



Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Katolik Ledalero  
JURNAL LEDALERO

<http://ejurnal.stfkledalero.ac.id/index.php/JLe/index>



## Reading Texts on The Violence of God in The Bible

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**Diajukan:** 28-01-2021; **Direview:** 08-04-2021; **Diterima:** 03-06-2021; **Dipublis:** Juni 2021

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.31385/jl.v20i1.215.117-128>

**Abstract:** *Violent texts in the bible both in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, especially in the Old Testament, arise a problem for a potential reader on how to read and understand their message and the theology of the author of the Book. For this reason, biblical scholars try to read it and they propose the way to read such texts, such as to read them in the historical context of the Book itself, and interpret them as a reflection of the author and their experience. This article tries to propose another way to read violent texts, in particularly that involve God as author of violent deeds. The methode of this discussion is exegetical analysis on the texts of the Old Testament, especially on those which narrate the violent deeds of God . The result of the study is the violent deeds of God aim to recreate the creation; that is why such violent texts might be read in the frame of the new creation.*

**Key words:** Alkitab, Keluaran, Kekerasan, Allah, Penciptaan (Baru)

### Introduction

The Bible undoubtedly contains many violent texts, as Fretheim wrote in his article, “The Bible in both Old Testament and New, speaks candidly about violence – both human violence and divine violence.”<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of the Scripture, the reader of the Sacred Scripture will find the accounts about the violence both human and divine. In the first book of the Scripture, that is, in the Genesis, the reader will find the violent act of God toward human beings in this world. The action of violence both human and divine not only found in the book of Genesis, but it is found also in the other books in the Scripture, from the Deuteronomistic books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings), the Prophets (Isiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.), the Psalms, and also in the New Testament.

In sum, the violence in the Old Testament is done both by human being and by God as well. The later raises the problem of the figure of God in the Old Testament. The God in the Old Testament is often depicted as violent, jealous, angry, warlike, and so on.

<sup>1</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “God and Violence in the Old Testament”, in *WW 24 no. 1* 2004 18.

In the history of the study on the God of the Old Testament who has the negative images, some scholars tried to avoid the Old Testament as part of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> The first person who rejected the God of the Old Testament is Marcion (AD 144) who argued that the God of the Old Testament was cruel, jealous, warlike, and violent.<sup>3</sup> The image of the God of the Old Testament differs from that of the New Testament in which Christ is described as love, merciful and goodness, whereas in the Old Testament God is often depicted as contrary to the God of Jesus. For this reason, Marcion rejected the Old Testament as part of the Bible.

Moreover, the problem of the violent texts in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, is not only in rejecting or avoiding such texts as part of the Bible by some scholars but also in considering that such violent texts provoke the horizontal violence in the society of today and to be their fundament to exercise and to justify their violent actions. The terrorist attack to the World Trade Centre in the United State (11/9) became a moment to biblical scholars to reflect seriously the texts on violence both human and divine. Of the biblical scholars who studied seriously is John J. Collins in his article, “The Zeal of Phinehas. The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence”, in *JBL* 122 (2003), 3-21. Recently (2014), the *Commissione Teologica Internazionale* released the document by title, “DIO TRINITÀ, UNITÀ DEGLI UOMINI. IL MONOTEISMO CRISTIANO CONTRO LA VIOLENZA”, and discussed the topic about the relationship between monotheism and the violence.

After a brief introduction of the problem in reading the Bible-in particularly on the violence of God above, in this article I would like to show some ways of reading on violent texts done by some biblical scholars and as my own opinion I will suggest the way of reading the such texts in the light of the new creation by studying the story of flood in the book of Genesis as it is narrated in chapters 6 to 9.

### History of Research on the Violence of God

There are various ways of reading the texts on violence of God.<sup>4</sup> Some biblical scholars bellow tried to study such texts to understand better the Scripture that is suspected as the source of the violence of today. From their study, we are helped to see the violence of God as: 1). The education of God to the people, 2). The projection of human beings, and 3). The salvation and judgement of God.

