POLITICS OF PACIFISM: COMMANDMENT – IDEAL – IMPOSSIBILITY? THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE ETHICS

Conference

Friday and Saturday, November 13–14, 2015
Collegium Helveticum, Schmelzbergstrasse 25, 8006 Zürich
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How could a genuinely theological pacifism look like given the presence of violence, terror, and “new wars”? Is there a pacifist stance at all that could claim to be politically realistic? And what about the theological element to it, is there a ‘genuine’ one?

Pacifism as a defensible position in peace ethics seems to be facing a dilemma: either it is presented as an absolute and unconditioned claim excluding all sorts of latent and explicit violence. However, that reluctance to use violence against (more pervasive) violence might itself turn into an immoral ignorance. Or pacifism is presented within a consequentialist framework referring to the, generally conceived, less worse results of the ‘pacifist option’ compared to military intervention. But then, one has to give up the pacifist orientation when its consequences are likely to be horrendous. This kind of pacifism seems, in the end, to fall back to the traditional just-war-doctrine.

Not only the justification of a pacifist position calls for a closer look. Moreover, the status of pacifism is worth being discussed as well. One might argue that the whole idea of justifying, grounding, rationalizing pacifism is wrongheaded from the outset, since for the participant it represents not a debatable proposition, but a ‘certainty’, not a moral claim to be defended by argument, but an element of an existential cluster that gives the background for a person to distinguish between morally right and wrong in the first place. The status of the pacifist stance, however, could be characterized in a different way too, not as a realistic position, but a regulative idea, as a tool of collective orientation not necessarily entailing its own fulfilment.

Pacifism is then, still, restricted to peace ethics and the challenges of violence on highly divergent levels. A broader understanding of the term underlines not only the ethical implications of such a position or moral certainty, but pacifism as a way of knowing, discerning, existing. ‘Pacifism’ is, then, not confined to ethical endeavours, but signifies a hermeneutical concept that does not refer to a position among others, but denotes a perspective by which the world is seen and understood.
Speakers

Prof. Dr. **Christian E. Early** (Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia)

Prof. Dr. **Tommy Givens** (Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California)

Prof. Dr. **Friedrich Lohmann** (Professor for Protestant Theology with Special Regard to Applied Ethics at the Bundeswehr University Munich)

Prof. Dr. **Olaf Müller** (Professor for Philosophy with Special Regard to the Philosophy of Science at Humboldt University Berlin)

PD Dr. **Christian Polke** (‘Privatdozent’ for Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg)

PD Dr. **Hartmut von Sass** (‘Privatdozent’ for Systematic Theology and Philosophy of Religion and Vice Director of the Collegium Helveticum, ETH and University of Zurich)

Prof. Dr. **Johannes Zachhuber** (Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology and Fellow and Tutor in Theology at Trinity College, University of Oxford)

Prof. Dr. **Walther Ch. Zimmerli** (holds a Senior Endowed Professorship for Philosophy at the Graduate School of Humboldt University Berlin)
Program

Friday, November 13, 2015

13:30–13:45  Hartmut von Sass
Introduction: A Pacifist Way of Living?

13:45–15:00  Christian E. Early
To Empire or Not To Empire: Theological Possibilities for Pacifism

15:15–16:30  Johannes Zachhuber
Christianity and violence: a difficult story

16:30–17:00  Coffee break

17:00–18:15  Friedrich Lohmann
Myth and reality. Pacifism's discourse on violence revisited

18:30–19:45  Tommy Givens
The Subtlety of Peace: A New Testament Challenge to Modern State Violence
Program

Saturday, November 14, 2015

09:00–10:15  Olaf Müller
             Pragmatist Pacifism

10:30–11:45  Christian Polke
             Is Pacifism a Democratic Virtue?
             Considerations beyond the religious-secular divide

11:45–12:15  Coffee break

12:15–13:30  Walther Ch. Zimmerli
             Si vis pacem para bellum! On the Indispensable Pitfalls
             in the Piecemeal Engineering of Peace

13:30        End of conference
Venue
Collegium Helveticum, Semper-Sternwarte, Schmelzbergstr. 25, 8006 Zürich

STW: Collegium Helveticum, Schmelzbergstr. 25, 8006 Zürich

Contact
Hartmut von Sass: vonsass@collegium.ethz.ch

Registration
Please register before November 10, 2015: reservation@collegium.ethz.ch