The Canopy of
the Old War

The Canopy of the Old War:

On the Relationship Between Religion and Violence

By

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INTRODUCTION

Manhattan, 11 September 2001: It probably takes more than a little imagination to recognise an image of the Anti-Christ in the billows of smoke from the destroyed World Trade Center. Apocalyptic-minded contemporaries spread the image of a satanic grimace on the web; but it was probably the usual consequence of modern image production. Nevertheless, the symbolism behind it is meaningful, as it speaks of a historical moment that gathers everything that comes afterwards under the thought of world conflagration .[1]

After more than twenty years, the terror has become contemporary history. Those who wanted to recognise the beginning of a downfall in the attack have been proven right in another way. The world still exists, it has not come to an end, but time is to a certain extent out of joint. So why look back over the past decades if we are now in a position to distinguish between political structures and political semantics? Looking back, we know the effects of terror within societies; we also know how the war on terror was justified and carried out. Other conflicts have emerged; unrest has increased, terror remains omnipresent. The popular images of our time include the moment of the assassination as well as the silence at Ground Zero, the destruction of the Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan, or the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. The latter event is an empty image, however, because this moment was reflected solely in the eyes of the politicians and military in the Situation Room - presumably.

To a certain extent, these are all signs of the times with images and events that will not be forgotten. What these examples show is nothing less than a new kind of war of images, for which previous historical experience cannot account. It is also a war of religions and cultures, but it has a peculiar structure: in the midst of a global society, it cannot be meaningfully contained or even understood by any territorial boundary.

Scholars who deal with the phenomenon of terror and the fight against it, however, reserve the right to distinguish between *raw violence as an experience* and the *narrative about violence.* The violence itself remains

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[1] Johannes Fried: Dies Irae. Munich: C. H. Beck 2016, p. 11

distant and uncanny, something that is experienced and thus remains forever in the world of the person affected. The semantics, however, which are stretched over the event, reach beyond one's own horizon. The final battle between good and evil, the struggle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light results in a new grand narrative, flanked by the needs of political society. All of this can be translated into critical reflections, whereby the question of how the reality of history can be related to people's narratives remains unanswered to the end.

But why and to what extent it is worth thinking about religion and violence becomes recognisable in another dimension. The simplest of all questions could be brought into this context: *what would the world be like without religion? Would it be poorer in violence, poorer in enmity and division? What part does religion play in violence* - a question that has been asked so often that it tends to have a paralysing effect. But here it is posed in a special context.

It is well known that the great stories of religious history still resonate today. Whether you want to follow the interpretations or not, at the centre is the confrontation between man and religion. One great narrative is of a psychological nature; it tells of the human psyche, its seductiveness, its vulnerability and its dependence on meaning. The other great tradition of religious history looks first and foremost at the big picture, the all-encompassing, the world and only secondarily at the human being. This view, however, is of an existential sharpness, because the relationship between man and religion conceals a "higher" conflict: between the *historical and the divine*. The historical-philosophical nucleus of this relationship is still significant, even if we interpret the philosophy of history differently today.

Two interpretations are under discussion here, for which no exclusive names can be found. At their centre - here and there - is the human being capable of violence in relation to the divine. It is the garish, exaggerated images of religion that take centre stage: In this image, the religious person questions the will of God, submits to the higher power and can, at that moment, become violence itself or turn towards peace. The emergence of a "political theology" and its tendency towards totalitarianism is rooted in this movement of thought. Unravelling the context forces a relentless reflection on what man "still" is, can still be, when he is deprived of his higher meaning, when he literally stands naked in existence. It is the interest in the gestures of subordination to the divine will that determines this perception. As is well known, the presumption of presenting oneself as the mouthpiece

of a higher will determines the tradition of criticism. The inequality between people is continued in the field of theology; the will to power determines both spheres.

The psychology of imaginative religious consciousness has been established since Hegel at the latest; the believer therefore indulges in strong images, creates myths and spreads mythical stories of the absolute. Religious narratives trace existence back to divine creative power; they establish order by distinguishing between heaven and earth. They justify the difference between good and evil in stories about the fall of man and the expulsion from paradise.[2] The religious world view has a genuinely psychological effect: in view of the unsurpassable ultimate generality, it offers a way of transforming "indeterminacy into determinacy". Religion offers the believer the opportunity to attain a supporting certainty in the face of the negative in life; if things go well, this is the special achievement of religion.[3]

This basic psychological situation must be considered in its social and political dimension; as is well known, it promotes a historical dynamic of extreme significance. Religion is expressed as an effective force in the great historical contexts. In terms of the philosophy of history, therefore, a different task for thought arises: the question is not whether man becomes violent through religion, but to what extent the religious or "the divine" and the historical can be brought into a common relationship.

These outlined lines of the philosophy of violence and religion form a guideline that will be developed and deepened in the following. The underlying questions are to a certain extent theoretical; they ask about the general reason for religious orientation. Why do people turn to God? The everyday theory answers: because they expect comfort and meaning, because they are not satisfied with rational reasons, because they want to go beyond themselves.

One can follow these answers to a certain extent; however, a disproportion appears in each individual definition: religion cannot be reduced to psychological aspects when viewed as a whole. We can anticipate this much here: it is only properly understood as a life-related, existential truth.

