

**WEEK #9: EASTERN ORTHODOXY AND THE JUSTIFIABLE WAR TRADITION**  
**November 9, 2008**

**I. A TELEOLOGY OF JUSTICE**

**A. “Justifiable” Versus “Just” War**

- What does the use of this term, vice “just war,” tell us?

**B. A Lesser Good, Not Evil**

- Entails a proportionality of morally good (or at least, in some circumstances, morally “neutral”) means to morally good ends.
- Issue is whether the resort to war for a good end is itself an *evil*, or whether it may be a *good means* to that end.
- ***The Pauline Principle:***
  - “And why not do evil that good may come? As some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.” (Romans 3:8)
- Not even one Church father gives moral permission to commit an unmistakably evil act, lesser or otherwise.
- ***St. Thomas Aquinas***
  - The object of one’s moral decision (i.e., the action that is chosen as the means to one’s end) must itself be morally good, or at least not intrinsically evil.
- “If a particular war can be justified morally, it must be a good act- or at least a morally neutral act.
  - Perhaps it is a ‘lesser good’ than diplomatic persuasion or nonviolent, nonresistant suffering in full imitation of the ‘higher’ self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ, but a good nonetheless.”
  - *Fr. Webster, The Virtue of War (107)*
- In defining justifiable war, we must define accurately and correctly both the *means* and the *end* in question
  - “If the ends do not justify the means, at least in part, then what else does?”
  - *Use of a knife to cut open a person’s chest*
    - *Does the end justify the means? Depends upon what the end is! And who the agent is!*
  - The specific act of harming, wounding, killing enemy soldiers must be similarly evaluated in the context of a teleology of justice.
- If the war is just (generally, legitimate authority, defensive only, minimal force in proportion to restoring the status quo), a soldier may in good conscience engage in warfare as a *lesser good*.

- Note that this is a highly constrained use of armed might, even more limited in scope than the modern just war doctrine.
- Such limited/proportional warfare in pursuit of just ends becomes a function of *justice*
  - Since justice is one of the four “cardinal” virtues, justice in war may also be virtuous and, hence, morally good.
  - This is the conclusion that we may draw from the six sources discussed below: Justification of such activity as a moral good and of the soldiers who carry it out as virtuous warriors.

### **C. Lesser Morality:**

- The moral trajectory of the just war tradition enjoys an unbroken continuity beginning in the Old Testament, through two thousand years of Orthodox moral reflection.
  - Same with the absolute pacifism trajectory!
- The recasting of war as a concession to human weakness and sin, and hence a “lesser evil,” is wrong.
  - *Contra* Niebuhr and Christian realism
  - *Contra* the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) bishops who stated that the justifiable war tradition “does not reflect our theological tradition, because war may never be theologically justified.”
    - And yet, they add, “[A] lesser evil sometimes must be chosen to resist a greater evil.”
  - *Contra* Fr. Stanly Harakas
    - “The just war theory holds that war is an evil and seeks to make it less so.”
      - War is a “necessary evil” that must be allowed for, realistically, “sometimes.”

### **D. Why the Orthodox Divergence on Whether a Justifiable War Tradition Exists?**

- 1) The legacy of one of the fundamental anthropological claims of the Protestant Reformation: the inherent sinfulness and depravity of all mankind after the original Fall from grace.
  - a. The notion that the most one can hope for is to choose an evil lesser than its more grievous alternatives
  - b. While this notion departs significantly from the patristic heritage of Orthodox Christianity, it still exists.
- 2) Roman Catholic “Proportionalism”
  - a. Proportionalists withhold moral judgment of particular acts until they can calculate the likely proportion of good and evil effects of the alternative choices.
  - b. Notion that it is impossible to establish moral absolutes that prohibit certain behaviors at all times and everywhere.
  - c. Puts “intentions” and “consequences” ahead of the act itself considered objectively.
- 3) Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian Realism:

