses how three theorists understand violence within an Islamic context. Religion is a complex concept like the concept of violence. According to Emile Durkheim’s definition, “a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”² With this brief introduction, we will be answering the following question: What is the position of Islam on religious violence?

Before delving into the three theories, one should acquire some background information about violence from the Islamic perspective. This information would make it easier for us to understand Islam's views of violence and theories of Karen Armstrong and Mark Juergensmeyer. Both groups of war-based and peace-based believers use religious resources as evidence to support their opinions.

¹ Krug EG et al., 2002, World report on violence and health, https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/

² Robert Alun Jones&Daniela Barberis, “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912)” n.d., <http://durkheim.uchicago.edu/Summaries/forms.html#pgfId=6212> (accessed Nov. 12, 2018).

Theorizing religious violence in Islam

Muslims and non-Muslim people and scholars have often used the term jihad when they argue about religious violence in Islamic perspective. This term is common because it is more sacred and religious especially according to Western scholars. Jihad, which means “struggle” or “striving” but is often misunderstood to mean holy war, is a religious cause.³ Jihad legitimizes Islamic violence for certain Muslims because it was subjected to a shift in meaning. There are some different types of jihad as described by the Qur’an and teachings Muhammad: God’s Messenger such as the lesser jihad/external (*al-jihad al-asghar*) and the greater/internal jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*). The lesser jihad is the military struggle with the enemy on the battlefields. The greater jihad is the name of the fight it has with the *nafs*, which is described as the greatest enemy of the human. *Nafs* is an Arabic word that literally means *self* in the Qur’an. It is translated as soul, ego or spirit. After returning from a war, the Prophet said: "We are finished with the lesser jihad, now we are starting the greater jihad." He explained to his followers with this hadith that fighting against the external enemy is the lesser jihad, and that it is the greater jihad to fight against one’s self.⁴

Jihad can be classified into four different fields: scientific, social, internal, and military jihad. Scientific jihad is the work of generating knowledge through exhaustive and intense efforts. Social jihad involves working for the benefit of the community, as when helping the poor, ordering goodness, and obstructing evil. Internal jihad is the struggle against the wishes and desires that are prohibited in Islam. Military jihad is violent struggle against an enemy, a last resort in the midst of a failure to live in peace.⁵

³ Ahmet Yaman, “Savas”, *TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi*, 2009, Vol. 36, pp. 189-194.

⁴ Ahmet Ozel, “Cihad”, *TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi*, 1993 Vol. 7, pp. 527-531.

⁵ Bekir Topaloglu, “Cihad”, *TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi*, 1993, Vol. 7, pp. 531-534.

There are four main sources of Islamic law. The *Qur'an* is the sacred scripture of Islam. The *sunnah* and *hadiths* are the actions and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. *Ijma* is an Arabic term that refers to the consensus or agreement of Islamic scholars on a subject of Islamic law. Lastly, *qiyas* is analogical reasoning as it is applied to the issuance of legal principles from the Qur'an and sunnah. This involves debate with evidence presented on both sides. With regard to the question of violence, some Muslims claim that according to Islam the dominant element in international relations is war while others argue that the dominant element in international relations is peaceful relations.

According to some believers and groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, Islam always supports wars against non-Muslims, under all circumstances and in any case. According to them, the verses related to jihad were revealed step-by-step such that earlier, peaceful verses ought to be interpreted in terms of later, more bellicose one. On the other hand, many Muslims believe that the verses related to jihad cannot be interpreted without other verses, hadiths, the history of Islam, and *seerah*, a literary genre that emerged from the narrative stories about Muhammad's life and activities, comparing him to other prophets (the plural form is *siyar* and is used for the lives of saints). And according to the majority of Muslims, these minorities of believers misinterpreted these verses of the Qur'an in understanding jihad.⁶

According to the order of the revelations of the jihad verses, an order with five steps can be discerned.⁷ In the early periods of Islam in Mecca, when the balance of power was in favor of the polytheists, the believers were ordered not to enter into an argument, even if verbally.

⁶ Isil Arpaci, "Terorizm ve Cihat Uzerine Kavramsal bir Mukayese", *Uludag University Faculty of Arts and Sciences Journal of Social Sciences*, 2018, 19(34), pp. 264-266.

⁷ Talip Turcan, "Islam Hukukunun Klasik ve Cagdas Doktrinlerinde Cihad (Savastan Barisa Dogru bir Evrilme)", 2016, *Kuramer*, pp. 293-295.

“There is no compulsion in the Religion”

(Surah Al-Baqarah-The Cow 2:256).

“So from now on, proclaim what you are commanded to convey openly and in an emphatic manner, and do not care (whatever) those who associate partners with God (say and do)”

(Surah Al-Hijr-The Rock 15:94).