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[2] Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: Introduction. In: Ders. / Heinrich Meier (eds.): Politik und Religion. Munich: C. H. Beck 2013, p. 9
[3] Ibid,. S. 10

The first part of this book is like an introduction to the history of violence in the context of religion. Religious conflicts have the disadvantage that they do not lie before our eyes as the objective object of a distant past, but as an ongoing history. What happens eludes the conventional approach. We are bound in our perception, regardless of which culture, religion or way of life we ascribe to. This ambivalence accompanies the portrayal like a shadow. The decisive point that is marked here refers to the change in form of violence in the shadow of religion.

The considerations in the second part can be summarised under the heading of *how the religious is not to be understood*. As we can see, this is a critical perspective with a strong reference to the present.

The following section takes a direct look at the problems outlined above, with an open mind, so to speak. It deals with "hardening", which can be assumed to be known and exist as a permanent task for thought and action. Religion can tip over into violence, be linked to violence, appear as violence. As is well known, religion takes on its most threatening form when it enters the realm of war. There is no reason to look past this constellation, which is why the second part will be linked to politological or contemporary conflicts.

In contrast, the last part has only one function. It is intended to point out points of contact and scope for action that are obstructed by the prevailing discourses. It is about possible "alliances" - not in the sense of political units joining forces, but in the broadest sense. The aim here is to break out of the usual circle of thinking - because anyone who addresses a conflict legitimately expects solutions. This expectation is not met here because, above all, it would exceed the author's competences. Our interest is focussed solely on the *actual meaning that* we derive from the religious complex.

PART ONE

THE CANOPY OF THE OLD WAR

Some events of religious violence have retained their significance to the present day and have become proverbial: think of St Bartholomew's Day, which occupies a firm place in France's collective memory. The Paris Blood Wedding was a pogrom against French Protestants, the Huguenots, in August 1572. The massacre was part of the sequence of the Huguenot Wars, the failed assassination attempt on Admiral des Coligny on 22 August 1572, the subsequent murder of the Huguenot leaders and the pogroms that followed throughout France. This experience was repeatedly taken up as a motif in art and literature; in terms of religious history, St Bartholomew's Night is considered evidence of the failure of Protestantism in France[1] . However, the event also symbolises religious obstinacy, fury and frenzy, fiercely inflamed by religious mania.

In the Enlightenment, people had turned their attention to the phenomenon; Voltaire even recognised the prototype of contagious madness in the figure of the ecstatic zealot1[2]. Voltaire's reflections certainly have contemporary relevance. What drives a fanatic, what is "behind" the medieval crusade movement, regicide, religious fervour? A fanatic is a sinister figure, haunted by dark and bloody madness. A madness that spreads like a virus, whose fire spreads and especially takes possession of people with less resistance. Voltaire recognised a force in furor and obsession that could only work through the countervailing power of enlightenment - in the guise of ancient stoicism.

This view of religious fanaticism is modern in the sense that it works with the stylistic devices of pathology. The religious zealot, who will not flinch from even the most horrific act, can only be dealt with in the language of

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[1] Simon P. Widman: Die Bartholomäusnacht des Jahres 1572. Wolfenbüttel: Melchior 2006; Francois Dubois, Le Massacre de la Saint-Barthelemy
[2] Volker Reinhardt: Voltaire. Das Abenteuer der Freiheit. Munich: C. H Beck 2022

medicine. Fanaticism and ecstasy are therefore "diseases" that must be treated as such.

Religious violence is frightening. It finds a breeding ground in various forms of "group mania". Philipp Buc describes physiognomy and characteristics that prove to be filled with heightened egotism and megalomania, diminished powers of judgement and a lack of social bonding. These episodes, as difficult as they are to bear, lead from the first crusades, in which "religious enthusiasm" expressed itself in excessive forms, to the psychopathology of Nazi terror and the contemporary extremism of the Bader-Meinhof group.[3]

However, the reflections remain short-lived if they are not extended to the political sphere. In political religions, the opposites of holy furore and cooled enlightenment are expressed. The problem, it could be argued, did not end historically with the "pacification" of religion. Only in the longue dureé, in which the inertial forces of religion become visible, can the scope of the phenomenon be recognised.

This much seems clear: religious consciousness is notorious, ambivalent and dangerous when it is integrated into the context of domination and salvation. Can we attribute a comparable effectiveness in history and politics to the consciousness-forming power of religion in psychological contexts? Religion helps the individual believer to asceticism and discipline, to self-efficacy and self-limitation; but it is also known to promote the opposite: excess and the loss of the self, "hatred of those who think and believe differently"[4] and dogmatic rigour.

As we know, violence seeks meaning, significance and legitimacy. Violence is sacred, or rather it is judged as such, when it reaches into the realm of the unavailable, when it identifies "ultimate reasons" or claims the highest goals. The historical examples are not only to be found in the history of religion; in the course of modern times, they lead into the obscure realm of *political religions*.

Violence and religion - no alliance could be more haunting, none more disturbing. Religiously motivated, radical violence is a horror of the modern age, but it is difficult to understand this violence. It is obviously only

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[3] Buc draws a wide arc from medieval and early modern theology to contemporary politics; however, he does not consider the more current problem of jihadism.
[4] Graf 2013, p. 14

possible if we assume the extreme opposites. Violence is rooted in a realm of metaphysics and far removed from all rationality. Religious fanaticism casts a long shadow. But can we "keep this phenomenon away from us", keep it at a distance by simply categorising it as part of the spectrum of madness? The challenge for philosophical reflection is precisely this: not to rely on other instances, but to grasp the relationship between madness and enlightenment in depth. Why this is helpful and necessary is not immediately obvious.

