THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS:
THE BIBLE AND THE LEGITIMATION
OF VIOLENCE

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"The Bible, of all books, is the most dangerous one, the one that has been endowed with the power to kill," writes Mieke Bal.[1] Like many striking aphorisms, this statement is not quite true. Some other books, notably the *Qurʾan*, are surely as lethal, and in any case, to coin a phrase, books don't kill people. But Professor Bal has a point nonetheless. When it became clear that the terrorists of September 11, 2001, saw or imagined their grievances in religious terms, any reader of the Bible should have had a flash of recognition. The Muslim extremists drew their inspiration from the *Qurʾan* rather than the Bible, but both Scriptures draw from the same wellsprings of ancient Near Eastern religion. While it is true that both Bible and *Qurʾan* admit of various readings and emphases, and that terrorist hermeneutics can be seen as a case of the devil citing Scripture for his purpose, it is also true that the devil does not have to work very hard to find biblical precedents for the legitimation of violence. Many people in the modern world suspect that there is an intrinsic link between violence and what Jan Assmann has called "the Mosaic distinction" between true and false religion,[2] or even between violence and monotheism or monolatry.[3] Such claims are, no doubt, too simple. Violence and the sacred went hand in hand long before the rise of Akhenaten or Moses, and polytheism can be used to

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[1] Mieke Bal, *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 14.

[2] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Moses in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1–6.

[3] See, e.g., Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

legitimate violence just as easily as monotheism.[4] But it is biblical monotheism that has dominated the Western world for the last two thousand years, and it is the Bible that concerns us here. At a time when the Western world is supposedly engaged in a war on terrorism, it may be opportune to reflect on the ways in which the Bible appears to endorse and bless the recourse to violence, and to ask what the implications may be for the task of biblical interpretation.

Violence, of course, has many forms. On a broad level, it has been defined as "the attempt of an individual or group to impose its will on others through any nonverbal, verbal, or physical means that inflict psychological or physical injury."[5] Often the term is reserved for coercion or force that is illegitimate, and is associated with social disorder, although states and governments routinely use forceful and coercive methods to impose order.[6] For the present, I will restrict myself to the most obvious, even crude, forms of violence—the killing of others without benefit of judicial procedure. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the line between actual killing and verbal, symbolic, or imaginary violence is thin and permeable. The threat of violence is a method of forceful coercion, even if no blood is actually shed.

I. The *ḥerem* or Ban

"The Lord is a warrior," says the Song of Moses (Exod 15:3), in one of the earliest attempts to characterize the God of Israel.[7] Many of the oldest hymns in praise of this god celebrate "the triumphs of the Lord" (צדקות יהוה, Judg 5:11). "It is as good as certain," wrote Gerhard von Rad, "that the concept of faith—in other words, that confident trusting in the action of Yahweh—had its actual origin in the holy war, and that from there it took on its own peculiar

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[4] See Manfred Weippert, "'Heiliger Krieg' in Israel und Assyrien: Kritische Anmerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des 'Heiligen Krieges im alten Israel,'" *ZAW* 84 (1972): 460–93; Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 177; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989); Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1985); Eckart Otto, *Krieg und Frieden in der Hebräischen Bibel und im Alten Orient* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 13–75. More broadly, on the mythology of violence in world religions, see James A. Aho, *Religious Mythology and the Art of War: Comparative Religious Symbolisms of Military Violence* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981).

[5] Craig L. Nessan, "Sex, Aggression, and Pain: Sociobiological Implications for Theological Anthropology," *Zygon* 33 (1998): 451. Compare Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 13.

[6] David Riches, "The Phenomenon of Violence," in *The Anthropology of Violence* (ed. David Riches; Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 1–7.

[7] On the antiquity of the song, see Frank Moore Cross, "The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth," in his *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 112–44.

dynamic."[8] Even if we regard von Rad's statement as exaggerated, it is certainly true that YHWH's putative power in battle was a major consideration in early Israelite worship.[9] Moreover, the Israelites were expected to "come to the help of the Lord" in battle and were subject to sanctions if they did not, as can be seen from the cursing of Meroz in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:23). Only in much later times would the power of the deity be taken as a reason for quietism on the part of human worshipers.[10]

The violence associated with the worship of YHWH in antiquity is most vividly illustrated by the *ḥerem,* or ban, the practice whereby the defeated enemy was devoted to destruction.[11] The practice was not peculiar to Israel. A famous parallel is provided by the Moabite Stone, erected by the ninth-century king Mesha:

> And Chemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel. So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all, seven thousand men, boys, women, girls, and maid–servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for (the god) Ashtar-Chemosh."[12]

The practice was evidently known in Israel and its environs, although it is not widely attested in the ancient Near East.[13] It was not just a figment of the imagination of later writers.

The Moabite example shows that the slaughter has a sacrificial character; the victims are offered to the god.[14] In the Bible, this is sometimes done at the

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[8] Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (trans M. J. Dawn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 71. On the reception of von Rad's study, see Ben Ollenburger's introductory essay, "Gerhard von Rad's Theory of Holy War," in the same volume, pp. 1–33.