André Wénin suggests how to read the texts on violence by replacing the texts in the historical context where they are redacted to relativize their statements and to defuse the problems. He gives the example from the first part of the book of Joshua that narrated the conquest of Canaan done by Israel. This account reflects on the historical reality of the end of the second millennium. Furthermore, André Wénin tried to analyze the violent God in the Old Testament by grouping it thematically.<sup>5</sup> God used the violence for numerous reasons. The violence of God, first of all, done by God for the reason of justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Romer, *Dark God. Cruelty, sex, and violence in the Old Testament*, New York; Mahawah, N.J.: Paulist Press 2013, 3-6.

<sup>3</sup> For a further reading on Marcion see Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic. God and Scripture in the Second Century*, Cambridge: University Press 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Of many ways on reading texts, the reader might read Leo Kleden, “Wahyu Alkitabiah dalam Tinjauan Hermeneutika Ricoeur,” in *JL* 19 No. 2 (2020) 169-184.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Daniel Causse – Elian Cuvillier – Andre Wénin, *Violenza divina. Un problema esegetico e antropologico*, Bologna 2012, 22-40.

God wants to express his justice to those who do injustice. The texts in the Old Testament which describe the injustice acts can be found in Gen 4:1-16; Gdt 2-7; Es 1 and 5; Judge 19-21 and 2 Kings 25. In the front of injustice, God cannot be indifferent and the use of the violence has the function to end those who exercised the evil. Moreover, the violence exercised by God has the reason of the salvation of the poor. These motives usually found in the psalms which narrate the poor who is in the dangerous situation. The other text of the same type of this theme is that of Es 1-15 about the exodus from the Egypt. André Wénin read some texts which contain the violent God as the scandalous texts for the reader of today. These are the texts which describe the violence done by God without any motive or reason or in the word of Schwager as irrational anger. Finally, André Wénin read the violence of God as the way to educate his people, Israel to be faithful to the covenant. Such a theme is found in the prophets like Isa 1:2-20, Jer 31:18-19, Joel 1-2 and 2Sam 7:14.

Norbert Lohfink, in his article, discussed about violent God and as solution of this problem he suggested to consider the texts on violent God in the context of the relation between two Testaments.<sup>6</sup> His argument is based on *Dei Verbum* that said that the exegesis should not consider only on the meaning that the biblical authors wanted to express at their time, but in the research of what God wanted to communicate, the exegesis must consider the contents and the unity of the Scripture. It means that what Jesus and the New Testament affirmed and the rest should be explained in this function. According to Lohfink, we are invited to read the Old Testament as a divine educational account. In his thesis, he underlines that the experience of Israel on God is connected to the changes of their attitudes in front of the violence. The image of God depends on the condition of the society. If they are warriors, so the God. So, the conception of God depends on their condition.

While D. Tonelli<sup>7</sup> begins her study on divine violence by putting in question, “The violence exercised by God in many biblical accounts reveal the real face of God or only the necessities, the problems, or the sentiments of those who testified?” So according to her, the question on divine violence means not only about God, but about the person who imagined such a God, because God has many faces and which one prevailed depends on the testimony of the authors and their epoch. According to her, the theme of the violence first of all is the hermeneutical problem that delineates the contents of the text that stress our sensibility. To resolve this problem, it is necessary to change our perspective and try to understand better which the role and the messages of these texts in the field of divine revelation. That is why, the topic of the violence is the historical and cultural problem as well. So the imagines of violent God must be understood based on the literary context where the texts are written. In other word, the question on the divine violence only can be answered through an analysis of specific context. Tonelli concludes her study saying that the divine violence is not the character of God but only the way of how the person interprets God. So the violence of God is the violence of the person who imagines God as the answers of their suffering, of desire for justice, of vengeance, of hope of salvation and of the impotence in front of the evil.

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<sup>6</sup> Norbert Lohfink, “Il Dio violento dell’Antico Testamento e la ricerca d’una società non-violenta”, *la civiltà Cattolica* 135 vol. 2, 1984, 30-48.

<sup>7</sup> Debora Tonelli, *Immagini di violenza divina nell’Antico Testamento*, Bologna: EDB, 2014.

