Fear, violence and racism: can religion help us outlive the past in South Africa?

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ABSTRACT

When Beyers Naude, an anti-apartheid stalwart, asked in an open letter to ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church how it was possible to preach peace from the Gospel on Sundays without touching the heart of people, he touched a very sensitive hermeneutic nerve. The Bible played a central role to establish the policy of apartheid as a social model. The problem was that only a few elements were extracted from the stories that are rather full of undesirable elements. The question is how was it possible for religion to pacify the minds of people and to suffocate its faith community's moral vision? Fear played a central role, so it seems. This paper explores different aspects of fear, violence and religion. Firstly, the paper looks at Modernity and violent responses to the agenda of Modernity. Since fear of a threat appears to be an underlying concern, the next section takes a look at fear. This is done in three ways, namely a discussion of the film Bowling for Columbine*, a brief look at fear for criminality that became racially compounded in South Africa and an analysis of the biological workings of fear in human beings. The paper then proceeds to link fear with religion via Rudolph Otto's concept of the mysterium tremendum et fascinans. This discussion logically leads to a brief look at the Old Testament concept fear of the Lord. Fifthly, the paper discusses the link between Jesus and violence. Lastly the paper expounds in a broad manner some aspects of the role of religion in violence.*

1. Basic instincts

'Religion is powerful medicine, and it should be administered in small doses, if at all'. Scott Appleby, a professor in history and director at a center for the study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame, encountered this remark when he delivered a lecture on violent and nonviolent activism before 200 students of the National Defence University in the USA (Appleby 2000:7).

In the light of recent South African history, I wonder what would have happened if this remarked was applied? The Bible played a central role to establish the policy of apartheid as a social model. The problem was that only a few elements were extracted from the stories that are rather full of undesirable elements. Such a reading remains an inadequate way of using the Bible to initiate social engineering. Robert Carroll (2000:200) says that the innocence of intention of any group choosing to read the Bible in this way is not guaranteed: 'Apartheid in South Africa has demonstrated just how destructive and costly such *bad hermeneutics* [my italics - G. F. S.] can be, and because reading and implementing any such reading of the Bible remains a common and popular practice around the world today it is necessary to be very careful in matters hermeneutical - *caveat lector*, mind how you read!'

The liberatory model extrapolated from the Bible is a partial paradigm extracted from a larger narrative which is in itself not liberatory at all. Liberation theology played an important role in the dismantling and the struggle against apartheid. Given the preponderance of race in this conflict, the use of religion gave it a distinct ethno-religious nature. Ethnicity and religion were favoured markers for cultural identities during the apartheid years.

Ethnicity differentiates and classifies people, as well as evaluates them comparatively. It brings together those people who entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of physical similarities and / or customs, or they share memories of colonisation and migration (cf. Appleby 2000:59). Such groups of people seek to achieve some kind of

political autonomy in order to secure their distinctive culture. Religion plays an important part. Appleby (2000:60) argues that behind ethnicity stands the concept of a chosen people. In South Africa, it had frightening consequences.

What struck me in the research into violence, religion and race or ethnicity, was the preponderance of the words *primal* and *primordial*. I understand 'primal' to refer to being first in time, original or belonging to the first or earliest age. The word 'primordial' also has the connotation of being first in a sequence of time. Biologically it refers to the earliest stage of development.

(a) A significant factor of ethnicity is the psychology of that group, in other words, what they believe about themselves. Appleby (2000:60) suggests that an important ingredient is their belief in a separate origin or a *primordial* experience that determined their sense of identity. Religion identifies that *primordial* experience as the groups encounter with the sacred.

(b) In an unsettling book about the global rise of religious violence, Mark Juergensmeyer (2001) explores cultures of violence. In identifying martyrdom as one of the most fundamental forms of religiosity, he (2001:167) relates it to sacrifice which ennobles the violent act of killing. A sacrifice involved the killing of a living being, an animal or a human being. It was a gory act that stood central in ancient religions. Sacrifices are perceived as a social activity of organised conflict, be it the hunting of an animal or the killing of a human being in a battle. This is, according to Juergensmeyer (2001:169), a *primal* form of human activity.

(c) In a critique on Rudolph Otto's concept of the Holy, it is argued that the reality in which the *mysterium tremendum* has a bearing, is a constructed or an artificial reality where the normal way of reacting does not apply. The audience is forced back to what is called a *primal* emotional state and *primal* responses (Durham 2001). The reaction is similar to the awe-struck submissiveness in the face of the impression of immense worldly power and fascination in the face of an individual who is clearly human yet belonging to another world.

(d) Fear, the point of origin for violence, is linked to one of the first functions of the brain in the process of evolution. It seems that our fear system learnt about threats that have been major obstacles to survival over the million years it has taken for the brain to evolve. Fear triggers the emotional memory which is later difficult to eradicate. It is as if the brain prevents a deliberate overriding of fear responses. In a traumatic situation the fear system takes control and prevents the conscious awareness from reigning.

This is a design for a predator-rich environment. Says Joseph LeDoux (2002:6):

> 'Keeping still in the face of danger is often the best thing for predators to do. Because millions of years ago animals who did so were more likely to survive, today it's what most animals do, at least as an initial line of defence. Freezing is not a choice but an automatic response, a preprogrammed way of dealing with danger. It sometimes backfires, however, as when a deer is frozen in the headlights of an oncoming car. Like most evolutionary based strategies, it's good for many animals much of the time, but not for all animals all of the time.'

I am haunted by a question posed by Afrikaans speaking anti-apartheid stalwarts (Beyers Naudé and Nico Smith) when the issue of confession of guilt came up in the early nineties (cf. Snyman 1999). They asked how was it possible for decent people to attend church yet to

concede to a policy of social ordering that devastated large communities. I think that, somehow, religion played a very large role in pacifying our minds for the violence that ensued in the enforcing of that political ideology. But I am not sure exactly *how* this religion (a Protestant and Calvinistic variety) succeeded to suffocate its faith community's moral vision. I hope, in exploring different aspects of violence and religion, to arrive at some theory.

The paper has been structured as follows: Firstly, I take a look at Modernity and violent responses to the agenda of Modernity. Since fear of a threat appears to be an underlying concern, the next section takes a look at fear. This is done in two ways, namely a discussion of the film *Bowling for Columbine* and an analysis of the biological workings of fear in human beings. The paper then proceeds to link fear with religion via Rudolph Otto's concept of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This discussion logically leads to a brief look at the Old Testament concept *fear of the Lord*. Fifthly, the paper discusses the link between Jesus and violence. Lastly the paper expounds in a broad manner some aspects of the role of religion in violence.

2. Modernity

The *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa* addressed in three issues (12-14) aspects of the contextuality of Old Testament Studies in South Africa. In a religious debate where race or ethnicity was very much part of the discussion, Dr. Madipoane Masenya (2002) suggested that an interpreter living in Africa speaks with more authenticity and legitimacy about the African context. She was aided by Prof. Jesse Mugambi (2003) who linked contextual authenticity to the kind of community for which the Bible is read. His remarks brought the problem modernity faces in postcolonial Africa, to the fore.

