

Introduction

An important personality of his time, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) has been, and continues to be, a key point of reference for political theorists many centuries after his death. Some of his works were posthumously published (Grotius 1988), while others are still debated and quoted today. Although he is known as a jurist and founder of international law (Bonaiuti, Collina 2015:45; Janis 1999:121; Haskell 2011:269), he also contributed greatly to both the theological and philosophical sphere. Influenced by the ancient philosophers whom he regularly quotes (Bonaiuti, Collina 2015:45), but also by Christian values and theology, he would eventually be sent to prison where he wrote many interesting books and treatises dedicated to these topics.

Grotius' most famous work is *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* (Grozio 2010). Written in 1625, one year after his imprisonment, this book made him famous and contributed to the widespread diffusion of his ideas in many different disciplines (history, politics, theology and philosophy). Thanks to this book, he would go on to be compared with later authors (Neff 2012:13) like Tolstoy (Tolstoy 1952). He is considered by some to be among the first to have approached the complicated relationship between war, peace and the laws relating to them (Gallie 1989:12). In this article, we will try to focus on those aspects of his political theology that can be found in *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis*. We will therefore investigate how the concepts of war and peace find new depths of meaning in the Christian context and how religion influenced Grotius' way of thinking. Interestingly, some of his ideas concerning peace, man, natural law and other related concepts evolved during this time also.

Political theology in the work of Hugo Grotius *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* (1625)

As we have already mentioned, *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* was the most important work of Hugo Grotius. The success of *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* secured his place among the greatest natural law theorists in the generations to follow. As one contemporary author has commented:

In contemporary international thought Hugo Grotius stands alongside Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant in something of a "holy trinity" of classical the-

orists. His 1625 work, *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* is rightly counted alongside Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (Kant 2008), as one of the most important "classics" of international thought (Jeffery 2006:1).

Structurally, his masterpiece has three parts, accompanied by a foreword and a conclusion. It can be summarised as follows:

The first book of *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* speaks about fundamental concepts, the second about the reasons for war, while the third speaks about the conclusions of war and only at the end, very briefly, about the conclusion of peace. (Bonaiuti, Collina 2015:46).

The ideas expressed there are often either a synthesis of the thoughts of ancient philosophers (Guillaume 1988:26) or those of Christian writers from different times and places. Formed in the humanist tradition (Haskell 2011:277), he is, as the reader may expect to be, eclectic in his use of sources (Haskell 2011:297). His conceptions of political theology are related to the Old Testament, the Church and to the attitudes of Christian thinkers concerning war and peace (Neil 2012:XIII), Biblical notions of government, human life and sovereignty. Some of his conclusions may be compared with those of later authors like, for example, Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961). Hammarskjöld was also interested in law and politics (Morariu 2018:1-5) and was very interested in religion. Of course, when one speaks about his religious ideas, Erasmus must also be considered because thanks to him, Grotius developed a Universalist conception of religion.

Grotius makes reference to the inherent sociability of each person, at the level of his being. He recognises that man has the capacity to form relationships which are communitarian in nature (a term that will be developed later by Hobbes (1946) and other "social contract theorists"). Grotius also speaks about associations, their necessity, their benefits and their role in preserving peace, based on salvation history:

Aspects of political theology in the work of Hugo Grotius *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* (1625)

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But sacred history, besides enjoining rules of conduct, in no slight degree reinforces man's inclinations towards sociable-ness, by teaching that all men are sprung from the same first parents. In this sense, we can rightly affirm also that... a blood-relationship has been established among us by nature. Consequently, it is wrong for a man to set a snare for a fellow-man. Among mankind generally, one's parents are as it were divinities, and to them is owed an obedience which, if it is not unlimited, is nevertheless of an altogether special kind. (Grotius 2012:5)

Again, since it is a rule of the law of nature to abide by pacts (for it was necessary that among men there be some method of obligating themselves one to another and no other method can be imagined), the body of municipal laws have arisen. They are for those who have associated themselves with some group, those who have expressly promised, or from the nature of the transaction must be understood to have at least implied their assent to that which was agreed, in the one case by the majority, in the other by those upon whom the authority has been conferred. (Grotius 2012:5).

