

MONOTHEISM(S) AND VIOLENCE: FROM THE POWER OF THE SACRED TO THE SACRALISATION OF POWERS¹

MONOTEÍSMO(S) E VIOLÊNCIA: DA FORÇA DO SAGRADO DO SAGRADO À SACRALIZAÇÃO DOS PODERES

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Abstract: The article seeks to address the origin of the ambivalent (and ambiguous) relationship between religion and violence, asking, on the one hand, to what extent the force of the sacred determines and is determined by the “sacralization” of power, and discussing, on the other hand, the extent to which the devices for legitimizing political power tend to absorb the “strength” of religious power and vice versa, in a circularity whose feedback often insinuates and infiltrates a latent “inter-monotheistic” rivalry and, from this, narratives capable of inducing unimaginable levels of conflict and belligerence. Can interreligious dialogue overcome the impasses that fideisms (whether of a Jewish, Christian or Islamic

nature) multiply and amplify at the heart of human communities, regardless of the societal or cultural ecosystem in which they occur?

Keywords: Religion. Sacred. Violence. Monotheism(s). Judaism. Christianity. Islam. Fideism. Power. Interreligious Dialogue. Multiculturalism. Ecumenism.

Resumo: O artigo procura abordar a origem da ambivalente (e ambígua) relação entre religião e violência, indagando, por um lado, em que medida a força do sagrado determina e é determinada pela “sacralização” do poder, e discutindo, por outro lado, até que ponto os dispositivos de legitimação do poder político tendem a absorver a “força” do poder religioso e vice-versa, numa circularidade em cuja retroacção não raro se insinua e infiltra uma latente rivalidade “inter-monoteísta” e, a partir desta, narrativas susceptíveis de induzir níveis inimagináveis de conflitualidade e beligerância. Poderá o diálogo interreligioso superar os impasses que os fideísmos (sejam eles de cariz judaico, cristão ou islâmico) multiplicam e amplificam no cerne das comunidades humanas, independentemente do ecossistema societário ou cultural em que os mesmos ocorrem?

Palavras-chave: Religião. Sagrado. Violência. Monoteísmo(s). Judaísmo. Cristianismo. Islamismo. Fideísmo. Poder. Diálogo Interreligioso. Multiculturalismo. Ecumenismo.

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1. Introduction

Apart from any apologetic or confessional intentions, the primary purpose of this reflective journey is to provide a brief theoretical topography of the problem of the relationship between religion and violence and its possible figurations. The aim is to critically explore, through the hands of contemporary authors, in which way the power of the sacred, religious power and political domination interpenetrate, based on a problematization that is more prospective and inquisitive than conclusive.

From the outset, it is important to focus attention on the notions of force, power and domination, whose impact is echoed and amplified in and by violence, in order to understand the extent to which this can be found, under certain critical conditions, latently disseminated in the religious dimension.

Let us, therefore, stop at Psalm 82, said of Asaph, in the Veterotestamentary Sacred Text, which reads:

God presides over the divine assembly
and pronounces his sentences amid the gods:
[...]
I said, "You are gods,
you are all children of the Almighty.
But you will die like any mortal;
you will fall like any prince."
Arise, O God, to judge the earth,
because all nations belong to you.

The excerpt immediately raises two perplexities: on the one hand, contrary to what is usually thought of veterotestamentary monotheism, in which God exercises cosmic autonomy without "rivals" and is self-sufficient, the fact is that the psalm gives us a God who cohabits with other gods; on the other hand, it is a God who, in the face of a pantheon with a power that is divided up and equated to that of princes, stands out as *primus inter pares* to assume a judgmental role, which allows him both to call them to account and to announce the downfall and death of each of them. What meaning is echoed in this biblical allusion to a "divine Prince" who towers over the others, with an omnipotence that borders on intimidation?

To dispel this initial strangeness, it is important to realize that the most "remote" Judaism began by being monolatrous: it admitted the existence of several gods but affirmed that the Hebrew God should be worshipped above the others (Exodus 15:11). Only later would this religious proto-intuition be joined by another, in the form of a central

profession of faith: that He is One. How, then, did the transition from the pyramid scheme of a God at the top to the singularistic figuration of a One and Only God take place and what impact did it have? As Maimonides shrewdly observed in the 12th century, the "one" God of the Bible is not of the numerical-quantitative order: his Unity and Oneness does not derive so much from the fact that he is isolated, but because he presents himself, in his immediate revelation, as singular, unequalled and incomparable.

In this sense, it will be important to see to what extent a consolidated concept of divine Unity and Oneness (to which the ubiquitous and univocal Totality will later be connected, thanks to the impulse of Aristotelian-Plotinian metaphysics, *despite* the relational alternative of Christian Trinitarianism²), will not create the hermeneutical conditions (historical-critical and symbolic-cultural) for a phenomenology of the relationship between monotheism and violence... Does this prospect make any sense or, as Paul Valadier wittily indicated, aren't we using the two concepts as a scapegoat of one relative to the other?³

2. Conceptual archaeology: power, force and violence

In purpose of make converging which terms to use, thus avoiding the infiltration of misunderstandings in a field where confusion often reigns, it is important to conduct a preliminary and brief conceptual inventory.

From the outset, the concept of "power" emerges divided in two planes:

1. It also correspond to the potential manifestation of a faculty, a *dynamis*, to exercise a consented force in the form of authority;
2. but it can also connote the effective capacitance of an act, an *energy*, to exert a force whose lack of control can result in self-inflated prepotency to compensate a lack of recognition.

Considering this ambivalence, it can be said that, on the one hand, the religious dimension has the power to "give-force-to-have-meaning"; but on the other, it can also be said that it gives power to the "meaning-of-having-force". And what is "force"?

² On the subject of the theological-political relationship between monotheism and trinitarianism, see ROSA José, «Monoteísmo, Trindade e Teologia Política» [«Monotheism, Trinity and Political Theology»], in AAVV., *Convergências & Afinidades. Homenagem a António Braz Teixeira*, Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa / Centro de Estudos de Filosofia da Faculdade de Ciências Humanas da Universidade Católica, Lisboa, 2008, 905-918

³ Cf. VALADIER Paul, "Violence et monothéismes", in *Études*, 2003, 6, pp. 755-764; as a counterpoint, see CASTEL Jean-Pierre, *La violence monothéiste: mythe ou réalité?* Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017; and also CAVANAUGH William, *Le mythe de la violence religieuse*, Paris: L'Homme nouveau, 2009

By "force" we mean a power of influence or determination exercised within the limits of its sustainability and therefore endowed with a critical balance which, when lacking "measure", translates into abuse and aggression. Raising the voice, scrunching up the face, emphasising muscle tension, clenching the fists - here are some of the many indices of a body semantics that accompanies and signals a pre-warning of a threat, the concretization of which translates into a set of psychosomatic marks that tend to perpetuate themselves in the more or less scarred memory of a body that has been "forced", assaulted or, ultimately, annihilated.

