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Book Do Not Kill, the Readers Do So: Reflections on the Violence-Breeding Employment of Christianity

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Abstract

This essay offers an overview of the phenomenon of violence in today's public squares from a Christian perspective. It tries to anatomize the link that connects religiosity with violence and whether the latter is the by-product of the former at every case or not. It demonstrates that studying violence from a Christian perspective avoids approaching the religion-violence relation from either 'all organized violence is religiously inspired' or 'religion is entirely benevolent' one-sided position. The essay, then, proposes that there are considerably factual situations of secularly, politically, culturally and socially rooted violence that generates its own version of religious explanation and manifestation to implement in the service of its legitimization and longevity and for the sake of endowing its existence with necessity and significance.

Keywords: Phenomenon of Violence, Christian Perspective, Legitimization, and longevity.

Introduction

Modern scholarship believes that 'Violence' plays a primary role in human societies, even the nes that are deemed 'civilized and progressive (Ellul, 1969).' This is why violence is today studied extensively as something with multifaceted dimensions related to human life and relational networks, e.g. gender relations (against women), children's and youths' rights (domestic violence), LGBT's rights, civil and reforming institutions, human cultural and anthropological perceptions, etc (Lee & Stanko, 2002). In recent years, nonetheless, the study of violence exceeded the boundaries of reasoning in the areas of social sciences, human rights, and criminology. It became a study subject for ecologists and geneticists as well. Some ecologists and geneticists in the Western academic world relate recently that chasing after the roots and nature of human violence is still as central and heatedly controversial area of study in their own domain as it was when violence started to gain intellectual attention back in 1651, when Thomas Hobbs published his famous book, *Leviathan*, on the relation of violence to cultural and social existence, and when he articulated his famous statement 'the human is a *violent animal*' (inspired by Aristotle's saying that 'the human is a political animal') (Gomez et al., 2016).

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Today's academia frankly treats violence as a multifaceted and multi-originated phenomenon. Ecologists and the scholars who study human evolution equally emphasize that the components of human violence are supra-behavioral in extent. It is evenly the outcome of "the complex interactions between ecological, social, behavioral, and genetic factors." Therefore, studying it needs a thorough phylogenetic approach that probes the evolutionary process of violence existence within *Homo Sapiens* and other mammals alike (Gomez et al., 2016). There is a dire level of violence that is hereditary within the human beings, and it is something believed to have evolved "as our history has progressed mostly associated with changes in the socio-political organization of human populations (Gomez et al., 2016)." This suggests to ecologists that culture can modulate the evolution of violence in human populations. Therefore, one can plausibly conclude that if a cultural setting was also religious in textile, or rooted in religiously shaped and subsisted civilizational context (like the West's rootedness in Judeo-Christian heritage, and the Arab World's rootedness in a Muslim one), then the phylogenetic progress and evolution of violence in these settings must also be influenced by this context's religious identity.

It is this specific relatedness of violence to the religious self-perception of human societies that this essay directly focuses on. The essay reflects on the relation between violence and religiosity from the specific perspective of the relation of violence to the Christian manifestations of human religiosity and belief-system. The essay pays attention to the violence-Christian religiosity equation inspired by an interest growing in the recent intellectual circles of reasoning on religious thought. In Today's disturbed world, the interest in religion-violence correlation has intensified research "into the ways that people operating within the horizons of one religious tradition or another have historically derived – and continue to derive – prescriptions for and models of 'legitimate' violence from authoritative texts, practices and institutions (Boustan et al., 2010)." Researches on the role of religiosity in the existence of violence in today's Christian religiosity reflect before us the generally observed fact that "the number of extremist religious movements of all types around the world tripled from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s," and that "in the period from 1970 to 1995, religious groups accounted for over half of the total acts of world terrorism," and all this, as one notices, is before even 9/11 (Eller, 2007). No wonder that the old charge against monotheistic religions of causing violent conflicts is occupying the international intellectual stage today, (Palaver, 2008) and it applies, as we will see, to some forms of global Christianity as well. Be that as it may, it is significant for the understanding of violence in the context of the Christian religious imagination to touch upon the following inquiries: How is Christian religiosity related to violence? How does Christianity approach human violence? Is Christianity, and other religions for that matter, by default expressive of that human disposition to violence, or is this religiosity expressive of a discourse that was developed in Christian history for ultimately withstanding this human disposition to violence and taming the Christians propensity to it?

Theses inquiries pose themselves before us as essential and highly relevant to today's reasoning on Christian religiosity, as the 21st century conspicuously witnesses a terrifying internationalization of violent hatred and enmity behaviors and terrorism in the name of (false or genuine) affiliation to and abidance with religious teachings and beliefs. Violence

today seems to be primarily manifested in the behaviors and conducts of religiously committed and staunchly adherent individuals, Christians definitely included. Has this violence to do with these Christian individuals' mere generically mammal and genetically hereditary nature; or has it to do with these Christians' religiosity and belief convictions, first and foremost?

In this essay, I touch upon violence in relation to Christian religious imagination, and I do this from the particular experience of the Christians. What I present is not a comprehensive study of the Christian discourse on, or against, violence. I rather display some focused reflections on violence in conversation with some Christian theological voices. I touch first upon some images of violence in the Christian religious scripture, the Bible. I then visit briefly the history of reading and interpreting the Bible in Christianity. I then present an analysis of the roots and ramifications of violence in relation to religiosity today; before I finally end the essay with some conclusions on violence-religion relation that one can glean from the exposed aspects and points in the previous sections.