While according to the war-based perspective, these verses have been abrogated and superseded by later revelations, the peace-based side says that these verses will remain valid at all times and everywhere. Islam strictly forbade pressure on people to choose a religion and concluded that the faith chosen under pressure was invalid. From the peace-based perspective, it is impossible to think of war and hatred as communication tools. The possibility for non-believers to believe in Islam is present until they die, and fighting them to believe in Islam eliminates this possibility for those who were killed during the war. Therefore, the first thing for Muslims to do is not to fight non-believers who do not attack Muslims, but rather to follow a peaceful and welcoming approach in inviting them to Islam.

In the latter periods of Islam in Mecca prior *hijrah*, Prophet Muhammad’s and his companions migrated from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution in 622 C.E. This date also symbolizes the starting point of the Hijri calendar. During this period, polytheists, who had limited knowledge about Islam and Muslims, entered into conversations with Muslims and polytheists.

“Do not argue with those who were given the Book

save in the best way, unless it be those of them who are given to wrongdoing (and, therefore, not accessible to courteous argument).

Say (to them): "We believe in what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to you, and your God and our God is one and the same.

We are Muslims wholly submitted to Him"

(Surah Al- Ankabut-The Spider, 29:46).

"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and argue with them in the best way possible"

(Surah An- Nahl-The Bee, 16:125).

Those who argue that international relations are based on war and those who argue for peace interpret the verses in the first period in the same way. They disagree in that the first group thinks that these verses were later canceled and replaced by revelations, the second group believes that the responsibilities of these verses still continue today.

In the early period of Islam after the *hijrah* in Medina, this period corresponds to the years when war was allowed for the first time by the by the Quranic verses.

"Fight in God's cause (in order to exalt His Name) against those who fight against you"
(Surah Al-Baqarah-The Cow, 2:190).

*“The believers against whom war is waged are given
permission to fight in response, for they have been
wronged”*

(Surah Al-Haj-The Pilgrimage, 22:39).

*“And if they (the enemies) incline to peace, incline to it
also, and put your trust in God”*

(Surah Al-Anfal-The Accessions, 8:61).

Muslims who have war-based perspectives contended that these verses is removed like other verses in the previous two periods. However, those who argue that Islam is a religion of peace interpret the first verse of this period as Islam not being a proponent for war, but stating that Muslims must defend themselves against parties starting war on them. The second verse (22:39) is revealed to the prophet in the first year after *hijrah* and brings to mind the question: Why are those who fight against Muslims unjust? The next verse (22:40) following this verse answers this question. It means Allah is explaining a verse in another verse.

*“Those who have been driven from their homeland against
all right, for no other reason than that they say,
“Our Lord is God.”*

(Surah Al-Hajj-The Pilgrimage, 22:40).

According to the Qur'an, polytheists were unfair because they inhibited the freedom of faith of Muslims. Polytheists were powerful during this period; and because Muslims openly proclaimed that "Our Lord is Allah", they were uprooted from their homes by

polytheists. Muslims who have war-based perspectives have a sense of collective jihad and that this jihad must continue until everyone becomes Muslim. However, when considering that verse 8:61 directly opposes this mentality, the question arises: What will be the applicability of this verse?

In the fourth step, verse 9:5 allows Muslims to clash with others except during the sacred months: Rajab (7), and the three consecutive months of Dhū al-Qa'dah (11), Dhu al-Hijjah (12) and Muḥarram (1).

“Then, when the (four) sacred months (of respite, during which fighting with those who associate partners with God and violate their treaties was prohibited to you,) are over, then (declare war on them and) kill them wherever you may come upon them, and seize them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place. Yet if they repent and (mending their ways) establish the Prescribed Prayer and pay the Prescribed Purifying Alms, let them go their way. Surely God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.”

(Surah At-Taubah-The Immunity, 9:5)

Surah At-Taubah (The Immunity) is the only chapter in the Qur'an that does not begin with the usual opening formula, In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. Unlike all other surahs, the Messenger of God did not order this formula to be put at the head of this surah. One of the most accepted explanations for his decision regards that this formula conveys security for readers. However, surah at-Taubah begins with

an ultimatum against some polytheists in Arabia. It mostly deals with the re-evaluation of relations with polytheists who often violate their agreements.

This verse (9:5) is one of the most important pieces of evidence used by Muslims who believe that international relations should be based on war. According to them, this verse refers to the beginning of the offensive wars and allows Muslims to fight not only their attackers but also those who do not fight against them. Muslims who have war-based perspectives use this verse to legitimize their violence and suppose that Allah explicitly orders their attacks. These Muslims initiate offensive wars and the killing of the non-believers in this struggle.

On the other hand, other Muslims who support peace think that there is an incorrect text-based reading and interpretation that is disconnected from *asbab al-nuzul* (the reason of the verse descent) and the historical and structural context in the understanding above. In order to understand the true purpose of Allah, we must read the verse without breaking the context (reading with previous and next verses) -- not in isolation. This reading would be a more accurate reading and interpretation. The verse appeared in connection with Muslims fighting the polytheists of Mecca. Therefore, it should be noted in this verse that the declaration of war against polytheists is not about Jews or Christians in terms of Islamic law.

“Excepting those among the people who associate partners with God with whom you made a treaty, and who have not thereafter failed to fulfill their obligations towards you (required by the treaty), nor have backed anyone against you. Observe, then, your treaty with them until the end of the term (that you agreed with them).