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From the dark past to the present: at present, it seems as if we are falling back into the age of Heraclitus. The forefather of war had projected war into the cosmos of becoming and recognised its immanent nature. The essence of being unfolded in war, which brought the one close to the divine and condemned the other to slavish existence. The dark thinker from Ionian Asia Minor was probably the first to describe the logos of war in this way, thus drawing a cultural-historical line that has paved its way through the ages. "Polemos" - the term is still used today in a modified form. It speaks of tense conflicts, of becoming and division in the light of the Logos. One can simplify this philosophy inappropriately - then life appears as a constant struggle in the political, which would lead us to the hardest foundation of the political (in the sense of Carl Schmitt).

However, the dark philosophy in the tense "Polemos" can also be read as a kind of cautionary reminder; a reminder of the irrefutable conditions of the negativity of human existence, which manifest themselves in a special way in war. This reading does not recognise a direct call to war in the polemogenic execution of being, it does not sing a heroic song that invokes the Logos. Instead, the underlying meaning of negativity, which manifests itself in a forceful way in war, is analysed. War is then initially not a purely political category, but an anthropological principle. This comes before the divine omnipotence that Heraclitus had in mind in his time and before human agency.

A metaphor can be used for this dark philosophy. A *canopy* is known to be a magnificent and ornamental roof that symbolises a sky in various forms. As an umbrella-like sun canopy for church processions or as a fixed ornament for thrones and altars - the canopy surrounds a "monstrance", it protects something sacred or surrounds it with an aura.

In the ecclesiastical sphere, we encounter different variants, such as the "carrying canopy" during a Eucharistic procession, the free-hanging canopy as a ciborium above the altar, or the magnificent decorative canopy, such as in Thai temples. We encounter contemporary variants in the form of the Jewish chuppah at wedding celebrations. Oriental rulers used canopies to protect themselves from the sun and as a sign of their dignity; they found their way to the West as gifts in the early Middle Ages.

What is interesting here, however, is the transferability to historical constellations. It is important to use the term as a metaphor and to think beyond the immediate theological dimension. In a broad historical perspective, the phenomenon of war appears as a framed event. For the longest time in human history, war was surrounded by a canopy, which is not just an allusion to religion as a culture and practice. This canopy of war, which will occupy us, is a narrative framework that - like its counterpart in church history - can appear in splendid forms, but suggests a certain flexibility in its handling. A *supporting sky* is ambivalent. It surrounds a monstrance that must remain hidden.

This aspect contains the metaphorical substance. War is enveloped and surrounded by sacred gestures. The art and church-historical interpretation directs our perception to the inside of the canopy, the golden or red glowing sky - an image of the unity of heaven and earth, of the world as a whole that connects heaven, earth and the underworld.

The obvious interpretation may be disappointing: think, for example, of the justification of holy war, of the many alliances between war, politics and religion. But this merely refers to the form of legitimisation that we do not have to take as a basis today.

Let's think about this for a moment: *war surrounded by a canopy*. In a narrower sense, this means that wars were driven by religion and justified by sacred authorities. But we can recognise more in the symbol of the canopy: a canopy of values, an offer of meaning, a supporting existential security, morality and morality contained in sacred forms. The possibilities of transfer extend to the present day, to the effects of old and new war narratives.

This idea will accompany us in the further course of our journey and, behind the scenes, place the history of the war in a special perspective. The path, if you will, encompasses the decisive and formative phases. In archaic times, the connection between *domination and salvation* must be taken into

account; the thesis of the *Mosaic distinction* (J: Assmann) must be considered here. Violence in the name of monotheism is a frequently described topos that must also be considered here. However, this narrative continues as soon as we reach the threshold of modern times. In the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era, the history of violence underwent a change in form. War was rewritten - as a war of states, of the masses, war as a moral process, as a struggle for world views and spaces.

What are the preconditions for describing war in the course of history? Reinhart Koselleck has interpreted the transformation of modern violence as a conflict between the absolutist state and bourgeois morality. Koselleck thus drew a line of reflection on violence that lasted from the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century. In the 18th century, bourgeois society had found itself; it created the language for a world without the authoritarian state, which was obsessed with maintaining power. If you like, we can recognise in this phase the first attempt to write history without the traditional canopy. An attempt that stripped morality bare and, as Koselleck lucidly puts it, gave rise to an intrinsic disparity that still concerns us today.[5]

Hans Joas also recognises a kind of translation that leads from medieval faith to the presence of the sacred[6]. The difficulties in the relationship between religion and politics can be traced back to the temptation to transfer the definitions of one area completely to those of the other. Religion thus completely fulfils the sphere of the political; everything that fulfils the appearance of secular politics would be reduced in essence to the characteristics of religion. Talk of political religions emphasises this aspect very sharply.

In the other case, it is about the emptiness that the loss of religion brings about from common life; religion leaves behind a human world that would fall prey to decay, radicalisation and excess. For Joas, the task of philosophy is characterised by questioning these convictions - which are by no means unfounded, but taken from historical insights.

