

Editorial

Peace in Times of Political and Moral Uncertainty



Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the ensuing war, peace, pacifism and international peace practice have received increased multi-disciplinary attention. The armed conflict between Israel and Hamas and the war in Gaza, sparked by the terror attacks on 7 October 2023, further intensified the urgency of these discussions. In light of the above, traditionally pacifist groups and leftwing political parties in particular have shifted their stance in the discourse on peace: Staunchly pacifist principles gave way to open and contested considerations of justified military actions in self-defence, potentially including pro-active armed attacks. Concepts of a "just war" and peace are thrown into question and the potential and constraints of peace interventions are being renegotiated, not least in view of accelerated efforts towards military re-armament in Europe. The ongoing geopolitical shifts and debates reveal many political and moral insecurities and doubts that give new rise to fundamental questions.

Religions and religious groups play a fundamental role in many ongoing conflicts. Although these groups often see themselves as peace actors, they may also incite violence and justify war. This raises the question of whether and to what extent positions that legitimise violence within religions constitute an aberration of them, or whether they emerge from specific religious characteristics. Yet, instances of conflict and peace processes in the international community cannot be assessed purely objectively and separated from religious-theological identities. For example, Christianity and Judaism are historically and tragically interwoven and both faith traditions share a mutually entangled history with Islam.

Translation:
Dagmar Astleitner MA
PRISM Translations, London

Following the current ecological, political, military, social as well as technological developments, our understanding of peace also requires constant rearticulation. While the concept of peace is entangled with certain religious and political roots, it also needs to adapt in order to meet new realities and changes. At the same time, these processes are caught between idealistic concepts of peace, such as positive peace or liberal peace, on the one hand, and the realistic possibilities and limitations of distinct and practically feasible peace practices on the other hand.

The powerful and almost redemptive significance of peace equally holds potential for abuse and manipulation. Accordingly, ‘peace’ and ‘peace intervention’ can be used to justify military action and legitimize authoritarian structures. Thus, adopting a critical perspective on the concept of peace is crucial in order to scrutinise the contexts in which peace is discussed, the ways in which it is discussed, and the underlying power dynamics at play..

Peace – in its personal, spiritual, as well as social and political dimensions – is in many ways a core concern of religion and deserves recognition as such in current contexts and discussions. Its diverse and constitutive influence across people’s lived realities demands an equally diversified and multi-disciplinary dialogue in order to better understand what peace is.

This issue of [LIMINA](#) addresses the above issues and questions from the perspectives of theology, political science, the humanities, and peace studies. In the first paper of this issue *Mario Steinwender* analyses the philosophical discourse of the Enlightenment, which culminates in Kant’s concept of “perpetual peace”. Steinwender reveals the brittleness of generalising ideas of peace through a postmodern lens and thus opens up new philosophical perspectives. After all, it was not least the traumata of the 20th century that forced postmodern philosophy to confront and reconsider modern thought. Steinwender finally examines what insights can be gained from this discourse for a contemporary understanding of peace.

Following on, *Klaus Moegling* and *Josef Mühlbauer* present a Critical Peace Studies approach. This requires the ability to think in terms of complexity in order to adequately address the complexity of the so-called multiple crises ranging from politics to environment to artificial intelligence.

In order to overcome this multitude of challenges, the understanding of peace needs to be both broad in scope and emancipatory in practice, leading towards a just social order free from discrimination. In turn, this requires an equally broad understanding of science alongside methodological openness. This approach most closely reflects the necessary intersectional emancipatory work that is asked of a critical study of peace. *Werner Wintersteiner* discusses the idea of an ethical duty to pursue peace in response to the current positional shift towards equating peace with militarism in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. He calls on Ethics as a scientific discipline with the responsibility and ability to systematically and scientifically understand human duty. The article argues that such a foundationally neutral ethical imperative of peace would be more effective than the notion of just peace.

In his biblical study, *Josef Pichler* puts the concepts of peace in the New Testament, as presented in the Letter to the Ephesians and the Gospel of Luke, in context and contrast with the political idea of the Pax Romana. Rather than suggesting a mere alternative to the Roman concept of peace, both biblical texts offer a complex relational analysis of the Roman power discourse. The article shows how the different yet complementary approaches in the Gospel of Luke and the Letter to the Ephesians interact with and distance themselves from the dominant Roman culture of order without outright rejecting it.

Juliana Krohn undertakes a rearticulation of the concept of peace within the context and the problems of the ongoing triple planetary crisis. The currently dominant liberal peace is not only being called into question by the modest success of associated peace interventions, but also necessarily overlaps with planetary crises. Taking this into consideration, Krohn offers a concept of peace based on a relational worldviews and a care approach.

From a similar theoretical background, *Daniela Lehner* observes a multitude of current crises and traces their root cause to a reductive ontological interpretation. She rejects a divided ontology that separates humans from nature and in response introduces a relational understanding of peace in order to facilitate a practice of peace that follows principles of care ethics and expands a singular understanding of the world into a pluriversal one.

Julia Sachseder critically investigates peace efforts in Colombia. Despite a formal agreement in 2016, peace remains elusive for many as communities continue to experience violence against Afro-Colombian and indigenous women. Drawing on the concept of colonial violence, Sachseder lays bare complex and interwoven economic, socio-ecological and symbolic mechanisms that underpin a so-called extractive violence that manifests itself in forms of sexualized and ecological violence.

Drawing on the principles of interreligious education, *Şenol Yagdı* examines its potentials and applications for peace education. His analysis focuses on Islamic religion teachers, their experiences and attitudes. The results reveal that interreligious learning processes offer many opportunities for peace education, but can only be truly effective if established social power structures and asymmetries (e. g. regarding religious differences) are critically reviewed. Conversely, if interreligious dialogue does not address these foundational starting points, it can create new mechanisms of exclusion and othering amongst participants.

Oliver Fink and *Orly Idan* look at the link between moral foundations and collective action within different contexts of political and moral uncertainty, with a focus on inter-group conflicts. They analyse autobiographical documents from the Second World War that provide insight into the moral considerations and behaviours of Etty Hillesum and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as examples of moral role models and put them in contrast with Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Using natural language processing tools, they reveal how role models of morality resist general moral shifts while perpetrators justify their actions based on loyalty and authority. The findings in this study hold present relevance for building moral resilience and peaceful collective action in polarised and fragmented social contexts.

In the second biblical studies article in this issue, *Alexa Stephany* highlights the unconditionality of peace in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. She explains the understanding of peace as described in the Gospel of Luke, in particular with reference to the "sending of the 72" (Luke 10:1-12), and analyzes how Luke translated this specific understanding for his Greek-speaking audience. The biblical passages clearly demonstrate that the promise of peace can be made unconditionally and that speaking of peace is always related to God's universal salvation.

The [Open Space](#) segment of our issue allows us to publish poignant and debate-worthy contributions outside the scope of peer-review regulations. Here, *Egon Spiegel* offers a creative and original blueprint for an “Irenology 3.0”, weaving together various discourses on peace and biographical experiences and personal perspectives. Spurred on by his observations of dissolving peace discourses, particularly in Christian communities, he emphasises the necessity for consequent and violence-free action towards conflict resolution deepened by reflections on globalisation, concepts of culture, daily coexistence and peace education.

We hope you find the articles in this issue to be interesting and engaging, and that [LIMINA – Theological perspectives from Graz](#) can be an enriching resource for you.

Christian Feichtinger and Maximilian Lakitsch
Issue Editors, on behalf of the editorial team