[9] Israelite religion was not at all exceptional in this regard. See the works of Weippert and Kang, cited in n. 4 above.

[10] Contra Millard C. Lind (*Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* [Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1980]), who argues that Israel depended on the miraculous power of YHWH and that Israel's fighting was ineffective. Lind takes the Song of the Sea in Exod 15 as the archetypical example.

[11] Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Ḥerem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (BJS 211; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28–89.

[12] *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ed. Andrew Dearman; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Stern, *Biblical Ḥerem,* 19–87. For the text, see *ANET,* 320–21 (trans. W. F. Albright).

[13] For an exhaustive discussion of proposed parallels, see Stern, *Biblical Ḥerem,* 57–87. Stern tries to show "that a specific cast of mind that was responsible for the חרם was also present at varying times and places elsewhere in the ancient Near East" (p. 87), but he admits that none of the parallels is perfect. Kang declares that "the idea of the ban is not attested in the ancient Near Eastern context except in the Moabite stone and in the Bible" (*Divine War,* 81). Kang follows the analysis of C. H. W. Brekelmans, *De Ḥerem in het Oude Testament* (Nijmegen: Centrale Drukkerij, 1959).

[14] The sacrificial character of the ban is argued especially by Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible,* 28–55.

deity's command. 1 Samuel 15:3 may serve as a representative example: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy (*ḥrm*) all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." The *ḥerem* can also be undertaken on human initiative. In Num 21:1–3, the Israelites respond to a setback at Arad by making a vow to the Lord, that "if you will indeed give this people into our hands, then we will utterly destroy their towns." When the Lord duly hands over the Canaanites, the Israelites "utterly destroy them and their towns." The fulfillment of the promise shows that more than the destruction of property was involved. We are reminded of the vow of Jephthah in Judg 11:31: "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me . . . shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering." Jephthah clearly intended human sacrifice, though not the sacrifice of his daughter, as transpired.[15] The parallel underlines the fact that the ban, too, involves human sacrifice. The *do ut des* mentality may also be implied in other cases where no rationale is given for the ban: the assumption is that the offering wins the support of the deity. In any case, there is assumed to be a connection between the fulfillment of the ban and success in battle, as is clear in the story of Achan and the conquest of Ai in Josh 7–8, where defeat is attributed to Achan's violation of the ban.

The ritualistic character of the *ḥerem*, which leaves no room for individual decision, has sometimes been viewed as a mitigating factor in its morality. It eliminated plunder and exploitation. "Paradoxically," writes Susan Niditch, "the ban as sacrifice may be viewed as admitting of more respect for the value of human life than other war ideologies that allow for the arbitrary killing of soldiers and civilians."[16] The enemy is deemed worthy of being offered to God. One hopes that the Canaanites appreciated the honor. Rather than respect for human life, the practice bespeaks a totalistic attitude, which is common in armies and warfare, wherein the individual is completely subordinated to the interests of the group.[17] Niditch is quite right, however, that the ban as sacrifice requires "a God who appreciates human sacrifice," and that those who practiced the ban "would presumably have something in common with those who

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[15] George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1901), 299.

[16] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible,* 50. Compare the remarks of James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 209. Stern argues that the enemy is perceived as an embodiment of chaos (*Biblical Ḥerem,* 218–20).

[17] Compare Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Violence, and Exemplary Dualism: Beyond the Extrinsic Model," in *Millennialism and Violence* (ed. Michael Barkun; London: Cass, 1996), 10–50.

believed in the efficacy of child sacrifice."[18] All of this helps put the practice in context in the ancient world, but increases rather than lessens its problematic nature from an ethical point of view.

It is now widely recognized that human sacrifice was practiced in ancient Israel much later than scholars of an earlier generation had assumed.[19] Abraham is not condemned but praised for his willingness to offer up his son, even though he is not required to go through with it.[20] Exodus 22:28–29 appears to require the sacrifice of the firstborn and does not provide for substitution in the manner of the parallel text in Exod 34:19–20.[21] The Judean kings Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:3) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:6) are accused of child sacrifice. Their practice cannot be dismissed as due to foreign influence, but had venerable precedents in the cult of YHWH. Nonetheless, by the time of the Deuteronomists this practice had been denounced by prophets (Mic 6:6–8; Jer 19:4–6), and Deuteronomy explicitly condemns it as an abhorrent Canaanite custom (Deut 12:31; 18:10). Yet the same Deuteronomy has no qualms about the practice of the ban, and in fact most of the passages dealing with *ḥerem* are found in the Deuteronomistic corpus.