We will have to deal with this idea as we proceed. For the initial question is of the utmost topicality and urgency - where does the loss of religious vitality lead; and is man even capable of being without religion? The

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[5] Reinhart Koselleck: Kritik und Krise. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1973
[6] Hans Joas: Die Sakralität der Person. Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011

contradiction between the two lines of enquiry must be explored if we want to do justice to the depth of the connection.

Finally, the work of Hans Blumenberg should also be included in the considerations[7] . Blumenberg did not explicitly address the problem of war, but his interpretation of the modern era provides decisive impulses on how to categorise the modern relationship to the world. This is because a situation has arisen in the modern era that must be described as genuinely "new". Secularisation as a term is already misguided if we see in it merely a relationship of subtraction; a world after religion, but with theological legacies. In contrast, modernity is about an anthropologically significant self-assertion. Modernity is not a derivative, inferior form of secularisation, but is always already permeated by worldliness. The modern age is therefore set in its right: this does not only mean that the vacant place of the king is reoccupied, it also means resisting the fighting concept of the theological heritage. Blumenberg spoke in various ways of the will to self-assertion; we will take up this eminent idea and apply it to the contemporary perception of war.

In this way, we can provisionally bring all the variants mentioned into a context. The *canopy of war* denotes a cultural formation of meaning. Even if the religious component is addressed in the term, the core of the connection points beyond the narrower area of religion.

The attempt should be made here to place the present entirely under the perspective of a history of meaning in which the negative takes on a different significance than in previous epochs. But can we go so far as to bear the consequences and endure them that we integrate war into our order without a canopy? In the end, this question will have to remain unanswered, if only because today we are faced with a variety of formations of meaning that we can recognise in their history but cannot fix. We live with the war without a canopy - but can we also live without stories?

1. War in the old world

As is well known, the order of a whole was also the criterion that was given a special meaning in the Greek polis. In Athens, the close connection between language and violence became obvious. People in the polis used language as a means of communication for political and commercial

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[7] Hans Blumenberg: Die Legitimität der Neuzeit. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1996, 9th edition

activities. As is well known, the unease caused by evil led the ancient philosophers to the political philosophy of the dialogue-based search for peace. In the background was the disquiet caused by the descent into civil war, tyranny, violence and chaos. It was therefore the duty to seek dialogue with the polis. Where this duty was not fulfilled, evil arose and the disintegration of the community began. A community of neglected souls was the negative antithesis of order in the polis. Defending this was the ethos of the armed citizen.

Violence had a special function in ancient cities. The political community was regarded as a space of non-violence between the owning citizens. A practice that was sanctified by the Areopagus and drew a clear dividing line between legitimate violence. Violence was legitimate and required against external enemies, against barbarians, against slaves, against all those who were politically alien. Internally, the duty of peace and the pursuit of a life under the law applied. Only in such a state, as we read in Plato's Politeia, could one not only survive but also realise the good life.

The awareness of violence in the polis gives us valuable clues as to how we should read the history of war. With the help of religion and the cult, violence is transformed into a viable order. Violence does not remain wild and threatening, but becomes legitimate when it is turned outwards, for example against enemies or barbarians.

A profound function of religion can be recognised here. Violence and religion form the inner core of a society that is defined by its capacity for violence. And we can certainly draw a line of historical violence that runs along precisely this track; as a political, domineering violence that in one form or another runs towards religion, unites with it, uses it for its benefit or surrenders to it completely - in a totalitarian manner. However, this reading only touches on one dimension, for which we naturally find plenty of evidence.

What we cannot yet grasp is how to explain historical events in which a change has to be taken into account. The functionalist reading remains on the surface; it asks about the use of religion in historical constellations. However, we must go deeper in our reflections and question the categories of war, violence and religion in the broadest sense.

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Let's take a step back in history with Jan Assmann. How were the orders of violence stabilised in the early advanced civilisations, how was anthropological conflictuality brought into balance there? In order to understand violence in the early period of advanced civilisations, with Egypt as the central location, we need to retrace some assumptions. When we come to the interplay of rule, power, religious reference and violence, we need to take an extremely broad narrative framework as a basis. How did an early "state" establish itself, how was it able to stabilise its rule and extend violence over space and people? As we know, Egypt looks back on three millennia of rule, with changing forms of order, disruptions and revolutions. The decisive characteristics of the culture include the relationship between narrative, temporality and statehood. How domination was represented in mythical forms is of particular interest here.

Jan Assmann makes it clear that it is not only the chronological course of history that is important, but also the history of meaning. So-called "coherence fictions"[8] ensured the organisation of memory, experience and expectation. The Egyptians looked back on their past with the help of their own form of historicity. Here, myth does not stand in opposition to history, but rather it is the foundational figure of memory that recalls the emergence of the state and with which society assures itself of its identity. Mythical narratives shed light on the present, which becomes clear in the mirror of the past. Such myths are unifying and binding, they enable us to utilise what we would today call "ideology", although such critically enlightened categories would be problematic here.

Rather, the history of Egyptian rule shows a cultural space of its own temporality, "where time seems to run according to its own laws and special orders." [9] History does not exist here in a uniform framework of universal time, but in a space of its own unavailable semantics. This is of great significance for the categorical framework of historical reflection.

We pick out a few motifs from the deep treasure trove of knowledge in Egyptology: state, time, founding history and revolutionary ruptures. These motifs can be combined in a parallel movement of thought with contemporary problems of the history of violence.

