

Peace and Truce of God

The **Peace and Truce of God** (Latin: *Pax et treuga Dei*; German: *Gottesfriede*; French: *Paix de Dieu*; Catalan: *Pau i Treva de Déu*) was a movement in the Middle Ages led by the Catholic Church that applied spiritual sanctions to limit the violence of feuding. It began with very limited provisions in 989 due to the political and territorial upheaval in France caused by the Frankish nobility^[1] and the movement survived in some form until the thirteenth century

Georges Duby summarized the widening social repercussions of *Pax Dei*:

The Peace and Truce of God, by attaching sacred significance to privacy, helped create a space in which communal gatherings could take place and thus encouraged the reconstitution of public space at the village level ... In the eleventh and twelfth centuries many a village grew up in the shadow of the church, in the zone of immunity where violence was prohibited under peace regulations.^[2]

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Background

The eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon, interpreting Tacitus, *Germania* §40, detected a parallel among the pagan German tribes who worshipped a goddess of the earth (identified by modern scholars with Nerthus) who in Gibbon's interpretation resided at the island of Rügen, who annually travelled to visit the tribes.

During her progress the sound of war was hushed, quarrels were suspended, arms laid aside, and the restless Germans had an opportunity of tasting the blessings of peace and harmony. The truce of God, so often and so ineffectually proclaimed by the clegy of the eleventh century was an obvious imitation of this ancient custom.^[3]

However, Gibbon's assertion has since been discredited, given that the canon law of *Pax Dei* derives no foundation from pagan customs, but rather from rational principles of Roman Law regarding violence. The Christian concept evolved from the earlier concept of Pax Romana.^[4]

As early as 697, Adomnán of Iona promulgated the Cáin Adomnáin, which provided sanctions against the killing of children, clerics, clerical students and peasants on clerical lands.

Some historians note a preexisting ecclesiastical discussion of peace for secular authorities in 494 with Pope Gelasius I's letter to Emperor Anastasius:

Two there are, august emperor, by which this world is principally ruled: the consecrated authority of bishops and the royal power. Of these, the responsibility of the priests is more weighty insofar as they will answer for the kings of men themselves at the divine judgment. You know, most clement son, that, although you take precedence over all mankind in dignity, nevertheless you piously bow the neck to those who have charge of divine affairs and seek from them the means of your salvation, and hence you realize that, in the order of religion, in matters concerning the reception and right administration of heavenly sacraments, you ought to submit yourself rather than rule, and that in these matters you should depend on their judgment rather than seek to bend them to your will.^[6]

This ecclesiastical argument flourished in the eleventh century regarding the issues of secular violence and ecclesiastical precedence over secular authorities as private wars and violent feuding began to endanger both church buildings and monastic communities across Europe. Other ecclesiastical steps to protect church property were also observed from the tenth to the eleventh century, as seen with the Council of Frosly specifically commenting on the role of destruction of church property as sacrilegious.

Overview

The Peace and Truce of God movement was one of the ways that the Church attempted to Christianize the feudal structures of society through non-violent means. After the collapse of the Carolingian empire in the ninth century, France had degenerated into many small counties and lordships, in which local lords and knights frequently fought each other for control.^[6] The West Frankish nobility capitalized on the accession of the Carolingian throne and ushered in the Capetian dynasty and further altered French, and by extension, European medieval society. One of the critical points of this dynastic shift is what Guy Bois characterizes "the mutation of the year 1000," wherein the period is known for the inexorable link between chaos and creativity.^[7] The chaos of the period is attributed to the issue of violent feuding, with the *castellans* and their *milites* working towards consolidated power and freedom from the overarching political structure of the Carolingian empire. Frederick S. Paxton argues that the political and cultural landscape of the period highlights some of the prevailing cultural anxieties and issues surrounding the millennium, particularly "unparalleled disorder in governmental, legal, and social institutions" and Carolingian society was faced with a "king unable and the nobility unwilling to act [causing] the French people, imbued with a 'national spirit' peculiarly creative in the fight against political and social ills, turned to spiritual sanctions as the only available means to limit violence."^[8]

