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Can War Ever be Just? Light from the Christian East

Lev Smith

Lev Smith
Institut Saint-Denys, Paris
E-mail: xaris@me.com

Abstract
Since the word war is still very frequently heard, I intend to show how liturgical theology has played a determinative role in shaping the Eastern response to war. My hope in making this case is that Western Christians will find the Orthodox experience, and its moral theological appreciation of war, helpful in renewing our understanding of authentically Christian responses to violent conflict in today's world.

Keywords
war, peace, liturgical theology, violence, tradition

Introduction

The Gulf War of a decade ago and the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have renewed Christian moral reflection on issues of war and peace. This debate usually takes the form of a debate between the respective merits of the pacifist and just war theory (JWT) traditions, or that of an intramural debate within JWT, e.g., whether a particular conflict meets the criteria for a war to be reckoned 'just', or whether modern realities of politics and warfare require substantial modification of those criteria, or even whether

the classical JWT contains a presumption against war (or violence), or a less difficult standard of a presumption against injustice.[1]

I shall begin by addressing some distinguishing characteristics of Eastern Orthodox theology in general, and of its moral theology in particular, as those characteristics affect our moral tradition concerning war. Then, following a brief summary of the Church's experience prior to the first ecumenical council of Nicea in 325 CE, I shall present the Eastern approach to war as it has developed in distinction from the more familiar Western treatment analyzed under the heading of the JWT. What I hope will become evident throughout, however, is how liturgical theology has played a determinative role in shaping the Eastern response to war. My hope in making this case is that Western Christians will find the Orthodox experience, and its moral theological appreciation of war, helpful in renewing our understanding of authentically Christian responses to violent conflict in today's world.

Some Aspects of the Orthodox Theologial Tradition

The Eastern Orthodox Church, or better, the communion of Eastern Orthodox Churches, is the second largest communion of Christians in the world and it is arguably the oldest expression of Christian tradition. Yet it is largely unknown in the West, and numerous histories and systematic theologies written in the West do not even mention the experience of the Eastern Church. On an individual level, one often encounters Western Christians who assume that, if one is identified as Orthodox, one must be either Greek or Russian or perhaps Jewish. Given this general unfamiliarity, I hope you will forgive me if I rehearse salient features of Orthodox dogmatic, moral, and liturgical theology as they bear upon the present topic.

First is the matter of theological authority, which, for the Orthodox, resides in what we term 'Holy Tradition'. This Tradition finds expression through the following forms, roughly in order of importance from first

[1] This last debate is surveyed by Tobias L. Winright in '*Two Rival Versions of Just War Theory and the Presumption Against Harm in Policing*,' in John Kelsay and Summer B. Twiss, eds., "The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics", vol. 18, The Society of Christian Ethics, Chicago, 1998, p. 221-239.

to last: (1) Holy Scripture, (2) the Seven Ecumenical Councils, including the Symbol of Faith or 'Nicene Creed' produced by the first two of those councils (Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381), (3) later councils, (4) the Church Fathers, (5) the Liturgy, (6) the canonical tradition, and (7) the holy Icons. Thus Orthodoxy does not oppose Tradition to Scripture, or see them as two separate sources of revelation. Rather we understand our theological inheritance as one living stream of Tradition, of which the Bible is arguably the most authoritative. Still, we see Scripture as one element in God's revelation to His people, and therefore as something that may not be read in isolation from the other elements of that Tradition. A helpful image is to see the Church's tradition as the history of its interpretation and appropriation of the written expression of the Word of God. Thus our moral theological tradition concerning war draws upon each of the constitutive elements listed above – Scripture, councils, Fathers, liturgy, canons, and icons.

Second, Orthodox theology is above all else *doxological*. Having just said that there are seven constitutive elements of the Church's theology, I must immediately unsay that, for in another sense, the source of the Church's theology – dogmatic, moral, and pastoral – is her liturgy. For it is in the Church's worship, and especially in the Divine Liturgy (or Eucharist), that the various sources of theological authority come together for the Orthodox Christian. The Eastern Church is the chief practitioner and exemplar of that understanding of theology that sees it as transpiring in the liturgical act itself. Father Aidan Kavanagh, a bi-ritual Benedictine priest-monk greatly influenced by the Orthodox tradition, is fond of citing Prosper of Aquitaine's dictum, 'that the law of worshipping establishes the law of belief.[2] An example of this is during the fourth century debate over whether the Holy Spirit was coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son. St Basil the Great (c. 330-379), answered by pointing to the Church's worship, specifically, the Trinitarian doxology: 'Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit'. The law of worship establishes the law of believing. On this view, liturgy is *theologia prima*; systematic, moral, and other theologies are all species of secondary theology, and all of them are to be understood as grounded in the Church's liturgy.