    (a) *State and time*. The early Egyptian state had a specific command of time and space. It had concepts for memories, others for renewal that

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[8] Assmann 1999, p. 23
[9] Ibid, p. 25

were close to the categories of experiential space and horizon of expectation. Specific constructions of time, power and space that formed the cultural framework of rule and violence must therefore be taken into account. If we put it in the simplest terms, domination was presented as eternity and duration. In ancient Egyptian time thinking, cyclical and non-cyclical concepts of time flowed into one another. "Neheh" and "Djet" symbolised time in a concise, but not historical form. "Neheh" symbolised the process of becoming, visible through the movement of the stars and the course of the sun. The scarab was regarded as a lucky beetle, usually as an amulet made of stone. In ancient Egypt, it was identified with the course of the sun and was therefore close to the sun god Re, but also symbolised resurrection and nascent life. "Djet", the other tense, was identified with the concept of permanence, currency and duration. "Its symbols are stone and mummy, its god is Osiris, the dead god who presides over the realm of the dead. Djet is a sacred space of duration, in which that, which has become, matured to its final form and in this sense completed, is unchangingly and continuously suspended." [10] It is an unusual time structure and time consciousness for which we need a specific translation. The dynastic units, the early and late empires merged over an enormous time frame and at the same time maintained an identical unity. The different empires referred to each other, but not in a modern sense of "learning from history". Egyptian history lacks a visualising "reappraisal". Egyptians of later times did not look back on their past culture, for whom the pyramids would appear to be the achievements of a golden age. Rather, they considered themselves to belong to an enduring age that reached deep into the past but presupposed continuity.

(b) *Violence and order*. This state was a guarantor and guardian of order. This also revealed the specific relationship to violence that is of interest here. A programmatic tradition is known for the 12th dynasty, according to which chaos could only be countered with effective violence. This reveals a characteristic that also applies to the modern state: a form of legitimisation that directs righteous violence against the enemies of order. However, this requires a narrative that, on the one hand, maintains the memory of the threatening chaos and, on the other, puts the form of counter-violence in the right light. The Middle Kingdom, which spans the

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[10] Ibid, p. 32

11th to 13th dynasties and is dated to 2040 to 1650 BC, was evidently such a ruling entity that had enforced a monopoly on violence and developed a corresponding rhetoric[11] . The narrative structure reports visions of threat, situations of decline that signify nothing less than the collapse of a culture. Conjunctive justice, the guarantor of social cohesion, was in danger of being torn apart. This is not a process that only takes place on the surface of society. Rather, it affects the whole world, in which the living and the dead, gods and comic elements are connected. When the bond breaks, the existentials disappear: language, morality, knowledge, memory. "People no longer understand each other, language is replaced by violence. The community with the gods also breaks down. The gods turn away, nature loses its nourishing powers. Famine and impoverishment are the result."[12]

We are familiar with the function of narratives of decline from many eras. However, this reveals a remarkable world view that cannot be reconciled with the modern psychology of domination. What characterises domination and what makes it right is its ability to keep the world going. In this world, violence, greed or lies, i.e. evil, must be reckoned with. The task of the state is to preserve this ambivalent form, to standardise it as far as possible, not in absolute but in relative forms. And this is remarkable insofar as there is still no semantics here that seeks to defend a coming kingdom of God against evil. Dominion is not conceived of in the sense of the katechon, of a stopper of the Antichrist, but as the "before" and "behind" of all worldly phenomena.[13]

To think of the world without the state is unnatural, a sacrilege. Peace, order and justice, creation and natural prosperity are dependent on the state. This state maintains the world in its existence and its progress. The ability to use force is demonstrated by the king's legitimate power to punish. It encompasses more than a single act that is satisfied in the form of execution. This power to punish reveals immense power and powerful effects. However, semantic subtleties must also be taken into account here: punitive power is used with caution; the king is advised to exercise restraint when imposing death penalties. There is talk of inhibition of killing, which

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[11] S. 162

[12] Ibid.

[13] About this: Günther Meuter. Der Katechon. Berlin 1994

in the Old Kingdom was still attributed to the king alone, but was then transferred to all people .[14]

(c). *The break with the old order*. Finally, a special episode in the history of Egypt that is significant in terms of the history of religion should be mentioned. The Armana revolution and the emergence of religion in a polytheistic universe.

In the new empire of the 18th dynasty, Akhenaten raised the god Aten in the form of the sun disc and appointed him god of all gods. This revolution was surprising in its radicalism and speed. After all, it was nothing less than the establishment of a new form of religion in a theological order that had existed for thousands of years. The reasons for the break with tradition - in short, from polytheism to monolatry - are disputed. One suspects conflicts between the high priesthood and the kingship, which would correspond to a classic conflict between secular and spiritual power. Another interpretation emphasises the power problem of an overstretched empire; and here, too, familiar historical lines can be drawn[15] . It is possible that Egypt was no longer "perceived coextensively with the ordered world", but was recognised as part of a "world encompassing many peoples". The resulting cognitive dissonance may have led to a re-evaluation, perhaps a questioning of the world view. [16]

A highly explosive episode in religious history is only hinted at here. It perhaps seemed that a new ecumenism could establish itself as a new form of meaning, with a new idea of a supreme sun god who unfolds a world-embracing and integrative power. However, this moment in Egypt's history is difficult to access and seems to have been erased from memory by the ruling powers. A hundred years after Akhenaten's death, his name was removed from the royal lists and the memory of the revolutionary spark was, as it were, erased. It was not until the end of the 19th century that this attempt to establish an early monotheism became the subject of research.

