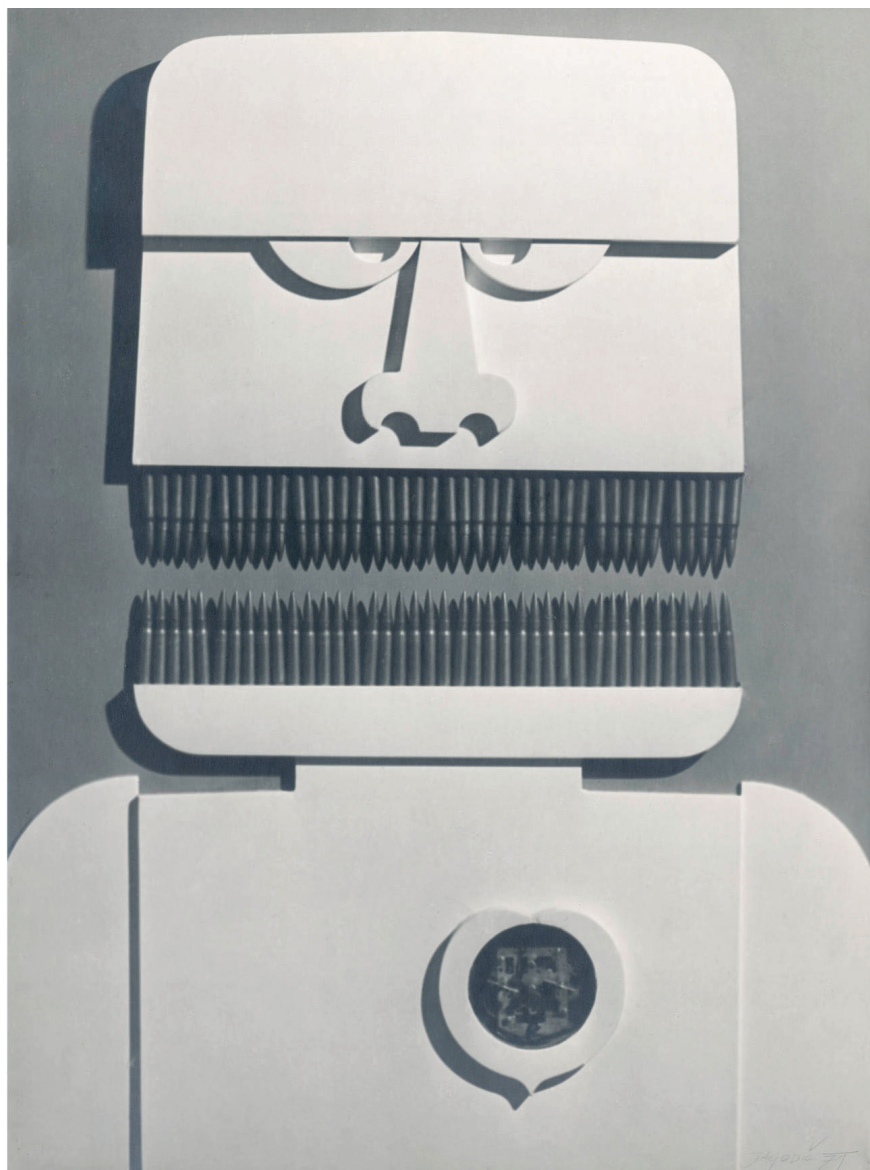


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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UNCONDITIONAL!



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in Yugoslavia and Beyond

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Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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Tomaž Mastnak

Unconditional Peace? The Idea of Peace in Political Context

Abstract Peace has always been a cherished idea, yet there is a long history of questioning peace. From the Old Testament prophets to Enlightenment philosophers, there had been doubts about what peace meant in a given historical situation. Medieval and early modern peace plans had all too often been linked to plans of war and conquest. Understanding peace from historical perspectives, therefore, requires understanding war, whereas understanding both peace and war requires taking into account concrete historical-political contexts. The predominant tradition of making war in Western history is the holy war tradition. The logic of holy war, with all the mutations and metamorphoses it has run through in the course of history, remains as relevant as ever for understanding the wars that overshadow our own world today.

