

“An Eye for an Eye”, a Civilisational Step Backwards?

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Holy books contain theological principles and play a crucial role in the transmission of faith. The Bible in Christianity, the Koran in Islam, the Torah in Judaism are texts that are taught from the cradle, becoming absolute, undeniable and exclusive truths.

There have been wars for strictly religious motivations in the past, but history shows that, for the most part, wars have been motivated by a combination of economic, territorial, ethnic and political factors. Whatever the motivation, the consequences of war are always devastating.

The three religions mentioned above, which predominate in Western and Middle Eastern culture, all enshrine the principle of “an eye for an eye” which implies equal or worse punishment for the crime committed, thus satisfying the revenge desired by the victim and society. Its religious origin may explain why this principle is so deeply rooted in human relations and in relations between states, and why it is so difficult to take the first step in building a peaceful coexistence.

It will always be easier to apply “an eye for an eye” because it does not require the courage to engage in dialogue and seek a healthy coexistence. As the song “Give peace a chance” by John Lennon says, “Peace is not something you wish for, it is something you create, and it can be achieved if you have the will”. In many parts of the world there is no such will.

This is what we are seeing in the Middle East. A long-standing conflict in which leaders display religious justifications, tirelessly repeated because it is easier to identify an enemy and align their own people. And in the pursuit of biblical, tit-for-tat justice, unimaginable atrocities and barbarities are being committed, which must be unambiguously and unhesitatingly condemned.

The force of politics and the media, which also respond to political interests, promote polarisation, so that anyone who condemns the violence on both sides is made to look like a traitor. Condemning violence perpetrated by those you sympathise with is not treason, it is collaborating in the first steps towards peace.

Children are born free of evil and prejudice. They are a blank sheet of paper that begins to be written by the adult world, which is why it is important to always distinguish between organisations and individuals.

In the Middle East situation, being Israeli or Zionist is not the same as being Jewish, and being Hamas or Islamic Jihad is not the same as being Palestinian.

Chile, with a large Palestinian and Jewish community, has been an example of good coexistence and collaboration, and our country can make a contribution by being very clear and direct as it has been so far.

Every war, however terrible it may be, can serve as an example in the classroom to remove it and to educate. To seek an “eye for an eye” is to go against the civilising advances that seek to have a recognised and legitimate rule of law that resolves conflicts between parties, avoiding violence and barbarity.

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