Deuteronomy does not eradicate the sacrificial aspect of the ban, but it seeks to rationalize the practice by justifying it.[22] Deuteronomy 20 distinguishes between "towns that are very far from you" and "the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance." In the latter, "you must not let anything that breathes remain alive . . . so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord your God." Ethnic cleansing is the way to ensure cultic purity. In the case of faraway towns, only the males need be put to the sword. In this case, no justification is deemed necessary; the slaughter is normal procedure in warfare; it is the restraint that is remarkable. Reasons other than the danger of false worship are occasionally offered. Sihon, king of Heshbon, is

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[18] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible,* 50.

[19] George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985); John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3–17.

[20] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection,* 13. On the sacrifice of Abraham, see further my essay "Faith Without Works: Biblical Ethics and the Sacrifice of Isaac," in *Recht und Ethos im Alten Testament: Gestalt und Wirkung: Festschrift für Horst Seebass zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. S. Beyerle, G. Mayer, and H. Strauss; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 115–31.

[21] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection,* 3–4.

[22] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible,* 56–77 ("The Ban as God's Justice"). Compare Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 143: "There are signs in the text of some anxiety about the conquest commands—a search for reasons, lest God's wrath seem wholly arbitrary."

condemned for his lack of hospitality to the Israelites in Deut 2:26–35, and not a single survivor is left. Perhaps the most practical justification is given in Num 33:55: "but if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides; they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling." The predominant justification for the slaughter, however, is as a precautionary measure against false worship.[23]

Insofar as the *ḥerem* applies primarily to the promised land, it also rests on the premise that this land is legitimately given to Israel by its God. The command in Deut 7 is typical and foundational:

> When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the Lord gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deut 7:1–6)

There are two primary factors in these passages that are taken as warrants for violence on the part of Israel. One is the demand that Israel worship only one god, YHWH. Other peoples who might interfere with that demand and Israelites who fail to comply with it may legitimately be killed. The second is the claim that a land is given to Israel by divine grant and that consequently the previous inhabitants not only may be driven out or killed, but should be. The legitimation for violence is not simply monotheism as such. There is no demand that all people must worship YHWH, although that is envisioned as a desirable goal in some prophetic texts.[24] The issues concern the status of Israel as YHWH's chosen people and covenant partner, and the claim of a land as its inheritance. In short, the issue is not monotheism as such, but the advancement of a particular people and the imposition of its cult within the territory it controls.

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[23] Stern argues that the connection with idolatry is primary (*Biblical Ḥerem,* 221). Exodus 22:19 says that anyone who sacrifices to gods other than YHWH must be devoted to destruction. This does not require, however, that prevention of idolatry was always the primary factor in the use of *ḥerem* in warfare.

[24] This point is emphasized by Jonathan Boyarin, "Reading Exodus into History," *New Literary History* 23 (1992): 525.

The command to slaughter the Canaanites is not without a certain irony in the context of Deuteronomy. As Moshe Weinfeld has shown, Deuteronomy is one of the great repositories of humanistic values in the biblical corpus.[25] This is the book that repeatedly tells the Israelites to be compassionate to slaves and aliens, remembering that they themselves were slaves and exiles in the land of Egypt.[26] The ethical principle to do unto others as you would have them do unto you was not an innovation of the NT.[27] The laws on slaves and aliens in Deuteronomy show an appreciation of what Emmanuel Levinas calls "the face of the other"[28] as human and call for empathy with our fellow human beings. But this empathy does not extend to the Canaanites, or the peoples of the land. At least by the time Deuteronomy was written, the people of Israel and Judah should have known the heart of the conquered, and known what it was like to have their land overrun and their shrines burned down. Yet there is no appreciation here of the face of the Canaanite and no misgiving about doing to others what they themselves had suffered.

There is also some irony in the way in which these commands of destruction are embedded in the story of the exodus, which has served as the great paradigm of liberation in Western history.[29] But the liberation of the Israelites and the subjugation of the Canaanites are two sides of the same coin. Without a land of their own, the liberated Israelites would have nowhere to go, but the land promised to them was not empty and had its own inhabitants. Read from the Canaanite perspective, this is not a liberating story at all.[30]

Of course, those who have read and recited the story of the exodus over the centuries have been Jews and Christians who identify with Israel in the story. In the not too distant past, biblical scholars gave the Canaanites short shrift. "From the impartial standpoint of a philosopher of history," wrote

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[25] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 282–97.

[26] Deuteronomy 15:15; 24:18, 22 etc.; cf. Exod 23:9: "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

[27] Some formulation of the golden rule is known to nearly every culture, East and West. See Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 509–16.

[28] Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 23: "I have already spoken much about the face of the other as being the original locus of the meaningful."

[29] On the exodus paradigm, see Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution.*

[30] Edward Said, "Michael Walzer's Exodus and Revolution: A Canaanite Reading," *Grand Street* 5 (winter 1986): 86–106; Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (1989): 261–66; Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 71–121.

