

War, Conquest, and Religion

The Roman Empire has a vast history and going off the little that we learned about the society, it seems that a lot of its conflicts can be dwindled down to three topics: war, conquest, and religion. Constantine: laws for Christians and Augustus letter 189 from week 9 both approach this concept the same while Crusades Conquest of Jerusalem Primary Source Excerpts\ and pope urban II speech from week 11, takes a more malicious approach. With Constantine and Augustus, both texts are written with the condescending tone of a ruler and Augustus justifies a holy war by claiming some as necessary under certain conditions, that of course the church would decide. The Crusade excerpts and the popes speech however, justify their war by claiming to be helping god and the writing from soldiers from the first crusade focus more on conquest than war while not even trying to hide the fact that they are being cruel for cruelty's sake and are not looking for rightful retribution like the first two sources portray. The four, though similar in idea, are different in action. One side is claiming that they're enacting violence for the sake of God to justify slaughtering people, and the other is claiming that violence and wars can be justified as long as they get to decide the justifications.

If we take a look at Constantine's laws for christianity and compare it to the crusade excerpts we can see the difference almost immediately in how each addresses those outside the religion. Constantine states in the first of the laws mentioned (**Eusebias, 10:5**) *"if any such things belonged to the Catholic Church of the-Christians, in any city or other place, but are now held by citizens (15) or by any others, thou shalt cause them to be restored immediately to the said churches."* and he speaks as I mentioned before in the tone of a ruler, that is to say he is not asking but telling, yet he is still treating people with respect. During his reign he let other religions do their thing while focusing on getting christians back what they had lost. His goal

was not like Augustus, he didn't want or need war or to conquer, he wanted peace and he started promoting it through tolerance. Something Pope Urban severely lacked. We can see in the pope's speech how he goes straight into othering the Shia people who overtook Jerusalem and in not saying that after what they did that anger is not understandable but, as a man of God, to take it this far was disgraceful. In the speech he says, (Pope Urban II, 2) "*...namely, that a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation foresooth which has not directed its heart and has not entrusted its spirit in God, has invaded the lands of those christians and has depopulated them by the sword, pillage, and fire;...*" and proving my point that the first crusade hindered on justifying taking Jerusalem back with any force necessary under the precursor that it was all for God. You can tell by the way he described the assault that the actual people pushed from their homes and murdered in heinous ways are not important to him, and I'm sure if they weren't christian or if the pillagers weren't Shia, then the pope would've minded his business. You can tell because he only mentions the Shia in length, spinning obscenities and curses about them, without paying respects to the people who suffered, and barely even to their God. He says a whole lot of nothing, describing the tortures the people are going through, again without paying respects, just a whole bunch of they're doing this and that and this and that, lets go kill them now because they did this and that. It's a performance, and a bad one too. If he truly cared for his fellow christians then the first thing he should've done was try to help those who escaped and yes, eventually try to overpower the Shia for control back of Jerusalem, but he didn't and instead chose to go too far and stage a war. A life for a life is not what God stands for and it's blasphemy to say he does, or to insinuate he does by claiming your enemies as his.

To compare the next two sources, Augustus' letter and the Crusade excerpts, we need to understand that this time around both sources are talking about war in one form or another but Augustus focuses on soldiers as people more than pawns for wars. He still makes me roll my eyes though, particularly when he quotes the bible and says, (Augustine, 6) *“Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”*...” The wages part just pulled me out of the whole text because it's so random. Like you're talking about the importance of people losing their lives in wars and quoting the bible about doing good by people, and you expect me to believe that God just slipped in that you shouldn't ask for a raise in the middle of talking about morality? Like, I'm sorry I had to point that out because it's just so absurd to me, but anyway, an actual quote that differs this text from the crusade excerpts is, (Augustine, 6) *“Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace.”* This seems like a noble task and in truth it is, but the line gets blurry when you have to figure out who decides when war is justifiable and what defines peace? God and old texts that no one can identify the origin of? The catholic church who is historically not kind to atheists nor other religions? Or a singular pope? No matter the option, if the church was in any way the decider, now or then, on if a country was to go to war or not then it would only cause a lot of problems very quickly. There is a reason why religion and state are separated in many larger countries today. There's too many different people with different lifestyles in the same area for one organization to hold all the power and not to mention that power could easily be manipulated. Churches are not where morals are born but they can be where they die, religious people will do anything to reach heaven and a priest can claim anything as God's will. Something as easily corrupted as religion should not be the deciding factor for war. Still, while this quote pushes the

narrative that the church is willing to commit violence in the name of God, they are not justifying the slaughtering of people like soldiers in the crusades excerpts. We don't even have to go far to see completely unhinged behavior, the first testimony reads, (D'Aguiliers) *"In the Temple of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies."* I don't even feel that I need to say much here. This is despicable and shows what I mean when I say that religious people will do anything for God and that is not a good thing. At some point you have to question yourself but religious people move in the footsteps of their god and how can you question such a holy being? That's not to say religious people are easily corruptible but religions are. I mean they start off as cults for a reason. It's easy for religion to go from a belief to an obsession, especially of this caliber where you have grown men preaching about the blood of *"unbelievers"* like they spoke to God themselves. What's crazier is that he goes on after this to celebrate getting the fatherland back as if the blood spilled on God's green earth means nothing, and that's how I know it was never about God but about conquest. They could've negotiated being able to visit Jerusalem or they could've taken it back without killing so many people, but they didn't, they wanted to prove something. That with God as their shield they could do anything.

Anyway, that's the essay, and in conclusion we can say that in history god has one of two roles, the shield or the sword. He is the statement and its retort, the savior and adversary, and he is hardly ever wielded righteously. However, I do believe even after reading what I have, that religion is a good thing and despite its misuse, people need something to believe in. They also need to learn to walk away. When a religion is enacting sadistic violence and using their God to justify it, or is claiming that violence and wars can be justified as long as they get to decide the

justifications, then we need to make sure people know that's the church, not God. I don't think many people know the difference anymore.

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