He made a very peculiar remark which I found unsettling yet significant. He argued that if the Bible is read like any book of fiction, poetry or mythology, a community of faith which claims the Bible as source of divine guidance, can do nothing with such a reading. A reading of the Bible as mere literature or mythology is secular or scientific, which does not belong to a Faculty of Theology.

The contrast between contextual authenticity and a secular or scientific reading of the Bible signals a struggle with modernity. Karen Armstrong (2001:367) argues that one should understand that Modernity, although it has been beneficial, benevolent and humane, it was nevertheless cruel at stages, especially in those countries that became colonies of Europe at some stage. The inhabitants of these colonies experienced modernity as invasive, imperialistic and alien. In these countries, the modernisation process was not characterised by independence and innovation as was the case in Europe and the United States. Modernisation was rather accompanied by dependence and imitation. People are forced to fight back against the onslaught of modernity and secularism.

Mugambi's implicit rejection of historical criticism highlighted an aspect of the conflict within modernity, namely a conflict between secularism and religious living in the same country or continent. Both feel profoundly threatened by each other, so that a sense of estrangement and alienation is only exacerbated (cf. Armstrong 2001:367). Estrangement and alienation breed polarisation, which, in turn, stimulates a climate of fear.

Hardt and Negri (2000) sketches very clearly the new global form of sovereignty what they

call 'Empire'. There is no territorial centre of power and no fixed boundaries or barriers. They see it as a decentered and deterritorialising ruling mechanism which progressively incorporates the worldwide territory within its open and expanding frontiers:

> 'Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow' (Hardt and Negri 2000:xiii).

In a context where no credible opposition to the new order can be mustered, ethno-nationalist sentiments that fuse with religion (already weakened by secularism), are brought in to bolster the opposition to this progressing force. In these circumstances, ethnicity and religion become favoured markers of new cultural identities.

Violent acts in the name of religion have become one of the most decisive and explosive gestures that can destabilise the entire world. One may argue that such violence is simply evil or the result of some political ideology. At worst, the accomplices are regarded lunatic followers of some aberrant form of religion. But the question some scholars ask, is why a theological justification for a destructive act is accepted with a conviction of such certainty.

In a study on the rise of religious violence, Juergensmeyer (2001:6-7) is puzzled why bad things are done by people who otherwise appear to be good, or in case of religious terrorism, by pious people dedicated to a moral vision of the world. This is more or less the same question one asks these days about apartheid. How was it possible that decent hard-working and loving people could vote for such a policy?

Juergensmeyer found a significant feature in the cultures of violence: the world was perceived as already violent, or enmeshed in great struggles that gave the ensuing violent actions moral meaning (2001:11). The subjects of these cultures of violence thought that their communities are already under attack. Their violent response is simply a reaction to the violence they are experiencing.

In some instances, one can relate to that context, in others the violence appears to be a paranoid delusion. In the case of apartheid, the community felt itself after the South African / Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902 threatened by British imperialism as well as an upcoming black middle class. But the political process reconciled only Boer and Brit, so that after 1948, the violence was sadly aimed at the other group in the form of institutionalised racism. And as time proceeded, this 'battle' received cultural and cosmic dimensions.

It is disconcerting when religious violence takes place within a constructed reality of a cosmic battle. Juergensmeyer (2001:161) argues that when a struggle is thought to be of ultimate significance, it will be regarded as a cultural war with spiritual implications. At the height of the rebellion in the late eighties, apartheid was set up as a bulwark against communism. A struggle may well begin on worldly terms, but as it becomes clear that any solution is unlikely and that it is actually a losing battle, the struggle receives the characteristic of a cosmic battle (Juergensmeyer 2001:163). The problem is that the moment a particular struggle becomes sacralised, a minor incident is elevated to immense proportions.

Simple opponents suddenly become cosmic foes, setting in motion a process of satanisation where the contest is only between martyrs and demons (Juergensmeyer 2001:163). And

martyrdom is one of the most fundamental forms of religiosity.[1]

Modernity loosened the ideological and intellectual grip of religion on society. The result now is a crisis of secular nationalism, the principle that the nation is rooted in secular rather than religious or ethnic identity (Juergensmeyer 2001:227). When authority is in question, violence and religion enter the scene. Violence is based on physical force and religion claims to have access to an ultimate order. To Juergensmeyer (2001:228), the combination of the two is a potent assertion.

Religion is one of the constituting elements in ethnic identity.[2] In an ethnic conflict, religion is one of the rallying points, because the bond between members of a group is very strong when they share a distinctive religion (cf. Dobratz 2001:288). I think in the postcolonial debate religion has indeed become one of the rallying points to form a peculiar African identity. But there is another aspect that feeds off religion and ethnicity. It is fear which is exacerbated when the conflict is defined in terms of some kind of war, be it a cultural one, an economic one, a cosmic one or some kind of conspiracy theory.

3. Fear

(i) Bowling for Columbine

War implies threat and threat implies fear. Fear leads to violence. At least, this is the message I got from the award winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine.* In this award-winning, humourous yet shocking film, Michael Moore searched for an answer why 11 000 people died by the gun every year in the USA. It is a filmic essay on gun violence in the United States, ripping open the fearful heart and soul of those Americans lucky enough to have the right to a constitutionally protected gun. Its point of departure is the 1999 assault at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Two pupils shot their fellow mates and teachers before committing suicide. The film notes different reasons for this tragedy, but find none conclusive enough: Images of violence that pervades the news bulletins, the video stores, the computer games and the storybooks, ideals of masculinity that are based on

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[1]Juergensmeyer (2001:170) gives an interesting view on the nature of these martyrs who construct themselves as sacrifical victims. The victim, like the violence, is often out of place. The victim is then a symbol of disorder. In India, in the case of the *sati* of widows, these women were anomalies: married women without husbands. Saints were most of the time social misfits. They had to be perceived as wacky enough in order for their martyrdom and self-sacrifice to be seen as pure! The suicide bombers in Palestine meet these criteria of purity and anomaly. They were no longer children, but not married. They were members of a community but free from family responsibilities. They were shy but good people, serious but aloof from the crowd. They were pious but not clergy (2001:171). They practised their religion on the margins of society as a response to aspects of modernity that threatened them.

[2]I am not clear on exactly what constitutes racism and what is simply ethnicity. From a nonracialistic point of view, what is perceived to be racism, is regarded by others as mere ethnicity. It seems that race is associated with biology and nature, whereas ethnicity with culture. Blauner (1994:24) says that a weakening of European ethnic identities because of a diverse ethnic heritage forces 'white people' to see in the dynamics of ethnicity mere racism. To honour ethnic differences, one should rather refer to Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhose or Northern Sotho speaking people and not blandly to 'Whites' and 'Blacks'. The line between ethnocentrism and racism is a thin one, but I think what is important is the power base from which one observes. Racism and power are linked.

aggression and possession and the readily availability of guns.