William Foxwell Albright, "it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities."[31] In a more explicitly theological vein, George Ernest Wright could claim that "the Canaanite civilization and religion was one of the weakest, most decadent, and most immoral cultures of the civilized world at that time," and that God had a purpose in choosing Israel and giving it the land.[32] Most scholars, we should hope, have learned by now that biblical denunciations of the Canaanites cannot be taken at face value and that these texts may tell us more about the purposes of their human authors than about the purposes of God.[33]

II. History and Ideology

The context of the discussion has changed significantly in recent years with the recognition that the biblical texts are not historically reliable accounts of early Israelite history but ideological fictions from a much later time. The archaeological evidence does not support the view that marauding Israelites actually engaged in the massive slaughter of Canaanites, either in the thirteenth century or at any later time.[34] Recent scholarly hypotheses about the origins of Israel tend to be more compatible with modern moral sensibilities, whether the early Israelites are imagined as peasants in revolt,[35] or as quiet, hard-working settlers in the hill country.[36] But this scarcely relieves the moral problem posed by the biblical texts, which portray Israel as an aggressive, invading force, impelled by divine commands.[37] In the words of James Barr:

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[31] William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 280–81, cited by Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel,* 83. Albright noted several analogies to the Israelite treatment of the Canaanites, including the treatment of native Americans.

[32] George Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament," in *The Book of the Acts of God: Christian Scholarship Interprets the Bible* (ed. G. E. Wright and R. H. Fuller; London: Duckworth, 1960), 109, cited by Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel,* 93. On the vilification of the Canaanites, see the comments of Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology,* 214.

[33] For a more positive view of the Canaanites, see Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

[34] For up-to-date assessments, see Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 72–122; William G. Dever, "Israel, History of (Archaeology and the 'Conquest')," *ABD* 3:545–58.

[35] George E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962): 66–87; Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

[36] Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed,* 105–22.

[37] Von Rad argued that holy war was an institution for the defense of the amphictyony (*Holy*

"the problem is not whether the narratives are fact or fiction, the problem is that, whether fact or fiction, the ritual destruction is *commended*."[38] The texts are not naïve reflections of primitive practice but programmatic ideological statements from the late seventh century B.C.E. or later. We can no longer accept them as simply presenting what happened. Whether we see these texts as reflecting expansionistic policies of King Josiah or as mere fantasies of powerless Judeans after the exile, they project a model of the ways in which Israel should relate to its neighbors. In this perspective, ownership of the land of Israel is conferred by divine grant, not by ancestral occupancy or by negotiation, and violence against rival claimants of that land is not only legitimate but mandatory, especially if these people worship gods other than YHWH, the God of Israel.

It is a commonplace of modern scholarship to say that the books of the Torah and the Deuteronomistic history are engaged in the construction of the identity of "Israel." What they reflect is not Israel as it was but Israel as the authors thought it should be. Identity is defined negatively by a sharp differentiation of Israel from the other peoples of the land, and positively by the prescriptions of a covenant with a jealous sovereign god. In Deut 7, the peoples of the land are identified chiefly by their worship, which involves sacred poles and pillars and idols. At least some of these cultic accoutrements are associated with the worship of YHWH in Genesis.[39] In Deut 12 we find that any cultic worship outside of "the place that the Lord your God will choose" is illegitimate. The reform of King Josiah described in 2 Kgs 22–23 is evidently an attempt to implement the cultic demands of Deuteronomy, or, to put it differently, Deuteronomy, in some form, was promulgated to authorize the actions of Josiah. Josiah's actions were directed not against actual Canaanites but against Israelites whose cultic practices did not conform to Deuteronomic orthopraxy. There is much to be said, then, for the view that neither Deuteronomy nor Joshua, in the historical context of their composition, was intended "to incite literal violence against ethnic outsiders," but rather they were directed at "insiders who pose a threat to the hierarchy that is being asserted."[40] Whether this really relieves the moral problem might be debated.[41] In fairness to Josiah, we

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War, 52–73). The whole idea of an amphictyony in the period of the Judges is no longer accepted, but in any case the biblical accounts associate *ḥerem* with the conquest, not with defensive actions.

[38] Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology,* 209.

[39] See, e.g., Gen 21:33; 28:18. On sacred sites and ritual objects in ancient Israel, see Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 319–53; Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 62–79.

[40] Lori L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (JSOTSup 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 12–13.

[41] The violence might be explained to a degree along Girardian lines, insofar as the "Canaan-

are not told that he practiced *ḥerem* against anyone, although he certainly used violence to suppress the high places. But texts have a life of their own, and the effective history of the conquest stories is based not on critical reconstructions of the underlying history but on the *prima facie* meaning of the texts.