Keywords Peace, just war, holy war, Crusades, war in Ukraine, war in Palestine

From the evils of peace to the peace of the graveyard

Who would question the idea of peace? Actually, questions about peace have a long history, reaching back to the Bible, if not even further back. Jeremiah, for example, lamented: “Small and great alike, all are greedy for gain; prophet and priest, all practice fraud. They have treated lightly the injury to my people: ‘Peace, peace!’ they say, though there is no peace”.¹ Ezekiel complained about the “prophets of peace” who had “led my people astray, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace”.² In the *Book of Wisdom* (generally dated to the mid-1st century BC), it is written: “They call so many and so great evils peace”.³ The Latin

¹ Jer 6.13–14.

² Ez 13.10.

³ Wis 14.23.



Stane Jagodič, *Peace Pipe*, photomontage, 1968–1973

translation in the *Vulgate* of the original Greek text reads: “*tot et tam magna mala pacem appellant*”.⁴ I am citing this line because the same words – and the same critical distancing from what in a given historical context was “called” peace – appear in the great Roman historian Tacitus.

Of the Romans, Tacitus wrote: “These plunderers of the world, after exhausting the land by their devastations, are rifling the ocean: stimulated by avarice, if their enemy be rich; by ambition, if poor; unsatiated by the East and by the West: the only people who behold wealth and indigence with equal avidity. To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace [*ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*]”.⁵

A frequent inscription on Roman medals, Tacitus commentators remind us, was “Peace given to the world”. What that imperial Roman peace, the *pax romana*, in fact gave to the world was violence, destruction and fear, of which even those who shed blood were not free. As Augustine eloquently put it: “For the Romans always lived in dark fear and cruel lust, surrounded by the disasters of war and the shedding of blood which, whether that of fellow citizens or enemies, was human nonetheless. The joy of such men may be compared to the fragile splendor of glass: they are horribly afraid lest it be suddenly shattered”.⁶

That was not an uncommon view of the *pax romana*. More than one contemporary was much more critical of the Roman Empire than many modern historians. Minucius Felix, an early Christian apologist, writing about one century and a half before Augustine, described the Romans and their empire as having had their origin in crime and having grown by terror. Whatever they held, cultivated and possessed, he opined, had been the spoil of their audacity and violence.⁷

Such passages were transcribed, read, preached, printed and commented on through the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, when Leibniz, D’Alembert and Kant, with some bitter irony, all associated peace with the graveyard. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, undoubtedly a man of peace, reported to a friend that he had seen “something of the project of M. de St Pierre, for maintaining a perpetual peace in Europe. I am reminded of a device in a cemetery, with the words: *Pax perpetua*; for the dead do not fight any longer”.⁸ Jean le Rond d’Alembert, in his praise for Saint-Pierre, referred to a Dutch merchant who had mentioned a sign at a cemetery that read “*à paix perpétuelle*”.⁹ And Immanuel Kant, the

most irenic of them all, made a remark, with his dry humour, about “a satirical inscription on the sign-board on that Dutch inn, on which a graveyard was painted”, which read “perpetual peace”.¹⁰

Like Leibniz and D’Alembert, Kant was referring to Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre, commonly known as abbé de Saint-Pierre. Saint-Pierre was famous for his peace plan for Europe, conceived about the time of the Utrecht peace negotiations early in the 18th century, in which he envisaged a union of all European states. Kant commented on that plan a number of times, as did countless other public figures in the 18th and 19th centuries (and beyond). Probably the best summary of Kant’s views on the subject is the following comment in his anthropological notes: “Should the abbot of St. Pierre most zealously pursue his idea of the one and only republic of all the states of Europe, he would be a fantasm, who actually rests his idea on a lot of reason, yet lacks reason with regard to the execution”.¹¹

One may consider this the most common reservation or objection to otherwise praiseworthy ideas of peace or peace plans: The idea itself is good, reasonable and laudable, but how can it be realized? How to translate theory into practice? In my view, the real problem of Saint-Pierre’s peace design¹² does not lie in its presumably lacking a reasonable blueprint for realization. The real problem lies precisely in the envisaged realization of the plan. In fact, Saint-Pierre proposed more than one well-reasoned plan for the execution of his peace design. That is where reason – not the lack of reason, but rather its overabundance – became dangerous. There is a popular saying that, when reason sleeps, monsters awake. But when reason is awake, it may produce even worse monstrosities. Some such monstrosities have been, and in our own time continue to be, generated in the name of peace.