There is one reason that is being offered, yet that is completely downplayed in the film's promotional campaign: race and racism. *Bowling for Columbine* offers an animated history of the USA which outlines the racial fears that has shaped the sensibility in that country. I am not sure we have escaped that sensibility here in South Africa.

The story runs briefly as follows (cf. Fuchs 2002). People crossed the Atlantic to escape persecution, but in the New World, they ran into the native American whom they massacred. Extinguishing a labour source, free labor was imported from Africa. But this caused more reason to be afraid for rebellion, so that they armed themselves. The US became the richest country in the world, but resistance to this particular economic system is met by multiple shot weapons. When the KKK is banned, the NRA is born. As the descendants of the African slaves moved into the cities, whites ran in fear to the suburbs where they bought millions of guns to preserve their property, privilege and sense of order.[3]

The fear is racially based. When Charles Heston was pressed for the reasons for the inordinate rates of gun violence, he suggested the American mixed ethnicity. It was a slip of the tongue, but nevertheless a window on the slippery, unconscious working of US culture, politics and morality.[4] Moore's conclusion is that the people are paranoid. They feel threatened for some reason. And that reason he finds in race. It is the underclass that scares the US Whites into owning guns, and it is the same underclass who fall victim to the gun shots from which these white people insulate themselves (cf. Bradshaw 2003:iii).

(ii) Fear, farm murders and car-hijackings in South Africa

It is this kind of fear we encounter in the recent arrest of three Pretoria schoolboys, accused of driving one night in search of a man on whom they could take out their racial aggression (cf. Van Eeden 2003). It is with this kind of fear in mind that some Afrikaans newspapers recently looked for a racial motif in the farm killings the past ten years. In South Africa, when a long awaited report on farm murders was being withheld, the Afrikaans Press (*Beeld* and *Rapport*) suggested that race was indeed a factor in the farm murders plaguing the country since 1994, although not a motivating factor (cf. Louw 2003 and Pelser 2003). Black farm workers and black farm owners were also attacked. The driving force for these murders were theft.

The level of criminality makes fear a reality for everyone. Race simply muddles this fear. In a research on the motives behind car hijackings (between 1996 and 2002 102 111 cars and 29089 trucks were hijacked), it was found that the choice of a victim was determined by race in 30% of the cases. When the victim's cultural group differed from that of the hijacker, the victim experienced more violence despite obeying the hijacker's orders and not resisting. 56% of the hijackers did not care who the victims were, but there was a trend of 30% of black

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[3]Banks (2002) notes the exclusion of black people from possessing fire arms as early as 1639. One of the earliest laws in English colonial America regulating gun control distinguished between blacks and non-blacks. The mandate to arm grew out of a fear by colonialists that local hostile indigenous people would massacre them. After all, they took the land of the indigenous Indians living there at that moment!

[4]Moore illustrates the racial basis of fear by pointing out that even nature is perceived in these terms. They have a problem of a specie of bees that annihilates other bees. This specie is called the 'Africanised' killer bee.

hijackers targeting only white victims (cf. Zinn 2003).

The moment a report like this is published, the fear factor and the race factor are compounded. Fear becomes racially determined in public perspective. It becomes then easy to see the struggle for land or any other possession in terms of race, a struggle between *white* haves and the *black* have-nots.

But the issue is not so simple. From a post-colonial view, the following anecdote is crucial to understand the land problem: 'When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us "let us pray". After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible' (cf. West 2000a:30 and 2000b:608). When this anecdote with its religious undertone is set within a land redestribution programme, it generates fear and violence, as was the indeed case in Zimbabwe. What happened in Zimbabwe, in turn, generated in South Africa a lot of heated debate based on racial fears, despite a fairly successful yet slow land redistribution programme. In some cases, researchers (cf. Du Toit 2002) argued that farm murderers are soldiers dissatisfied with the political settlement in 1994. It is believed that they have set out to rectify the historical injustice caused by white settlement since 1652.

(iii) The physiology of fear

Recent research showed that when something bad happens to a person, part of the brain acts independently, storing its own memories so that it can save you the next time (cf. LeDoux 2002). The feeling of fear happens to the body and the mind and it can later play a dominant role in shaping personalities. In a traumatic event there is a sudden physical response, such as freezing of the body, and then the debilitating persistence in memory.

LeDoux (2002:156 ff) distinguishes between a declarative memory and an emotional memory in fear conditioning. A declarative memory is laid down in the Hippocampus of the brain. When a threat is encountered, the brain searches for a mental picture of past experiences to which the current threat can be linked. Simultaneously, there is a freezing response of the body that is caused by the amygdala, an almond shaped part of the brain next to the Hippocampus. If one had a past encounter with a snake, for example, and one felt threatened by it, a trace of memory would have been stored in the amygdala as well as the Hippocampus.
According to LeDoux the amygdala directs signal traffic in the brain when danger lurks. It receives direct and unfiltered information from the thalamus. It is a short cut that enables one to respond to a threat within a thousandth of a second. But the amygdala also receives information via the visual cortex. This information is much more detailed and specific, but it takes twice as long. However, the moment the amygdala perceives danger, it activates a variety of brain networks. Various systems become affected in a coordination process of response to that danger (cf. LeDoux 2002:320).

The fear system was developed or designed when human beings were, as it were, delivered to the elements. The system is, however, not a good adaptation for modern environments where work and job performance reviews are the stressors in society.[5] The fear circuitry steers the

[5]The amygdala may serve your interests of survival by preserving a memory of a car hijacking, but if it results in an inability to communicate and socialise with a particular group of people, in LeDoux's terms, the fear circuitry has gone too far. Indeed, one of the neuro-sciences problems is to find out how to subdue the amygdala when

human being towards a desirable state that is away from a predator or threat, but one does not know in advance what lies around the next corner. However, '[w]e are not slaves to our emotions, but they are hardly at our beck and call. They propel us in directions that our rational minds don't always understand - fear most of all. The amygdala, like the heart in Pascal's famous phrase, has reasons of which reason knows nothing' (Johnson 2003).

What does religion have to do with this? LeDoux (2002:14 ff) narrates the following episode in his book: He attended a conference sponsored by the Vatican on the topic of neuroscience and divine action. The problem to be discussed was how it was possible for God to influence people's lives without violating the laws of physics. What stood out was the notion that God interacts but does not intervene. People live a physical existence in a physical world. As God is not part of the physical world, how does he interact with people? If God and the soul are nonmaterial, the interaction will also be nonmaterial and the laws of physics will remain unviolated.

But these people, according to LeDoux, did not believe in a nonmaterial soul. They accepted the principle that the mind is tied to the brain. The soul and the mind are pretty much one and the same as the neurally mediated mind. It is part of the physical world that must obey the laws of physics.

Here is what LeDoux calls the quantum pickle: If the soul is equivalent to the mind, and the mind depends on the functioning of the brain, how can God interact with people without physically affecting the neurons, and thus, intervening? What is clear, is that much of what we are is accounted for by what goes on in our brains.