- a. The perfect morality modeled by Jesus Christ is not practical in human society and must be moderated by a pragmatic or realistic ethic of responsibility that requires a choice of *lesser evils* on behalf of justice for the community.
  - b. Problem is the moral incongruity: “Jesus’ ethic of love impels us to do vicious things.”
- The “lesser evil” approach opens a Pandora’s box of rationalizations for all manner of evils in war and even other apparent or real ethical dilemmas.
  - “The ‘lesser evil’ approach makes us ‘lesser’ human beings.” (Webster, Virtue of War, 121)

## II. ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: TWO-TIERED MORALITY

- Since the patristic era, Orthodoxy has proffered a “two-tiered” morality
- A. The Civilizing Ethic**
- The ethic inherent in the created order
  - A common-denominator ethic for humanity based on natural law
  - *Fr. Stanley Harakas:*
    - o The “inborn moral law”
    - o Universal, unchanging, and perceivable by the effort of unaided reason
  - The classic example of the “civilizing ethic,” according to the Church fathers, is found in the last six commandments of the Decalogue.
    - o These provide the norms of *what humans ought to do*
- B. Transfigurative Morality**
- Reflects mankind’s greatest potential and fulfillment
  - Revealed in the incarnate Son of God Himself
  - Inspires religiously motivated conformity by believers to divine law
  - The classic example of “transfigurative morality” is the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes
    - o These provide the norms of *how humans ought to be*
- C. How does This Fit in to War and Peace?**
- Transfigurative morality may not be imported wholesale into the public square, as many Americans simply do not share the faith in divine revelation.
  - However, in our dealings in the public square, we *can* and *should* stand on the “civilizing ethic” of virtues and norms
    - o This will permit our arguments to be heard by fellow Americans

## III. ORTHODOX JUSTIFIABLE WAR IN OUTLINE

### A. Trajectories: Absolute Pacifism and Justifiable War:

- Eastern Orthodox teaching on the morality of some wars forms one of two dynamic “trajectories” through the history of the Church, beginning with the Old Testament
- The other trajectory is *absolute pacifism* (see The Pacifist Option by Fr. Alexander Webster for a study of this trajectory)
- The Orthodox justifiable war tradition reflects the lower “civilizing ethic”
- The Orthodox absolute pacifist trajectory reflects the higher “transfigurative morality”
- “But it is precisely the synthesis of idealism and realism, of vision and power, of mysticism and justice in the Orthodox justifiable war tradition that might speak forcefully to the role of the United States in the contemporary world.” (VOW, 31).
  
- **Mercy** is the virtue that the Orthodox absolute pacifist endeavors to maximize by refraining from *all* violence against human beings.
- **Justice** is the *corresponding* virtue that has priority for the Orthodox just warrior.
  
- The absolute pacifist seeks to emulate Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd who allowed Himself to be slain unjustly by and for sinners.
- The just war perceives an even higher duty than emulation of Christ: to defend the relatively innocent from unjust aggression.
  
- Orthodox pacifist can never do anything that he deems evil even for a reasonably just end.
- The Orthodox warrior cannot preserve his personal holiness by allowing evil to triumph through his own inaction.
  
- *The Virtue of Justice* is the primary characteristic of both the conduct in war (*jus in bello*) and the decision to go to war (*jus ad bellum*).
  
- B. “Lesser Good”:**
- Because the justifiable war tradition reflects the civilizing ethic, a justifiable war is a “*lesser good*”- but still a good! It is not a “necessary evil”

#### IV. TEXTUAL SOURCES FOR JUSTIFIABLE WAR TRAJECTORY

##### A. Holy Scripture

- The complete Bible of the Church in the fourth century, including the *Septuagint* Greek version of the Old Testament and the New Testament

##### B. Patristic Writings

- The writings of the Church Fathers from the first century through the entire Byzantine era that ended in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks

##### C. Canon Law

##### D. Hagiography

- The literature of the acts/virtues of the saints

- The associated icons of the saints as narrative theology “in color and form”

### **E. Devotional Literature**

- Liturgical and hymnographic texts
- Spiritual writing focusing on ascetical or mystical themes