I would like to clarify that, in my essay, I simply use interpretive literature and do not engage directly the primary Biblical or scriptural texts in any exegetical manner because my paper is not about Violence in the Bible or the Christian Scripture. It is rather on how readers of the text, from different historical and contextual settings, use it in conjuring specific religious interpretations that originates violence and that are violent in their orientations. The essay is not on the 'Religious Books', but on their *readers*. This is why the essay is titled 'Books do not Kill, those Who Read them Do So.' This wants to articulate its focus on 'those who read them.' Be that as it may, the essay naturally addresses the interpretative literature, old and new, antique and modern, in order to see how such reading interpretations are the source of violence.

Violence and Christian Scripture

Considerable number of Christian biblical scholars and hermeneutists do concede today that it would be not only biasedly partial, but also scholarly highly questionable, to allege that, opposite to the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam, Christianity is a purely peaceful religion and its religious teaching, scriptural, dogmatic and ecclesial alike, circles fully around peace, love and hope and contains no stain of aggressiveness or violent tendencies therein. Such a self-righteousness stance can sometimes be still encountered at some interreligious dialogue occasions, where Christians may like to emphasis a contradistinction between their Holy Scripture and the Muslim Qur'ān or the Hebrew Bible. They do this upon a claimed conviction that, while the Qur'ān and the Hebrew Scripture include numerous evident *sūras* and books that depict a violent, merciless and vengeful deity or invite for war, killing in the name of God, *jihād* and confrontation with the different other, the Christian Holy Scripture includes but only teachings that depict peaceful and forgiving deity and calls for acceptance and love toward the entire world. In the Arab Middle-Eastern context, this essentializing 'black-vs-white' discourse is also practiced within the local Christian churches in relation to a contradistinction they presume between the Old Testament and the New Testament (in a clear invocation of a 2nd century Marcionite trend), that is as similar in its sharpness as the contradistinction they also preconceive between the Christian text and the Muslim one.

Against the abovementioned orientation, many Christian scholars today ask: Is this conventional tendency really accurate? Is the Christian Scripture truly violence-free? Biblical and historical Christian scholars do engage with these questions critically, and their answers are far from either 'fully a book of violence' or 'fully a book of anti-violence'. The Christian scriptural attestations and their studies are much more sophisticated and multileveled than 'yes-or-no' simplistic stereotypical stance.

In October 2007, a group of scholars held a conference at the University of Minnesota on the subject of violence and its presence in early Jewish and Christian texts. The anthological volume of this conference was published by Brill in 2010 under the title, *Violence, Scripture and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*. In their contributions, the conference's participants departed from a rather praiseworthy principal attempt at seriously deconstructing a general Western (but also Eastern, I believe) Christian tendency to view violence in Christianity's historical narrative in a purely positive, facile and triumphalist perspective as traces of blessed and sanctified martyrdom or desperate actions in the service of faith. They all conceded that such an idealization and glorification tendency may actually be a sign of a bias legitimization of violence upon the questionable folk conjecture that it is "undertaken on behalf of the 'right' religion (Boustan et al., 2010)."

The essays of this volume demonstrate critically, textually, historically and contextually that, by carefully and objectively reading the Bible, one can inescapably find expressions, images, incidents and cases of violence throughout the pages of the New Testament. For example, in Matthew 10:21; 34-37 and Luke 12:51-53, Jesus Christ speaks on the end-of-days' manifestation in terms of a time when children will militate against their parents and even put them to death (Boustan et al., 2010); the book of Revelation 9:15 declares the annihilation of third of the World's inhabitants (Boustan et al., 2010). Also, many martial, offending rhetorical expressions are detectible in the letters of the Apostle Paul and the highly theological text of the Gospel of John, where one can read narratives on violence associated with Jesus himself, like his reaction to the merchants in the temple (Boustan et al., 2010).

During the very first years of the formation of the group of the followers of Jesus Christ after his death and absence, serious clashes and conflicts occurred among the Christians themselves. One of the oldest clashes took place over the authenticity of the apostleship of some of the second- or third-generations of disciples. One of these clashes over apostleship that are recorded in the New Testament is between the apostle Paul and those Christians in the city of Corinth who doubted the authenticity of his apostleship and his teaching on Christ's Gospel. One can read about this clash in 2. Corinthians 10:1-13:10. In his study of this text, the contemporary scholar Calvin J. Roetzel deems it an example of the scriptural attestation of religious violence in the very early history of Christianity. Paul the apostle gets exposed from the church of Corinth to a humiliating and aggressive attack "on his apostolic legitimacy, honesty, steadfastness, sincerity, adequacy, rhetorical sufficiency and bodily presence (Roetzel, 2010)." Reacting to this verbal violence, Paul concocts a counter-, no less violent, verbal attack to defend himself and advocate for his own apostleship and teaching on the Gospel. He uses in his written response a blunt militaristic and aggressive symbols and expressions that are as savage and ugly, Roetzel opines, as the

ones of his gainsayers (Roetzel, 2010). Roetzel suggests that a perceptive and accurate reading of Paul's language in 2. Corinthians 10:1-6 cannot but disagree with those who try to fudge and downplay "the anger and hurt embedded in the bellicose out-burst [of Paul in this text] (Roetzel, 2010)." Roetzel finds in the language of Paul's response to his aggressors and scolders an example of how language can turn sometimes into "a prison wall that implies a larger system of threat and coercion," and mirrors some elements of violence that can be permeating the structure of the words and terms that are used by someone at specific occasions (Roetzel, 2010).

