

CHAPTER 43

Geographies of Peace and Religion

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Every religion now has a global dimension with the accelerated intermixing of ideas and peoples through history. Scarcely a region in the world can boast of members coming from a single religious tradition (Juergensmayer 2003). Taking the globalizing and intermixing of religions as a cue, this essay locates the possibilities of personal and social peace that intersect various temporal and spatial geographies of religion. This synthesis by no means implies a convergence among religious beliefs but a sharing of compatible beliefs, a commensality of sorts, to indicate intersections rather than exclusivities. In doing so, the essay explores the perennial hold of an 'us' versus 'them' worldview versus one which upholds a global humanity, both views finding resonance in religious precepts.

Peace geographies and religions are analysed in three parts: just conduct through war, peace beyond war, and the transformational possibilities of peace. Taken together, the intersecting ideas move from human and moral repugnance at the horrors of war to the kinds of spiritual and human transformations that would usher a transformational culture of peace. War is a point of reference in the essay, peace being broader than the cessation of hostilities. The deepest argument for peace lies in cultural values (Singh 2020). The possible realization of such transformational peace remains elusive, but the repugnance towards war, in part informed with religious convictions, has equally occupied human imagination. By some accounts, death through interstate war violence has decreased manifold in the last 100 years (Pinker 2011). The possibility for peace in the essay is humanity's recognition of each other as human even in the field of war.

Divine Conduct and Just War

The ethical dimensions of war, or the ability to overlook certain kinds of ethics in war, have found sanction in religious beliefs or indirectly through notions of justice and morality. These ethical dimensions often sit in contradistinction to theories of war and conflict in international relations that often describe the sources of war in terms of resource differences and power differentials (Choucri and North 1975, Waltz 2001/1954).

Consider the famous statement about the strong doing what they can while the weak suffer what they must in the Melian Dialogue from Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*. As referenced in realpolitik accounts, the power differential is revealed in amoral terms as the ability of the strong to subjugate the weak. Melians must join the Athenians, not because the latter are morally superior but, as the Athenians remind the Melians, because their neutrality would be seen by the Spartans as Athenian weakness. The Melian demurrer is unacceptable, and the Athenians annihilate them. There is a pessimistic view of human nature here that continues in Western political thought with the need for a preponderant power to ensure peace. For seventeenth century Hobbes, without a Leviathan to keep human beings in awe, they would continually be at war with each other. Under such anarchy, life is, according to Hobbes, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.' This view of human life and the benefits of a global hegemon to suppress violence finds resonance in current accounts of international relations; David Lake's *Hierarchy* (2009) is an example.

Sitting astride the Western tradition of 'might makes right', although seemingly compatible at times with realpolitik, is another tradition that advocates taming harsh passions in human beings to forge a balance between naked interests and divine conduct. Plato's allegory of the charioteer in *Phaedrus* makes clear that madness or divine inspiration makes the soul advance towards heaven holding the winged steeds, the good and the bad, in balance. As Socrates tells Phaedrus, the gods only have good horses, but mortal beings must steer the good and bad. Holding the balance through divine inspiration advances the heroic soul towards heaven. Plato also makes another fundamental point about human conduct: Divine inspiration, not impartiality, makes a lover care for another. This could equally apply to all human interactions.

It is this divine inspiration that must guide the warrior in the battle and not just an appetite or a passion for war. Even in the Melian Dialogue, Thucydides suggests a higher purpose, peace among warring allies with Athenian democracy ascendant, although the end is tragic for the Melians. Lebow (2008) working to provide a generalizable cultural theory of international relations notes that the idea of 'spirit', divine or otherwise, informs the notion of a community: 'The spirit refers to the universal drive for self-esteem' (p. 508). A theory of action based solely on material interests (appetite) is an insufficient explanation for community although Lebow notes that liberalism and realism often only account for such interests.

A similar allegory about balance occurs in the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*. Unwilling to fight his Kaurava brothers across the battlefield, the Pandava warrior Arjuna turns to his charioteer Krishna for guidance. The sermon that Krishna provides is known as *Gita Upadesh* (or *Bhagwat Gita*). Krishna reminds Arjuna that life on earth is an illusion but that he must live with *dharma*, metaphorically divine virtue or order. War is transposed, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*, into a divine calling. The heroic spirits in *Mahābhārata* and *Phaedrus* are similar: Both are moved through the Gods.