*Surely God loves the God-revering, pious (who keep their
duties to Him)”*

(Surah Taubah-The Immunity 9:4)

Verse 9:5 was a war declared against polytheist Arabs who terminated the peace treaty with their violation of the terms to the agreement. The polytheists who remained loyal to their agreements with verse 9:4 are excluded from the scope of the declaration of war. Therefore, killing the polytheists is not an absolute statement, but a verse for the Arab polytheists in Mecca depending on those specific circumstances.

The fifth and last period is the period in which the war was absolutely ordered by eliminating the sacred months.

*“(But if they persist in causing disorder, continue to) fight
against them until there is no longer disorder rooted in
rebellion against God, and the religion (the right for
worship and the authority to order the way of life is
recognized) for God”*

(Surah Al-Baqarah-The Cow 2:193).

According to Muslims who have war-based perspectives, previous verses of four periods have been abrogated and superseded by this revelation. The conclusion reached in their interpretation: Muslims must unconditionally and continuously wage war with non-believers and polytheists. Peace-based Muslims consider not only this verse but also its set verses just as this is explained in the previous verse. Taking a verse from the verse set or

taking a half sentence or a few words in the verse to interpret does not lead to the correct conclusion.

2:190“Fight in God’s cause (in order to exalt His Name) against those who fight against you, but do not exceed the bounds (set by God), for surely God loves not those who exceed the bounds.”

2:191“(While at war) kill them wherever you come upon them, and drive them out from where they drove you out (thus recovering your lands from their usurpation). (Though killing is something you feel aversion to,) disorder (rooted in rebellion against God and recognizing no laws) is worse than killing. Do not fight against them in the vicinities of the Sacred Mosque unless they fight against you there; but if they fight against you (there), kill them – such is the recompense of the (rebellious) unbelievers.”

2:192“Then if they desist (from fighting), surely God is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate (especially towards those who return to Him in repentance).”

2:194“A sacred month is retributive for another sacred month, and the inviolate values demand retaliation. So whoever attacks you, attack them in like manner as they attacked you. Nevertheless, fear God and remain within the bounds of piety and righteousness, and know that God is with the God-revering, pious.”

2:195“(Just retaliation, as well as war or other defensive measures to maintain your existence, are not possible without expense. So) spend in God’s cause (out of whatever you have) and do not ruin yourselves by your own hands (by refraining from spending. Whatever you do,) do it in the best way, in the awareness that God sees it. Surely God loves those who are devoted to doing good, aware that God is seeing them.”

According to the majority of Muslims who have peace-based perspectives, Islam wants to eliminate fitnah. If some people try to use authority and establish a social order according to their own will, and even force others to obey them, this is fitnah which that Muslims are ordered to fight against them. Islam seeks to create a stable environment of justice and freedom for all, without excuses for injustice, oppression, violation of fundamental human rights, anarchy and terror. Verses about jihad especially verses of surah at-Taubah are also an ultimatum to polytheists who broke their political agreement with God’s messenger as a president.

Many scholars study the causes of violence. Many studies have been conducted to determine whether the cause of violence is religion or not, and Karen Armstrong’s, Mark Juergensmeyer’s, and William Cavanaugh’s studies are only three of them about the origin of religious violence. Armstrong and Juergensmeyer begin their studies by assuming a significant distinction between religious and the secular violence. However, according to Cavanaugh, this distinction is incoherent.

Literature Review

Scott M. Thomas reviewed two books: *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* by Karen Armstrong and *Terror in the mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* by Mark Juergensmeyer. Thomas's study is short. He examines the importance of the different aspects of violence in these two books on the basis of international politics. The book *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur'an to the Mongols*, edited by Robert Gleave and István T. Kristó-Nagy, provides a framework about Jihad. It explains the meanings of Jihad in the Qur'an. The aim of the author is to fully explain the concept of "jihad" to non-Muslim people and some violent Muslims and to eliminate false and problematic thoughts about the concept of jihad. The article "Does Religion Cause Violence? Behind the Common Question Lies a Morass of Unclear Thinking" by William T. Cavanaugh provides a framework about the origin of violence. In this essay, Cavanaugh believes that it is impossible to separate religion from economic and political motives. He states that "The myth of religious violence marks the "clash of civilizations" worldview that attributes Muslims' animosity toward the West to their inability to learn the lessons of history and remove the baneful influence of religion from politics" (Cavanaugh, 2007). As in this quote, he gives important points about his book *The Myth of Religious Violence* and the opinions of Juergensmeyer.

This study seeks to answer the research question: How helpful are Juergensmeyer and Armstrong for understanding violence in the Islamic context? To address this question, their studies *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* by Juergensmeyer and *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* by Armstrong can be used as two main sources in this study. These two theorists assume and depend on the distinction between religious and secular violence. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* by Cavanaugh is another main source, and it provides the most

comprehensive answer to the research question. While Armstrong and Juergensmeyer systematically distinguish between religious and secular causes of violence, according to Cavanaugh, this distinction is one that sits uncomfortably in many Islamic contexts. Therefore, Armstrong and Juergensmeyer are not helpful in understanding violence and their arguments rely on an essential distinction between the religious and the secular which is foreign to many Islamic contexts.