The Enlightenment, European peace and crusade

Saint-Pierre’s peace plan was ultimately a plan to “make the way to a universal crusade, incomparably more solid and better concerted than all the previous”.¹³ European princes should “make a perpetual peace and chase the Turk out of Europe”. Their “indissoluble”

4 I cite *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. R. Gryson, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

5 Tacitus, *Agricola*, in: *Tacitus I*. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

6 Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, IV, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

7 Minucius Felix, *Octavius XXV*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, vol. 6 (Reprint: Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993–1996).

8 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Letter to Grimarset, 1712,” in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Political Writings*, ed. Patrick Riley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 183.

9 D’Alembert, “Éloge de Saint-Pierre,” in *Oeuvres de D’Alembert*, vol. III, Part 1 (Paris, 1821), 257.

10 Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden, Werkausgabe*, ed. W. Weischedel, vol. XI (Frankfurt, 1977), 195.

11 *Immanuel Kants Menschenkunde oder philosophische Anthropologie*, ed. Fr. Ch. Starke (Leipzig: Die Expedition des europäischen Aufsehers, 1831), 176. I wrote on Kant’s views of peace in Tomaž Mastnak, “Kant *eirenikós*: Republicanism, Commerce and the Law of Nations,” *Filozofski Vestnik*, 13, no. 2 (1992): 115–134.

12 Another famous peace plan, formulated by the Duke of Sully and attributed to King Henry IV of France was called the “Great Design.” Cf. Duc de Sully, *Memoirs of Maximilian de Bethune, Duke of Sully, Prime Minister to Henry the Great*, vol. 5 (London, 1757), 135 sqq.

13 Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *Projet de traité pour rendre la paix perpétuelle entre les souverains chrétiens* (Utrecht, 1717). I cite a modern reprint in: Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la Paix perpétuelle en Europe*, ed. Simone Goyard-Fabre, *Corpus des œuvres de philosophie en langue française* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 693.

pacific European union would be “an offensive League for the extermination of the Turks”. What had ever been “more glorious and more important to Christianity”, Saint-Pierre asked, “than to establish everlasting peace among all the Christian princes” as the precondition for a military campaign to “exterminate these infidels?”¹⁴ The great objective of this Enlightenment crusade was “the conquest of everything that the Turks possess in Europe and on the Mediterranean islands, in Asia and Africa”.¹⁵ On the ruins of the Turkish Empire, Saint-Pierre would establish “many new Christian sovereignties”.¹⁶ European union and peace were “the only means for making Europe and the European political order [*la police Européenne*] reign in all the parts of the world”.¹⁷

Abbé de Saint-Pierre was an immensely popular figure in his time; his ideas circulated widely, and his peace plan had been much talked about. Sometimes it was ridiculed and at times subjected to friendly criticism. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no one had ever disputed the intimate linkage of his vision of peace to a “universal crusade”. At first sight, this may seem surprising, given how the literati of the Age of Reason related to the supposedly Dark Ages, when the Crusades were born and had their heyday. Some philosophers and historians, notably David Hume in his *History of England*, came to consider the Crusades a folly.¹⁸ However, Saint-Pierre adapted the crusade to the Enlightenment sensibilities. He understood his crusading peace plan as an expression of the “universal progress of reason” that required the annihilation of “Mohammedanism and other human religions” (which Christianity was not).¹⁹

How could it be that the Enlightenment philosophers’ rejection of religion did not extend to the rejection of religious war, which the Crusades were by definition?

The first approximation to the answer is that the Crusades were, as a rule, wars against the Muslims. By the time Saint-Pierre wrote, the Christian heretics in the South of Europe had been exterminated, whereas in the North, the territorial gains of the so-called Northern Crusades against both the pagan western and Orthodox Christian eastern Slavic peoples had long been consolidated. The Muslims, however, had remained a threat. The Ottoman Empire was a mighty power with some possessions even in Europe, and the corsairs off the coast of Barbary were a nuisance. Represented by the “Turk,” the Muslims

were an obstacle, as Saint-Pierre put it, to the making of “Europe and the European political order reign in all the parts of the world”.