Eastern and Western philosophy, thus, offer precedence for what may be termed the doctrine of just war, prescribing and proscribing rules for entering a war (*jus ad bello*) and for

conducting oneself in it (*jus in bello*). As other essays in this volume attend to doctrines of just war, suffice it to say here that the doctrinal constraints come directly from religion. In *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna is reminded of *dharma*. From St Augustine in the fourth and fifth century to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century in Western political thought, just war similarly finds its roots in the divine right of a community or rulers as protection from evil even if that means incurring violence. The corollary is that war is not fought for personal gain, and therefore, war in religious terms must be justified in communal terms including the polity.

The jump from divine virtue to civilization is not hard to make. If virtue, inspired with divinity, belongs at an individual level, then civilization is its broadest communal counterpart. A just war could then be fought to convert or kill the heathens and savages who are uncivilized. An example is the religious debate on colonialism that took place in the sixteenth century regarding the status of the colonized as human beings. It moulded the ways in which Europe ‘imagined’ and acted upon its interactions with the colonized world until the twentieth century. Shortly after the Spanish conquest of the Indies, the Spanish humanist Juan Gines de Sepulveda argued that the ‘Indians’ were savages and fit to be enslaved; the Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas noted that they were humans who needed to be converted to Christianity and introduced to civilization as the Europeans imagined it. The colonized world was assigned an inferior and dehumanizing status in both narratives. The early sixteenth century debate was never quite settled but the idea that Europe was bringing civilized conduct to the savages or natives informed the moral justifications for colonialism for three centuries although within Europe there were also strong protests and counter currents. The debate settled in favour of de Las Casas. Colonies needed civilization; the colonizer and Christianity provided the strategy. Nevertheless, even at the time of decolonization, European elites continued to argue that the colonies were unfit to govern themselves. The post-colonial projects of economic benevolence—foreign aid, preferences in trade, persuasions to ‘modernize’, technical schemes for catching-up, exclusions from US-EU decision-making—are all ontologically connected to colonial and paternalistic reasoning (Singh 2017).

The legacy of the variable topographies of just war and divine conduct in our current affairs today forces humanity’s highest justifications for forms of violence in moral terms, often derived from religious precepts. International actions, such as the right to protect or to intervene on humanitarian grounds, often take on explicit and implicit religious undertones and are voiced in the name of a global community. Global conventions on the conduct of war, rights of prisoners, prohibitions on torture, banning of chemical and biological weapons, and treaties on nuclear control and disarmament have the fate of a global humanity in mind even if the religious component is not readily apparent. Equally, political leaders cite religion to justify forms of violence. The United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions cited Romans 13 from the Bible in June 2018 to rationalize separating children from undocumented migrants crossing into the border from Mexico as part of the Trump administration’s zero tolerance policy: ‘I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order.’ As critics quickly pointed out, Romans 13 was also cited in the United States during the revolutionary war in the eighteenth century to pledge loyalty to King George III of England, in the nineteenth century to justify slavery, and in the mid-twentieth century to quash civil rights protests including in Sessions’ home state Alabama. In June 2020, President Trump stood outside St. John’s Episcopal Church near the White

House in Washington, DC, with a Bible in his hand after security forces cleared out Black Lives Matter protesters from the adjoining Lafayette Square with tear gas. Law and order and the Bible were conflated again.

Bourgeois Peace & Its Art

The concurrent commercial and industrial revolutions and the Protestant Reformations in Europe gave rise to bourgeois society. The nation-state rose as a political unit in response to these developments (North and Thomas 1973). The securing of property rights and the fixity of borders meant that existing political units – empires, city-states, emerging nations – went to war with each other in a race for survival of the fittest political form (Spruyt 1996). The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), one of the deadliest to mark the emergence of the modern nation-state, was between the fragmented states of the Holy Roman Empire and the newly forming Protestant states of Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648 enshrined the principle of sovereign nation-states.

At a deeper societal level, if the prior religious discourses had upheld human virtue, there would now be a subtle shift towards human dignity and tolerance. Economic historian Cippola (1994) writes that the growth of commercial towns led to great intermixing of classes and peoples. From the eleventh century onward, even before the commercial revolution, serfs could flee from the landlords to a city and be free after a year and one day. The German saying 'Stadtluft macht frei' or 'city air makes you free' arose from these times.

