

World Religions and Norms of War

Edited by

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Introduction

Vesselin Popovski

War is a rational choice, but there is always a desire from all sides to look for a certain ideology behind the rationality of war – to couple the pragmatism of decisions with various beliefs, principles or dogmas. With the end of the East–West ideological confrontation, attempts have been made to review the sources and nature of conflicts. Samuel Huntington first proposed the idea of a “clash of civilizations”,¹ arguing that, with the demise of Communism and the end of the Cold War, conflicts will emerge along the dividing lines of national, ethnic or religious groups, in effect bringing religion back as an ideological *causa belli*. Inter-religious or “holy” wars existed for centuries before Huntington. Scholars debated whether the Crusades were about religious supremacy, or whether the “holy” warriors used – or, rather, abused – the name of God for material interests, such as grabbing foreign land.² Some challenged Huntington for simplifying the causes of conflicts, and argued that civilizational identities are not necessarily solid foundations, that there could be official and unofficial, orthodox and unorthodox civilizations.³

Today, more people in more countries exercise individual freedom of expression and decide independently whether to identify themselves through ethnic or religious characteristics or to resist predetermined affiliations.⁴ Yet many violent conflicts – Kashmir, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Darfur and Iraq – have been presented as inter-religious conflicts, and have generated discussions about how religious traditions would justify wars between states, and rebellions within states. Recent terrorist attacks, carried out all over the world – in

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Moscow, New York, Colombo, Bali, Madrid, Istanbul, London, Mumbai and Algiers, among others – by organizations claiming religious motivations, have raised further questions about religious attitudes to violence. To understand how religion and violence are connected, one must look at the original religious texts and at the subsequent teachings and interpretations within religious traditions. A fresh analysis of when and how world religions justify the use of force is necessary in order to avoid oversimplification in the explanation of recent conflicts, terrorism, asymmetric warfare, genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The importance of examining such issues arises from the fact that religions continue to be the foundations of human civilization – the central anchors of human consciousness, motivation and behaviour.

This book results from a joint research project conducted by the United Nations University (UNU) in Tokyo and the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO). It brings together theologians and historians with in-depth knowledge of religious traditions, who were approached and asked to research and write original chapters on how the world religious traditions address specifically the issues of justification of war (*jus ad bellum*) and methods of warfare (*jus in belli*). Many books on religion and war have been written by Western authors. A distinct feature of this book project is that it assembles scholars with deep roots in each tradition. We consciously aimed to create more direct access to the internal debates within the traditions and channel these debates towards *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* considerations. Our book is dedicated both to exploring the historical roots and interpretations of all the major traditions and to linking them to the challenges of modern warfare. An essential virtue of this book is that all the authors have profound expertise in their religions and they are both intellectually and emotionally engaged in the debates.

The book reflects on many historical texts and demonstrates how the world religions distinguish between offensive and defensive war, how they address principles such as necessity, proportionality, right cause and right purpose, and discrimination between combatants and non-combatants. The book avoids judgements; it does not apply labels such as “right” or “wrong”, and it is not interested in generalizations about whether the modern world can be characterized as a “clash” or as an “alliance” of civilizations. The authors focus on each religion separately and avoid confrontational comparisons. Readers can obviously find similarities and analogies that manifest certain harmonies between the religious and ethical perspectives and also the distinctive features of particular religions, demonstrating their diversity. The book does not aim to classify which religion is more permissive or more prohibitive towards the resort to force, but rather aims to look at the variety of sources and interpreta-

tions of just causes and permissible instruments of warfare. Another challenge is that the chapters explore hundreds, and even thousands, of years of the evolution of each tradition, at various times subjected to splits and unifications, progressions and regressions. Sunni and Shia Islam; Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christianity; Theravada Buddhism; Japanese religion; and Hinduism all have historical connections and disconnections, dialogues and antagonisms. The authors re-emphasize both the pacifist and the belligerent messages of the religions, detailing various interpretations and misinterpretations, uncertainties and deliberate abuses of religious texts made for policy-driven purposes.

In addition to this comprehensive historical outlook, this book intends to illustrate how religions respond to modern developments – the creation of international regimes and organizations (such as the United Nations) – as well as to assess recent armed escalations (such as that in Lebanon in August 2006). As the chapters unfold, the realities of origin and interpretation, fairness and injustice, legitimacy and illegitimacy, among others, surface and lend reason to rethink the intertwined nature of religions and norms of war, to demonstrate and analyse how religious teachings engage in norm-making. Looking at the norms of war from the perspective of religious literature helps to understand modern threats to peace and security and the responses to these threats, including – *in extremis* – the use of military force. To summarize, the main objective of this book is to present the evolution of the norms of war in the world religions.