While some historians have postulated that the Peace of God and Truce of God movements stem from the inability or unwillingness of the top tiers of Carolingian society to quell the violence and feuding amongst Capetian nobles, other scholars have argued that there is a castellan revolution ongoing in the Frankish kingdoms that contributes to the problem. According to André Debord, the Peace and Truce movements originate in the reaction against the social and political upheaval that stems from rapid proliferations of castle-building during the early eleventh century, particularly in Aquitaine.^[9] The major point of contention in early eleventh century France is the role of comital power and the ways in which social forces exert influence on the possession of power. Around 1030, and at the same general time as the deaths of William the Great, William IV, and Ademar of Chabannes, comital power is supreme in the Charente.^[10] This period is the site of transformation of the comital power of dukes and counts because castle construction is an inherent consolidation of power, but at the same time "those who held comital fortresses had a distinct tendency toward insubordination as soon as the count or duke turned their backs," hence figures who held little traditional power, such as Hugh the Chiliarc, "could cause the prestigious duke of Aquitaine the worst kind of difficulties."^[11]

At the same time there were often attacks from the Vikings, who settled in northern France as Normans but continued to raid territory further inland.

The two movements began at separate times and places, but by the eleventh century they became synonymous as the "Peace and Truce of God". "Germans looked with mingled horror and contempt at the French 'anarchy'." Maintain the king's peace was the first duty of a German sovereign."^[12] The movement, though seemingly redundant to the duties of the crown, had a religious momentum that would not be denied. Holy Roman Emperor Henry III issued the earliest form of this in his empire while a Constance in 1043. In the Holy Roman Empire it subsequently developed into the similar concept of *Landfriede*.^[13]

Peace of God

The **Peace of God** or *Pax Dei* was a proclamation issued by local clergy that granted immunity from violence to noncombatants who could not defend themselves, beginning with the peasants (*agricolae*) and with the clergy. The Synod of Charroux decreed a limited *Pax Dei* in 989, and the practice spread to most of Western Europe over the next century,^[14] surviving in some form until at least the thirteenth century.

At the Benedictine abbey of Charroux in La Marche on the borders of the Aquitaine "a great crowd of many people (*populus*) gathered there from the Poitou, the Limousin, and neighboring regions. Many bodies of saints were also brought there" bringing miracles in their wake.^[15] Three canons promulgated at Charroux, under the leadership of Gombald Archbishop of Bordeaux and Gascony, were signed by the bishops of Poitiers, Limoges, Périgueux, Saintes and Angoulême, all in the west of France beyond the limited jurisdiction of King Hugh Capet. Excommunication would be the punishment for attacking or robbing a church, for robbing peasants or the poor of farm animals – among which the donkey is mentioned, but not the horse (an item beyond the reach of a peasant) – and for robbing, striking or seizing a priest or any man of the clergy "who is not bearing arms". Making compensation or reparations could circumvent the anathema of the Church.

Children and women (virgins and widows) were added to the early protections. The *Pax Dei* prohibited nobles from invading churches, from beating the defenseless, from burning houses, and so on. A synod of 1033 added merchants and their goods to the protected list. Significantly, the Peace of God movement began in Aquitaine, Burgundy and Languedoc, areas where central authority had most completely fragmented.

The participation of large, enthusiastic crowds marks the *Pax Dei* phenomenon as one of the first popular religious movements of the Middle Ages. In the early phase, the blend of relics and crowds and enthusiasm stamped the movement with an exceptionally popular character.^[6]

After a lull in the first two decades of the eleventh century, the movement spread to the north of France with the support of king Robert II of France (reigned 996-1031). There, the high nobility sponsored Peace assemblies throughout Flanders, Burgundy, Champagne, Normandy, the Amiénois, and Berry.^[6] The oaths to keep the peace sworn by nobles spread in time to the villagers themselves; heads of households meeting communally would ritually swear to uphold the common peace.^[16]

The tenth-century foundation of the Cluny Abbey in Burgundy aided the development of the Peace of God. Cluny was independent of any secular authority, subject to the Papacy alone, and while all church territory was inviolate, Cluny's territory extended far beyond its own boundaries. A piece of land 30 km in diameter was considered to be part of Cluny itself, and any smaller monastery that allied itself with Cluny was granted the same protection from violence. A Peace of God council gave this grant in Anse in 994. The monastery was also immune from excommunications, interdicts, and anathemas, which would normally affect an entire region. Fleury Abbey was granted similar protection. Many Cluniac monks came from the same knightly class whose violence they were trying to stop.

The movement was not very effective. However it set a precedent that would be followed by other successful popular movements to control nobles' violence such as medieval communes and the Crusades.