With the new division of labour and interdependence of individuals and societies on each other, older hierarchies of feudal Europe gave away. The bourgeois peace refers to the rising dignity of a commercial class and provided recognition to new forms of work which, in turn, fostered the need for peace among interdependent commercial polities. It also marked a burgeoning tolerance for different ways of life. Deirdre McCloskey (2010, p. 10) notes that the rise of bourgeois dignity '...was probably of greater importance for explaining the modern world than the clerical Reformation in Germany in 1517.' The rise in dignity of the commercial classes was important: 'They began to be seen in theory as worthy of a certain respect, as not being hopelessly vulgar or sinful or underhanded or lower class' (p. 22).

An interesting exploration of bourgeois peace and its departure from earlier religious thought can be located in the rise of new forms of art, especially painting. The commercial and later the industrial revolutions changed the course of liberalism in England and that of English political and social thought regarding painting. Overall, this movement introduced the notion of virtue, embedded in the liberal arts, and the artist's position in society. Two writers from the eighteenth century provide the contours for the movement on ideas of art. Earl Shaftesbury (1671–1713), who spent considerable time in the Netherlands, was of a liberal disposition and a believer in humanism. Shaftesbury turned back, nevertheless, to the Hellenistic period to define virtue. In his essay *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*, Shaftesbury comes close to recreating the Platonic idea of form and then equating virtue with divine heroism. The purpose of painting was to recall the heroic journey and was attributed the heroism of a Homeric epic (Barrell 1986).

Such painting was meant to nourish the nation and inculcate active citizenship. The notion of virtue, of course, was only available to the men who were propertied and often aristocratic. Being of leisure, they were, therefore, free to think with a liberal mind. This was

the foundation of the liberal arts. Shaftesbury has a static notion of the sublime, linked to Platonic thought, to which painting had to aspire. Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) put ‘the soul in motion’ (Barrell 1986, p. 35). Reynolds turned away from the heroic to the everyday and broadened the notion of the body public to include the artist and the painter whose position began to be respectable. The foundation of the Royal Academy for the Arts in 1768 established this function not just for the artist but also for the art in society. Though Joshua Reynolds painted portraits, the rising commercial and industrial classes also demanded something more picturesque as well. This was among the factors that led to the foundation of English landscape painting (Goodwin 2006).

This brief summary of 150 years of political thought surrounding painting provides some context for understanding the type of peace being suggested in, and following from, Bartholomeus van der Helst’s *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Münster* from 1648. Twenty-five people are vividly portrayed in the painting; the Captain holds a silver cup and is seen congratulating his lieutenant, the words of the treaty sit on the table, and the Jan Vos poem on the drum celebrates the end of war.

The social and economic history of the type of art that van der Helst portrayed is important for this essay, and therein lies in the notion of the bourgeois peace. The Peace of Münster marked the emergence of the Dutch Republic at the end of the Thirty Years’ War, which was also a victory for the commercial Protestant towns, with a new class of social patrons whose demand for art was unprecedented. The economic historian Carlo Cipolla (1976) notes that the ‘Dutch painters produced their art at low prices and in prolific quantities.... The new attitude of the Dutch was prompted by – and their success was linked to the fact that new, larger social groups were ascending the economic ladder in Europe, and price elasticity of demand was growing for an increasing number of commodities.’ Van der Helst’s painting of the civic guard along with its even more famous counterpart from the era Rembrandt’s *Nightwatch* (1642), formally *Company of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch*, are among the many works produced mostly on private commission or for sale, and among many produced of the Amsterdam Civic Guard. Art historian Meijer 2014, p. 4) notes: ‘The civic guard portraits are in the end, with some exceptions, neither *history* portraits nor depictions of facts although now and then, perhaps even often, certain historical facts, such as an entry, – were introduced to give civic guards ideas of how to remember themselves.’

When the English portrait painter and essayist Joshua Reynolds saw van der Helst’s *Peace of Münster* in 1782, he wrote the following: ‘Perhaps, the first picture of portraits in the world, comprehending more of those qualities which make a perfect portrait than any other I have ever seen.’ Joshua Reynolds’ notation on ‘those qualities’ is important. The seventeenth century painting had featured a fierce debate on the purpose of art, following, much like in the neighbouring Netherlands, a rising commercial class.

The analysis above of the rise of bourgeois peace and the brief digression into art deepen our understanding of the firm foundation of these ideas in Europe and later throughout the world. Three centuries later, notions of liberal and democratic peace, contending that interconnected polities and democracies respectively do not go to war with each other, have almost an axiomatic status (Rosecrance 1986). Even when jealousy of trade, to use a term from David Hume about economic nationalism, has aroused suspicion, scholars have harkened to histories of trading states to argue for their importance to peace. The rise of China as an economic powerhouse is the latest incarnation with scholars noting that China is a trading nation, not a security threat (Kang 2008).