Third, it must be noted that Eastern Orthodox theology is different in aim from Western theology, at least insofar as the latter is conventionally

[2] Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1984.

understood. Western theology, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, is generally an intellectual activity. One recent work by a Dominican moral theologian is typical in saying that theology may be understood as 'thinking about God.'[3] The Eastern view of theology, however, is understood as an action of *theosis* or deification. The point of theology is nothing other than union with God, and therefore for us the theologian is more usually a monk who has given his lifetime to unceasing prayer than a university professor with graduate degrees. Indeed, one finds frequent reference in the tradition to the saying of the Egyptian ascetic, Evagrios of Pontus (346-399) that 'The one who prays truly is a theologian, and a theologian is one who prays truly'.

Theology is aimed at union with God, and this union is the end of all our actions, most especially our celebration of the liturgy. For it is chiefly in the Eucharist that we participate in the truth of the Incarnation expressed by St Irenaeus of Lyons (c130-c200), St Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373), and of the Eastern theological tradition ever since, that God became human in order that all humans might be divinized. Deification, then, is the proper subject of Orthodox moral theology.

Fourth, the Christian West understands sin in juridical terms, as a violation of God's law and justice, as a crime or offense committed against God. The East, however, sees sin more as illness than as transgression. One result of this is that the concept of justice, while not absent from Orthodox tradition, does not play as large a role as it does in Western thinking. I am reminded here of St Isaac the Syrian, the seventh-century bishop of Nineveh, who warned that we are never to call God 'just', for if God is just then we are all in a great deal of trouble.

Fifth, and this follows from the last point, Eastern moral theology is not juridical in nature. Rather than being an analysis of sin, moral theology is concerned with human action that either cooperates or refuses to cooperate with deifying grace. It is therapy, not criminology, much less criminal law. In the mystery (or sacrament) of repentance, the priest exhorts the penitent to confess all of her sins, 'lest having come to a physician, [she] leave unhealed'. When the spiritual father gives the penitent something to do, it is not understood as a penance but as a *pharmikon*, a remedy.

[3] Romanus Cessario, OP, *Introduction to Moral Theology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 2001.

Sixth and finally, Orthodox moral theology holds that sins may be involuntary. An example of this that will prove relevant to our discussion today is the sin of homicide. The Christian East teaches that the taking of a human life is always a sin. This is true whether a governmental court would judge the homicide to be criminally culpable (as in the case of murder), or 'justifiable' (as in the case of self-defense), or even involuntary (as in some cases of vehicular homicide). Homicide is objectively wrong, although different contexts and intentions will determine the character of the sin and the extent of the remedy. For example, while it would be usual for anyone who has taken a human life to undergo a period of excommunication, the length of the period would vary greatly for someone who has committed murder, killed in self-defense, or killed someone in an auto accident through no fault of his own. A further point must be made. Orthodoxy does not understand excommunication as a punishment, so its different lengths must not be seen as varying sentences deemed appropriate to various degrees of a 'crime'. No, excommunication, i.e., forbidding someone to receive Holy Communion, is done for the spiritual benefit of the penitent. Following the Apostle Paul's warning in his First Epistle to the Corinthians not to receive the Body and Blood of Christ unprepared, Orthodoxy believes that someone who has killed another might be eating and drinking condemnation by receiving Communion. A period of excommunication is prescribed as part of the spiritual preparation for Communion, rather than as a punishment for breaking a moral commandment.

Early Christian Reflection on War

It is generally accepted that the Church of the first three centuries of the Christian Era was essentially pacifist in character, i.e., the Church generally regarded service in the military as incompatible with being a Christian. This consensus has been challenged as of late,[4] generally on the belief that Christian opposition to military service was founded upon the Roman military practice of offering sacrifices to pagan gods. While this was no doubt *one* of the reasons for Christian opposition, it was hardly the only or even the dominant one. A few brief examples will have to suffice for today:

[4] A useful survey of recent literature is David G. Hunter's '*A Decade of Research on Early Christians and Military Service*,' in "Religious Studies Review" 18:2 (April 1992), p. 87-94.

