

Changing the Conversation: Theologizing War in the Twenty-First Century

Dr. Shelly Rambo

Boston University School of Theology

Abstract

While the post-9/11 wars have reshaped war as understood and practiced by the United States, theological discourse about war has changed very little. Highlighting distinctive dimensions of twenty-first-century war, I argue that existing theological discourse is insufficient to address these new realities. These “new wars” press up against existing theological frameworks for interpreting war and call for different modes of thought and action. This article proposes three angles for theological engagement—the traumatic, the interreligious, and the aesthetic. Taking the theological classroom as a starting point, I envision a new approach that prepares religious leaders for effective theological engagement about war.

Keywords

theology, war, 9/11, U.S. military, twenty-first century

In the early decades of the new millennium, the United States has been almost perpetually at war on foreign soil. In the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, citizens have witnessed changes in the way in which war is waged. There have been astounding developments in the technologies of weaponry, a different constitution of the military in a non-draft era, and the rise of a growing “epidemic” of PTSD amongst military personnel.¹ The controversial justifications for the invasion of

1. For an outline of some of these developments, see Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 2nd ed (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash, eds, *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, Management* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Corresponding author:

Shelly Rambo, Boston University School of Theology, 745 Commonwealth Ave, Boston, MA 02115.

Email: srambo@bu.edu

Iraq and the institution of the Patriot Act raised public concern about U.S. aims and military efforts. Underlying these changes are the moral and spiritual complexities that have always accompanied war. David Grossman describes this as a “shrinking of the surface area of the soul that comes in contact with the bloody and menacing world out there.”²

The post-9/11 wars briefly reignited the longstanding discourses of just war and pacifism and spurred retrievals of noted twentieth-century theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr.³ While new challenges appeared, there was little disruption to the academic study of theology. There was a theological window in which the discourse of war and the questions about military service and faith commitments were reignited. We saw a brief resurgence of the classic questions: Can Christians go to war? Is this a just war? But for the most part, theological discourse remained relatively intact. Whereas twentieth-century theologians were engrossed in issues of war (and, in fact, it was often a litmus test for what kind of theologian you were), contemporary theologians and theological schools did not, for the most part, have issues of war at the forefront of the curriculum. It was largely “business as usual.” But the business of war has changed. Even as these particular wars come to a close, the contours of post-9/11 wars have shifted the theological landscape for thinking about combat, violence, and suffering. New angles of theological engagement must be forged as a result.

In *A Terrible Love of War*, psychologist James Hillman begins his analysis of war with a curious statement about theology: “War is . . . a psychological task because philosophy and theology, the fields supposed to do the heavy lifting for our species, have neglected war’s overriding importance.”⁴ While theological voices were prominent in twentieth-century reflections on war, theological discourse about the wars of a new millennium has yet to take shape. As the nature of war and religion’s role in war changes, how will theologians respond to these changes? First, I aim briefly to identify present theological approaches to war. Second, I outline distinctive dimensions of the new century’s wars. Third, I propose three angles for theological engagement that meet the new realities: the traumatic, the interreligious, and the aesthetic. These three expose theological dimensions different than those addressed by dominant twentieth-century theologians. Influential educator and author Parker J. Palmer speaks about living in the “tragic gap” of our times; rather than maneuvering around this gap, he invites us to navigate

2. David Grossman lost his son in the Israeli-Lebanon war in 2002. His essay was adapted from the Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture, which he delivered at PEN’s World Voices Festival on April 29, 2007. See David Grossman, “Writing in the Dark,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2007. It was translated from the Hebrew by Orr Scharf.

3. The most notable recovery of Niebuhr’s ideas to speak against U.S. practices of war in Iraq was made by historian Andrew Bacevich in *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Macmillan, 2008). Bacevich writes, “*The Limits of Power* employs what might be called a Niebuhrian perspective. Writing decades ago, Reinhold Niebuhr anticipated that predicament with uncanny accuracy and astonishing prescience” (6).

4. James Hillman, *The Terrible Love of War* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 2.

amidst it.⁵ Because war remains a theologically charged and polarizing issue, discourse about war places us in this tragic gap; the case I'm making here is that this requires new means of theological navigation drawn from the richness of our theological traditions.

Part One: Present Approaches

"You would not believe the things that I have seen." A chaplain in the U.S. Navy, Chaplain (LtCdr) Laura Bender arrived at Boston University School of Theology after tours of duty in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq. Her stories pulled me into a new, and unfamiliar, world.⁶ Ignited by Laura's presence in the classroom, my inquiry into Christian theological responses to war began. Her entrance into the classroom challenged fundamental assumptions that I had—about women, about the military, and about war. She, and others like her, sent me on a journey through the literatures of war and through the hallways of military institutions, in an unwieldy theological journey, in which I have had to examine what role, as a theologian, I would play in responding to the military realities of my day. Looking around, I asked, what resources were at my disposal for engaging the complexities of Laura's war experiences?

There are three primary approaches to war within the current theological context: critique, stance, and care. The first approach is critique. One way that contemporary theologians are engaging issues of war is through an analysis of empire and the military-industrial complex.⁷ In the wake of 9/11, there was growing concern about the decision by the US government to send troops into Iraq. Yet even before this, the broad identification of the United States as enacting a new face of empire in the globalized world had prompted a wealth of literature and discussion about the implications of US presence around the world. The emphasis of this literature pointed to the entangled relationship of discourses of empire and theological discourse. Hart and Negri's *Empire* analyzed shifts taking place in the global sphere and provided language to interpret the role of the United States in the global economy. The identification of the USA as an empire, on the scale of

5. "To live in this world, we must learn how to stand in the tragic gap with faith and hope... The tragic gap is a gap between 'what is and what should be'." See Parker J. Palmer, "The Broken-Open Heart: Living with Faith and Hope in the Tragic Gap," *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian's Spiritual Life* 24.2 (2009): 8.

6. Laura had done tours in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq; she was one of the first chaplains to be deployed in 2003. She is presently stationed at the Wounded Warrior Regiment in Quantico, VA.

7. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2000). The provocative analysis of new forms of imperialism set forth in this text spawned the following theological works: Kwok Pui Lan et al., *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007); Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007); David Ray Griffin et al., *American Empire and the Commonwealth of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Katherine Keller et al., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Duluth, GA: Christian Board of Publication, 2004).

Rome and Britain was provocative, but it named the forces of late capitalism in ways that resonated with present US activities; the era of the nation-state was over, and something else was coming into being.