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[14] Assmann 1999, p. 164
[15] Herfried Münkler: Imperien. Berlin: Rowohlt 2014
[16] Assmann 1999, p. 243

2. The Mosaic distinction

The change from a polytheistic to a monotheistic world view is of the greatest interest for the history of religion, which has to deal with the phenomenon of violence. Two questions overlap and must be kept apart, at least at the beginning. One direction focuses on the effects of religion per se; this thinking is interested in psychological aspects, which we can recognise in the categories of fulfilment and radicalisation. Jan Assmann speaks of puritanical intensification[17], which comes close to this psychological movement: religion "awakens" elementary feelings of the religiously moved person through its formal language and visual power.
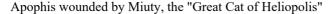
The other direction is more complicated because it is far removed from the concrete psychological dimensions and asks about the tension between *religion* and *violence at* the highest abstract level. Despite all the criticism that has accompanied the discourse on the violence of monotheism for years, this line of questioning remains indispensable. As can be seen from a distanced position, it is of eminent importance due to the global threat of terrorism and fundamentalism. So how should we understand the relationship between violence and religion if we assume that there were major differences in the world view in pre-Axis, Axis and medieval eras? How can we understand the propensity to violence as a culture broken by religious language? Under what historical and cultural conditions does the language of religion turn into the language of violence?

It is worth recalling the initial thesis: warlike violence is in principle under a canopy. It takes place in a "covered" space in which the conditions of possible violence are unavailable to contemporaries. The change from a polytheistic to a monotheistic world view fits into this context. It is a process of intensification that can certainly be questioned, because violence is present here as well as there. We will see that we need to go beyond these observations.

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[17] Jan Assmann: Totale Religion. Vienna: Picus 2016; Ders: Die Mosaische Unterscheidung. Oder der Preis des Monotheismus. Munich: Hanser 2003

Apophis wounded by Miuty, the "Great Cat of Heliopolis"

This is a file from the Wikimedia Commons
Apep
Tomb, Deir el-Medina, Luxor, Egypt
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Papyrus_with_an_image_of_Rame
sses_IX_on_the_verso_and_a_ritual_text_for_the_annihilation_of_Apopis_on_the
_recto_Cyperus_-_Museo_Egizio_(Turin)_C._1954

Let us once again consider the conditions under which people in the early advanced civilisations perceived their world. The few sources that exist reflect an imaginary world with mythical figures. These include "Apophis", the giant water snake that confronted the sun god every day as he travelled across the sky on his barque. Apophis symbolises evil in the familiar form of an antagonistic god. This deity can be sensually experienced in the form of storms and natural phenomena; it therefore represents a permanent threat to the cosmic stability of the "Maat".

Apophis is embodied in various legends and mythical tales; it symbolises dissolution, chaos and gravity, in which the world threatens to disappear. The order of the world must be constantly defended against Apophis. [18]

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[18] Richard H. Wilkinson: The World of the Gods in Ancient Egypt. Faith - Power - Mythology. Stuttgart: Theiss 2003; Hans Bonnet: Lexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte. Hamburg: Nikol 2000, p. 51 ff.

We are dealing with a mythical tale in which evil and good are in open confrontation with each other; a tale that also suggests a particular awareness of violence. The sun god was to be praised and Apophis was to be fought; one god was worshipped with love and delight, the other was fought because of his abomination. Reading a hieroglyphic text provides information about the intensity of the violence towards this deity[19] . There, rituals of hatred are performed with a frightening range of violent fantasies. The cosmic enemy is - in parallel to the earthly political enemy - "maltreated in every conceivable way and finally destroyed in fire". "Tirades of hatred" are hurled against the enemy in ritual and solemn repetition[20] . This was the only way to fight Pharaoh's enemies and promote prosperity. Pharaonic rule, and with it the world as such, had to be kept going in order to prevent a possible fall into chaos at any time.

What kind of violence are we dealing with here? Rituals that utilise hatred and violence as a basis and at the same time promote them are an anthropological phenomenon. It is by no means a question of evoking a strong affect that "works itself out" on the object in a seemingly absurd way. From an art-historical perspective, pictorial nudes appear as a place of a remarkable encounter between power and powerlessness, violence and subjugation. In pictorial nudes, the subject is challenged from its cosy position as the recipient[21]. This aesthetic form is recognisable in religious artefacts, but also in all conceivable forms of acts of violence on the object. The demolition of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan in March 2001 by Taliban iconoclasts is an example of this. A modern "iconoclasm" which, under the condition of mass media processing, was obviously aimed entirely at the strong effect. But even if one considers this context in broad outline, a break in the structure of time becomes recognisable. The destruction of an artefact serves to brute legitimisation, which is all the more powerful because it creates a void in the eye of the beholder. The toppling of an iconic figure is more than just a triumphant gesture, it also carries a message of negation because it activates impulses for action in a medial structure. However, this relationship between violence and image, which is difficult to decipher, has moved a long way away from the archaic religious form.