Roetzel validly relates that one must not here conclude that language *per se* is inherently violent in its own aspects, and then opines that Paul's usage of this language with its inherent violent structure exempts him personally from any accountability of the negative implications and coercive and intimidating impact of what he wrote. Language as such must not be blamed for the violence conveyed through it. As Hanna Arndt accurately reminded us once, language can also be a means of liberation and construction; can be an instrument of positive persuasion and consent (Arendt, 1970). One should rather never undermine the fact that the same language becomes an instrument of violence when it is used to transmit the aggressiveness and conflictive intentions of its user. This, according to Roetzel (2010), applies to Paul's language in his Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul believes himself to be a legitimate disciple and agent in Jesus Christ's service. He believes that his discipleship to Jesus entitles him to claim "the authority to threaten, scold, shame and utter divine curses and judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus (1. Cor. 5:1-5, 16:22; Gal. 1:18, 9) (Roetzel, 2010)." Paul even uses this violent language not to rebuke strangers or non-Christians, but rather to brutally menace the Christians whom he personally converted into faith in Christ and helped them to create their church community. Some scholars go as far as deeming this a deliberate action which Paul exerts on the righteous on the basis of his belief that "violence and suffering serve as markers of authentic apostleship… the closer the apostle himself comes to violent death, the more his message reflected this fervent conviction (Gager & Gibson, 2005)." We have here a biblical attestation of a Christian apostle using clearly violent language "to hurt, to silence [counter-speech] and to eliminate opposition. It allows for no compromise or negotiation (Roetzel, 2010)." Convinced about the necessity of reading Paul and any other biblical figure in his own time and place, many Christian scholars do concede today with Roetzel (2010) that Paul depicts an image of his historical background as originally a religiously zealot Jew who started his own life as a persecutor before he became later an apostle. They consider Paul's background as a base for viewing him as a complicit figure in the cycle of violence that one can detect at the heart of the historical sacred story of every religion, including Judaism and Christianity (Gager & Gibson, 2005). Scholars do not anymore wonder that Paul considers the ultimate proof of authentic apostleship manifested in the horribly violent experience of the crucifixion and no else (Gager & Gibson, 2005).

If the previous is a sample of verbal violence in the Christian Scripture, one can also find other scriptural textual examples that illustrate cases of religious violence in terms of *action* as well. One of the most intriguing textual examples of violent actions in the Christian Scripture exists in the Gospel of John. In some Christian traditional circles, the Gospel of John used always to be read as 'the Gospel of love'. Verses on Jesus's commandment to his

disciples to love each other in John 13:34-35 and John 15:9-12, for instance, has been construed fully definitive of this Gospel's core-message. This notwithstanding, Christian scholars today do exceed this conventional read and pay equal attention to other violence-expressing verses in the same Gospel, like John 2:19; 3:19; 8:24, 44, etc (Reinhartz, 2005). Scholars are trying today to go beyond 'only-love' reading of John's Gospel into an endeavor to unpack the historical background behind it, rather, grammar and imagery of violence that underpin its 'love-and-harshness' expressions and language in some chapters (Reinhartz, 2005).

One of the most intriguing aspects in the Gospel of John is its depiction of violence activity associated with no other than Jesus Christ himself. This is seen in particular in story of Jesus's clash with the merchants and money changers in the temple, in John 2: 13-16. The story in John states that Jesus once enters the temple and sees all kind of trade, business and merchantilic affairs taking place inside its courtyard. This enrages him deeply, so he devises a whip and uses it to attack the money changers and merchants, to overturn their counters and goods and to kick them out of the temple, verbally accusing them and the clerics of turning the house of his heavenly Father into a din of thieves.

The story of Jesus's rage in the temple is not restricted to the Gospel of John in the New Testament. It also exists in the Gospels of Mark (11:15-19), Matthew (21: 12-17) and Luke (19: 45-48), as it is known. Yet, the uniquely intriguing and thought-provoking difference in the case of the Gospel of John is that this Gospel is used to be known as the one that offers high Christology and presents Jesus not primarily as the 'son of man', i.e., focuses on the historical Jesus, but concentrates, instead, on Jesus as the 'son of God' or as God-incarnate, i.e., focuses on the Christ of faith. So, in its narration of an action like Jesus's in the temple, the traditionally known as 'the spiritual Gospel' – as St. Clement of Alexandria describes it – seems to be associating a violent action with no else than the divine-in-person himself and, thus, linking violence up to God *per se*. This is what intrigues scholars and draw their attention to this story in its version in the Gospel of John in particular when they ponder violent actions in the New Testament. This seems to be, for example, the driving motif of the biblical scholar, Jennifer A. Glancy, in the paper which she read in the aforementioned conference on Violence in Minnesota University, 2007. Glancy suggests that the story of Jesus in the temple enjoys particular importance in that text, because, she believes, "the Gospel of John inter-animates a history of violence centered on Jesus with the history of violence at the site of the Jerusalem temple (Glancy, 2010)."

Glancy accurately read this incidence within the historically plausible framework of Jesus's tension with the authorities of his time (Glancy, 2010). Aware of the exegetical tradition that reads the Gospel of John as a book of signs that reveal solely Jesus's eternal, divine identity, Glancy also reads Jesus's violent action in the temple as a religious sign on Jesus's authority over-against the authority of the Jewish religious leaders. She then proposes that the ensuing violence, which leads eventually to Jesus's crucifixion and death by the actions of these clerics, did not come from a vacuum. It was rather "precipitated by Jesus's own act of violence," which he conducted in the temple (Glancy, 2010).