KAREN ARMSTRONG

Karen Armstrong is a religious thinker and author. She has written more than 20 books on faith and major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. *The Case for God, A History of God, The Battle for God, Holy War, Islam, Buddha,* and *The Great Transformation* are the most popular studies of hers. In this present thesis, the focus will be on her book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, because Armstrong provides a framework for the relation of religion and violence, and religion and secularism. The author has investigated the cause of war and the role of religions in these conflicts.

The book *Field of Blood* book consists of three main parts: Beginnings, Keeping the Peace, and Modernity and 13 intermediate sections. The first and second parts explain the views of Abrahamic religions concerning violence in the pre-modern era. Section three explores the wave of violence claiming to justify religion and the nature of secularism. According to Armstrong, followers of three major monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a dilemma between their respective faith and religion. According to peace-based believers, these religions fundamentally oppose all physical and psychological violence between people in society, whether they belong to the same religion or not. According to war-based believers, there are times and situations in which war is supported by their religions. The dilemma here is that both groups of believers offer religious resources as evidence to support their views.

Judaism: At the beginning of ‘The Hebrew dilemma’, Armstrong gives a broad historical overview of Judaism and their prophets. After establishing the necessary

framework, she explains the dilemma: Yahweh or God expatriated Jewry from their agrarian state but in later times, they did not live without it. They wanted to take the Promised Land from the Palestinians. Therefore, some priestly writers abandoned their antiwar stance and distorted the ideology of their own traditions. They adopted an aggressive ideology so followers of this religion believed that everything is allowable in the way of victory. Non-peaceful political leaders used Judaism to legitimize their violence. However, according to peace-based Jews, they believe that Yahweh is “originally the fierce opponent of the violence and cruelty of empire”⁸ and would reject this new ideology.

Akin to the chapter on Judaism, Armstrong begins by giving extensive information about the history of Christianity in the parts ‘Jesus: Not of This World?’ and ‘Byzantium: The Tragedy of Empire’. According to the author, the reasons of violence is rooted in politics in Christian states, including Rome: Their goal is to improve their political and economic power and extend the boundaries of their states. As in Judaism, political leaders used Christianity as a means of affirming their violence. However, “There was no such thing as a “just” war, because it was never permissible to take human life”⁹. Politics is considered secular by Armstrong; therefore, she makes a distinction between religion and secularism to say that politics is the cause of violence rather than religion, in order to promote the religious-secular distinction.

Islam

Armstrong explains the origin of religious violence in Islam in the parts ‘The Muslim Dilemma’ and ‘Crusade and Jihad, which are two of the most important sections for us because we are studying on religious violence in Islamic contexts in this study. As in the

⁸ Karen Armstrong, *Fields of blood: Religion and the history of violence*. New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2014, pp. 127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 154

previous chapters, these chapters begin with historical information about the emergence of Islam.

The part 'The Muslim Dilemma' begins with the first revelation from Allah to Muhammad 610 C.E. and ends in the 11th century with the Seljuk Empire. Armstrong describes Muhammad's life, the prophet's attitudes to the polytheists in the period of Mecca and his attitudes to the Jews during the Medina period as peaceful. There is a dilemma among Muslims as among the Jews. There are four schools of Islamic law in Sunni Islam. While Muhammad Idris al-Shafii (d.820) who is the one of the founders of these schools supports the offensive wars between Muslims and others, other founders; Abu Hanifa an-Numan ibn Thabit (d.767), Malik ibn Anas (d.795), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855) argue that only defensive war can be done, that world peace is an aim of Islam. The same situation is also available between Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims. Thus, according to Armstrong, Muslims have a dilemma.

According to Armstrong, Islam was not the main reason for the wars between Muslims and non-believers or polytheists from the beginning of Islam to the present day. She states that "Muhammad had left his cave on Mount Hira for a political struggle against the structural violence of Mecca".¹⁰ The author states that prophet Muhammad did not provoke the offensive wars, he only responded to attackers. However, political leaders used Islam and religious leaders to justify their violence. Like all other leaders of states, they wanted to improve their economic and political power and to increase their economic and regional earnings. The other reasons are grounded in nationalism and revenge.