What we are, the authentic essential self, reflects patterns of interconnectivity between neurons in the brain. The connections between the neurons are called synapses. Most of what the brain does is accomplished by synaptic transmission. Synaptic transmission suggests that the brain systems are modifiable by experience. The brain systems are designed to perform certain tasks, and learning is a feature that helps these systems to perform better (LeDoux 2002:6).

The learning that occurs is directed to the relevance to the current aroused emotional system (LeDoux 2002:322). The broader the range of emotions a child can experience the broader wil be the emotional range of self that develops. If a significant proportion of a child's early emotional experience is due to fear, the learning process will, for example, be associated by negativity and hopelessness.[6]

But LeDoux (2002:322) warns us that the connections between the cognitive and emotional systems of the brain are far from perfect. A brilliant mathematician can fall victim to road rage, racism, rape or depression, because the system that makes complex thinking possible cannot control the old systems that gave rise to our base needs and motives in a predator environment. We are not the victims of our brains and we cannot act out our urges.

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these memories hurt the organism. The amygdala can be trained to respond differently when a particular memory of a threat is triggered.

[6]The brain has a number of emotion systems. When one is active, the others are inhibited. Once aroused, it brings many of the brain's cognitive resources to bear on that state, but it also shuts down other emotion systems.

Doing the right thing does not always flow from knowing what the right thing to do is (LeDoux 2002:323):

> 'In the end, then, the self is maintained by systems that function both explicitly and implicitly. Through explicit systems, we try to wilfully dictate who we are, and how we will behave. But we are only partially effective in doing so, since we have imperfect conscious access to emotional systems, which play such a crucial role in coordinating learning by other systems.'

4. Fear and religion: the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*

In a book on how to manage fear, Gavin de Becker (2000:277), an expert on violent behaviour, talks about the 'gift' of fear. The gift of fear is the ability to discern that survival signal that sounds only in the presence of danger. He says that too many people are walking around in a constant state of vigilance. Their intuition is misinformed about what really poses danger. He argues that people have forgotten that fear is not an emotion like sadness or happiness, emotions which last a while. Fear is only a survival signal that flashes in the presence of danger. It is momentary.

How is one then to understand the concept 'fear for the Lord'? Fear was the reason why Bertrand Russel (1927) rejected being called a Christian. Russel regards fear as the foundation of religion:

> 'It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing - fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of all cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand. It is because fear is at the base of those two things.'

He wants to look the world with its good and bad, its beauty and ugliness fair and square. He wants to see the world as it is and not be afraid of it. He wants to conquer the world by intelligence and not by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from a conception of God derived from ancient Oriental despotisms.

This is exactly the criticism one can direct towards Rudolph Otto's (1923) concept of the holy and the concomitant *mysterium tremendum et fascinans.* According to Otto, the idea of the holy is more than being completely good. The idea of the holy constitutes the core of religion, an experience that cannot be described in terms of other experiences. He uses the term numinous to coin this experience of the holy, an experience of tremendous and mysterious awe. It is an experience of being overwhelmed before God, an experience in which a human being can only respond with spontaneous affirmation and worship of the supreme being.

The sacred illicit awe and draws the human spirit beyond the ordinary range of imagination and desire. Otto calls that quality of the sacred that inspires dread and fascination at the same time the numinous. The holy is extremely ambivalent. The feeling of the numinous ranges from the sweeping of a gentle tide providing the mind with a tranquil mood to a wild and demonic forms that sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. Its antecedents can be equally crude and barbaric as the creature trembling in speechless humility in its presence (Otto 1923:12-13).

Appleby (2000:29) argues that Otto's insight here in the experience of the holy is that it is

pre-moral. One cannot say whether it is good or bad. It is ambiguous, as it contains within itself the authority to kill and to heal, the power to unleash brutality and viciousness or to bless humankind with healing and wholeness. The possibility of life and death resides within the holy. Religion interprets that ambiguity each time.[1] The numinous does not exclude violence.

Similarly, the experience of the holy as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* reflects the ambivalence of the sacred. The tremerous mystery reflects the awfulness of the holy. It is a manifestation of fear, but to Otto it is not a natural emotion. It differs qualitatively from natural fear. The *tremendum* component has three elements: awfulness, overpoweringness and an impression of immense vigour. The *mysterium* component relates to an experience of something wholly other, outside our normal experience. A mental attitude of stupor is induced, a sense of blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, an absolute amazement. The mystery is also attractive to us, of religious interest, fascinating. It draws us in, *fascinans.*

How should one see this fear in the light of what LeDoux said about the physiological process when a threat is encountered? With reference to the tremerousness, Otto suggests that the experience of the numinous has a residue of the origins of the most primitive form of religious experience (cf. Durham 2001). He calls the first crude primitive form in which the numinous shows itself as awe 'daemonic dread'. He describes it as a crudely naive and primordial emotional disturbance (Otto 1923:15-16). Moreover, he argues that the real *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is only found within Christianity who stands out in superiority over Judaism and Islam.

But if one wants to understand the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans,* one needs to think about people appearing before kings, despots and tyrants, especially the ones in the Ancient Near East on which the topic of fear has a bearing (cf. Durham 2001). Rulers of the Ancient Near East had absolute power over life and death. Anyone in their presence, under the impression of an immense explosive power, would be struck by awe and felt their own subordination while admiring the ruler.

When one bears the role of the public transcript in mind (cf. Scott 1990), the public appearance of any ruler is stage-managed in order to maintain a particular public transcript. One of the props in this staging event is to create an impression of immense power, so that the audience can only stand in awe and submission. Durham (2001) calls it rightfully an artificial reality in which normal life becomes suspended for the duration and everything was orchestrated to focus on the grand appearance of the majestic ruler. Even when he appeared, everything about him was artificial in comparison with the norms of everyday life, says Durham.

5. *Yir'at Yahweh* Fear of the Lord

A glimpse of what a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* entails is given in Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela moving narrative of her encounter with prime evil, Eugene de Kock, the 'behind-

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[1]It is possible that two people of unimpeachable integrity and piety may reach diametrically opposed conclusions about the will of God. One experienced this in the theological justification provided for flying the planes into the World Trade Center and the justification for nonviolence in Gandhi's effort to liberate India from the British. To him, violence was a sign of spiritual weakness (Appleby 2000:12).

the-scenes engineer of apartheid's murderous operations' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:4). De Kock played God in deciding who of apartheid's opponents will live or die. He did not just give apartheid's murderous evil a name. He was that evil. Gobodo-Madikizela was going to meet the embodiment of evil.

As she approaches Pretoria Central Prison, she tells the reader the following:

> I slowed down my car, drove up to within a few yards of the prison entrance, and turned the engine off. I sat there, seeing but not seeing the people milling around gloomily after a visit with loved ones, waiting for the taxi vans that would drive them back to the impoverished townships on the outskirts of Pretoria. My anxiety built until I felt as if it could have exploded through the windows in my car.

