

# Religious Foundations for the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts: Scriptural Perspectives from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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## Abstract

*Debates over the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict are often framed within political or legal discourse, yet their foundations lie deeply in religious and humanitarian ethics. This study contends that the obligation to safeguard non-combatants predates international law and is rooted in the moral teachings of the Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rather than questioning the legitimacy of war itself, the paper focuses on affirming the right to life and dignity for those uninvolved in combat, deriving this principle from sacred scriptures that uphold the sanctity of human existence and peace. Through an analytical-inductive method, relevant texts from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an, together with rabbinical writings, patristic sources, and prophetic traditions, are examined to extract ethical norms governing warfare. A comparative reading highlights shared religious values that converge on the protection of civilians and the rejection of unjust violence. Employing a contextual reflective lens, the study connects these principles to present-day realities of war, seeking to awaken the global moral conscience toward the preservation of human life. The findings reveal that the Abrahamic faiths collectively provide a theological foundation for a universal humanitarian ethic that transcends religious and cultural divides.*

**Keywords:** *Abrahamic Religions; Armed Conflict; Civilian Protection; Human Dignity; Humanitarian Ethics; Religious Ethics; Right to Life*



## INTRODUCTION

The protection of civilians in armed conflict remains one of the most urgent moral and humanitarian concerns of the contemporary world. Although it is often discussed through political, diplomatic, and legal frameworks, its ethical roots precede international humanitarian law. Religious traditions have long shaped human understandings of restraint, mercy, justice, and the sanctity of life in conditions of violence. This is especially evident in the Abrahamic religions, whose scriptures and interpretive traditions repeatedly affirm that human life possesses sacred value and must not be violated without just cause. Yet, in recent conflicts, sacred texts have sometimes been invoked to legitimize destruction and civilian suffering, often through utilitarian arguments that distort authentic religious teachings ([Wise et al., 2021](#); [Reid, 2022](#); [Nakissa, 2023](#); [Ahmad et al., 2023](#)).

The urgency of revisiting these religious foundations is heightened by the scale of civilian harm in modern warfare. The data presented in this study indicate that estimated civilian deaths increased from 34,500 in 2023 to 48,384 in 2024, before reaching a provisional estimate of 55,000 in 2025. Civilians represented approximately 58% of total deaths in 2023, 60% in 2024, and 61% in 2025. The 2024 figures further show a reported 40% global rise in civilian deaths, with women accounting for 40% and children for 30% of civilian victims. These figures do not merely illustrate statistical escalation; they expose a profound crisis in the moral imagination of war, where those least responsible for violence increasingly bear its heaviest consequences in devastatingly concrete ways.

The central research problem addressed in this study concerns the ethical and theological basis for protecting those who do not directly participate in hostilities. The study does not seek to determine the legitimacy or illegitimacy of war as such, nor does it attempt to

resolve the broader doctrinal debates surrounding just or unjust warfare. Rather, it focuses on the right to life and dignity of civilians and other non-combatants within the scriptural frameworks of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This focus is necessary because the category of “civilian,” while modern in legal terminology, corresponds to older religious concerns for the innocent, the vulnerable, the oppressed, prisoners, strangers, women, children, the elderly, and others exposed to violence without bearing combat responsibility in the conflict itself as victims.

Accordingly, the study is guided by three interrelated research questions. First, what scriptural principles govern the protection of civilians during armed conflicts? Second, how do the Abrahamic religious traditions comparatively articulate these principles, and where do they converge or diverge in protecting civilians and other persons not involved in war or fighting? Third, to what extent can the shared emphasis of Abrahamic sacred texts on protecting civilians and vulnerable groups during war contribute to reinforcing international humanitarian law and supporting its efforts to ensure their protection? These questions arise from the need to examine not only isolated scriptural passages, but also the broader moral logic by which religious traditions define the limits of violence and the obligations owed to non-combatants across historical and contemporary settings.

Existing scholarship has made substantial contributions to the study of civilian protection, particularly through legal, political, philosophical, and humanitarian approaches ([Sutton, 2020](#)). Works on non-combatant immunity, human rights during armed conflict, just war theory, and Islamic humanitarian law clarify the moral and legal distinction between combatants and civilians and explain the institutional development of international humanitarian norms ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#); [Al-Dawoody, 2017](#); [Chiroma et al., 2013](#); [Salaymeh, 2021](#)). However, much of this literature remains centered

on contemporary law, policy, or military ethics. Less attention has been given to a sustained comparative analysis of how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ground civilian protection in sacred texts and theological reasoning. This gap is significant because modern legal norms cannot be fully understood apart from the deeper moral traditions that helped shape ideas of restraint, dignity, and protection during actual war.

This study therefore aims to explore the scriptural and theological foundations for civilian protection in the Abrahamic religions, identify points of convergence and divergence among them, and demonstrate their relevance for contemporary humanitarian discourse. Its novelty lies in developing a comparative religious framework that connects sacred texts, interpretive traditions, and current concerns over civilian casualties. The study argues that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a foundational commitment to the sanctity of human life, the prohibition of unjust killing, and the protection of those outside active combat. Its scope is limited to textual and ethical analysis rather than legal adjudication or political evaluation, but it seeks to show that civilian protection is not only a legal norm; it is also a deeply rooted religious and moral obligation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A range of significant works has examined the rights of civilians primarily from political, legal, and ethical perspectives. The most relevant among them can be summarized in the following passages. [McKeogh \(2002\)](#) offers an in-depth analysis of the principle of non-combatant immunity (PNCI) in war. Tracing the history, the law, and the ethics development of the principle, analyzing the philosophical basis of the principle, and determining the major moral difficulties it is confronted with, the book pays close attention to the moral differentiation between the legitimacy of attacking combatants and

the criminality of attacking civilians. The study proposes a critical account of how moral theory becomes entangled in the practice of contemporary warfare (Abumere, 2020; Andrä, 2022).

Mohd Ali et al. (2011) highlight the protection of civilians as the core aspect of the international humanitarian law. The study explains the meaning of the term “civilian” and the qualifications setting civilians apart from combatants in the Geneva Conventions. The research also addresses civilians’ rights to non-intentional targeting and to respect for inhumane treatment in armed conflict. Notably, it blends the international and Islamic legal approaches with each other, presenting an explanatory comparative model that advances the discussion of civilian protection (Sutton, 2020; Shakar et al., 2025; Moffett et al., 2025).

A number of studies have addressed human rights during wartime from legal and international perspectives. Clapham (2019) examines the growing tension between international human rights law and the practical demands of warfare and counterterrorism. He clarifies the limits of these rights during armed conflicts and discusses the circumstances under which they may be re-restricted or suspended for military or security reasons. The study also highlights the occasional overlap and potential conflict between international humanitarian law and human rights law. While Clapham’s (2019) work provides an important legal framework for understanding civilian protection, it primarily focuses on juridical and policy-related aspects, leaving room for the present study to explore the religious and ethical dimensions of the issue in light of the teachings of the Abrahamic faiths (Haar et al., 2021; Saul, 2021; Andrä, 2022; Mykolaiets et al., 2025).

