

Just Peace

Just Peace
Orthodox Perspectives

Edited by
Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh
Marian Gh. Simion

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Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives

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Introduction

Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh,
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As part of the process leading to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) mandated by the 9th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2006 (Porto Alegre, Brazil), a set of consultations on the notion of peace—in its various dimensions—was launched in 2007 as well. An expert consultation on The Responsibility to Protect—held at the Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain (Germany) in 2007—revealed the richness of the Orthodox tradition on issues such as war and peace, responsible protection of endangered civilian populations, and legitimate use of force.

As a follow-up to this consultation, two international conferences were co-organised by the Institute for Theology and Peace (ITHF), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity (IPSEC), bringing together Orthodox theologians from the Eastern and Oriental families. These consultations were focused on the Orthodox teachings on peace and justice: *Ethics of Peace: An Orthodox Christian Consultation* (Bucharest, Romania in 2009), and *Orthodox Contributions to a Theology of Just Peace: Developing the Principles of a Just Peace* (Saydnaya, Syria in 2010). This book is composed of a selection of the papers presented during these conferences.

Both conferences were welcomed, hosted, blessed and addressed by their respective Patriarchs, namely His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church; His Beatitude Ignatius IV Hazim, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; in cooperation with His Holiness Ignatius Zakka Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch & All the East,

Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church – as reflected in the prologue of this volume. Such endorsement was a clear indication of the importance of the understanding and practice of peace and justice; it reaffirmed that peace is a divine gift, that humanity is created in God's image, and that love is the essence of Christianity.

Given the diverse and rich theological, cultural and political experiences of Orthodox churches throughout history, the two conferences explored the differences in perceptions, understanding and practice of peace among Orthodox churches and communities.

The Bucharest conference proposed several questions with the expectation that reflections would be provided from within the experience of each church. Questions included the following: What are the core teachings of the Eastern Church on peace and peaceful coexistence? Does the Eastern Church endorse war? Is war holy? Is war a lesser evil or a lesser good? As no pan-orthodox synod ever endorsed a Just War theory, the agony of war often created sentiments of self-righteousness, particularly when acting in self-defence, while also maintaining a sense of guilt for any act of violence. In order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the ethics of peace in Orthodox Christianity, the invited scholars were challenged to reflect historically and theologically on the experience of their local church over issues such as blessing weapons in times of warfare, the role of canonical traditions, the relationship between church and state, nationalism, globalization, sentiments of victimization, traditional perceptions of good and evil, the role of chaplaincy, and so on.

In engaging such themes, scholars such as Bishop Angaelos, Dr Antonia Atanassova, Dr Alexei Bodrov, Dr Harutyun Harutyunyan, Fr Jacob Kurien, and Fr Philip LeMasters insisted on their theological contextualization by emphasizing the historical experience of each church. On the other hand, scholars such as Dr Georgios I. Mantzaridis, Metropolitan Irineu Popa, Nikolaos Asproulis, Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis, and Dr Christos Tsironis offered in-depth theological examinations.

At the Saydnaya conference the participants wrestled with questions surrounding the concept of “just peace,” again from the perspective of their own social contexts. The proposed questions included, what is the Orthodox teaching and understanding of a peaceful and just world? What are the role and mission of Orthodox communities as agents of peace? If peace cannot be understood in the absence of justice, then what does

“just peace” entail? Where do Orthodox churches and their communities stand in the face of current controversial challenges to peace, such as intervention for protection purposes, responsible prevention, and legitimate protection, and so on?

In order to reach a comprehensive understanding of the basic principles, and also coin a specific Orthodox Christian concept of “just peace,” the initial attempt was to steer the consultation towards general social ethics. This is because, in the Orthodox Church, the understanding of peace-oriented justice is rooted in a long ethical and canonical tradition centred not only on the Gospel, but also on three basic definitions offered by the Roman jurists Celsus and Ulpianus. While Celsus (+129C.E.) defined justice as “the art of good and equity” (*jus est ars boni et aequi*), Ulpianus (170-228C.E.) emphasized its distributive aspect, saying that, “justice is the constant and perpetual desire to give everyone his/her due.” (*justitia est constans et perpetua voluntas, jus suum cuique tribuendi*). He described the purpose of justice in non-violent terms saying that, “the precepts of justice are these: to live honestly, to harm no one, and to give everyone his due.” (*juris praecepta sunt haec: honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere* [Justinian, *Institutes* I, I, 3; *Digest*, I, I, 10]) These definitions were adopted not only by the Byzantine state as guiding principles for social justice, but also replicated in the moral teachings of the Orthodox Church. For instance, when all Eastern Orthodox patriarchs adopted Metropolitan Petru Movilă’s Orthodox Confession of Faith during the pan-Orthodox Synod of Iași in 1642, the work of peace was understood as doing justice. As this unanimously-adopted catechism declared, “holy justice means giving everyone his due as deserved, without discrimination by virtue of one’s wealth or social status. Furthermore, Christian justice means responding to evils by doing the good, as the Apostle taught (Romans 13:7).”

