Religion and Peace

PEACE IN JUDAISM

Even when Israel is surrounded by enemies seeking to ruin it, even when it is worried about its survival and the peace of the world which human folly may destroy forever, Israel must take upon itself its primary responsibility to be the light of nations, the announcer of good tidings, the peacemaker, the builder of the temple of universal brotherhood. (Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat)\textsuperscript{16}

As dialogue among the Abrahamic faiths unfold in a new era of growing trust, friendship, and mutual enrichment, participants have identified a commitment to peace in the world as a central concern. As Rabbi Sirat asserts above, there is never a time or a place in which the Jewish tradition is silent about this peace. The Hebrew word \textit{shalom}, so far from being a simple greeting, is invoked as a name of God and an iteration of the covenant with Abraham. This word, \textit{shalom}, peace, is at the heart of the Jewish faith and its identity with respect to the nations.

Peace in the Hebrew Scriptures

To live peacefully is to “live up to the noblest vision of [the] Abrahamic tradition,” according to Rabbi David Rosen.\textsuperscript{17} The tradition of which he speaks is grounded in the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The following passages begin to illustrate the notion of peace that inhabits and nourishes the Jewish religion.

Come and see the works of the Lord, who has done fearsome deeds on earth; who stops wars to the ends of the earth, breaks the bow, splinters the spear, and burns the shields with fire; who says, “Be still and confess that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.” (Psalm 46: 9-11)
On that day they will sing this song in the land of Judah: “A strong city have we; He sets up walls and ramparts to protect us. Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just, one that keeps faith. A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace; in peace, for its trust in you.” (Isaiah 26:1-3)

Right will dwell in the desert and justice abide in the orchard. Justice will bring about peace; right will produce calm and security. My people will live in peaceful country, in secure dwellings and quiet resting places. (Isaiah 32:16-18)

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he be thirsty, give him to drink. (Proverbs 25:21)

Here the tribes have come, the tribes of the Lord; as it was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. Here are the thrones of justice, the thrones of the House of David. For the peace of Jerusalem pray: “May those who love you prosper! May peace be within your ramparts, prosperity within your towers.” For family and friends I say, “May peace be yours.” (Psalm 122:4-8)

For Continued Discussion

It is clear from the above quotes that peace in the Hebrew Scriptures is more than simply the absence of war. For the Biblical authors, what is peace, and what/who brings it about?

Think about a personal experience where you felt at peace or experienced peace. What can be learned from direct, first-hand knowledge of the causes and effects of peace?

Will there ever be a time when all people on the earth are at peace? Does your answer to this question, especially in light of your religious beliefs, make a difference in how you live your life?

Justice and Peace in Judaism

Justice and Peace in Judaism are inextricably tied to one another: justice is the guarantor, the sine qua non of peace. By this logic, peace
cannot be defined as a mere absence of violence, or even a simple shared feeling of fraternity. Rather, peace is what the rightly ordered society enjoys, by ensuring the just fulfillment of obligations to God and among the people. “Horizontal” justice, the lawful interaction between human beings, and “vertical” justice, the fulfillment of covenantal duties to God, are the pillars of this right order that ushers peace into the world.

The dictum “no peace without justice” has become proverbial today, cited as a first principle of international peace and amnesty organizations, governmental bodies, and religious authorities. Despite its widespread influence in world affairs, however, justice retains a special meaning within Judaism, because of the Jewish legal tradition, called halakhah. Unlike secular law, halakhic law is equally concerned with vertical justice (toward the Creator) and horizontal (between human persons). It contains not only the Law of Moses as found in the Torah, but also includes a vast corpus of rabbinic teachings about the ethical norms and moral directives by which Jews are to live.

**Halakhah: A Guide to Justice**

*Halakhah* is an overarching term, denoting the sum of the Written Law (the 613 commandments of the Torah) and the Oral Law (rabbinic interpretations codified in the Talmud and Mishnah). Whether halakhah has only a “vote but not a veto” (Mordecai Kaplan, *Not So Random Thoughts*) in contemporary Jewish ethical deliberation, or whether it remains binding even as it continues to develop (David Novak, *The Role of Dogma in Judaism*), the halakhic tradition has always held a central place in Jewish life.