After the early Muslims, there are only political, economic, and social reasons for Islamic violence; and Islam, in its essence, does not involve any violence when one studies

¹⁰ Ibid., 260-261.

the life of the prophet according to Armstrong. The root of the word Islam, *salam* directly translates to *peace*. Peace means a lack of conflict and a sense of living in harmony. Prophet Muhammed established the model for peacemaking early on in his life when he removed the conflict and forged cooperation between the competing Quraysh tribes to lift the sacred stone called Aswad, in a piece of cloth by involving every party in peacemaking. That is what Islam means: reducing conflicts and creating peace. Armstrong illustrates that the origin of violence is not religious, but rather a manifestation of state power. Therefore, religion has not been responsible for all the violence in her book. She develops this theory through the interactions of religion and government from the Mesopotamian period to the present. Rather than to put blame on bloody images and legends in holy scriptures and holy history, she says we must focus on political contexts that shape religion. The problem lies in the nature of humanity and the state -- not in the nature of religion. Armstrong concludes that “the problem lies not in the multifaceted activity that we call ‘religion’ but in the violence embedded in our human nature and the nature of the state”.¹¹

While Armstrong connects all conflicts to economic, political, and nationalist reasons, she begins her study by assuming a significant distinction between the religious and secular. Therefore, the third part of her book examines secularism and its nature. However, while secularism has lots of benefits, she studies deficiencies and inadequacies of secularism in the modern period. Armstrong states that *The Myth of Religious Violence* by Cavanaugh served Western people a lot of benefit at the time the book was written; but today, different perspectives are needed to comprehensively understand our predicament.¹²

Armstrong believes that today, secularism is a part of the identity of the West. Secularism distinguishes religion from state, economy, and science. This situation is better

¹¹ Ibid., 394.

¹² Ibid., 15-16.

than the case of the pre-modern era because secularism prevents religious justification by the state. Religion is regulated by the separation of the public and the private, the sacred and the secular. The French Revolution led to important ideals such as secularism, laicism and nationalism, which spread to the rest of the world. These three principles emerged as a result of a struggle against Catholicism. According to Armstrong, the birth of secularism itself involved violence as seen in the French revolution.¹³ She gives the example of laicism as a variety of secularism in Turkey promoted by Ataturk to demonstrate the violence of secularism.¹⁴ By giving a brief overview of this process, it can be demonstrated that secularism brings about its own violence.

The process of secularism began with the influence of external dynamics and developments rather than internal dynamics in Turkey.¹⁵ After the foundation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923, M. K. Ataturk adapted the French model of laicism that became known as Kemalism. Ataturk discouraged religious participation in state affairs, especially religious influence in determining state policies; he also forbade government involvement in religious affairs and, in particular, the influence of government in the determination of religion. He prohibited Sufi activities. The caliphate and the religious courts were abolished. The Islamic calendar -- replaced with the Gregorian. The Arabic script -- replaced with the Latin alphabet. Women were discouraged from wearing traditional dresses and they were forbidden from entering public places such as schools, hospitals, congress in traditional attire. The state shut down lodges and *madrasas*, private schools where Islam and other religions were taught.¹⁶ Since 1924, the Kemalist regime identified religion as a problem concerned with the negligence of science and the backwardness of Turkey. As a result, this regime

¹³ Ibid., 398.

¹⁴ Ibid., 317-318.

¹⁵ Talip Kucukcan, "Laiklik", *TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi*, 2003, Vol. 27, pp. 62-65.

¹⁶ Elizabeth S. Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 66.

followed science instead of religion and humanities. The secular state kept religion away from politics and public education with the proposition that religion should remain a private matter and the educational system should be secular.

Laicism is anti-religious. It prevents the freedom of people to choose any religion and it prevents people from fulfilling their obligations to religion. Instead of providing freedom of religion and conscience and equal distance to all religions, it deepened divides and contributed to discrimination between religious and laypeople. A religious person is considered someone who fulfills the orders and prohibitions of his/her religion. For instance, a praying and fasting Muslim would be considered a religious person. “The Islamists may be attempting to recover what they imagine to be an ideal past that has been repudiated by Kemalists. At the same time, the Kemalist establishment is creating a version of modernity by repudiating history by attempting to push Islam into the private sphere and away from political involvement, as was typical during the Ottoman Empire. The appearance of headscarved women in universities, jobs, and government is an indication of the failure of that repudiation. The failures of the past, at least as the secular establishments imagine those failures, are draped on the bodies of women”.¹⁷

Therefore, according to Armstrong secularism is not a definitive result for the end of violence as shown in secular Turkey. Regardless, Armstrong considers the separation between religion and secular is better than their union, and considers secularism to be superior to the religious state; the religious state in pre-modern times is no longer appropriate during modern times.

¹⁷ Kim Shively, “Religious Bodies and the Secular State: The Merve Kavakci Affair”, *Duke University Press*, pp. 69.

Conclusion

The main argument of Armstrong's book is the origin of violence lies in our human nature and the nature of the states. When we look at her book in Islamic context, we can say that sources of Islam law, the Qur'an, and the prophet Muhammed never support an offensive war. Some Muslims believe that Muslims must always clash with non-Muslims under all circumstances. However, all of the battles, such as the Battle of Badr (624 C.E.), the Battle of Uhud (625 C.E.), and the Battle of Trench (627 C.E.), that the prophet participated in during the early period of Islam, are defensive battles.

