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SOURSES AND PREREQUISITES FOR THE FORMATION OF THE ORTHODOX ETHICS OF PEACE

This article analyses the underlying factors in the development of Orthodox peace ethics. Contemporary documents of the Orthodox Churches, which set out their social teachings on war and peace, and even more so the statements and speeches of church leaders regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war, reflect significant differences in approaches to peace ethics and issues of war. The article notes that the Orthodox perspective is characterized by diversity and uncertainty; Orthodoxy lacks a systematic methodology for addressing the ethical, theological and socio-political issues associated with war and peace. However, socio-historical factors have been identified that explain this trend. The author argues that this is facilitated by the general ecclesiastical structure of Orthodoxy, which complicates the formation of a shared vision of social problems, given the different social, political and historical contexts in which autonomous and autocephalous churches operate. Furthermore, historically established features of relations between Orthodox churches and state authorities play a role.

The author also analyses the ideological origins of Orthodox peace ethics, drawing on the biblical narrative and the Eastern Christian theological heritage, specifically the ideas of the most prominent figures who formulated their reflections on issues of war and peace from an ethical perspective, namely Basil the Great and Gregory Palamas. The article notes that the Eastern Christian patristic heritage, together with liturgical practice and theological works, does not constitute a fully systematized doctrine, yet it provides a rationale and normative guidelines for the Orthodox response to the challenge of war.

Key words: war, peace, ethics of peace, Orthodoxy, Orthodox Churches, Orthodox ethics, conflict, violence, theology.

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ДЖЕРЕЛА ТА ПЕРЕДУМОВИ ФОРМУВАННЯ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЇ ЕТИКИ МИРУ

Стаття присвячена аналізу передумов формування православної етики миру. Сучасні документи православних церков, в яких презентовано соціальне вчення щодо війни і миру, а тим більше позиції, промови церковних лідерів щодо російсько-української війни, відображають значну різницю в підходах до етики миру і питань війни. У статті констатується, що православний погляд характеризується різноманітністю та невизначеністю, православ'ю бракує систематичної методології для осмислення етичних, богословських та соціально-політичних питань, пов'язаних із війною та миром. Однак виявлені суспільно-історичні фактори, що пояснюють цю тенденцію. Автор обґрунтовує що цьому сприяють загальна церковна структура

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Вселенського православ'я, що ускладнює формування спільного бачення соціальних проблем, зважаючи на різний суспільний, політичний і історичний контекст функціонування автономних і автокефальних церков. А також історично сформовані особливості відносин між православними церквами і державною владою.

Автор також аналізує ідейні витоки православної етики миру, звертаючись до біблейського наративу та східнохристиянської богословської спадщини, а саме ідей найбільш яскравих представників, що сформулювали свої певні рефлексії щодо питань війни і миру з етичною основою, а саме Василія Великого та Григорія Палами. У статті констатується, що східнохристиянська патристична спадщина, разом із літургійною практикою та богословськими працями, не становить повністю систематизованого вчення, однак формує обґрунтування та нормативні орієнтири для православної відповіді на виклик війни.

Ключові слова: війна, мир, етика миру, православ'я, православні церкви, православна етика, конфлікт, насильство, теологія.

Introduction. In the contemporary world, marked by the accelerated escalation of military conflicts, the infringement on the pillars of global and European security architecture, and the emergence of new geopolitical blocs and partnerships, there is an imperative to revert to the ethical framework of social and international relations. This reorientation necessitates a pronounced emphasis on political ethics and the ethics of peace. In this section, the theoretical and methodological foundations of understanding ethics in general are to be outlined. These foundations are further divided by researchers into meta-ethics, descriptive ethics, and normative ethics (Schrage, 2022, p. 15–16). For the purposes of this study, normative ethics is of the utmost importance, as it deals with the analysis of the most general relevant principles, such as human dignity, freedom, justification of norms, virtues and responsibility, as well as the ethical foundations of specific spheres of personal or social life (Schrage, 2022, p. 16). Therefore, in political ethics and the ethics of peace, these fundamental ethical principles manifest and are reflected in a particular sphere of social relations, namely socio-political relations, where freedom and justice serve as the basic principles. Despite the fact that the issues of peace and war have regularly become highly relevant throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, there is still a need for a conceptual and systematic understanding of the ethics of peace, given its multifaceted and interdisciplinary context. However, from a theological and religious studies perspective, and especially in the context of Christian social ethics, «stands in peculiar tension with the central importance of peace ethics in the biblical message and in political philosophy» (Bock, Frühbauer, Stur, 2015, p. 18).