Thomas Romer<sup>8</sup> like the other scholars (André Wénin, Tonelli) underlines that the texts on violent God are written in very particular historical situations. He discussed some problematic questions on the image of God: is God cruel? Is God a warlike despot? And is God violent and vengeful? On the question of the cruelty of God, he takes Gen 22 and Judges 11 as his study and he concludes that these texts are really about the cruelty of human beings, not the cruelty of God. While to explain the question on is God a warlike despot is found in the Book of Deuteronomy and the conquest narratives of the Book of Joshua and in the books that form part of the historiographical range, from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, he looks that the authors of Deuteronomy use a vassal treaty as a model to describe the relationship between YHWH and his people. Similarly, in Joshua 1-12, YHWH is depicted as God of conquest, where the authors of Joshua were greatly inspired by Assyrian texts in presenting YHWH as the God of conquest. The narratives of the Assyrian conquest are built according to a stereotyped model, from which the Deuteronomistic authors were mostly inspired to develop an ideology of the 'war of YHWH'. In a manner of speaking, the war is stolen away from the people. The image of warlike YHWH no longer serves to justify human war, but to express a hope in the salutary intervention of God on behalf of his people.

Terence E. Fretheim<sup>9</sup> studied the violence in the book of Prophet. He interpreted the violence of God by understanding of God's relationship with Israel and the world. He acknowledges that the books of the Prophets contain the violence both human and divine. According to him, the violence of God has the reason of justice and salvation. God cannot be indifferent in front of the oppression of the poor and the needy. He added that these two ways of God to use the violence can be reduced only to one, that is, God's use of violence is intended to subvert human violence in order to bring the creation along to a point where violence is no more.<sup>10</sup> To complete his plan God did the violence using the agents both human and nonhuman, through the Prophets, non-Israelite kings and the moral created order.

Kamionkowski in his article criticized Fretheim. He said that Fretheim is influenced by Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel asks us not to view divine violence as allegorical, but as 'a stark reality', one that must be understood within his definition of divine pathos.<sup>11</sup> In this point, there is the different point of view between Fretheim and Heschel where Fretheim interpreted the violent texts in the context of justice, whereas Heschel looked them in the context of divine pathos. Furthermore, Kamionkowski argued that the prophetic texts are ideological texts that reveal more about the producers of the text and the world in which they lived than any transcendent truths. The problem therefore not one of divine violence, but of a culture's imposition of violence upon the divine to understand and legitimate the world they know. To prove his argument, he studied the text of Isaiah 2:2-4 and he concluded that divine violence in prophetic literature is not simply a justified, proportional response to human violence. Human imaginations of divine violence cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon, it is part of the same system that both

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Romer, *Dark God. Cruelty, Sex, and Violence in the Old Testament*, New York; Mahawah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "I was only a little angry". *Divine Violence in the Prophets*, *Interpretation* 58 no.4 2004, 365-375.

<sup>10</sup> See Terence E. Fretheim, "I was only a little angry", 371.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *The Problem of Violence in Prophetic Literature: Definitions as the Real Problem* in Bernat, D. A–Jonathan Klawans (eds.), *Religion and Violence*. The Biblical Heritage, Sheffield, 2007, 39.

condones and condemns the monarchy, that demands absolute loyalty to a single deity, that assigns distinct roles to individuals based on gender, circumstances of birth, and so on.<sup>12</sup> According to him, the prophets were products of their age; cultural violence was so embedded in their world that they were unable to step outside of themselves.

Hitherto, the ways of reading on the violent texts which are done by the biblical scholars already studied. The following paragraphs will be dedicated to discuss another alternative way on reading such texts.