- Tertullian (c.160-c.225) holds that Christians, as 'sons of peace,' cannot serve in the military. He asks: 'Will a son of peace who should not even go to court take part in a battle? Will a man who does not avenge wrongs done to himself have any part in chains, prisons, tortures, and punishments?[5] More explicitly, he said that 'when Christ disarmed Peter [in the Garden of Gethsemane], he disarmed every Christian.'[6]
- Origen of Alexandria (c.185-c.254) writes that Christians 'no longer take up the sword against any nation, nor do we learn the art of war any more. Instead, … we have become sons of peace through Jesus our founder.'[7]
- A last quote, this from St John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), archbishop of Constantinople, whose liturgy is celebrated as the principal liturgy among the Eastern Orthodox Churches: 'God is not a God of war and fighting. Make war and fighting to cease, both that which is against Him, and that which is against your neighbor. Be at peace with all men, consider with what character God saves them. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Such always imitate the Son of God: you are to imitate Him, too. Be at peace. The more your brother wars against you, by so much the greater will be your reward. For hear the prophet who says, "With the haters of peace, I was peaceful" (Ps 120.7 LXX). This is virtue, this is above understanding, this makes us near God; nothing so much delights God as to remember no evil. This sets you free from your sins, this looses the charges against you: but if we are fighting and buffeting, we become far off from God: for enmities are produced by conflict, and from enmity springs remembrance of evil.'[8]

In short, Christian opposition to military service was based upon, *inter alia*, but perhaps especially, the early Christian conviction that killing is intrinsically wrong. The early authorities cited above make explicit reference to the teachings and example of Jesus.

Critics of this pacifist reading of pre-Nicene Christianity point to isolated examples of Christians serving in the military before the Emperor Constantine's adoption of Christianity, and so one cannot say that military

[5] *On the Crown* II:1-7.
[6] *De Idolotria*, XIX.
[7] 5:33.
[8] St. John Chrysostom, *14th Homily on Philippians*.

service was strictly prohibited for all Christians. However, early texts also indicate that although a Christian might serve as a soldier or civil magistrate, killing was nonetheless held to be incompatible with being a Christian. A striking example of this is found in the third-century document, *The Apostolic Tradition*, usually attributed to Hippolytus. In a detailed list of professions deemed incompatible with receiving Christian baptism, the author specifies: 'A soldier in command must be told not to kill people; if he is ordered to do so, he shall not carry it out. Nor should he take the oath. If he will not agree, he should be rejected. Anyone who has the power of the sword, or who is a civil magistrate wearing the purple, should desist, or he should be rejected.'[9] So while some in the Church saw military service as possible for a Christian, killing as an ingredient of that service was strictly forbidden. One finds as a vestige of this early view at the Council of Nicea itself in its twelfth canon. It declares, in part: 'Those who, being called by grace and being obedient to its first movement, have laid aside their sword belts who have later on, like dogs returning to their own vomit, even gone so far as to pay money and give gifts to be reinstated into the military service, all those persons must remain among the prostraters during ten years, after a period of three years as hearers.'[10] In other words, Christians who had left the military but who decided to return to it were excommunicated for three years and had to do prostrate themselves for a decade in order to be fully restored to the life of the Church.

After Constantine

But things change. With the advent of Constantine as Roman emperor, and his approbation and eventual adoption of the Christian faith, one begins to see a divergence between Western and Eastern Christian thinking on war and Christian participation in it. In this West, we see JWT beginning in St Ambrose of Milan (c. 339-397), then in his disciple, St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), then in St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), then in Luther and Calvin, and so on up to the present day. Broadly speaking, this tradition holds that there can be such a thing as a just war, provided that certain

[9] *The Apostolic Tradition*, § 16.

[10] Translation in Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils*, Crestwood, 1996, p. 67.

criteria are met both in the initiation of the war (the so-called *jus ad bellum* criteria) and the conduct of the war (the *jus in bello* criteria). As I suggested at the outset, these criteria and their applicability to modern warfare are debatable, and there is the fundamental disagreement as to whether JWT is premised upon a strong presumption against war (or violence), or a somewhat weaker presumption against injustice. (I say 'weaker' because proponents of the presumption against injustice reading of JWT, such as James Turner Johnson and George Weigel, see that presumption as more easily overcome than one against war.)