Defining the basic foundations and principles of the Orthodox ethics of peace is an interesting and rather difficult task for a researcher. On the one hand, we can speak of the confessionally oriented views of the Orthodox on the issues of war and peace, which reflect Orthodox doctrine and practice. Conversely, it is impracticable to articulate a singular Orthodox perspective on these matters. A close examination of the documents that are most representative of the current position on war and peace reveals significant differences in approach. This is particularly evident in the documents of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Moscow. A similar distinction is also apparent in the positions, speeches, and practices of the two Patriarchs.

The Russian war against Ukraine has brought this to the fore and increased the need for a systematic analysis of the foundations of the Orthodox ethic of peace, its key provisions, and origins. The Orthodox ethic of peace remains a relatively underexplored area in academic research, though there are scholars who are developing specific inquiries related to the topic. The following are a few examples of such investigations. Regina Elsner, Professor of Eastern Church Studies and Ecumenism at the Ecumenical Institute at the University of Münster, who focuses on the study of Orthodox peace ethics and the militarisation of the Church in the post-Soviet space. Ioan Moga, Associate Professor of Orthodox Theology at the University of Vienna, who studies the peacebuilding potential of the Orthodox Church. In the research literature, one can find attempts to understand the peculiarities of the Orthodox approach to war, as well as attempts to build Orthodox hermeneutics of war and peace. Examples include the work of Elizabeth Prodromou and Perry Hamalis from the United States. Thus, the historiography of the Western Christian tradition is presented as existing between two poles: the radically pacifist Protestant position and the Catholic justification of just war. Several Orthodox theologians, including Stanley Harakas,

Alexander Webster, and John McGuckin, have emphasized this contrast and the fundamental differences between the Orthodox and Western Christian positions (Hamalis, Karras, 2017).

The fundamentals and historical stages of the formation of peace ethics from a «Western» perspective have been developed and systematized. For example, Marco Schrage provides a thorough analysis of the development of peace ethics, tracing the fundamental paradigm shift from a «natural law and Christian understanding» (based on the belief in a natural order) to a «positive-legal formal understanding» (a legal minimum order) to a «normative-elementary» understanding («condemnation of war and normative restrictions on sovereignty, which must be measured by ethical standards») (Schrage, 2022, p. 57–60). In other words, from its very beginnings, Christianity has demonstrated an interest in social and political issues, grounded in theological and ethical principles, and a discourse on peace has been an integral part of it. And as Vasilios N. Makrides so aptly observes «it is important to pay closer attention to the institutional church and its overall position within the existing socio-political establishment and context in the East and West» (Makrides, 2013).

Key Research Findings. The Orthodox view is characterized by diversity and vagueness, meaning there is no single, consistent position characteristic of the entire Orthodox community. The researchers observe that Orthodoxy is deficient in a systematical methodology for comprehending the ethical, theological and socio-political issues that pertain to war and peace. The following factors must be considered when analyzing this phenomenon: 1. Ecclesiastical structure of the Orthodox Church. It is not possible to speak in general terms about the Orthodox approach to issues of war or the ethics of peace, because the structure of ecumenical Orthodoxy includes autonomous and autocephalous Churches that independently form their fundamental views on social and political views, while remaining doctrinally united and drawing on the common heritage of Scripture and Tradition, basic ethical principles and values. 2. The historical and sociopolitical shaping of the specificities of relations between Orthodox churches (with a focus on the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow) and between churches and state power has led to different approaches to social doctrine, social ethics, and the hermeneutics of war and peace. These differences are reflected in the practices of these churches.

In other words, the historical and political context played an important role in shaping Eastern Christian views on war in theological and ethical terms.

In defining the basic position of the Orthodox ethic of peace, the researchers agree that the Orthodox hermeneutic of war and peace is located «a categorical rejection of notions of just or holy war on the one hand and complete pacifism, on the other» (Hamalis, Karras, 2017, p. 216–217).