### **F. Modern Theologians and Literary Authors**

## **Source #1: Holy Scripture**

### ***Old Testament (Septuagint Version):***

- Progressive moral tightening of a just war code (from captivity in Egypt to the Maccabean period to the perfect holiness revealed in Christ)
- Outlines of a just war code, particularly pertaining to *jus in bello*
- First, an idealization of combat and its victors. War is glorified and made palatable
  - o Judges 8:18-21: Gideon and the two kings of Midean
  - o 1 Samuel 17: David and Goliath
  - o 2 Samuel 2:18-28; 23:8-39
- Ethical reworkings of older narrative in books of 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings, by the editor of 1 & 2 Chronicles
  - o More idealistic depiction of ethical leadership in Israel
  - o Explanation of why God did not allow David to build temple (blood on hands) (1 Chron. 22:7-10)
  - o Obligation on handling prisoners-of-war (2 Chron. 28:9-11)
- Later, emphasis on justifiable defensive war (rather than wars of conquest)
  - o 1-3 Maccabees
  - o Nehemiah 4
- Additional limits on Israel’s conduct in war
  - o 1 Macc. 2:29-48
  - o 1 Macc. 5: 28, 35, 51
  - o 1 Macc. 5:55-62
  - o 1 Macc. 5:67
  - o 1 Macc. 13:43-48
- But...war as a moral good
  - o 2 Macc. 15:11-16
  - o 2 Macc. 2:12-16
    - “...Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a golden sword, and as he gave it he addressed him thus: *‘Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries.’*”
- David as the ultimate just warrior of the Old Testament

### ***New Testament:***

- Luke 14:31-33 (Jesus’ parable about a king preparing to war; Christ resorts to militaristic images, suggesting that perhaps he does not categorically disapprove of all war)
- Passages where centurions or other Roman military officers play a role

- The believing centurion
- Cornelius the centurion
- The centurion at the cross
- Several centurions/tribunes who display some level of kindness to St. Paul
- Idea that the New Testament writers did not reject Roman soldiers as so hopeless, their work so heinous, as to be precluded by virtue of their profession from salvation as soldiers.
- Passages with relevance to military service (obedience to civil authority)
  - Romans 13:1-7
  - Titus 3:1
  - 1 Timothy 2:1-2
  - 1 Peter 2:13-17
- Passages with an apparent sanction of military service
  - 2 Timothy 2:3-6 (use of soldier analogy to describe the good Christian life)
    - Paul here “shows what kind of man a priest ought to be. For he ought to possess...the courage of a soldier.” – *St. John Chrysostom*
  - 1 Corinthians 9:7 (use of soldier as apparently no more morally objectionable than occupations as vinedressers and goatherds)
  - Luke 3:14-15: John the Baptist (“be content with your wages”)

## Source #2: Patristic Writings:

- ***St. Augustine:***
  - As in the West, St. Augustine is somewhat influential in the Eastern justifiable war tradition; though not very much...
  - Orthodoxy relies more heavily on the patristic patrimony of the Greek and Middle Eastern fathers
  - For Augustine, recall that the primary virtue that we demonstrate in war, paradoxically, is *love*
    - We show love to our enemies by killing them
  - For the East, the focus is not on the greater virtue of love (or mercy), but the lesser virtue- but still a virtue!- of justice
- ***St. Clement of Rome (d. 99 A.D.):***
  - Explicit admiration for the “discipline, readiness, and obedience” of “those who serve under generals” in the Roman Army (*1 Clement*)
- ***Clement of Alexandria (150-211):***
  - Clearly accepted the active involvement of Christians in the military as a meritorious enterprise.
  - Yet while warfare was acceptable as a lesser good, the better way was peace.
- ***St. Basil the Great (d. 379):***

- “Even in a soldier’s life it is possible to preserve the perfection of love to God, and we must mark a Christian not by the style of his dress, but by the disposition of his soul.” (*Letter to Soldier, 378 A.D.*)
- ***St. Photios the Great (810-893):***
  - Bravery in battle adorns a good ruler
- ***Theophylactos of Ochrid (1055-1107):***
  - “While making peace, practice for war, exercising yourself constantly in preparation for every type of warfare.”