The necessity of having pacts comes therefore, according to him, is simply a matter of historical fact. It is a manifestation of the natural law placed in the soul of every person by God. The obedience promised is also, according to Grotius, a fact that must be adhered to. The leader or sovereign (in this case, the king), is appointed by divine ordinance, as he would later underline (Grotius 2010:87).

Starting from the basis that God has established the laws that govern the world (Grotius 2010:14), the natural law represents the incarnation of God's will (Bonaiuti, Collina 2015:45). He investigates war and its causes. He also considers peace, using the Old and New Testament, under the aspect of the two laws, as well as the thoughts of theorists from later periods. For example, he compares opinions expressed by ancient thinkers like Ulpianus (Grozio 2010:54) with those of Christian thinkers, in an attempt to show

the superiority of Christianity in the way of understanding peace and its possibilities. Of all the New Testament writings, he prefers Saint Paul's letters.

Although he shows that God is a God of peace and rejects those who make war, Grotius notes that unfortunately, war is not totally absent from the New Testament. He even offers a particular interpretation of the fact that the Bible prohibited the shedding of blood, by highlighting the fact that the Old Testament can be seen more clearly in light of the New Testament:

The biblical prohibition regarding the shedding of blood has no wider application than the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," but this commandment, it is clear, has not proved to be an obstacle to capital punishment or wars. The latter rule of law then, as well as the former, had in view not so much the ordaining of something new as the declaration and repetition of a rule of the law of nature which had been effaced by degenerate usage. Hence these words are to be taken in a sense which conveys the idea of a moral fault, just as by the word "homicide," we understand not the slaying of a man in general, but a premeditated murder of an innocent man. What follows in regard to the shedding of blood in turn seems to me to contain not a statement of a bare fact, but a provision of law. (Grotius 2012:38).

Using the allegorical and spiritual senses of the Scripture as Holy Fathers like John Chrysostom, Augustine and others have done, he not only explains complicated paragraphs bearing important meanings for the Judaic world but he also suggests that sin consists in the premeditation of crime. Therefore, as others would later say, a defensive war is not prohibited by God. Neither is the killing of people in such a war a sin against the natural law and God, although the right to life belongs only to God. Later, using a passage from the aforementioned Apostle, he shows that the Christian vision is a very peaceful one:

The first and most important testimony about the fact that war breaks out, and the right to partake in it, have not been completely abolished by Christ's law is this passage from the First letter of St. Paul to Timothy: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is ac-

ceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (RSVCE 1 Tim 2:1-4). From these words we learn three things. Firstly, that it is pleasing to the Lord that the emperors become Christians. Secondly, that once they become Christians, they remain as kings: this concept has also been expressed by Saint Justin Martyr, Martyr and Philosopher, in his First Apology (1980:34) and thirdly, we learn that God is pleased when Christians contribute to a tranquil life (Grotius 2010:86).

The desire for peace is therefore an important aspect that defines Grotius' thought. During his life, he even fought against misunderstandings of peace and the rigours of religious life. It was this fact that led him to prison and caused him a lot of distress. Drawing on the thoughts of Christian thinkers from the first centuries of Christian history, and especially from the period before the Edict of Milan, he identifies certain references to the idea of punishment which can be correlated with the reality of war:

Those who oppose wars are wont to bring forward several sayings of the early Christians, regarding which I have three things to say. In the first place, any interference based upon these sayings represents nothing more than the private opinion of certain individuals; it is not the publicly expressed opinion of the Church. Further, the authors of the sayings referred to are, for the most part, men who like to follow a road different from that of others and to set forth a teaching on some point in a rather lofty manner. Such are Origen and Tertullian. These writers are in fact, not consistent. For Origen says that bees were given by God as an example to show "how wars, if ever there should arise a necessity for them, should be waged in a just and orderly manner among men". The same Tertullian, who elsewhere seems to be less in favour of capital punishment, said: "No one denies that it is a good thing when the guilty are punished." (Grotius 2012:39).