Scholars of New Testament Studies were puzzled already by the violent action that Jesus conducted in the temple, and they were challenged with finding a plausible way to harmonize

it with Jesus's own teaching on love for neighbors and for enemies alike. Seeking a plausible solution to this puzzle, some suggested that since the temple was traditionally a house constructed on violence and hierarchical oppression, Jesus's action in it is not an act of violence (Brendin, 2003). The logic of such an explanation seems to run as follows: as long as the violent action is exerted against another violent side and within a context that is violent-breeding in nature and requirements, this action is non-violent but courageous and praiseworthy. Against such justification, Jennifer Glancy validly asks "is an attack on a house of violence an act of non-violence?" (Glancy, 2010). Glancy responds, first, by persuasively distinguishing between 'justifiable violence' and 'non-violence', relating that the former is quite different from the later (Glancy, 2010). While one can find reasons and justifications to explain Jesus's opting for wielding a whip and acting violently, one cannot use that justification as a foundation for describing what Jesus did as non-violent (Glancy, 2010). Justifying the action's motivations does not change the action's nature, as Biblical scholars admit today and concede that Jesus's action was aggressively and menacingly violent (Brown, 1966). Scholars are even critical of some of the contemporary English translations of the Bible that try to downplay the violent extent of Jesus's action or fudge its nature by, for example, limiting the use of the whip to the animals in the temple but not to the people (Glancy, 2010). Any vailing translation, scholars believe, is going to rip off the Gospel of John of its particular recording of the history of violence in relation to Christian history (Glancy, 2010).

Violence and the Historical Readers of the Religious Text

In the previous section, I offered two, verbal and active, examples of religious violence cases related to the master of Christian faith, Jesus Christ, and to the most influential apostle in the history of Christianity, Paul the apostle. What is comparatively more demonstrative of religious violence in Christianity, nevertheless, is actually how the Christians in the post-Jesus's era interpreted the Scripture and used its expressions and images in the service of justifying and legitimizing violent orientations and conducts, which Christians opted for at some stations on their 2000 years-old journey. I will show in the ensuing paragraphs that this hermeneutical implementation of the scriptural attestation was more dangerously violence-breeding and proliferating than what the content of the Biblical texts themselves could ever cause.

When it comes to the history of textual interpretation, one realizes that the early Christians' implementation of religious texts in shaping their life and conducts is itself an extension of the broader historical and contextual Greco-Roman *Sitz im Leben* which they existed in and belonged to. Scholars do pause today in their study of the Greco-Roman world at the clear religious violence that generally existed in it and permeated its polytheistic and monotheistic religious groups alike. The lack of any evident religious freedom in the Roman Empire was one of the causes of violence in relation to religiosity in Roman societies (Bremmer, 2014). In addition, there was a time before the 4th century when Christianity suffered from the violent reaction of the authorities against those who endeavor to displease the imperial leadership by their non-conformity. So, Christians were themselves as victims of religious violence as later on part of its perpetrators. This was at least the case till the 4th century, when the Christian clerical authorities started to increasingly win power and influence due to the Christianization of the Roman Empire (Bremmer, 2014). The first victim of Christian violence in the Roman world was paganism, whose temples were sometimes

closed or destroyed, whose worshiping activities and rituals were banned and whose followers were proselytized gradually to the new ruling religion in the empire (Bremmer, 2014). This violence toward paganism did replace the earlier violent interaction between Christians and Jews. The transformation of Christianity into a ruling religion transformed the severe collision between these religious groups into rather more regular and intensified course (Bremmer, 2014). Though this Christian-vs-Jewish violence is comparatively less intense and terrible than what one witnesses in medieval and modern eras, one cannot deny its existence from that early time.

In an attempt at shedding scrutinizing light on the phenomenon of violence in relation to early centuries of Christianity, Praet (2014) relates that any violence associated with the Christian religiosity must be fully read within the broader historical and cultural context of the life-setting which Christianity belonged to. When we do this, Praet proposes, we perceive that what we ostensibly call religious violence needs actually to be understood as "social, economic, political, ethnic or other tensions," (Praet, 2014) and not truly a religious one. Far from turning this realization into a non-realistic and ahistorical purification and idealization of Christianity as inherently tolerant and non-violent, Praet (2014) opts for a middle position between either 'totally violence-free' or 'fully violence-breeding'. This middle position, Praet (2014) suggests, lies in the presumption that "discussing violence in a given tradition does not imply that tradition is inherently, always, or even most of the time violent. All traditions have different, both irenic and polemic, sides (Praet, 2014)." One should not, thus, always seek the roots of the violent actions of certain religious groups in the soil of their religious faith itself. On the other hand, there are occasions when chasing after the roots of such public violence cannot be achieved apart from factors that are inherent to certain religious practices or cultural tradition (Praet, 2014). Researchers of violence in Christian history avoid, therefore, the 'black-vs-white' or 'nonviolent-vs- fully violent' diameters and try to read the violent expressions and incidents as just one side of a rather more complicated and multifaceted contextual and historical story that is also as full of peace, tolerance and charity. Francois Bovon once eloquently expressed this scholarly surmise when he states

> Early Christians knew that evil and violence were universal, present in every society, in the church, and in the soul. The triumph of violence seemed inescapable. But they also knew that zones of peace could be established, that models of non-retaliation could be created, and that victory over demonic bestiality could be hoped for, not only through the victory of the cross…but also through the power of human love (Bovon, 1999).