### Source #3: Canon Law:

- ***Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339): Demonstration of the Gospel:***
  - Foreshadows the dual canonical standards that would later prohibit all clergy from killing any human beings, while regulating the conditions under which laymen might serve in the military
    - The “perfect form of the Christian life” is that of the priesthood: no marriage, no children, no property, no killing- wholly devoted to God in body and soul
    - The “other more humble, more human” form of Christian life is that of the layman, who is allowed to join in marriage, have children, serve in government, “give orders to soldiers fighting for right...”
- ***St. Athanasius the Great (293-373): Canon 1:***
  - “It is not lawful to murder, but in war [it is] both lawful and worthy of approval to destroy the adversaries...So the same thing, on the one hand, is not lawful according to some circumstances and at some times, but, on the other hand, according to some other circumstances and opportunely it is permitted and possible.”
  - Compare to ***St. Maximos the Confessor*** (7<sup>th</sup> century):
    - “Nothing among creatures is evil except misuse.”
    - An act may in itself be morally neutral- intrinsically neither good nor evil- but requires personal intention in order to acquire moral value.
  - Based on this, killing in war could, under certain conditions, be a lawful act with a *good* intention or goal.
  - St. Athanasius’s canon appears to sanction some wars as *moral goods*, or at least not as *evils*.
- ***St. Basil the Great (330-379): Canon 13:***
  - “Our fathers did not reckon as murders the murders in war, it seems to me, *giving a pardon* to those who defend themselves *on behalf of moderation and piety*. But perhaps it is well to advise that they abstain from the communion for only three years, since their hands are not clean.”
    - Basil provides a specific condition for the traditional justification for killing in war- the defense of moderation and piety.

- Also, the suggested penance entails refraining from receiving the holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ
  - But NOT an expulsion from the Church altogether or reduction to the status of catechumen
- The recommended penance is clearly intended as an advisory opinion rather than a definite canonical requirement.

#### Source #4: Hagiography

- While many Eastern saints maintained an absolute pacifist position, many more engaged in or blessed certain military operations as righteous or good acts.
- **St. George (ca. 275-303):**
  - Promoted to the rank of general by the emperor Diocletian
    - Refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods, and was summarily imprisoned, tortured, and executed
  - Orthodox icons show St. George in full Roman military uniform on a white horse and lancing a dragon (a typical iconographic image of Satan)
  - Regarded by Orthodox (and many Western) Christians as a supernatural protector in time of war



- **The Acta of St. Procopios:**
  - Portray St. George as a devout pagan named Neanian who Diocletian appointed “Duke” of Egypt to persecute the Christians
  - Converted to Christianity himself
  - During a battle in Alexandria, he was ordered to sacrifice to the gods
  - Removed his armor and refused to sacrifice- killed for his refusal.
- **The Acta of St. Demetrios of Thessalonika:**
  - Demetrios pretends to be an idolater until Emperor Maximillian makes him a general
  - Thereafter, Demetrios openly professed his Christianity and was imprisoned

- While in jail, he blesses a man named Nestor, who despite his small stature, then defeats and kills the pagan giant Lyaaios in combat in the arena
- The emperor then orders Demetrios put to death when he learns of the blessing
- Demetrios is often depicted in Orthodox icons astride a horse while lancing an enemy soldier lying prostrate near his horse
  - That such a violent act can adorn a sacred image leaves no doubt that the Church regards Demetrios's profession- and his role in blessing combat- as worthy of veneration.