Etymologically rooted in the Latin "vis", violence represents the disfigurement of an "enabling power" whose force is subverted into the intentional and intensified power of an "effort" beyond what is necessary and sufficient to produce a certain result at the limit of its absorption. In this case, all violence tends to expand its phenomenal plot to the threshold of coercion without the mediation of a *logos* capable of giving reasons and, in this sense, inducing consent, reciprocity and trust, in a spectrum of possibilities that unfolds from self-violence to mass destruction, passing through physical, discursive, psychological, cultural, political, social, racial, labour, sexual and gender violence, dimensions to which it is added the religious in its historical-cultural intertwining.⁴

No one better than Jan Assmann, in his work entitled *Violence et Monotheïsme*, has glimpsed this intertwining, unpacking the complex phenomenon of violence into six vectors:

1. Violence pure and simple, of an impulsive nature, which manifests itself uncontrollably in anger, jealousy, and fear;
to this is opposed the
2. "Cultural violence", which in turn can branch into five possibilities, namely:
 - 2.1 the social violence rooted in asymmetrical family, labour and institutional relationships;
 - 2.2. the juridic violence present in legal coercion;
 - 2.3. the statist violence manifested in the friend-enemy divide, both internally in terms of the public safety of citizens and externally in terms of the militarised defence of a community;
 - 2.4. the ritual violence patent in initiatory and sacrificial practices, whether to validate a status of organic belonging, in the case of the former, or to prevent

⁴ Cf. LUZ Marcelo, "Considerações sobre a Correlação entre Religião e Violência", ["Considerations on the Correlation between Religion and Violence"], in *Conscientia*, 12 (2008) 3: 268-271

or eradicate any form of group, collective or societal anomie, in the case of the latter;

2.5. and, finally, so-called "religious" violence, not because it derives from religion per se, but insofar as it is exercised by mediators qualified to receive, decipher, communicate, and act in the name of the "will" of a transcendent higher order through the "power" of recourse to a legitimising "force" whose sacredness derives from its "monotheistic" foundation.⁵

Once arrived here, the question that needs to be addressed for now – given its aporetic contours – is where this plot linking violence to monotheism emerges from.

3. Protogenesis of the problem: enthronement of oriental royalty and premonotheism in Hesiod's Theogony

Sticking to the two civilisational epicentres of the ancient world - the West (Minoan-Mycenaean) and the Middle East (Mesopotamian-Egyptian) - if we want to find out where the genesis of the problematic correlation between monotheism and violence lies, we can't neglect attention to what Francis Cornford says in his work *Principium sapientiae* about the process of gradual consolidation of archaic mythographic production, as well as its decisive influence on the origin of Greek philosophy, based on a double cultural input:

1. from one side, the shamanic contribution concentrated in the figure of the seer invested with sacralised power, whose spread moves axially from the northern steppes to the rugged Balkan regions, and from there to the southern Mediterranean, opening the door to the production of Homeric epic;
2. from the other side, the contribution of the super-monarchs invested with divinised force, whose influence spread axially from the East (Mesopotamian) and the Mediterranean Southeast (Egyptian) to the region of Canaan and the Aegean, inspiring the production of the Hesiodine cosmogony along the way.⁶

⁵ Cf. ASSMANN Jan, *Violence and Monotheism*, Paris: Bayard, 2009, 20-32

⁶ Francis Cornford has particularly emphasised the influence of the Canaanite-Ugaritic enthronements of sovereignty on the elaboration of Mesopotamian cosmogonies – with immediate dissemination and repercussion on the subsequent narrative structuring of Minoan-Mycenaean mythologies and Homeric-Hesiodine mythographies in a Greek context, as well as the sacred texts of the Hebrew religion – linking the rituals of the institution of divinised kingships in the proto-urban and agrarian societies of the ancient Near and Middle East with dramatisations of strong community involvement that stratified three critical events 1. "being born" or "originating" in a genetic and hereditary context, 2. "separating" and "delimiting" in an agonistic and distributive context, and 3. "forming" or "moulding" in an artisanal and poetic context: cf. CORNFORD Francis, *Principium Sapientiae: as origens do pensamento filosófico grego*, Lisboa: FCG, 1975, 329-348; 391-408

In the wake of this interpretation, Jean-Pierre Vernant will show to what extent the intersection of this double Homeric-Hesiodine line resulted in the immediate philosophical assimilation of both the power of the *logos* (i.e. reason) to uncover the principle that orders and governs (*arkê* ↔ *arkhein*) the cosmos and the political appropriation of the *logos* (i.e. word) inherent in the governing power of the magistrate (*arkhonte* ↔ *arkhein*).⁷

Turns out to be curious that, when trying to substantiate the unity of the celestial orb in the last lines of Book Lambda (XII) of the *Metaphysics*, and before tackling the *Politics*, Aristotle makes a furtive foray into the text of the *Iliad*, using a formula (whose paternity is not Aristotelian, indeed, but Homeric) and which in the full length of the passage from which it is extracted reads as follows:

Great madman, stay in your place and keep calm; then listen to the opinions of others, of those who are worth more than you, a poltroon, a coward; you no longer count in the deliberating council or in combat. Everyone is not going to become a king here, among us, the Achaeans. Having too many chiefs is not good: let only one be chief, let only one be king - the one whom the son of Kronos, the Cunning One, will have granted to be king." (*Iliad* II, 204)⁸

⁷ The historical genesis of the intimate connection between knowledge and politics is well typified and formulated by Jean-Pierre Vernant in *Les origines de la pensée grecque*, through an interpretation – in our view perfectly admissible and, at the very least, not discredited by further counterfactual evidence – according to which the emergence of Greek rationality takes place within a social and political historical framework whose key moment coincides with the critical transition from the oriental, Minoan-Cretan and Mycenaean royalty – all of them based on the *supreme power* (ὑπόταξις) of a *divinised sovereign* (ἄναξ) and hidden from the gaze of the subjects in impregnable palaces – to the heroic aristocracies of the Helladic type, this time more based on merit obtained in “open space” (battlefield, public square or *polis*), whose legitimisation is no longer based on the intimidating manifestation of a discretionary and annihilating power, but now either on the discursive force of rhapsodic recitation and the ability of the aedos (cases of Homer and, most likely, of Hesiod of Ascrea and Pherecrates of Syro) to exalt *excellence* that is difficult to equalise (this is the ἀριστεία that will later lead to ethical reflections on the exercise of *virtue*, ἀρετή), or in the persuasive authority of *public magistracies* (the ἀρχαί that will later be assimilated by the first philosophical reflections on the *primordial principle*, ἀρχή). It is in this osmosis between a *logos* that organises discourse and a political organisation through the *logos* that Greek rationality gradually matures through multiple and differentiated critical cycles: cf. VERNANT Jean-Pierre, *Origens do pensamento grego* [*Les origines de la pensée grecque*, Paris: PUF, 1962], Lisboa: Teorema, 1987, especially the chapters “A realza micénica” [“Mycenaean kingship”] and “A crise de soberania” [“The crisis of sovereignty”], pp. 23-54; as well as “O universo espiritual da polis” [“The spiritual universe of the polis”] and “A crise da cidade” [“The crisis of the city”], pp. 55-92

⁸ Commenting on this passage, Jacques Derrida emphasises that “the spoken word pronounces, pronounces itself, pronouncing the One and the sovereignty of the One, of the Unique, above and beyond the dispersion of the plural. These verses safeguard the government of several (...). We'll come back later to talk – aside from Plato, Aristotle and Rousseau – about One-God, the United God or the God-One who doesn't come to democracy, or who only comes to its idea. (...) <For now,> the allusion <is> to Zeus from whom kings come. Zeus is first and foremost a son, a male son and a descendant who, through cunning (*metis*), but also with the help of his mother, escapes time. He thus gets the better of his father Kronos, who in turn had also gotten the better of his own father Uranus. (...) 'Through this parricidal theogony, it is a raging political struggle for monarchical sovereignty that manifests itself, Kronos' plan being to prevent one of his sons from obtaining, in his place, “royal honour among the Immortals” (Theogony of Hesiod, 461-2). Among the guards of his son Zeus, who is himself a mixture of cunning and strength, are Kratos and Bia, power and violent force. Whether inaugural or not, this theogonic mythology of sovereignty belongs (...) to a long cycle of ipsocentric political theology (...): DERRIDA Jacques, *Vadios. Dois ensaios sobre a razão* [*Voyous*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003], Coimbra: Palimage, 2009, 64-65