III. Story and Example

Two examples may suffice here to illustrate the ways in which these biblical texts have served to legitimize violent action. The first is drawn from ancient Judaism, from the book of 1 Maccabees, which, ironically, has the status of scripture in Catholic Christianity but not in Judaism. It is easy enough to sympathize with the story of the Maccabean revolt.[42] In view of the alleged persecution of observant Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, the actions of Mattathias and his sons can be viewed as self-defense, and therefore legitimate by the standards of any culture. But this is not the only, nor even the primary, aspect of the situation emphasized in 1 Maccabees. Mattathias, we are told, "burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu" (1 Macc 1:26). The reference is to the incident at Baal-Peor in Num 25, when the Israelites incurred the wrath of the Lord by having sexual relations with Moabite women and participating in the sacrifices of pagan gods.[43] The unfortunate Zimri brought a Midianite woman into his family in the sight of Moses and the congregation. Phinehas took his spear and followed them into the tent and pierced the two of them. His action was approved in an oracle spoken by Moses:

> Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites by manifesting such zeal among them on my behalf that in my jealousy I did not consume the Israelites. Therefore say, "I hereby grant him my covenant of peace." It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites. (Num 25:10–15)

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ites" become scapegoats for the sake of the solidarity of Israel. René Girard's views may be found in *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and, with reference to the Bible, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). For a balanced evaluation of Girard's theories, see Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*, 20–23, 29–31.

[42] On the circumstances that led to the revolt, see John J. Collins, "Cult and Culture: The Limits of Hellenization in Judea," in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel* (ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 38–61.

[43] For a full analysis of the passage, see Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 279–303. Verses 1–5, where the problem is of Moabite origin, are usually ascribed to J or JE. The remainder of the story, which concerns a Midianite woman, is Priestly.

A recent monograph entitled *Old Testament Ethics* assures us that "the exemplary dimension of his act was not its violence . . . but Phinehas's zeal for the Lord and his atoning for the people. These were hallmarks of true priesthood. . . ."[44] Mattathias, however, was in no doubt as to what the exemplary dimension of the act required. Like Phinehas, he first kills a compatriot, thereby lending credence to the view that a primary purpose of violence in the biblical texts is to enforce conformity within the people of Israel. But Phinehas also participates, as priest, in the massacre of the Midianites, which follows the practice of the *ḥerem,* or ban, although that word is not used.[45] Mattathias also proceeds to wage war against the Gentiles. Moreover, the example both of Mattathias and of Phinehas became the model for the "zealots" who fought against the Romans in the first century C.E.,[46] and whose methods would surely qualify for the label "terrorist" in modern political rhetoric.[47]

The second example is drawn from Christian history. The English Puritan revolution was justified repeatedly by biblical analogies drawn from the OT. Using a rather dubious interpretation of the book of Daniel, the revolutionaries saw themselves as "the Saints of the Most High," commissioned to execute judgment on kings and nobles.[48] Oliver Cromwell drew a parallel between his revolution and the exodus[49] and proceeded to treat the Catholics of Ireland as the Canaanites. He even declared that "there are great occasions in which some men are called to great services in the doing of which they are excused from the common rule of morality," as were the heroes of the OT.[50] A generation later, the Puritans of New England applied the biblical texts about the conquest to their own situation, casting the Native American tribes in the role of the

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[44] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 108.

[45] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible,* 81. The Midianites lived outside the promised land and were not subject to eradication by the decree of Deuteronomy. The slaughter is justified in Num 25:16–18 on the grounds that "they have harassed you by the trickery with which they deceived you in the affair of Peor."

[46] Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989). Josephus uses the name "Zealots" for a faction that emerged in 67–68 C.E., but the ideology of zeal informed other revolutionary groups too. For a nuanced summary see David Rhoads, "Zealots," *ABD* 6:1043–54; also Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), 190–243. On the ideological continuity with the Maccabees, see William R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

[47] David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 658–77.

[48] Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-Evaluation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960) 148-49.

[49] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution,* 3–4.

[50] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes,* 151.

Canaanites and Amalekites. In 1689, Cotton Mather urged the colonists to go forth against "Amalek annoying this Israel in the wilderness."[51] A few years later, one Herbert Gibbs gave thanks for "the mercies of God in extirpating the enemies of Israel in Canaan."[52] He was not referring to biblical times. Similar rhetoric persisted in American Puritanism through the eighteenth century, and indeed biblical analogies have continued to play a part in American political rhetoric down to the present.[53]

Of course Americans are not alone in looking to the Hebrew Bible or OT for an exemplary paradigm. The Boers of South Africa applied the story of the exodus to their situation under British rule, and black African liberationists later applied it to their situation under the Boers.[54] Most obviously, biblical narratives have been a factor in the Zionist movement in Israel, shaping the imagination even of secular, socialist Zionists and providing powerful precedents for right-wing militants.[55] Biblical analogies also provide the underpinnings for support of Israel among conservative Christians.[56]

IV. Eschatological Vengeance

The examples of the Zealots and the Puritans may help to dispel any notion that religion evolves in a linear way and that the violence of Joshua or of Phinehas was a vestige of primitive religion, transcended in later Judaism and Christianity. It is true, however, that most of the biblical endorsements of violent human action are set in the context of early Israel, even if they were written later. The highly ritualized accounts of warfare in the books of Chronicles are also set in an earlier time and are unlikely to stir the blood in any case. In the lit-

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[51] Ibid., 168.

[52] Ibid.

