

# THE PROPOSED BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE MORALITY OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

Irwan\*

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## Abstract

*Moralitas intervensi kemanusiaan harus didasarkan pada Alkitab. Artikel ini mencoba mengusulkan dasar alkitabiah dari moralitas intervensi kemanusiaan. Metode yang digunakan dalam artikel ini adalah studi pustaka. Dua ajaran Alkitab, satu dari Perjanjian Lama dan satu dari Perjanjian Baru, direfleksikan. Pertama, teks Perjanjian Lama Kejadian 1:26-27 menceritakan martabat dan nilai manusia, sebagai puncak ciptaan Tuhan. Manusia harus menghormatinya. Melindungi hidup manusia adalah alasan yang adil untuk intervensi kemanusiaan. Kedua, dalam intervensi kemanusiaan, ada ketegangan antara “keprihatinan kemanusiaan” dan “kedaulatan bangsa.” Ketegangan ini sejajar dengan ketegangan dalam Perjanjian Baru Luk 6:6-11. Teks ini menceritakan ketegangan antara “berbuat baik” dan “menjaga hukum”. Yesus, Guru Moralitas kita, mengajarkan bahwa berbuat baik dan menyelamatkan hidup (“keprihatinan kemanusiaan” dalam intervensi kemanusiaan) lebih tinggi nilainya daripada mengikuti hukum Sabat (“kedaulatan bangsa”). Kedua teks dapat menjadi dasar bagi moralitas intervensi kemanusiaan.*

## Keywords

Bible, morality, humanitarian intervention.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article tries to propose the biblical foundation of the morality of humanitarian intervention. We would like to begin our discussion by recalling the events of the Rwandan genocide as the background. The Rwandan genocide happened in 1994. In April an extremist Hutu regime, fearing the loss of its power in the face of a democracy movement and a civil war, systematically slaughtered their enemy in the effort to wipe out the Tutsi population in Rwanda. The killings ended when the Rwandan Patriotic Front, attacking from neighboring states, defeated the Hutu in July 1994.<sup>1</sup> From early April 1994 through mid-July 1994 (for nearly 100 days), the Hutu killed approximately 800,000 persons (overwhelmingly Tutsi, but also tens of thousands of Hutus who opposed to the genocidal government), more than one-tenth of a population of 7 million people. And hundreds of thousands of Tutsi managed to flee their nation and settle in neighboring states.<sup>2</sup>

Since April 1994 Rwanda has become a synonym for one of the worst genocides of the 20th century. The international community had failed to stop it. At the opening of the Memorial Conference on the Rwandan Genocide, held on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003 in memory of 10 years ago of the genocide, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, stated that *the genocide in Rwanda should never have happened, but it did. The international community had failed*

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\* STIKAS Santo Yohanes Salib, West Kalimantan. E-mail: irwan.widjaja@stikassantoyohanessalib.ac.id

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Howard BALL, *Genocide: A Reference Handbook*, ABC-CLIO, Inc., Santa Barbara et al. 2011, 105-106.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

*Rwanda, which must always leave it with a sense of bitter regret and abiding sorrow. If the international community had acted promptly, it could have stopped most of the killing. But neither the political will nor the troops had been there. The international community was guilty of sins of omission.*<sup>3</sup> We can conclude that the international community could have stopped most of the killing, if it had the political will and had provided the troops, or in short, if it had made a “humanitarian intervention.”

What is humanitarian intervention? Humanitarian intervention is a military action taken by a state, or a group of states, or a regional organization (for example: NATO) in a target state, generally without that state’s consent, for the purpose of stopping massive killings of a civilian population that shock the moral conscience of mankind (for example: genocide), and ideally with a UN mandate.

When talking about morality, as Catholic Christians, first of all, we must return to the Holy Scripture, as stated in the Vatican II Council document *Optatam Totius* no. 16.<sup>4</sup> The Bible is very important for morality, as the Preface of *The Bible and Morality* mentioned, “For Christians Holy Scripture is not only a source of revelation on which to ground one’s faith, it is also an indispensable reference point for morality.”<sup>5</sup> The Preface continues, “In Bible we find many norms, commandments, laws, collections of codices, etc.”<sup>6</sup> So, we will discuss what the Bible says for moral foundation .

The morality of humanitarian intervention must be based on the Bible. Jesus is our Teacher of Morality. This article tries to propose the biblical foundation of morality of humanitarian intervention. Two teachings of the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, will be reflected, i.e.: (1) The dignity and worth of the human person in Gen 1:26-27, and (2) The teaching of Jesus on tension between “do good (to save life)” and “keep the Sabbath law” in Luk 6:6-11.