From our point of view, "it is in the volatile and ambiguous context of the search for legitimisation of a power no longer concentrated in the figure of a divine sovereign, but now fragmented into aristocratic powers, that we witness a subtle and gradual process of mythographic appropriation of the religious experience of the sacred, carried out by Homer and Hesiod. In essence, the Greek epic story gives a narrative frame to the rise of the aristocratic *basileiai*, legitimising them with a power analogous to the divinised power of the supreme *anax*. The divine intrigues on Olympus and the theogonic dramas of constant struggles, successive dethronements, the uninterrupted killing of titans, divinities and heroes, culminating in Zeus' appropriation of the summit, represent a certain expectation of order that the dramaturgy of the enthronement of Mesopotamian sovereignties offers as a mirror to late mythographies in their task of legitimising an emerging power for a reconfiguring social reality. (...) The gods of the mythographic epic thus become not only the supreme models, but also the immanentized legitimisers of an eminently political religiosity."⁹

How, then, do human societies deal with the violence underlying a saturation of supremacy?

4. Reflective prelude: violence, sacredness and mimetic antagonism

Although René Girard's work does not develop a theorisation specifically aimed at monotheism, it does provide a useful reading key, based on a snippet of Thomas Hobbes, according to which "if two men desire the same thing and if, at the same time, it seems impossible for both to enjoy it, they become enemies. And on the way to their arrival destination (...) they endeavour to destroy or subjugate each other."¹⁰

It is therefore from the desiderative drive for the same object to possess that rivalry arises. The problem is amplified and aggravated when this conflictual experience spills over from the intersubjective microcosm into the community dynamic, contaminating and jeopardising social stability and, ultimately, its political viability.¹¹ In order to neutralise the

⁹ AMARAL António, "Do Poder do Sagrado à Sacralização do Poder: precedentes gregos de uma Teologia Política?", in *CULTUM. Excursos de Hermenêutica, Política e Religião*, Editora LabCom.IFP, 2018, pg. 267 [see *Ibid.*, in *Secularização e Teologia Política <Secularisation and Political Theology>*, coord. and org. A. Bento, J. Rosa e J. Domingues, Lisboa: Documenta, 2019, pp. 25-37]

¹⁰ HOBBS Thomas, *Leviathan*, I, ch. 13

¹¹ See TEIXEIRA Alfredo, *A Pedra Rejeitada: O Eterno Retorno da Violência e a Singularidade da Revelação Evangélica na Obra de René Girard* [*The Rejected Stone: The Eternal Return of Violence and the Singularity of Evangelical Revelation in the Work of René Girard*], Porto: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 1995, where the author presents

catastrophic effects of this possibility, human communities have always been able to count on the religious dimension to produce a device to inhibit this threat through a ritual designed to confer sacredness on a process on which the perception of social survival itself would depend. The name given to this collective catharsis device is the "scapegoat". In order to dissolve the violence of all against all, a sacrificial procedure is set up in which the violence of all against one is mirrored, with ritualisation serving to validate the symmetrical "one for all" inversion and, through it, the suppression of the generalised remorse for this selective elimination, which, if it were to happen, would be even more devastating in its diametrically opposed effects.

According to Girard,

Religion is far from "useless". It dehumanises violence, subtracts man from his violence to protect him from it, transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present threat that demands to be appeased through appropriate rites (...). Men wouldn't be able to place their violence outside of themselves, in a separate, sovereign and redeeming entity, if there wasn't an atoning victim, if violence itself didn't provide them with a truce that is also a new beginning (...)¹²

Of course, the thesis of mimetic rivalry neutralised by sacrificial devices capable of bringing about a collective catharsis faces a certain amount of aporetic resistance. Firstly because it seeks to obviate violence with another type of violence, which is only not violence because it is religiously mediated by the sacredness of a mediation conveniently reduced to the condition of "victim".¹³ If in archaic models this focus on the victim was reasonably sheltered from public space (in most cases the sacrificial act was eccentric and therefore obscene, as was the case with the ritual immolation of a goat at the end of tragediographic performances), with the passage of time it has faded (which doesn't mean it

the topography of Girardian thought based on three fundamental axes: 1. the antagonistic structure of mimetic desire; 2. the ontogenesis of the sacred from which violence emerges as a driving force in cultural dynamics; 3. the sacrificial reconfiguration of violence in the light of the Christian worldview; see also, in a complementary perspective, MERUJE Márcio, *Metamorfoses da Rivalidade Mimética. Uma Leitura Atualizante de René Girard* [*Metamorphoses of Mimetic Rivalry. An Updated Reading of René Girard*], Doctoral dissertation, UBI - Covilhã: 2016, 47-52

¹² GIRARD René, *La violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972, 172

¹³ Perhaps an exception should be made for the sui generis character of the Christian sacrificial model, since Christ represents a kind of paradoxical cathartic mediator, given his innocent condition (not so much because he doesn't know what he's going to go through, since actually he knows it, but because he knows he's exempt from guilt, which adds to his victim status); his sacrifice in favour of the community only shows signs of violence for those watching from the outside, but not for those who, as is the case here, retain within themselves the purpose of his act of surrender or oblation: unlike the expiatory victim of a collective evil, he is not chosen, he is not forced, but decides and chooses for himself to sacrifice himself for the good of all: see GIRARD, René, *Evolution and Conversion. Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, New York: Continuum, 2010, pp. 234 ss.

has disappeared¹⁴), becoming imperceptible today, since the condition of "victim" has gained such visibility that it has become paradoxically transparent and, ipso facto, practically inoperative.¹⁵ In a certain sense, perhaps this explains why almost no one is willing to offer themselves up as a martyr to save the critical situation of many, while when it comes to a scapegoat, there are very few who don't give in to the temptation to participate in the choice and even initiate the beheading or stoning, if they can obtain a painless *reset* of conscience.

The girardian thesis of mimetic rivalry not only opens up space for a theorisation of the greatest interest and relevance for illuminating from within the importance that each person wants to give to religion, even if there is none, but also provides a reading key from which, in our opinion, the latent and potential violence of the semantics of each of the Abrahamic monotheisms will always be ready to erupt in mimetic rivalry for the desire to possess a truth revealed in an endo-religious and self-referential context.¹⁶

5. Historical-critical diagnosis: violence and monotheism

Religion, for René Girard, is the best remedy against human violence - strictly speaking, in fact, the Greek term *pharmakon* is used to designate both the expiatory element of religious catharsis and the therapeutic element of medicinal healing. For Jan Assmann, however, the thesis needs not to be refuted, but sufficiently destabilised in order to access a deeper level of analysis.¹⁷ In *Violence and Monotheism*, in fact, the approach to violence is

¹⁴ See about this, for instance, BAUHN Per, *Ethical Aspects of Political Terrorism: The Sacrificing of the Innocent*, Lund: Lund University Press, 1989