[53] *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (ed. Conrad Cherry; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), 11–12.

[54] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution,* 6; T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), chs. 1 and 2.

[55] Boyarin disputes the extent of the influence of the exodus story on early Zionism, but grants its increased importance after World War II ("Reading Exodus into History," 538–43). On the use of the Bible by contemporary right-wing Israelis, see the thoughtful comments of Moshe Greenberg, "On the Political Use of the Bible in Modern Israel: An Engaged Critique," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 461–71.

[56] Keith Whitelam finds pervasive analogies with Zionism in the various reconstructions of early Israel by modern scholars (*Invention of Ancient Israel,* 71–121), but his argument is flawed by overstatement.

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erature of the Second Temple period, however, the focus is often on the future rather than on the past.[57] The late prophetic and apocalyptic literature is not necessarily less violent in its rhetoric than Deuteronomy or Joshua, but it has less emphasis on human action and more on the expectation of the eschatological judgment of God.

Again, a few examples may suffice. The prophet of the latter chapters of the book of Isaiah imagines God as a warrior spattered in blood, like a person who has been treading the wine press (Isa 63:3).[58] The day of redemption must also be a day of vengeance on God's enemies. Here, no one is asked to "come to the help of the Lord":

> I looked, but there was no helper;
> I stared, but there was no one to sustain me;
> So my own arm brought me victory and my wrath sustained me. (Isa 63:5)

In the apocalyptic literature of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the faithful people are to wait for this divine intervention. The book of Daniel tells how in a time of persecution the wise among the people will instruct the many, even though some of them will fall, "so that they may be refined, purified, and cleansed, until the time of the end." The archangel Michael does the fighting on their behalf. At the end, when Michael prevails, they are elevated to shine like the stars forever (Dan 12:1-3).

In this literature there is a new factor to be considered: the hope of resurrection. Martyrdom becomes an option, because the reward of the righteous is not in this world but in heaven.[59] The apocalyptic literature is not necessarily quietistic. One apocalypse in the book of *Enoch*, known as the Animal Apocalypse, apparently endorses the militancy of the Maccabees (*1 En.* 90:9–16).[60] The *War Scroll* from Qumran is written in anticipation of human participation in the final conflict, but this is compatible with the pledge to avoid conflict with "the men of the pit" until the Day of Vengeance (1QS 10:19).[61] But the dominant tendency of this literature is quietistic, in the sense that it encourages endurance and even martyrdom in the present era. This is also true of the book of Revelation in the NT, which holds up the crucified Messiah, the Lamb that

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[57] Obviously, this is not always the case. For example, the story of the sack of Shechem in Gen 34 is retold repeatedly in Second Temple literature. See Reinhard Pummer, "Genesis 34 in Jewish Writings of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *HTR* 75 (1982): 177–88.

[58] On this passage, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 203–8.

[59] John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," in idem, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 75–97.

[60] Judas Maccabee is represented as a ram with a large horn. See Patrick A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 62–63.

[61] John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 108–9.

was slain, as the model for Christians to emulate.[62] We find a similar combination of present restraint, in the hope of future vengeance, in the rabbinic tradition.[63] The *Mekilta* cites Exod 15:6: "Your right hand shatters the foe," and comments: "it does not say 'has shattered the foe' but 'will shatter the foe'—in the Age to Come" (*Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmaʾel,* Shirta, 5). And again, quoting Deut 32:35: "Vengeance is mine and recompense—I will punish them myself. Not through an angel and not through a sent one" (*Sifre Deuteronomy* [ed. Finkelstein], 325).[64]

There is, in fact, an intrinsic connection between present forbearance and eschatological vengeance in this literature.[65] In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul cites the same verse from Deut 32 to illustrate the point that his readers should "never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God. . . . No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads'" (Rom 12:19–21).[66] As Krister Stendahl showed in a famous article, this attitude has more to do with the perfection of hatred than with disinterested love: "With the Day of Vengeance at hand, the proper and reasonable attitude is to forego one's own vengeance and to leave vengeance to God. Why walk around with a little shotgun if the atomic blast is imminent?"[67] The expectation of vengeance is also pivotal in the book of Revelation.[68] The coming fall of Rome is heralded in gloating terms in ch. 18. In ch. 19, Christ appears from heaven as a warrior on a white horse, from whose mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and who will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God. Even in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies is framed by the prospect of a final judgment when the wheat will be definitively separated from the tares (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43).

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[62] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John," in *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 198–217.

[63] Adiel Schremer, "Eschatology, Violence, and Suicide: The Role of an Early Rabbinic Theme in the Middle Ages," a paper delivered at a conference entitled "Apocalypse and Violence," at Yale University, May 5, 2002.

[64] For the use of Deut 32 in an earlier apocalyptic text, see *Testament of Moses* 9–10; and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131.

[65] H. G. L. Peels (*The Vengeance of God* [Leiden: Brill, 1995]) provides a thorough study of the motif in the Hebrew Bible, but deals with "the intertestamental literature" and the NT only in an appendix (pp. 306–12).