The primary source for comprehending the concept of peace and its manifold aspects is the biblical message. In the course of their research, theologians have repeatedly emphasized the significant potential of the ideas contained within the Holy Scriptures, «Biblical proclamation is, at its core, a message of peace» (Biser, 2003, p. 11). The New Testament texts are unambiguous in their presentation of the call for peace and peacemaking. By contrast, the Old Testament texts may initially appear to be obscure, but as E. Biser, German theologian and philosopher of religion, argues, «Those who expect it to contain only reports of times of calamity, wars, and judgments will be surprised by the moving testimonies of peace that it offers in all its parts» (Biser, 2003, p. 11). And Gerd Theissen, former professor of New Testament studies at the University of Heidelber, summarized all the complementary views on the ethics of peace in biblical texts: «It is based on a combination of the desire for peace in the Old Testament and an ethic of loving one's enemies in the New Testament» (Theißen, 2017, p. 7–8).

The semantic framework of the concept of peace, its various dimensions, the anthropological foundations of peace, the psychological aspects of reconciliation with oneself and others, issues of identity and conflict, the ability to compromise and the limits of compromise, violence and justice, and many other topics are raised in biblical texts. In essence, Christian social ethics, in its broader sense, and Orthodox ethics, in its specific sense, regard the Holy Scriptures as the primary source for the development of ideas about the ethics of peace, their interpretation, and clarification of contexts.

The patristic heritage constitutes a significant source for the development of the doctrine of war and peace. It is noteworthy that the Eastern patristic

tradition, characterized by its distinct approaches to theological issues and the interpretation of biblical provisions, also engages with the subjects of war and peace. This tradition establishes the fundamental guidelines for the development of an ethics of peace.

In Eastern Christian theology, fragmentary reflections on war can be found in the works of several notable figures, including Basil of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Palamas. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the substantial variation in the rhetoric and hermeneutics of war and peace across their philosophical works. A paucity of consistent and systematic views on war is evident among the Fathers of the Eastern Church. In contrast to the consistent and well-founded position espoused by Augustine of Aurelius, Gratian, Thomas Aquinas in the West, Byzantine theologians did not articulate a position of comparable consistency and foundation. Additionally, there is an absence of internal Orthodox discourse concerning the ethical implications of warfare.

The evolution of views on war in early Christian writings will be considered, with particular emphasis on the Eastern patristic tradition.

Early Christian thought underwent significant changes in its attitude toward war and military service. A thorough examination of the works from the second and third centuries reveals a definitive rejection of the notion of Christian participation in military service. This consensus was evident in both the Latin and Greek parts. As Gerd Theissen observes, given that military service was not obligatory in the pre-Constantinian era, it was not challenging to maintain this position, and the instruction that Christians should not be soldiers but soldiers could become Christians was tacitly observed (Theißen, 2017, p. 10–11). According to Ronald Sider, prior to the time of Constantine, no known Christian writer has expressed support for the idea of Christian military service or provided a justification for legitimate killing (Hamalis, Karras, 2017, p. 134).

A striking example of how the role or mission of Christians was explained during times of war can be found in Origen, where he responds to Celsus. «And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them… And none fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army – an army of piety – by offering our prayers to God» (Origen, VIII, 73). There's been a debate in academic circles about whether there was a total rejection of military service and whether it can be defined as completely pacifist. The rationale behind the rejection of military service is therefore as follows: the performance of idolatrous pagan rites, which contradicted the foundations of the Christian faith, constituted an unacceptable part of military life. Alternatively, this could be attributed to the fact that military service was perceived as being in direct opposition to the principles of Christianity, which advocate for the rejection of violence.

In the second half of the second century and later a shift in circumstances became evident. In academic discourse, this phenomenon is referred to as the «Konstantinischen Wende», signifying that, as a Christian, the emperor naturally recruited an increasing number of Christians into the military (Theißen, 2017, p. 11). The transition from the pre-Constantinian to the post-Constantinian era was characterized by a shift in the conceptualisation of military service. At the political and governmental level, the question of the participation of Christians in a pagan army was first posed in terms of the military defence of the Christian state. During the 3rd and 4th centuries, there was an increase in numbers of Christian soldiers. This situation required a reflection on and formulation of a position by Christians regarding the circumstances under which participation in military action is justified for them. The Cappadocians are the most prominent representatives in this area.