¹⁵ M. Meruje summarises this aspect well when he says that "Girard uses the concept of *desire* in a multiplicity of senses, but we could already summarise three topics that fundamentally determine some of these senses that are presented in the work: 1. all mimetic desire has its origin in the Other; 2. all conflicts, called mimetic rivalry, have their origin in mimetic desire. 3. the scapegoat mechanism is the origin of sacrifice and founds human culture, religion being necessary for human evolution to control the violence that arises or can arise from mimetic rivalry.": MERUJE Márcio, *Metamorfoses da Rivalidade Mimética. Uma Leitura Atualizante de René Girard* [*Metamorphoses of Mimetic Rivalry. An Updated Reading of René Girard*], *op. cit.*, 51

¹⁶ Cf. GIRARD, René, *Battling to the End - Conversations with Benoît Chantre* [= *Achever Clausewitz*], Carnets Nord, Paris, 2007], Michigan State University Press, Michigan, 2010, 215; see HUNTINGTON Samuel, "The Clash of Civilizations", in *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993) 3, 22-49; *Idem*, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996

¹⁷ Perhaps this is why the author chooses to avoid the archetypal approach of the original fratricide of Abel by Cain [see SCHWARTZ Regina, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], thus avoiding, right from the start, the shaky ground of either purely historiographical research [see LEMAIRE André, *Naissance du monothéisme. Point de vue d'un historien*, Paris: Bayard, 2003], or strictly theological or even historical-critical exegesis [see SOLER Jean, *La violence monothéiste*, Paris: Editions de Fallois, 2008].

inscribed in a densified cultural memorialisation, and it is from this that the foundational texts of biblical monotheism begin to display a *semantics of rupture*:

"The fundamental axiom is this: *cultura facit saltus*. (...) This is how monotheism (...), in the biblical representation, (...) enters the scene as a revolutionary leap and rupture (...); a radical new beginning (as opposed to a multisecular evolution); an extraordinary intervention (...) by God in history."¹⁸

Unlike pagan religions whose polytheistic structure encouraged a continuous effort to translate between reasonably interchangeable referents of meaning, monotheism, according to Jan Assmann, operates from an original rupture of self-delimitation that the author calls the *Mosaic distinction*, i.e. relating to the biblical figure of Moses. There is nothing to translate into this religion, not because the multiple divinities of other religions are strangely different, but because they are completely false¹⁹; and the same goes for their worshippers - they are not really considered different, but enemies, insofar as they do not have access to a God who is not only One and Only²⁰, and therefore "true", but also capable, if necessary, of marching ahead of his chosen people to defeat all who oppose him.²¹ This formulation, which Assmann stereotypes to make his position more evident, is accelerated by the catalyst of the constant test of fidelity to an Alliance, with catastrophic historical consequences (destruction, captivity, epidemics, etc.) if it is not fulfilled or respected.

The first point to retain from Assmann's theorising is what we would call the agonistic construction of the other through religion. What is important to understand is not so much whether biblical monotheism - and the same could be said of Koranic

¹⁸ ASSMANN Jan, *Violence and Monotheism*, Paris: Bayard, 2009, 36-37

¹⁹ See STARK Rodney, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001

²⁰ It should be noted in this regard that Assmann, an eminent Egyptologist, develops the thesis of the Mosaic distinction by closely relating it to previous research into the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten of Amarna, who was responsible for leading a monotheistic revolution within the Egyptian polytheistic framework, on whose presuppositions the religion operated by the Mosaic distinction could, *mutatis mutandis*, be perfectly revised: Cf. ASSMANN Jan, *Violence et monotheïsme*, *op. cit.*, 45 ss.

²¹ Alain de Benoist points out that "the Bible, since the Pentateuch, has unambiguously attributed to Yahweh, the Eternal, an extremely warlike character. "The Lord is a warrior", declares the chant uttered by Moses after the passage of the Red Sea. "Warrior" is one of the attributes most frequently attributed to Yahweh, whether in the ancient texts (Exodus 15,3), the pasha ("Yahweh, the vanquisher of battles", Psaume 24,8) or prophetic literature (Isaiah 42,13). Chapter 20 of Deuteronomy provides an extensive description of these attributes. L'Eternel, Hashem-Adonai, le dieu d'Israël, est *Iahvé sabaot*, le "dieu des armées", un dieu radicalement et foncièrement mâle - tendant de ce fait à exclure le féminin (qui sera fréquemment assimilé au polythéisme). The Bible says that Yahweh "fights for Israël" and speaks explicitly of the *milbâmôt YHVH*, the "wars of Yahweh": "Don't be jealous or anxious, and don't tremble before them, because Yahweh your God is with you": BENOIST, Alain de, "Violence sacrée, guerre et monothéisme", in *Krisis*, avril (2010) 3

monotheism²² - is violent or uses violent language, but rather why its establishing narrative uses a *semantics of violence*:

"the problem that occupies us is that of monotheism and the language of violence. (...) The topicality of this question is evident, because it is not so much the past in itself, but its memoriality that motivates and directs our actions. The return of religion, which we have seen over the last few decades, is disturbingly linked to violence, intimidation, hatred and fear, as well as to the production of enemies." ²³

Where there are gods, there must be God²⁴: this is the protocolar formulation to produce meaning in Sinaitic monotheism. It carries with it a perfectly interchangeable bisector: a) at first, all the gods are subjugated to One God; b) at a later stage, there are no gods apart from the One God.²⁵

The second point to keep in mind relates to some aspects developed in another work entitled *The Price of Monotheism*²⁶, where Jan Assmann analyses the persistent twinning of the concepts of exclusivity and universalism in order to assess the political impact of intolerance that they contain, especially in a context of globalisation.²⁷ Pure monotheism

²² The question is not about the Islamic religion, or any of the others, in itself, but about the subliminal semantics that underlies its massive production of meaning: "we must recognise that these texts <Torah, Veterotestamentary Scripture and Al Qur'an>, namely their antagonistic semantics of delimitation (...) have gained a topicality that is both considerable and disturbing: not because of the religions themselves, but among the fundamentalist movements that have proliferated within their referential framework, as is currently particularly the case with Islam.": ASSMANN Jan, *Violence et monotheïsme*, op. cit, 75

²³ Cf. *Ididem*, 37-38

²⁴ See KIRSCH Jonathan, *God Against the Gods. The History of War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*, New York: Viking Press, 2004

²⁵ Cf. ASSMANN Jan, *Violence and Monotheism*, op. cit., 44

²⁶ See *Idem*, *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010

²⁷ The globalising dynamic of monotheism is based on its underlying universalism. "Diaspora", in Jewish parlance, and "Catholicism", in Christian parlance, translate this disseminating and diffusive impulse. Wolfgang Huber says that "scholarly research shows that religiosity does not necessarily lead to a decrease but, at least in certain circumstances, rather to an increase in latent or manifest violence. This tendency is astonishing considering that at least three major monotheistic religions-Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-include the commandment to love one's neighbour as one of their central ethical precepts. What can be the driving force negating the basic religious stricture not to kill but instead to respect the dignity of the other and love one's neighbour? What can be the reason for the violation of the Golden Rule, to treat the other as we want to be treated by him? Some argue that aggression is so basic to human nature that it cannot be limited by ethical or even religious restraints. But that is obviously not true. People are able to limit their aggression; they listen to the voice of their conscience and invent the instruments of law to overcome or limit the tendency to hurt one another. Why, then, does it happen that the sources of religion are not used in this direction but instead become instrumental in the intensification of hatred and the readiness to use violence? To explain this linkage between religiosity and the use of violence, it is often argued that people tend to devalue others with a different faith when they are convinced of the superiority of their own belief system. But, again, this is not an inevitable consequence. Personal trust in the truth of a specific religion does not imply the need to disrespect people of other faiths. Historically, we know examples of the peaceful coexistence of religions as well as violent conflicts between them": HUBER Wolfgang, "Religion and violence in a globalised world", in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32 (2011) 2, 53-54; cf. in this regard ZOLO Danilo, "Una guerra globale monoteistica", in *Iride*, 2003, 2, pp. 223-240

does not recognise the existence of national gods.²⁸ The formulation of the One God is now joined, by later historical accretion, by that of "God-the-same-for-all" [and consequently "everywhere"], with claims to globalisation within the geopolitical scales known at the time. However, this claim is controlled within a framework of "exclusionary exclusivity"²⁹, which implies a direct consequence, namely the implacable condemnation of idolatry under the sign of *iconoclastic violence*³⁰ present in all three monotheisms without exception:

- "If your brother, (...) your son or daughter, your mate or friend whom you love secretly seduces you, saying, 'Let us serve foreign gods' (...) you must kill him", Torah, *Deut. 13, 7-11*;
- "those who have exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and who have worshipped and served creatures (...) are worthy of death," New Testament, 1 *Rom 1:25-32*;
- "Kill the idolaters wherever you find them", *Qur'an surah 9, verse 5 [said of the Sword]*.

The idea of the One God is linked to two apparently distinct but related demands: the absolute prohibition of iconoplasty (i.e. not making an image of God himself) and

²⁸ Jan Assmann's position is unequivocal: "This problem is solved by the monotheistic religions in different ways. The Jewish solution consists in 'sub-sovereignty'. Israel develops the pure form of monotheism only under minority conditions, in the Babylonian exile and under Persian rule. Under these conditions, YHWH may renounce his political function as a state god and become truly universal. The Christian and Islamic solution of this problem is the empire. So little monotheism suits the needs of a national religion, so well it functions as an imperial religion. It does not support a nation-state, but an empire. Christianity is linked to the Roman Empire, Islam forms empires of its own, from the Abassid, Omayyad, Fatimid etc. up to the Ottoman empires. Nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism, therefore, represented a mortal danger to the alliance between religion and politics, in the Muslim East as well as the Christian West. The typical nation-state is a secular state. This holds for post-revolutionary France, as well as for Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and even early Zionism. Nationalism is also a political religion that does not tolerate other religions beside itself. Religious nation-states such as Pakistan and Iran are exceptional and problematic constructions. The same would apply to a not yet existing 'Serbia' (at least not under this designation), with its national branch of Greek orthodox faith. The political forms that are congenial to monotheistic universalism are either minority conditions or imperial multinationalism": ASSMANN Jan, "Monotheism and its political consequences", in GIESEN Bernhard - ŠUBER Daniel (Hg.), *Religion and politics. Cultural perspectives* (International studies in religion and society 3), Leiden; London 2005, 149-150

²⁹ "Many critics felt the concept of the Mosaic distinction to be hostile to religion, even anti-Semitic or anti-Christian, because in their view it implies the charge that hatred, intolerance, and exclusion first came into the world with the Mosaic distinction.⁷ Naturally, I do not believe that the world of the primary religions was free from hatred and violence. On the contrary, it was filled with violence and aggression in the most diverse forms, and many of these forms were domesticated, civilised, or even eliminated altogether by the monotheistic religions as they rose to power, since such violence was perceived to be incompatible with the truth they proclaimed. I do not wish to deny this in the least. Yet neither can it be denied that these religions simultaneously brought a new form of hatred into the world: hatred for pagans, heretics, idolaters and their temples, rites, and gods. If we dismiss such considerations as "anti-Semitic," we consent to discursive and intellectual fetters that restrict our historical reflection in a dangerous way. Whoever refuses to account for the path he has taken for fear that the goal at which he has arrived might prove contingent, relative, or perhaps even undesirable when compared with his point of departure, or the options he has rejected along the way, fosters a new form of intolerance. The capacity to historicize and relativize one's own position is the precondition of all true tolerance": ASSMANN Jan, *The Price of Monotheism*, *op. cit.*, 15-16

³⁰ Cf. *Idem*, *Violence and Monotheism*, *op. cit.*, 71-88

iconolatry (i.e. not venerating images of other gods).³¹ This prohibition provides a pretext not only for persecuting and eliminating those who engage in these practices, but also for destroying all the artefacts and buildings responsible for these deviations. The deep-seated reason for this iconoclastic furor is based on the idea that the images created, like their worshippers, should be destroyed not so much because they are fantasies or imaginary daydreams, but because they represent nostalgia and the temptation to return to a certain cosmotheism³² that monotheistic belief rightly seeks to overcome and demarcate itself from by sworn allegiance in an Alliance with a God invoked, in the context of the revelation to Moses, as YHWH, "I am who I am".

The third point to keep in mind lies in what Assmann presents and describes as a notable innovation of biblical monotheism, namely the theologisation of morality through legal mediation, even though the price to be paid is manifested in the ambivalence of a very subtle and internalised legalistic violence. Where does this source of violence come from, the historical-religious explanation of which could be formulated in the binomial "monotheism-nomothetism"?

Religion and ethics have different roots. At the origin of the monotheistic religions, however, their fusion revealed an indestructible symbiosis in the cultural process: it makes it possible to measure not so much cultic fidelity (as in the case of iconoclasm in relation to the sense of exclusive belonging), but above all ritual standardisation, creating an

³¹ In equating the implications that emerge from a single thought as "*miroir de la condamnation de l'idolâtrie*", J.-P. Castel adds that "en conséquence, le croyant monothéiste considère son Dieu comme le garant d'une vérité transcendante et unique, comme une autorité supérieure, infaillible, absolue, qui s'impose autant à l'incroyant qu'à lui-même. Un arbitre neutre, qui pourrait être reconnu par les deux parties, n'est plus de mise: de façon unilatérale, le croyant érige son dieu en arbitre nécessaire": CASTEL Jean-Pierre, "La violence monothéiste n'est pas que politique", in <http://www.mezetulle.fr/violence-monotheiste-jean-pierre-castel/> [Mezetulle, 12 November 2017]

³² It's worth listening to Jan Assmann on this point: "the concept of cosmotheism was coined, referring as much to the pagan religion of antiquity as to the contemporary philosophy of Spinoza. The end of the eighteenth century saw the discovery of India as a spiritual world. Linguists recognised the affinities between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and so on, postulating India as the ancestral homeland of the "Indogermanic" peoples on the basis of this linguistic affinity. With that, India inherited Egypt's legacy of representing cosmotheism as the rejected alternative to monotheism. Only now did the Semitic and Indogermanic spheres begin to face each other as two opposing linguistic, ethnic (or "racial"), and spiritual-religious camps; only now, in connection with India, did cosmotheism or anti-monotheism take on anti-Semitic features. Exclusive monotheism now appeared, precisely in its hostility to images, as a typically Semitic religion, the religion of desert nomads. Fundamental ancient Egyptian phobias were revived. Many elements of anti-Semitism are not Christian but pagan or neo-pagan. [...] The cosmotheistic option has never been completely overcome and eradicated, but has resurfaced time and again in various transformations and guises, such as hermeticism, Paracelsism, alchemy, Spinozism, freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, theosophy, and so on. In the twentieth century, movements like anthroposophy, Haeckel's Monist League, the Munich cosmicists, and National Socialist neo-paganism, as well as the many different New Age religions, display obvious cosmotheistic tendencies. In relation to one another, these movements are of course completely different, even antagonistic, and should on no account be lumped together. Still, they do all share an element of anti-monotheism": Assmann, Jan, *The Price of Monotheism*, *op. cit.*, 75

ambiguous prescriptive instance that short-circuits prescriptive legality (under the name of virtue) and behavioural perfectionism (under the name of purity). The result was more than predictable: the consolidation of a moralistic ecosystem which, due to its potential for coercive control, creates more problems than solutions³³; see, by the way, the intra-religious tensions and persecutions³⁴ that occurred in the Jewish context in relation to the quarrels between Sadducees and Pharisees; in Christianity in relation to schismatic or anti-heretical movements³⁵; and in Islam in relation to the antagonism between Shiites and Sunnis.