Jewish tradition affirms that conscience and moral knowledge are essential, but not sufficient for the construction of a just society; a binding legislative structure is also necessary, which *halakhah* provides. Divinely instituted and seen to be the ideal guide to achieving justice, *halakhah* is absolutely binding as Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits explains:

The same ethical code may be desired by society or God; the difference will lie in the nature of the obligation. The binding force of a code instituted by society or the state is relative; the force of the one willed by God is absolute...All secular ethics lack the quality of absolute obligation. They are as changeable
as the desires and the wills that institute them; the law of God alone is as eternal as His will.\textsuperscript{20}

The ritual laws and the so-called ethical laws (the vertical and the horizontal) are not entirely different in nature or intention; this is because no dualistic distinction is made in Judaism between the body and soul. The two types of norms cross-fertilize one another. Norms like the dietary regulations and Sabbath injunctions help to train the body to submit to the requirements of the mind or inner “soul,” which in turn disposes the person to act justly—to outwardly observe the ethical norms in society with others. Conversely, justice toward others incites a desire for a transcendent and more fulfilling relationship with God, which then is cultivated for its own sake through the ritual practices.\textsuperscript{21} Halakhah, then, is the legal framework of Judaism by which humans learn to act with justice toward God and toward humanity in a holistic way that orients that community to become just and peaceful.

Jewish law is essential to religious Jewish communities the world over. The different approaches to halakhic observance range from the Orthodox position, that \textit{halakhah} is always and everywhere binding for Jews, in its received form without modification, to the Reform and Reconstructionist approaches, which view \textit{halakhah} chiefly as a useful source of inspiration in a developing tradition within which revelation continues to unfold.\textsuperscript{22}

Called to be a “light unto the nations,” the people of Israel have always sought to put their special covenantal gifts to the service of the world. This principle underlies all Jewish ritual and observance, giving it a transcendent direction in the history of the world. Halakhic observance is in one sense nourishes and strengthens Judaism’s relationship with God, but in another sense it fulfills the purpose of preparing Jews to undertake the task of \textit{tikkun olam}, the sanctification and reparation of all that ails the world. As Rabbi Sirat’s words at the beginning of this section make clear, a constant and hopeful commitment to peace is at the heart of \textit{tikkun olam}. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin summarizes this well:

Judaism believes that the purpose of Jewish existence is nothing less than “to perfect the world under the rule of God.” Human beings are obligated to bring mankind to a knowledge of God,
whose primary demand of human beings is moral behavior. All people who hold this belief are "ethical monotheists," and thus natural allies of religiously committed Jews.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{For Continued Discussion}

According to Judaism, peace is what a rightly ordered society enjoys, by ensuring the just fulfillment of obligations to God and others. What do you think are the starting points or fundamental principles in cultivating a just and peaceful society? Are these similar/different from those presented here about Judaism?

The Jewish principle that justice precedes peace can be interpreted in many ways on a communal and global scale, and indeed has been. Efforts towards peace are tried and tested in the real world. Discuss some contemporary issues where there is disagreement over the appropriate interpretation and application of justice in pursuit of peace. How does one negotiate such disagreements? Can the Jewish ideas discussed above shed any light?

Judaism teaches that by fulfilling one's duties to God and one's neighbors, God's peace will be ushered into the world. What are the challenges to practically living a life of faith seeking to prioritize and balance "horizontal" justice between human beings and "vertical" justice of fulfilling one's covenantal duties to God? Would you think that this struggle common to all conscientious believers of the Abrahamic faiths?

