

Religion & War Show Notes

Question 1: Share a bit about your work and how it relates to today's conversation.

MaryEllen:

- International law focused on peace. A lot of my work reflects growing up in the Roman Catholic faith, being a child of Vietnam war, Pope John's Peace on Earth, 1963, I sought answers to childhood questions. The U.S. has lost every war since second world war, except for the Liberation of Kuwait. Which was fought consistently with the UN charter rules, the rules on just war.

Kate:

- Looks at the intersection of religion, history, genocide, brings together these concepts. Much of my work looks at the evolution of war and early connections between religion and war, like Augustine 4/5th century AD. My work now is looking at how religion, sadly, is on the wrong side of genocide and trying to see religious actors as helping with forecasting. Looking at intersection between religion, religious actors can help forecast or mitigate violence and war.

Samuel:

- Intellectual history, European history, religion has been a rationale for war, framework for justification. There are different versions of imitations to sets of rules.
- Christian ideas of peace. Another form, damage control, Christian project, Swiss Christians red cross. I try to draw attention to these projects that reduce suffering.

Question 2: leverage power against what is coming, where do we see religion as a lever to stop the storm of war

Kate

- There are some shifts that I have seen, the UN and U.S. State Department have been allergic to approaching religion, they keep it separate, and historically it has been something we aren't supposed to talk about. But that has shifted, because of publications... All this seems to be talking about the role religious institutions can play in peacemaking to forestall the violence that could erupt. One way this is happening is the role that religion can play in plugging ways to make life better, more equitable, or ways they can provide goods or services to people. ...
- Another way is to keep those within their ranks from radicalizing. ... Trying to understand how we can leverage the peace we see in our traditions or faith as a way of trying to be an example. Many religions have things to call people to a higher calling, higher purpose and connection to peace. Having something you can commit yourself to that goes along with peace.

It's about prevention not stopping. You can't stop it once it starts.

Ray

- I show a film in my classes that shows the peace movements that took place throughout Europe during WW1, where people are trying to use music to rally people to something that will stall the slaughter that is coming. They all see it coming and hope to diffuse it.

Question 3: Religious traditions can be universalized and operationalized to some degree both in the service of actors who are trying to create peace but also in the service of law. Can you talk a bit about that and how you see these laws being created, that you see in your work.

MaryEllen

- Almost all faiths are committed to peace at their core. All Christians were committed pacifists for a long period in the beginning of Christianity. Buddhism, Jainism, all law and religion are committed to peace and committed to correcting the human tendency to violence. ... Law combined with transcendent law. The laws used and understood in our belief systems can be combined with international law. Religion and law have a “similar project”, but inspiration comes from different areas. ... The Genocide Convention is a triumph of these laws coming together. The United Nations Charter is also important. It encompasses both opposing genocide, promoting peace and prosperity. We need to really look at how political ideas and anti-religious ideas have deformed religious thinking and religious leaders from looking towards peace.

International law is available to all cultures, to bring us all together and come together to create common governing principles for all people and nations.

Question 4: Why is Tolstoy necessary or interesting to look at when thinking about his ideas and faith of and in peace.

Samuel

- I was taken by his thought when looking back. Not only was he committed to peace, but he was anxious about humanizing war. He thought he had to save Jesus’ message from organized Christianity.

Question 5: Just war theory, is it still a theory or is it just a thought? It is no longer systematic; it is used in a variety of ways so what does that mean for this idea?

MaryEllen

- Pope Francis: no just war, there is no fair war, there are some parties that fight lawfully, then there is someone not. There are no positive things in war, you cannot achieve anything good from war, you can only protect but there is no good in war.
 - o Reinhold Nieber

How did we get into this mentality that war is a good thing, as a tool to protect human rights?

Kate

- Difference between a negative peace and positive peace. A negative peace being the absence of fighting, whereas a positive peace is one that really promotes flourishing, human rights and allows people to live peacefully. I feel as though that element has been lost. Thinking about why we are fighting. Within some thinking is the limitations of war.
- Heritage of Just War. We can't ignore it, but we can take the ideas and continue forward.

Question from audience: Karen Armstrong's book, *Fields of Blood*, suggests that war grows naturally from agricultural city states that emerged long ago and religion began as a form of controlling this warfare. Does this historical narrative make sense to the panel?

Samuel

- We wouldn't want to suppress how endemic warfare was in preagricultural societies. They had seasonal warfare that could lapse into wars of extermination. I would say the rise of religious teaching like Christianity took us away from martial valor and made room for peace, love and spreading that.

MaryEllen

- Suppression of religion in the development of law.