The US military, recognized as the chief agent of this empire, was the object of critique. Yet within the analysis of the military-industrial complex, there is an acknowledgement that this reality pervades every arena of our lives. To wake up, go to work, and to exist in the United States is to be supported by not only an industrialized nation but a militarized one. Simply by being a consumer, we are complicit in these structures. This recognition is one of the key contributions of this theological work. Whether you acknowledge support of the US military or not, you are part of this larger complex. At its best, this approach offers the means by which to detect the mechanisms of war.

Another way in which theologians are engaging war is through continuing the longstanding discussions and debates about just war theory and pacifism. I refer to this as the stance approach. For religious persons, the question of whether one can ever justify the taking of another life is at the heart of one's understanding of what it means to live as a believer in a society that engages in war. These approaches grapple with the issues of the relationship between religious identity and commitments and civic and national identity and commitments. These stances develop from deep engagement with the Christian tradition, reaching back to apostolic faith, biblical teachings, and to influential figures such as Augustine to speak to questions of modern-day warfare.⁸ This is perhaps the most recognized theological approach to war, and it is certainly the most familiar in terms of the teaching and training of religious leaders.⁹ Can Christians take up arms? If peace is at the heart of the Christian message, how can a person reconcile this faith stance with the individual—or the national—acts of warfare?

A third approach to war is theological response to the wounds of war—what I identify as care. The inheritance of these ongoing wars is becoming clear. With increased awareness of PTSD and the impact of combat on the US military, religious communities are recognizing the need for support. Theologians and religious leaders are thinking about how to address these needs.¹⁰ In many cases, education about trauma is central to this approach. Part of the legacy of Vietnam has been a decided effort not to repeat the mistakes of the past—to not turn away from the needs of veterans and their families as a way of protesting US military involvement

8. See Oliver O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited* (New York: Cambridge, 2003).

9. New works in these areas that press beyond just war and pacifism as primarily understood as theoretical "stances" and, instead, casts them within the realm of communal "practices" and ways of life. See Daniel Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather Than the State* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), and Patricia Applebaum, *Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist Culture between World War I and the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

10. One of the most recent responses is the "moral injury" initiative by theologian Rita Nakashima Brock and retired chaplain Herm Keizer at Brite Divinity School. See Brock's book, *Soul Repair: Recovering From Moral Injury After War* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012).

in the war. Whatever one's political position, the focus of this approach is to respond to the needs growing out of war.

When Chaplain Bender and I began to talk about her tours of duty and the challenges she faces in providing spiritual care to Navy personnel, her account revealed unique dynamics at play in twenty-first-century warring: the stresses of multiple deployments, the rise of social media in all arenas of war, and the complexities of ministering as a military chaplain in the religiously charged aftermath of 9/11. As I reached for any of the existing approaches, the shortcomings were apparent. We were far away from the question of whether the USA should enter the war. Militarism is so woven into the fabric of life in the USA that it's difficult to see it as such; yet analysis of the mechanisms of war production is even more imperative given war's normalization. If war is a permanent state, a new condition of being American and living in America, where does this place the just war and pacifist discourses? If, as those who articulate the critique response are correct, the military-industrial complex is something in which we are all complicit, the discourses of "going to war" do not provide a way of speaking about what seems to be an ongoing condition.¹¹ It is difficult to sustain public attention for a decade-long war without visible end, so the question of care is a serious one.¹² Care approaches can be responsive but can operate without an inherent critique of conditions leading to war. Critique is care's complementary discourse. Analysis of how class is functioning within these wars is needed, and this analysis reaches across critique and care approaches. The insufficiency of existing approaches is reflective of the rapidly shifting realities of twenty-first-century war.¹³

Part Two: Twenty-First Century War

There is a certain irony in speaking about twenty-first century war, given that we are a little more than a decade into this century. Yet the events of September 11, 2001 and the US response marked the beginning of this millennium in significant

11. Dwight Eisenhower forecast this in his farewell speech to the nation in 1960. He first coined the term "military-industrial complex."
12. Judith Herman describes the ebb and flow of public attention to trauma. Although trauma and PTSD are prominent in the public eye, the challenge is to *sustain* attention to issues of trauma. See chapter 1 in Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic, 2007).
13. Reflecting on Chaplain Bender's theological education, I noted that each of these present approaches is housed in different areas of the theological school. The approach of critique can be found in contemporary theology classrooms where critical theories are engaged. There is excellent work being done by constructive theologians, who are drawing on postcolonial and political theories, for example, to analyze operations of power within the military-industrial complex. The "stance" approach is situated in ethics classrooms, where war is discussed through the traditions of just war and pacifism. Is war ever justified? Can Christians go to war? There, students will be introduced to just war and pacifist debates. The pastoral care classroom is often the site in which the care approach is explored. Focus, there, might be on care for veterans returning from war who seek pastoral guidance.

ways. The nature of war and warring has changed. I want to highlight briefly three aspects of these changes to which theologians need to be alerted.

In the twentieth century, wars were largely wars fought between nations. The targeted enemy of twenty-first-century wars is more difficult to name, as networks now replace nations. Determining the literal borders of this war as well as defining a clear enemy has been a serious challenge for the United States. In this first decade of the twenty-first century, we are witnessing the rise of networks of power that are difficult to track and to fight. Although terrorists may be operating within one country, their home base may be in another. The question of the relationship of the national government to the terrorist networks is also unclear; if a nation houses terrorists, does the nation become the target of US forces? Terrorists do not primarily represent nation-states, and they do not operate within a particular geographic territory. One of the consequences is that in the absence of a clear enemy, we have witnessed the rise of religious rhetoric to name an enemy and to fuel fighting. To identify the terrorists as religious fundamentalists has meant that Islam has become an easy target for war in the absence of a clear enemy.¹⁴ We see the repercussions of this in anti-Islamic sentiment that emerged in the post-9/11 context in, for example, the placement of a mosque in proximity to Ground Zero.