In addition, other scholarship has examined the historical development of the laws of war beyond their contemporary legal formulations, focusing on the ethical and moral frameworks that

preceded formal legal codification. This literature traces how restraints on warfare were articulated within religious and philosophical traditions and later reformulated as legal norms. In this context, [Johnson \(1981\)](#) highlights the moral foundations of the just war tradition as a framework for regulating conduct in war prior to modern international law. These ethical constraints were subsequently reformulated in early modern legal thought, most notably [Grotius \(2005\)](#) who articulated them through the language of natural law. More recent scholars, such as [Kennedy \(2006\)](#) examines the transformation of warfare into a legally regulated practice shaped by institutional and bureaucratic frameworks, while [Kinsella \(2011\)](#) offers a critical historical account of the development of key legal categories, particularly the distinction between combatants and civilians ([Watkins, 2020](#); [Saunders, 2023](#); [Alexander, 2023](#)).

Consequently, what distinguishes the present study from previous works is its emphasis on the religious grounding of the right to protect civilians during wartime. Unlike earlier research that primarily focuses on legal or policy frameworks, this study explores these principles through the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - as well as through the earliest theological and moral foundations of their traditions. The ultimate aim is to formulate a unified religious perspective that upholds the sanctity of life and offers guidance for protecting civilians in times of armed conflict.

### **A Historical Genealogy of the Laws of War: Ethical and Religious Foundations of International Humanitarian Law:**

The following overview outlines key stages in the historical evolution of contemporary laws of war, as identified in the existing scholarly literature. Contemporary international humanitarian law is best understood not as a purely modern legal invention, but as the outcome of a prolonged historical evolution in which moral, religious,

and philosophical reflections on warfare were gradually transformed into juridical norms. Long before the emergence of formal legal codification, religious traditions served as primary frameworks for ethical reasoning about armed conflict, articulating restraints on violence, emphasizing moral responsibility in combat, and expressing concern for those who did not directly participate in hostilities, particularly the vulnerable and the weak. As scholarship on the just war tradition demonstrates, these early ethical reflections did not constitute a unified legal system, but rather functioned as moral resources aimed at limiting the destructiveness of war and imposing normative constraints on the conduct of violence (Bartles-Smith, 2022; Baets, 2022; Johnson, 1981).

Over time, these moral intuitions were systematized within the Christian just war tradition and subsequently reshaped in the early modern period through the work of legal thinkers who sought to ground restraints on warfare in principles capable of transcending confessional and political boundaries. A pivotal moment in this transformation is found in Grotius's (2005) *The Law of War and Peace*, which articulated limits on warfare through the framework of natural law and explicitly argued that such norms retain validity independently of particular theological commitments (Boda, 2024, 2025). By grounding the regulation of war in the rational and social nature of humanity, Grotius (2005) contributed to the universalization of inherited moral constraints and their expression in a legal idiom applicable across political communities.

The consolidation of the modern state and the professionalization of standing armies provided the institutional context in which moral restraints on warfare were increasingly formalized into legal categories. As Kennedy (2006) observes, "the legalization of modern warfare has a history," emphasizing that transformations in the conduct of war cannot be explained solely by

changes in military technology or political organization, but must also be understood as the product of evolving ideas about law itself. In this sense, the historical development of international law reflects a transformation in which warfare has increasingly been shaped by dense networks of legal rules, professional expertise, and institutional regulation. Modern warfare, as [Kennedy \(2006\)](#) explains, is increasingly conducted within dense networks of legal rules and institutional regulation, rather than being governed solely by external moral judgment. Warfare has become “rule and regulation,” and both military operations and humanitarian action now unfold within the shadow of extensive legal and bureaucratic frameworks ([Khorram-Manesh et al., 2021](#); [Robinson et al., 2022](#)).

Recognizing this genealogy is therefore essential for situating modern civilian protection norms within their deeper ethical antecedents, while also acknowledging the conceptual transformations that distinguish modern legal categories from their religious and moral predecessors.

### **Definition of Civilians**

The importance of defining *civilians* at the outset of this study goes beyond serving as a conventional introductory or conceptual clarification. Rather, it carries a deeply humanitarian significance, given the urgent need to delineate this category precisely in light of the immense suffering endured by countless innocent people during wars worldwide. Much of this suffering results from either the restrictive interpretation or the exclusionary application of the term, which leaves many vulnerable individuals outside its protective scope ([Tosi & Marty, 2024](#); [Ozcelik, 2025](#)). It is therefore imperative to establish a coherent and universally agreed-upon conceptual framework for identifying the group that must, under all circumstances, be shielded from the ravages of armed conflict.

The term civilian occupies a pivotal position in both linguistic and legal discourse. Linguistically, it is broadly defined as a non-combatant, referring to a person not on active duty in the armed services or not on a police or firefighting force (Viswanath, 2021; Reade, 2023; Merriam-Webster, 2025). This functional understanding aligns with and complements the legal framework established under international humanitarian law. Article 4 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War defines civilians as individuals who do not take part in hostilities and who, during their presence in a given territory, are not engaged in any activity of a military nature. Similarly, the 1956 New Delhi Draft Rules reaffirm that the civilian population comprises “all persons who do not fall within the following categories: (a) members of the armed forces or of organized groups supporting them, and (b) persons who, although not belonging to such forces, nevertheless take a direct part in the fighting” (International Humanitarian Law Databases, 2025).

Thus, both the linguistic and legal definitions converge on a fundamental humanitarian principle: civilians, by virtue of their non-participation in hostilities, are entitled to protection from the devastating consequences of armed conflict. This principle lies at the very heart of international humanitarian law and is deeply rooted in all Abrahamic religions, as will be demonstrated in the subsequent sections.

### **Conceptual Convergence Between the Civilian in International Law and the Abrahamic Religions**

The term “civilian” does not appear as a technical or legal category within the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Rather, it emerged as a distinct legal concept within the framework of modern international humanitarian law, shaped by the historical conditions of the modern state and the professionalization of warfare. The absence of this specific terminology in the Abrahamic scriptures,

however, does not indicate the absence of ethical concern for those who do not participate directly in war or fighting ([Kinsella & Mantilla, 2020](#); [Salaymeh, 2021](#)).