Earlier, her anxious anticipation in meeting De Kock, caused her to lose her sense of direction as she entered Pretoria. To her, the city became a surreal scene in which the forbidding architecture of the apartheid era assumed a menacing air and the one-way streets seemed to entangle her in a maze from which she could not free herself. She could not even calm herself by looking at the blooming Jacaranda trees lining the streets (2003:3). Later, when a friend of Gobodo-Madikizela was introduced to De Kock at one of the TRC hearings, she was baffled and dumbfounded (2003:50).

The line that separates good from evil, is paper thin. The meeting of good with evil persons is frightening and discomforting, especially when the evil one shows good traits. It is this ambivalence that people find disconcerting. The ambivalence of good and evil in one is found in the sacred too.

Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10 tell us that fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom tells us what is the right things to do so that disharmony with God can be avoided. Disharmony leads to chaos. Fear of Yahweh focus the attention to know God and to obey his ways. It keeps the faithful from stumbling. It seems to me that the concept fear of Yahweh is regarded in positive terms as reverence and proper behaviour and not in a negative term such as dread.

But dread is not fully excluded, as the fear of Yahweh is actually a motivational force for people to worship God and obey his commandments, because disobedience has dire consequences. In the precepts in Deuteronomy, the people of Israel is threatened into obedience by creating a fear for a particular punishment, such as stoning (Dtr. 13:10-11, Dtr. 21:20-21), death (Dtr. 17:12-13) or retribution (Dtr. 19:19-20). But this fear is translated as being afraid, thereby giving the notion of fear a slant quite different from the translation fear of Yahweh. Fear as *being afraid* relates to abject terror.

However, the impression I received when I read Fuhs' explanation of the term in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band III*, is that *Yir'at Yahweh / Elohim* has been sanitised to a large extent, or purged from the notion of terror.[1]

Fuhs distinguishes between a secular or profane understanding and a theological

[1]My observation is only preliminary, as I have not done yet an in depth study of this term. Fuhs' understanding is in any case influenced by Rudolph Otto's notion of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which seems now a somewhat romanticised understanding of being in the presence of the Holy.

understanding of the term *y~re'*. On a secular level, fear is simply that emotion people experience in the face of a bodily threat that could end in death. Jacob feared Laban and Esau, Joseph's brothers feared being taken as his slaves. The royal household feared David and Adonijah feared Solomon. The prophet Uriah feared Jojachim and fled.

Fear of the Lord is regarded as a central term within the understanding of the faith in the Old Testament. It is even suggested that it is the earliest term for religion in biblical Hebrew as well as the origin of religion. Fuhs sees in the term a polarity of shock and fleeing versus trust and love. He says that the moment fear recedes fear for the Lord becomes equivalent to worship and piety.

The original numinous character of the fear of God is linked directly to God's holiness. To meet God in his holiness is life threatening for the human being. Men who experience a revelation of God in a theophany, dream or vision experience a fear of death. God is dangerous. Moses covered his face when he meets God. When God appears before the people at Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning, the people were filled with fear. When Jacob awoke from his dream in Bethel, he was filled with fear when he realised what happened.

Apart from experiencing divine presence through the senses, the numinous presents itself according to Fuhs, also in history and in nature. The central theological theme of liberation from slavery in Egypt creates fear amongst the peoples. God's intervention on behalf of his people instills fear amongst the Canaanite people. In fact, the whole earth trembles in fear for this God who will judge the people. Yahweh reveals his power and majesty in the creation in which the human being experiences the numinous and fear. God's messengers command also fear, as well as his anointed (the king) and his people (amongst other peoples).
But how does this ambivalence or tension between fear and flee versus rapprochement, trust and joy in the presence of God work? I do not follow the link. In Psalm 52:8 the psalmist confesses his trust in the steadfast love of God, but in the previous verses he described what God does to those who do not trust in his steadfast love. In verse 5 God breaks them down, snatch them and tear them away from their homes or tents; they become completely uprooted. What does the faithful do? They fear and laugh at the evildoer (v. 6). Fear for the numinous stands in the light of what the numinous does to those who do not fear.

Similarly, in Psalm 64:10 the psalmist has the righteous rejoice in Yahweh and have them take refuge with him. But this joy and refuge stands in contrast to the wicked who comes under the wrath of Yahweh that instills fear in them (v. 9). In a hymn of praise to Yahweh as ruler and judge, Psalm 96 declare Yahweh's glory and majesty, his strength and beauty, calling on all people to bring an offering, to worship and to tremble before him. But behind this call, is his judgment of the world in righteousness, which means everyone will get their just desert.

I cannot escape that even behind this joy, jubilation and worship is fear, an abject terror for what may happen if one does not join. Fear is the motivation to become righteous. After Israel crossed the Red Sea and the Egyptians drowned, Israel is said to have seen the Egyptians dead on the seashore (Ex. 14:31). They regarded the Egyptians' violent death as the work of Yahweh, whom they subsequently feared and believed.

It is a fear for damnation that urges the believer to the correct path. It is a fear for violence that encourages a righteous lifestyle. Fear for death, eternal death, is used to get people to believe in God. One sees the same thing in the cries for the death penalty: fear for death

should work as a deterrent to commit murder. Fear for death or divine judgment might have had a desirable effect on ancient Israel, but does fear still work as a motivation for belief?

6. Jesus and violence

A central feature in the debate about violence and / in religion, is the role of the crucifixion or atonement (Weaver 2001). In the early church, Jesus was believed to be given as ransom for the souls held captive by Satan in the cosmic battle with God. Later, Jesus' death was perceived as satisfaction in order to satisfy the honour of God, or, in terms of the Reformation, his death had to satisfy the divine law's requirement that sin should be punished. Another version interprets his death as an act of love by God who gave his son as his most precious possession.

When one asks who ultimately killed Jesus, the atonement doctrine present us with an image of a deity as avenger or, worse, a child abuser who arranges the death of his child for the benefit of others.

Perhaps one should not be surprised that people whose faith were shaped according to these atonement theories, do not find a problem with violence in God (Weaver 2001:155). The question is how will one be able to challenge violence if the deity is at times violent. The problem with these atonement doctrines, especially the satisfaction one of the Reformation, is that it is unable to challenge injustice in the social order, because they are defined a-historically. They only envisage a change in status beyond this life. According to Weaver (2001:161) their inability to challenge violence boils down to accommodate violence, be it overt or systemic.[2]

The inability to challenge violence is also evident when Jesus is depicted as a voluntary, passive and innocent victim who suffers for the good of another. This model becomes an obstacle for people suffering systemic injustice, because in order to be like Jesus entails to submit oneself to unjust suffering (Weaver 2001:163). When linked to the satisfaction model of atonement, no challenge is put to those who exploit or suppress.

Aichele (1998) has drawn attention to violence associated with Jesus:

> Each of the synoptic gospels portrays Jesus as a violent man, one who contests violently with others (Pharisees and scribes, his own followers, the crowds, and perhaps even the Romans). Jesus fights with these others over his own role and identity, over the meaning of the scriptures, and also over the kingdom of God. None of the gospels presents Jesus as a violent man both more explicitly and yet more ambiguously and fantastically than does the gospel of Mark.

