

Perry T. Hamalis and Valerie A. Karras (eds.), *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2017, 384 pp.

In a world increasingly threatened by wars and conflicts, it is extremely helpful to focus on how Orthodox Christianity perceives this cruel reality. Conflicts in areas where orthodoxy is dominant such as Ukraine, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, as well as Egypt, Ethiopia and Cyprus to mention some recent examples, reveal the need for a deep analysis of the faith – war – peace relationship.

Hence, this collection of essays, edited by Perry T. Hamalis¹ and Valerie A. Karras², helps substantially to fill the gap in the existing scholarship and enhances available Christian resources by engaging the subject of war. In this volume, the vast topic of “war” is deconstructed into a number of its consecutive elements, with the contributors examining one or more of these

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elements, from the perspective of their own areas of academic expertise: political science, history, medicine, ethics, biblical studies, patristics and systematic theology.

On the other hand, the contributors all agree that the history and experience of the Orthodox Church provides an alternative viewpoint to that of Roman Catholicism and of various Protestant denominations. Orthodoxy's roots in early Christianity and its persistent adherence to those roots, its connections with the Roman emperor Constantine and the Byzantine Empire, its historical relationships with Muslim communities in the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East, its predominance within Russia and other Slavic nations, its complicated role in many Balkan and post – Soviet states' developments, and its increasing though still limited visibility in the Americas, Asia and Australia, all testify to Orthodoxy's historical significance for reflection on war.

The essays collected in this volume are structured under three headings. In *Part 1*, "Confronting the Present – Day Reality" (chapters 1 – 2), the relevance and immediacy of the question is presented in two studies. First, the challenges of war are explored from the raw, personal level of soldiers and their families in an essay of Aristotle Papanikolaou. Second, Andrew Walsh provides an analysis that helps readers to discern the nature of the challenges that Orthodox communities in the United States face in striving to respond to the reality of war. All in all, part 1 thus spans the personal to the political and proffers an engaging foray into the topic through concrete examples.

In *Part 2*, "Reengaging Orthodoxy's History and Tradition" (chapters 3 – 8), seven contributors offer their critical and constructive interpretations of authoritative sources within Orthodoxy's historical tradition. Beginning with the Old Testament, Nicolae Roddy's essay reminds readers of a basic insight from the prophetic corpus: no matter how advanced a nation's offensive weapons and defensive armor are, the only sure path to preservation lies in faithfulness to the true God. Picking up the topic in first – century Palestine, John Fotopoulos examines the significance of the "popular king/bandit" phenomenon and trope within Jewish tradition to illuminate how both Palestinian Jews and the Roman occupiers perceived and responded to Jesus and to interpret Jesus's teachings on war and violence in that context.

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Valerie A. Karras's study, straddling pre and post – Constantinian Christianity, compares and contrasts the views toward Christians in the military of the third – century Alexandrian theologian Origen, with the fourth – century Cappadocian St. Basil the Great and his contemporaries St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In his essay, George Demacopoulos moves the investigation of war firmly into the fourth – century Byzantine Empire and offers the first of several essays focused on the post – Constantinian Church's teachings and witness on war. For Demacopoulos, one of the most significant sources for advancing our understanding of the shift from pre to post – Constantinian Christianity is St. Ambrose of Milan, and his reading of Ambrose paints a picture that is significantly different from predominant interpretations within and outside of Orthodox circles. The hagiographic tradition's fascinating witness, which contrasts sharply with popular notions of "holy warriors", comes into focus in James Skedros's essay, and, finally, a coauthored study by Alexandros Kyrou and Elizabeth Prodromu rounds out part 2. Kyrou and Prodromu advance both a corrective reading of Byzantine attitudes toward war and a constructive proposal for how Orthodoxy's Byzantine legacy can contribute positively to current global challenges and discourse on peace and war.

Part 3, "Constructive Directions in Orthodox Theology and Ethics" (chapters 9 – 12), begins with two essays that center on the theme of providence and war. In the first, Peter Bouteneff mines Greek patristic sources for teachings on good and evil as they pertain to the phenomenon of war and relates them to current debates on war as a "lesser good" or a "necessary evil". In the second, Brandon Gallaher examines the writings of one of the most influential and creative voices from nineteenth – century Russia, Vladimir Soloviev, discerning his distinctive approach to good and evil and expressing his normative teachings on war, realpolitik and pacifism. Gayle Woloschak centres her analysis upon the canonical concept of "oeconomia" and its constructive value engaging in deliberations regarding both decisions to go to war and decisions on the use of various war technologies. Finally, Perry Hamalis argues that the best step for Orthodoxy's representatives is not to insist on the utter distinctiveness of our tradition of reflection on war, but rather to embrace and adapt two lesser – known but established approaches that comport more organically with Orthodoxy's witness on war: just peacemaking and Christian realism.

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We can say, in conclusion, that this volume speaks to two audiences. It aims, first, to present non – Orthodox readers with the breadth and depth of Orthodox Christian thought on the phenomenon of war with the hope of dispelling myths. Secondly, the volume seeks to make Orthodox readers around the world more aware of the complexities and nuances of their own tradition. Finally, editors hope, therefore, to make contributions that are authentic, scholarly, theological, pragmatic and pastoral for Orthodox and non – Orthodox readers alike.

Rev. Traian Nojea