The proposed reflective questions focused on concepts extracted from these definitions in order to develop the principles of an Orthodox theology of Just Peace. In this regard, Fr Alexander Vasyutin engaged some Western perspectives on the Just Peace concept, insisting on its incompatibility with the contemporary precepts of the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, all presentations maintained to a certain extent a comprehensive analysis, while exploring a specific track.

First, viewing justice as an “art of good and equity,” the question tapped into the coordination of preventive measures required from

the Church in engaging political power. While Dr Aida Avanesian recommended international advocacy for peace and justice, Dr Ciprian Toroczkai presented a case of such advocacy conducted from within the confines of the Cold War. From a different perspective, Fr Kondothra M. George pointed to the UN Millennium Development Goals as a venue of engagement, exemplifying how his local church in India could implement them. Furthermore, Archimandrite Jack Khalil from Lebanon stressed the crucial role played by the interpretation of scripture on issues of peace and justice, and Sister Theodora Ansam Nasser exemplified how the interpretation of such sacred texts could be implemented in places of conflict, particularly in her native Iraq.

Second, the 1642 Orthodox Confession of Faith defined the peacemaker as the one who (1) prays for peace, (2) mediates between the oppressor and the oppressed, and (3) mediates between rival political authorities in order to eliminate military confrontations. The participants were encouraged to describe what their local churches do in this regard, and how strategies and tactics could be shared across cultures. Here, Dr Tamara Grdzeldze offered a case-study analysis of the difficult path which the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church had to carve in mediating the recent military confrontation between Georgia and Russia.

Third, by “giving everyone his/her due,” the participants were encouraged to reflect on their own contextual understanding of justice, asking whether justice should be restorative, distributive, or punitive in nature. Thus, Fr Emmanuel Clapsis offered a comprehensive theological analysis of peace, insisting on justice in its restorative aspect, as historically developed by Orthodox Christianity.

Fourth, concerning the broad expression “to live honestly,” several proposed questions pondered what it means to live honestly in a currently deregulated world economic system. Here, specific reflective questions focused on justice for workers, the relationship between the laissez-faire capitalism and social justice, and whether the interest charged for money lending is a sin, or merely its abuse.

Fifth, the question of inter-religious coexistence was raised in view of the Church’s claim to be the true one, focusing on general attitudes toward other religions, and on the role of dialogue. Here, Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis offered a magisterial thesis on peaceful dialogue between

Orthodox Christianity and Islam, as driven by modernity, globalization, fundamentalism and multiculturalism.

Finally, the participants were challenged to explore and reflect upon the level of implementation of the ethical teachings into social action. Last but not least, the Bucharest conference hosted the formal launching of the Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity (IPSEC). Therefore, IPSEC's founder wishes to record his recognition and gratitude to several people whose role was crucial, starting with Fr Raymond Helmick, SJ, Dr Mugur A Roz, Denise E. Simion, Semegnish Asfaw, Dr Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, Dr Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, Dr Konrad Raiser, and others.

As editors, we wish to express our gratitude to all those involved in making these conversations possible, particularly to the authors themselves, whose expertise, hard work and dedication are commendable. Special gratitude goes to our hosts in Bucharest and Damascus, such as His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea, His Beatitude Ignatius IV Hazim, His Holiness Ignatius Zakka Iwas, Fr Michael Tita, Fr Alexios Chehadeh, Mr. Samer Laham, and many others.

Today, such reflections on peace and justice are crucial, as the world witnesses profound political transformations, particularly in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Analysts are yet again divided on whether coercive solutions to “protect” the civilian population qualify as just war, or simply as war. Peace is a gift from God—our King of Peace—as well as a vocation. Peace is communion with God—as he gives peace to those who serve him (Psalms 85:8-13)—and is salvation (Rom 16:20) for those who practise it. Peacemaking is therefore a concrete opportunity to connect our theology with ethical witness and praxis, faith with social transformation. We are confident that this volume will make a solid contribution to the emerging field of peace studies.

An Orthodox Contribution toward a Theology of Just Peace

Outcome Document of the International Orthodox Consultation at
Saidnaya, Syria, October 22, 2010

The Orthodox church understands peace and peacemaking as indispensable aspects of her faith and mission to the world. Peace is both a quality of a person, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and the gift of God to families, communities and nations. Peace in Scripture, patristic tradition, and liturgy is a greeting and a dynamic grace-giving reality (Jn. 20:19-21). God Himself is peace (Jdg. 6:24) and peace is his gift. Peace is a sign of communion with God (Ps. 85: 8-13). It grants freedom from fear and threat from enemies; it is inseparable from righteousness, without which there is no real peace. In short “peace” is intrinsic to salvation (Rom. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:23). Peace is communion with God and Jesus Christ is our peace, since he is the bond of communion (Eph. 2:14-17): “We live in peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). St. Basil the Great calls Christians a peaceable race since “nothing is more characteristic of a Christian than to be a worker for peace.”¹