As it relates to the promotion of peace through justice, how do you understand the following passage as a Jew, Christian or Muslim?

\begin{quote}
For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes; who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him; so you too must befriend the alien, for you were aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)
\end{quote}

Discuss the April 1994, passage by Pope John Paul II and its implications for peace among religions as a way to promote peace in the world. Do you agree? If so, how can you advance such cooperation and blessing?
Christians and Jews together have a great deal to offer to a world struggling to distinguish good from evil, a world called by the Creator to defend and protect life, and yet so vulnerable to voices that propagate values bringing death and destruction. As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world and it is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, be first at blessing to one another.

PEACE IN CHRISTIANITY

Peace is a dominant message in the Christian scriptures. The word occurs 92 times and is found in almost every book of the New Testament. Similar in dynamic to the Jewish principle of justice, peace for Christians has a vertical dimension (God's gift of peace) and a horizontal expression (peace with others). The vertical and the horizontal meet on the cross on which Jesus died as a voluntary sacrifice of atonement for human sins. This is a sacrifice that Christians recall and make sacramentally present during prayer and worship. To prepare for such worship, Christians call to mind their sins and ask forgiveness from God and from each another. Also it is common during a service to exchange a sign of peace with one's neighbor in the hope that all may be made well through the peace of Christ. Some passages that illustrate these themes follow:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27)

But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh. (Ephesians 2:14)
Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask... Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. (James 4:1-2, 8-10)

Canticle of Zechariah:
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, he has come to his people and set them free; he has raised up for us a mighty savior in the house of his servant David. As he spoke from his holy prophets of old, that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham, to set us free from the hands of our enemies so that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. You my child shall be called the Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give the people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. Through the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:68-79)

The Early Martyrs and Nonviolent Resistance

Early Christians under the Roman Empire faced an increasingly policy of intolerance and persecution for over two and a half centuries, culminating in the early fourth century with the empire-wide persecutions by the emperor Diocletian. The refusal of Christians to accept the religion of the Roman and the divinity of the emperor, as well as their active seeking of converts, placed them outside the law. Christians practiced their faith in hiding, for suspicion alone was cause for their arrest, consignment to exile or execution. It is likely that tens of thousands of these early Christians were executed by the Roman authorities, until Constantine adopted the Christian religion for the Roman empire in the year 313. From these years of persecution, a tradition of nonvio-
lent martyrdom sprang forth, a tradition that has found expression in movements for justice and civil rights even up to the present day. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage who became a martyr in the year 258, writes to his diocese:

You must follow the lessons, which I have preached and taught to you time and time again. Remain calm and peaceable. Let no one among you stir up any trouble for the brethren or offer himself up to the pagans of his own volition. But if a man has been apprehended and delivered up, then he has a duty to speak out, in as much as God who dwells within us speaks at that hour. He has shown that His will is that we should do more than profess our faith, we are to confess it.25 (Cyprian of Carthage, Letter 81)

Cyprian was beheaded on September 14, a few weeks after Letter 81 was distributed. The martyr-acta (accounts of martyrs’ lives and deaths) describe his demeanor in dying as “calm and peaceable,” just as he preached to his people. It is important to note that although the vast majority of martyr-acta are of dubious historicity, documents such as the Acta Proconsularia, which tells of Cyprian, were composed by Roman notaries themselves and are thus seen to be reliable. Equanimity in the face of mortal danger, respect for one’s own life (martyrdom should never be sought), and submission to the will of God are the distinguishing features of this tradition. Eileen Egan aptly notes, “The nonviolent response of the Christians to the evils heaped upon them was a mystery to those around them, and above all to their persecutors. It was not only a mystery but a madness, a madness inexplicable without the example of the willing death on the cross.”26

One of the most important early Christian texts, the Apologia of St. Justin Martyr, was submitted directly to the emperor Antoninus Pius in the mid-second century. Justin, in defending the right of Christians to exist in the empire, describes his own people as the epitome of a peaceful community: “It is not right to answer fighting with fighting, nor does God wish us to imitate the wicked; but he has exhorted us to lead all men away from the shame and cupidity of the wicked by patience and gentleness.”27 As Justin’s traditional title indicates, his ethic of nonviolence did not save his life. Nor was that his intent. For men, women and
children such as these, death was not the end but a new beginning and its pains were seen as inconsequential in comparison to the eternal blessedness that lay ahead. The words of Thomas Merton illustrate this point in a modern context:

Nonviolence is not for power but for truth. It is not pragmatic but prophetic. It is not aimed at immediate political results, but at the manifestation of fundamental and crucially important truth. Nonviolence is not primarily the language of efficacy, but the language of kairos. It does not say, “We shall overcome” so much as “This is the day of the Lord, and whatever may happen to us, he shall overcome.”