The order of the chapters is sequenced chronologically. The first religion to be featured is Hinduism, as its extant writings reach further back in time than the other traditions. The book then reflects the fact that Buddhism developed from Hinduism, and Christianity and Islam from Abraham/Judaism. To maintain this chronological approach strictly, one would have included Judaism second after Hinduism, but the order chosen also attempts to group together the religions of the same broad family: Hindu–Buddhist, Judaeo-Christian, and Islamic.

Kaushik Roy's chapter analyses the role of Hinduism in shaping the ethics and dynamics of organized violence in India and presents the Hindu religion as a key factor in the evolution of Indian military strategies. He examines the ambivalent relationship between religion and violence, arguing that, in comparison with the Western world's attempts to secularize warfare, religion is crucial in the understanding of the nature of warfare in many parts of Asia, where violence remains the moral essence of the warrior. His analysis challenges the view that Hinduism is a genuinely pacifist religion, showing that the rejection of warfare is only a marginal and comparatively recent trend, whereas the realist view of war has been highly respected for centuries. Apart from Gandhi, none of the

major Hindu theorists spoke about non-violent resistance. Roy demonstrates that, in fact, in Hinduism the norms of war, not pacifism, have historically introduced humane principles, reducing the lethality of war and moderating the effect of warfare on non-combatants. The chapter is a model demonstration of how historical analysis can help to understand modern political options, and concludes that even today the Indian ruling elite's consciousness continues to be shaped by traditional philosophies. It is the Hindu religious texts, rather than the teachings of Hindu priests, that have influenced warfare.

Mahinda Deegalle's chapter offers a valuable comparative study of the teachings of Buddha, the Theravada traditions and those of their Mahayana alternative. It addresses the contradiction of being Buddhist and engaging in war, asking crucial questions such as: Can Buddhism justify a war? Can Buddhists join an army? If so, what happens to their Buddhist identity? How can states with a majority Buddhist population manage war situations? What is the role of Buddhism in such situations? Deegalle reveals the various sources of Buddhist traditions, and naturally focuses on identifying the conceptualization of war and the use of force in the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka, a country still ravaged by violence. The chapter offers additional value and relevance in understanding the contemporary conflict by asking whether violence is justified to protect the state. Deegalle explores both historical and contemporary interpretations and demonstrates how, both in theory and in practice, war is largely incompatible with Buddhist teachings and the Buddhist way of life, and how therefore the war in Sri Lanka is an enormous challenge to the way fundamental Buddhist teachings and practices have been developed and communicated.

Robert Kisala's chapter explores the influence of the Buddhist and Shinto traditions on war and peace in the context of Japanese history. Insofar as prior to the twentieth century Japan was involved in very few international armed conflicts, the most important influence on the pre-modern Japanese concept of peace was the experience of internal conflict and internal social order. The situation changed at the end of the Tokugawa era, when universal conscription was introduced by the Meiji regime and a national army created. Japan went to war with China in 1894 over spheres of influence, gained Taiwan as a colony, later fought Russia and was granted privileges and control of Manchuria. With the annexation of Korea in 1910 and by allying itself with European forces fighting Germany in World War I, Japan was able to expand its territorial control. It was in this context that Western pacifist and "just war" ideas entered the intellectual and public discourse in Japan, assisted largely by the activities of several Christian missionaries. Kisala shows how the defeat in World War II, the postwar occupation and, especially, the destruc-

tive use of atomic weapons have shaped Japanese attitudes towards “pacifism”, in particular the presumption against the use of force and the renunciation of war in Article 9 of the Constitution. Along with pacifism, Kisala identifies a second characteristic of the Japanese religious concept of war and peace and calls it “civilizational morality” – a unique Japanese concept with a dual emphasis on individual moral cultivation and, at times, an oppositional schema derived from a sense of cultural superiority. The idea of “civilization” emphasizes the active pursuit of individual moral edification, leading to a refined, civilized state of the being. It can lead to a conceptual distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized” regions, which in turn can result in a cultural mission aimed at spreading the benefits of “civilization” as they are enjoyed in one’s own region. Kisala finds commonality between Japanese and Western usage of the “civilizational” mission to justify, or at least inspire, military and colonial conquest.