In the case of Sinaitic monotheism – so-called due the Sinai, mountain where Moses received the Decalogue, the table of ten laws or commandments – a sacred continuum is projected between codified justice (e.g. in legal provisions and precepts), social adjustment (e.g. in prophetic invectives against indifference, negligence and oppression of the most vulnerable) and ritual justice (e.g. in purification protocols). It turns out that the same line that separates the legal from the illegal in the name of the distinction between the just and the unjust, is the same line that allows the infiltration of persecutory violence by formulating the criterion that separates the pure from the impure. The plot became well

³³ Indeed, according to Jan Assmann, "the Bible is no less concerned with salvational justice, with justice from below. Here it is demanded by the prophets, who speak on behalf of God and in the face of the state. There is nothing comparable to this in the ancient Eastern world, which is why the view that this idea of justice was first brought into the world by the monotheism proclaimed by the prophets could first take hold. In the world of the Ancient Near East, however, there are gnomic texts and mirrors held up to the prince to remind him of the state's mission to institute salvational justice here on earth. The authors of these texts are not prophets speaking in god's name, since they offer only simple, relatively profane principles for regulating individual and community life": ASSMANN Jan, *The Price of Monotheism*, *op. cit.*, 49-50

³⁴ See HAUGHT James, *Perseguições religiosas: uma história do fanatismo e dos crimes religiosos* [*Religious persecutions: a history of fanaticism and religious crimes*], Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 2003

³⁵ Alfons Fürst explains that "When Constantine I (306-337) converted to Christianity and identified the God of the sun with the God of the Christians, he opened a general line towards monotheism. If, in pre-Stalin times, Christians had already taken advantage of the monotheistic environment, now they could even use it for their political benefit. (...) Until then, Christianity had taken advantage of it peacefully, so much so that, as it were, the monotheistic spirit of the time had taken a hand in it. Through Constantine's political support for Christianity, this propagation gained a strong impetus, but also acquired a new accent: associated with state power, Christianity was increasingly consecrated with the help of force and violence. (...) To clarify the process by which a religious movement becomes a threat from those who are hostile to it, we have to ask ourselves about a possible deep ambivalence within Christianity itself. How did the followers of the religion of love come to establish new forms of violence and religious intolerance? Was Christianity perceived, even before Constantine's conversion, as a threat by some contemporaries? Just as it is not enough to refer to the conversion of Constantine to explain the violence used by Christians, it is not enough to refer to the non-violence of Jesus to dismiss the reproach that the monotheistic creed is irredeemably intolerant and violent. Renouncing violence is characteristic of the life and preaching of Jesus. The early church did not immediately betray this norm, but formulated an ethic of peace which ultimately expressed its reservations against military service. However, there are also ancient Christian texts that use another language, with violent content, and history gives us examples of how often Christian praxis has fallen behind its own demands. Against its own tradition, there have been many unscrupulous ecclesiastics willing to use violence. By this I don't just mean violent pogroms against ancient cults, the destruction of shrines and images of gods, but relationships between Christians themselves. Much more often and much more violently than against pagans or Jews, Christian aggression in antiquity was directed against schismatics and heretics": FÜRST Alfons, "Monoteísmo y violencia" ["Monotheism and Violence"], in *Selecciones de teología* 176 (2005) 305-306

known since the remote times of Gnosis and Manichaeism, propagating its echoes to the present days.³⁶

6. Exodus and aporetic outcome: religion and interculturality

Jan Assmann shows the extent to which monotheisms contain a memorialised semantics of violence whose visible face has historically manifested itself in phenomena of extreme intolerance. You don't have to go very far to realise, in the light of such counterintuitive designations as holy, just and sacred wars, that this extremism has precipitated hegemonic inter-religious wars³⁷ where religious legitimisation of political expectations and political legitimisation of religious motivations are almost impossible to discern: see what happened with Zionist Judaism in relation to identity preservation; with post-Reformation Christianity in relation to the struggle of states for geopolitical supremacy between the 16th and 18th centuries in Europe; and with jihadist Islam in relation to the threatening emergence of phantom states such as DAESH or Middle Eastern states ruled by theocratic regimes in the midst of the 21st century.³⁸

³⁶ See PÉTREMENT Simone, *Le Dieu séparé: les origines du gnosticisme*, Paris: Cerf, 1984; VÖGELIN Eric, "Apocalisse e rivoluzione", in *Caratteri gnostici della moderna politica economica e sociale*, Milano: Nuovi Carteggi, 1967; *Idem*, *Ciencia, Política y Gnosticismo*, Madrid: RIALP, 1973

³⁷ Alain Benoist's explanation is useful in this regard: "The biblical doctrine of sacred violence has indeed profoundly influenced the theories of war developed by the Christians, as well as by the Muslims. In the Middle Ages, the doctrine of just war (*bellum justum*), which became authoritative for over a millennium, was based on a reworking of the Vétérotestamentaire idea of "holy war". Just war is not quite the same as holy war as described in the Torah. It is not a war directly willed by God, but a war conducted to obey divine will and in compliance with the moral rules decreed by religious authority. The doctrine of *bellum justum*, which Saint Thomas Aquinas helped to define, aims to enumerate the circumstances or criteria that make a war just, thus justifying the use of arms while keeping in mind the evangelical principles of love for others and charity, and to specify the rules that must be observed during combat so that the war remains just. It turns out that all wars are not allowed, and that everything is not allowed when they are. But it also follows that the enemy that we fight is always accused of defending an unjust cause. Les limitations sont à la fois de l'ordre des causes, qui justifient le *jus ad bellum*, de l'ordre des finalités et de l'ordre des moyens, qui définissent le *jus in bello*. War must be declared to defend a "just cause", because no other means can correct the situation which it is intended to end. It must be decided by a legitimate authority, with a "right intention" and have a goal of peace. It must finally be carried out by separating non-combatants as much as possible and respecting a principle of proportionality between the objectives pursued and the cost in human lives that it entails. The doctrine of just war, on the other hand, admits preventive war and the right to attack those who have offended God.: BENOIST Alain de, "Violence sacrée, guerre et monothéisme", in *Krisis*, avril (2010) pg. 21; see also RUSSELL Frederick, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975; O'BRIEN William, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War*, New York: Praeger, 1981; ELSHTAIN Jean (ed.), *Just War Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992

³⁸ See FIORI Jean, *Guerre sainte, jibad, croisade. Violence et religion dans le christianisme et l'islam*, Paris: Seuil-Points, 2002; *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 2, ed. J. Esposito, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 369-373; HOFFMANN Joseph, *The Just War and Jihad. Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005

There is a common element linking these three forms of intolerance and monotheistic extremism: fideism. What makes it problematic is the fact that it sometimes reveals a strange anti-cultural proselytising, under the pretext of which religious belief is imposed as a univocal criterion, leading its apologists to fanaticism and sectarianism.³⁹ This unsustainable "de-rationalisation" of faith can only be explained, in the final analysis, by a lack of critical sense⁴⁰, which tends to degenerate into discrediting the very basis of doctrinal, institutional and even spiritual support.⁴¹ There are four principles that pathologically block⁴² this critical sense, converting fideism into fundamentalism:

