

in the first five books of the Bible. A more realistic religion than Christianity, Islam recognizes that war is inevitable & sometimes a positive duty.”

The Quran speaks of three grounds when it comes justification of war:

First, fighting in self-defense. “To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are wronged; verily, God is most powerful for their aid; those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, for no cause except that they say “our Lord is God.” (22:39–40).

Second, defending people who cannot defend themselves from oppression and tyranny. “Why should you not fight for the cause of God and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying: Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! Oh, give us from Your presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from Your presence some defender!” (An-Nisaa 4:75).

Third, safeguarding religious freedom by protecting houses of worship, regardless of the faith of the worshippers. “And were it not that God checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure.”(22:40)

The Quran explicitly forbids the expansive use of the right of self-defense to initiate war: “Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loves not aggressors.” (Al-Baqarah 2:190) And Prophet Muhammad (p) established war ethics that strictly preserved non-combatants from the perils of war: “Do not be treacherous. Do not mutilate. Do not kill children.” Abu Bakr, his first successor in the leadership of the Muslim Ummah, ordered his army thus: “Do not betray or be treacherous. Do not mutilate. Do not kill the children, the aged, or the women. Do not cut palm trees or fruitful trees. Do not slay a sheep, a cow, or a camel except for your food. You will come across people who confined themselves to worship in monasteries; leave them alone to what they devoted themselves for.”

Muslims subjugated many nations to the authority of their empire in the past, but they never coerced the people to convert to Islam, despite the fact that Islam is a proselytizing religion. The reason for this religious tolerance is this unequivocal Quranic verse: “Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from falsehood.” (2:256)

In terms of war ethics, and within the traditions of the empires, history puts Muslims on the highest level of nobility and humane treatment of the defeated. In his book *La Civilisation Arabe*, the French historian and sociologist Gustav Le Bon affirmed that **the world had never known a conqueror more merciful than Muslims**.

The interrelatedness of certain religious traditions can lead to points of convergence that increase potential for conflict transformation and peacemaking. There is an abiding connectivity that monotheistic peoples feel toward each other as relatives in an intense but troubled family. We must open a track of peacemaking (parallel to the political one) that focuses on religion, culture, symbolic gestures, moral commitments, and transformation of relationships. **Building peace demands more than political agreements**. It requires an understanding between religions & an ability to address the cultural dimensions of a conflict that has distorted perceptions & bred intolerance. Inter-religious peacemaking has the potential to culturally & spiritually reinforce political peace processes & potentially propel stalled processes forward. For example, the groups might develop a peace treaty that juxtaposes the religious communities’ highest ideals & emphasizes their common cultural, moral, & religious values.

We must explore ways in which religions can move from incrimination and alienation to inclusion, engagement & mutual honor. “Othering” is a general human tendency **not** unique to organized religion. Moreover, destructive patterns of “othering” and incrimination are not necessary concomitants of religion. There is a strong need for religious groups to shift away from radical & violent “othering” and toward pluralism or more benign forms of exclusion. The best way to accomplish this is through “re-mythification.” This means creatively re-reading traditional texts and re-working religious theology to emphasize life & justice & formulate more peaceful forms of “othering.” These new interpretations of a religious tradition can move a community toward a new way of thinking about & relating to their “enemies”. The jolting effect of seeing chief rabbis/sheikhs/priests embracing might generate its own momentum of peacemaking. Religious actors and leaders should **not** be excluded from the sphere of diplomacy. Better than all religious rituals, including prayer, is **making peace** says the Prince of Peace, Muhammad (p). One ignores the religious factor in international relations at one’s peril. Faith (not zealotry, but earnest faith) can alter the spiral of violence.

Earnest Faith = Peace.

Peace is the only battle worth waging

PEACE

IS HOLY... WAR IS NOT

Building peace demands more than political agreements

Historically dismissed by Western policymakers as a divisive influence, **religion in fact has significant potential** for overcoming the obstacles of political peacemaking, that lead to **paralysis & stalemate**. The incorporation of religion as part of the solution to such problems is as simple as it is profound. It is long overdue. Nevertheless, **holy war** is today a main theme in the Western media. The Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity & Islam) have more to say about **holy peace** than **holy war**, and this is what we need to better explore in our religious & political discourse. **Sometimes Just but Never Holy**: The theology of holy war has no place in Islam, and terms like **holy war & war of God** do not appear in any Quranic verses nor in any Prophetic hadith. But the concept of just war was a part of Islamic teaching since its inception. In Islam, God’s grace is **not** to be separated from His justice. The right of self-defense is a self-evident right. Therefore, war in Islam is a means to **establish justice**, but **never a holy act**. We must have more **constructive** approaches to **destructive** conflict.