## **GENESIS 1:26-27 RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

The origin of man or mankind or human being or human person or humankind (Heb. ‘*ādām*) is in God’s act of creation. The Hebrew word ‘*ādām* is a collective and is therefore never used in the plural.<sup>7</sup> The Old Testament Genesis preserves two distinct accounts Gen. 1:1 - 2:4a (written by the Priestly Tradition, abbreviated as P) and Gen 2:4b - 3:24 (written by the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. UNITED NATIONS, *Memorial Conference on Rwanda Genocide Considers Ways to Ensure More Effective International Response in Future*, (Press Release, AFR/868, HQ/630, 26 March 2003), United Nations, New York (NY) 2003, in <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/ afr868.doc.htm> (accessed on February 10, 2019). Other sources are not available.

<sup>4</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Optatam Totius* (Rome, October 28, 1965), Decree on priestly training, in in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, = Vatican Collection Volume I, revised edition, 8<sup>th</sup> printing, edited by Austin Flannery, Costello Publishing Co., Inc., New York (NY) 1987; *AAS* 58 (1966), 713-727.

<sup>5</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical roots of Christian conducts* (Roma, May 11, 2008), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2008, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gerhard von RAD, *Genesis: A Commentary*, = The Old Testament Library (translated into English by John H. Marks), The Westminster Press, Philadelphia (PA) 1961, 55. Origin: *Das erste Buch Mose, Genesis*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen 1956.

Yahwist, abbreviated as J).<sup>8</sup> In John Chrysostom's opinion (*Homilies on Genesis*) the two biblical reports of creation refer to the same and single act of creation.<sup>9</sup>

In Genesis 1, God creates everything in six days. His creative act culminates in the second part of the sixth day when He creates man in his image. As the pinnacle of God's creative work, what is the meaning that man has been created in the image (Heb. *šelem*; LXX. *Eikōn*; Vulgate. *imago*)<sup>10</sup> and likeness (Heb. *dēmūt*; LXX. *homoiōsis*; Vulgate. *similitudo*) of God in Gen 1:26, 27? The Book of Genesis declares, but does not explain clearly. The meaning of the statement that mankind was created in God's image and likeness has always been a matter of long discussion in the history of the Church by: Irenaeus (c. 130-200, in *Against Heresies*),<sup>11</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (*De Opificio Hominis*, written in 380),<sup>12</sup> Augustine (354-430, in *The Trinity*),<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274, in *Summa Theologica* I. 93),<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth (1886-1968, in *Church Dogmatics*),<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar (*Communion and Stewardship*, no. 57).<sup>16</sup>

The document *The Bible and Morality. Biblical roots of Christian conducts* from Catholic Church (Pontifical Biblical Commission) asserts that at least six features contribute to the status of the human person as God's "image":<sup>17</sup>

- a) Human reason: the capacity and the duty to know and understand the created world.
- b) Human freedom: the capacity and obligation to make decisions and to take responsibility for decisions made.
- c) Leadership: not unconditional but in subordination to God.
- d) The capacity to act in conformity with him of whom the human person is an image, namely by imitating God.
- e) The dignity of being a person, a 'relational' being, capable of having personal relationships with God and with other human beings.
- f) The sanctity of human life.

Not only created as the paramount of the creation, man is precious because God loves him "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). God incarnated and died for man. God gives the law "you shall not kill" (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17). God says that "from man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life" (Gen 9:5)

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Claus WESTERMANN, *Genesis: An Introduction* (translated into English by John J. Scullion), Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis (MN) 1992, 18. Origin: *Biblischer Kommentar* Series as the introductions to GENESIS 1-11 (1974), GENESIS 12-36 (1981), GENESIS 37-50 (1982) by Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchener Verlag.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. H. S. BENYAMINS, "Keeping Marriage out of Paradise: The Creation of Man and Woman in Patristic Literature," in LUTTIKHUIZEN, Gerard P. (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln 2000, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Horst Dietrich PREUSS, *The Old Testament Theology*, Volume 2 (translated into English by Lao G. Purdue), Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville 1996, 114. Origin: *Theologie des Alten Testaments, Band II: Israel's Weg mit JHWH*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1992.

<sup>11</sup> See Bruce A. WARE, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," in GRUDEM, Wayne (ed.), *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, Crossway Books, Wheaton 2002, 73.

<sup>12</sup> See Kevin J. VANHOZER, et al. (ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Baker Book House Company, Grand Rapids (MI) 2005, 563.

<sup>13</sup> See B. A. WARE, *op. cit.*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>16</sup> See Dominic ROBINSON, *Understanding the 'Imago Dei': The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham and Burlington 2011, 123.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *op. cit.*, 18-19.

