Shalom, Peace, and as-salam ‘alaykum to all of you here tonight. I am honored to be in your presence and happy to note that I have had several great opportunities of meeting Father Ryan in New York at various venues, including Manhattan College where I recently held a conference on Abrahamic faiths. I would like to thank Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse for her arrangements and everyone else who has made this McGinley lecture possible.

“‘Making war … making peace?’” “Hmmmm,” I thought, “what a timely topic for a Muslim, and what a deadly topic to respond to as a Muslim today.” So, I began to think of ways of responding to Father Ryan’s brilliant illumination of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity with the theological and contemporary implications of war and peace. Since Father Ryan has done such an impeccable job about the different meanings of jihad, I will take a different turn tonight and ask the following question: How is making war also making peace? Father Ryan states: “War has been made in Ireland as well as peace over the past century.” This statement provoked many thoughts and got me thinking about what “Making War and Making Peace” might mean, but more importantly what making war for peace
might mean. Is making war for peace indeed a necessary precondition for change and revolution in an ever-evolving world of war, oppression and fighting for freedom and human rights?

However, in the spirit of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, we are taught that we should not rejoice at the failure of others because of our own suffering or loss. This led me to think about a very special man, Albert Rosa, whom I interviewed in 2007 in Los Angeles. He is a survivor of Auschwitz, originally from Greece, who spoke to me about how he had watched his sister and brother murdered brutally in front of him. He was still very angry as I interviewed him, and he was very tough and very strong about his emotions. Rosa is special because I learned from him that while he was sent to Dachau on a death march from Auschwitz, he and seven other prisoners escaped and hid in a barn until they were rescued by American soldiers. Rosa noted that “two kind American soldiers showed us where the American Army was and they gave us [food] to eat.” He told me that even after being saved the group of seven prisoners fell to five in number when two of them died from overeating. He said: “I owe my life to those [American] soldiers. Without the United States Army I wouldn’t be here. I would not be strong again.” The Americans outfitted Albert Rosa in U.S. soldier’s attire, gave him a rifle and he instantly began fighting with them against the Nazis. He went from Auschwitz to fighting the Nazis, a heroic act at a time of deep weakness and suffering. He earned five medals, including a purple heart, for his courageous efforts in war. Albert Rosa wanted to take revenge on his siblings’ killers and he did so with no regret and no remorse. The defeat of the Nazis remains one of the most celebrated causes in the world to this day.

So, was he making war for peace, or was he stopping war so that others would not have to live in war or be murdered?

This story comes to mind as I consider the challenges that Muslims face because some Muslims are creating uncertainty in the name of Islam through extremism and reactions all over the world. The ambiguous
face of Islam lingers globally. Many Muslims have condemned extremist positions and yet we only hear about isolated acts of violence and terror.

The earliest Muslims were exposed to extreme violence both in the Medinan and Meccan periods. But these experiences compelled the Prophet Muhammad to express his most meaningful and deep messages of peace. These messages of peace did not include any desire for revenge against any person or any group; instead, the overall message expressed an ardent desire for a violence-free world for all.

A recent story comes to mind of three Yazidi men who, after the Yazidis were rescued from the city of Sinjar in 2015, killed local Arab shepherds whom they believed were collaborators with ISIS.¹ One Yazidi, whose name will remain anonymous, said that local Arabs would not be allowed back to Sinjar. Yazidis accuse local Arabs of siding with the Muslim militants. “How can we let them back?” asked the Yazidi colonel. “They lived with us for 100 years but they stabbed us in the back. They took our women and raped them. Arabs who lived here either helped ISIS militarily, financially or supported them ideologically.” The Yazidis don’t trust anyone, especially Arabs and Kurds.

These stories bring us to how “Making War, Making Peace” may be read as one of the major discussions in classical religious doctrine from the Hebrew Bible to the Qur’an, and it remains a poignant and deep concern for many of us, and especially for Muslims. Father Ryan clearly sets out to complicate the very notion of war and peace by setting us up in Ireland in 1921. The conflict of the British with the Irish back then (or with the IRA later on) was an ongoing conflict that I remember as a young child in London. It was referred to as a deep conflict with IRA terrorists, a war that called for thinking about how and why we think of war and perhaps ways in which war must be justified or even clarified.
What are some of the regulations on warfare within Islam besides what Father Ryan explains as *jihad al-akbar* (the greater struggle within) and as *jihad al-asghar* (the lesser struggle for Islam)? What were the rules set down by the Prophet Muhammad and what were some of the examples?

Let me try to illuminate some thoughts about Islam and especially the commandments that were given to Muslims to first defend, then resist war, and finally become peacemakers. Islam, like Judaism, gives us the right to life as an absolute value: “He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind” (Qur’an 5:32).

Father Ryan asked: “How did Bacha Khan justify such a nonviolent, peacemaking program in Islamic terms?” He was simply another example of a person acting on the creed of non-violence that the Prophet Muhammad had explained as Islam’s potential to contribute to safety and peace in society. Muhammad, like Bacha Khan, specified one goal of safety and peace in his time as the following: “A rider will travel from Sana’a (a city in Yemen) to Hadhramaut (a region in the southwest of the Arabian peninsula) fearing none but God, or a wolf as regards his sheep.”

Safety was a major concern, but it was to be entrusted to God, and if you entrusted yourself to God, you also did so with people.