“BETTER THAN ALL RELIGIOUS RITUALS, INCLUDING PRAYER, IS MAKING PEACE”

THE PRINCE OF PEACE, MUHAMMAD (P)

Religions have the power to bring about a better world for everyone, even where conflict seems the most intractable. Consider the Palestinian & Israeli problem. Elite forms of peacemaking that do **not** embrace the basic needs of average people on all sides are bound to fail. The complete neglect of deeper cultural & religious systems in the peace process is now apparent, as is the role that this neglect has played in the failure of the process.

The religion of Islam recommends dialogue between religions and cultures as a way for solutions and prevention of conflicts. This is because terror and anti-terror will lead in the end to self-annihilation. The religions from the point of view of Islam are ways that give peace a chance because their mission is to urge people to be just and peaceful.

Annihilation at the Order of God: **The roots of holy war are to be found in the Torah** (which constitutes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament) where the Israelites' experience after their Exodus from Egypt was presented in a bloody sacredness. Though the term holy war is not used in the Old Testament, other close terms were used such as “the battles of the Lord” (1 Samuel 25:28) & “the wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14). **Thousands of innocent people were indiscriminately slaughtered** in order to prepare the ground for the Israelites' entry into the Holy Land. These Israelite wars of extermination were not in any sense justifiable self-defense, but an **offensive war** at the order of God — a God Who is presented in the Torah as a warrior: **“The Lord is a warrior”** (Exodus 15:3); and a soldier fighting on behalf of Israel: **“The Lord will fight for you”** (Exodus 14:14).

The idea of God supporting His people in the battlefield is not strange in any of the three Abrahamic faiths, nor is territorial expansion novel in the history of Christianity or Islam. **What makes the Hebrew experience scripturally distinctive in this context is the legitimization of the indiscriminate extermination of whole populations through slaying every human soul in the defeated towns.** The Jews believed they were given a divine order to kill every human being who became an obstacle in their way: “in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, **do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them**—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you” (Deut 20:16-17).

The warrior-God of the Torah warned the Israelites against showing any mercy or pity: “When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations ... then you must **destroy them totally.** Make no treaty with them, and **show them no mercy”** (Deut 7:1-2). This “divine” order was followed to the letter: “At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them – men, women and children. **We left no survivors”** (Deut: 2:34).

Illustrating the texts of the Torah, British scholar Karen Armstrong concluded that “in a Jewish holy war, there was no question of coexistence, mutual respect, or peace treaties...When the Jews had to establish themselves in the Promised Land, ordinary morality ceased to apply.”

From Just War to Holy War: The idea of holy war was not conceivable in Christianity for almost a thousand years because Jesus was pacifist. But the destruction of the Roman Empire pushed Saint Augustine and other Christian theologians to look for scriptural justification for waging war. They developed a concept of just war strikingly similar to that of Islam.

Only a few verses in the New Testament would help a warmonger, such as these verses that make Jesus (p) say: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth; **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”** (Matthew 10:34); **“I have come to bring fire on the earth,** and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49); “Do not think I came to bring peace on earth; No, I tell you, **but division”** (Luke 12:51); “Those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and **kill them in front of me”** (Luke 19:27).

Some non-Christians took these verses as evidence of moral deficiency or logical inconsistency of the message of Jesus (p), but most Christian theologians interpreted these texts metaphorically or understood them as an apocalyptic prediction, not a moral approval of violence. The “sword” and the “fire” in these verses were interpreted as the powerful word of Jesus and his spiritual light. The whole context of the words & deeds of Jesus (p) supports such peaceful interpretations of the war language of the Gospels, though Jesus in his Second Coming will be far from pacifist – at least if we take seriously what some American evangelicals are saying about him today.

The criteria that make a war just in Christian classical theology include just cause, right intention, proportionality, probability of success, and immunity of non-combatants. These are very important principles from the moral & practical perspectives. But Christians did not give much attention to these principles during their Crusades against the Islamic world and the Byzantine Empire in the 12th and 13th centuries, and during their expansion throughout the New World and beyond. The guide to the Western wars since the 12th century is the extermination of Joshua and David, not the theology of Saint Augustine or Thomas Aquinas.

The Gospel of Jesus was not helpful to justify the new wars of extermination, but Christians found what they needed in the Old Testament (which constitutes about 75% of the Christian holy book). The initiators of the Crusades, such as Pope Urban II and Pope Innocent III, used the Old Testament more than the New Testament Gospels as a reference to justify their call for crusading – a call that led to two centuries of atrocities against the Muslims of Palestine; brought suffering to Jews, Syrian Christians, Byzantines; and devastated the Cathars of southern France who were seen as heretics. Needless to say that the barbarity of these 12th- and 13th-century Crusades left a deep wound that has ever since poisoned relations between the Islamic world and the West.

Armstrong sees Islam as a middle way between the pacifism of Jesus & the annihilation of Joshua. Rejecting a common misconception in the West, Armstrong affirms that “Islam does not justify a total aggressive war of extermination, as the Torah does

Why should you **Not** fight for the cause of God (An-Nisaa 4:75)
& of the feeble among men & women & children who are crying

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