Structural Peace & UNESCO

In the last two centuries, new possibilities for peace have also arisen from examining the transformative potential within individuals to overcome their willingness to resort to violence. One of the most important manifestations, the doctrine of nonviolence or *ahimsa*, has counterparts in Western thought, such as through the Romantic poet P.B. Shelly and philosopher Henry David Thoreau. However, nonviolence as a spiritual and transformative political and social practice finds its origins in ancient Indian Vedic texts. Mahatma Gandhi brought it to the fore to fight British Colonialism in India. Later, Martin Luther King, Jr., took up nonviolence and civil disobedience to fight segregation and racism. Gandhi and King often recounted the religious origins of non-violence.

Similar transformative ideas can be located in the notions of world community, perhaps even a logical extension following the rise of nation-states and bourgeois peace. These ideas can be explored through the creation of a post-World War Two organization that would explore the culture of peace in the context of a world community. Just as, in the last section, Dutch painting provided an in-depth case for studying commercial peace, this section (adapted from Singh 2011) attends to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to explore the possibilities of a structural transformation through a culture of peace, especially the religious antecedents.

UNESCO came into being after a conference of delegates from 37 countries met during 1–16 November, 1945, in London, and 20 signed on to the constitution. This conference framed a charter reflecting three years of diplomacy, begun among the Allied Powers, to institute a post-war organization that would reflect Enlightenment values in seeking to end human violence through education. As the negotiations proceeded beyond 1942, the emphasis on education was expanded to include science and culture as central tenets of the emerging institution. Speaking to the London Conference, the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee asked the important question, ‘Do not all wars begin in the minds of men?’ The US delegate to the conference Archibald Macleish, Librarian of Congress, adapted these words for the Preamble of the UNESCO Constitution: ‘...since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.’

UNESCO’s philosophy is also located in deeper spiritual precepts connected to a human quest for a better world. Vincenzo Pavone (2008), in writing of UNESCO, provides a compelling account of the almost puritanical ideas of the Czech born Comenius (1592–1670) who wrote *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (1623): ‘Through education, the Labyrinth of the World could eventually be reconciled with the Paradise of the Heart’ (p. 34). The puritanical dualism being evoked here is that of a human’s base, violent nature versus the religious virtuous self. Scientific education was considered necessary in Comenius’ and later Puritanical ideas as leading to the highest state of knowledge and a universal community. UNESCO published Comenius’ collected works in 1956, and his biography was published in 1991 shortly before the four hundredth anniversary of his birth. Director General Federico Mayor (1987–1999) frequently cited Comenius in his speeches, noting at the time of the publication of his biography that ‘As Comenius reminds us, the teachers are the key of the future and the shaper of democracy’ (Pavone 2008, p. 140). Mayor recalled Comenius’ notion of *Dicasterium Pacis* or world assembly for nations and a *Collegium Lacis*, which would house scholarly members, to name Comenius ‘as one of the spiritual ancestors of UNESCO’ (p. 141).

Similar to Comenius' thought, Auguste Comte's (1798–1857) 'Religion of Humanity' ascribed to science the basis of society and global solidarity that would replace god as its ordering principle. Comte's positivist theory of humanity reflected science to be not just a source for Enlightenment ideas of progress but also its spiritual core. Comte provides a precursor to the ideas of scientific humanism that became popular in the 1930s. Julian Huxley, UNESCO's first Director-General (1946–1948), tried to provide a similar manifesto in his pamphlet *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*: 'Thus the general philosophy of UNESCO should, it seems, be a scientific world humanism, global in extent and evolutionary in background' (Huxley 1947, p. 8). The thrust of Huxley's ideas was towards human perfection rooted in natural selection, evolution, and one dangerously close to Eugenics. Nevertheless, his ideas also reflected the scientific humanism of the 1930s. In 1933, a group of 33 humanists including academics, philosophers, and theologians, penned a 15-point *Humanist Manifesto*. Point Four noted that 'Humanism recognizes that man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and with his social heritage. The individual born into a particular culture is largely molded by that culture.'