Twenty-first-century warring is costly. Neta Crawford and Catherine Lutz recently published the findings from a study assessing the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Cost of War study states that, since entering the war in 2003, the United States has spent over \$4 trillion dollars. This study is the first of its kind, and it reflects, through statistics, the new reality of war as we know it. Crawford writes, "The way the United States fights war is different than in the past. These are very capital-intensive wars."¹⁵ In the case of the present wars, the unsustainability of continual fighting is becoming more and more apparent. We simply cannot afford to be at war. Some of these costs can be attributed to the highly advanced technologies developed and employed in war. Drone technologies, artificial intelligence, and digital weaponry are the "unmanned" recruits in twenty-first-century wars. The rate at which these technologies are being developed is exceeding our capacity to assess and weigh the implications of robotic fighting. The development of these technologies is controversial. Peter W. Singer asks, "What happens when science fiction becomes battlefield reality?"¹⁶ The use of private contractors in the war in Iraq came to light with names such as Halliburton and Blackwater. Corporations were entering the "market" of war and profiting from the US presence in other countries. When troops would exit

14. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2000). For a provocative complementary text, see William Kavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

15. The Costs of War Study was conducted under the direction of Dr. Neta Crawford and Dr. Catherine Lutz. <http://costsofwar.org>. See the description of the study in *BUToday*, July 8, 2011. www.bu.edu/today/2011/staggering-price-tag-for-iraq-afghanistan-wars. Accessed August 8, 2012.

16. P.W. Singer. <http://wiredforwar.pwsinger.com>.

an area, private security contractors would enter and continue the mission. These new technologies and corporate presence in war raise ethical questions. When war is fought at a distance, with humans pressing buttons rather than bearing arms, how does this position us in relationship to responsibility for casualties. What does it mean that machines are actually making decisions about war?¹⁷ If private corporate employees are in war zones, to whom are these contractors accountable? If there is profit to be made, for example, in maintaining security forces in other countries, does extending the war fighting in other countries actually benefit private companies?

Money is driving the war in another way. Different than the wars of the twentieth century, these present wars are conducted with non-draft armies. We are operating with a mercenary army. What this means is that economics is not just driving the wars (interests, cost to nation); economics is driving the constitution of the military. In a non-draft army, only certain sectors of American society enter the military. Looking at the locations and strategies of military recruiters is telling. Charles Rangel's repeated attempts to pass a bill in Congress that would reinstitute the draft post-9/11 are motivated by concern that wars are fought off the backs of the poor. With economic and educational incentives, the military becomes an attractive employer, providing opportunities to those who are economically challenged. While there are exceptions to this, the self-selecting process means that certain segments of America fight the nation's wars. Underlying our current military configuration are unspoken issues of class. What is the cost of a life?

These wars are ongoing. Historian Andrew Bacevich speaks about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as the "endless" wars, signaling a new militarized norm in the United States.¹⁸ Wars cannot be spoken of in terms of beginnings and endings but, instead, in terms of a series of movements within the ongoing state of war. If you are tracking the question, "Are we winning the war?," it is apparent that the notion of an end and victory is precarious. It is difficult to determine the criteria for winning, given what appear to be wars that spill over into other wars. The US move into Afghanistan did not require a declaration of war; instead, the justification for entrance seemed to rest in this understanding of continuous warring. The points of entrance and withdrawal are no longer clearly drawn or identified, and the causes are mixed. A nation involved in endless wars does not need to talk in terms of invasion or even occupation; instead, the rhetoric of extension is most prevalent. This extension of war with no foreseeable outcome has prompted us to think about war differently. With the ongoingness of war, we are seeing an unprecedented number of deployments and a serious drain on the energy of the armed forces. The effects are more apparent to us as the war stretches on. PTSD, suicide

17. P.W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 78.

18. Andrew Bacevich, "Endless War: A Recipe for Four-Star Arrogance," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 2010.

rates, and sexualized violence among enlisted military personnel are at unprecedented levels, and the military is pressing to find ways of fortifying soldier resilience.¹⁹

Heeding Hillman's comment about the absence of theology in analysis of war, I imagined theological discourse that could simultaneously take account of: the realities of force and complicity, the importance of enacting moral stances, and the call to care. The theological challenge is to keep all of these in play, actively informing and sharpening each other. The language and practices of faith provide deep wisdom to address our current situation; but how? Could persons of faith engage in imaginative practices of creating a world "otherwise," vigilantly critique systemic injustices, confront government policies that justify military force in the name of "safety" and "security," work toward conditions in which war is not normative, and actively engage in practices of care for returning service members? Could the best insights from the critique, stance, and care approaches be garnered, but from new angles?

Part Three: New Angles for Theologizing Twenty-First-Century War

I want to suggest three angles that refocus theological engagement about war: the traumatic, the interreligious, and the aesthetic. I use the term angle instead of approach, because each forms a critical lens through which to examine war without presuming a singular or comprehensive approach.

Traumatic

I initially entered the conversation about war as a theologian who studied trauma. Bringing this lens to the study of war could be perceived as falling squarely within the "care" approach. Yet the lens of trauma that I bring to war provides more than instruction about the psychological after-care of veterans. Instead, it can serve as a hermeneutical lens through which theologians can speak to the non-linear and non-narrative dimensions of human suffering as they are enacted in war. Studies of trauma arose in the early twentieth century, and our descriptions of trauma have been shaped, in large part, by studying the effects of war on returning combat veterans.²⁰ From Freud's early observations of World War I soldiers to Abram Kardiner's categorization of war symptoms prior to World War II, to rap groups for Vietnam veterans, and present studies of PTSD, the study of trauma has revealed vexing dimensions of human experience, namely the way in which

19. The US Army has instituted a new program to build soldier resiliency. It is called *Comprehensive Soldier Fitness*, and it identifies five components that constitute fitness for combat: social, psychological, physical, family, and spiritual. The last two—family and spiritual—are the new components of the program.

20. Part 1 in Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic, 1997).

humans process memories.²¹ What does it mean that overwhelming experiences cannot be integrated and are, thus, inaccessible to cognition? This problem of integration has changed the way we think about traumatic experiences; it is the failure of integration that lies at the heart of trauma, providing explanations of why so many soldiers suffer when they return from war. The “enigma of experience” and its haunting return represented in trauma has been theorized in the latter half of the twentieth century.²² The questions of trauma have extended across multiple disciplines. What does it mean for an experience to remain with you long after that experience is over, but its form of remaining is not easily identifiable or accessible to you?

Although trauma is often conceived as clinical and, thus, largely individual, evoking images of therapist and client in a room talking, theories of trauma have pressed beyond the individual to think about collective trauma and conceptions of history itself. Trauma studies point to the ways in which histories are enacted without cognitive awareness. The event of war inhabits persons and communities in ways that cannot be named, and it can do this long after an event is over. If processing of memories is shut down by traumatic events, what are the implications of this on a communal or a national level? The way nations tell stories—narrate history—may be conceived of differently if thought of in terms of trauma.