The book then turns to the three Abrahamic monotheistic traditions: a chapter on Judaism by Jack Bemporad; three chapters on Christianity – Gregory Reichberg’s on Catholicism, Yuri Stoyanov’s on the Orthodox tradition and Valerie Morkevicius’ on Protestantism; and two chapters on Shia and Sunni Islam, respectively by Davood Feirahi and Amira Sonbol. Again, the order of these chapters follows the historical chronology, starting with the oldest tradition and finishing with the youngest.

Jack Bemporad recognizes that the Jewish tradition does not operate explicitly with the just war categories of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, but shows how many discussions in biblical and rabbinical sources engage in very similar considerations. One can categorize certain Jewish statements as contributing to right reasons for going to war and the right conduct of war. What is significantly different between these principles in Judaism and just war theory is the Jewish belief that war is not a natural condition and that universal peace can be a reality. The biblical and rabbinical sources are concerned with peace more than with war, even if the Old Testament contains stories of brutal mass slaying. Bemporad, similarly to the other authors, makes a brilliant cross-century historical voyage, arriving at the current state of affairs. He argues that Israel as a Jewish state cannot forsake the task of explaining its existence and behaviour in terms of Jewish tradition and heritage, and thereby in universal ethical categories. If Israel were a secular nation-state, it would respond in terms of realpolitik and ethics would apply secondarily, if at all. The dilemma becomes complicated with the issue of asymmetric war and with the post-Holocaust imperative of survival. Asymmetric warfare evolved gradually and the rift between political and religious factors deepened. The concepts of restraint and purity of arms, developed in the 1930s by what later became the State of Israel, were constantly under

review, and the protection of enemy non-combatants in modern warfare has increasingly been called into question, owing to weapons of mass destruction, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and suicide bombing. Also important in the historical heritage is that many Holocaust survivors witnessed how millions of Jews, predominantly non-combatants, were marked for total extermination. The inhuman Nazi ideology – which not many could predict at the time – led to real and duly implemented genocidal policies, which the League of Nations and governments could not stop. As a result, Israel still lives with a “siege mentality” and the great challenge, as Bemporad ascertains, is how to preserve the original Jewish ethics when it comes to modern methods of warfare.

Gregory Reichberg presents the ethics of war in Catholic Christianity, where the substantive origins of the just war theory can be found. Reichberg describes four approaches – pacifism, just war, perpetual peace and regular war – and comprehensively analyses the changing tendencies and dynamics in different historical contexts over the centuries. He demonstrates that these four approaches have not developed in isolation and that various elements of them have frequently been integrated into the outlook of the same Catholic thinkers. This interconnectedness accounts for much of the complexity and richness of the just war theory within the tradition, adding an important element of right authority into the right causes and aims of war. Reichberg also shows how early Catholic convictions – such as those of Ambrose and Augustine – that war could be waged only for the maintenance of a just peace gradually developed into a main normative concept against which any resort to war was to be measured. As a result, motives of personal gain, power, territorial aggrandizement and economic reasons were explicitly excluded from the list of justifiable causes of war. Despite the richness of the early teachings, the actual just war theory did not arise until many centuries later, when the canon lawyers such as Gratian sought to organize early texts on war and violence – passages from the Bible, statements by Augustine, enunciations of church councils, formulations from ancient Roman law – into an articulated doctrine. Focusing on *jus ad bellum*, the chapter is comprehensive in both scope and time, exploring developments of the Catholic tradition up to the present day, discussing the role of the just war in shaping the prohibition on the use of force in the League of Nations and in the UN Charter, and examining recent messages from the Vatican, citing papal references to the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo.

Yuri Stoyanov’s chapter undertakes a huge, almost impossible, task – to analyse attitudes of the Eastern Orthodox Church toward the use of armed force and methods of warfare. Most texts have remained unpublished or untranslated into English, but even those published have not received anything like the same degree of scholarly attention as parallel