The true cause of all of the wars, even if they were offensive wars, that occurred after the death of the Prophet, were entrenched in political or economic motivations. Leaders of the state used religion to legitimize their violence. They galvanized their warriors and supporters by citing religious missions as justification for these battles and their goals. To attribute divinity to what someone does, renders it unquestionable and shields it from criticism. However, Muhammad is the best teacher in this regard as a prophet, and the story of his life is also the best source in setting an example for believers. Thus, claiming divinity without true roots is not only misleading, but it is used to facilitate the goals of those who aspire to achieve their objectives without repercussions by playing with a soft spot for many people: religion. Invoking religion is often used as a free pass card. Nationalism is another reason to fight with different nations. But in an address to the believers during his farewell Hajj pilgrimage, prophet Muhammad made it clear that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab person, and no white person is superior to a black person.

Armstrong's theory about the reason of violence depends on the distinction between the religious and the secular. In our modern era, secularism helps us to deeply understand the origin of violence. She believes that the detachment of religion from the state reveals that

religion is innocent. However, secularism embodies its own violence, so we must try to eliminate national and international violence with different perspectives in our modern era.

MARK JUERGENSMEYER

Mark Juergensmeyer is the director of the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, professor of sociology, and associate professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has a dozen books, including *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State* and *Gandhi's Way*, along with numerous articles. This study focuses on his book *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, because it is based on extensive personal interviews with violent religious activists around the world. The author provides a framework for the relationship between religion and violence. The author has investigated the cause of wars and the role of religion in these conflicts. After the discussions of the author with people of different religions who play essential roles in perpetrating violence, he believes that religion is the most important reason underlying the violence. His theory also depends on the distinction between the religious and the secular.

In his book, Juergensmeyer brings the reader into the mind of those who employ violence in the name of religion and who support violence. Identifying patterns within these cultures of violence explains why and how religion and violence are linked and how religious acts of terrorism are carried out not only for strategic reasons but also for symbolic purposes. He explains that Muslims who have war-based perspectives use violence in a way that was considered horrible and thinks that there are both political and religious reasons embedded the violence. The political reason is that politicians and government leaders want to widen their country's borders. Although the reasons of violence consist of political, religious, and economic reasons, the most important cause is religion because religion affirms this violence

according to Juergensmeyer. Jihad, which means “struggle” but is often misunderstood to mean holy war, is a religious cause and it legitimizes this Islamic violence for some believers, contributing to Juergensmeyer’s stance on the root of violence stemming from religion.

The book consists of two main sections: ‘cultures of violence’ and ‘the logic of religious violence’. The first part is concerned more with practical information and the second part is more theoretical. The first part imparts religious reasons for the use of violence in marginalized groups. These groups come from the Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism. When Juergensmeyer explains the violence in cultures and beliefs in the first part, he starts from Christianity. However, it is not chronological, and there is no information on why he began Christianity before Judaism. Additionally, a significant distinction was ignored by the author: that violent events are also based in theological reasons and secular justifications. For instance, there are three religious reasons for why violence starts in Judaism; the coming of Messiah, the Promised Land, and the Temple of Solomon. However, when the author asked Mahmud Aboulhalima about the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing on April 19, 1995, Aboulhalima told him “it was done for a very, very specific reason, they (attackers) had some certain target, you know, a specific achievement. They wanted to reach the government with the message that we are not tolerating the way that you are dealing with our citizens” .¹⁸ These two different examples reveal that not only religious reasons but also political, economic and cultural reasons are involved in the acts of violence. Unfortunately, the author classifies all acts of violence as religious actions, even if some of them were based on secular justifications that receive psychological support from religious motivation. While the distinction is easily recognized in the interviews from the book,

¹⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 64.

Juergensmeyer classifies all acts of violence that foment cosmic war as rooted in religious rationale.

In the second part, Juergensmeyer tries to understand the logic of religious violence. It involves more theoretical reasoning than the first part. He argues that three characteristics may cause a clash to be called a cosmic war: the struggle perceived as a defense of basic identity and dignity, losing the struggle being unthinkable and the struggle blocked, and unwinnable in real time or real terms. Also, he thinks the existence of any one of these three characteristics may create a conflict to be called sacred war. It is a big problem because this situation negatively affects a real-world battle and terrorist attacks. “When a struggle becomes sacralized, incidents that might previously have been considered minor skirmishes or slight differences of understanding, are elevated to monumental proportions. The use of violence becomes legitimized, and the slightest provocation or insult can lead to terrorist assaults”.¹⁹

While answering the question of why America was the enemy on September 11, 2001? under the subtitle of ‘America as Enemy’ in the second part, the author states that there are three reasons or motives for enemies of America to wage war on America. The first reason is religious: America supports un-Islamic governments. The American government tries to keep them strong because when a clash between Islamic movements and un-Islamic governments arises, these now powerful states are more likely to defeat Islamic movements. The second reason is cultural. America is a modern country so it has a strong culture; this culture can affect the younger generations of other countries. In fact, when younger generations undergo a deterioration in the religious sense, the influencing culture, often American culture, is accused.²⁰ America's economic power is the final reason why it appears

¹⁹ Ibid., 166.

²⁰ Ibid., 183-184.

to be an enemy. According to him, the majority of the murders committed due to moral rules are not the underlying cause of morality, but politics.

