

God's Writing on the Wall

It is my belief that most contemporary “Western” nation-states are ultimately founded on two basic transcendental covenants: (1) the Greco-Roman city-state, and (2) the Mosaic Decalogue. Practically all our modern constitutions are founded on covenants ultimately derived from these two historic compacts.

The original proto-Athenians, under their mythical ruler Cecrops, accepted the goddess Athena's olive tree –symbolizing peace and prosperity– and named the city after that goddess.¹ We could argue that the covenant with Athena gave birth eventually to the famous city-state of Athens, which enshrined original democracy from 1068 to 322 BCE.

In the case of the ancient Romans, we know that they were polytheists and had no specific foundational deity for what eventually became the first republic –although Jupiter was at the head of the Roman pantheon. However, as Professor Inge Kroppenbergh wrote in *Law, Religion and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins* (2010): “...the Vestals [were] at the center of legal, religious, and political life in the Roman republic as was done by lawyers, historians, and poets.... They represented the separation of the legal, religious, and political spheres of Roman life, the domestication of raw power through division. As sovereign figures, the Vestals would wander freely among the religious world of the aedes Vestae, in which they were subject to the sacral jurisdiction of the pontifex maximus, the legal world, where they acted as personae sui iuris, and the political Rome, in which magistrates would honor them as symbols of the state, lowering their fasces before the Vestals' "public virginity." As a "living constitution" or "totem" of the republic, the Vestals stood as guardians at the border of civilization and chaos.”²

Although the Romans worshiped many divinities –even elevating the emperors to the godly sphere– this all changed in 380 A.D. when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica, which recognized the Catholic orthodoxy as the Roman Empire's official state religion. In doing so, the Roman “constitution” presumably enshrined the Christian version of the Decalogue as the moral and ethical guiding light for all law and jurisprudence –if not, unfortunately, for the conduct of war.

Although Moslem nations cannot be considered as deriving from these Western compacts, yet the revolutionary moral teachings of the Prophet Muhammad clearly incorporated many basic elements both from Judaism and Christianity, including the Decalogue. However, it is a curious and troubling fact that the main contenders in the on-going Israel/Hamas war seem to have forgotten at least one of the core foundational moral principles of both Judaism and Islam: the 6th Commandment: **“Thou shall not kill.”**

According to the Book of Exodus in the Torah, the Ten Commandments were revealed by God to Moses at Mount Sinai, and inscribed by Him on two tablets of stone –as reported by Moses to the Israelites in Exodus 19:25. The Decalogue enshrined the original covenant between God and the Israelites.

To quote the relevant passages: (1) "God...said: I am YHWH, thy God, who brought thee out of...bondage... (7) **Thou shalt do no murder.**" ³

The equivalent Commandment in Al-Qur'an is Surat 5, Verset 32, also known as Surat Al-Mā'idah - المائدة سورة: **"If anyone has killed one person it is as if he had killed the whole mankind."** ⁴

Perhaps the voice of Adonai/Allah has been heard by the nations of the world, who have just called, after 2½ months of barbaric conflict, for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and for aid to the innocent civilian victims –reflecting thereby the beneficent influence of the two basic transcendental covenants treated herein.

Written by ©Pascual Delgado, December 15th 2023.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Athens

² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/lal.2010.22.3.418>

³ <https://bcponline.org/HE/decaloguet.html>

⁴ <https://www.islamcan.com/islamic-articles/the-ten-commandments-confirmed-in-the-quran.shtml>