In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Grace M. Cho brilliantly witnesses to how trauma shapes personal, communal, and national identities across generations.²³ She traces the figure of *yanggongju*, the name for the forgotten women of Korea, whose lives were used in service of both Japanese and American military operations. The histories of these women are continually erased, as countries like the United States seek to deny the realities of military force and the abuses that incurred in the Korean War. These women represent the spoils of war, and Cho analyzes the effects of this legacy of war on subsequent generations of Koreans. Her aim is to retrieve forgotten history and to recover the voices of those who were on the underside of history. This requires a unique approach to interpreting the past; Cho, like other scholars attempting to articulate traumatic histories, must wrestle with the inarticulable. She outlines a phenomenon referred to as “transgenerational haunting,”²⁴ that is, the concept of ghosts, haunting, and the spectral

21. There are many new books that focus on the development of military psychiatry. See especially Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock To PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (New York: Psychology, 2005); Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001); and Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

22. Theories of trauma emerged within several fields of study including history, psychology, neurobiology, and literature. Cathy Caruth's edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1995) is representative of the interdisciplinary nature of trauma studies.

23. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2008).

24. The intergenerational transmission of trauma has often been associated with children of Holocaust survivors, who manifest symptoms of their parent's trauma in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

emerge in literatures of trauma, but not as traditionally evoked in terms of the supernatural or otherworldly. This vocabulary speaks, instead, to a more complex dimension of historical suffering in which the past cannot be so clearly delineated from the present. The enigmatic dimension of trauma is precisely the enigma of the past "occupying" the present in such a way that it is not remembered but relived.

What this means in terms of war is that while the declarations of war may signal an ending, the experiences of war live on long after the war is over. Do we have theological ways of thinking about war's aftermath and about this transgenerational haunting? Robert Jay Lifton's provocative thesis that unresolved wars are the seeds of new wars draws on traumatic insights.²⁵ Does what is unresolved about Vietnam "return" to haunt the present? And are the wars of the twentieth century more intertwined than we might have realized? Insights about trauma answer affirmatively and provide, I suggest, a helpful way of interpreting the effects of war, especially in light of the "ongoingness" of war that I described above.

This presents theologians with two significant challenges. The first contends with theological articulations of history.²⁶ I realized that critique, stance, and care often operate according to a timeline that can no longer hold in the present context. Stance is employed before entrance to a war, critique upon entrance into the war, and care often follows a war. Yet in the case of these "new" wars, that timeline does not hold. Entrance and exit to these wars has been challenged. The language of occupation and the forms that it takes is just now unfolding. The clear delineation of before, middle, and after is dissolving, making it impossible to think according to stages of theological response. Within the framework of Christian theology, concepts of eschatology could be re-approached in terms of the dynamics of "ongoingness" and disrupted temporality that are represented in war trauma. How might claims about the "end of time" testify to the realities of war and its shattering effects? How can new beginnings arise out of death? Eschatological vocabulary might be recovered to make sense of the non-linear dimensions of war. It is equally important to note that eschatological visions might also be operative in fueling war. For example, religious vocabulary of the afterlife may provide visions of eternal reign, the Kingdom of God, and final judgment that can serve to sanction and justify violence in the present in the name of a more ultimate religious reality. In either case, reassessing eschatological claims is essential.

Second, the study of trauma challenges theologians to rethink conceptions of the human. Violence and harm are now placed at the forefront of the longstanding practices of describing creaturely existence, known as theological anthropology. Who are we—that we can wound and be so wounded? War literatures often feature this question as well, as warriors are brought to their limits in combat. Theological anthropologies that examine human fragility within a tragic framework, such as

25. Robert J. Lifton, *Superpower Syndrom: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation With the World*. (New York: Nation Books, 2003).

26. A good example of the challenge of traumatic time to theology is Flora Keshgegian, *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today's World* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

that of Wendy Farley, steer away from traditional paradigms for conceiving of the human and provide a cosmology of wounding.²⁷ Emerging research in moral injury from clinical and theological perspectives also suggests that war's toll on the human extends beyond a narrow psychological framework.

I want to focus briefly on a different aspect of trauma and the human: the regulation of concepts of the human at play in war. Conceptions of the human are in flux. I want to illustrate this by pointing to the work of Judith Butler. Butler notes that while we once understood human nature as something fixed and essential, the normative assumptions about what constitutes the human are regulative rather than substantive. She is writing in response to the political climate surrounding Abu Ghraib, and her focus is on the politics of representation. What justifies the use of torture? The root of the issue rests for her in the power of the media to represent the human and, in turn, to deny humanity by what is not represented. She is not unique in describing the dehumanization of enemies in war; yet her analysis involves sharper attention to the role of the media and visual representation, both of which are central to present-day warring. Butler is a theorist who deconstructs gender essentialism by unearthing the performative nature of identity construction. This is a longstanding theoretical debate between essentialism and social constructivism, an inflection of the nature–nurture discussions. Butler is pressed, however, in her more recent work, to respond to the political realities and, more specifically, to interpret harm enacted upon persons within situations of war. Her analysis of torture raises questions about how certain bodies are counted and represented as human while others are susceptible to harm precisely because they are not counted and represented as such. If the category of “human” becomes something manipulatable and used as an instrument upon which harm can be wielded, upon what grounds can bodies be protected? Butler is, thus, probing the fragility of human rights discourse, which depends on identifiable and agreed upon marks of what constitutes the human to regulate and protect persons against harm.

The analysis of present day war practices turns Butler back to her own anthropology, as she searches for language to speak about an interrelated dimension of human existence that can be garnered in the face of torture and present war practices. She strives to do this without reinscribing normative conceptions of the human person. How do we protect those who do not count as human, who are not recognized within our frames of reference? “The human” is not a fixed category of reference; instead, it is a highly regulated category, assigned to some and not to others. “The human,” then, is a wielding mechanism and not an essential category that can, for example, ground human rights. Because of this, Butler aims to find words to protect persons against these regulative practices. Butler's reach places her in territory that resonates with the language of theological anthropology.²⁸

27. Wendy Farley, *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

28. Even contemporary philosophers who mostly resist universal claims about the human are searching for language to speak about the wounds of war. The example I develop here is the work of Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2006) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

Although theologians have been interested in Butler's work on gender construction and identity, this is a point at which theologians could speak to Butler's quandary.