The ethical dilemmas of participation in war, as well as the necessity for Christians to engage in acts of violence during times of conflict, were examined among the Cappadocians, particularly by Basil of Caesarea (Basil the Great), whose thought was significantly shaped by Origen. At the same time, Basil advances these reflections further, offering a more developed consideration of war and military life while placing special emphasis on their moral and religious tensions. His writings contain reflections on these issues, which may be summarized as follows. War is invariably regarded as an evil. Furthermore, there exists no moral or ecclesiastical justification for Christian participation in armed

conflict, insofar as such involvement necessarily entails violence and the taking of human life. As Basil of Caesarea observes with regard to soldiers, «their hands are un not clean» (Basil, 1955, p. 23). Violent acts committed in wartime share the same inherent nature as other forms of violence; however, soldiers may be granted «pardon or forgiveness» on the grounds that their actions were undertaken in defense of «virtue and piety» (Hamalis, Karras, 2017, p. 146). As noted in his article on Basil the Great Valerie A. Karras (Karras, 2018), he recognised the moral ambiguity involved in taking a life to save others, as well as the profound impact that the act of killing inevitably has on the soldier, regardless of how «just» or «righteous» the cause of the war may be considered.

The position of St Basil the Great does not provide any justification for a just war; it contradicts the Christian way of thinking because it involves violence. In the words of Basil the Great scholar J. McGuckin, "all violence – whether local, individual or state-sanctioned – is an expression of pride that is incompatible with the values of the Kingdom of God" and the only legitimate reason is the defence of the weak and innocent – but it cannot be justified (Karras, 2018). Despite the most noble of intentions, a true Christian may seek the purifying experience of temporarily returning to a repentant lifestyle.

Another thinker within the Eastern Christian tradition who addressed the topic of war and peace in his reflections was Byzantine Greek theologian Gregory Palamas, though he situated this issue within a much broader thematic framework. Overall, the legacy of Saint Gregory Palamas (14th century) is of decisive importance for the development of Orthodox theology and spirituality. By providing a theological foundation for Hesychasm as a tradition of rational prayer, the Saint affirms the doctrine of the possibility of a real union between man and God. His hermeneutics of war and peace is constructed through a return to the roots – that is, ontology. C. Athanasopoulos notes the importance of precisely this approach, pointing out that «This perspective needs to be ontological because it needs to focus on the existence of what actually and really influences human will» (Athanasopoulos, 2025, p. 20), and it enables to delve deeply into an understanding of the foundations of human existence and nature. This is the only way to identify the roots and causes of human cruelty and violence, which are the key factors in alienating people from peace and tranquillity. Consequently, the following questions arise in the context of theology, ontology, anthropology and ethics. In his work "Homily One: On Peace between us and others" Palamas emphasizes that it is sin that lies at the root of hostility between people and the turning away from love, which should fill the heart and serve as a reliable foundation for communion with God and other people. The author is clear: the disappearance of love from the heart and the subsequent intrusion of hatred (which he describes as a disease) is the cause of destructive processes within the human being. These processes manifest at the individual and societal levels as violence and war. The consequences of it can be summarised as follows: "rational powers are weakened, the heart loses its sensitivity and ability to love, there is no control of one's volitional powers, and a transformation into an inert being by materiality and the will of the flesh" (Athanasopoulos, 2025, p. 24). In other words, this condition affects the human condition as a whole, and it is therefore primarily through a "holistic" transformation of the individual that we can overcome violence and war, and achieve peace – again, first and foremost, peace within the human soul and heart. In summary, this condition impacts the human being as a whole. Therefore, achieving peace and overcoming violence and war necessitates a "holistic" transformation of the individual, with the primary focus being on peace within the soul and heart.

Conclutions. Although early Christian and Byzantine theology lacks comprehensiveness and systematicity in its understanding of the ethics of peace, it is worth noting that the theological and ethical justifications for issues of war and peace in the works of Eastern Christian thinkers nevertheless reveal interesting patterns and trends. The pastoral dimension is evident in attempts to present an eschatological perspective within the hermeneutics of war and peace. There is a palpable tension between the Christian ideal of the world in a state of perfection prior to the Fall, as well as the coming Kingdom of God, and the present state of sinfulness on earth. And war and violence are manifestations of evil and sin in this world. Consequently, there is an expressed need for spiritual guidance, the moral transformation of humanity, and a return to authentic spirituality.

The Eastern Christian patristic heritage, together with liturgical practice and theological writings does not constitute a fully systematized doctrine; nevertheless, it offers substantial evidence and normative guidance for the Orthodox response to the challenge of war.

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