- ***Saints Who Blessed/Comforted Military Commanders:***
  - St. Daniel the Stylite (d. 493)
  - St. Theodore of Sykeon (d. 613)
  - St. Methodios (d. 885)
  - Father Sergius of Radonezh (d. 1392)
    - “It behooveth you, lord, to have a care for the lives of the flock committed to you by God. Go forth against the heathens; and upheld by the strong arm of God, conquer; and return to your country sound in health, and glorify God with loud praise.”
- ***Vita of the “Warrior-Saint”***
  - St. Lazar (d. 1389)
  - St. Alexander Nevsky (d. 1263)
    - Quintessential just prince and righteous warrior
    - Swedes, Teutonic Knights, Mongols come into Russia to conquer; Alexander has no military purpose in mind but to defend their fatherland
    - *Prayer of St. Alexander at Church of the Hagia Sophia (eve of battle):*
      - “Glorious and just Lord, Great and Powerful God, God Eternal, who created the heaven and earth, and who determined the boundaries of the peoples: Thou commandest people to live without oppressing other countries. O Lord, judge those who offended me. Smite those who set themselves against me and come to my aid with arms and shields.”

- Constantine XI Palaiologos (d. 1453):
  - Last emperor of Byzantium
  - On the eve of battle with the Turks, and the fall of Constantine imminent, the emperor received the Holy Mysteries from the Greek Orthodox and Latin clergy concelebrating the final Eucharist *in extremis*.
  - Dedicated the rest of the evening in tearful prayer on his knees, not in fear or for himself, but for his subjects, his Church, and the last vestige of the once great Orthodox Christian Roman Empire.
  - *Speech at beginning of battle:*
    - “...For your strength lies in the protection of God and you must show it in your arms quivering and your swords brandished against the enemy...[Y]ou will hold them at bay these dumb brutes, thrusting your spears and swords into them...”
  - During the battle, as many of his troops lost heart and panicked, Constantine Palaiologos cast off his imperial garb and rushed headlong into the growing mass of Turks at the gate, fighting to death with sword in hand as a common soldier.

#### **Source #5: Devotional Texts**

- Orthodox church, like the Anglican church, operates on the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi* (“the rule of prayer is the rule of belief”)- i.e., our worship experience shapes our doctrine.
- Devotional texts include the *liturgy*, *hymns*, and *prayers*

#### ***The Divine Liturgy:***

- Appeals for “peace” do abound in Orthodox worship
  - “In peace let us pray to the Lord”
  - “Peace be with you”
  - “Depart in peace”
- But that same liturgy includes a petition on behalf of the head of the state, the government, and “our armed forces everywhere.”
- *Divine Liturgy of St. Basil:*
  - The prayer of intercession that the priest quietly recites at the altar, after the consecration, includes a prayer asking God to remember “our brothers who serve in...the armed forces.”

#### ***Hymns:***

- Militaristic imagery often juxtaposed with word-images of peace, mercy, humility, suffering, and martyrdom.

#### ***Prayers:***

- Throughout the Eastern Orthodox ages, specific prayer services for time of war and liturgical rites of blessing for military personnel and weapons.
- *Book of Needs: Molieben to the Lord God Sung in Time of War*
  - o *Book of Needs* is a multivolume series that contains special prayers, prayer services, blessings, sacramental rites
  - o Canticles refer repeatedly to Old Testament military victories as precedents for the Lord now to “grant victory to them that govern us over all adversaries who have risen against us.”
  - o Petitions where the deacon calls upon the Lord to let “the nations who have fallen against Thine inheritance and defiled Thy Holy Church...be assailed by Thy tempests and shake them with thy wrath...”
  - o Prayer of the priest toward the end of the service:
    - *Toward the enemy*: “Rise up to our help and set to naught the evil counsels purposed against us by the evil ones. Judge them that affront us and defeat them that war against us, and turn their impious boldness into fear and fight.
    - *Toward Us*: But grant unto our god-fearing armies that hope in Thee great boldness and courage to drive onward and overtake them, and to defeat them in Thy Name. And unto them that Thou hast judged to lay down their lives for Faith and Country, forgive them their trespasses, and in the day of Thy righteous reckoning grant them incorruptible crowns.”
- Russian Orthodox tradition includes a special memorial service for Orthodox warriors (August 29)
  - o Warriors throughout the ages are acknowledged for their valor and Christ-like sacrifices
  - o Nowhere in this service is there any hint that the work of those soldiers is evil or sinful.
  - o Instead, these rites extol the virtues of the fighting men who risk their own lives for Church and homeland.
- *Blessing of Weapons*:
  - o Appears in the *Kosovo Book of Needs* in 1993
  - o Recognized even by the Orthodox Peace Fellowship as an ancient usage and “established ecclesiastical custom.”
  - o *Prayer Over Weapons*: “Send Your heavenly blessing over these weapons (priest names each weapon). Give force and strength that they may protect Your holy Church, the poor and the widows, and Your holy inheritance on earth, and make it horrible and terrible to any enemy army.”
  - o Priest/bishop then sprinkles the weapons with blessed water, invoking the blessing of the Triune God “upon these weapons and those who carry them, for the protection of the truth of Christ.”
  - o Priest/bishop then blesses “the soldiers carrying the weapons” and exhorts them, “Be brave and let your heart be stronger and win victory over your enemies, trusting in God, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