One purpose of this paper is to remind us of something that is usually ignored in the literature on Christian pacifism and JWT – namely, that after Constantine, Eastern Christian theologians responded to the issue of Christian participation in war differently than their Western counterparts. What post-Constantinian Christianity – both East and West – shared was a conviction that the state was right to use 'military force for the protection of the temporal order…'[11] Where they differed was in their moral appreciation of the character of such activity, at least, when such activity entailed violence and killing.

It should not be forgotten, however, that even though both parts of the Christian Roman Empire came to agree on the theoretical legitimacy of a defensive war, both East and West continued to acknowledge and honor the pacifist position of the Church prior to Constantine. While it did come to permit the Christian laity to serve in the military to fight and to kill, the Church – East and West – nonetheless maintained the older prohibition against killing for members of the clergy. Church canons, including Canon Seven of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451 CE), forbid clerics or monks to join the military upon pain of being anathematized.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that this ban has had a mixed history in the West, where Catholic priests sometimes participated in the Crusades not as chaplains but as crusaders. In her chronicle of the period, Princess Anna Comnena (1083-1153), displays her revulsion at seeing Western priests armed and fighting in battle. (This despite St Thomas Aquinas' clear teaching that clerics must not do battle or kill.[12]

[11] John Helgeland, Robert J. Daly, and S. Patout Burns, *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience*, Philadelphia, 1985.

[12] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 40, 2.

So apart from this common 'stratification of pacifism,'[13] as Father Stanley Harakas has termed it, how did the East theologically appreciate participation in warfare by the Christian laity? In brief, the East held – and continues to hold – that killing in war is always evil, even in wars that meet the strictest formulations of the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* criteria of the JWT. Of course, the most influential theologian in the West, St Augustine 'called it a Manichean heresy to assert that war is intrinsically evil and contrary to Christian charity.'[14] But then the bishop of Hippo was never influential in the Christian East. Indeed, the contemporary Greek theologian Christos Yannaras has described Augustine as 'the fount of every distortion and alteration in the Church's truth in the West.'[15]

For Eastern Orthodoxy, war – like the homicide it inevitably entails – is a *malum in se*; it is an intrinsic evil. This appears to be the unanimous position of the Eastern Church Fathers. A recent attempt to argue for an Orthodox version of just war theory has sought support in canon one of St Athanasius of Alexandria, which says that 'to kill enemies in war is lawful and praiseworthy.' However, the subsequent sentence clarifies: 'Therefore, the same thing on the one hand according to which at one time is not permitted, is on the other, at appropriate times permitted and *is forgiven*.'[16] So even for Athanasius, killing in warfare is evil, albeit a 'lesser evil'; it is something that requires forgiveness.

The most commonly cited authority is St Basil the Great, whose canon thirteen counsels that those who kill in war be excommunicated for a period of three years. This is considerably less time than the penance for involuntary murder, eleven years, or for voluntary murder, which is twenty years. Clearly, then, killing in a defensive war was regarded as less blameworthy than murder; but just as clearly, it remained evil and therefore must be repented of, confessed, and – after the required penance – forgiven.

It might well be imagined that the JWT arose when it did because the Western part of the empire faced hostile incursions, and it might further be supposed that it was inevitable that the Church should revise its theology

[13] Stanley S. Harakas, *'The Morality of War*,' in Joseph J. Allen, ed., Orthodox Synthesis: The Unity of Theological Thought, Crestwood, 1981.

[14] Quoted in The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, Washington DC, 1983, §82, footnote 31.

[15] Christos Yannaras in *The Freedom of Morality*, Crestwood, 1984, p. 151n.

[16] PG 26, 1173B.

and practice in order to support the empire. But the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, whose capitol was Byzantium, also faced hostile military incursions, and indeed, it eventually fell in 1453 CE to Muslim invaders. Yet Eastern theology did not change. A few examples can give one a picture of how the Eastern position on even a defensive war always being evil was fleshed out in the Byzantine Empire.

To begin with, even at a time when the West was extending its notion of just war to include the Crusades, the Orthodox Church refused to alter its position on war. The emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (emperor 963-969), e.g., sought to imitate the theology of his Muslim enemies by declaring 'that men who fell in battle against the Muslims should be counted as martyrs.'[17] Yet the Patriarch and Holy Synod of Constantinople forcefully condemned his declaration, citing St Basil the Great's canon thirteen previously mentioned.