Some may be concerned by Grotius' critical attitude towards important Church writers like those mentioned above, and perhaps even angered by his assumption that their opinion is a personal one, not reflecting the authoritative voice of the entire Church. Yet his protestant background must not be forgotten. It was part of a real "technical rhetorical technique" of a "*captatio benevolensis*" method who adopted this kind of incisive approach. The author had a great capacity to under-

stand different nuances of meaning. It is worth remembering that in the turbulent moments of the first Christian centuries there was no uniformity regarding this topic. Many Christians were even part of the army and it was not the intention to offend them. There were also for other reasons. For example, Christians were more concerned with doctrine and apologetics, being schooled in catechetical schools like the one led by Origen in Alexandria, rather than being concerned with questions of war and peace. The fact that Christians do not shirk military service (Grotius 2012:39-41) is used by Grotius as a mutual acceptance of war in certain, specific conditions, although their preference is for peace.

Grotius also argues that certain religious values might justify war. He claims that one could envisage a situation where people entrusted with public responsibilities and care of the common good may be mandated to punish other people or even to declare war. This arises when there is a situation of immorality (Grotius 2010:103). Still, he insists on the distinction that must be made between the maintaining of the rules of daily social life and making war on someone. For him, social rules are important. He develops a theory of sociability (Blom 2014:39), which is linked with the idea of peace.

Interpreting the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians (6:12), about the fight which is not against flesh and blood, he highlights a key point of his thought; namely, the priority of spiritual combat over fleshly combat. He speaks there about spiritual combat and the need to fight against temptations and sin. Yet, at the same time, he does not exclude the practical interpretation, saying that from a practical point of view:

the Apostle speaks there about the combats where Christians must sustain other Christians as much as possible and not about the common combats with other men, in determinate cases. (Grotius 2010:104).

The product of a post-reformation world, divided by religious wars and the occupation of Christian territories by colonial powers who were also Christians, he pleads for peace. Peace is, according to him, the centre of Christian life, as it has been stipulated in the divine commandments (Grotius 2010:89-99). When this is not possible, one must labour for it or at least, not make war on fellow Christians. Influenced by Erasmus of Rotterdam, his pan-Christian opinion

about unity (Bonaiuti, Collina: 2015:45) is deeply linked with the idea of peace and is intended for all Christians people. This is the reason why he insists on the need for peace among Christians from different denominations.

Conclusion

As can be seen, the political theology of Hugo Grotius is primarily linked with the concepts of peace and war. Using Biblical sources, which are often compared with the opinions of ancient philosophers, he speaks about the nature of the army and possible reasons which might justify a soldier's conscientious objection to a given command from his superior (Grozio 2010:108). He also speaks about the relevance of peace, which is a *leitmotiv* of the entire Bible and about the exceptional situations in which Christians might legitimately declare war. His cultural and social influences can be seen also in the way he insists on cooperation between Christians of different denominations in case of war. Peace is, for him, a Gospel precept. Coming from the humanist tradition, known for his vast knowledge, he often uses key hermeneutical tools in order to discover the real sense of some Biblical and/or patristic passages. He always tries to interpret, using the context and/or authoritative voices, the passages from Scripture that are related with the theme of war and peace and the relationship between them.

There are people today who may think that some of Grotius' ideas about political theology, outlined *De Jure Bellum ac Pacis* (1625), no longer reflect modern social reality. However, as we have tried to emphasize here, Grotius' thought is still full of interesting and important approaches that might well be beneficial if re-discovered, discussed and valorised in the contemporary context.

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