The phrase "Peace of God" also occurs as a general term that means "under the protection of the Church", used in multiple contexts in medieval society. For example, pilgrims who traveled on Crusade did so under the "peace of God" i.e. under the protection of the Church. This general usage of the term does not always relate to the Peace and Truce of God movement.

Peace of God and Popular Participation

One of the problems with the historiography regarding one of the most popular Peace of God movements, the Limousin Peace of God (994–1032/3), is that there is little direct textual evidence^[17] and most of the primary source material on this movement is around 300 pages from Ademar of Chabannes. Ademar is a monk of Saint-Eparchius of Angoulême, who spent time at Saint-Martial in Limoges and was a historian, liturgist, grammarian, and artist.^[18] The Limousin Peace of God movement is generally accepted as mostly fiction because Ademar seems to have created a fiction about the actual development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine. One of the points that Richard Landes and other historians have noted is there was a Peace of God movement in Aquitaine because Rodulphus Glaber, writing about the Peace councils in Francia in 1033, did state that the movement started in Aquitaine.

One of the major point of Landes' historiographical examination of the early councils of Limoges is the fact that ecclesiastical authorities promoted cultural and religious enthusiasm within the conciliar activities in the late tenth and early eleventh century. Landes, well known for his work on the apocalyptic strains of thought surrounding the year 1000, argues that the conciliar activities at Limoges and other areas in Aquitaine are crucial to understanding the role of the Peace of God movement overall because of the combination of the apocalyptic attitudes nearing the end of the tenth century and the popularity of penitential practices for natural and man-made disasters. In the case of Limoges, there was a major outbreak of a "plague of plagues," probably ergotism and "the abbot and the bishop (brothers of the viscount), in consultation with the duke of Aquitaine, called for a three-day fast during which relics from all over would come to Limoges."^[19]

The emphasis on relics in this particular instance is crucial to understanding the development of the Peace of God movement overall because popular participation in this movement across Europe stems from the popularity of relics and the penitential practices linked to the cult of the saints. In the case of Limoges, the cult of Saint Martial takes preeminence because of the miracles attested to his shrine during the Peace council of 994. From the *Vita prolixior s. Martialis*, the narrative directly correlates to Peace ideals:

Mass conversions to a gospel of peace ensue, including the ruler and his soldiers, who accept an ethic of restraint and express their collective penitence with great emotion. This process of projection radically transforms Valeria's pagan fiancé Stephen from a local nobleman's son into the powerful duke of the Gauls, a mirror image of William V (993–1030), with his pilgrimage to Rome, his devotion to Martial, his love of the church and of peace. Elsewhere Martial exorcises Rixoaldus, the demon leader of a diabolic band, so named because he loved strife and dissension – the very personification of that bellicose temperament so rampant among the warrior class, the great enemy of the Peace of God.^[20]

Truce of God

The **Truce of God** or *Treuga Dei* had its origin in Normandy in the city of Caen.^[21] It dates from the eleventh century^[22]

While the Truce of God is a temporary suspension of hostilities, as distinct from the Peace of God which is perpetual, the jurisdiction of the Truce of God is broader. The Peace of God prohibited fighting on Sundays and feria (feast days on which people were not obliged to work). It was the sanctification of Sunday which gave rise to the Truce of God, for it had always been agreed not to do battle on that day and to suspend disputes in the law-courts.^[22]

It confirmed permanent peace for all churches and their grounds, the monks, clerks and chattels; all women, pilgrims, merchants and their servants, cattle and horses; and men at work in the fields. For all others peace was required throughout Advent, the season of Lent, and from the beginning of the Rogation days until eight days after Pentecost.^[21] This prohibition was subsequently extended to specific days of the week, viz., Thursday, in memory of the Ascension, Friday, the day of the Passion, and Saturday, the day of the Resurrection (council 1041). By the middle of the twelfth century the number of proscribed days was extended until there was left some eighty days for fighting.