For Continued Discussion

The New Testament understanding of peace carries the rich heritage of the Hebrew shalom and seeks to foster spiritual, mental, and physical well being. How can Jews, Christians and Muslims cultivate an environment or social context in which relationships between men and women and God participate in God’s plan for humanity’s blessing and creation’s flourishing? Discuss practical ways to begin with one’s family and community.

The radical nonviolence of the early Christians was in direct juxtaposition to the martial virtue extolled by Roman Empire. Discuss the extent to which the New Testament formed the lives of these Christians, especially in the midst of a culture that diametrically opposed many of its central teachings. What can modern Christians learn from the martyrs’ reliance on the teachings of justice and peace advanced by Jesus? Discuss the lives of courageous people, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who are examples of believers responding to injustice. His April 1963, letter from a Birmingham jail follows:

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks, before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.
The absence of violent conflict is not the fullest expression of peace, but it is an important precondition for justice to take root. Why isn’t the cessation of violence in the world enough for Jews, Christians or Muslims? For the sake of harmony and peaceful co-existence, why is it not enough for believers to be quiet non-participants in the midst of a dominant culture that advocates values contrary to theirs? What are the implications for historical revelation and interpretation, ethics, and hope in such a consideration?

The Just War Theory: Insights and Problems

The legalization of Christian faith in the year 313 ended the imperial persecutions, and at the same time paved the road toward the day when Christians would wield political power in the Mediterranean world. With political power came the responsibility to defend the populace against aggression, making a categorical adherence to nonviolence all but impossible at the practical level of the state. Christian leaders and intellectuals formulated the beginnings of what is now known as the just war theory, which they regarded as an authentically Christian response to the realities of Christian society and the threats from abroad.

St. Augustine (d. 430) exerted significant influence in the formulation of Christian just war theory. In a letter to Boniface he wrote, “Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained.” In another letter to Darius he wrote, “But it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war. For those who fight, if they are good men, doubtless seek for peace; nevertheless it is through blood. Your mission, however, is to prevent the shedding of blood.”

Any interpretation of the Christian just war theory must acknowledge its purpose: to constrain, define, and codify the limits of morally legitimate force. Warfare, in this context, is never the goal, but remains as a possible duty after the exhaustion of all its alternatives. This approach must not be selectively applied to thwart this purpose of limiting and restraining the human inclination toward violence.
By the medieval period, Augustine’s teachings would become the basis for law. The canon lawyers in medieval Europe devised a system by which the right to go to war (ius ad bellum) and the conduct of armed conflict (ius in bello) would be ascertained by a rigorous list of criteria. These criteria have changed as warfare has changed over the centuries, but the criteria remain largely the same today. A contemporary document, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, summarizes *ius ad bellum* in the following way:

- The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- All other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- There must be serious prospects of success;
- The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weights heavily in evaluating this condition. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2309)

In brief, the *ius in bello* norms are: noncombatant immunity, by which civilians are spared as much as possible from the direct and indirect ravages of war; proportionality, by which objectives are met with no further force than is absolutely required; and right intention, by which the concern for peace with justice prevents indiscriminate violence and excesses that stem from immoral intentions in conflict.