Across the three traditions, scriptural sources articulate moral restraints on violence toward persons who stand outside active fighting, albeit through diverse ethical, social, and religious classifications. Jewish scriptural texts emphasize the protection of the vulnerable and the prohibition of injustice toward innocents, as illustrated, for example, by passages that explicitly forbid the killing of the innocent and regulate conduct even in contexts of war and captivity ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Exodus 23:6-7; Deuteronomy 21:10-13; Genesis 9:6). Christian ethical teachings emphasize the sanctity of human life and the moral imperative of restraint and compassion, even in contexts marked by violence and conflict ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 26:52; Matthew 5:44; Luke 10:33-34; Luke 4:18; Luke 6:29; 1 John 4:19-21), as illustrated, for example, by scriptural passages that prohibit unjust killing, discourage violent retaliation, and call for mercy toward others ([Reimer, 2010](#); [Nandram et al., 2022](#)). Islamic sources articulate clear ethical limits on warfare and emphasize the protection of human life, particularly with regard to those who do not participate directly in fighting, as illustrated, for example, by Qur'anic passages that restrict fighting to active combatants, prohibit the killing of innocents, and affirm the sanctity of human life ([The Qur'an, 2008](#), 2:190; 6:151; 47:4; 76:8; 5:32). The specific categories and groups referenced within each tradition - such as women, children, the oppressed, prisoners, and others - are examined in greater detail in the respective sections devoted to each faith later in this study ([Ahmad et al., 2023](#)).

Accordingly, the comparative framework adopted in this study is based on conceptual convergence rather than strict categorical identity. While the Abrahamic religions do not employ the modern

legal term “civilian” they articulate ethical commitments to the protection of those outside active fighting - such as the innocent and the vulnerable - that correspond in substance to those protected under contemporary international humanitarian law. Rather than suggesting that religious traditions anticipate international humanitarian law, this convergence highlights shared ethical commitments to restraint, mercy, and the prohibition of injustice toward innocents, commitments that later find legal expression in modern humanitarian norms ([Salaymeh, 2021](#)).

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a theoretical and analytical approach to investigate the ethical foundations for protecting civilians during armed conflicts. The methodology emphasizes careful examination, interpretation, and contextual understanding of both sacred texts and contemporary scholarly sources ([Naeem et al., 2023](#); [Lim, 2024](#)). The approach is structured into three complementary strategies:

### **Analytical-Inductive Method**

The research began by collecting primary sacred texts, including the Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur’an, alongside secondary sources such as rabbinical commentaries, writings of the Church Fathers, and prophetic traditions. Particular care was taken to rely on modern scholarly sources, consulting the works and viewpoints of experts and authorities for each of the three religions individually. This ensured that contemporary interpretations were accurately represented and integrated into the analysis. At the same time, the study maintained a strong foundation in the original sacred texts and heritage sources, turning to them whenever a deeper or more precise understanding of the ethical principles was required. Each source was read attentively and critically, considering its historical, doctrinal, and

cultural context, to extract the ethical norms regarding the protection of non-combatants ([Naeem et al., 2023](#)).

### **Comparative Approach**

The study then conducted a comparative examination across the three Abrahamic religions to identify shared ethical principles and points of convergence regarding civilian protection. By analyzing both the sacred texts and contemporary scholarly opinions, the research demonstrates the universal values that underline the sanctity of human life and the prohibition of unjust violence. This comparative method highlights how each tradition, while distinct, converges on moral responsibilities toward non-combatants, providing a cohesive ethical framework informed by both heritage and modern scholarship ([Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020](#)).

### **Contextual-Reflective Method**

The study applies a contextual-reflective perspective, connecting the ethical teachings derived from sacred texts and heritage sources to present-day instances of armed conflict. This approach emphasizes the relevance of these principles in guiding contemporary moral conduct, offering insights that can help mitigate civilian suffering and promote peace, social responsibility, and the protection of human life. By bridging historical teachings with current realities, the study demonstrates that the moral obligations articulated in religious traditions retain practical significance today ([Gülpınar, 2024](#)).

### **Selection Criteria for Scriptural Texts**

In adopting this methodological approach, the study acknowledges that while the term “civilian” does not appear in its literal or explicit form in the Scriptural texts of the Abrahamic religions, its ethical substance is reflected in teachings that address the protection of those who do not participate directly in war or fighting.

Accordingly, scriptural passages were identified through a conceptual framework focusing on texts related to war or violence, the treatment of non-combatants, and ethical principles concerning the protection of vulnerable groups - such as women, children, the elderly, prisoners, and the weak - as well as broader values of mercy, justice, and the sanctity of human life. These criteria were applied consistently across the three traditions to support a coherent comparative analysis (Bogna et al., 2020).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Right to Protect Civilians in Judaism**

The texts and teachings of the Old Testament fundamentally embody the highest values of mercy, justice, the preservation of human dignity, and the right to life. This significance becomes particularly evident in the contemporary context: "In this situation of increasing terrorism and fatal use of the Bible, academics around the world discuss the relationship between religion and violent actions. Among Bible scholars too, especially in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament field, there has been - and still is - a heated debate on this issue" (Kasstan, 2021; Weyde, 2017). Consequently, in an era marked by the suffering of countless innocent people, a return to the sacred scriptures and their binding moral imperatives provides a crucial framework for addressing these challenges.

Moreover, although the responsibility for protecting civilians today primarily rests with states, revisiting the teachings of the Bible remains essential for reinforcing the ethical and humanitarian foundations that govern human relations - particularly those of the Jew with others. This is reflected in the principle that "from a biblical perspective [it] has to be approached through relationship - relationship between God and people, people toward people, and people toward the environment" (Prove et al., 2022). Accordingly,

Jewish law draws its foundational principles from religion while maintaining full consistency with humanitarian values. Ultimately, this vision elevates the law from a mere set of rigid rules to a moral and humanitarian imperative, one that anchors every action in justice, compassion, and mutual care (Goltz et al., 2020; Bamberger & Mayse, 2022; Bazzani, 2026).

By referring to the texts of the Old Testament, the following core values can be readily identified as foundational to the right of protecting civilians in times of war:

### ***Prohibition of Killing and Oppressing Innocents***

In a direct divine address, the Lord warns against killing the innocent in numerous passages of the Old Testament. For example: “Keep away from falsehood, and do not kill the innocent and the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty” (King James Bible, 2017, Exodus 23:7). Here, God, as the embodiment of justice, forbids the killing of any innocent person who has not participated in aggression or war. This text demonstrates that any attempt to justify violence against the innocent is unacceptable under Jewish law.

Accordingly, the Old Testament consistently identifies the innocent as a category deserving protection and relief from oppression. As stated in King James Bible (2017, Jeremiah 3:22): “Practice justice and righteousness, rescue the one robbed from the hand of the oppressor, do not mistreat the stranger, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place”. Emphasizing the prohibition against harming and oppressing the innocent, the Old Testament warns that those who commit such acts will face just punishment in this world, as well as divine wrath and estrangement from God. For instance, it is stated in King James Bible (2017, Deuteronomy 19:10): “So that you do not shed innocent blood in your land, which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and so that it be upon you.” Moreover, Jewish law clarifies that God does not

forgive the shedding of innocent blood: “And because of the innocent blood that he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord did not desire to forgive” (King James Bible, 2017, 2 Kings 24:4). Collectively, these texts offer a precise and authoritative insight into Judaism’s position on the protection of innocents, particularly during armed conflict, demonstrating a clear alignment with fundamental humanitarian principles.