UNESCO's philosophy is rooted in humanism and enlightenment: knowledge of others' ways, participation in others' lives and rituals, and exchange and cooperation lead to security and peace. Comenius' influence began to be explicitly acknowledged as antecedent to UNESCO during the Federico Mayor's director-generalship and was most visible in Mayor's Culture of Peace Program, which began to be conceived in 1989. The program arose from two prior declarations: the May 1986 Seville and the June 1989 Yamoussoukro statements on violence. It also paralleled the UN's 1992 publication *Agenda for Peace*. In 1994, UNESCO followed with the Culture of Peace Program. According to its website, '...the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.' The program was specifically conceived by the Princeton social psychologist David Adams, who suggested it to Director-General Federico Mayor. Initially, the program was launched in El Salvador. It included development, education, intercultural dialogue, and democratic participation as its instruments. After 1996, other conflict zones were included: Burundi, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Mozambique. In 1999, the UN followed with the Declaration of the Culture of Peace. Ostensibly, the Culture of Peace furthers a positive agenda: After hostilities end in conflict zones, a positive agenda of peace must be undertaken that furthers development, dialogues, and participation. Nevertheless, though the programme has undertaken a wide variety of projects in various continents, its specific contributions to producing a 'culture of peace' in the areas where these projects are implemented is debatable.

The belief that people who know each other or are highly educated will always lead peaceful lives (the precept of scientific humanism) is questionable. The Hobbesian belief in human nature points in a different direction. Social scientists proceed cautiously when it comes to analysing UNESCO's positive peace agenda. Sagarika Dutt (2002) provides a literature review of cognitive theories and evidence questioning whether war is only about thoughts and images. He cites the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: 'Ignorance may aggravate fear. But it is not true that knowledge of each other's ways necessarily allays suspicion and mistrust. Some of the most terrible conflicts in history have occurred between neighbours who knew each other

quite well, Germany and France for instance' (p. 11). British academic Richard Hoggart, who was also the Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, cites Herman Hesse to point the tragic flaw in the organization's idealism: 'I must confess that I have no faith whatever in the concerted action of intellectuals or in the good will of the "civilized world." The mind cannot be measured in terms of quantity, and whether ten or a hundred "leading lights" appeal to the mighty to do or not to do something, such an appeal is hopeless' (p. 59).

Conclusion

The temporal and spatial geographies of peace and violence are explored above through the lens of religious precepts and beliefs. The three major ideas examined here offer both hope and caution for the prospects of peace. Doctrines of just war offer restraint and a justification for violence. Liberal peace seems natural but rests on the assumption that human beings become less violent and more tolerant as they co-exist and become interdependent. A transformational culture of peace has a long and spiritual progeny but even in UNESCO, where these ideas are represented to the fullest, power battles and human suspicions loom large, the latest manifestation of which was the US withdrawal from UNESCO in 2017 following its earlier withdrawal 1986–2004. In these instances, the United States accused UNESCO of furthering a violent agenda that encouraged the Arab world (1980s) and recognized Palestine as a member-state in 2011.

The geographies of peace are stuck between the Hobbesian suspicions of human beings and the kinds of spiritual quests that could move humanity to transcend violence. Justified in the name of a God, a ruler, or a country, violence rests ultimately on an 'us' versus 'them' imagery. Kenneth Boulding (1959), one of the founders of the conflict resolution field, noted that national images are formed during childhood and not just imposed by the elite. Collective memories sustain the images, and religion has definitely played a role in encouraging such imagery: 'It is hard for an ardent patriot to realize that his country is a mental, rather than a physical phenomenon, but such indeed is the truth!' (p. 52). Opposite to the bellicose 'us' versus 'them' imagery lies the irenic aversion to violence from the simple recognition of each other as human to restrain a warrior's sword or a neighbour's belligerence. National and global institutions and forms of interdependence have been humanity's best hope for putting the best of religion into practice. At a practical level, thinkers often inspired with spiritual principles have outlined steps to re-educate and socialize the mind. The work of Johann Galtung (1996) has called for positive peace and removing the deeper underlying structural factors, including material wants and oppressive ideologies, that prevent human beings from attaining their full potential. Among other things, he advocates peace journalism to counteract the negative and war-mongering effects of conflict media, such as those which further negative imageries among peoples and nation-states. Violence or war-oriented journalism focuses on the conflict as it unfolds and can often lead to dehumanization through 'us' versus 'them' type of language and posing the 'other' as the problem. Further, as with a Mahatma Gandhi and a Martin Luther King, Jr., there remain other collective possibilities for transcending violence through a type of praxis that proclaims love for the world, including forgiveness for the oppressor. Meanwhile, the geographies of peace oscillate between spiritual idealism and often a practical need to stop killing each other.

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