There are many who have objected to the use of the just war theory as an authentic Christian response to violence. They say that light of the Gospel, warfare can never truly claim to be justifiable. Leo Tolstoy, in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, sums this position up simply: “Christianity, with its doctrine of humility, of forgiveness, of love, is incompatible with the state, with its haughtiness, its violence, its punishment, its wars.” John H. Yoder, in *The Politics of Jesus*, analyzes this position critically:

The key to the obedience of God’s people is not their effectiveness but their patience. The triumph of the right is assured not by the might that comes to the aid of the right, which is of course the justification of the use of violence and the other kinds of power in every human conflict; the triumph of the right, although it is assured, is sure because of the power of the resurrection and not because of any calculation of causes and
effects, nor because of the inherently greater strength of the good guys. The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.  

For Continued Discussion

As noted earlier in Part II of this Study Guide, the Code of Hammurabi, Lex Talionis, the Ten Commandments and the establishment of just laws are vehicles to assist in reducing violence. Can we expect more from peace-making efforts than the reduction of violence? If so, what can we expect? If not, why continue trying? Should this discussion be one of what we can hope for, more than what we can expect?

Do you think that the just war theory and a commitment to Gospel non-violence are mutually exclusive? Is it a simple question of “realism vs. idealism,” or can there be a conversation between these two positions?

Read Eileen Egan's critique of the effectiveness of just war theory proponents. Do you agree or disagree with her assessment? What might be other viable alternatives to the just war proponents or Egan?

The just war conditions, as a means of preventing war or of lessening its brutality, have shown themselves to be irrelevant to the war-makers. Christians, their role in war always presented to them by the state as the enterprise of justice through violence, have little choice but to join with their nation-state in judging and punishing...The tragedy would be if God's creation met destruction by the power and destructive will of humankind. The expression of this destructive will might well be a war undoubtedly declared just by its perpetrators.

Individuals and groups of individuals (Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and others with their followers) have demonstrated the self-denial and suffering that strict nonviolence seems to require in the midst of adversarial power and injustice. Given the diverse make up of democracies, is it possible for an entire nation to operate with the same principles? Could there ever be such a nation?
RELIGION AND PEACE

Have you ever resorted to violence in self-defense or in defense of others? Have you ever confronted aggression with nonviolence? Think about these experiences and the necessities and choices that they presented.

PEACE IN ISLAM

Peace in the Qur'an

And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in God. (Qur'an, 8:61)

If they let you be, and do not make war against you and offer you peace, then God does not allow you to harm them. (Qur'an, 4:90)

The Jews and the Christians all who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds, shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Qur'an, 5:69).

And know that God invites man to the abode of peace. (Qur'an, 10:25)

As for those of the unbelievers who do not fight against you on account of your faith, and neither do they drive you out of your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity, for verily, God loves those who act equitably. (Qur'an, 60:7)

Peace be upon you and God's Mercy and His blessings. (Obligatory form of greeting)

Tolerance as a Principle of Peace

In Arabic, *islam* is the word for “surrender” which also comes from the root SLM, from which also comes the word “*salam,*” peace. The name of the religion Islam combines the meanings of surrender to God and peace.

Similar to Judaism and Christianity, Islam views justice and peace as necessarily related. Peace is what the rightly ordered society enjoys, by
ensuring the just fulfillment of obligations to God and others. The Qur’an is a book of faith from which Muslims derive their laws, philosophy, ethics and theology necessary to constitute the kind of human society that God intends. The Qur’an is intended to be studied and interpreted in a holistic way. From the Qur’an, principles of tolerance and pluralism emerge as ways to achieve peace through just laws and societies.

As noted above, in the Qur’an, it is said that God has ordained that there be different religions on earth (49:13, 30:22), they must respect each other (49:11) and discrimination is forbidden on any basis. Freedom of religious belief is paramount in the Qur’an, which states, “There shall be no coercion in matters of faith” (2:256). Further, “Surely, those who have faith in this divine writ, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians and the Sabians, all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds, shall have their reward with their Lord, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.” (2:62 and also 5:65).