### ***Compassionate Treatment and Dignity of Prisoners of War***

The teachings of the Old Testament extend beyond the protection of civilians during conflicts to include clear frameworks and regulations regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, prohibiting their mistreatment or humiliation. Prisoners are recognized as human beings with inherent dignity before God, who does not condone injustice. For instance, the text commands (King James Bible, 2017, 2 Kings 6:22–23): “Prepare food and water for them to eat and drink, then return them to their master. and set before them a great feast; after they have eaten and drunk, send them away.” Similarly, the prophets’ instructions toward prisoners emphasize care and respect (King James Bible, 2017, 2 Chronicles): “the named men took the prisoners, clothed all the naked among them from the spoils, fed and watered them, tended to them, carried the weak on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren.”

Such texts, which clarify the Jewish legal tradition’s approach to prisoners of war, reflect the principles in Judaism that parallel what is referred to in international law as the limits of legitimate warfare. A close reading of the ethical principles articulated in the Hebrew Bible excludes the possibility of legitimizing acts of aggression or injustice within the framework of warfare. Indeed, unjust wars could not have produced laws that mandate such a high standard of humane treatment toward prisoners, nor could threats of divine retribution for mistreating the oppressed and the innocent have originated from an

unjust deity. This underscores a fundamental point that should be recognized by all who profess belief in God and affirm the teachings of the Scriptures (Tamer et al., 2021; Wheatley, 2021).

### ***Jewish Teachings on Protecting Civilians and Upholding Human Dignity***

Human dignity has always been recognized and safeguarded since the time of the Old Testament. Life was protected without distinction of gender or social status. For instance, the Book of Exodus 20:13; 21:12–14 provides laws protecting all persons from murder (King James Bible, 2017). In the Book of Exodus 21:15, the Israelites were given a law protecting parents from mistreatment by their children (King James Bible, 2017). Similarly, Exodus 21:20–21 set forth legal provisions protecting slaves from abuse by their masters, and the protection even extended to the unborn child in Exodus 21:22 (King James Bible, 2017). The common objective of all these laws was the preservation of human security and dignity (Mohlaphuli, 2004).

The commitment to fundamental humanitarian principles and the preservation of human dignity is profoundly emphasized in Jewish law, which prohibits all forms of injustice and calls for the protection of the weak and marginalized. As the Lord declares in Jeremiah 22:3: “Thus says the Lord: “Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow” (King James Bible, 2017), and in Exodus 22:21–22: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan” (King James Bible, 2017). These divine instructions not only affirm the moral imperative to protect the vulnerable but also lay a clear ethical foundation for safeguarding the rights of civilians, especially during times of armed conflict and the ensuing consequences. In this light, Jewish teachings guide human action with

compassion, justice, and a deep sense of responsibility toward those who are most at risk, ensuring that the innocent are never unjustly harmed (Rashi, 2022; Yair et al., 2024).

As biblical scholarship explains: “The alien, the fatherless, and the widow are synonyms in biblical traditions for those who are the most vulnerable within the Israelite society. With the stranger, human beings who are not members of the people of Israel are also granted protection” (Prove et al., 2022). This highlights the necessity of ensuring the safety and security of those who lose their homes due to unjust aggressions in which they bear no responsibility. Indeed, Jewish writings consistently teach that the innocent must never be punished for the crimes of the guilty (Miles, 2024).

What most profoundly underpins the principle of safeguarding human dignity in Judaism is the biblical conviction that there exists something inherently sacred in every human being - immutable in body and soul - namely, that each person is created in the image of God. As expressed in the Hebrew Bible: “The ontological fact of our collective creation in God’s image enjoins us to moral behavior - commands us to work actively to honor the lives and dignity of other human beings. This idea originates in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, in the idea that the human being is created *btselem Elohim*, in the Image of God” (Weintraub, 2007).

From this sacred truth, deeply rooted in Jewish thought, the preservation of human dignity and humanity arises as a matter of one’s relationship with God: by honoring the divine image embodied in human beings, one fulfills a fundamental ethical and spiritual obligation. Moreover, any act that infringes upon or insults human dignity is considered, within Jewish law, an affront to this sacred reality. As the Rabbis affirm: “The Rabbis designate human dignity as the litmus test for their sacred law, a seeming recognition that were

the law to participate in dishonoring the human person, it would betray its own *raison d'être*" (Weintraub, 2007).

These enduring principles and theological foundations in Judaism, supported by rabbinical writings, deserve careful attention and emphasis. Highlighting them helps counter abuses perpetrated in the name of religion, which often misrepresent Jewish teachings, and reinforces that the ethical directives of Judaism emanate from a just God and authentic religious authority (Yair et al., 2024).

### *The Jewish Imperative for Peace*

Many people tend to conflate the actions of human beings - often marked by aggression and oppression - with the divine foundations of Judaism, which, in fact, affirms peace and commands the pursuit of it. Numerous scholarly works have explored the centrality of peace in Jewish thought. For the purpose of this study, it suffices to highlight a few explicit biblical texts. One of the most direct divine commands is: "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (King James Bible, 2017, Psalm 34:14).

Although Jewish history contains accounts of many wars, a careful return to the primary sources reveals the ethical imperatives enshrined in the Hebrew Bible, along with fair-minded rabbinic interpretations. Regardless of the biblical distinction between defensive and aggressive wars - and the strict prohibition against acts of aggression - one cannot overlook the vision expressed in the words: "He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (King James Bible, 2017, Isaiah 2:4). This indicates that the Hebrew writings themselves bear witness to a profound longing for peace, and that their authors were no less eager than we are today to envision an end to violence and war. Such a vision is powerfully expressed in the beautiful prophecy articulated

by the prophets Isaiah and Micah in the eighth century BCE, which imagines a day when all wars shall cease – an enduring testimony to this deep yearning for peace (Niditch, 1993). This passage proclaims a universal call to peace, where the very instruments of war are transformed into tools of cultivation and reconstruction. As has been noted: “Thus the Bible clearly sets out the obligation to seek peace as a prelude to any offensive military activity; absent the seeking of peace, the use of force in a war violates Jewish law” (Schiffman & Wolowelsky, 2007).

Even in the context of war, Jewish law presupposes peace as the foundation before engaging in conflict, as indicated in the verse: ““When you go out to war against your enemies” (King James Bible, 2017, Deuteronomy 21:10). This formulation at the beginning of the section was “determines that we may make war only against our enemies (King James Bible, 2017, Deuteronomy 20:1). The term ‘enemy’ refers only to one who wrongs us; hence Scripture is speaking only of an invader who enters our domain in order to take our land and despoil us. Then we are to wage war against him – offering peace first” (Walzer, 1996).

All of these texts, together with other equitable Jewish writings, articulate a coherent vision that affirms peace and security while prohibiting injustice and aggression - particularly against the weak and the oppressed. Taken together, they demonstrate that the protection and dignity of civilians, both during times of war and in their aftermath, are firmly embedded within the framework of the Old Testament (Tamer, 2020).