Theologians are well equipped to raise questions about what constitutes the human and to shed light on changing conceptions. One of the practices within the Christian tradition that might be recovered is the practice of divine naming.²⁹ In theological speech, theologians have wrestled with the question of how to name and approach that which we do not know and cannot circumscribe. As theologians seek to articulate the divine, they are aware of being bound up in a complex process of naming and unnamings the reality of and to which they speak. Metaphorical speech admits a distance between seeing something as it is and also seeing it in terms of something else. This is an imaginative move, and it is well practiced in theology, as attempts to circumscribe divine reality are always met with apophatic warnings. These exercises of naming and unnamings are invaluable in speaking to the conditions to which Butler's analysis is aimed.

But, for theologians, the approach to speaking about divine reality could be aptly carried over into articulations of the human as well. Could the practice of divine naming inform our approach to naming the human? In other words, the human is not assumed to be that which we know but, in fact, that which, like the divine, we cannot fully know. Assuming uncircumscribability, we name toward that which we cannot fully know. I am emphasizing the process of unnamings the human as a critical inquiry, especially within the context of current practices of war. In light of the instrumentality of conceptions of "the human" that Butler speaks about—that make it possible for harm to be administered on some bodies and not others—the corresponding practice of naming is important. And, here, the full practice of divine naming should be employed, not simply to unname but also to make affirmations. The posture of humility and practices of protection and preservation of life are components of the apophatic and cataphatic exercise of theological anthropology. Butler's sharp analysis of practices of representation and her willingness to contend and uproot her earlier theories in light of harm enacted on human bodies provides impetus for theological reflection.

In the midst of twentieth-century wars, theologians attempted to name the impact of war on the human. I am thinking here of works by Langdon Gilkey, Richard Niebuhr, Georgia Harkness, William Sloane Coffin, Daniel Berrigan, and by organizations such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation.³⁰ The language of the sanctity of life is religiously rooted and religiously inflected language that undergirds human rights discourse. Even this is being contested.³¹ Theological claims

29. "The Divine Names," in Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987).

30. See Gary Dorrien's two volumes: *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, Modernism 1900–1950* and *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity 1950–2005* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003, 2006).

31. Anat Biletzki, "The Sacred and the Humane," *New York Times*, July 17, 2011.

that simply reassert essential notions of the human are not sufficient to address these challenges or practices. Might the theological practice of naming and unnam-ing the human provide a model for tracking the rhetoric of the human as it is being exercised in the public sphere? In turn, might we also offer robust affirmations of life, both human and non-human?

Interreligious

Second, while theological perspectives on war in the twentieth century were largely shaped by Christian theology, the lens for examining present-day wars must engage multiple religious traditions. It is important to acknowledge that the role of religion in war has significantly changed, given shifts globally and within American society.³² Although this was not exclusively the result of 9/11, the event signaled the entangle-ment of religion in forms of extremism, terrorism, and global capitalism. New, and often toxic, modes of religious engagement were inaugurated. Through a confluence of cultural and political shifts, religion was no longer a sideline issue in US military missions. Misperceptions about religion and how it is operating in the global sphere unveil what Stephen Prothero refers to as the rampant “religious illiteracy” within the USA.³³ This illiteracy, when operative in relationship to war and the military, has been deadly, resulting in caricatures of both Islam and Christianity that fuel fear and violence toward the religious “other.”³⁴ An exclusively Christian framework for approaching war is not sufficient, given this current climate.

Shifts in religion can also be witnessed within the military since the Vietnam War. One example is the constitution of the military chaplaincy corps. In *American Evangelicals and the Military*, historian Anne Loveland provides a comprehensive analysis of the military chaplaincy in the latter half of the twentieth century.³⁵ Her study tracks the changing constitution of religious affiliation within the chaplaincy corps. One of the most striking changes is the decline of chaplains coming from

32. The 2009 study sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reveals significant shifts in religious affiliation but also tracks the ongoing growth of evangelicalism that signals a decline of mainline Protestantism. This confirms the “seismic shift” that Martin Marty referred to in 1979. This rise of religious conservatives in the US political sphere has been rapid, and it is difficult to delineate this rise from the events of 2001. See the recent Pew study: <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>. Martin Marty, “Preface,” in Dean R. Hodge and David A. Roozen, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950–1978* (New York: Pilgrim, 1979), 10. This book was an early study of significant shifts taking place in US congregations.

33. Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

34. Jessica Stern, *Denial: A Memoir of Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). For example, associations of terrorism with Islamic fundamentalism are complex; while public perception aligns terrorism with religious fundamentalism, Jessica Stern’s analysis of terrorism suggests that factors other than religious conviction underlie terrorism and may be stronger indicators of what drives terrorists to engage in violence.

35. Anne Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the US Military* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. While these groups once represented a majority of the chaplaincy, there has been an increasing surge of chaplains endorsed by non-affiliated conservative agencies. There are several reasons for this, one of them being the response within mainline Protestant churches to US involvement in Vietnam. With increasing dissent about US involvement in Vietnam, mainline churches were more reluctant to endorse chaplains. Religious activity within the military colleges and in combat has also ignited questions of the role of religion in America. Recent legal cases at the US Air Force academy and media attention to proselytizing missions in Iraq has unearthed tensions at the heart of the US constitution, between free exercise of religion and the establishment clause.³⁶ The emergence, for example, of “dominion theologies” within the USA can easily undergird military missions with religious significance.³⁷ Theologian Stanley Hauerwas’s writings about war have continually critiqued the conflation of national identity and Christian identity, and this conflation is increasingly apparent, and, I would argue, problematic, in these present wars.³⁸ As I suggest an interreligious approach to war, I am mindful that “civil religion” must also be seriously examined alongside the world’s religions.

Glen Stassen’s work in just peacemaking aims to provide a passage between the often-polarized positions of just war and pacifism. A student of Reinhold Niebuhr, Stassen recalls participating in a Christian ethics conference just prior to the US bombing in Iraq (Gulf War); he reports a growing frustration with the standard debates. He reflects, “The positions held by both groups [just war and pacifist theorists] imply the need to take peacemaking initiatives, but their debate with each other reduced the issue to making war versus not making war. The guidance for peacemaking initiatives got lost.”³⁹ The failure of this group to present peacemaking initiatives spurred Stassen to develop a new model of theological engagement. From broadening practices of evaluating “war-making” by way of developing initiatives for “peacemaking,” Stassen and others in this work have started to reshape the role of religious leaders in respect to war. Instead of having students solely clarify a stance on war, the just peacemaking classroom involves students in constructive practices of peacemaking.