There was another historical reason for linking the European peace to a crusade, which Saint-Pierre’s usage of the phrase “chasing the Turk out of Europe” indicates. As a self-conscious political community, “Europe” emerged out of Medieval Latin Christendom or *christianitas* under the banner of “chasing the Turk out of Europe”. “The bloody and cruel Turk” became the symbolic figure of the Muslim during the Renaissance,²⁰ while “Europe” was coming into being as the new bearer of Western collective political and cultural identity. The synthesis of these two historical developments was the rallying call for cleansing Europe of the Turk.

The language and imagery Saint-Pierre used was invented and codified chiefly by the 15th-century humanists shocked by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. They tirelessly called for peace in Europe in order to go to war against the Turks. Through those calls for peace in preparations for war against the common enemy, Latin Christians became “Europeans”, coalescing into a new body politic: “Europe.” For Saint-Pierre, the Turks were essential for imagining European peace, because they had been essential for the very formation of Europe as a political community.²¹

But whereas Renaissance popes and intellectuals invented the formula of making peace in Europe in order to wage war against the Turk, the idea of making peace to go to war was older. This was the logic of the 11th-century peace movement, originating in today’s France, the so-called *pax* and *treuga Dei*, which prepared the ground for the First Crusade.²² Ironically, it was not Pope Gregory VII, regarded by later historians as a “man of war”, *Kriegspapst*, who went to war against the Muslims – he actually advocated a peaceful coexistence with them. It was Urban II, the peacemaker pope, who capitalized on the Peace and Truce of God movement and launched the Crusades.²³ The Council of Clermont in 1095, where the First Crusade was declared, was a peace council (just like a little more than 800 years later the military invasion of the newly formed Soviet republic originated in the Versailles Peace Conference; and today, the European Union is financing the war in Ukraine through the European Peace Facility). Urban II promoted peace in western Christendom and turned warlike energies to fighting the infidels in the land called holy.

14 Saint-Pierre, *Projet de traité*, 613, 677, 679. For a detailed discussion of Saint-Pierre, see Tomaž Mastnak, “Abbé de Saint-Pierre: European Union and the Turk,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 4 (1998): 570–598.

15 *Projet de traité*, 690.

16 Saint-Pierre, *Supplément à l’Abreuvé*, in: *Ouvrages de Politique & de Morale*, vol. 2 (Rotterdam: Beman, 1733–41), 69.

17 *Abreuvé du Projet*, in: *Ouvrages*, op. cit., vol. 1, 295.

18 David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), vol. 1, 292–298. Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, “Politika raziskovanja in razlaganja križarskih vojn,” postscript to Amin Maalouf, *Križarske vojne v očeh Arabcev* (Ljubljana: Založba / “cf.”, 2008).

19 Cf. Saint-Pierre, “Aneantissement futur. Du Mahometisme & des autres Religions humaines par le progrès continuel de la Réson humaine universelle,” *Pensées diverses*, in: *Ouvrages*, vol. 13, 204–5, 210, 218, 219, 237; *Discours contre le Mahometisme*, in: *Ouvrages*, vol. 5, 121; *Observations Sur le progrès continuel de la Raizon Universelle*, in: *Ouvrages*, vol. 11, 282, 284.

20 C. A. Patrides, “The Bloody and Cruel Turk: the Background of a Renaissance commonplace,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 10 (1963): 126–135.

21 I argued this, and presented the evidence elsewhere. Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, “Europe and the Muslims: The Permanent Crusade?,” in: *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); more specifically for “chasing the Turk out of Europe”: *idem*, “Iznajdba Evrope: humanisti in vojna proti Turkom,” *Filozofski vestnik*, 18, no. 1 (1997): 9–24; *Evropa: istorija političkog pojma* (Belgrade: Beogradski krug/Belgrade circle, 2007), Ch. 3.

22 Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), Ch. 1.

23 Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, “Gregory VII: Pope Gregory VII, Hildebrand,” and “Urban II,” both in: *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 3, ed. David Richard Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 182–203, 229–48.

The Crusades were neither the first holy war in history nor the first war between the Christians and the Muslims. But they became the model holy war as the Christian war against the Muslims made into the universal, fundamental, irreconcilable enemy of faith. The Muslims had generally not had that status in the preceding centuries, and wars against them had consequently not been holy wars.²⁴ But holy war requires the construction of such an enemy. Without an imagined implacable, existential enemy, there is no holy war.