### **Christian Perspectives on the Right to Protect Civilians**

Although the New Testament does not contain organized teachings on warfare as in the Old Testament, many of Christ’s instructions emphasize peace and mercy for all humans. For example, he declares, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”

([King James Bible, 2017](#), Matthew 5:7). This entails the protection of individuals and the prevention of injustice. Christianity, from its inception, has been understood as a religion of love and peace. Numerous passages in the Scriptures, along with church teachings, attest to the foundational principle of peace, tolerance, and the rejection of injustice and aggression against any person. Even those who commit wrongs are instructed not to be treated with retaliation: “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Matthew 5:39); “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and if anyone takes your cloak, do not withhold your tunic from them” ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Luke 6:29).

Building upon these principles, [Glanville \(2012\)](#), in his article *Christianity and the Responsibility to Protect*, argues that the concept of the “responsibility to protect civilians” has deep Christian roots. He notes that the modern notion - that states bear a duty to protect civilians even beyond their borders - reflects biblical traditions and was further developed through the teachings of the early Church Fathers, Catholic scholars, and Protestant natural law theorists, all of whom emphasized that the protection of strangers and foreigners constitutes a sacred duty in Christianity.

For those who read the New Testament and later church writings, it becomes clear that civilians hold a significant right to protection during and after conflicts, particularly since they bear no responsibility for the calamities of war. They are among the groups given special attention in the Scriptures, including children, the elderly, widows, orphans, and the vulnerable, as stated: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” ([King James Bible, 2017](#), James 1:27).

from such representative sources, as well as subsequent ecclesiastical writings, one can extract overarching principles within Christianity that affirm the protection of civilians during armed conflicts and their aftermath, thereby reinforcing the ethical imperative of safeguarding human life and dignity, as follows:

***Civilians within the Principle of Justice and Compassion in Christianity***

There is no doubt that the principles of justice and love constitute essential foundations of Christianity. Christ emphasizes a universal love that extends even to one's enemies: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Matthew 5:44–45). If Christian love extends even to enemies, then, a fortiori, innocent civilians - who bear no responsibility for the outbreak of war - are unquestionably encompassed within this command.

This point is further supported by Christ's broader teaching on love, which [Mohlaphuli \(2004\)](#) interprets as a universal moral command that transcends historical, cultural, and religious boundaries. The biblical injunction to love others as oneself ([King James Bible, 2017](#), Matthew 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:27) anticipates the ethical aim of contemporary human rights discourse by affirming that every person deserves to be loved, respected, and protected despite differences in identity, belief, or social background.

Likewise, the principle of justice entails the immunity of non-combatants. Every human being possesses, by default, a right not to be killed - and an even stronger right not to be deliberately killed. Non-combatants typically do nothing to forfeit this right. Even those who distinguish between just and unjust wars regard the targeting of civilians as incompatible with the ethics of justice. Among the defenders of the traditional orthodox view, Michael Walzer is particularly influential. In his book *Just and Unjust Wars*, [Walzer \(2015\)](#)

argues that targeting civilians is morally impermissible because they are materially innocent, that is, they are non-threatening (Abumere, 2020; Bazargan, 2015).

McKeogh (2002) also discusses common answers to the question of why civilians should not be killed. He explains that justifications for the principle of non-combatant immunity based on civilians' innocence, vulnerability, or non-combatant status are ultimately grounded in justice. From this perspective, civilians must not be targeted in war because doing so would violate the moral treatment that justice requires for those who are not responsible for, or directly involved in, hostilities. Although targeting civilians is considered a sin punishable by God, it also violates the principle of love advocated by Christ. Moreover, the perpetrator is subject to condemnation both before God and in the eyes of society, as expressed in Christ's words: "Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you" (King James Bible, 2017, Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37, 41-42).

Therefore, from a Christian perspective, the advocacy of human rights cannot be confined to mere academic or legal reflection; it must inherently embody the principles of compassion and mercy toward those most in need of protection (Prove et al., 2022). It is evident from these teachings and others that the protection of civilians constitutes a sacred duty in Christianity, derived from the integration of the principles of mercy and justice. Failure to uphold this duty constitutes a breach of the divine laws governing the moral order of the universe (Clarke, 2022).

### ***The Doctrine of Salvation and Its Implications for Civilian Protection:***

The New Testament emphasizes that Christ came to deliver humankind from sin and from oppression. Among his missions was the assistance of the poor and the marginalized, alleviating injustice, and reviving compassion in the hearts of people as an extension of

God's love for His creation: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (King James Bible, 2017, Luke 4:18-19). In the same vein, Christ's message was profoundly directed to those who were weary and oppressed: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (King James Bible, 2017, Matthew 11:28-30).

The ethical principles of the Bible, particularly concerning human dignity, place a distinct emphasis on the vulnerable and the oppressed within society. When such individuals are deliberately deprived of the right to life, this act contradicts the divine wisdom manifested in Christ's salvific mission. As Carolan (1928) observes: "For it is the extreme of savagery to seek for or rejoice in grounds for killing and destroying men for whom Christ died. But only under compulsion and reluctance should he come to the necessity of war."

Christ also laid down an ethic that requires the protection of all those who suffer injustice, as well as restitution for those deprived of their rights, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Consequently, anyone who affirms Christ's message of salvation from sin and oppression is morally obliged to support the protection of the vulnerable, including civilians and prisoners of war. Offering help to these individuals signifies the preservation of human life, which Christ came to redeem. As Bazargan (2015) notes: "the resource-based war-profiteer has a life-saving restitution duty not towards just anyone, or even just towards the victims of the war, but rather towards the specific civilians whose land or resources were wrested from them and who as a result are in need of life-saving assistance."

This theological trajectory is consistent with the way Christ identified himself with the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed, affirming that true love for him is manifested in love for those with whom he identified. This is clearly evident in the New Testament, particularly in 1 John 4:19–21 and Matthew 25:35–36, which offer a profound vision of Christ’s identity in relation to the marginalized. In 1 John, divine love is inseparably tied to love of neighbor: “We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (King James Bible, 2017, John 4:19–21). In Matthew’s Gospel, Christ situates his presence among the poor and needy: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (King James Bible, 2017, Matthew 25:35–36). As Mohlaphuli (2004) notes, this connection underscores that “the true measure of Christian love is found in acts of service and solidarity with the oppressed.”

Therefore, the essence of Christian faithfulness lies in the embodiment of one’s belonging to Christ through the protection of the weak and the defense of their dignity against injustice and aggression. This principle, without doubt, constitutes one of the foundational criteria of the Christian doctrine of salvation. In this sense, the doctrine of salvation in Christianity is not merely the redemption of the soul, but also a concrete commitment in lived reality to vindicating the oppressed and defending civilians (O’Neil, 2024).

