

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Topic: Christian and Islamic Ethics in Dialogue
Convener: Margaret R. Pfeil, University of Notre Dame
Moderator: Brian D. Berry, College of Notre Dame of Maryland
Presenter: John Kelsay, Florida State University
Respondents: Joan Crist, Calumet College
Kristin Heyer, Loyola Marymount University
William O'Neill, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley

Holding Christian and Islamic ethics in conversation, John Kelsay offered a twenty-five-minute presentation based upon a longer manuscript, "And Why Should You Not Fight? The Imperative of War in Christianity and Islam." He began by establishing the broad categories of divine law governance and pluralism and then related the *Shari'a* reasoning to Christian just-war thinking as forms of practical reason, asserting that both are text-based approaches that seek to discern God's guidance or command regarding the contemporary context. In both Islamic and Christian ethical deliberations regarding war, he notes two main areas of intrareligious discussion: the proper interpretation of approved texts and the application of particular textual precedents to current armed conflicts. In both traditions, adherents attempt to apprehend "the command of the living God," a task that "should engender a sense of humility." Parallel development of Islamic and Christian ethics regarding armed conflict is no longer sufficient, he argued. Given the reality of global religious pluralism, adherents of these traditions must now enter into dialogue regarding their respective texts as part of "one long intercommunal argument about the meaning of responsibility to God. . . ."

Joan Crist responded to Kelsay's paper from the perspective of her involvement in the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East. First, she noted the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as seen in examples of the *Shari'a* reasoning that advocate using terrorist tactics against U.S. civilians. Second, she observed that the Islamic idea of a just social order includes the notion of religious tolerance. There is a history of Catholic-Palestinian dialogue on this issue in the context of final status negotiations: leading up to Camp David 2000, the Vatican negotiated an agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization to safeguard the rights of Catholic institutions under future Palestinian sovereignty. Such a conversation is needed again today, she argued. Third, applying Kelsay's paradigm of distinctions within the framework of *ahkam al-jihad*, Crist noted recent shifts in the message and behavior of Hamas with regard to the use of force. Finally, she suggested a path for Muslim-Catholic dialogue with Palestinian leaders, and/or supporting informal contacts between willing Israelis and present Palestinian Authority leaders. Catholic leadership in working for a negotiated resolution of the conflict presents an opportunity to explore the implications of *Nostra Aetate*.

Alluding to Kelsay's affirmation of James Turner Johnson's argument that just war theory is directed toward the pursuit of justice and does not entail a presumption against war, Kristin Heyer observed, first, that one might understand Christian just war theory as involving both the pursuit of justice and the restriction of force. Second, differences among Christian ethicists regarding the interpretation of just war theory are often hermeneutical in origin. Affirming Kelsay's call for humility, she suggests that intra- and interreligious dialogue may be mutually beneficial when pursued in tandem. Honest identification of which particular theological lens one privileges in adjudicating just war theory may foster the sort of dialogical climate required for ecumenical engagement of ethical issues regarding armed conflict. Finally, referring to the particular case of the current war in Iraq, she suggested that the development of *jus post bellum* criteria might be a fruitful area for Islamic-Christian dialogue.

William O'Neill began by first considering Kelsay's argument regarding an "overlapping consensus" between the just-war and *jihad* frameworks potentially leading to "intercommunal agreement" about the nature of divine obedience. First, O'Neill noted that the basis for consensus in just-war terms is thin since that framework of reasoning does not rely upon "distinctive religious revelation." Second, observing the significance of narrative dependence in interpreting just-war norms, he pointed out that just-war rhetoric in the contemporary context is commonly separated from its religious narrative tradition and recast within a politically realist narrative. Lastly, O'Neill argued for grounding intercommunal consensus in a "weak narrative dependence" that would permit identification of strands of narrative continuity with particular religious traditions "without assuming a 'God's eye' point of view." Rahner's notion of essentialist ethics seems to apply to the state's process of moral reasoning regarding war through appeal to generalized political norms of just war emerging from intercommunal agreement. The individual citizen of faith, as distinct from the state, draws upon existentialist ethics to discern as part of one's vocation whether one should participate in war.

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