- Impassibility of faith
- Infallibility of hierarchical power
- Unquestionability of sacred texts
- Inflexibility of worldview values

³⁹See CASTEL Jean-Pierre, «Fanatisme et tentation de l'absolu», in *Topique* 140 (2017) 109-122

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Huber clarifies that "to justify and to drive violence in conflict is not an inherent and unchangeable characteristic of religion, but an acquired or even ascribed quality of religion. But there are situations or contexts in which this kind of acquisition or ascription tends to be enforced. This seems to be the case today. The necessary answer to this dangerous constellation includes good historical research on the manifold reasons for conflicts and the forces behind them, and a self-critical reflection within religious communities on their role in conflict and their possible functions in peace-building processes": HUBER Wolfgang, "Religion and violence in a globalised world", in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32 (2011) 2, 61

⁴¹ As Isabel Magalhães rightly points out, "Sacred texts almost always have a symbolic dimension that prevents them from being interpreted literally, as this would hide other layers of meaning. Although a literal reading also has a hermeneutic, a predominantly literal reading, by the very fact of remaining close to the text, violates that letter instead of discovering life in it. (Note here the care to be taken with the fact that "life" and "violence" come from the same Greek root: *bios/bia*). It's even worse when the text is read as the voice of God himself: then the fundamentalist threat becomes performative, acting independently of any context. We are thus entering a terrain that already exceeds the religious: it is that of politics and the will to power. There is nothing spiritual about it. However, we come across other ways of reading that clearly rule out fundamentalism, because they are free, open and critical. In all the monotheisms and in each of the Abrahamic traditions we find these readings, which are in no way imposed. In Judaism, *midrashic* interpretation opens up the Text to many possibilities of meaning, in a kind of infinitisation of reading (the *Talmud* is an example), which has a parallel in the *ijtihad* experienced in Islam (...). In Islam, with Averrois, we welcome this vision of openness, just as in Judaism we find it in Spinoza and many others who have critically analysed the 'Texts': MAGALHÃES Isabel Allegro de, "Monoteísmo(s) e fundamentalismo(s)" ["Monotheism(s) and fundamentalism(s)"], in *As Três Religiões do Livro [The Three Religions of the Book]*, coord. A. Borges e J. Monteiro, Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2012, 53-54

⁴² See ALDEEB Sami, *La violence dans l'islam diagnostic et thérapie*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018, in which the author uses the clinical metaphor to approach the phenomenon of the relationship between violence and Islam, according to the following vectors: 1) De l'islam non violent à l'islam violent: Évolution d'un islam meququois non violent à un islam médinois violent. Taha: return to the Meccan Koran; 2) Violence within Muslim society: against animals, children, women, in criminal law, violence and the alternation of power; 3) External violence against non-Muslims: the hague as a prelude to war, dissimulation, jihad, relations with the dhimmis 4) Therapy of violence: recognize the problem, avoid rhetoric, be firm and consistent, desacralize the sacred books, legal measures and solution to the refugee problem, promote justice: see ALDEEB Sami, *La violence dans l'islam diagnostic et thérapie*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018. The same critical and therapeutic protocol could, in its structural transversality, be applied to and involved in the other monotheisms - Jewish and Christian: see SIBONY Daniel, *Les Trois monothéismes. Juifs, chrétiens, musulmans entre leurs sources et leurs destins*, Paris: Seuil, 1992

In hermeneutical terms, each of these four vectors has repercussions and aggravates syndromes of violence if, in each monotheistic frame of reference, they are supported by a “monological” rationality in which the concepts of unity, identity and universality are domesticated by a univocal, tautological, disjunctive and binary logic (V/F)⁴³, thus dissolving that relational differentiation of the *logos* that converts all possible narratives into a interlegible (and thus intelligible) text, including the discourse of action.

We all know that certain cultural processes will hardly be perceptible, let alone interpretable, if that intensified production of meaning is obliterated, which, for example, made it possible to operationalise the pre-political legitimisation of religious power in ancient times (in the mimetic expropriations of enthronement rites), but also, at a later stage, the religious legitimisation of political power (in the secularised re-appropriations of monotheistic supremacies)⁴⁴; even so, perhaps there is still something worth emphasising: precisely because all culture is subliminally religious (even in the negativity of its refusal or in the counterfeiting of its substitutes), the entire religious dimension is, ipso facto, structurally cultural, so any pretence of overstepping the culture - whether to judge it from above or suppress it from within - condemns any religion to self-centred, super-identitarian agonistic processes⁴⁵ that distract them from their essential purpose, which is to ensure the

⁴³ In this regard, J.-P. Castel points out that "distinguishing the 'true' from the 'false' in fact implies a criterion of truth and a validation process outside the field under consideration, under penalty of self-reference. In science and philosophy, the criterion of truth is logical coherence and, when possible, confrontation with reality (this is the role in particular of scientific experience), and the validation procedure, verification by the community of peers": CASTEL Jean-Pierre, "La violence monothéiste n'est pas que politique", in <http://www.mezetulle.fr/violence-monotheiste-jean-pierre-castel/> [Mezetulle, 12 November 2017]

⁴⁴ Analysing the tension that runs through the binomial between religion and politics as "a distinction that has been possible for many centuries", JP Castel says: "Since the dawn of time, religion and politics have been intimately linked. More generally, language, parenthood, religion, politics, economics, law, etc., these different fields of social life, which were originally more or less confused, became progressively autonomous over the centuries. Even if interdependencies remain, this autonomy, and in particular the secularisation of politics, the removal of politics from the religious sphere, are often seen as characteristics of western modernity. This secularization was, however, already underway in the Greek world of Solon and Pericles, as well as in the Roman Empire": CASTEL Jean-Pierre, "La violence monothéiste n'est pas que politique", in <http://www.mezetulle.fr/violence-monotheiste-jean-pierre-castel/> [Mezetulle, 12 novembre 2017]; see GENTILE Emilio, "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism", in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1/1, 2000, 34-55

⁴⁵ The configuration of the religious dimension as an "identity marker" prompts the following clarification from J.-P. Castel: "the exclusivism of monotheistic religions makes them an identity marker more fraught with violence than others. While in Athens the difference between "them" and "us" was mainly of a cultural nature - it was enough for a foreigner to speak Greek to be admitted to participate in all social activities, except of course politics -, in Jerusalem it was of a religious order, or ontological, with the consequence of a demonisation of the adversary - qualified as an idolater - a radicalisation of conflicts, a sacralisation of violence. Developed by Christianity and Islam, proselytism seeks to convert humanity as a whole to its conception of the divine, of the absolute, of truth; (...) the means deployed to this end are manifold: 1) an institution guardian of dogma; 2) the threat of damnation; 3) missionary proselytism; 4) the crusade and jihad": CASTEL Jean-Pierre, "La violence monothéiste n'est pas que politique", in <http://www.mezetulle.fr/violence-monotheiste-jean-pierre-castel/> [Mezetulle, 12 November 2017]; regarding

historical-cultural mediation of the sacred in view of a saturated donation and an intensified production of meaning.⁴⁶ It is therefore urgent to put the three monotheisms in a position to interact in an ecosystem that is not monocultural, but multicultural and intercultural.⁴⁷ If this is not the case, the remaining alternative could prove problematic because it contains within itself the possibility of causing what we would dare to call *inter-monotheistic mimetic antagonism* to erupt.