This fundamental conviction about the intrinsic evil of war was not restricted to bishops and theologians. One finds it represented even in Byzantine manuals of military strategy. This from a sixth century manual: 'I know well that war is a great evil, even the greatest of evils. But because enemies shed our blood in fulfillment of an incitement of law and valor, and because it is wholly necessary for each man to defend his own fatherland and his fellow countrymen with words, writings, and acts, we have decided to write about strategy, through which we shall be able not only to fight but to overcome the enemy.'[18] The language of this manual is mostly defensive; as Harakas has observed, 'the majority of the tactics espoused seek to embody subterfuge, cunning, deception, tricks, and hoaxes in order to avoid battle, and to cause the enemy to withdraw of his own volition. The Byzantines also preferred the payment of tribute rather than the doing of battle.'[19]

The *Strategikon of Maurice*, dating from the late sixth or early seventh century, exhibits the same restraint, arguing against open warfare even to the point of saying 'it is better to allow an encircled enemy to flee' than to force him into taking 'a life-or-death stand.'[20]

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[17] J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, Oxford, 1986, p. 112.

[18] '*Des Byzantiner Anonymous Kriegswissenschaft*,' in *Griechische Knegsschnfisteller*, ed. H. Koechly and W. Rustow, Leipzig, 1855, vol. 2, p. 56.

[19] Harakas, '*The Teaching on Peace in the Fathers*.'

[20] *Ibid*.

The Byzantine historian, Princess Anna Comnena is representative of the Byzantine mindset in her view that 'war [is] a shameful thing, a last resort when all else had failed, indeed in itself a confession of failure.'[21]

The Russian Experience

The theological concept of kenoticism is grounded in a particular New Testament text, Philippians 2.6-7, in which St Paul writes that Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (NRSV). Christ's self-emptying, his kenosis, is understood as an expression of the humility of the Incarnation. This theme flowered in Orthodoxy, especially in its Russian expression. Shortly after the baptism of the Kievan Rus' (988 CE), one of Prince Vladimir's sons decided to kill his brothers, Boris and Gleb, in order to take complete control of the Rus'. The two brothers refused to fight for power or even to defend themselves. After their martyrdom (1015 CE), the Russians created a new category of saint for them – passion-bearers – in reference to their voluntary acceptance of death in imitation of Christ.

Inspired by Christ's voluntary death on the Cross, and by the native example of Sts Boris and Gleb, a theological movement characterized by kenoticism revitalized Russian Orthodox theology from 1725-1917. Important figures included St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1722-1783), Metropolitan Philaret Drozdov of Moscow (1782-1867), Archimandrite Alexis M. Bukharev (1822-1871), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and the theologian Mikhail M. Tareev (1866-1934). Traditional pacifist virtues of non-violence and nonresistance to evil were joined in this kenoticism by its understanding of voluntary humiliation. These virtues, together with the emphasis upon universal forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption that characterizes much of Russian theology, provide a solid theological grounding of the Orthodox view of war.[22] This Russian kenoticism is well

[21] William Olnhausen, '*Orthodox Teaching About War and Peace*,' in "The Word", June 2003.

[22] Alexander Webster, *The Pacifist Option: The Moral Argument Against War* in "Eastern Orthodox Theology", International Scholars Publications, San Francisco, CA, 1998, p. 217-242.

expressed by the character of Father Zosima, the *staretz* or spiritual father, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. He says:

At some thoughts a man stands perplexed, above all at the sight of human sin, and he wonders whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide: 'I will combat it by humble love'. If you resolve on that once for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force: it is the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it.[23]

The Liturgy

Thus far, I have mentioned Scripture, canons composed by Church councils and individual Church Fathers, the witness of the saints, and some characteristic expressions of the Byzantine and Russian Orthodox experiences. Orthodoxy has been remarkably consistent in its moral theological appreciation of warfare. This is not to say that Orthodox Christians have always acted in fidelity to our tradition. But whatever the failings of Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, and laity, it is nonetheless surprising that the Orthodox Church has managed to refrain from adopting either of the Western models of JWT or crusade. One might well ask why.