developments in Catholicism and Protestantism. Accordingly, this is an original and impressive chapter, assessing and bringing into the public knowledge many texts that have been largely unknown until now. The comprehensive historico-academic journey is structured, similarly to the previous two chapters, through the trichotomy of pacifism, just war and crusade as the main characteristics of Christian attitudes to warfare. Stoyanov discovers that the formation of religious-national ideologies in Orthodox Eastern Europe has led to the emergence of what can be defined as elements of crusading along with the traditional presence of pacifism and just war. The historically prevalent pacifist Eastern Orthodox stance has recently been categorically reiterated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and a number of senior Orthodox ecclesiasts. Stoyanov makes some other significant findings – for example, that the 2000 Jubilee Council of Russian Bishops’ Statement of Faith advances a rare exposition of a systematic Orthodox just war tradition. Although the Statement begins with an explicit emphasis on the Orthodox view of war as unconditionally evil, caused by hatred and human abuse of God-given freedom, it also identifies the cases in which war may be necessary, such as self-defence, defence of neighbours and “restoration of trampled justice”. It alludes to cases in which national saints and churchmen have blessed defensive wars against invaders. To justify the resort to war in these instances, the Statement reproduces episodes of the church’s high respect for the Christian virtues of soldiers who follow the precepts of a just war, and rewards them by canonizing them as saints. It also uses scriptural references to characterize the Orthodox teachings of *jus in bello* norms – a topic that was largely ignored in earlier Eastern Orthodox texts and speculations on justifiable warfare. Stoyanov also provides an in-depth exposition of the Orthodox concepts of peace, with the Russian Church’s commitment to peace-making and its dedication to opposing propaganda of war and violence. He shows that the military conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East have compelled Orthodox clerical circles as well as theologians and historians to address the moral problems related to the justification of modern warfare more systematically. In a public statement from 1991 in relation to the first Gulf War, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America declared that just war theory does not reflect the Orthodox theological tradition, which maintains that war can never be theologically justified. Accordingly, questions have been asked whether Western Christian-style just war systems can really be appropriate for the Orthodox Church. Stoyanov concludes that modern Orthodox thought can certainly draw on a rich heritage of theological and ethical views to stimulate such reconceptions.

Valerie Morkevicius’ chapter follows naturally by describing how the

Protestant Christian tradition has contributed to the development of the norms of war. Morkevicius analyses five broad groups of historical origin: Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Evangelical and Anabaptist. The first three and their successor churches, she affirms, uphold a traditional view of just war theory inherited from their Catholic predecessors. Morkevicius argues that these Protestant groups elevated the just war theory to an even higher position than under the Catholic tradition. It is important to note that within each of these divisions there are numerous independent groups, which in terms of practice may differ greatly and may not even recognize each other as members of the same family. Denominations associated with the first three traditions – Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans, as well as their daughter churches – have often been the main state churches or the most dominant forces within their societies. Evangelicals – a very loose grouping of denominations and sects – also often locate their historical roots in one or more of these three traditions. For this reason, their beliefs about war are as highly varied as their origins. The Anabaptists, with a few exceptions, primarily consist of denominations known as “peace churches”, which uphold a pacifist doctrine. Morkevicius examines the evolution of three dominant approaches within Protestantism: pacifism, realism (or crusading) and just war. Of these three, she maintains that the just war approach has received the most attention. One explanation could be that the denominations that follow the just war approach have been more dominant in political, social and demographic terms, and more connected to the power of kings, emperors and colonizers.

Last, but not least, the two chapters on Islam by Davood Feirahi and Amira Sonbol present the views of Shia and Sunni Islam as a culmination of the monotheist Abrahamic traditions. Over many centuries, Islamic communities have developed norms and traditions pertaining to war and peace that can generally be referred to as Islamic ethics of war. The Qur’an and Hadith literature, the jurisprudence, politics and decisions necessitated by historical events, and the theological interpretations of war made by religious and political leaders have all contributed to Islamic war ethics.

Davood Feirahi offers a detailed assessment of the concept of *jihad* in the traditional Shiite jurisprudence, in which “offensive” war may be waged only at the command of an infallible (twelfth) Imam. The view that jihad cannot be conducted in the absence of instruction by an infallible Imam is in effect a prohibition on, or at least a suspension of, offensive warfare. In contrast, “defensive” jihad is permitted: if Muslims are attacked by an enemy or if the religion and lives of Muslims are in danger, the defensive war is a religious duty even under an unjust ruler. Feirahi outlines the various levels of self-defence in Shiite Islam, starting with

non-violent opposition; then requesting help from others; and, if these are unsuccessful, the use of coercive sanctions, from simple, to more sophisticated, to confronting the enemy. These strategies aim to stop the aggression but, if the aggressor does not withdraw, then he, free or slave, Muslim or unbeliever, deserves death. The defenders shall be considered martyrs if they are killed in the process. These norms are valid only if the aggressor does not flee or cease fighting. If the aggressor stops and withdraws, any further harm should be avoided or compensated. This is in effect the genesis of the norm of protection of surrendered soldiers and prisoners of war. Feirahi also presents other norms of *jus in bello*: the prohibition on “cursing an enemy”, and on the use of terror or deceit in warfare. Traditional Islam can be seen as the developer of the modern prohibition on weapons of mass destruction – it introduced the prohibition on poisoning water or the air. Even during defensive war, any use of weapons other than those absolutely vital is not permitted; if heavy weapons are used when there is no need, Islam demands punishment of the user.