João Duque, in theological dialogue with Paul Ricoeur⁴⁸, offers a solid basis for this:

"By pretending to take possession of the transcendent foundation, a community inserts itself into the range of all the communities that also intend to appropriate it, which thus appear as rivals in this process of finite appropriation of the infinite foundation. This undoubtedly results in an attitude of violence between different forms of alleged appropriation of the infinite, as manifestations of the primordial tension between human finitude and the infinitude of the foundation. [...] I think it's possible (...) to move forward with a reading of the contribution of religion to inter-cultural relations that overcomes the potential for latent violence and can contribute to the construction of a relationship (...) rooted in the deepest difference that characterises Christian identity: the Trinitarian difference. Therein is articulated a primordial relationship between identity and difference, which could be fertile in understanding the inter-cultural pertinence of religion, since this pertinence will always be measured by the capacity for peaceful articulation between identity and difference (...)"⁴⁹

Based on this relational paradigm in which the Christian worldview is challenged to take the first step by the "eccentricity" and differentiation that its conception of God contains⁵⁰, what is proposed to each religion, especially those that profess belief in a One God, is that, by putting on stand by, on *epokhê*, not monotheism but the self-centred and reactive militancy in which it germinates and develops, promote among themselves the self-conditioning of their possibility of credibility. How? By engaging in dialogue. Not to settle accounts with the past or to assess which of the truths that each claims to hold is more

the connection between identitarian obsession and religious violence, see also SEN Amartya, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (Issues of Our Time)*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006

⁴⁶ See PANIKKAR Raimon, "The Religion of the Future or the Crisis of the Notion of Religion: Human Righteousness", Part I, in *Interculture*, XXIII (1990) 2, 1-24

⁴⁷ See ANDRÉ João Maria, *Ecumenismo, Multiculturalismo e Educação Intercultural [Ecumenism, Multiculturalism and Intercultural Education]*, Lisboa: Graal-Publicações Terraço, 2003

⁴⁸ See RICOEUR Paul, "A religião e a violência" ["Religion and Violence"], in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 56 (2000) 25-35

⁴⁹ DUQUE João, "Interculturalidade e religião – para além da violência" ["Interculturality and religion - beyond violence"], pp. 7 ss., in

<https://repositorio.ucp.pt/bitstream/10400.14/14935/1/Interculturalidade%20e%20Religi%C3%A3o.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 15

"true"⁵¹ (even if the discourse of the action of each of them contradicts this all too often), but to assume, in an interreligious agenda, a minimum ethic capable of creating the conditions for, through an interreligious ecumenical design⁵², getting to know each other and studying what precisely differentiates them. This implies the constant search for a basic consensus with a view to building a "sustainable discourse" that will have to consider:

- on the one hand, a deep-rooted axiology capable of transforming the legal into the moral and the moral into the ethical;
- and on the other, a decisive consensus committed to knowing how to listen to propose and dare to reconsider positions in order to shape solutions.

Conclusion

More than being written down in texts, crystallised in dogma or proclaimed from pulpits, the critique of violence present in all religious traditions is, for better or worse, umbilically linked to the discursive action of the believers themselves: their relationship with transcendence does not exempt them, on the contrary, it demands of them, as proof of their credibility, the responsibility to protect their own and others' freedom from arbitrariness and prepotency. Religion doesn't guarantee peace, of course, but it doesn't make it unrealisable either⁵³; for its part, violence has existed, exists and will always exist long before and far beyond monotheisms. However, whenever these are crossed by her, it will always be pertinent to question the extent to which, far from supporting its self-affirmation, this contributes to its discrediting.

In an insightful 2005 article in which Hans Kung, analysing the intertwining of religions with the current outbreaks of belligerence around the world, carefully filters the arguments leading to the accusation that, under the biased pretext of a "holy war", monotheisms should be held responsible for promoting the use of violence, the renowned Swiss theologian launches a warning whose stentorian scope should also give food for thought:

⁵¹ See CASTEL Jean-Pierre, *À l'origine de la violence monothéiste le dieu jaloux, L'introduction du vrai et du faux dans le domaine des dieux*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017

⁵² See BINGEMER Clara (org), *Violência e Religião: Cristianismo, Islamismo, Judaísmo: três religiões em confronto e diálogo* [Violence and Religion: Christianity, Islam, Judaism: three religions in confrontation and dialogue], São Paulo: Loyola, 2001; and also BORGES Anselmo, *Religião e Diálogo Inter-religioso* [Religion and Interreligious Dialogue], Coimbra: University Press, 2010

⁵³ See GOPIN Marc, *Between Eden and Armageddon. The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000

"In the twenty-first century, too, wars are neither "holy", "just" nor "clean." Even modern "wars of Yahweh" (Sharon), "crusades" (Bush) and *jihad* (al Qaeda), with their toll of countless human lives, their large-scale destruction of the infrastructure and cultural heritage and the damage they do to the environment, are utterly irresponsible. [...] Absolute pacifism, which regards peace as the *summum bonum* to which everything must be sacrificed, is hardly attainable politically and, as a political principle, may even be irresponsible. Unfortunately, however many messages of peace and calls for peace are made by secular and religious quarters, however many preventive measures and bans are introduced, they will not be able to prevent wars completely and eliminate them once and for all. Thus when wars - which always signal an abject failure of human civilisation - do occur, there is only one thing to do: even in that extreme situation, the minimum basic rules of humane conduct must be respected".⁵⁴

Once we've got here, all that remains is to clear up any misunderstanding that may still persist: religion is not violent per se, nor are monotheisms responsible for the violence infiltrated into the semantic background of sacred texts and, from there, extracted between the lines of the action of discourse and discourse in action of religious belief.⁵⁵ The link between monotheism and violence, wherever it occurs, is contingent and ambivalent⁵⁶ – it is not impossible for it to occur, but neither does it have to be fatally necessary...

⁵⁴ KUNG Hans, "Religion, violence and "holy wars"", in *International Review of Red Cross* 87 (2005) 858: 266-267

⁵⁵ "Catholics can continue, under any circumstances, to be inspired by the pacifist appeal of the Gospels; Protestants by the ethics that reject any form of violence, as in the case of the Mennonite, Amish and Quaker communities; Islamists by the *djihad* interpreted by the Sufi brotherhoods as a struggle for self-improvement; Jews by the witness of mystical regeneration aimed at by the Hasidic current. Isabel Magalhães reinforces the idea in the following sense: "In India, too, we find elements of tolerance and harmonious articulation of differences. At various moments in history, it has been possible to build fabrics of diversity. This was the case in the 16th and 17th centuries, when there was a great balance in relations and mutual respect between Hindus and Muslims. Akhbar "the Great", the Muslim Mughal emperor, is said to have expressed a vision that placed God beyond any specific religion, a position that may have been due to the influence of the Sufis of Islam. It's interesting to see that when the conceptual and *practical* possibility of harmony between different religions and spiritualities was realised, the presence of mystics was usually close at hand. And this in all religions. First and foremost, the influence of mystics is due to their intuition that God cannot be grasped, that religions are only means, that the Absolute is unattainable": MAGALHÃES Isabel Allegro de, "Monotheism(s) and fundamentalism(s)", in *As Três Religiões do Livro* [*The Three Religions of the Book*], coord. A. Borges e J. Monteiro, *op. cit.*, 51

⁵⁶ See APPLEBY Scott, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: religion, violence, and reconciliation*, New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York / Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000

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