Mark never uses the word violence, but violence seems to be a significant part of the unsaid that provides the Gospel of Mark with its ambiguity and indeterminacy. In Mark 3:27 Jesus refers to a violent struggle between a thief and a strong man. The strong man seems to be Satan and the thief who initiate the violence Jesus himself. Jesus becomes the aggressor and

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[2]Similarly, classic Christology as formulated in the ancient creeds of Nicea for example, are unable to challenge violence.

the one who breaks the law (Aichele 1998:75).

In the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:1-9) the kingdom of God is explicitly associated with violence. God is the owner of the vineyard, the vineyard itself is the kingdom and the heir is God's son. The son's death is the result of the tenant's unjust claim to ownership. His death is to be avenged by the true owner. It is an implicit threat of divine violence (Aichele 1998:81) to which the audience of priests later responded equally violently by laying a charge of blasphemy against Jesus (Mk 14). Jesus actions were sometimes violent. He drives out the mourners who laugh at him in Jairus' house (mk 5:40). The violence with which the demons left those they possessed indicates that Jesus might have acted violently too (Aichele 1998:82). In Mark 5:1-20 Jesus overpowers the extremely violent demons that possessed the Gerasene man. He sends them into a herd of pigs who stampede over a cliff into the sea.

His arrest in Mark 14 suggest that Jesus' group could have been associated with violence (Aichele 1998:83). Although one may argue that his arrest mispresents his character, one should bear in mind that one of his followers is said to have drawn a sword and violently attacked a member of the arresting party (Aichele 1998:83). To Aichele, Jesus' identity in Mark is ambiguous. He associates the ambiguity with the element of the fantastic in the story of Mark which is eliminated by Matthew and Luke. The ambiguity of the element of fantasy in the gospel of Mark makes Jesus' violence troubling and uncertain. The reader is left with a few questions, says Aichele (1998:87): Is Jesus an uncanny human being or a marvellous divine being? Is he a revolutionary or a holy man?

Jay (2001:32) asks whether religion can help to combat violence. He poses the question whether religion is part of the problem or of the solution. Historically, founding acts of violence played a central role in Western religious traditions. Greek paganism was rooted in acts of sacrificial piety. Animal sacrifice was a staple of Jewish life. A sacrifice either tried to win a favour from God or simply gave him something without expecting anything back. But the act meant a willingness to shed innocent blood. Abraham's willingness to slaughter Isaac in obedience to God's wish, is for Jay an example of the shedding of human blood as an act of profound religious faith. The mass or eucharist is a symbolic residue of the shedding of blood that is a vivid reminder of the original act (Jay 2001:33). To Jay, the brutal murder of God's son, although interpreted as a unique self-sacrifice, has the possibility to serve as the model for an infinity of subsequent mimetic figurative enactments.

The problem is that if religion has the potential to express violence, the assumption that morality has its basic roots in religion, is seriously called into question. The theological justification of apartheid and the subsequent violence with which the policy was enforced, reminds one that religion and ethical behaviour can sometimes be at odds.

Luhrmann (2001:115) asks the question why do people see God as destructive, chaotic, fearsome or cruel, in other words, why is violence associated with the sacred. He observed some middle-class Londoners who practised a religion they had invented. They represented divinity as, at times, a terrifying violent destructress. His question was, if one invents a religion from scratch, why place violence in its centre? According to them, the image of violence gave their own pain and anger meaning. Their violent Goddess permitted women to be angry in cultures where women repress their proper feelings (Luhrmann 2001:130): 'The symbol of the raging, devouring Goddess allows them to lay claim to aggression and anger both as political tool and as an expression of their own private hardships.' In this way, they transform culturally induced shame at being angry and female into an experience of pride

(Luhrmann 2001:132). They identify explicitly with the rejected and relabel it as something with the greatest power.

Luhrmann's problem was this group's violent religious images that were presented as intrinsic to their sacredness (2001:133). He wonders whether one should not think that the violence that arises from the sacred is a human response to the radical otherness of God (2001:133): 'If the sacred is what set apart, and different, then to confront the sacred - indeed, to "invent" a representation of the sacred, as these women do, at least to some extent - should invite the annihilating terror of one's own nonbeing.' If a deity was not terrifying, Luhrmann thinks it will not be radically other. Its terror and violence flow naturally out of the semiotic logic of human awareness (2001:139). The middle-class London women's image of a violent Goddess made their god religiously real, radically other and, thus, divine. So, when one constructs a deity in the secular age, one needs to assert the divinity of the god. To insist on a radical otherness is to insist on the god's nonhumanity.

7. The role of religion in violence

Gobodo-Madikizela's book on reconciliation with Eugene de Kock tries to understand where he came from and what made it possible for him to commit all the atrocities he went to jail for. She (2003:52-53) says the following:

> It was not just de Kock's conscience that was stilled. White society in general became numbed. The image of a deer frozen in the headlights of an oncoming car may resonate; a sense of being mesmerized and not being able to think clearly until the whole thing is over, and then wondering how one was able to behave in that way and did not speak out. Even the Dutch Reformed Church [I would say, the Afrikaans Reformed Calvinistic tradition] actively participated in providing justification for killing "enemies of the state". Army chaplains drove the message home through their sermons preached to soldiers of the South African army, who were issued a special copy of the Bible for easy reference to the inspirational passages.

During the presidency of P.W. Botha, the Defence Minister who became Prime Minister and then an 'imperial' State President, a message in his name was attached to these Bibles, whereby the soldiers were admonished to consult the Bible ('this wonderful book') when in doubt or in pain. Botha prays that this book will be a comfort to the soldiers so that they can fulfil their duties. The Bible is regarded as the greatest of all the weapons a soldier can carry.

What comfort can a soldier get from the Bible? Lüdemann (1997:39), in a book on the dark side of the Bible, says that anyone who reads these texts, especially where there is mention of the ban and the slaughter of people (Deuteronomy and Joshua) without any prejudice can only be disturbed about them. He cites Renan who said that human cruelty took the form of a pact with a deity. They made an oath with God to kill everything. No compassion was to be shown. When Saul did, he was summarily stripped of his kingship. The ban is thought to eliminate plunder and exploitation by sacrificing the enemy to God. It is as if the enemy is deemed worthy of being offered to God. To this Collins (2003:6) wryly remarks that he only hopes that the Canaanites appreciated that honour!