### **Reading Violent Texts in the Light of the New Creation**

The beginning of the book of Genesis narrates the story of the creation (Gen 1:1-2:4a) where God put all creatures in order. The messages of this story are that God, in creating the human beings and the other creatures, did it in peace and in the end of his work God called the creation at every stage good, and God, by making human beings according to his image and likeness, appointed them as divine representatives on earth (Gen 1:26-28).<sup>13</sup> This creation, that is depicted as in order and without conflict, becomes in-order and full of the violence. As soon as after the fall of the first human being in Gen 3, the book of Genesis narrates the series of violence both human violence and divine violence. For example, in Gen 4 is showed to us the violence done by Cain to his brother Abel and in Gen 6-9 is revealed to us the violence of God by destroying his creation both human beings and animals, except Noah, his family and pairs of every kind of creature. God, by destroying the human beings and the creatures on the earth, completed his work of creation.<sup>14</sup> In other words, in the story of flood we will find the new creation. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on the story of flood in Gen 6-9.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The Story of Flood in Genesis 6-9*

The main goal of the story of flood, as Creach wrote, is that “the flood story is really about God’s struggle to maintain creation in the face of humanity’s spread of violence.”<sup>16</sup> This statement brings us to trace the reasons of the flood in Gen 6. The reasons of flood as we find in Gen 6:5.11-13 are the wickedness, corruption, and violence of human beings. The reason of the flood is clear in what God said to Noah, “I have decided that the end has come for all of living things, for the earth is full of violence because of human beings. So I am now about to destroy them and the earth” (Gen 6:13). Therefore, the main reason of the flood is the human violence.

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<sup>12</sup> S. Tamar Kamionkowski, 45.

<sup>13</sup> See Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*. Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church, Louisville-Kentucky, 2013, 17.

<sup>14</sup> See Germano Galvagno, “Creazione”, in Romano Penna–Giacomo Perego–Gianfranco Ravasi (eds.), *Temî teologici della Bibbia*, Milano, 2010, 248.

<sup>15</sup> The similar story of the flood could be found in the poem of Gilgames, in the second and third tablet of Atrahasis, or in the myth of the deluge of Ras ShaRmra and somehow to be the background of the story of flood in the book of Genesis. For the profound study of the comparison between the story of flood in Babylon and in the book of Genesis see Federico Giuntoli, *Genesi 1-11*. Introduzione, traduzione e commento, Milano, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, 34.

The Hebrew's word for violence is *hamas* that used to express the technical term for the oppression of the weak by the strong. David Clines defined the term *hamas* as “the violent breach of a just order”; even when used of man's inhumanity to man, it usually has religious overtones, for it is the violation of an order laid down or guaranteed by God.<sup>17</sup> While the Septuagint translated *hamas* as “injustice” to contrast with the “justice” of Noah in Gen 6:9.

In the eyes of God, therefore, violence of human beings is the factor that make the creation in chaos and spoils everything including all of the earth. That is why, in verse 13 of Genesis 6 God decided to end all of living things. The reason of the biblical flood differs from the story of flood that is reported in the Epic of Atrahasis.<sup>18</sup>

In this epic, the anger of god which provoked the flood toward human beings is caused by the noise of mankind, as it is vivid from the sayings of god Enlil, as follows, “The noise of mankind has become too intense for me, with their uproar I am deprived of sleep. Let there be plague” (cf. The Epic of Atrahasis I, 358-360). A close reading on the term noise brings some scholars to conclude that the reason of the flood in the Epic of Atrahasis is the sin of mankind.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, there is a similarity between the story of flood which is narrated in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near Eastern Text, that is, the Epic of Atrahasis.

The further exegetical question from this verse (v. 13 of Gen 6) is the meaning of כָּל־בְּשָׂר׃ “all flesh”. What does it mean by “all flesh”. The term “all flesh” in the bible usually refers to “all humanity” or “all humankind” (cf. Gen 6:12-13; Num 16:22, 27:16; Deut 5:23; Isaiah 40:5-6, 49: 26, 66:16; Jer 12:12; Jos 3:1; Zac 2:17). Moreover, some biblical scholars interpreted the term of “all flesh” as both man and animals. Therefore, “all flesh” in the context of Gen 6 has the meaning “every living creature.”<sup>20</sup>

We have to note that in this story God saved Noah and his family.<sup>21</sup> This phrase confirmed the interpretation above that every living creature in the earth is destructed and only Noah, his family and the pairs of every kind of creature will be saved from the destruction of the flood.