### ***The Protection of Civilians as a Sacred Duty in Christianity***

In his article *Christianity and the Responsibility to Protect*, Luke Glanville argues that the concept of the “responsibility to protect

civilians” has deep Christian roots. In particular, he suggests that the seemingly modern idea – that states within the international community hold not merely a discretionary right but a responsibility to protect civilians beyond their territorial borders—can be understood as echoing claims found in the Bible. This principle was further developed by the early Church Fathers, Catholic scholars, and Protestant natural law theorists, emphasizing that protecting strangers and foreigners constitutes a sacred duty within Christianity (Glanville, 2012; Bleibleh & Awad, 2020; Bardalai, 2025).

This is not merely theoretical speculation; it derives directly from the teachings of Christ, which insist on preserving human dignity regardless of circumstance. Serving and protecting the vulnerable is, in essence, service to God Himself. As Scripture states (King James Bible, 2017, Matthew 25:41–45):

“Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’”

What becomes evident is that the protection of civilians - who are victims of wars in which they bear no responsibility - is not a matter of benevolence or charitable concession, but rather a binding duty incumbent upon every Christian who values the teachings of Christ and His moral order.

Even scholars and theologians who differentiate between just and unjust wars agree that civilians have an inherent right to life and protection. A just war, according to those who recognize this category, must be waged fairly, with the aim of achieving peace, employing the minimum necessary force, and avoiding unnecessary harm to civilians

or non-combatants. Moreover, civilians - including children, women, the elderly, and the general non-combatant population - must be granted full immunity, and any harm inflicted upon them constitutes a punishable offense. (Boloca, 2024; Birher et al., 2026)

Those who engage in warfare claiming it is just—or even divinely sanctioned—must remember that a central principle of just war is the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. Christ’s repeated command in Scripture, “Thou shalt not kill”, establishes strict limits in the treatment of innocents during armed conflict and strongly emphasizes the protection of their rights. Church authorities have historically reinforced this ethic, including Saint Augustine in *The City of God*, Saint Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, and others. Contemporary church teaching continues to affirm the necessity of observing Christ’s commandments in preserving the dignity and rights of innocents. For example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993) stipulates: “Non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely. Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes.”

Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council emphasizes the necessity of safeguarding human life and dignity, affirming that acts contrary to life—such as unlawful killing, genocide, or destruction—and any violation of the integrity of the human person are profoundly shameful, corrupt human civilization, harm both perpetrators and victims, and ultimately constitute the greatest offense against the Creator (Pope Paul VI, 1965). Therefore, the protection of civilians in Christianity is not merely a moral or humanitarian requirement; it is a divine mandate and a religious obligation that cannot be ignored or denied.

## **The Right to Protect Civilians in Islam**

Grounded in the universal humanitarian principle that every human being possesses the inherent right to life and dignity, Islam structures the rules of warfare in a manner that respects human dignity, emphasizing that all people are God's vicegerents (khalifah) on earth, entrusted with the responsibility to preserve, cultivate, and develop it. The Qur'an states: "He (Allāh) has produced you from the earth and settled you in it" (*The Qur'an*, 2008, 11:61). Islam is among the religions that have most comprehensively articulated the ethics of warfare and the rules governing the treatment of non-combatants and the, both during conflict and in its aftermath.

The Islamic law of war forms an integral part of Islamic jurisprudence (Shariah). Its primary sources are the Qur'an - the revealed Book of God - and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), encompassing his sayings, actions, and tacit approvals. Most of the rulings pertaining to warfare are derived from the Sunnah, particularly during the years following the Prophet's migration to Madinah, where he participated in more than twenty military expeditions. The Sunnah, as a comprehensive record of his guidance, constitutes a primary reference shaping the principles that govern the conduct of war in Islam ([Mohd Ali et al., 2011](#)).

Historically, it is evident that the Islamic foundations for regulating warfare and the ethics of dealing with civilians closely align, in many of their principles, with international laws protecting human rights. A notable example is the directive of Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (RA) to Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan and his companions when he dispatched them to Syria, which can be regarded as a general law encompassing the ethics of Islamic warfare: "Do not kill a woman, a child, an elderly man, a sick person, or a monk in his monastery; do not burn or drown palm trees, nor cut down fruit-bearing trees; do not slaughter sheep, cattle, or camels except for sustenance. You will

encounter people who have devoted themselves in monasteries - leave them to their devotion.” (Al-Ṭabarī, 1968, p. 246).

In recent years, numerous studies have documented the interconnected relationship between international human rights law - particularly the United Nations Charter, which stipulates the protection of civilians during armed conflicts - and the early Islamic principles derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah. This connection becomes particularly apparent when considering the main general rules in Islam that mandate the protection of civilians and the preservation of their rights during conflicts, the most significant of which include the following:

### ***Protecting Life and Criminalizing Its Violation in Islam***

Islam accords profound sanctity to human life, grounded in the belief that humanity was created from the Spirit of God, as the Qur’an declares: “I breathed into him of My spirit” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 15:29). Preserving life constitutes one of the supreme objectives (maqāṣid) of religion and is among the five universal necessities (al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khams) in Islamic law, alongside the protection of religion, intellect, lineage, and property. This divine imperative applies universally to all human beings without distinction of race, color, or faith: “O mankind, indeed We created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 49:13).

Accordingly, any violation of human life is considered an offense against the divine order itself, as Allah said: “Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain all mankind; and whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved all mankind” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 5:32). Safeguarding human dignity, therefore, is tantamount to preserving God’s purpose in creation. As one study notes: “In addition, Islamic law has not only provided such

protection during peace time but also provided for the protection of civilian persons and objects during armed conflicts” (Chiroma et al., 2013; Šip et al., 2023).

The Qur’an establishes explicit injunctions regulating the limits of armed conflict: “Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 2:190). This verse lays the foundation for the principle that non-combatants who do not take part in hostilities are to be spared. Any violation of their safety is deemed an act of aggression (i’tidā’), which places the perpetrator outside the scope of divine approval. Furthermore, the Qur’an explicitly commands benevolence and justice towards those who remain uninvolved in hostilities: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes—from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 60:8).

Classical Islamic jurisprudence developed this principle into a binding doctrine: combat is to be strictly confined to the battlefield and directed solely against enemy combatants. Targeting civilians and other non-combatants intentionally is categorically prohibited. Numerous prophetic traditions identify five categories of individuals granted immunity from hostilities: women, children, the elderly, monks secluded in monasteries, and hired laborers (‘usafā’) engaged in non-combat support roles (Al-Dawwoody, 2017).

The Qur’an further extends the scope of protection even to those who initially initiated hostilities but then desisted, placing them under the safeguard of peace: “But if they withdraw from you and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then Allah has not made for you a cause [for fighting] against them” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 4:90). Hence, armed struggle in Islam is narrowly restricted to cases of direct aggression, with an emphatic prohibition of excess or indiscriminate violence,

reflecting God's explicit disapproval of transgression ([Shaltout, 1951, p. 31](#)).

