

SPRING 2024 VIRTUAL EVENT

Ad Hoc Board Committee on Virtual Events:

Mary Kate Holman (Chair), Susan Bigelow Reynolds, SimonMary Asease Ahiokhai

Spring Topic: Theology and Teaching in Light of ChatGPT
 Date: April 8, 2024
 Convener: Kristin E. Heyer, CTSA President, Boston College
 Moderator: Susan Bigelow Reynolds, Emory University
 Presenters: Heather M. DuBois, Boston College
 Eli McCarthy, Georgetown University
 Lilian Ehidihamhen, KU Leuven

In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Society continued the practice of holding two online gatherings. The sessions were organized by a committee composed of Mary Kate Holman (Fairfield University and Committee Chair), Susan Bigelow Reynolds (Emory University), and SimonMary Asease Ahiokhai (University of Portland and CTSA Board Member). Both meetings were well attended by members of the Society. The theme of the second meeting was “Is Peace Possible in a World of Violence?” It met on April 8, 2024. Given the violent conflicts around the world, the session invited CTSA members to consider what resources the Catholic theological tradition might offer to conversations about peacebuilding. Each of the panelist spoke from their experience and disciplinary expertise.

Heather DuBois considered how disciples can “do some ‘thing’ that is particular to our place, our vulnerabilities, our strengths, our relationships” in conflict resolution. Engaging the work of John Paul Lederach and his distinction between “episodes” of conflict and epicenters of conflict—those “patterns and relational contexts that persist over time, fueling episodes”—she argued that the change we seek is only possible by attending to both episodes and epicenters. This entails “giv[ing] up the dream of perfection in order to increase the good” and investing in “iterative processes of changes because there is no single fix” in the work of peacebuilding.

Eli McCarthy introduced the framework of just peace and its adoption in ecclesial settings in recent decades. He explained how just peace strategies, which are always contextual in nature and attend to those most directly affected by violence, seek (1) to build virtues and skillsets to transform conflict, (2) to break cycles of violence, and (3) to build more sustainable peace. McCarthy described and unpacked several norms that ought to shape each of these three goals. He then related the framework of just peace to the War in Gaza, noting that any resolution, which may be advocated for through peaceful civil disobedience in both the United States and Israel, must break the dynamics and patterns of violence that preceded the war and have been made manifest in it.

Lilian Ehidihamhen argued that peace is possible when Gospel nonviolence is practiced. Developing her argument, she traced how early Christians first followed Gospel nonviolence before later developing just war theory. She noted that while just war theory was used to justify allied involvement in the two world wars of the twentieth

century, John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* and later John Paul II, both raised the question as to whether any war could be just and meet the principles of discrimination and proportionality given the nature of modern weapons of war. Advocating for a return to nonviolent means of conflict resolution, Ehidiameh engaged the work Marshall Rosenberg on the topic of nonviolent communication to stress the importance of language and dialogue that allows humans to express their needs before feeling compelled to turn to violence when those needs are not met. Such dialogue, she argued is essential to break the patterns wherein humans have been socialized into hating their perceived enemies and creating the possibility of nonretaliation and loving one's enemies by allowing each party to recognize the needs of the other and to discern together how those needs might be met.

Discussion proceeded in two ways. Following the presentations, participants met in self-selected small group discussions, each facilitated by one of the four presenters for approximately twenty-minutes. A robust discussion among all participants took place as participants returned to the large group

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