Furthermore, Noah is described “as a just man and perfect in his generations and he walked with God” (Cf. Gen 6:9). Noah was the only figure in the Hebrew Bible which was described as a just man.

<sup>17</sup> See David Clines, “Noah's Flood I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative,” *Faith and Thought* 100 no. 2, 1972-3, 133.

<sup>18</sup> This epic is a composition that originated from Sumero-Babylonian cultures. The date of composition of the Epic of Atrahasis is associated with Nur-Aya or Ku-Aya/Kasap-Aya, the author of the Epic of Atrahasis who lived in the era of Ammi-saduqa, king of Babylon about 1702-1682 BC. See W. G. Lambert-A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Clarendon: Oxford 1969. For the parallel between the Old Testament and the Ancient Near Eastern Texts see Victor H. Mathews–Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels. Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, New York/Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press 2016; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament. Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic 2018<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> William L. Moran, “Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood,” *Bib* 52 (1971) 51-61, esp. p. 53; Bernard F. Batto, “The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected of Ancient Near Eastern Motif,” in *CBQ* 49 (1987) 187-211, esp. p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> In the biblical context, there is a merism that means a figure representing a whole by two (often polar) parts and usually it has a function to denote entirety. See A. M. Honeyman, “Merismus in Biblical Hebrew,” in *JBL* 71 (1952) 11-18.

<sup>21</sup> In the Epic of Atrahasis, in the place of Noah and his family there are Atrahasis and his wife as the survivor of the flood. From this similarity the reader might ask who copied who?

This description is contrast to the character of his generation. In the other words, Noah did not do the violence as the others. God, by saving Noah, his family, and pairs of every kind of creature, wanted to maintain the creation in its place as described in Gen 1:1-2:4a. In this point, Noah is prepared by God to be the ancestor of the creature<sup>22</sup> and to maintain the creation from the destruction of the flood by building an ark. The following verses told us how God gave the instructions to Noah in building the ark (Gen 6:14-16) and about all the living creatures and food that he must take in the ark (Gen 6:18-21).

The following chapters of the book of Genesis, that is, Gen 7:2–8:19, narrate the story of flood after God decided to destroy the earth. In this season, the reader can read how Noah as protagonist in this story carried out the instructions of God to take with him seven pairs of pure animals into the ark. The next narration is how the flood came and the ark was on the mountain of Ararat. Finally, Noah, his family, and the animals came off the ark.

The conclusion of the story of flood is found in Gen 8:20–19,18. Gen 8:20-22 narrates that Noah offered the sacrifice to God and then God promised to Noah that he would never destroy the earth with flood. Similarly, in the Epic of Atrahasis, at the end god Enlil gives his blessings to humankind by permitting them to live on the earth by condition that the birth rate of humankind is regulated. So, there will be harmony between god and humankind and as a result there will be an ordered world.<sup>23</sup>

In the case of the story of flood in Gen, it is interesting to give attention to Creach's opinion that the decision of God to allow humans to continue seems purely God's own, not because the sacrifice of Noah.<sup>24</sup> This argument means that he wants to underline the merciful and gracious God and neglected the meaning of the Hebrew expression  $\text{רִיחַ הַגְּבִיחַהּ}$  that usually refers to the acceptance of God. It means that the sacrifice of Noah made God happy and as the result God promised to Noah not to angry again.<sup>25</sup>

The consequence of the verses 21-22 in Genesis 8, God does not punish again the human beings. Whereas in Gen 9:1-7, God blesses Noah and his sons. This is the third blessing of God that appeared in the book of Genesis. The other two blessings are found in Gen 1:28 "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth" and in Gen 5:2 "He created them male and female, He blessed them and named man in the day when they were created". Similarly, in Gen 9:1 God said to Noah, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth."