In her observation of the phenomenon of violence in the history of Christianity, Karen King once similarly pointed at the diversity of the Christians' understanding of their actions and attitudes in life. King notices that the multiple discourses the Christians conjured up to narrate what happened with them, relating that a crucial part of that life was conveyed in "an often discordant diversity of Christian perspectives, of agonizing deliberations, misgivings, trepidations and sometimes fierce disagreement about what to do (King, 2015)." Such

moments indicate, according to King, that the images of violence in the Christians' life in society portray to a serious extent a violent tension that also ran high among them (King, 2015). Out of such tension, violent interactions incurred between different Christian factions in the name of defending true faith (orthodoxy) against false ones (heresies). And, those who violently suppressed others (the orthodox over heretics) tried to justify their polemic and aggressive methods by theologizing violence and raising it up into a high level of sanctity when they associated violent death with martyrdom and refused to deem 'Christians' "those who urged nonviolence, pacifism or withdrawal (King, 2015)." The question of whether violence and suffering in relation to faith is good and praiseworthy or bad and abhorrent was seemingly a tangible serious inquiry in the history of Christianity, to which the Christians offered various answers, and over which they themselves sometimes violently clashed seeking the right answer. As diverse as can be the answers Christians developed to attend to this challenge (King, 2015), one cannot but notice that the issue of violence – whether exerted by Christians on others and among themselves or others exposed them to – was a present issue in the life and thought of the followers of Christ at almost evert stage of their historical biography.

Throughout this history, loving God and one's own neighbor has always been a constitutive teaching of the Christians religious discourses. It has always been deemed the golden rule in Jesus's teaching, which he left behind for his disciples and ensuing church apostles and theologians. Yet, the abidance with the commandment of love, Christian scholars realize today, was not at every historical stage a guarantor of peace, fellowship and tolerance. When some Christians abided blindly and obsessively with 'loving God', they ideologized this principle to a radically extreme extent. "Loving God' became a dogmatic instrument for dictating truth from falsehood and for judging who is saved and who is not. Loving God was, that is, overcentralized at the expense of loving the human neighbor, and the zealous attempt at making people succumb to the command of loving God was not always pursued in a charitably loving manner, but in a clearly violent one. Violence was justified and legitimized by means of the ultimate end it was used to achieve (i.e., making the world love God). The jealousy for 'loving God' was supposed to fulfill the love commandment in the service of making the followers of God better human, more loving and accepting toward their fellow humans. But, due to the pietistic zeal and aggressive passion about spreading it, the application of this principle turned into a means for patronizing both God and the idea of obeying God by all methods imaginable, including violence.

One example of such religious zeal that opted for violence to exert what its followers deemed the only means to preserve the Christian faith, and to stress their love to the Christian God, is found in the 6th-7th centuries' Syria-Palestine. One of the scholars who offer a valuable reading of the violent features of the Christians' religious zeal in this region during that era is Thomas Sizgorich. In his monograph, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, Sizgorich relates that, in their attempt at preserving their own identity (as God's lovers) in the midst of the radical changes that Islam ushered in into Syria-Palestine, some of the Christians (especially the stylite hermits of the desert) resorted to an ascetic religiosity that made them act after the belief that "violence received or undertaken in defense of God's one community

upon the earth was in fact virtuous and indeed the highest of all forms of piety (Sizgorich, 2009)." Driven by this conviction, these Christian hermits did not hesitate resorting to violence to protect what they believed is constitutive of how the Christians define themselves as God's lovers and servants. For them, opting for militant forms of religiosity became crucial as a fashioning resource for securing the abidance of other Christians with God's commandments. Sizgorich suggests that some of the newly arriving Muslims to these regions encountered these militantly oriented Christians, they admired their religious zeal and they volitionally emulated them in safeguarding what these Muslims believed to be the accurate Islamic piety (*jihād*) (Sizgorich, 2009). Some scholars do believe that such an encounter between spiritually violent zealous Christian and Muslim pietists could be one of the originating fountains of the idea of military '*Jihād*' in Islam even before the time of the Crusades (Dennis, 2001). In the 6^{th} – 7^{th} centuries, we have in the Christian-Muslim world of Syria-Palestine attempts at abiding with the rule of 'loving God', on the Christian side, and the rule of 'surrender to Allah', on the Muslim side, that are violently incarnated by religious persons, who imagined themselves, as Sizgorich describes, "archetypical warriors on God's behalf;" the defenders of the defining boundaries of true religiosity (Sizgorich, 2009).

This legitimization of violence in the service of a practical obedience of the 'loving God' commandment paved the way throughout the centuries for developing the just-war theology and justifying killing at a time of war in the legacy of authors like Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Augustine of Hyppo and Thomas Aquinas (McGuckin & Anthony, 2011). The logic behind this theology was the conviction that "man can retain control of violence, that violence can be kept in the service of order and justice, and even of peace, that violence is good or bad depending on the use or purpose it is put to (Ellul, 1969)."

Parallel to this justification of violence, of course, another approach also evolved in the history of Christianity, namely the rejection of war and aggression and the insistence on non-violence. From its beginning up tell today, Christianity always contained peaceful, or even pacifist voices that strongly opposed violence, especially that violence which some Christians exerted in the service of religious convictions. The non-violent Christians always counter-parted the violent actions in the name of 'God's loving' by means of recalling Jesus's teaching on loving one's enemies and turning the other cheek and taking Jesus's commandment "thou shall not kill" and his peaceful, calling-for-love and forgetful sayings in texts like, Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 23:34 and John 20:19, to the extreme contradistinctive end against the stance of 'violence in the service of God' (Ellul, 1969). This counter-violence approach is just the other side of the very same coin of Christian history. Yet, our focus in this essay is on the face of violence and not on this one.