1. The mission of the church is to live in and preserve God’s peace and, despite human failures, to communicate prophetically the peace of God to the world as a blessed peacemaker. The calling of communicating the peace of God to the world in situations of conflict, violence, injustice, and oppression, invites the church to strengthen its contribution to ongoing efforts for transformation of persons and society at different levels toward greater justice, peace, and communion. The peacemaking

mission of the church is inherent to its ongoing commitment and active work toward the unity of all who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In today's global world, the church in collaboration with others should take proactive steps to prevent violence by addressing its root causes through all appropriate means that promote justice and peace. Christians are involved in a permanent process of becoming more conscious of their responsibility to incarnate the message of peace and justice in the world as a witness of the authenticity of their faith. This is clearly stated by St. Basil: "Christ is our peace," and hence "he who seeks peace seeks Christ...without love for others, without an attitude of peace towards all men, no one can be called a true servant of Christ."²² Peacemaking is an art that can be exercised at personal, institutional and global levels. At the institutional level, the church mediates between the person and the state, to the extent possible in given situations. At the global level, the church's witness may inspire policymakers.

2. The Orthodox church has an unshakeable belief in the unity of humankind and affirms the intrinsic dignity of all human beings because all partake in God's love (Gen 2:7; Wisdom of Solomon 10:1; Acts 17: 26) and are created in God's image (Gen.1:27). Fundamental rights of the human being, such as the right to life and freedom of conscience, are at the heart of the gospel and essential in the practice of the church. This is a contributing factor to her involvement in the life of the world, promoting justice and peace for all.

3. The Orthodox church also firmly believes that all forms of life and natural resources are essential parts of God's creation and, therefore, partake in the blessedness and goodness of God (Psalm 8). They must be treated with awe, care and respect. Peace among the peoples of the earth and peace with the earth are interconnected. Therefore, it follows that it is inappropriate for us and disrespectful to the creator to use them as mere objects of greed and selfishness.

4. The peaceable vocation of the Orthodox church should be carried on in collaboration and joint projects with other Christian churches and faith communities. This is what the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference recommended in 1986. "The local Orthodox churches in

close collaboration with the peace-loving faithful of other world religions consider it their duty to work for peace on earth and the establishment of fraternal relations between peoples. The Orthodox churches are called upon to contribute to joint effort and collaboration between religions, and thereby combat fanaticism anywhere; in this way, work for reconciliation between peoples, the triumph of the values represented by freedom and peace in the world, service to humanity today regardless of race or religion.”²³ Through such collaboration, the Orthodox churches contribute their gifts and efforts to the ongoing process for peace and justice, even as they learn from the experiences and the insights of others.

5. In the ambivalence of conflicts and violence in the present world, the church lives out a solid biblical and patristic theology of peace. She must also analyze and understand the nature and causes of conflict by taking into consideration the insights of peace practitioners and social scientists. She concretizes the message of peace through conversation with those who are knowledgeable about currently emerging trends of the world, such as general principles of international law on the subject of peace and peacemaking.

6. Peace and justice are inextricably related (Is 32:17; James 3:18). The Orthodox church understands justice to be restorative and distributive in nature (Rom. 3:25-26). By rewarding the good and disciplining the wrong, a peacemaker ought to be proactive in strengthening good will and forwarding the spirit of reconciliation to prevent evil consequences, just as God with his compassion and forbearance reconciled us and made us righteous through the “blood of Christ” (Rom 3:25-26, 5:9, Eph 1:7), thus proving his irreproachable justice. Justice should promote a sense of community and fairness, and sometimes requires just compromises. In St. Basil the Great’s words, which equally apply to the relation of communities and peoples, those who could give to the poor but did not were guilty of injustice and should restore excess goods to their rightful owners. “The bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the earth is for the needy. You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have aided, and did not.”²⁴

7. When Christians fail to witness to justice, they fall short of their mission. In addressing situations of injustice, the church appeals to moral conscience and the spiritual implications of abusing the weak. In some instances, the church may make this witness by refraining from supporting abusive authorities. The church is called to console and stand by the poor and the weak (Matt. 25). In facing the global crises of today, the Orthodox church exhorts a greater sensitivity by policymakers for the poor and the environment because they suffer the most. She encourages creative policies that work toward preservation of the environment and just distribution of wealth. This implies a careful management of the church's own resources.

NOTES

¹ St. Basil, Letter 11. See also Gregory the Theologian, Address 6, 1, PG 34, 741A-744A and "Letter 145 to Various," PG 47, 248B.

² St. Basil, Letter 203, 2.

³ Quoted by Vlassios Phidas in his article "Peace and Justice: Theological Foundations" in *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*, Gennadios Limouris (ed.), World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1990, 114.

⁴ St. Basil, "I Will Tear Down My Barns".