Fighting a fundamental, existential enemy, placed outside the human law, holy warriors themselves step out of the bounds of laws of war and of law itself. War ceases to be just war and is given a suprahuman, divine sanction: it is sanctified. In theory, just war, *justum bellum*, is proclaimed by a legitimate worldly authority and is fought within the limits of law to recover lost goods, be it real property or incorporeal rights. Just war aims to redress an injury caused by the enemy. Holy war, in contrast, is a wilful exercise of violence unleashed in the name of God. It draws its force from an apparently suprahuman authority. As such, holy warriors consider their enemies subhuman and treat them with deliberate, utmost inhumanity.

Gratian, the 12th-century systematiser of canon law, in his *Decretum* tucked the category of war “ordered by God” under the broad blanket of the classical doctrine of just war.²⁵ But this did not solve the problem presented by holy war to the legally minded Christian scholars. Early in the ecclesiastical history, the Church fathers had adopted the just war doctrine, and there existed a permanent tension within Christianity between just war and holy war. With the Crusades, the balance definitively shifted toward holy war.

The survival of the Crusades

The Crusades were no Medieval folly, that is, the crusading folly was not confined to the Middle Ages. In different ways, the Crusades survived well into our times.

The Crusades were model holy wars. They were wars fought by “holy Christendom”, *saineté crestienté*. With the transition from Christendom to “Europe”, the aura of holiness was passed on to Europe. Personified as “our common mother”, it was represented as speaking with a sacred voice. “Do but listen to the sacred voice of Europe”, French humanist Louis Le Roy beseeched the Christian kings of France and Spain. He called on them to make peace in order to be able to wage war against the enemies of faith.²⁶ There was – and

still is – a holy nimbus around the name of Europe. While religious Europe may have ceased to exist some time ago, a fostered religion of Europe compensates for that loss. This “Euroreligion” or, rather, Euro-idolatry imparts a sense of holy war to the European Union’s military involvements and is, as such, a link to the crusading past.

The expansionist nature of the Crusades survived too. The Crusades were the Lord’s war for the spread of Christianity (“*bella Domini [...] ad dilatationem Christianitatis*”), their intention was to “*essalcier sainte crestienté*”.²⁷ The spread of Christianity has an indelible missionary mark, yet the Crusades and missions are most often represented as opposites. In fact, they are hard to separate. Their aim was the same, the spread of Christianity, and the means employed in pursuing that aim were not mutually exclusive. Rather, they were complementary. Missionaries often sought the support of Christian arms, and the Crusades were ultimately a mission preached by the sword.²⁸

Christianity was spread either by converting the “infidels” or by killing them. Preaching the Crusade against the Slavic Wends, St Bernard proclaimed that either the rite or the nation had to be destroyed (“*aut ritus ipse, aut natio deleatur*”).²⁹ With the rise of “Europe,” the spread of Christianity was gradually supplemented or succeeded by spreading the “European political order”, as planned by Saint-Pierre; or “civilization”, once that term was invented in the second half of the 18th century and soon used to justify European colonialism; or “freedom”, starting with the Napoleonic wars;³⁰ or “democracy”, as it is a custom nowadays. The logic of action is basically the same in all these varieties of Western expansionism. The holy war zeal, which is animating them, has broken into the open for everyone to see with the Israeli genocide in Gaza, enabled and supported by the collective West.

Also contributing to the survival of the Crusades was their secularization, the main credit for which goes to Protestantism. Martin Luther was opposed to the Crusades as wars authorized, or led, by the pope. He, however, supported war against the Turks, the *Türkenkrieg*, if led by secular rulers. Such wars had, in his eyes, a sacred, godly character. They were blessed by him, and by God. He called them godly wars, *gotseliger Krieg*.³¹ The secularization of the Crusades, as we see, lay in their transfer from the ecclesiastical power, claiming sacred authority, to the secular prince – not in their desacralization. Paradoxically, the secularization saved the godly, holy war.

24 Cf. Tomáš Mastnak, “The Muslims as Enemy of Faith: The Crusades as Political Theology,” in: *I diritti del nemici*, edited by Pietro Costa, *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno* 38, vol. 1 (Milano: Giuffrè, 2009): 143–200.

25 Gratian, *Decretum* C.XXIII q.ii c.2–3. Cf. Tomáš Mastnak, “The Muslims as Enemy of Faith.”

26 Ludouici Regii Constantini *Oratio ad inuictissimos potentissimosque principes Henricum II. Franc. & Philippum Hispan. reges: De pace & concordia nuper inter eos inita, & bello religionis Christianae hostibus inferendo* (Paris: Apud Federicum Morellum, 1559).