Reading the Book of Apophis is instructive in this respect: although it describes a world full of violence, filled with tirades of hatred and holy furore, it does so without direct instrumental violence. One could leave it at

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[19] Assmann 2016, p. 11
[20] Ibid, p. 12
[21] Horst Bredekamp. Der Bildakt. Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach 2015, p. 223 ff.

that and point to the inner connection between religiosity, cult and violence. However, there are important differences that need to be recognised in order to unfold the connection[22] . It is a religious language of violence that is strictly ritually framed. The symbolic acts carried out violence in a kind of simulation that was by no means harmless, but was based on the separation of cultic, cultural and private spheres. Such violence can be acted out on symbols, artefacts, wax figures or images. In the world view of the myth, such violence was perhaps a link, a connection between the sacred sphere of the cult and the living world, which of course was by no means free of violent experiences. In the space in which violence was sanctified, it was possible to give violence an appropriate expression without this violence having to transcend political and social boundaries. To a certain extent, the separation of spheres of meaning remained.

Two types of religious violence must be distinguished. Violence in the polytheistic world was characterised by strong symbolism. The violence, which certainly bore traits of the extreme, was carried out on figurative and symbolic objects. The targets were the enemies of the deity, who were regarded as absolute enemies of the worldly order. However, the violence remained within a framework of magical thinking; its source was concern for the world, which was threatened by violent powers. A concern that required the observance of ritual rules and the worship of good powers.

As is well known, this world view was unhinged with biblical monotheism. Within this framework, law and morality became "objects of revelation"[23] ; the exclusive relationship between God and the people took centre stage, but now under different auspices.

What is the "price of monotheism"? [24] It is necessary to go further in order to grasp the scope of the change in the world view. The boundary between the ritual sphere and the living world was broken down. The old religion came under fire: the cult of sacrifice and festivals could not appease the one and only God; this required radical devotion and a lifestyle that was pleasing to God.

Divine authority now penetrates into the realm of everyday life. Only the faithful observance of the commandments makes the prospect of peace possible; it is no longer the cultic celebration but life itself that becomes a

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[22] In the following Assmann 2016, p. 15-20
[23] Assmann 2016, p. 15
[24] Assmann 2003

service to God. The absolutism of the arbitrary god is superimposed on the world of mankind and with it comes a "de-differentiating" as well as a "totalising element" in culture. It emerges for the first time in the Deuteronomistic tradition and remains "alive in many later forms of radical puritanism to this day"[25]

This change in the religious world view has many facets, but a decisive starting point that is closely linked to the religious history of Israel. According to Assmann, the price of monotheism lies in a new, different way of thinking and acting that is pleasing to God. Religious practice is now subject to the schema of purity and exclusive truth. Both elements had previously been embodied in other ways in the ancient religions. The priests in the early civilisation lived in a special sphere, secluded and exclusive. They had sacred powers and followed sacred rules.

With the shift to monotheism, this structure was broken up; submission to the commandment of purity was extended to the whole people. As Assmann points out, this placed law-abidingness at the centre of the "true believer". The ethnic definition, which centred on descent from Abraham, had only a minor effect. What is decisive is faithfulness to the law and the constant renewal of the covenant with God.

By turning to the one God, a force enters the world that demands a life characterised by purity. The new religion not only takes the social spheres, politics, law, science and art into its service, it also demands a new human being as a whole. The ritual forms leave the narrower sphere of the priesthood and penetrate the everyday lives of people, who now have to prove themselves as true believers. One can certainly identify a historical starting point here, after which this purity of doctrine and practice in religious matters penetrated the world of life.

It begins with early Judaism, which violently enforces a new practice against an old one and is described in the second book of Kings[26]. A starting point in history, in 622 BC, which is described as the first "radical Puritan purge"[27]. What happened here is a rupture with consequences that we cannot

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[25] Assmann 2016, p. 17
[26] The Second Book of Kings in the Jewish Tanakh, or the Christian Old Testament, continues the history of the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah after the Israelite division of the kingdom. Werner H. Schmidt: Introduction to the Old Testament. 5th edition. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 1995
[27] Assmann 2016, p. 17

grasp in *one epoch*, not in *one culture* (and to emphasise: not in the context of *one religion*). The manifestations of the belief in one God are extremely multifaceted: they point to a better future, to the end of all days, and at the same time they remain rooted in a pure origin. The fact that these phenomena literally keep the world in suspense to this day is a realisation that primarily raises the question of the psychological connections.

Belonging - purity - bond - covenant. This sequence contains the constellation of religious psychology. By virtue of the law, a person becomes a member of this new religion. Religious identity is not determined by descent, but by adherence to the law. This means that the decisive motive is not the luck of birth, but the endeavour to fit into a life that corresponds to the commandment of purity and, in the broadest sense, demands violence against oneself. We recognise these forms in all variants of old and new fundamentalisms.

Anyone endeavouring to find historical facts here will come across the last decades of the 20th century in their search. Some observers see a decisive leap in religious intensity in the second half of the 1970s. In May 1977, the Labour Party of Israel suffered a defeat, after which religious groups that had previously been insignificant received a political boost for the first time. In September 1978, the Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtila was elected Pope of the Roman Church; an election which, after a period of uncertainty, signalled a new formation in the power structure of the Catholic Church. And finally, according to "Islamic reckoning, the year 1979 ushered in the 15th century"[28]. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran and proclaimed the Islamic Republic; this period also saw the storming of the Great Mosque of Mecca, which was directed against the rule of the Saudis. According to Klaus Kienzler, "In one fell swoop, the entire potential that Islam harbours was brought to the attention of the world public".[29]

But this is contemporary history, which shows us certain continuities and lines of development. For a more far-reaching reflection, however, we need the distance of long-term observation.