My own conclusion as to why this is the case is the liturgy. Orthodox Christians of whatever nationality or political persuasion use the same liturgy with only minor variations reflecting Greek or Russian tradition. While certain Western Christians also use a particular liturgy all the time or almost all the time, none of the traditional Western rites emphasize peace to the extent we see in the East. In every celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we pray for our civil authorities and for the members of the armed forces three or four times. However, 'peace' or 'peaceful' is prayed close to thirty times in the course of the same Liturgy. Each litany begins with the deacon exhorting us to pray to the Lord 'in peace'. We ask God to grant us peace. The presiding bishop or priest repeatedly bids God's peace to be upon us. This is no accident, but a reflection of the essential character of this mystery or sacrament. In the words of St John Chrysostom, 'The mystery [of the Eucharist] requires that we should be innocent not only of violence but of all enmity, however slight, for it is the mystery of peace'.

[23] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Books, Hammondsworth,1958, vol. 1, 376.

It is important that see that Orthodoxy views the Eucharist as, in the words of the presider during the Divine Liturgy, an 'unbloody sacrifice'. This rejection of the shedding of the blood is evidenced, e.g. in our prohibition against any animal hide being placed on the altar. Thus our Gospel books, which rest upon the altar for most of the liturgy, are generally placed in metal covers and never in leather. The shedding of animal blood is inconsistent with celebrating the Eucharist.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the shedding of human blood is held to be inconsistent with celebrating the Eucharist. In the Orthodox Church, a man who has killed another – whether the law view his action as unjustified, justified, or accidental – may not be ordained as a priest or bishop. And if a bishop or priest should kill someone after ordination, then he must no longer celebrate the Divine Liturgy. Indeed, I am told that many Orthodox bishops in Greece have drivers for precisely this reason – they do not wish to have to give up their episcopacy should they unwittingly kill someone in an auto accident.

(It is interesting to speculate how differently the Western Christian tradition on war would have looked had such a rule been enforced in the West at the time of St Ambrose's election as bishop. Because Ambrose had ordered executions while serving in governmental office, he could not have been ordained an Orthodox bishop. But because he was made a bishop in the Catholic West, he went on to initiate the JWT, which was further developed by his most famous disciple, St. Augustine of Hippo.)

Another feature of the Liturgy, in this case one shared with some Western rites, is the exchange of the peace. While this often devolves in Western practice to merely a time for greeting other worshippers, it is best understood (and practiced) as a ritual enactment of Jesus' command that before approaching the altar, we must first be reconciled with anyone with whom we are at odds (Matthew 5. 23-24).

In addition to this repeated emphasis on peace throughout the liturgy, there is also an important element of redirecting our judging of others to our own repentance. Before approaching to receive communion, we all say a prayer that begins: 'I believe, O Lord, and I confess, that you are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first.' During Great Lent, the season of the Church year immediately preceding our Pascha or Easter, we repeatedly say the Prayer of St Ephrem the Syrian, the last petition of which says: 'Grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother'.

The emphasis upon reconciliation is most strikingly seen in the first service of Great Lent, which is known as 'Forgiveness Vespers'. All of the clergy and the laity greet every other person present individually, and then bows or prostrates themselves in front of the other, asking for his or her forgiveness. The person responds by saying 'God forgives, and I forgive'. Then the two greet one another with a holy kiss. Someone has described the event this way:

Because everyone participates, all inevitably stand faced to face with those who know them best. Young fathers bow before their young children. Boyfriends and girlfriends ask one another's forgiveness. A mother seeks pardon from her son. Husbands prostrate themselves before their wives, and vice versa. A few people, choked with emotion, cannot get the words out every time. Tears say what their tongues cannot.[24]

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have attempted to show that the moral theological tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy represents a via media between the absolute pacifism of pre-Nicene Christianity, and the JWT of mainstream Western Christian thinking, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. The East privileges the absolute pacifism of the Gospel in its liturgy, in the lives of its saints, and in its presumption against war – and indeed, against every kind of violence. At the same time, it acknowledges that war, although a great evil, is sometimes necessary in order to prevent even greater evils. Such tragic necessity must always be lamented, but more than that, it must be repented of. It falls short of the mark; it is sin. The taking of a human life can never be just; war can never be virtuous. To gather as Christians to celebrate the Eucharist is an eschatological celebration of the peace of that Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ, a kingdom of peace and non-violence. To quote again from St John Chrysostom, 'The mystery [of the Eucharist] requires that we should be innocent not only of violence but of all enmity, however slight, for it is the mystery of peace.'

[24] Quoted in Allyne Smith and Tobias Winright, *Christian Worship and Capital Punishment*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2003, 14.