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Introduction
War and Peace in the Late Middle Ages

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Whither just war? It is a question scholars and activists have been asking with particular intensity and reappraisal in the last two generations. We turn here to the late medieval period, especially around the time when Muslim forces finally achieved in 1453 an earlier goal: the occupation of Constantinople. This fifteenth-century event, along with the decades before and after, focused the 19th biennial meeting of the American Cusanus Society and the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Theology held at United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg PA during the autumn of 2023. Three panels of papers and two workshops on texts studied war, peace, and religious violence. While participants looked closely at the life and works of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), they also considered major events during the long late Middle Ages in Europe and the Middle East. The goal was to reevaluate options and actions for war and peace during this crucible moment in history with an eye toward applying historical lessons. This special issue features five articles that grew out of presentations at the 2023 conference by emerging and established scholars; the sixth is on a related topic (by this author). The journal articles in this special issue continue the prolific publication record of the American Cusanus Society, which since 1991 has published, mostly with Brill, over a dozen volumes of essays originating with papers from the Society's Gettysburg conferences as well as the annual meetings of the Renaissance Society of America and the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University and Leeds.

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tions. After centuries of development and adaptation, the discussion took a dramatic turn in the mid-twentieth century with the advent of nuclear weapons. Bertrand Russell argued that mutually assured destruction was quite literally madness, declaring that the only possible response was to use the apocalyptic threat posed by those weapons to seek peace (Russell, 1959). On the other hand, Paul Ramsey believed the use of nuclear weapons could be permissible under the just war tradition if they were deployed tactically and against proper targets (Ramsey 1968). But given the indiscriminate and massive destruction of public spaces and the decimation of non-combatant civilian life in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the notion of a tactical strike against proper targets seems at least complicated and at most impossible to apply. Yet pragmatists in the line of Reinhold Niebuhr contend that Christian realism cannot avoid the fact that we live in a fallen world theologically and a fallible world since human beings are not perfect. For them, a just war is still a viable option, though its application, especially in the face of new technology, must be carefully patrolled for misuse (Winright and Johnston 2015).

Indeed, history endlessly demonstrates that simply saying a war is just according to the three standard criteria for going to war (*ius ad bellum*) – just cause, right intention, legitimate authority – does not make it just. One person's freedom fighter is another's rebel. One country's claim to sovereignty is another's invasion. One faith's divine sanction is another's heresy. Another complication in studying just war is to look at the matter theoretically. Indeed, the very phrase *just war theory* falls short: while theologians, scholars, politicians, and military leaders have used the phrase in the abstract, the notions of going to war (*ius ad bellum*) and permissible actions in war (*ius in bello*) are never theoretical. The better way is to use the phrase "just war tradition" in place of "theory," thereby including notions and practical examples as models to be avoided or followed. In addition, the field has recently grown to include on very practical terms what happens after war ends (*ius post bellum*); the responsibility to protect (R2P) before, during, and after hostilities; just peacemaking; and continuing attempts at nuclear deterrence and disarmament (Christiansen and Sargent 2020, 2023; Kwon 2023).

One of the most frequent and fruitful examples of studying just war tradition in this practically-applied manner is to look at the medieval Crusades—a topic profitably studied but also grossly manipulated since 11 September 2001. To use just one example: the Christchurch New Zealand criminal who killed 51 Muslims in two mosques, physically wounded hundreds of others, and emotionally scarred countless people had written

732 on his assault weapon. This number is a code to white supremacists; it is a reference to the year of the Battle of Tours when Charles Martel stopped the Muslim advance into Europe. His rambling manifesto entitled "The Great Replacement" was full of cobbled-together references to Pope Urban II, who had called what became the first crusade in 1099, and praised martyrdom in God's cause as he defined it (Harwood 2021; Jones and Williams, 2020). He used nouns and verbs derived from the word *invade* 67 times, in fact more than the 44 forms of the word *replace* despite his title and referred to revenge for 1300 years of war.

We turn here, however, not to the two centuries of the major crusades (1099–1291), but to the late medieval period, especially around the time when Muslim forces finally achieved in 1453 an earlier goal: the occupation of Constantinople. This fifteenth-century event, along with the decades before and after, focused the 19th biennial meeting of the American Cusanus Society and the International Seminar on Pre-Reformation Theology held at United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg PA during the autumn of 2023. The collaborative conference was the latest in a series begun in 1986; this meeting featured a rich international in-person participation, especially enjoyable in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic. Three panels of papers and two workshops on texts studied war, peace, and religious violence. While participants looked closely at the life and works of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), they also considered major events during the long late Middle Ages in Europe and the Middle East. The goal was to reevaluate options and actions for war and peace during this crucible moment in history with an eye toward applying historical lessons.

This special issue features five articles that grew out of presentations at the 2023 conference by emerging and established scholars; the sixth is on a related topic. Unless otherwise noted, we rely largely on the definitive edition of Cusanus's work from the Heidelberg Academy as found on www.cusanus-portal.de, where a variety of translations from his Latin into German and English are noted, the latter especially by Jasper Hopkins. (The reader is directed to that site for full bibliographic citations to the critical edition project begun in 1928 and concluding early in the twenty-first century.) The journal articles in this special issue continue the prolific publication record of the American Cusanus Society, which since 1991 has published over a dozen volumes of essays originating with papers from the Society's Gettysburg conferences as well as the annual meetings of the Renaissance Society of America and the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University and Leeds. These volumes have been organized around the wide range of subjects on

which Cusanus wrote: philosophy, ecclesiology and particularly conciliarism, scriptural exegesis, Christology and trinitarian theology, politics, church reform, spirituality and mysticism, humanism, learned ignorance, and interreligious dialogue. A special issue of the journal *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* inspired this effort; that issue contains articles drawn primarily from the 2018 Gettysburg conference on Christian approaches to the Qur'an (Duclow *et al* 2019).

Markus Riedenauer begins by setting a theoretical framework for Cusanus's writings about violence. Matteo Esu moves the discussion to Vienna with the theologian and university rector Peter of Pirchenwart (d. 1436). Esu directs our attention to *De religione militari contra Hussitas*, in which Peter encourages political authorities to fight the Hussites as an enemy and religious minority within Christianity, even as he struggles to legitimate belligerence and to reconcile violent suppression with evangelical pacifism. Joëlle Rollo-Koster invites us to the bargaining table, discussing the physical setting and atmosphere where negotiators would convene, dine, and attempt to make peace. Marco Brösch and Thomas Woelki sift through Cusanus' complicated later years. Woelki considers how Cusanus, charged with protecting Rome and the papal states, was faced with street fighting and local conflicts, leading him to act simultaneously as both peacekeeper and warlord. Broesch is similarly concerned with Cusanus the pragmatist as he faced opposition to his authority as bishop, regional conflicts, and the new Islamic threat after 1453. The current author takes a comparative approach and moves forward to early modernity to pursue how Cusanus' efforts at war and peace compared with Juan de Segovia, Tommaso Giustiniani, and Vincenzo Querini. The hope is that such an exploration not only will provide nuance to our historical lens, but also shine light on the ongoing struggle of the contemporary world to secure peace in a time of conflict.

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