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[28] Klaus Kienzler: Religiöser Fundamentalismus. Christentum - Judaismus - Islam. Munich: C. H. Beck 2007, p. 9
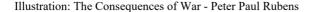[29] Ibid, p. 10

3. The battle of monotheisms and the moral divide

How long is the breath of religion? There is a constant debate about this and evidence of religiously motivated violence is eagerly produced. We are also faced with a historical panorama that shows violence in the name of religion not only in texts, but also in vivid images.

The large number of engravings, etchings and drawings from the time of the Thirty Years' War seems to support this assumption. Among the depictions of war that capture the misery of the civilian population or the cruelty of the mercenaries in realistic images, an allegory by P. P. Rubens from 1637 stands out. Commissioned by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, it depicts the horrors of war in an almost divinatory, mythical pose. Europa stretches her hands to the sky, wailing, while Mars, the god of war, is carried away by the torch-bearing Fury Alekto. Venus' attempts to appease the god of war with caresses remain unsuccessful. The victims of war lie on the ground: the disturbed harmony with a lute, master builders with instruments, a mother with her child; even science in the form of a book. [30]

The painting basically anticipates the realisation that Immanuel Kant was to comment on over a century later. War is the great destroyer, the cost of which no one can reasonably accept. It devastates landscapes, increases suffering and serves no one other than the selfish masters of war.

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[30] Helmut Lahrkamp: Der dreißigjährige Krieg. Peace of Westphalia. An account of the years 1618-1648 with 326 pictures and documents. Münster: Aschendorff'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1997, pp. 212-214

Illustration: The Consequences of War - Peter Paul Rubens

It can be argued with good reason that neither the allegory of the painter nor the insight of the philosopher has fundamentally changed the situation. War is the phenomenon that is associated with all evils in human existence and *yet it is always there*, seemingly independent of all attempts to ostracise it and prevent it. As sceptical as this statement is, it is important to take a closer look. War becomes more tangible not in its abstract, allegorical form, but in its physical, concrete shape.

The Thirty Years' War and the wars of the present day are worlds apart; nevertheless, connections can be made that go beyond mere anecdote. Even after centuries in which peace agreements were painstakingly achieved only to lead to a new confrontation in the next moment, the signatures of violent spaces remain significant. As is well known, the Thirty Years' War was an early modern world conflagration that accompanied people in a world of existential deprivation for the rest of their lives. Deprivation and hardship were the normal conditions under which life had to be lived and the war logically exacerbated the already meagre chances of survival. What consolation and hope remained for the people was religious meaning. The four apocalyptic horsemen, taken from the biblical revelation in John 6, symbolised the existential threats of plague and war, hunger and death. But the religious language of form was also used in concrete spaces of action and suffering, albeit with the intention of gaining an advantage for one's own warring party.

One example: the city of Magdeburg, which was elevated to God's holy chancery during the Thirty Years' War, eagerly invoked by Lutheran treatise authors[31]. The city was besieged several times by the troops of the Catholic League; by 1631 it had acquired the aura of a last, holy bastion for the Protestant cause. In May 1631, imperial troops were again at the gates of the city; the devastation that followed is deeply engraved in the memory of the war. This battle site has remained in historical memory as the "Magdeburg Blood Wedding"; the term indicates how deeply the war has inscribed itself in the collective consciousness. The conquest of the city by Imperial League troops under the warlord Tilly was considered a monstrous massacre, characterised by an unleashed, half-starved soldiery, murder, sexual violence and pillaging. Magdeburg came to symbolise war crimes in the absolute, the ugly face of war.

In the case of the conquest of Magdeburg, numerous sources are available; they provide a comprehensive picture of what the events meant in religious, political, private and even "civil" terms. The city was stylised in pompous images as a virgin who fell victim to the violent seizure of the Soldateska. Her fate was linked to God's plan of salvation; the threat of the Catholic Antichrist was omnipresent; the imminent downfall of the city fuelled visions and propagandistic intentions.

But how did contemporaries themselves perceive the events in the city? Here too, sources are available that provide a multi-layered picture. The destruction of Magdeburg was seen as a defeat that was interpreted primarily in theological terms. The apocalyptic proportions seemed to suggest divine punishment. If the inhabitants of Magdeburg had come to their senses in time and submitted to the emperor and the old faith, they would have been spared the wrath of God, according to the supposed victors. The theological and antique interpretative framework dominated the perception of the events: Comparisons were drawn to the ancient city of Sagunt, whose inhabitants had to defend themselves against Hannibal's troops. In a comparable sense, the Magdeburgers had made a vicarious sacrifice for the good and just cause. [32]

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[31] Johannes Arndt: Der dreißigjährige Krieg 1618-1648. Stuttgart: Reclam 2009, pp. 201-208

[32] Hans Medick: Der Dreißigjährige Krieg als Erfahrung und Memoria. In: Peter Hartmann, F. Schuller (eds.): Der dreißigjährige Krieg. Regensburg 2010, pp. 158-173; Hans Medick/Benigna v. Krusenstjern, B. v. (eds.): Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe: der dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe. Göttingen 1999