27 Sources are quoted in: Paul Rousset, *Les origines et les caractères de la première croisade* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1945), 100–101, 126–127; and “La notion de Chrétienté aux XIe et XIIe siècles”, *Le moyen âge*, 69 (1963): 191–203, 199.

28 More on this in Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*, Ch. 4.

29 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Briefe*, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Vols. 2 and 3, ed. G. B. Winkler (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1992), letter no. 457, 892.

30 Cf. Luciano Canfora, *Esportare la libertà: il mito che ha fallito* (Milano: Mondadori, 2007).

31 Martin Luther, *Vermanunge zum Gebet Wider den Türcken*, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 30 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1909), 620. See also *Eine Heerpredigt wider den Türcken*, in: *op. cit.*, and *Vom Kriege wider die Türcken*, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 51 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1914).

As a juridical institution, the Crusades ceased to exist with the expiration in 1940 of the last crusading bull granted to the Spanish kings. But the bull expired only because there was “no longer a Spanish king to receive another”.³² The so-called crusading spirit lives on. The ideas, images, language, iconography, sentiments and attitudes associated with the Crusades left a lasting influence on Western culture and institutions – on what we are used to calling Western civilization.

The crusading spirit guided Christopher Columbus when he “discovered” the Americas. His *empresa de las Indias*, as he understood it himself, was a path toward the “recovery of Jerusalem”.³³ The crusading spirit decided the treatment of American native populations.³⁴ We can see how the crusading spirit shaped European expansionist campaigns against non-Europeans, colonial wars and colonial rule,³⁵ and fed into modern-day imperialism.³⁶ World War I, in fact, was presented in both Europe and the United States as a replay of the Crusades. In a book for a popular audience, the great French historian of the Crusades, René Grousset, for example, described the arrival of the French army to the Middle East as the “Franks” again setting foot in Syria to “deliver Tripoli, Beirut, and Tyre, the city of Raymond of Saint-Gilles, the city of John of Ibelin, [and] the city of Philip de Montfort”. Jerusalem, he went on to say, was “‘reoccupied’ on December 9, 1917 by the descendants of King Richard under the command of Marshall Allenby”.³⁷ One may add that Lord Balfour infused the “Balfour Declaration” of 1917 with crusading language about the “delivery” and “reoccupation” of Jerusalem and Palestine.

The list goes on. The Crusades were a point of reference in the recent war in Bosnia. President Bush II represented the so-called global war on terror as a crusade. The victims of the war against Iraq saw that war as a crusade. Lately, the war against Russia in Ukraine and the war against Palestine invoke crusading imagery as well. In November 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu invoked the quintessential holy war, the war of the Israelites against Amalek as ordered by God. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts”, we read in King James Bible: “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass”.³⁸

32 Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, transl. J. Gillingham, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 287–288.

33 Cf. Abbas Hamdani, “Columbus and the Recovery of Jerusalem,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 99 o. 1 (1979): 39–48. See also Columbus’s preface to his diary in: John Cummins, *The Voyage of Christopher Columbus: Columbus’ Own Journal of Discovery Newly Restored and Translated* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1992), 81.

34 Cf. Tomaž Mastnak, “Fictions in Political Thought: Las Casas, Sepúlveda, the Indians, and the Turks,” *Filozofski vestnik* 15 no. 2 (1994): 127–149.

35 See, for example, Kim Munholland, “Michaud’s *History of the Crusades* and the French Crusade in Algeria under Louis-Philippe,” in: *The Popularization of Images: Visual Culture under the July Monarchy*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Gabriel P. Weisberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), especially 152–154.

36 By this term I mean the phenomenon first conceptualized by John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1902).

37 René Grousset, *L’épopée des Croisades* (Paris: Plon, 1939), 384–385.

38 1 Sam 15:1–3.

Holy dehumanization

Over the course of time, both the name of the Crusades and explicit references to the Crusades have faded away. Yet they reappear at times of violent conflict. The crusading spirit, as I argued, remains alive, and key structural elements of the Crusades remain in place and are still at work under ever new historical circumstances. One of those structural elements is what we today call supremacism. Holy war generates a sense of superiority among those who wage it, and the sense of superiority pushes toward holy war.