It interesting to note the contradiction between Gen 9:1 and Gen 6:11.13 in which it was described that "the earth was filled with violence" that provoked the angry of God by sending the flood upon the earth. Whereas, in Gen 9:1 "the earth will be filled by Noah and his sons" as the sign of the blessing of God to Noah, his family and all of the living things. The blessing of God to Noah and his sons

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<sup>22</sup> From the descendants of Noah, that is, Sem, Yafet, and Ham, the humankind is spread out to the whole world (Gen 6: 18-19). The descendants of Sem lived in Mesopotamia, nowadays Irak, Arab, and Persia (Gen 10:21-31). The sons of Ham stayed in Egypt, Africa (Gen 10:6-20), and the sons of Yafet went to Minor Asia, and Europe (Gen 10:1-5). At this point, it could be said that the ancestor of humankind is not Adam, but Noah. See G. Tri Wardoyo, CM., *Jejak-jejak Karya Keselamatan Allah*. Pengantar dan Seluk Beluk Kitab Suci Perjanjian Lama, Yogyakarta: Kanisius 2021, 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Robert A. Oden, Jr., "Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1-11,"in ZAW 93 (1981) 197-216, esp. p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> See Federico Giuntoli, *Genesi 1-11*. Introduzione, traduzione e commento, 152.

to fill the earth, it means also that the new creation is begun by Noah and his sons. In this sense, Noah became the ancestor of human beings that totally renewed after the flood.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, Noah is the new Adam. This new creation has the scope the entire world, not only to a local area. Some biblical scholars interpreted the story of flood as “re-creation”. For example, David Clines confirmed that “the story of the Flood, is therefore an affirmation of the story of creation, and speaks ultimately not of divine punishment but of God’s faithfulness to the works of His hands.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Jacques Doukhan put in parallel between the creation in Gen 1:2-2:3 and Gen 8-9:<sup>28</sup>

Day 1. The wind/spirit over the earth and waters. Gen 8:1; cf. Gen 1:2.

Day 2. Division of waters. Gen 8:1-5; cf. Gen 1:6-8.

Day 3. Appearance of dry ground and plants. Gen 8:5-12; cf. Gen 1:9-13.

Day 4. Appearance of light. Gen 8:13-14; cf. Gen 1:14-19.

Day 5. Emergence of animals (birds mention first). Gen 8:15-17; cf. Gen 1:20-23.

Day 6. Animals together with men, blessing, food for men, “male and female”, image of God. Gen 8:18-9:7; cf. Gen 1:24-31.

Day 7. Universal sign of covenant. Gen 9:8-17; cf. Gen 2:1-3.

In the new creation or in the new world, especially with the blessing of God, it does not mean that there is no violence upon this earth.<sup>29</sup> Violence is still there, however God limited the violent actions of human beings by commanding Noah and his family not to eat flesh with blood as God said in Gen 9:4, “You must not eat flesh with life, that is to say blood, in it.” David Clines gave the reason why violence is still there. According to him, because “the sin of the generation of the flood has left a mark which has been not wiped out by the flood.”<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, in this part of the book of Genesis, for the first time God allowed the human beings to eat the flesh of animals. Before God permitted to human beings only to eat plants as their food as we can read in Gen 1:29, “Look, to you I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food.” God, once again, limited the human violence among the other human beings (Cf. Gen 9:5-6) by saying, “And I shall demand account of your life-blood, too. I shall demand it of every animal, and of man. Of man as regards his fellow-man, I shall demand account for human life.” The reason is clear, that is because man was created in the image of God (Gen 9:6).

In the end of the story of flood, God built a covenant with Noah as a sign of their new relationship. The covenant built between God and Noah has universal and everlasting character. It is said universal because, the covenant included not only human beings, but with all of the creature in the earth as well (Gen 9:10,12,15-16). The universality of the covenant is signed by the rainbow as well (Gen 9:12-17).<sup>31</sup> The rainbow sign, according to R. M. Davidson, is a sign of the everlasting covenant and “primarily

<sup>26</sup> Federico Giuntoli, *Genesis 1-11*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> David Clines, “Noah’s Flood I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative,” 140.

<sup>28</sup> See Richard M. Davidson, “The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42 no. 1, 2004, 69.

<sup>29</sup> The Old and New Testament provide many evidences on the existence of violent deeds after the story of flood in the history of Israel and in the era of Jesus.

<sup>30</sup> See David Clines, “Noah’s Flood I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative,” 138.