## Source #6: Modern Theology and Literature

- *Archbishop Nikolai (Kasatkin) of Tokyo (d. 1912)*
  - o Russian by birth/country, but serving as archbishop in Japan
  - o At the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), he exhorted his flock in Japan:
    - “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’ (John 15:13). In a word, do all that love for your fatherland demands. The Savior sanctified this feeling by His example of love for His earthly fatherland. ‘He wept over the wretched fate of Jerusalem.’ (Luke 1:91).”
  - o Yet because of his own loyalty to Russia (the universal principle of patriotism), he could not remain in Japan:
    - “I, as a Russian, cannot pray for the victory of Japan over my homeland. I also have obligations towards my homeland, and precisely therefore I will be happy when I see you fulfill your duties towards your country.”
  - o In effect, he blesses both sides of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904
  
- *Serbian Orthodox Bishop St. Nikolai Velimirovich (d. 1956):*
  - o “War is one of the tools in the hands of God, as well as peace. War is a poison, which kills, but which at the same time cures and heals... We have to wish those, whom we love, both a good life and a good death. To die in the struggle for a common cause is a good death.”
  
- *Vladimir Soloviev:*
  - o “War is not an unconditional evil, and peace is not an unconditional good... [I]t is possible to have a good war, it is possible to have a bad peace.” (*War and Christianity from the Russian Point of View*, 1899).
  
- *Father Sergei Tchetverikoff:*
  - o “Emperors, princes, generals as well as Christian soldiers entered into the host of saints. And the heavenly light of their holy glory has forever sanctified all Christ-bearing and Christ-loving military endeavors and struggles for the Holy Church, Christian statehood and the baptized people, for the Kingdom of God on earth.” (*The Sanctity of the Military Endeavor*, 1929)
  
- *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn:*
  - o Captain in Russian army till 1945, when he was caught criticizing Stalin in private correspondence; spent 8 years in *gulags* and 3 more years in exile
  - o “*Repentance and Self-Limitation of Nations*” (1973):
    - Nations, unlike individuals, cannot make completely self-sacrificing decisions, especially when their neighbors are militarily aggressive
    - “Even in the most totalitarian states, we all bear responsibility-... for the campaigns of our military leaders, for the deeds of our soldiers in the line of duty, for the shots fired by our frontier guards.”

- Sadness, but duty, of defending one's nation, even in a totalitarian regime, even when the cause is hopeless: *August 1914*:
  - Sanya's reason for fighting in WWI: "I feel sorry for Russia."
  - Sanya determines to fight for Russia simply "because Russia *is*, and because she, and not another country, is his motherland, granted him like the sun and the air; because she is his home and body, and no one can be without these." (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann on Sanya)
  - Similar to St. Nikolai's decision at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war
  - Notion that "the Christian ought to serve his country- and no other- in time of war regardless of who happens to be governing the homeland at the time. For the exigencies of birth have located him in that particular place and it is the only country he has. Such service will most likely be a tragic, bittersweet endeavor, a *moral necessity* and a *virtuous activity*, but in no way a joy." (Fr. Alexander Webster)