

Editors' Introduction to the Just War Symposium

THE JUST WAR TRADITION is a complex and developing doctrine of Catholic moral theology and social teaching. The specific contours of the Just War doctrine have been and continue to be intensely debated inside and outside the Catholic Church. In the second half of the twentieth century, in light of two World Wars and under the threat of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers, a lively debate among moral theologians and theological ethicists in the United States and Europe unfolded over the ongoing relevance, applicability, and defensibility of Just War teaching. Proponents of nuclear pacifism, of Christological pacifism, and of just peace doctrine entered the debate.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed unforeseen dramatic political changes on the world scale. While the nuclear confrontation became less urgent, the phenomenon of “holy war” reemerged, and new local and conventionally fought wars erupted and involved the interventions of NATO, the United Nations, or other multinational alliances. It suffices to name former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and, most recently, Libya.

In light of these rapid and dramatic developments, an ecumenical and interreligious symposium on the Just War teaching is timely and relevant. This particular symposium developed out of a conference, “Just War in the Catholic Tradition: Continuity or Rupture?” that took place in Naples, Florida on 25–28 June 2009. Organized by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) with help from the Aquinas Center at Ave Maria University, the conference was funded by the Research Council of Norway.

Spearheaded by the Catholic philosopher Gregory Reichberg, the 2009 PRIO symposium on “Just War in the Catholic Tradition” invited Catholic and non-Catholic scholars to reflect upon war in light of the traditional Catholic affirmation of the possibility of just war. Three of the participants in the symposium are Catholic: Joseph Koterski, S.J., Robert Araujo, S.J.,

and Gregory Reichberg. They introduce the inner logic, the history, and the contemporary applicability of the Catholic teaching on just war. Four symposiasts come from various Protestant traditions and offer a representative range of perspectives on just war, just peace, and pacifism: James Turner Johnson, Valerie Morkevicius, Martin Cook, and Charles Mathewes. Gedaliah and Adam Afterman offer a Jewish perspective on war.

PRIO's ecumenical and interreligious symposium is a welcome beginning to what we hope will be a fruitful conversation in our pages about just war in the Catholic tradition.