The Truce soon spread from France to Italy and Germany; the 179 Third Council of the Lateran extended the institution to the whole Church by Canon xxi, "De treugis servandis", which was inserted in the collection of canon law, Decretal of Gregory IX, I, tit., "De treuga et pace".^[22] Aquinas challenged the Truce, holding that it was lawful to wage war to safeguard the commonwealth on holy days and feast days.^[21]

Peace of God and Truce of God within Chivalry and Crusade

One of the interesting developments beginning at the end of the tenth century and continuing well into the eleventh century is the rhetoric of the Peace of God and Truce of God movements within chivalric pledges and as a way to divert knightly violence away from one's own country. While the Peace of God and the Truce of God must be seen as separately developing movements in Europe in terms of the roles of these movements martially and civilly, there are instances where the rhetoric of the movements is combined within oaths and speeches by both secular and ecclesiastical leaders. In terms of secular leadership, Robert the Pious (996–1031) espouses an oath that combines both religious movements:

I will not infringe on the Church in any way. I will not hurt a cleric or a monk if unarmed. I will not steal an ox, cow, pig, sheep, goat, ass, or a mare with colt. I will not attack a vilian or vilainesse or servants or merchants for ransom. I will not take a mule or a horse male or female or a colt in pasture from any man from the calends of March to the feast of the All Saints unless to recover a debt. I will not burn houses or destroy them unless there is a knight inside. I will not root up vines. I will not attack noble ladies traveling without husband nor their maids, nor widows or nuns unless it is their fault. From the beginning of Lent to the end of Easter I will not attack an unarmed knight.^[23]

The oath is important because it shows that secular powers are now willing to show obedience to ecclesiastical powers and to reign in problematic knights and armies. Furthermore, knightly and martial violence is often subverted by ecclesiastical powers through the use of crusade. For Pope Urban II, at the Council of Clermont in 1095, the subversion of martial violence is effective in dealing with secular violence:

Oh race of the Franks, we learn that in some of your provinces no one can venture on the road by day or by night without injury or attack by highwaymen, and no one is secure even at home. Let us then re-enact the law of our ancestors known as the Truce of God. And now that you have promised to maintain the peace among yourselves you are obligated to succour your brethren in the East, menaced by an accursed race, utterly alienated from God. The Holy Sepulchre of our Lord is polluted by the filthiness of an unclean nation. Recall the greatness of Charlemagne. O most valiant soldiers, descendants of invincible ancestors, be not degenerate. Let all hatred depart from among you, all quarrels end, all wars cease. Start upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre to wrest that land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves!^[24]

The Peace of God and the Truce of God therefore works within the rhetorical landscape of subverting violence by redirecting it to more applicable regions, such as a crusade in the Middle East against Islam in an attempt to regain Jerusalem.

Other developments

Beginning in the 11th century, knighthood developed a religious character. Prospective knights underwent rigorous religious rituals in order to be initiated. An initiate had to fast, confess his sins, was given a symbolic bath, had his hair cut to represent humility, and he spent a night praying, his weapons upon an altar representing the dedication of his weapons to the Church and God. Advancements in metallurgy allowed inscriptions and pictures of holy symbols to be engraved on helmets, swords, shields, a horse's saddle and bridle. Relics and objects with religious symbols, often of saints, on them were routinely carried into battles by knights in medieval times. The symbols allowed for a physical reminder to knights and military men that God was supporting their efforts, providing protection to those soldiers as well as the assurance of a victory over their enemies.^[25]

In addition to the Peace and Truce of God movement, other non-violent, although less direct, methods of controlling violence were used by the clergy. By adding the religious oaths of fealty to the feudal act of homage, and in organizing rights and duties within the system, churchmen did their utmost to Christianize feudal society in general and to set limits on feudal violence in particular

Louis IX of France was famous for his attention to the settlement of disputes and the maintenance of peace, at least within Christian lands. He issued the first extant ordinance indefinitely prohibiting warfare in France, a text dating from January 1258 that outlawed *guerrae omnes* as well as arson, and disturbances to carts and to *agricolae* who work with carts or plows. Those who transgressed this prohibition were to be punished as peace-breakers (*fractores pacis*) by the king's officer and the bishop-elect of le Puy-en-Velay. Louis IX promulgated this text as a simple royal act on the basis of his authority as king.^[26]

The *Bianchi* was a religious movement that swept through Italy for several months in 1399. Tens of thousands of men, women and children could be found travelling across the country to pray and promote peace. It was a shock to many observers and caught authorities off guard. It also brought peace, at least for a few months, to much of Italy

See also

- Catholic peace traditions
- Cluniac Reforms
- Anglo-Saxon law (King's Peace)
- Landfrieden
- Religion and peacebuilding
- Cáin Adomnáin

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External links

- [Gunbald of Bordeaux, Peace of God](#)
- [Decree of the Emperor Henry IV Concerning a Truce of God; 1085 A.D.](#)
-  ["Peace of God". *Encyclopedia Americana* 1920.](#)

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