Increasingly, Stassen and others have also come to see the limitations of peacemaking discourse that is exclusively Christian, signaled in the recent work edited by

36. For information about major figures in this debate, see Anne C. Loveland, “Evangelical Proselytizing at the US Air Force Academy: The Civilian–Military Controversy, 2004–2006,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44 (Winter, 2009), 11–25. Also see journalist Jeff Sharlet’s provocative piece, “Jesus Killed Mohammed: The Crusade for a Christian Military,” *Harpers Magazine* (May, 2009), 31–43.

37. See Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic, 2007).

38. Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

39. Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Issues for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 17.

Susan Brooks Thiselthwaite, *Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, that features textual engagement between the Abrahamic religions.⁴⁰ Thiselthwaite begins, “The twenty-first century is shaping up to become the century of the world’s religions.” In a global world in which there are “increased religious interactions,” the challenge of creating a peaceful world requires interreligious engagement.⁴¹ Interfaith peacemakers are needed in a world in which competing faith claims are often operative in violent situations. The capacity to understand and negotiate these claims will be central. This will involve training within religious communities and theological schools.

Theological discourse about war in the twentieth century was implicitly Christian. While there is recognition, for instance, that Gandhi’s thought influenced Christian leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., in respect to his perspective about war, the discourse did not extend much beyond the level of influence. This can no longer be the case. Instead, the theological task must be interreligious. In the model of interfaith peacemaking, each tradition examines its theological claims, commitments, and practices, but does this alongside, and in conversation with, other traditions. This will require careful examination of texts that play a central role in both inciting violence and countering violence. The presumed innocence of the respective theological claims can no longer hold, as witnessed in present global conflicts. But neither can religious discourse operate in a singular fashion, as a Christian or even an intra-Christian activity. The internal examination of Christianity must be done simultaneously with external inquiry—engaging other religious traditions. Insights from interreligious dialogue and the rising arena of comparative theology provide necessary insights and cautions about how to engage religious claims and practices from outside a tradition.

Aesthetic

While war is often conceived through the lens of ethics, I propose that aesthetics is a critical lens through which to interpret twenty-first century wars. I am using aesthetics to refer to the realm of war and war-making that appeals to the visual, the sensory, and the rhetorical. While propaganda has always been used in war, and aesthetics understood as a component of recruiting and garnering support for a nation’s war effort, the media in the twenty-first century has shaped views of war significantly. The emergence of the war journalist “on the front lines” has given viewers a close up of war. Though we witness more of the “realities” of war, the media’s power to frame war for us is unprecedented. Americans are also generally aware that the media’s presentation has a political slant; conservative viewers might, for example, tune into one news station and more liberal viewers another. Which war are you watching? Through the careful

40. Susan Brooks Thiselthwaite, ed., *Interfaith Just Peacemaking: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 1.

41. Thiselthwaite, *Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, 1.

selection of images and sound bites, the war arrives already interpreted. Using Judith Butler's language, it is important to discern how war is being framed for us.⁴² While we may be transported to the front lines via media journalists, we also are being presented with an interpretation of what is happening there.⁴³ We are presented with images, but these images are part of a story that is being told about who we are as a nation, why we are fighting, and how we are to understand our enemy. No frame is neutral. The challenge comes, then, in interpreting the images while they are working on us at a visual, and visceral, level. While this visual dimension of presenting the war to a public is not new, the proliferation of images and the expansion of news coverage make the exercise of aesthetic interpretation more pressing. The hyper-visual and virtual dimensions of contemporary culture make it necessary to think more deeply about the powers of representation.

By aesthetics, I also refer to the mythic dimension of war that is being recovered in recent literatures. Even as the technologies of war proliferate, interpretations of war within the arena of myth and story are also proliferating. Recent works by psychologists Jonathan Shay and Edward Tick feature ancient myths to make sense of the present day wounds of war. These retrievals are motivated by a concern to speak more broadly about the human than clinical frameworks allow. These psychologists are wary of the frame that the prevailing medical model places on veteran's suffering, believing that it tends to pathologize veterans and fails to address the deep moral and spiritual wounding that they experience in war. "War is a mythic arena," according to Tick, in that it transforms the "mundane into the epic."⁴⁴ Everything is charged with intensity—with ultimacy. Defining myth, Tick writes,

We do not use the word in the popular sense of falsehood or superstition. Rather, we are speaking of myth as the universal stories that convey the deepest truths of human experience and repeat themselves in every generation and every individual . . . Myths are the master templates for the patterns of our lives.⁴⁵

42. See Butler, *Frames of War*. She introduces her analysis of contemporary war claiming, "I am seeking to draw attention to the epistemological problem raised by the issue of framing: the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated," 1.

43. For initial descriptions of the media's role in framing, see Butler, *Frames of War*, 9–12.

44. Edward Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 2005), 25.

45. *Ibid.*, 28. Journalist Chris Hedges presents war as mythic in this negative sense. For Hedges, myth refers to a denial and distortion of what is real. He opens *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* by titling the first chapter "The Myth of War." He recognizes myth as the composite of the false ideas we employ to give war its force. For Hedges, rejecting this mythic dimension is critical in order to deal with the "sensory reality." The "mythic reality" is its false presentation and, therefore, myth must be rejected. Tick and Hillman would attribute Hedges's reduction of myth to the workings of seductive propaganda and ideological manipulation. Instead, they describe myth in ways similar to theologian Paul Tillich's description of symbols; there is a depth dimension that symbols

This means, Hillman says, "that to understand war we have to get at its myths," which speak to the "depths of inhuman cruelty, horror, and tragedy and to the heights of mystical transhuman sublimity."⁴⁶ To make sense of war's exhilarating and erotic dimensions as well as its cruel and degenerative dimensions, we are aided by mythologies that cast human behavior within a broader scope of the cosmos.

For both Tick and Hillman, war reaches deep into the narrative dimensions of existence. All societies and all religions, Ticks says, have their roots in myth. Although war is often described as unimaginable, Hillman quotes Robert Jay Lifton in saying that it is our task in these times to "imagine the real."⁴⁷ War involves analysis, but it also involves examining the narratives supporting our actions. The force of war does not lie in logistics alone but in the undergirding narratives that speak to matters of ultimacy. Tick implies that it is impossible to abate war without contending with this mythic dimension, and without seriously "correcting our mythologizing."⁴⁸ War is not just something we enact; war provides images and symbols that tell us who we are. It is out of these that we act. Herein lies the power of myth.