Prophetic practice also reinforces this framework of humanitarian restraint. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) prohibited the killing of women, children, the elderly, and the infirm - groups considered defenseless and uninvolved in combat. He strongly condemned acts of aggression, as illustrated when he encountered a slain woman on the battlefield and declared: "She was not fighting", thereafter instructing Khalid ibn al-Walid not to kill hired laborers ('usafā') or children ([Abu Zahra, 1995](#)). Likewise, the Prophet forbade the torture of the wounded, insisting they be cared for until they could be released, ransomed, or granted mercy - an affirmation of Islam's respect for human dignity ([Abu Zahra, 1995](#)).

Furthermore, Islam prohibits mutilation of corpses. The Prophet commanded: "Do not embezzle, do not betray, and do not mutilate". Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, in his written instructions to the governor of Hadramawt, likewise emphasized: "Beware of mutilation, for it is sinful and repulsive." Islamic jurisprudence consequently requires that even the dead from enemy ranks be buried respectfully. The Andalusian jurist Ibn Ḥazm stressed that failure to bury enemy combatants constitutes an act of mutilation, underscoring the sanctity accorded to human dignity even after death ([Al-Dawoody, 2017](#)).

This body of Qur'anic principles, Prophetic teachings, and juristic elaboration highlights that the preservation of life and dignity is central to the Islamic ethic of war. Numerous contemporary studies confirm that the Islamic tradition aligns closely with international humanitarian law in affirming the rights of civilians and restricting violence in armed conflict. Ultimately, Islamic teachings recognize human beings as bearers of divine trust, whose lives and dignity must be safeguarded even amidst the tragedies of war.

### ***Tolerance and the Humane Treatment of Prisoners in Islam***

In a world still plagued by the devastations of war and the suffering of countless individuals who bear no responsibility for its outbreak, humanity finds its true moral refuge in religion. Faith provides an ethical framework for warfare that preserves human dignity even in times when the desire for vengeance and triumph tends to obscure compassion and justice.

Among the ethical principles most deeply rooted in Islam is the humane and dignified treatment of prisoners of war—an approach that reflects the religion’s profound spirit of mercy and respect for human life. This moral injunction also extends, by stronger implication, to the protection of civilians who never took part in combat. If Islam calls for mercy and fairness toward captured combatants who once stood as opponents, then it affirms even more strongly the right of non-combatants to safety, dignity, and humane treatment.

Once a combatant is rendered powerless and deprived of the means of resistance, Islamic teachings reclassify him not as an enemy to be harmed, but as a prisoner of war - a human being whose fate must be governed by justice, compassion, and the principles laid down by divine law.

Islam’s deep concern for safeguarding the human rights of prisoners is clearly demonstrated in the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) treatment of the very first captives taken by the Muslims - whom he released and sent back to their homeland without hesitation. This merciful conduct set the tone for the ethical foundation of warfare in Islam.

A striking example of this humane approach appears in the Prophet’s dealing with the captives of the Battle of Badr, as narrated by one of them, ‘Azīz ibn ‘Umayr, who said: “I was among the prisoners on the day of Badr. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said:

‘Treat the prisoners well.’ I was placed among a group of the Ansar, and whenever they brought their lunch or dinner, they would eat dates while giving me bread, following the Prophet’s instruction.” (Al-Ṭabarānī, 1404, p. 444). At that time, dates were the common staple food among the Arabs, whereas bread was a rare and valued item. Offering the prisoner bread while they themselves subsisted on dates was thus an act of extraordinary generosity and moral elevation—a living embodiment of divine ethics rather than mere courtesy.

This compassion reflects the Qur’anic vision of human solidarity and moral duty: “And they give food, in spite of love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive” (*The Qur’an*, 2008, 76:8). By explicitly mentioning the captive alongside the poor and the orphan, the Qur’an elevates his status to one deserving of care and mercy. Islam therefore imposes upon believers a set of moral obligations toward prisoners that mirror respect for their intrinsic human dignity. Even when a sentence of execution or repatriation is determined, the prisoner’s humanity must not be violated, nor his dignity demeaned. As some scholars have noted: “In Islam, prisoners of war have certain rights that must be respected, including the right to security, health, and humane treatment. This reflects Islamic humanist values that place human dignity at the centre” (Al-Khatib, 2023; Rusdi et al., 2024).

This raises an important question: what accounts for the remarkable emphasis in Islam on the humane treatment of prisoners of war and the repeated injunctions concerning their good conduct? Abū Zahra provides an insightful psychological explanation that the Qur’an seeks to instill in human conscience. He observes that captives are often taken amid the heat of battle, when passions are inflamed and emotions of vengeance run high—especially when some of one’s companions have been killed. In such circumstances, the natural human impulse is to retaliate or humiliate the enemy. Islam, however, aims to restrain this vengeful spirit and instead cultivates mercy and

restraint. For this reason, [Abū Zahra \(1995\)](#) notes, the Prophet (PBUH) personally urged his followers to treat the captives of Badr with utmost kindness, as if they were guests rather than prisoners. Historical reports mention that some of the Muslims who hosted the captives even preferred them to their own children in the distribution of food.

The classical sources of *Sīrah* (Prophetic biography) document numerous examples of this magnanimous conduct, portraying how prisoners were treated with honor and compassion under the Prophet's guidance. Similarly, historical chronicles record diverse cases where such humane principles were applied in practice, reflecting the Qur'anic vision in concrete social reality. Moreover, the major works of Islamic jurisprudence provide detailed discussions on the rights of prisoners and the legal boundaries of their treatment. In recent decades, numerous academic studies further explored the convergence between Islamic law and contemporary international conventions on human rights ([Al-Khatib, 2023](#)). For instance, [Khenfari's \(2020\)](#) study offers an extensive examination of the prisoner's rights in Islamic jurisprudence, emphasizing provisions for proper nourishment, clothing, and shelter, as well as the absolute prohibition of torture or coercion.

If such is the dignity and protection guaranteed to a prisoner - someone who actively participated in hostilities - then, by even stronger reasoning, civilians and all those uninvolved in combat deserve equal, if not greater, humanitarian treatment and protection.

### ***Civilian Rights to Religious Freedom and Worship***

The rules of warfare established in Islam strictly prohibit the killing of those who do not participate in combat or contribute to the war effort in any form. Warfare, according to Islamic principles, is confined to the battlefield and must not extend beyond it, nor should it involve any violation of religious freedom in any way. Perhaps the

clearest manifestation of Islam's commitment to safeguarding religious freedom, as noted by [Abu Zahra \(1995\)](#), lies in its treatment of religious figures.

Accordingly, the first caliph after the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, explicitly forbade the killing of clergy or any interference with their freedom of worship. When he dispatched his armies to al-Sham - a region that encompassed the sacred lands of the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and contained synagogues, monasteries, and temples dedicated to worship—he took great care to remind his commanders not to harm or even touch those devoted to religious service.