One can finally here say that Christian history demonstrates before us a narrative of 'violence-nonviolence' dialectic that is permeating the biography of Christianity at almost every milestone on its track. Both sides of this narrative were actually shaped after a direct interaction with the scriptural attestation. Far is this story from a 'biblical-vs-nonbiblical' interaction model. Both the pro-violence and the anti-violence stances alike presume that they sincerely adhere to the 'accurate' message of the Scripture. They both were actually sincere in their adherence to their own reading and interpretation of this text, no more, no less.

Religious Violence of the 'Religiosity of Violence'? an Analysis

The diversity of the stance on violence in the Bible and the history of the Christians' life in the light of its teaching extends to how the Christian thinkers also reason on the phenomenon of violence and reflect on it intellectually. Christian thinkers pursue this thinking after diverse forms of inquiries. In this last section, I would like to touch upon this conceptual and intellectual reflection on violence in Christianity from the angle of the particular following inquiry: does the world-religion relation one-way track, wherein the influence always proceeds from religion towards the world, or is it rather a two-ways track, wherein the world also influences religion and impacts it equally? And, if the second option is the case, could this indicate that the world can sometimes export its violence ideology to religion and colours its discourse, as religion exports its violence views to the world and influences its course?

One of the valuable understandings of violence among intellectual Christians who ponder the above inquiry in the modern era is the French Social critic and theologian, Jacques Ellul. Ellul is one of those Christian voices which believe that the best perception of the Christians' orientation toward violence may not originate from reading this orientation in relation to these Christians' belief in the divine. It rather stems from their relatedness to and understanding of the human conditions in the world they live in.

In a book he produced in 1969, Jacques Ellul touches upon what he deems a conspicuous orientation towards forbearing the practice of violence, if not practicing it personally, which is followed by Christians in today's world. Ellul spots in this tendency a readiness to compromise the core-teaching of their faith and to let the conditions of the world dictate their opinion and acting habits. Ellul does not principally consider the attention to the preconditions of the world such a bad thing in principle. It is rather commendable and necessary, he opines. What is bad in his opinion is the fact that the Christians' stances do not seem to be actually reflective of, or shaped, by their theological understanding of the divine God in Jesus Christ. Ellul expresses this in the following eloquent words that merit full citation

> What troubles me is not that the opinions of Christians change, nor that their opinions are shaped by the problems of the times: on the contrary, that is good. What troubles me is that Christians conform to the trend of the moment without introducing into it *anything* specifically Christian. Their convictions are determined by their social milieu, not by faith in the revelation; they lack the uniqueness which ought to be the expression of that faith. Thus. theologies become mechanical exercises that justify the positions adopted, and justify them on grounds that are absolutely not Christian (Ellul, 1969).

When Ellul is imaginably asked 'how does this tendency relate to the Christians' stance on violence today?', he will relate that this manifests itself in the Christians' "readiness to participate in violence in order to attain socially just objectives," and their consequential conviction that one must try to attain to these good and just objectives by whatever means

imaginable (Ellul, 1969). Observing the application of this conviction on the ground, Ellul states, enables us to realize that "many Christians today participate in 'revolutionary' violence just as fervently as, half a century ago, other Christians participated in military violence (Ellul, 1969)."

How do the Christians rationalize their opting to violent orientation in today's context? Ellul suggests that such rationalization rests on presuppositions which Christians and non-Christians alike extract from the non-religious, secular realm of reasoning. The first presumption, Ellul argues, is the modernist perception of the human person as narrowly self-sufficient, purely rational, consumptive-materialist being who is not to be viewed any more as necessarily 'moral' and definitely not as 'religious' in nature. In the light of downgrading the spiritual and moral dimensions of human existence, Ellul (1969) explains, the human life gets impoverishedly reduced into mere state of consumption and possessiveness. And, within this context, what only corresponds is a "conception of injustice" that marginalizes the idea of 'equality' and centralizes the standard of 'domination-in-competition'. Be that as it may, the only way to achieve this domination-in- competition purpose is violence (Ellul, 1969). Those Christians who walk on the track of this logic will tell you today: "preaching the gospel to hungry people is useless (Ellul, 1969)." They will then relate that "violence is necessary and [the] Christians should participate in it" if they want to have influential and useful role in today's human life (Ellul, 1969). Ellul, finally, adds that associated with this pragmatist view is an intrinsic "will to power," which, according to him, Christians today seem to be deeming it "excellent and consonant with the dignity of man (Ellul, 1969)." The trend of thought that motivates this orientation in today's human life, Ellul notes, is the general socio-political and cultural view that

> Man… can and must affirm his domination… He must have no inhibitions about using the means of power that are at his disposal… the virtues of humility and resignation are rejected as despicable… the politico-economic reality is the only one that counts, and it is clear that in this field man must be a conqueror (Ellul, 1969).

Remotely, then, from being derived from religious teaching in the Bible or from theology, these Christians' proneness to justify violent activism demonstrates that a worldly socio-political and contextual trend of human imagination and conduct-rule is allowed to define, re-shape and implement Christian religiosity after its own image. Violence is not originated from the religious conviction. It is rather originating its own interpretation and re-creation of that religiosity.