Hillman believed that both philosophy and theology once addressed this mythic dimension, because they imagined the primordial condition of the human and a cosmos in which the drama of the human unfolded. Christian theologians were able to speak to this dimension because they narrated the drama of the human within a larger drama of God's relationship to the world. This larger story provided meaning to existence, as persons and communities storied their experiences within the broader narrative of their religious traditions.⁴⁹ In combat, many veterans experience a shattering of frameworks of meaning. If myths provide stories in which persons and communities can make meaning of existence, then war entails both the collapse of these stories and a necessary reworking of them. If the storying function is abandoned altogether (reduced to illusion), I fear that questions of existence fail to be engaged with the gravity with which they are being asked. What is needed are practices of mythologizing that acknowledge simultaneously the power of myths to speak to perennial questions of existence and the malleability and necessary contextualization of the myths.⁵⁰

participate in and illuminate. Although the myths are told differently, the themes are universal. Myths constitute cultures and speak to universal themes of existence. While cultural myths vary, their function is important, according to Tick and Hillman. Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor, 2002). He appeals to the contrast offered by Laurence LeShan in *The Psychology of War: Comprehending Its Mystique and Its Madness* (Chicago: Noble, 1992). Tillich's analysis of symbol is throughout his work. See, in particular, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958).

46. Hillman, *The Terrible Love of War*, 9.

47. *Ibid.*, 4.

48. Tick, *War and the Soul*, 43.

49. Note the connection to the previous point about the assumed Western Christian narration of that larger story and the problems of privileged narration.

50. Richard Slotkin, "Introduction," in *idem*, *Gunfighter Nation: Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1998), 1–28.

I want to highlight a current enactment of mythologizing that speaks to the importance of mythic narratives in respect to war. It illustrates my affirmation of the importance of speaking about the human within a larger story, while emphasizing the importance of re-storying, of evoking the questions of existence by way of story. Greek tragedies have been invoked recently within the context of healing combat trauma. Bryan Doerries, who had a vision to heal the wounds of war through recovering and performing ancient stories, conceived of *Theater of War*. The project is described in this way:

Theater of War presents readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* to military and civilian communities. By presenting these plays to military and civilian audiences, our hope is to de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, disseminate information regarding available resources, and foster greater family, community, and troop resilience.⁵¹

One of the productions features readings from Sophocles' *Ajax*, which tells the story of a warrior "gone mad" from acts of violence he committed in war. The selections from the play feature monologues from Ajax, conversations between Ajax and his wife Tecmessa and his half-brother Teucer, and warriors who discuss Ajax's fate and witness his suffering. Local actors read these selections in front of mixed audiences of civilians and veterans, and the telling of the story provides a way into a resonant story—the stories of present-day veterans. Doerries carefully connects these stories, by inserting questions posed to the audience: "Why did Sophocles write this play? Who was his audience?" The questions are in service of Doerries's conviction that framing the soldier experience within a larger cosmic drama can provide a space in which actors can orient themselves in the aftermath of war. It literally positions the broader community in relationship to war's aftermath, by having them witness the companion stories—the ancient and the contemporary. Although the divisions between civilian and military are not broken down, the link is made between them by way of the ancient story.

It is this "resonance" of experience across time that myth captures. According to Richard Kearney, this resonance is best captured and expressed through the processes of creating and telling stories. He speaks about the "cathartic nature of narrative" and the ethics of storying.⁵² "Every life," Kearney says, "is in search of a narrative." Storytelling is a human process and an inherently dynamic and relational one. Stories connect people; "every story shares the common function of *someone telling something to someone about something*."⁵³ Stories are the means by

51. Outside the Wire, www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview. Accessed August 14, 2012.

52. Richard Kearney, "Narrating Pain: The Ethics of Catharsis," in *Difficulties of Ethical Life*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Dennis J. Schmidt (Bronx, NY: Fordham, 2008). Although he develops this theoretically, he spearheads a project that focus on storytelling within contexts of conflict. See the *Guestbook Project*, www.bc.edu/schools/cas/guestbook.

53. Kearney, *On Stories: Thinking in Action* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

which communities and nations “explain themselves to themselves and others.”⁵⁴ Stories do not simply tell a history; they create worlds. The interweaving between fiction and history is part of who we are as human beings, as storytellers. For Kearney, this fictional aspect is important, because he believes it allows us to “imagine new possibilities of saying and being.”⁵⁵ Kearney is concerned about preserving the importance of this storying function, because he believes that we “work through” the traumas of human existence by way of story. They are vehicles for healing the wounds of existence. Stories are not simple accounts but, in fact, mediums through which reconciliation and healing can take place.

I heed Chris Hedges’s concern that this larger drama can glorify the experience of war at the expense of dealing with the real injuries of combat. But the larger drama provides a stage on which to narrate the extremities and paradoxes of war, and, in so doing, can name the range of human experiences without necessarily glorifying them. In the case of the *Theater of War* productions, the experiences of current wars are resonant with that of Ajax, the wounded warrior in Sophocles’ play. The distance and yet resonance in those experiences creates an opening in which military personnel and civilians can speak about war. But how they talk about it is key. The after-discussions do not comprise accounts of military strategies, but, rather, the language of human experience: stories of betrayal by those in power, stories of moral transgressions, stories of shame and pride, and stories of love between soldiers. This public conversation is carefully directed (by Doerries) in order not to fall into familiar patterns of political debate or to serve as a therapeutic forum for individuals. His navigation, instead, is a search for this human “resonance.”

What is taking place in the *Theater of War* productions is the re-storying of contemporary experiences of war, to give meaning to these experiences; in turn, the myths take on new meaning. While Ajax’s story resonates with the soldier’s story, it does not rob that soldier of the particularity of her or his story. As a theologian witnessing these aesthetic engagements, it is clear to me that religious traditions also have the potential to provide this storying or narrative dimension, through engagement with sacred stories. The same theater company also featured readings of Stephen Mitchell’s translation of the Book of Job in Joplin, MS, a town devastated by tornadoes in 2011. And insofar as religious communities see their sacred texts as resonant, as able to speak across time to questions of existence, as connecting human beings across time, these sacred literatures could perform a similar function.