[66] The quotation is derived from Prov 25:21–22.

[67] Krister Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love: 1QS X, 17–20 and Rom 12:19–21," *HTR* 55 (1962): 343–55, citation from pp. 344–45.

[68] Adela Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 729–49.

The effective history of apocalyptic literature has varied with the patience of believers. As we have seen, books like Daniel and Revelation were originally intended to encourage patient endurance, and they have often inspired quietistic movements through the centuries.[69] But there also have been numerous examples of people who took it upon themselves to "force the end."[70] In the Christian tradition, there are several striking examples of this in the late Middle Ages and the period of the Reformation: the Taborites in Bohemia, Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' Revolt, John of Leyden, the messiah of Münster.[71] Apocalyptic expectations played a part in the Puritan revolution in England.[72] In most of these cases, however, the revolutionaries drew their inspiration not just from Daniel or Revelation but from an apocalyptic reading of the entire Bible. The examples of Joshua and Phinehas were all the more relevant in the throes of eschatological crisis. Even when the millenarian movements did not initiate violence themselves, they often provoked it by their uncompromising criticism of the authorities and their refusal to compromise. The Branch Davidians in Waco provide a modern example.[73] In some cases, the violence was self-inflicted, as in the latter-day instances of Jonestown and Heaven's Gate.[74]

The expectation of a final Armageddon may not be as directly conducive to violence as a command to kill the idolators next door, but in fact the impact of eschatological texts may not be very different from that of history-like narrative precedents. Few people in any age have taken the *ḥerem* texts of the Hebrew

[69] See the history of the interpretation of Revelation by Christopher Rowland in *NIB* 12:528–43, and his paper "Apocalypse and Violence: The Evidence from the Reception History of the Book of Revelation," delivered at the conference on "Apocalypse and Violence" at Yale, May 5, 2002. On the traditional quietism of Orthodox Judaism, in anticipation of eschatological salvation, see Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Radical Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 40–78.

[70] On the notion of "forcing the end," which traditionally had negative implications in Judaism, see Ravitzky, *Messianism,* 18.

[71] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 198–280; Robin Barnes, "Images of Hope and Despair: Western Apocalypticism ca. 1500–1800," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (ed. B. McGinn; New York: Continuum, 1998), 2:143–84.

[72] Barnes, "Images of Hope,"163: "The most famous case of radical expectancy in this period was that of the Fifth Monarchy Men, who saw it as the responsibility of believers to help bring on the final and most perfect historical age through militant action." See also Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[73] See James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On the interpretation of the book of Revelation by David Koresh, see pp. 52–79.

[74] On violence and latter-day apocalyptic movements, see further Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges, 2000); eadem, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); and *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer; New York: Routledge, 1997).

Bible as commandments for their own time. Strictly interpreted, they apply only to specific peoples who no longer exist.[75] Equally, eschatological violence is properly the prerogative of God. But in both cases, the approval of violence in the texts offers dangerous encouragement for militants, which has, on occasion, contributed to disaster.

Like the commands to slaughter the Canaanites in the Deuteronomic literature, the predictions of eschatological judgment also shape group identities. In the Jewish apocalyptic literature, the national identity is already qualified. The elect, or the sons of light, are not simply identical with Israel. The land remains important in the Jewish works, but even there it is relativized. In many cases, the ultimate hope of the elect is for life with the angels in heaven. In the NT, identity is no longer tied to ethnicity or to possession of a particular land. What this literature shares with Deuteronomy, however, is the sharp antithesis with the Other, whether the Other is defined in moral terms, as sinners, or in political terms as the Roman Empire. Both Deuteronomy and the apocalypses fashion identity by constructing absolute, incompatible contrasts. In the older literature, the contrast is ethnic and religious, but regional. In the apocalypses, it takes the form of cosmic dualism. In both cases, the absoluteness of the categories is guaranteed by divine revelation and is therefore not subject to negotiation or compromise. Herein lies the root of religious violence in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

V. Violence and Hermeneutics

"There is a time to kill," said Qoheleth, "and a time to heal . . . a time for war, and a time for peace" (Qoh 3:3, 8). Not all violence is necessarily to be condemned. The image of God the Warrior and the hope for an apocalyptic judgment have often given hope to the oppressed. Nonetheless, few will disagree that violence is seldom a good option, and that it can be justified only as a last recourse. Most people in the Western world are rightly repelled by the idea that terrorists, such as the perpetrators of the attacks of September 11, 2001, could be inspired by religious ideals. The thrust of my reflections on violence and religion in the biblical tradition is that the problem is not peculiar to Islam, but can also be found in attitudes and assumptions that are deeply embedded in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The material of which I have been speaking is what Gerd Lüdemann has called "the dark side of the Bible."[76] The

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[75] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution,* 144; Greenberg, "On the Political Use of the Bible," 469.