If the Bible is received as a benevolent (cf. Carroll 1993) book, the violence it contains may sooth the conscience of a soldier. There is then, what Kamansky (2003) calls, no ethical uneasiness over the fact that the biblical authors frequently appear more comfortable with the use of violence than we are today. Reading the Bible as a benevolent book enables the

readers to put on the thickest rose-coloured glasses to sanitise the violence, blood and gore within its pages.[1]

Sustenance begins with violence. We kill animals for meat and pull roots and vegetables out of the earth. That which feeds our body is born of death and violence. Spiritual sustenance is also born of violence. No wonder that the stories of Judaism and Christianity are rife with blood and violence (Moser 2001:223). But reading the Bible as a benevolent book, ignores[2] the mix of peace and violence in the texts, says Moser (2001:227):

> Too many limners (...) of Holy Writ have shied away from the violence and difficulties of the real text and instead of wrestling with the terrible and eternal verities that are within its pages, have fed us 'Bible lite'. A marrowless version sanitized of pointed meaning and significance that is fit only for pallid minds, a watery substitute for the real thing - a wolf merely scalded, not the main ingredient of a garlicky wolf-stew.

In movies and in television we are accustomed to see violence cleanly and without any emotional sequelae (Madsen 2001:230). We look at it for shallow excitement and not for understanding or pity. In the Bible, we want to exonerate God from violence. We do mental contortions to portray him as good and loving.

Is it possible to redraw the boundaries in order to leave violence outside the definition of God? Madsen perceives in feminist theology a nurturing and consoling God. In a critique on feminist images of deities, Madsen (2001:233) argues that feminist theology wants to quarantine violence, as if when enough violent images are deleted, violent realities will subside. It is based on a hope, that if there is no longer a violent God, there will be no longer violent men.

Madsen sees the same reasoning in television and movie violence: if people see violence on

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[1]Moser (2001:220) eloquently asks the following: 'Why this abundance of violence and blood in the Holy Writ of two religions whose espoused, primary tenets are peace and good will toward others?' But violence played a large role in the birth of these two religions! Judaism was born of the violence of slavery and Christianity out of the violence of the crucifixion.

[2]In sacrifice, an animal is slaughtered with its throat cut and its blood drained. The animal struggles and its blood is sprinkled on the altar. The animal is then cut and burnt on the fire. Moser (2001:225) calls it a barbecue for a God who relishes blood sacrifices and burnt offerings. With the crucifixion of Christ, the blood and cruelty associated with the violence of a crucifixion is leached off, so that one has a sweet languid Jesus attached without stress on the cross.

TV, they will imitate it. If one sees God committed to violence, a person will act similarly. The problem of this kind of reasoning for Madsen is that representation comes first and then action. It assumes that stories spring from malevolent purposes trying to work themselves out as realities (Madsen 2001:230). But is malevolence the reason to tell a troubling story?

Madsen is very honest and direct in her response to the problem of God and violence. She says (2001:247) a violent God is not an image of our aspirations, but rather an image of what happens when we fail. She regards the Bible as a profound psychological portrait of a relationship that has been wretched from the start. One can run away from a violent husband, but we cannot leave the universe and divorce God. In her words, God is not the cure but the disease.

Schwarz (2003) argues that the violent face of God lurking in the religious traditions needs to be destroyed through active interpretation. To her, the biblical texts reflect more on human occupations within the social realm than on divine ones in a heavenly realm. To depict God as intolerant and to see him endorsing the killing of other peoples strikes Schwartz as a deeply impoverished version of divinity. Such a depiction tells her more about human intolerance and violence than about God.

There are two questions here: (a) Is it valid to assume a causal link between violent imagery in a text and violent behaviour? (b) When a text exhibits violent imagery, does it necessarily follow that the text endorses that violence for another community?

In 2000 CESA (Christian Education South Africa) launched a court action to have section 10 of the Schools Act declared an infringement on their freedom of religious beliefs (cf. Snyman 2000:277-278). They wanted to provide boys with corporeal punishment, but the law prohibited it. They based their justification on corporeal punishment on a few texts in the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs 13:24 says that to spare the rod is to hate your son. Proverbs 24:13-14 says it is better to beat a child, because one delivers his soul from hell.

I would provide a qualified affirmative answer for the first question. The assumption for a link between textual violence and violent behaviour can only be based on the presupposition with which the Bible is read. If it is read as a benevolent text in the sense that it provides guidelines for social order and general life style, the violent imagery is coopted within a perception of what the will of God is. Corporal punishment for children is an example. Within this group the text will obviously be seen as endorsing violence too. But does it mean that the text says that one should replicate the violence of which it speaks? An answer will also obviously depend on the way one reads and regards the biblical text. If one accepts the text within a particular historical framework where certain cultural forces have left an imprint, it does not have to follow that the text endorses the violence it refers to.

Hunsberger (1995:127) claims that those who follow traditional religious teachings most scrupulously, are also those who tend to be more intolerant of their fellow human beings. He believes (1995:124) that religious people who hold their religious beliefs as absolute truth, and who feel they must be constantly on the alert to Satanic influences, are highly prejudiced. These prejudices contribute to intolerance, discrimination, suffering and bloodshed in the world.

These beliefs are able to foster, encourage or even justify abusive behaviour (Bottoms et al

1995:86-87). In some cases,[1] as in corporeal punishment, the biblical text indeed provides encouragement for physically abusive child-rearing techniques:

> [A] belief in a vengeful God who would punish earthly pleasure with the ultimate torture of hell, both corporal punishment to enforce parental authority and actions designed to combat Satan make sense. It is thought that sin is the vehicle to hell, inspired by a literal Satan - ergo both sin and Satan must be stopped. Accordingly, it is better that children experience a temporary hell inflicted by loving parents than that the burn in an eternal hell.

A literal interpretation of the Bible is incapable of metaphor. Representation in imagery simply leads to action because it demands obedience. In this framework, an image cannot simply be accepted as image. Because it is Word of God, it must become some directive.

Madsen & Holland (2001:149) suggests that if obedience to the text should be the outcome of every reading process, obedience need not be imitative in nature. Obedience may simply mean to confront the violent imagery in the text, give it due attention in order to distinguish between a violent image that integrates and a violent image that destroys.
Ultimately, it is not that texts cause violence, but *readers* who read them who commit to violent behaviour: 'It is only in the dynamic encounter between the text and a specific reader, in a specific community, in a particular historical and cultural context that individuals engage, interpret, internalize and ultimately act on those texts' (Kilne 2003).

[1]In other cases, as in the days of apartheid, the biblical text provided a programme for a discriminatory social order. That was based on the principle of election and a special relationship with God, a typical fundamentalist belief that there is one set of teachings that contains the fundamental truth about humanity and God, namely separation as testified to by Genesis 1-11. This truth was thought to have been opposed by forces of evil as revealed in the threat of communism which had to be fought vigorously on the far away borders of initially Zimbabwe and later on Namibia and Angola. In this mind set, the pious and faithful regarded themselves as the true descendants of Abraham through faith *à la* Hebrews 11.