The Bible tells the dignity and worth of the human person, as the pinnacle of God's creation. Men must respect it. In the context of this thesis, to protect human life is the just reason for humanitarian intervention.

### **LUKE 6:6-11 THE TEACHING OF JESUS ON THE TENSION BETWEEN “DO GOOD” (TO SAVE LIFE) AND “KEEP THE SABBATH LAW”**

When we must make a decision to choose between two actions: “do good or keep the Sabbath law,” what should we choose? These two actions are good. To choose “to do good or to keep the law” is a moral question. To solve this question, as Christians we must look to Jesus, our Teacher of Morality.

In the the New Testament Synoptic Gospels, we find the tension between “do good” and “keep the Sabbath law” in Mark's account of the man with the withered hand (Mrk 3:1-6 || Luk 6:6-11), in Luke's account of the woman who was bent over for eighteen years (Luk 13:10-17), in Luke's account of the man with dropsy (Luk 14:1-6). The writer choose Luk 6:6-11 due to this text gives clearer tension between “do good” and “keep the Sabbath law.”

Joseph A. Fitzmyer explains that for Luke, eventhough the Sabbath-rest is important, it has to yield to other considerations. The institution of Sabbath-rest must yield a charitable deed. Jesus himself performed charitable deeds on behalf of an unfortunate individual, a man with a stunted hand, and not on behalf of his disciples. The Pharisaic tradition knew of exceptions that could be made to Sabbath-rest, as the later rabbinical tradition said: “Whenever there is doubt whether life is in danger, this overrides the Sabbath” (*m. Yoma* 8:6). But the gospel tradition, which depicts Jesus curing a less extreme case (not in danger), seems to know nothing of that tradition. Jesus' question “I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” (Luk 6:9), which is the pronouncement in this scene, appeals to common sense. It emphasizes the freedom that his followers will have in the face of the Sabbath law, when there is the opportunity to do good for people or to save a life. The story enshrines his pronouncement and exemplifies his ministry of love, which ends with the recounting of a miracle. The preceding controversy (Luk 6:1-5) depicts in another way that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”<sup>18</sup>

Jesus said to the scribes and the Pharisees, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” (Luk 6:9). François Bovon believes that Luke teaches an ethical conception of the Sabbath, based on the Christology of Jesus the Savior (the verb “save” in Luk 6:9). Jesus is the Lord of Sabbath (Luk 6:5) when He saves someone (the sick who need a physician, Luk 5:31) and when he invites the Pharisees and scribes to reflect on themselves and on the will of God. Luke would like to see that Sabbath was an opportunity and a motivation “to do good,” and “to save,” as Jesus did in his communion with God. This is the new interpretation of the law.<sup>19</sup>

P. Noll, in his book *Jesus und das Gesetz. Rechtliche Analyse der Normenkritik in der Lehre Jesu*, concludes that the end of Jesus' ethics and the law is the man. Jesus enunciated the principle, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Joseph A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, = The Anchor Bible; Volume 28, Introduction, translation, and notes, Doubleday & Company, New York (NY) 1981, 606-607.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. François BOVON, *Vangelo di Luca, Volume 1, Commento a 1,1-9,50*, = Commentario Paideia, Edizione italiana a cura di Oscar Ianovitz, Paidea Editrice, Brescia 2005. Orig.: *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1996 & 2001, 323.

Man is lord even of the sabbath.” (Mrk 2:27, NAB). This principle is a particular formulation of the more general principle: “The rules are made for man and not man for rules.”<sup>20</sup>

One application of Jesus’ teaching on Sabbath is humanitarian intervention. In Luk 6:6-11, we find the tension between “do good” and “keep the law.” In a humanitarian intervention, we find the tension between “humanitarian concern” and “sovereignty of a nation (sovereignty as authority over territory).” Based on the conclusion that one can do good or save life in Sabbath and it is morally right, we are able to say that humanitarian intervention is morally right. Doing humanitarian work is to be preferred to upholding the law of sovereignty of a nation.

## CONCLUSION

Two ideas from the Bible are discussed. First, Genesis 1:26-27 tells the dignity and worth of the human person, as the pinnacle of God’s creation. Men must respect it. To protect human life is the just reason for humanitarian intervention. Second, in humanitarian intervention, we find the tension between “humanitarian concern” and “the sovereignty of nations.” Luk 6:6-11 tells the tension between “do good” and “keep the law.” Jesus, our Teacher of Morality, teaches that one should do good and save life in Sabbatical law. These two biblical texts can be used for the foundation of morality of humanitarian intervention.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Giuseppe SEGALLA, *Introduzione all’etica biblica del Nuovo Testamento*, = Biblioteca Biblica 2, Queriniana Editrice, Brescia 1989, 159.

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