According to Juergensmeyer, religion is a significant problem and the primary reason for conflicts, because it legitimizes, motivates, and rewards violence. He notes “how religious ideas have been endemic to the cultures of violence from terrorism, how the drama of religion is appropriated to the theater of terror, and how images of martyrdom, satanization, and cosmic war are centralized to religious ideologies”.²¹

Christianity: Christianity has the same theological identity as does Judaism about a savior: The Messiah; the most important source of motivation for Christians. Some of them believe that chaos accelerates the coming of the Messiah and that when he returns to the world, he will provide peace all over the world, as mentioned by Juergensmeyer. There are two sides to Christians. The first side is a selfless love: “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44).²² Another side is an anti-love “do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth: I have come not to bring peace but a sword” (Mt 10:34).²³

Judaism: Jewish violence has religious and political factors. However, Juergensmeyer thinks that much of Jewish violence is based on more political reasons rather than religious ones. He mentions religious factors in the Jewish violence in this sentence; “the perpetrators of Jewish violence have often justified their deeds with pious language—with Jewish theology, historical precedents, and biblical examples.”²⁴

Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Conflict: Juergensmeyer gives historical information about the violence between Hindus and Muslims. He also discusses Buddhist

²¹ Ibid., 219.

²² Ibid., 25.

²³ Ibid., 25.

²⁴ Ibid., 45.

violence in Japan. The number of members in the Sikh movement declined when Hindu nationalism rose in India. According to the Sikh movement, to have weapons and kill anyone is a great sin. However, they have legitimized fighting on religious and moral grounds. There is a moral authority for Sikhs and it declares that fighting for faith and nation is possible. Nonviolence is a doctrine for Buddhists, but some traditional Buddhist teachings permit the killings in Japan.

Islam

Juergensmeyer explains the origin of violence in Islam the chapter ‘Islam’s “Neglected Duty”. In this chapter, he has an interview with Mahmud Abouhalima, regarded as the mind behind the World Trade Center bombings. After the interview, the author proclaims that Muslim activists target America as an enemy because of its secularist ideology. Abouhalima noted that America’s ideology of secularism is not equal to all countries, and that American secularism only supports non-Islamic countries and is against Islam.

Juergensmeyer expresses that the main reason of violence is religion, not only in the Islamic context, but for all religious contexts. He declares that violence and religion appeared at the same time. One's power strengthens the other. Warriors can have sacred missions with religion, so the origin of violence is religion. When he says that religion itself is more at fault for violence than Armstrong does, he too is working with the distinction between the religious and the secular.

In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Cavanaugh analyzes Juergensmeyer’s book depends on the distinction between religious and secular violence.²⁵ Cavanaugh says that

²⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, *The myth of religious violence: Secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 28-36, 226.

Juergensmeyer separates religious violence from secular violence in four ways: “First, religious violence is “almost exclusively symbolic, performed in remarkably dramatic ways.” Second, religious violence is “accompanied by strong claims of moral justification and enduring absolutism, characterized by the intensity of religious activists’ commitment.” Third, cosmic war is “beyond historical control... Fourth and finally, secular conflicts seek conclusion within their participants’ lifetimes, but religious activists will wait for hundreds of years, or even for fulfillment in some transtemporal realm”²⁶ Afterwards, Juergensmeyer made a separation between symbolic and strategic violence. Religious violence has symbols to encourage its followers and warriors and for religious justification, so it is linked with symbolic violence. And since political violence has some strategies to defeat enemies, it connected with strategic violence.

Conclusion

In the first part of Juergensmeyer’s book, he conducts interviews with important perpetrators of violence and connects his findings to the noble origins of violence. In this section, he aids readers in understanding the causes of violence in Christian, Hebrew, and Islamic contexts. In the second section, he illustrates his method in distinguishing religion from secularism and religious violence from political violence. The author explains that Muslims who have war-based perspectives use violence in a way that was considered horrible and thinks that there are both political and religious reasons in the violence. In Islamic contexts, according to Juergensmeyer, violence has religious and political factors. However, much of Islamic violence is connected more to religious reasons over political ones.

The political reasons are that politicians and government leaders want to widen their country’s borders, improve their political and economic power, and extend the boundaries of

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

their states. Each religion has its own god's various promises that may propel them to justify violence or perpetuate it. For example, martyrdom and the promise of heaven in Abrahamic religions, Messiah in Christianity and Judaism, and the Promised Land in Judaism.

When Juergensmeyer explained his theory about religious violence, he assumes a distinction between religious and secular violence. He separates symbolic and strategic violence, and then occasionally combines these two categories as religious/symbolic violence and political/strategic violence.

WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH

William T. Cavanaugh is Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University. He has seven books, including *Torture and Eucharist*, *Migrations of the Holy: Theologies of State and Church*, and *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*. In this study, his book *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* and his theory on religious violence were analyzed in support of the hypothesis that the reasons behind religious violence cannot be solely attributed to religion. While Armstrong and Juergensmeyer begin their studies by assuming a significant distinction between the religious and the secular violence, Cavanaugh argues in *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* that any theory trying to distinguish between religious and secular violence ends up being insufficient in explaining the causes behind violence.