[76] Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scriptures: The Dark Side of the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Lüdemann provides an extensive discussion of the ban in holy war (pp. 36–54).

issues it raises are not just academic. These texts have had a long effective history, and there is no reason to believe that it has run its course. What are we, as biblical scholars, to say about it at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

There is a long and venerable tradition of interpretation, going back through the church fathers to Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic Judaism, that sees as its task to save the appearances of the text. Luke Johnson has recently argued that modern interpreters have still much to learn from the church fathers: "Origen shows how much more passionately Scripture is engaged when the reader is persuaded of its divine inspiration, which implies that God's wisdom is somehow seeking to be communicated even through the impossibilities of the literal sense. If interpreters today were to learn from Origen, they would not rest easy with the practice of excising or censoring troublesome texts, but would wrestle with them until they yielded a meaning 'worthy of God.'"[77] But allegorical interpretation of the kind practiced in antiquity is hardly viable in the modern world. It is all very well to say that the Canaanites that we should root out are vice and sinfulness, but we still have texts that speak rather clearly of slaughtering human beings.

A more promising strategy is to note the diversity of viewpoints within the Bible, and thereby relativize the more problematic ones.[78] So, for example, we can emphasize the concern for slaves and aliens in Deuteronomy, or the model of the suffering servant, or the NT teaching on love of one's enemies. It is not unusual for Christian interpreters to claim that "the biblical witness to the innocent victim and the God of victims demystifies and demythologizes this sacred social order" in which violence is grounded.[79] Such a selective reading, privileging the death of Jesus, or the model of the suffering servant, is certainly possible, and even commendable, but it does not negate the force of the biblical endorsements of violence that we have been considering. The full canonical shape of the Christian Bible, for what it is worth, still concludes with the judgment scene in Revelation, in which the Lamb that was slain returns as the heavenly warrior with a sword for striking down the nations. In short, violence is not the only model of behavior on offer in the Bible, but it is not an incidental or peripheral feature, and it cannot be glossed over. The Bible not only witnesses

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[77] Luke Timothy Johnson, "Lessons from Premodern Biblical Scholarship," in *Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology 2001 Conference,* Princeton, November 9–11, 2001, conference abstracts, 4–5.

[78] So, in very different ways, Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible;* Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 97; Otto, *Krieg und Frieden,* 76–156; Greenberg, "On the Political Use of the Bible," 466–69.

[79] So James G. Williams, *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 243. Williams bases his approach on that of René Girard. Compare also William Klassen, "Jesus and Phineas: A Rejected First Century Role Model," *SBL Seminar Papers* (1986): 490–500.

to the innocent victim and to the God of victims, but also to the hungry God[80] who devours victims and to the zeal of his human agents.

And therein precisely lies its power. There is much in the Bible that is not "worthy" of the God of the philosophers. There is also much that is not worthy of humanity, certainly much that is not worthy to serve as a model for imitation. This material should not be disregarded, for it is at least as revelatory as the more edifying parts of the biblical witness. The power of the Bible is largely that it gives an unvarnished picture of human nature and of the dynamics of history, and also of religion and the things that people do in its name.[81] After all, it is only in the utopian future that the wolf is supposed to live with the lamb, and even then the wolf will probably feel the safer of the two. The biblical portrayal of human reality becomes pernicious only when it is vested with authority and assumed to reflect, without qualification or differentiation, the wisdom of God or the will of God. The Bible does not demystify or demythologize itself. But neither does it claim that the stories it tells are paradigms for human action in all times and places.

The least that should be expected of any biblical interpreter is honesty, and that requires the recognition, in the words of James Barr, that "the command of consecration to destruction is morally offensive and has to be faced as such,"[82] whether it is found in the Bible or in the *Qurʾan*. To recognize this is to admit that the Bible, for all the wisdom it contains, is no infallible guide on ethical matters. As Roland Bainton put it, in his survey of Christian attitudes to war and peace, "appeal to the Bible is not determinative."[83] But historically people have appealed to the Bible precisely because of its presumed divine authority, which gives an aura of certitude to any position it can be shown to support; in the phrase of Hannah Arendt, "God-like certainty that stops all discussion."[84] And here, I would suggest, is the most basic connection between the Bible and violence, more basic than any command or teaching it contains.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great American jurist, reflected late in his career that he had entered the Civil War brimming with certitude over the righteousness of abolition, which surely was a righteous cause. By the end of

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[80] The phrase of David Shulman, *The Hungry God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[81] Compare Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2: "If art imitates life, scripture likewise reflects it in both holiness and horror."

[82] Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 218.

[83] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 238.

[84] Hannah Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland: There is Still Time," in *Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (ed. Ron H. Feldman; New York: Grove Press, 1978), 181–82; quoted in Marc H. Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 7.

the war he had drawn a different lesson, that certitude leads to violence.[85] The Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation. Perhaps the most constructive thing a biblical critic can do toward lessening the contribution of the Bible to violence in the world, is to show that that certitude is an illusion.

[85] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001), 61.