Holy warriors consider themselves superior to their enemy. They believe to be the elect or chosen people, a higher civilization or a worthier race, *Übermenschen* and *über alles*, or an exceptional nation. The obverse of this sense of supremacy is the dehumanization of the enemy. Today, Ukrainian Nazis are declaring the Russians not human and are backed by the Euro-American Russophobes, while the Israeli Minister of Defence in a *camicia nera* is publicly calling the Palestinians “human animals”.

The logical conclusion of the dehumanization is the eradication of the enemy. Holy war is a war to the death, a war to extermination, *bellum internecinum*. Killing the enemy is not a homicide; it is seen as malicide, the annihilation of evil. The term *malicidium* was coined by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century,³⁹ but that language is spoken today by a number of Israeli government officials and their Euro-American allies. Whereas Israel is, in their view, fighting “pure evil” in human form, the Nazis in Ukraine are denying humanity to the Russians and regard them as insects. Just as the medieval Crusaders’ goal was to cleanse the Holy Land of the “infidels” and the goal of their early modern successors to “chase the Turk out of Europe” (as well as out of “Asia and Africa”), now we hear calls for erasing the Russians and Russian culture from Ukraine and for eradicating the Palestinians from Gaza and next from the *eretz Yisrael*. In 20th-century language, we call this genocide. These days, the power elites in the collective West are cheering on and supporting the genocide, which finds some echo among the population. Their self-styled “Western civilization” is showing its genocidal face.

Medieval holy warriors ignored the injunctions of the just war doctrine regarding both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. This is also true of the Western power elites nowadays. That disregard for legality we today sometimes describe as violations of the laws of war and of the humanitarian law, as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Yet we, as a rule, neither decry nor persecute these crimes when they are committed by us or our proxies.

39 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Éloge de la nouvelle chevalerie (De laude novae militiae)*, ed. Pierre-Yves Émery, vol. 31 of *Ouvres complètes, Sources chrétiennes* 367 (Paris: Les éditions du CERF, 1990), III, 4.

What kind of peace?

In my discussion thus far, my aim was to outline the logic of holy war. I argued that holy war is the predominant tradition of making war in Western history, and that it has all too often been linked to the idea of peace and to various peace projects. I believe this tradition, through a number of historical metamorphoses, continues to have a formative impact both on making war and imagining peace today. As such, it is of key importance for understanding the wars waged by Western powers in our own time, of which the war against Russia in Ukraine and against the Palestinians in Gaza (and, ever more, in the West Bank, too) attract the most attention and are most profoundly shaping the world order. Familiarizing with that tradition helps us think about the possibilities of peace as well.

The nature of war determines the nature of peace. But holy war does not lead to holy peace. It brings about hell. Since holy war is, by definition, a fight to the end, since it aims at the extermination of the enemy, the peace it brings about is the peace of the graveyard. In Gaza today, not even graveyards are left in peace. The Israeli army is bombing and bulldozing Palestinian graveyards as well. This holy war is a war against the dead, the living and the yet unborn.

But let us step back from the conceptual debate to the terrain of politics: What kind of peace is possible in our post-modern holy wars – if possible at all?

What I find very striking in view of the war in Ukraine is that the political elites in the West are *expressis verbis* rejecting peace. They provoked the war and then routinely called it “Putin’s unprovoked aggression”. They dismissed Russian offers to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict. They vetoed the ceasefire negotiated between Ukraine and Russia in March 2022. The pretentious chief of the European Union’s pretended diplomacy insisted that the solution to the conflict had to be found on the battlefield. Throughout the war, the United States and the European Union had escalated, and continue to escalate, the conflict. They explicitly rebuff even ever so timid calls for peace and strive for nothing less than a total defeat and destruction of the enemy – all while they are losing the war.

The same is true of the war against the Palestinian people. While the Israeli government is rejecting even a ceasefire, the American media proscribed the word itself. With the ceasefire blocked by the West, Gaza has become a modern-day Carthage. But there is a difference between the ancient city destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and our own times. Today, total subjugation of the enemy population is not the result of war, it is its cause. The Palestinian “enemy population” was subjugated long before this latest war started. The Israeli government occasionally talks of peace. Their “Carthaginian peace” means extermination. The peace pursued by the Israeli government is genocide accomplished. Ending war through genocide is not peace, it is – genocide. This genocide of the Palestinians is a crime with which even those who commit it will be unable to live.