Ellul profoundly detects the traces of this in the trend of thought that views Christianity either as "revolutionary force," as a theological discourse on revolution or as a religion that is totally "fused into the revolution (Ellul, 1969)." No better example in today's world of this christianization or sacralization of violence in the name of revolution than probably the religiously baptized voices that supports political campaigns on the American public, federal and stately scenes alike. Such religiously-loaded voices and discourses manifest conservative, highly and violently radical voting public that tends to re-proliferate in the public square a messianic view that aims basically at justifying and religiously legitimizing certain political demagogy and hatemongering. Within this framework, the human believer

no more just witnesses to the divine's graceful and salvific presence in the world. To the contrary, the divine's presence becomes an employed instrument in the service of a certain human, violence-oriented and violence-breeding, agenda. It becomes a tool for the sake of the latter's justification and legitimization. Religion here is not the *source*, but rather the weapon of a premeditated violent orientation and conduct. The outcome is not then a 'violent religion,' but rather a 'religious-like violence.' Driven by a mistakenly social, political and public life, these fundamental Christians advocate for a messianic revolutionary public influence that launches the salvation of a 'Social Gospel' discourse. They even reflect today zealous readiness to conjure up excuses and justifications to the verbal, intellectual, socio-political, cultural, racial, gender and administrative violence in the public square, all legitimized in the name of religio-ethical principles. Such public orientation is even backed up by an association of Jesus with the idea of 'revolution' and depicting him as a zealot rebel who was an advocate of violence, (Ellul, 1969) or a religious 'Che Guevara.'

We have in the abovementioned case and others like it examples of a public, originally non-religious violence using religious texts and ideas in the service of its legitimization and in recruiting the religiously enthusiastic public in support of its agenda. We have here socio-political violence 'sacralized': there is a particular theological discourse that is now made to found this secular violence upon sacred views and values. Such a discourse in Christian circles states something like what Jacques Ellul describes when he speaks about theologians who are convinced that "God is at work in the revolutionary movement of modern times…[and] the believer is commissioned to live as a revolutionary and to do his part in assuring change" (Ellul, 1969) by all means possible, including violence. This is, again, a situation where worldly violent human context dictates how religious people shall act and with which values they should abide: "since [the religious person] lives in the midst of a society where revolutionary [violent] movements are rife, he must take his cue from that society (Bennett, 1966)."

Does any of the above manifests a sort of violence based on, or derived from, religious belief in the sacred or in the divine? What Jacques Ellul invites us in his analysis to consider is that this may not actually be 'violence in the name of religion', no matter how religious in textile was the language and the justification this violence used to spread itself. What we have is rather a situation of 'religiosity in the name of violence'. In this case, the religious interpretation happens '"after the fact," after the decision for violence has been taken (Ellul, 1969)." The religious discourse is, then, nothing but populist "justification of the stance for violence," as Ellul states (Ellul, 1969). Religion in this case is not a corrector or interrogator that scrutinizes people's actions and their tendencies. It is rather the protector of these actions that safeguards their longevity. In this case, as Ellul correctly says, "theology is not really a theology but an ideology (Ellul, 1969)." And, what threatens the world is not 'violent religion', but something like 'religion of violence', wherein, as René Girard once said, the religious notion of 'sacrifice' and the notion of social 'murder' relate to each other in "a game of reciprocal substitution (Girard, 1989)." It is a 'religion of violence', wherein, rather than being dangerously irrational, such violence uses religiosity in such a dangerously rational manner that makes it derive from the religious discourse "rather convincing [reasons to justify its existence] when the need arises (Girard, 1989)." Sometimes, sinking its teeth in the religiosity of the human public is violence's way for protecting itself from condemnation by

means of transforming itself into a sacred sacrifice (Girard, 1989). This act of transformation into sacred sacrifice, as Girard already explained to us, may actually be the modern manifestation of a human orientation that originated historically and culturally from an ancient religious scapegoating mechanism that shrouds violence in religion. Having said that, the very same historical scapegoating tradition can equally be seen as an evidence that present-day, seemingly religious terrorism and violence is not the creation of religiosity, but one that suppresses the peaceful and nonviolent dimensions of religiosity in the service of reducing this latter into mere instrument in the service of sacralizing itself. Palaver (2008) perceives this and emphasizes it when he relates that "terrorism as we know it today was not possible in archaic societies. Religious rites and prohibitions restrained at numerous occasions the outbreak of violent conflicts to a high degree," and religions played an important role in keeping societal peace (Palaver, 2008).

What, then, we need to perceive the real affair that actually takes place between the human public action and religiosity in relation to violence is something Michel Foucault once drew our attention to brilliantly in his deconstruction of the notion of 'power' in the context of the human *police*. Foucault intriguingly suggests that one of the factors that determine power in relations between people is the rationalization discourse, which power-holders and seekers alike develop to exert sort of a governing practice over others. Foucault (1999), then, opines that chasing after the roots of that power-exertion for the sake of rebelling against it and denouncing its violence lies not just in condemning its violence nature alone. It also lies in questioning the rationale that underpins it (Foucault, 1999). The value of Ellul's approach to violence in relation to religion lies in his seemingly similar attempt at digging deep in the soil of the phenomenon of violence in the name of religion to unearth the *rationale* that makes the public think that such violence is substantially religious in nature and the child that was born from the womb of religious radicalism. What Foucault and Ellul do is turning the situation up-side-down and invite us to realize that the mere idea of a sacralized violence may actually be the product of a public rationalization of certain secular and socio-political (*police*, in Foucault's terms) attempts at practicing power over others. Religion in this case is just one of the instrumental components of such rationalization and nothing else. It is a faith without any power, in fact.