Unfortunately, only one reader following biblical analogies or seeking exemplary paradigms in the biblical text is needed to wreak havoc in the world! Amongst critical scholarship in the USA, there is serious concern about the religious undertones that Pres. George W. Bush exhibits. Siker (2003) talks of a quasi-church setting in the White House with a blend of Bible-based faith and conservative politics. Bush [1] saw himself as the one who took up figuratively Moses' mantle. He believes he governs in accord with the divine plan. He sees himself doing God's will. The events of 9/11 have only intensified his sense of call and divine mandate. When he commemorated 9/11 in September 2002, he paraphrased John 1:4-5, and replaced the Incarnate word with America. America has become the light shining in darkness. In various speeches he declared that God has chosen the USA to be a model for justice and the dispenser for liberty to suppressed nations such as Iraq (Davis 2003). Jewett & Lawrence (2003) calls it an American Messianism, a form of American civil religion that fuses biblical texts with the imagery of superheroic battles against supervillains.

On the question of the relation between the Bible and violence, Collins (2003:20) says that the power of the Bible resides in its ambivalence towards violence. To him, violence is not the only model, but definitely neither is it incidental. The stories witness to innocent victims and to the God of those victims, but they also witness to that God who creates these victims through the zeal of his human agents. Collins argues that the material referring to violence should not be glossed over, as it can be as revelatory as the other non-violent parts.

To him, the power of the Bible lies in its ability to provide an unvarnished picture of humanity, the dynamics of history and the deeds people commit in the name of religion. It becomes deadly and damaging when the portrayal of human reality is vested with authority, assuming it reflects without qualification or differentiation the will of God. Then anyone's appeal to the Bible in terms of divine authority is received within an aura of certitude which ends all discussion.

8. Conclusion

Violence and the sacred go hand in hand. This is apparently true for the postmodern world as well as the world from which the Bible originated. Yahweh's power in battle was a constituting factor for Israelite worship, especially as it is illustrated by the ban. Lüdemann (1997:40) says that the ban was the negation of an ethic of plundering and exploitation. The captured were dedicated to Yahweh, who receive them back as giver of life. In Deuteronomium the ban becomes a vehicle for ethnic cleansing in order to ensure cultic purity (Collins 2003:7). Anyone in the promised land who did not worship Yahweh, could be killed with reason. Moreover, since the land was given by Yahweh, the previous inhabitants ought to have been driven out in any case.

The liberation of Israel from Egypt was followed by the subjugation of the Canaanites in Palestine. From their point of view, Israel's liberation was not to their benefit (Collins

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[1] Just after the terrible events of 9/11, Pres. Bush's initial reaction was to talk of a crusade against the terrorist evildoers. A day or two later, he changed his rhetoric to refer to a war on terrorism. Nevertheless, he framed the conflict in religious terms, 'fighting evil', and 'the axis of evil' (Jewett & Lawrence 2003). In his State of the Union address he said that with the might of God on their side they will triumph over Iraq. He claimed that God will be on the side of their troops and he will grant them victory. But he condemned Osama bin Laden for declaring a Holy War against the USA and the West. I think the moment Bush related his intention to go to war with Afghanistan and later with Iraq with God's intentions, his intended violence received divine justification.

2003:9). To them Israel must have been an aggressive invading force impelled by divine command (2003:10).

Lüdemann (1997:73) refers to an utopia of violence. These texts deals with identity construction, so that one can argue that the violent Israel within the pages of Deuteronomy and Joshua is a constructed Israel that serve ideological purposes for the time in which Deuteronomy was conceived. It is authentic religious pseudepigraphy (1997:71). It is an utopia that called for a centralised pure cult within a rigorously demarcated group of people. Says Collins (2003:11): 'The texts are not naive reflections of primitive practice but programmatic ideological statements from the late seventh century B.C.E. or later.'

The divine approval of violence in the Bible offers encouragement to people bent on finding exemplary paradigms in the biblical text. Based on certitude, divine justification provides absolute categories of good versus evil, those for and those against Yahweh. In this instance, there is no argument or compromise. It is here where Collins (2003:18) observes the root of religious violence.

I have posed in the title the following question: In the light of fear, violence and racism, can religion help us outlive the past in South Africa? I have arrived at the following three preliminary observations.

Firstly, it appears to me that there is some link, albeit vague, between religion, fear and the primal functions of the brain. If this link exists, the primal function of religion was to give this fear a location or an object, namely a deity made responsible for creating this fear. Religion addressed our immediate survival needs. In this sense, the history portrayed of Israel in much of the Old Testament, is indeed about the survival of a group of people against all odds. Their survival seems to be closely tied to a deity who conjures up fear in people, in his loyal subjects as well as those against whom these loyal subjects have set up themselves. But is there a role in postmodern society for a deity whose existence and influence are based on fear?

Secondly, the problem of violence in the Bible we encounter today can be linked to our changed sensibilities. Violence is not heroic. It entails trauma and extreme suffering. The way we relate to violence in the Bible correlates to our view of what the Bible is. If it is regarded as a benevolent book, it is likely that the violent parts of the Bible will be glossed over or be sanitised. But it is also possible in some instances, as was the case in our immediate preceding history, that violence in the service of what is perceived to be a greater good, will be tolerated. I think this perception gives easy way to systemic violence. It is hidden and its presence can be ascribed to evil and sin. From this point of view, it is quite simple to argue a particular system may be theologically justified, but that the outcome is due to human error. This kind of reading is endemic in those circles where a-historical reading practices take place. Instead, I would argue that the violence in the text should be confronted head on. A historical reading will not gloss over the violence. The latter will be placed within the context of the story as well as the world of text production. Then it will be juxtaposed with the world of text reception from which readers can construct their perception of God.

Thirdly, the violence in the Bible reflects the brutal reality from where it originated. One of the problems with violence in the Bible is that it is thought to negatively influence behaviour. It is the same argument levelled at films which exhibit violent scenes. If violence in films should be banned, the same could be said about the violent images of the Bible. Perhaps this

argument is only true in those instances where violence in the biblical text or in the film is not critically perceived. For example, *Pulp Fiction* is a violent film, but its message as anti-violence. With the biblical text it is perhaps not so simple, as God is, in some instances, closely tied up with violence in that he ordered death and destruction. How can one glean an anti-violent message from it? Regarding violence in the biblical text, God remains the problem. In what way will people be prepared to consider this option? I guess such a stance will be quite unsettling for faith communities refusing to read the Bible historically. But how can one prevent the kind of Bible use that gives people divine legitimation to use violence?

If we want to use religion in overcoming our past in South Africa, we will have to move away from what is called 'bad hermeneutics'. I tend to agree with Robert Carroll when he (2000:198-199) says the following about the use of the Bible in South Africa:

> 'No ideology drawn from, based on or associated with the Bible should ever be allowed to see the light of day ever again. Until the Bible has been subjected to *a severe critical scrutiny* and strong allowance made for cultural differences and calculations made of the likely consequences of the imposition of any practical policy based on the Book, its role in social engineering should *at best* be kept to a minimum. The Bible is *an unsafe Book* from which to do politics or social engineering in contemporary society. Its roots are in ancient alien times and among ancient alien creatures. [...] I also learned at a new and deeper level that neither liberatory nor marxisant readings of the Bible could ever be adequate as constructions of society for many different reasons.'

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