The rejection of peace is linked to the rejection of politics. Neither the war in Ukraine nor the war in the occupied Palestine has a political strategy. So says the Israeli military itself. The Eurocrats, blindly following the American dictate to the detriment of Europe, have abandoned both diplomacy and politics. There is no political endgame, despite business plans for the “Day After” in a Gaza cleansed of Palestinians and the business bonanzas in arms and farmland in a destroyed and depopulated Ukraine.

The rejection of politics, in turn, is based on the decontextualization of both wars. Western governments and mainstream media narratives take these wars out of their historical and political contexts. Decontextualized, they are depoliticized. It is thus impossible to think about the war politically and to even imagine peace.

Just like war, in Clausewitz’s famous phrase, is the continuation of politics by other means, so can peace only be a result of politics. If we are unable to think about war politically, then war becomes senseless, pure violence. War becomes a substitute for politics. It becomes impossible to find a political solution to the conflict at the root of the fighting. It becomes impossible to end war and make peace. Any meaningful and sustainable peace is, necessarily, a result of politics. In the absence of politics, war can only end with the total elimination of the enemy. As a political solution, peace requires finding a *modus vivendi*, some form of coexistence. If that is ruled out, peace can only be the peace of the graveyard and, as I said, even graveyards are being destroyed along with everything else.

The inability to think about the war politically and the liberal usage of war as a substitute for politics are generated by a deeper malaise in the West: the decline of politics in general. A symptom of that decline is the selection of unprecedentedly incompetent, corrupt and perfidious political elites. Politics, in its classical definition, is about taking care of the public, the common affairs of the civic community. When big private economic interest groups assume control over the channels of political decision-making, the state as public authority is gradually deconstructed, and politics withers away. The withering away of politics is the result of an extremely unequal distribution of power and wealth. In turn, it cements power relations characterized by such inequality.

With the withering away of politics, war necessarily ceases to be the continuation of politics by other means and becomes a substitute for politics. It ceases to be an institution and becomes a horrifying freedom of destruction. In such a world, can peace be anything but the crown of destruction?

War as a substitute for politics is bound to affect the society that is waging war, too. Our societies are being militarized. In the process, we are not only being conditioned and trained to condone, embrace and even demand all kinds of crimes, up to the genocide, losing all moral compass; we are also sinking into a state where the unaccountable power elites are waging war against the underlying population. For when politics disappears in the life of society, what remains is war. Yet this is not the war of all against all: it is a war of a tiny minority against the majority.

When the powerful kill with impunity and the oppressed must resort to violence in hopes of regaining a modicum of human dignity, we are all thrust inside the fragile splendour of a glass house, filled with dark fear and cruel lust of which Augustine spoke. Our language will be the language of violence and war, coated in Orwellian propaganda of peace and democracy and civilization. If we are serious about peace, we need to relearn political language, revive politics and radically change power relations within our societies and in our world.

Summary

This contribution questions the idea of “unconditional peace” and calls for thinking about peace in ever-changing historical-political contexts. It opens with critical reflections on peace in Antiquity, citing the veterotestamental prophets, Tacitus, Minucius Felix, and Augustine. It proceeds to discuss Enlightenment views of peace, focusing on Leibniz, D’Alembert, and Kant’s reception of Abbé de Saint-Pierre and his plan for European peace. Whereas those philosophers made ironic comments that perpetual peace as envisaged by Saint-Pierre was only possible in the graveyard – for the dead don’t fight any longer – Saint-Pierre himself wanted to realize his peace plan for Europe by launching a “universal crusade”. The question of crusade prompts a discussion about the holy war tradition in the West, which is characterized by not being bound by laws of war and laws in war, by the dehumanization of the chosen enemy and by the fight to the point of extermination. The latest iterations of that tradition, predominant in Western history, are the wars against Russia in Ukraine and against the Palestinians in Gaza. The former is a liberal holy war, the latter a replay of the Israelites’ war against Amalek. The contribution closes by addressing the question of what kind of peace is possible in our post-modern holy wars – perhaps not even the peace of the graveyard, since the Israeli army is destroying even Palestinian graveyards.

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