A young girl, Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban in 2012, discusses this same hero Bacha Khan and the Prophet of Islam to remind people of peace. She also reminds us of her commitment to fight with the pen rather than with the sword as a theme more significant within Islamic teaching. Malala is not interested in violence or revenge and even further has stated that she would like to educate and have dialogue with the children of those who attempted to murder her because of Islamic teachings. For example, the Prophet Muhammad commanded cooperation and maintaining social solidarity, to open one’s heart to fellow human beings and to help one another at all times. He said, “Do not
cut off relations with each other! Do not turn your backs on each other! Do not grow hatred with each other! O God’s servants! Become brothers and sisters!”

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are referred to as Abrahamic faiths. The Prophet Abraham is considered the father of these three religions. We Muslims believe in all prophets, including Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, as messengers of God essentially carrying the same message. Muslims reserve a special place for Jews and Christians. The Qur’an refers to them as the “People of the Book,” those who received Holy Scriptures—the Pentateuch and the New Testament—before the Qur’an was revealed. There is a common call for them. “Say: O People of the Book! Come to an agreement between us and you, that we shall worship no God except one God, and that we ascribe no partners unto Him, and none of us shall take others for lords beside one God. And if they turn away, then say: I bear witness that we are they who have surrendered unto Him” (Qur’an 3:64-65). To surrender meant to surrender to God in war, in disputes and in love. And yet, we find that in several countries extremists are dedicated to killing religious minorities and any Muslims who will not fight in their cause.

Muslims are also commanded to follow earlier prophets. “In the matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had ordained upon Noah, and unto which we gave you (O Muhammad) insight through revelation as well as that which had been enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Steadfastly uphold the faith and do not break up your unity” (Qur’an 42:13). “Among the people of the book there are upright people, who recite God’s messages, throughout the night and prostrate themselves (before Him). They believe in God, and the last day, and enjoin the doing of what is right, forbid what is wrong and vie with one another in doing good work. These are among the righteous and whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof, for God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him” (Qur’an 3:113-115).
The Prophet Muhammad included the People of the Book in times of prayers and meals. For example, it is known that he asked his wife to remember her Jewish neighbor when they ate their meals, and he stood up for the funeral of a Jew, a gesture which shocked the people of Medina. He allowed a Christian delegation from Najran to stay safe in the mosque at Medina and to pray there. He forbade Muslim armies to destroy churches and synagogues as prohibited in the Qur’an (22:40). He advised Muslims to emigrate to Christian Abyssinia to enjoy the justice of Christian monarch there.

Even among groups like Jews and Christians with whom Muslims have a tense relationship today, Islam demonstrated deep tolerance in the earliest historical period. The three faiths may have made war but they have a long history of peaceful co-existence, even though there were smaller challenges like the jizya tax (an extra tax on non-Muslims). When Jews were being persecuted in Europe in the Christian Middle Ages, they found peace and harmony in Muslim Spain; it is that era of Jewish history that they refer to as the Golden Age. After the fall of Spain, Jews followed Muslims to Morocco and to Egypt where Maimonides became the personal physician of Saladin, who sent him to King Richard to treat the king himself. In the Ottoman Empire, Jews and Muslims lived and flourished together. Muslim scholars always respected the rights of the non-Muslim minority. When the Mongol Tartar became Muslim after capturing Baghdad, he wanted to free fellow Muslims, but Ibn Taymiyya insisted that the king, if he was a true Muslim, should free non-Muslim prisoners, too.

So, I ask, why do we see violence and making war in conjunction with Islam? Those who portray Islam as a religion promoting hate, violence and bloodshed have neither read the Qur’an in context nor have they made the commitment of entrusting peace to God and his people. Violence has been seen and justified most commonly on the basis of the following quotations from the Qur’an. For example, after Muslims were...
forced out of their homes and their town, and those who remained behind were subjected to even more abuse, God sanctioned fighting:

Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged, and God is indeed able to give them victory; those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, “Our Lord is God”—for had it not been for God’s repelling some men by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, in which the name of God is much mentioned, would certainly have been destroyed. Verily God helps those that help Him—lo! God is Strong, Almighty—those who, if they are given power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin what is good and forbid iniquity (Qur’an 22:39-41).

Here, war is seen as justifiable and necessary to defend people’s right to their own beliefs, and once the believers have been given victory they should not become triumphant or arrogant or have a sense of being a superpower, because of the promise of help given above and the rewards assured for those who do not seek to exalt themselves on earth or spread corruption (Qur’an 28:83).

ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaeda pick up one or two verses of the Qur’an and use them to express their own hatred of Islam and of Muslims. These verses can be dangerous, compelling and need to be seen in their context; yet they are indeed there in the Qur’an. Are these verses compelling the extremists to take their revenge on innocent lives in the thought that this will ultimately offer them justice or peace? Islam says: No! Yet it still does allow for self-defense and the permissibility of war within certain contexts in the world. I wonder if making war and making peace are not just the business of the historical cycle of revenge, frustration, and human rights in radical ways and definitions?

Albert Rosa reacted in self-defense and with strength and courage defeated—and in his own words “killed” Nazis. Yazidis revenged the shepherds who watched as their families were being dragged into
slavery and their female members raped. Perhaps this is the quandary of “Making War for Peace,” especially today as we see many examples of resistance and self-defense that culminate in human rights and freedom. Father Ryan recalls this from Irish history: “May the souls of the signers of the Proclamation, executed a century ago this spring, the souls of Winifred Barrington and Harry Biggs, and the soul of the man who shot Biggs at Coolboreen in May 1921—my father, Paddy Ryan ‘Lacken’—rest at long last in peace.”
NOTES


3 Muslim, *Birr*, 23.


Mehnaz M. Afridi holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Syracuse University, and a doctorate from the University of South Africa. She is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center at Manhattan College. Committed to interfaith work, contemporary Islam, and Holocaust education, she teaches courses on Islam, world religions, genocide studies, and contemporary Islamic Literature.