Amira Sonbol undertakes a comprehensive overview of Islamic teachings on war with a special focus on the Sunni tradition. She argues that, notwithstanding the widespread belief among Muslims that key Sharia norms of war derive directly from the teaching of Prophet Muhammad, Islamic ethics have evolved significantly over 14 centuries of history since then. Even today, Islam continues to evolve in different directions. Sonbol makes the challenging argument that various groups, including the most radical, find fertile ground for their advancement by following the Islamic belief in an unchanging and absolutist framework for righteous war. She explains how deconstructing the discursive history of the ethics of just war in Islam is one way of illustrating the contradictions between what Islam is purported to say and how various political groups interpret Islam and act accordingly. Islam incorporates basic principles common among major religions, such as the protection of civilian life, respect for human dignity and opposition to aggression, from earlier traditions. Protecting human life is the first command of the Qur’an and the first lesson taught to Muslims; life is a valuable gift from God. A close second is protecting the vulnerable and the helpless; the Qur’an and Hadith demand that warriors feed orphans, take care of wayfarers, and protect them in every possible way. Sunni Islam also demands special care for the elderly, women, children and the disabled – in effect, all vulnerable people who may suffer during war. Among the latter group would also be non-Muslims who do not participate in war. The wounded among enemy warriors also fall within the category of the helpless; extending medical service to them, even if they previously participated in battle, is an essential part of Islamic war ethics and fits with its ultimate purpose of protecting

life. Sunni Islam also advocates the fair treatment of prisoners who are unarmed and therefore rendered helpless. All these Islamic protections represent the source and the model for the later codification and development of international humanitarian law in the Hague and Geneva Conventions. In the same vein, the poisoning of water-wells is strongly forbidden in Sunni Islam, as is the poisoning of food supplies and the destruction of homes, animals or agriculture as methods of war. Also forbidden are outright massacres and punitive punishment meted out to the kin and tribes of enemies. Even a punitive war, or a war to take back what has been usurped, must be limited as precisely as possible and directed at the enemy who waged war against a peaceful community. Sonbol's assessment helps to orient and explain many contemporary issues, including the fact that Islam has nothing to do with al-Qaeda's pretences.

The book essentially documents how the world religions have developed various norms of war, but all the chapters, in addition to addressing this main task, maintain their own choice of historical texts, issues and specific focuses and can be read as independent individual assessments. Religions have often been ignored or reduced to stereotypes by social scientists and military strategists, who prefer to look at war as a rational, pragmatic exercise. This book comes as a necessary correction. It shows the richness of the cultural and religious parameters of war and argues that both the mind and the heart, both reason and emotion, are instrumental elements of when and how to fight.

Notes

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
2. Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. London: Allen Lane, 2006.
3. For example, Edward W. Said, "The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations", lecture delivered at the University of Massachusetts, 1998. Said advocated an alliance of civilizations and a coexistence of differences.
4. See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Issues of Our Time. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

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"Among the book's many virtues is that it does not treat the dominant religions as monolithic, . . . revealing harmonies and differences not only between but within different religions."

– **Dr. Jeff McMahan, Professor of Philosophy, Rutgers University**

"All great religions hold life to be sacred; all profess peace, yet few are absolutely pacifist. . . . [This book] offers a nuanced and illuminating, not to say politically much needed, antidote to simplistic and self-fulfilling commentary on the clash of civilizations."

– **Prof. Ramesh Thakur, Director, Balsillie School of International Affairs**

"This book is both timely and timeless: timely because of the surge of interest in the subject of religion and war, and timeless because it covers millennia of evolving human thought and principles."

– **Dr. Walter Dorn, Professor, Royal Military College of Canada**

"This extraordinary volume should speak to those who are fed up with the use of religion to fuel conflicts. . . . [It] is especially propitious at this moment when the global hegemon seems to be signalling a potential policy shift from a 'clash of civilizations' to a 'dialogue among civilizations'."

– **Dr. W. Andy Knight, Professor of International Relations, University of Alberta**

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