Cavanaugh's book argues that the myth of religious violence is part of Western folklore that forms the basis of Western violence. Religion is not a transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon.²⁷ Religious-secular and religious-political distinctions are modern Western discoveries.²⁸ The book delineates how power is regulated and considered religious or secular in any context.

The book consists of four chapters. Cavanaugh explains the anatomy of myth in the first chapter. He examines arguments of idea that religion is particularly prone to violence

²⁷ Cavanaugh, *The myth of religious violence*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15

from nine scholars. It is important to mention that, in this section, Juergensmeyer is one of these nine thinkers. Cavanaugh discusses, in detail, how Juergensmeyer separates religious violence from political or secular violence. He consequently presents to readers how this distinction breaks down in the process of each nine authors' own analysis including Juergensmeyer.

Cavanaugh also analyzed Juergensmeyer's book *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, explaining that "Despite his comments early in the book about secular nationalism as a religion, the rest of the book treats religious and secular, and religious and political, as binary pairs that are mutually opposed."²⁹ He reveals the inconsistency of Juergensmeyer in his book, while respecting that Juergensmeyer's work is full of interesting experimental studies on the ideology of violent groups and individuals. The arguments of these nine authors are that religion is absolutist, divisive, and irrational. However, the "so-called secular ideologies and institutions like nationalism and liberalism can be just as absolutist, divisive, and irrational as those called religious."³⁰

The second chapter consists of five sections. Cavanaugh shows that religion is not a transhistorical concept in the first section, that it is not a transcultural concept in the third, and that the distinction between religion and the secular state is still a highly controversial distinction in the West in the fourth.

The first part of chapter three, Cavanaugh provides the historical context concerning the emergence of the myth of religious wars in 16th and 17th century Europe. In the second part, he explains that it is false and unimaginable.

In the fourth, and final chapter, Cavanaugh researches the role of the myth of religious violence in the West. He finds that domestic and foreign roles play into this myth. In

²⁹ Ibid., 35.

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

domestic politics, the myth serves to marginalize certain forms of religion-labeled discourse, while encouraging the idea that the nation-state union saves us from the indivisibility of religion. In foreign policy, it is useful to consolidate and justify western attitudes and policies toward the non-western world.³¹ He continues the chapter by drawing attention to Juergensmeyer's argument that religion is the main reason of violence, which Cavanaugh points out as an important component in building opposition between the West and others. In fact, this argument is made not only by the author, but also by anyone who makes the distinction between secularism and religion such as Armstrong. According to Cavanaugh, Juergensmeyer argues that religion is problematic because religion presents the idea of cosmic war.

Islam

According to Cavanaugh, the myth of religious violence allows in the West to eliminate all complaints that the Muslim world might have about U.S. foreign policy. The myth of religious violence is useful for the West because it helps to justify secular violence against religious states, especially Islamic countries. It also helps to promote the idea that secular social orders are naturally peaceful. Therefore, the U.S. is the most peace-loving country. This opinion provides two benefits to the U.S. in foreign policy. First, it legitimizes all action of the U.S against the rest of the world and second, it allows Muslim countries and to be identified as enemies.

Karen Armstrong and Mark Juergensmeyer begin their study by assuming a significant distinction between the religious and secular when they explain the root cause of violence. The main argument of Armstrong's book is that human nature and the nature of states are the main cause of violence. However, William Cavanaugh is in opposition to them,

³¹ Ibid., 183.

and he argues that there is no transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion, and essentialist attempts to separate religious violence from secular violence are inconsistent.

Armstrong defends that the separation of religion from the state reveals that religion is innocent. Secularism, however, brings about its own violence; therefore, there must be an attempt to evaluate and eliminate national and international violence from different angles in the modern era.

According to Juergensmeyer, violence has religious and political factors. However, most of Islamic violence is rooted more in a religious foundation over political reasons. “Religious violence is especially savage and relentless since its perpetrators see it not merely as part of a worldly political battle but as a part of divine conflict.”³²

Cavanaugh explains that any theory trying to distinguish between religious and secular violence ends up being incoherent. This is because there is no essential – that is, transhistorical and transcultural – distinction between religious and secular. Rather, the distinction itself is part of the ideology that legitimates the secular state’s claim to monopolize legitimate violence. This ideological distinction confuses rather than clarifies any search for the cause of violence. As he puts it, “the distinction between secular and religious violence is unhelpful, misleading, and mystifying, and it should be avoided altogether.”³³ Also, this distinction applies particularly well to situations in the modern West. Since many Islamic contexts under discussion by Armstrong and Juergensmeyer are outside of the modern West, projecting this distinction onto them is problematic. It doesn’t accurately reflect the dynamics of violence in those contexts. As a result, the helpfulness of Armstrong and Juergensmeyer are undermined by their reliance on an essential (i.e., transhistorical, transcultural) distinction between the religious and the secular especially secular politics and secular economics which is foreign to many Islamic contexts.

³² Ibid., 199.

³³ Ibid., 56.

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