<sup>31</sup> See Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Biblical View of the Extent of the Flood”, in *Origins* 2 no. 2, 1975, 88.



not for humankind but for God to see and remember the covenant he has made with the earth (Gen 9:16).”<sup>32</sup>

*New Creation as a Key to Read the Violent Texts in the Bible*

The study of the story of flood in the book of Genesis 6-9 above gives us the idea to read and to interpret the Bible, especially on the violent texts, in the light of the new creation. Some scholars who have been mentioned above confirmed the argument that the story of flood is the event of God in recreating the creature by covering the earth with water and saved Noah, his family and every kind of creature in the ark. In the other hand, some scholars tried to see the merciful and gracious God in the story of flood. By doing so, they underline the aspect of grace from the part of God and ignored the effort of Noah by offering the sacrifice to God.

The deluge, that God used to destroy the earth and to recreate the new creation, does not stop violent actions and in the same time God always works in the story of salvation until today. In the other words, the violence both human and divine exists not only in the first book of the Scripture, that is Genesis, but in the other books as well even in the New Testament. To understand the violence of God in the Bible, the reader is invited to read the texts on violence by putting it in the frame of the new creation. Thus, the violence of God it is necessary to lead humankind to salvation and to the new creation.

The Christian Bible has the schema of inclusion where in the book of Genesis is found the story of creation (Gen 1-2) in which Adam and Eva, the first humankind lived in the garden of Eden in the harmony with the world, and in the book of Revelation (Chapter 22) will be found the allusion to Genesis 2, as we see bellow:

| Genesis 2:9-10  | Revelation 22:1-2   |
|---|---|
| <p><sup>9</sup> From the soil, Yahweh God caused to grow every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the <u>tree of life</u> in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> A <u>river</u> flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams.</p> | <p><sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me <u>the river</u> of life, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowing crystal-clear.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Down the middle of the city street, on either bank of the river were the <u>trees of life</u>, which bear twelve crops of fruit in a year, one in each month, and the leaves of which are the cure for the nations.</p> |

In the end of the book of Revelation (21:9-22:5) John of Patmos gave us the vision of the new Jerusalem where the biblical scholars interpreted it as the peak of the whole book of the Bible. <sup>33</sup> It is clear that John of Patmos wanted to conclude his book by alluding the book of Genesis 2. John of Patmos cited the term “river” and the concept of “tree of life” from Gen 2:9-10 without mentioning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, John of Patmos described the new Jerusalem as the new Eden

<sup>32</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate”, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Giancarlo Biguzzi, *Apocalisse*. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento, Milano, 2005, 367-368.

where all creature is invited to enter to the new Jerusalem as the new creation that has been sanctified (Cf. Revelation 21:24,26). Biguzzi said that, “the whole book of revelation told that the hand of God leads the story to the end (eschaton).”<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

The reading of the violent texts in the Bible, especially the violence done by God, is not easy. Such texts are often seen as scandalous for the reader of today and create the difficulty until now. This short study shows us some ways of reading the texts on the violence of God. Some biblical scholars tried to read such texts in the context of salvation and justice of God. Some read it as the way of God to educate the people to be faithful to the covenant between God and the people. The others see such texts as the projection of the writer of the Scripture who were influenced by their society and their own experiences. Furthermore, the study of the story of flood invites us to see or read the violent texts, especially the violence of God in the context of new creation that will be fulfilled in the book of Revelation.

Finally, there are some ways to read the difficult texts as they are proposed by some biblical scholars in this article. However, above all, the reader should consider that the biblical texts have three levels of meaning: literal, spiritual and the full meaning.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the main task of reader, in particularly exegesis, is to draw true messages of God from biblical texts, due to He is a writer as well, in order that the reader does not become fundamentalist.

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<sup>34</sup> Giancarlo Biguzzi, *Apocalisse*, 369.

<sup>35</sup> See Pietro Bovati-Pasquale Basta, “*Ci ha parlato per mezzo dei profeti*”. *Ermeneutica biblica*, Roma: GBP–Milano: San Paolo 2012, 324-325.

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