



RESENSI BUKU

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020; viii + 107.

Mark Juergensmeyer raises a key question at the beginning of his book, *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare*: why do we ponder about war? To continue the discussion, Juergensmeyer divides the book into five chapters. In an attempt to regain interest in the emergence of the notion, Chapter 1 explores war as a concept. The premise of this first chapter is that individuals become anxious due to social instability in the world, but the idea of war then turns into a force that gives our lives purpose (p. 23). Building upon this foundation, Chapter 2 extends the analysis by exploring war as an alternative reality. In this chapter, Juergensmeyer presents war as an alternative reality offering comfort, hope, and mental relief.

Because the concept of war provides an explanation for why horrible things occur in the world, as well as strategies for enduring and eventually hoping to eradicate them, an opponent is necessary for the concept of war to be credible. Juergensmeyer even clearly stated that if there is no enemy, they must be created. In the war scenario, one must be considered good and the other evil. Thus, justice and peace can be achieved by vanquishing the group deemed evil. While war offers one framework for understanding and responding to societal chaos, it is not the only system that provides such meaning. In Chapter 3, religion is presented as an alternative reality that is frequently connected to war.

The concept of religion provides an alternate reality that gives significance to the unsettling sense of chaos and abnormalities. Religion offers a course of action that helps people deal with issues that are directly tied to their mortality and impending death. That is what sets religion apart from war: religion refers to a worldview that envisions a transcendent order in which God rules. People who embrace a

religious perspective believe God is on their side and think those who give the ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield will win. The joy and pride of being part of something important drives someone to participate rather than imagine it. However, some groups even believe that they are God's defenders.

Therefore, Juergensmeyer claimed that both conceptions—war and religion—are rooted in the human imagination and social dynamics (p. 58). This fundamental connection between war and religion sets the stage for a deeper analysis of their interplay. In Chapter 4, he explores their intricate relationship, noting how religious concepts, institutions, and imagery can be used to promote war and, conversely, how war can reinforce religious narratives. Since the idea of war embraces religion, religious concepts, institutions, and imagery are used to promote the idea of war. Additionally, the idea of religion can also be associated with war; this happens when the concept of war is used to reinforce the idea of religion, yet religious rhetoric rarely results in actual warfare.

From an Indonesian perspective, Juergensmeyer's arguments might be criticized for their inadequate engagement with the nuanced role of religion in a multi-religious, postcolonial context. Indonesia presents a unique case study that challenges the book's theoretical frameworks, particularly its tendency to conceptualize religious interactions through a potentially oversimplified lens of conflict and meaning-making. The archipelago's complex religious landscape, epitomized by the principle of *Pancasila* (which emphasizes religious pluralism), offers a more sophisticated model of religious coexistence that transcends the binary conceptualizations presented in the text.

The text misses a critical opportunity to examine how religious rhetoric in Indonesia has simultaneously functioned as a potential source of conflict and a powerful tool for peacebuilding. Regions like Aceh demonstrate the complex ways religious identity can operate, shifting between sites of tension and reconciliation. This nuanced reality suggests that a comprehensive understanding of religion and conflict requires more localized, context-specific analyses that capture how religious identities interact in diverse global contexts.

While Juergensmeyer provides a valuable theoretical approach to understanding the relationship between religion and war, the Indonesian context reveals the limitations of a one-size-fits-all interpretation. This book would be significantly enriched by a more in-depth engagement with postcolonial, pluralistic societies like Indonesia, where

religious meaning-making occurs through processes far more complex than the symbolic and confrontational frameworks the author primarily explores.

Still, this complexity aligns with Juergensmeyer's core argument that no one can be persuaded to do acts of violence by literary example, nor can someone be persuaded to commit acts of violence and war by religious texts (p. 73). Religious rhetoric rarely translates directly into warfare, as violence emerges from complex interactions within social realities. The book ultimately suggests that societies can maintain war and religious mentalities without being entirely consumed by them, allowing for a nuanced understanding of these powerful conceptual frameworks.

We do not have to choose between competing realities, as multiple perspectives can coexist. Juergensmeyer advocates for keeping war symbolic by channeling violent impulses into nonviolent means through cultural expressions, like art, literature, and religious rituals. He argues that religion's potential to inspire hope and moral engagement may be crucial in imagining peaceful conflict resolution. The case studies demonstrate that war is not permanent but can return to a symbolic level, allowing for more constructive dialogue.

However, the brevity of these studies highlights the complex and varied interactions between religion and conflict across different historical and cultural contexts. *God at War* significantly contributes to understanding religion and violence through its balanced analytical framework. Juergensmeyer provides a sophisticated theoretical perspective that explores how religion might transform conflict and promote peace. The book is particularly valuable for scholars in social humanities, religious studies, sociology, peace studies, and professionals engaged in conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue.

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