These performances represent a combination of ethics and aesthetics that I see as essential to addressing war. It is the aesthetic component that assists in moving beyond the impasses that Stassen observes in peacemaking work. Re-storying is a creative act in which something new emerges when impasses present themselves. By hearing the larger story and its resonance, there is an opening to see in new ways.

54. Kearney, “Narrating Pain,” 187.

55. See Kearney, *On Stories*, 157 n. 2, for a concise description of the aim of Kearney’s broader work. *On Stories* is the third book in his trilogy.

Recognizing this as a shared story also wards against the isolation experienced by many veterans, especially when integrated back within civilian society. The civilians present also hear, through the readings, the ripples of impact that war has, not just on the veterans, but also on family members and broader society. Can the speaking and listening bind together disparate cultures by cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility—and can it do this indirectly, through the hearing of an ancient story?⁵⁶

A noted leader in conflict resolution work, John Paul Lederach, has turned to aesthetics. In his latest work, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, he makes a case for this aesthetic shift. This conviction centers his work: “Transcending violence is forged by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination.” This imaginative component involves processes that do not solely rely on cognition but also involve intuition. He believes that the field of conflict resolution has relied on technique and skills rather than attending to the cultivation of the arts of listening, of interpreting and employing metaphors, and of tapping into deep human intuition. He even frames listening as an aesthetic activity. By emphasizing this alone, he questions whether social change is possible; it will “not [be] found in perfecting or applying the techniques or the skills of a process.”⁵⁷ A partnership between “discipline and art,” and integration between “skill and aesthetics,” is needed.⁵⁸

I have highlighted here the need for theological aesthetics. This aesthetic shift opens up pathways for theological discourse about war, highlighting even the limits of the term “discourse” itself. Aesthetics provides a mode of moving beyond impasses in discourse, but it also exercises practices of re-creating worlds. Theological aesthetics is a recognizable arena within theology, but I wonder how the engagement with questions of twenty-first-century war might press the discourse of theological aesthetics to extend beyond theological reflections of divine beauty to reengage ethical questions of war in new ways, to envisioning practices of social transformation.

In her March 2011 address to the “Trauma and Spirituality” conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, psychologist Kaethe Weingarten opened by quoting portions of a poem by Galway Kinnell: “The bud / stands for all things, / even for those things that don’t flower, / for everything flowers, from within, of self-

56. Some of the techniques of storytelling, namely the aspect of hearing one’s own story *through* a character, provide important distance between oneself and another. This space provides freedom to engage the truth of what is being communicated without direct implication. This allows space for self-reflection without direct confrontation.

57. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

58. Lederach writes, “As aesthetics, the moral imagination seeks to connect with the deep intuition that creates the capacity to penetrate and transcend the challenges of violent conflict. Recognizing and nurturing this capacity is the ingredient that forges and sustains authentic constructive change” (*ibid.*, 71).

blessing; although sometimes it is necessary / to re-teach a thing its loveliness.”⁵⁹ She framed the work of trauma healing as a task of re-teaching persons their loveliness in the aftermath of trauma. Trauma destroys the capacity for persons and communities to access that loveliness. She emphasized, by way of the poem, the importance of awakening within the creature its capacity for restoration. It placed the work of healing within a broader framework than simply a clinical one. It was a surprisingly theological one. What Weingarten did not highlight is that Kinnell’s poem is titled, “Saint Francis and the Sow,” and Kinnell points to Saint Francis as a master teacher in this work of restoring the loveliness of all creatures. Kinnell presents the image of Saint Francis placing his hand on the forehead of the sow, perhaps the most unbecoming of creatures, and touching it in such a way that restores life to it. This process involves restoring to the creature the memory of something essential. Kinnell does not name what this is, beyond using the term loveliness. Theology has offered many descriptions of this loveliness, using terms and concepts such as *the imago Dei*, the divine spark, the innate goodness, and inner Light. But the reference to loveliness jars us with a different vocabulary and thus frames the task of restoring the human, of healing, as an aesthetic one.⁶⁰

In the ugliness of war, the toll cannot be simply described in terms of casualties and economics. The shrinking soul of the individual and the nation must be met by the recognition of something other than the brute realities. This requires, of those who participate in the task of healing, an imaginative capacity—to see something in its woundedness and yet to see it otherwise, to see beauty as well.

Conclusion

I have suggested three angles for expanding theological discourse about war for the twenty-first century: the traumatic, interreligious, and the aesthetic. These angles do not reject but, rather, extend the present approaches of critique, stance, and care. I implied that these inroads challenge theologians to reach across present disciplinary lines to envision a more integrated and collaborative engagement with weighty issues such as war. It will require acknowledgement of the ways in which our current political climate predisposes us to problematic modes of speaking to each other about these issues or to not speak to each other at all. It will involve educating leaders to interpret rhetoric and to unpack and analyze visual culture. It will require investments in artistic education and reclaiming mythmaking and storytelling as important theological practices. It will require developing constructive ways of addressing fear and strategies for confronting the affective dimensions of violence and war, pressing for theologizing descriptions of shame and

59. Kaethe Weingarten, keynote address, March 10, 2011, “Trauma and Spirituality: An International Dialogue,” sponsored by *Journey towards Healing*, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Galway Kinnell, “Saint Francis and the Sow,” in idem, *Three Books: Body Rags; Moral Acts, and Mortal Words; The Past* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 79–80.

60. This presses the question of how aesthetics might be a route to expanding Judith Butler’s conception of precarity and precariousness.

humiliation. It will need to be an intentionally interreligious endeavor, involving a collaborative examination of sacred texts and practices employed in war.

This is just a preliminary list, birthed out of the gaps in present discourse and attention to the particular demands of the twenty-first century. A researcher at the National Center for PTSD asked me, “Why aren’t all the religious people out protesting these wars? Isn’t that what religious people are supposed to do?” It was as simple as that for him. James Hillman also had certain assumptions about the place of the theologian in relationship to war. What is the heavy lifting we are supposed to be doing? What is required? The task of religious people is cast backward and forward, as we draw from ancient traditions yet reach forward to live faithfully, addressing the moral and spiritual challenges of this century.

Author biography

Shelly Rambo is Associate Professor of Theology at Boston University School of Theology. Her research and teaching interests focus on religious responses to suffering, trauma, and violence, and her book, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, develops a theology of Spirit in response to the interdisciplinary study of trauma.



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