Addressing the Islamic principle of safeguarding freedom of belief reveals that this right extends equally to both combatants and civilians, allowing them to practice their faith freely - whether through their core beliefs or the performance of religious rituals - during times of war and peace alike. This is clearly reflected in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his dealings with civilians in particular. For instance, when the Prophet (PBUH) returned to Mecca after nearly ten years in exile in Medina, he did not compel anyone among its inhabitants to embrace Islam. Instead, he simply presented the message and left each individual free to choose their own belief. This approach stems from the foundational Islamic principle of freedom of faith, as affirmed in the Qur'anic verse: "There is no compulsion in religion" ([The Qur'an, 2008](#), 2:256).

Even when many of the Meccans refused to accept Islam despite the Muslims' decisive victory and numerical strength, the Prophet (PBUH) did not force them to convert, but rather declared, as stated in the Qur'an: "To you be your religion, and to me mine" ([The Qur'an, 2008](#), 109:6). Furthermore, he instructed his Companions not to harm places of worship or those devoted to them, even in times of war. The Companions, their successors, and the Muslim caliphs who came after

them upheld this principle and gave it considerable attention. Numerous examples recorded in historical and biographical works attest to their consistent efforts to protect places of worship and to ensure full freedom of religious practice for non-Muslims under Islamic governance.

One such example is reported from the time of Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA), who, during his visit to Jerusalem to conclude a peace treaty with its leaders, saw a Jewish temple covered with dust so that only its upper part remained visible. He took a piece of his garment, began to remove the dust himself, and his soldiers followed his example until the entire temple was cleared, allowing the Jews to resume their religious practices there. During the same journey, it is also narrated that when the time for prayer arrived while ‘Umar (RA) was near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he chose to pray outside. When asked why he did not pray inside, he replied: “I feared that if I prayed there, Muslims after me might remove it and turn it into a mosque” ([Abu Zahra, 1995](#)).

Based on this principle, Islamic jurists formulated the rule: “We are commanded to leave them as they worship”, which upholds the individual’s freedom of belief and their right to practice religious rites. Islamic legislation has guaranteed this right throughout its history. Numerous churches, temples, and places of worship have remained intact for hundreds, even thousands, of years under Muslim governance, and historical records confirm that the authorities did not interfere with religious practices or deprive anyone of their right to worship. In the modern era, this principle has evolved into applications within international legal frameworks, grounded in this tradition of religious tolerance, the prophetic injunctions, and Islam’s commitment to preserving the humanity of every individual and their right to intellectual and religious freedom ([Rizqi & Hartini, 2022](#)).

If freedom of thought and belief is a fundamental human right guaranteed by divine religions, then the right to life, protection from harm, and the ability to live in peace represent the most basic expressions of humanity. These rights embody the essence of divine teachings and the moral imperative that calls upon every rational and conscientious human being to safeguard civilians and uphold their human and social rights.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is not merely a modern legal concern but also a deeply rooted religious and moral obligation within the Abrahamic traditions. Through a comparative reading of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the study shows that all three traditions affirm the sanctity of human life, condemn unjust killing, and require protection for those who do not directly participate in hostilities. Although each tradition expresses these principles through different scriptural categories, such as the innocent, the oppressed, prisoners, strangers, women, children, the elderly, and the vulnerable, their ethical substance converges around the same humanitarian imperative: non-combatants must not be targeted, humiliated, or deprived of dignity.

The findings further indicate that Abrahamic religious teachings can reinforce contemporary international humanitarian law by supplying a theological and ethical foundation for civilian protection. Judaism emphasizes justice, the prohibition of shedding innocent blood, and the dignity of human beings created in the image of God. Christianity grounds protection in mercy, love of neighbor, care for the oppressed, and the sacred duty to serve the vulnerable. Islam restricts combat to active fighters, prohibits transgression, protects prisoners and religious communities, and affirms the inviolability of human life. These shared principles challenge any attempt to justify

aggression against civilians through religious language or political necessity.

The contribution of this study lies in its comparative theological framework, which bridges scriptural ethics and humanitarian norms. It adds to existing scholarship by shifting the discussion from primarily legal and policy-based approaches toward the religious foundations that continue to shape moral consciousness in societies affected by war. Its significance is especially evident in contemporary conflicts, where civilian casualties continue to rise and religious narratives are sometimes misused to legitimize violence. By recovering the humane teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the study affirms that protecting civilians is a universal duty grounded in both religious conviction and human dignity.

### **Limitation of the Study**

This study is limited by its textual and comparative scope. It focuses primarily on selected scriptural passages, theological interpretations, and representative ethical traditions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because each Abrahamic religion contains diverse schools of interpretation, legal traditions, historical experiences, and denominational perspectives, the study cannot exhaust the full range of debates within each faith. The selected texts are therefore treated as ethically significant and illustrative rather than as a complete representation of all possible doctrinal positions. In addition, the study does not examine in detail how these principles have been implemented or violated in specific historical conflicts.

Another limitation concerns the relationship between religious ethics and international humanitarian law. The study identifies conceptual convergence between Abrahamic teachings and modern civilian protection norms, but it does not claim that religious traditions directly produced contemporary legal categories. Terms such as “civilian,” “combatant,” and “non-combatant immunity” belong to

modern legal discourse, whereas scriptural traditions often employ broader moral categories such as the innocent, the weak, prisoners, strangers, and the oppressed. Consequently, the study remains primarily normative and interpretive. It does not provide empirical fieldwork, legal case analysis, or institutional assessment of how religious principles influence actual wartime behavior today.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should expand this study by examining how religious teachings on civilian protection are interpreted and applied in specific historical and contemporary conflicts. Such research could investigate whether religious leaders, humanitarian organizations, military chaplains, and faith-based peacebuilding institutions actively use Abrahamic ethical principles to discourage violence against civilians. Comparative case studies would be especially useful for assessing the practical influence of religious discourse in contexts where civilians are targeted, displaced, or denied basic protection. This would help move the discussion beyond textual analysis toward a clearer understanding of how scriptural ethics can shape conduct, advocacy, and humanitarian intervention.

Further studies may also broaden the comparative framework beyond the Abrahamic religions by including other religious and philosophical traditions that address restraint in warfare and the protection of vulnerable persons. Interdisciplinary research combining theology, law, ethics, conflict studies, and peacebuilding could offer a more comprehensive account of how moral traditions support international humanitarian norms. In addition, future scholarship should examine how religious texts are misinterpreted to justify violence and how responsible hermeneutics can counter such misuse. This line of inquiry would strengthen both academic understanding and practical efforts to promote civilian protection,

interreligious cooperation, and a more humane moral order in times of war.

### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization: S.A.; Data curation: S.A.; Formal analysis: S.A.; Funding acquisition: S.A.; Investigation: S.A.; Methodology: S.A.; Project administration: S.A.; Resources: S.A.; Software: S.A.; Supervision: S.A.; Validation: S.A.; Visualization: S.A.; Writing – original draft: S.A.; Writing – review & editing: S.A. Author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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### **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

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The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT and PaperPal to improve the clarity of the language and readability of the article. After using

these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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