As one, therefore, reverses the interpretation track from 'from-religion-to-violence' toward 'from-violence-to-religion' instead, one not only treat religion – as one should, actually – as a human phenomenon and not as something ascended down from a super-natural source. One also starts to perceive violence itself as similarly "a social construct and a practice, one which is performed by specific actors in specific circumstances for specific reasons (Eller, 2007)." What makes religion an appealing means for violence to use in the service of justifying its existence more than any other means is the former's effective ability in 1) offering explanations of why violence is "necessary, good, even noble," which lies in the transcendent moralism religion offers to justify things, 2) in the images of struggle (cosmic war of good-vs-evil, for example) that violence can easily find in religious texts and teachings and 3) in the ability of religious traditions and accounts of persecution – derived from the historical collective memory of religious people – to make violence appears like a

response, a self-defense to an a priori violence executed against and experienced by some people and causing them to *react* as they did, and not otherwise (Juergensmeyer, 2000).
Realizing the ability of originally non-religious violence in recruiting religiosity, or in creating a religiosity, to justify and sanctify it should not be read as an invitation for us to ignore the fact that one of the characteristics of religion is its culpability to be equally productive and employer of violence. What one is, rather, to conceive is the fact that both religion and violence are similarly part of the natural and human conditions. Both, therefore, are equally "diverse, ambiguous and cultural," (Juergensmeyer, 2000) and they can mutually influence each other in even manners that are derived from these common features. As violence can be sometimes inspired by religion, violence can also be using religion to sanction it at other times. It is, thus, plausible to conclude that violence is "neither native nor foreign to religion. Rather both violence and religion are native to humans (Ellul, 1969)."

Conclusion

There is no doubt that a considerable portion of violence we encounter in today's global village seems apparently to be either associated with religions or presented as a religious orientation. This seems to be the case not only in relation to Islam, for example, but also in relation to Christianity, as reflecting on the history of the Christians demonstrates. Having this conceded, I tried to argue in this essay that a careful observation of the phenomenon of violence indicates that it would be quite narrow and one-sided to portray violence as only religious in origin or only expressive of particular form of people's religiosity. Violence is a much broader and multifaceted reality that exceeds the boundaries of human religiosity and permeates other levels of human existence and cognizance.

Once Thomas Hobbs perceived that human society in its entirety is "riddled with violence; violence is its natural condition (Ellul, 1969)." If Hobbs's observation is correct, violence then is as influential and affective on human life in its diverse aspects, including the religious one, as it is mutually affected and influenced in its creation and existence by them. The relation between violence and human thought is reciprocal and not one-way track in nature. Thus, the relation between violence and religion is also correlational in extent: as religion may generate certain violence to serve its own cause, violence can also generate a particular religious ideological world-view to legitimate and justify its existence.

In today's total occupation with the resurgence of religiosity to the public square and its attempt at using the post-modernist era for the sake of its re-occupation of the World's center-stage, the focus of scholars is directed one-sidedly on the impact of religion on violence, without paying equal attention to the post-modernist, religiously colored world view which violence is creating and bringing over to the human scene.

Discerning the role the human orientation to violence plays on a global scale in creating an ideologized, almost fully virtual, form of religiosity enables us not just to specify the core-influence of religions on the human worldly scene. It equally enables us to also dissect the components and symptoms of a global violence that itself is the root of formulating 'a religiosity of violence' that is not generated from religions but rather from their ideologization. When we perceive this distinction, we may then consider seriously this essay's three main proposals:

First, there is no such thing like a 'violent text/book'; there is rather 'violent author' or 'violent reader'. There is no such thing like 'violent interpretation'; there is rather 'violent interpreter'. I tried to show my full concurrence with the belief that "[Religious books] do not kill people; people kill people (Boustan et al., 2010; Roetzel, 2010)." Religious texts do not kill people or violet their lives by their content, no matter how aggressive and harsh this content may be. It is, rather, those who read these religious texts and use them who actually kill others and exert violent conducts on them. Religious texts *per se* neither lead automatically to peaceful world nor do they definitely or responsibly originate the violence we spot in human life. The content of the religious text can be 'responsible for many positive sides of our modern world but also for some of the worst threats of our era" (Palaver, 2008) in accordance with, and by means of, how this content is implemented and formulated by those who rely on it and (ab)use it.

Second, the term 'religious violence' is far from neutral or objective. It is actually a modern coinage that was conjured up by thinkers in the 18th century to interpret or name a secular socio-political violence that used religious discourses in the services of rationalizing a non-religious phenomenon. The same 'from-world-to-religion' track is being today still crossed by some groups, who try to ideologize their own worldly agenda and view by means of bestowing on it a religious or metaphysically sacred referential value. 'God is with me', which one can hear from any violent radical or terrorist today, is said by people to mirror that ideologization practice, not to articulate a religious belief 'teaching'.

Thirds, our total occupation with the time of violence we live in drives us to focus on religious violence at the expense of a 'religiosity of violence' that is created to replace religions, not to reflect them. This prevents us from discerning around us factual and promising cases of religious peaceful co-existence. Our understanding of the relation between violence and religion may be the victim of falling into a trap of double propagandism; one, that is, that cages us in either 'religiosity is the mother of violence' slogan or 'religions are clean from violence' cliché.

In conclusion, studying violence in the Christian scholarly circles portrays before us today a noticeable tendency to avoid approaching the religion-violence relation from either 'all organized violence is religiously inspired' or 'religion is entirely benevolent' one-sided position. It is believed that neither of these two positions is defensible (let alone always factual, I believe), for "there are many forms of violence…each of which has a unique set of causes, only one of which is religion (Krause, 2015)." Most significantly still, as I tried to propose in this essay, Christian scholars tend to ponder that it is not always the case that religiosity is a potential breeder of violence. There are considerably serious and factual situations of secularly, politically, culturally, socially, contextually and intellectually driven and rooted violence that generates its own version of religious explanation and manifestation to implement in the service of its legitimization and longevity and for the sake of endowing its existence with necessity and significance (Armstrong, 2014).

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