Islam holds in highest esteem the values of tolerance and respect for all people including non-Muslims. Muslims are permitted to eat the food of non-Muslims and to befriend them as in-laws, relatives and friends (5:5) thus creating the freedom for cooperation and peaceful coexistence. God who is Just (one of the 99 names of God) has sent his guidance and light to every community on earth, each in its own language or way. God has made humans his vicegerents (2:30, 6:165) so that they could continue to do his work on earth. Humans are expected to work for peace by protecting the values of equality, justice and fair dealings as ordered in the Qur’an—even between enemies or those one dislikes. The Qur’an reads: “O believers, be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred or enmity of any people lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just, this is the closest to being God conscious.” (5:8)

The Prophet Mohammed was the first person to establish an Islamic polity in Medina, where he drew up what came to be known as The Constitution of Medina. In this document the Jews of Medina were declared to be “one community with the believers, they have their religion and the Muslims have theirs” (n. 25).

For Continued Discussion

Is it possible and feasible to put the Islamic ethos of tolerance and
peaceful coexistence into practice? What are the conditions under which such a polity could exist today?

What can Jews and Christians learn from the period of the Golden Age in Spain where such an ethos successfully balanced peace and plurality among its community?

How can Jewish, Christian and Islamic intra-religious dialogue benefit from the insights of tolerance and peaceful co-existence advocated by Islam?

**Jihad, Justice and Peace**

The complexities of sustaining an Islamic ethos over a long period of time in the face of competing and antagonistic political and military forces caused those with the responsibility to defend the populace to develop an authentically Islamic response to such threats. The Qur'an allows for Muslims to defend themselves in the face of aggression or violence. Much like Christianity in its just war theory, Islam clearly specifies the defensive conditions under which violence or *jihad* in Islam is permitted.

The word *jihad* comes from the Arabic root JHD, which means to exert effort, to strive, to struggle. There are 14 layers of *jihad*; the highest or greatest of these is to struggle against one's own evil inclinations. Other *jihads* are described as one's efforts to make society more just through peaceful methods such as the jihad of the tongue or pen. The least desirable or smallest jihad is that with the sword. The Qur'an reads:

Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged—and verily God has indeed the power to give them victory. Those who have been driven out from their homelands against all right, for no other reason than their saying, “Our Lord is God.” If God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, then all monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled—all of them would have been destroyed. And God will support those who support Him. (22:39-40)
Chapter 9 of the Qur'an deals with the challenges of war and violence. God is opposed to war, although war is sometimes necessary: "Will you not fight a folk who broke their solemn pledges and proposed to drive out the Prophet and did attack you first?" (9:13). It is significant to note that Islam permits violence because of its possibility to defend the just society that God desires. Such a society is the best condition for equality and peace to flourish.

For Continued Discussion

Expansionist jihad is neither cited nor permitted in the Qur'an. Jihad with the sword should be limited to defensive purposes only. Historically, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all waged expansionist wars in the name of God. How can the Abrahamic faiths learn from and be challenged by each other to remain faithful to God's desire for peace and justice?

Can cultural, educational or religious programs be promoted in your community to build trust and respect while stemming the tide of those who would twist Judaism, Christianity or Islam into violent religions? What have others done from which you can learn? What can you do?

What are the appropriate interreligious collaborations or programs where the authentic teachings of peace and justice found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam can be advanced? What are the opportunities in your community for such efforts?

Concluding Reflections

Most significant in this matter is the behavior of Western societies, and above all of their intellectuals, when confronted with the great collective crimes of our century. There exists...an astonishing amnesia, as if these crimes were insignificant mishaps. We know, and yet we do not wish to remember. It is true that the memory of things past is susceptible to the opposite excess. It can become a kind of obsession that suffocates and stifles. We cannot develop here an analysis of the forms of remorse and the forms of guilt. It also happens that the indignant evocation of a distant past can serve as a kind of alibi for the hiding of a more recent past.
Our generation is realistic, for we have come to know what man is really all about. After all, man is that being who has invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also the being who has entered those chambers upright with the Lord’s Prayer or the Shema Israel on his lips."