

## How Should the UGCC Approach War?

As a retired Army Chaplain, I wondered should our approach to fighting war be different from that of the Latin West? So I looked at many Orthodox theologians who wrote about the “Just(ifiable) War” theory. Even though it started with St. Augustine, whom Orthodox often shun because of his teachings on original sin, he was acceptable in this area because he is a Church Father.

So the tactic I took was to look at this history of the East. Our spiritual heritage begins in the Hebrew Scriptures. There was no reason to judge the morality of war because the war is directed by God; win or lose, it is God who is righteous.

Seeing wars in the New Testament no one would find anything dishonorable in the soldiers' lives, even when it was in the service of a pagan ruler [see Luke 3:14]. Saint Paul pointed out there is no authority not from God Romans [13:1]. Therefore, the idea of refusing service on some moral grounds did not arise. Service was based upon “render unto Caesar” and “if you are pressed into service for one mile, go for a second.” Pressed into service were civilians. As the Roman army traveled, local villagers were expected to carry the soldier's gear to the next village. With the creation of Christian states in the East, it was seen as similar to the Jewish situation; it was the will of God.

People have always looked at the Beatitudes as being against war. And so, the Christian community did have a division on this subject, but it was not sufficient to cause a serious review of the study. For the most part, people who would not serve did not have to serve, but they still had to respect the emperor.

Interestingly, Prince Volodymyr the Great decided to abolish the death penalty for crimes. He saw this as a living-out of the teachings of the Beatitudes. The bishops dissuaded him from this because they said it would cause an increase in crime and a breakdown of society. Punishment and judgment were necessary for society to continue peacefully. He was told that he could “turn the other cheek” in his personal life but not in his public life.

Throughout the East, there were Christian rulers who would forgive their enemies and do good to the people who hated them, but in public life, they had to uphold the law, which meant executions and war. Even in the New Testament, it is written that a ruler is “the minister of God.” Romans 13:2-4: “Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct but to evil. Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good and you will receive approval from it. For it is a servant of God, you're good, but if you do evil, be afraid for it does not bear the sword without purpose; It is a servant of God to inflict wrath on the evildoer.”

For the most part, Christians concerning taxes and other obligations rendered “unto Caesar.” But when it came to offering sacrifices to Caesar, they refused. In response to that, they prayed and waited

and were aware of the power of the Cross of Christ. While many Christians were martyrs for the faith in the West, the same thing was not true in the East. They saw the raising up of Constantine, who became a Christian, as the one who would introduce Christian laws. Constantine did fight wars, but because he was the instrument of God, they were “just” wars. He was the legitimate ruler from God from the Battle of Milvian Bridge on; he fought in the name of Christ under the banner of the Cross, and even during peacetime, he showed that he was spreading the true Church of Christ. He only fought when he had to.

With the rulers being baptized, bishops, like St. Athanasius, sought their authority over civil rulers. Athanasius rebuked Constantius when he became an Arian heretic. St. Basil the Great spoke and wrote against Julian when the emperor became a pagan and wanted to destroy icons.

St. Basil's Canon 13 became the governing wisdom concerning wars, “Homicide in war is not reckoned by our Fathers as homicide; I presume from their wish to make concession to men fighting on behalf of chastity and true religion. Perhaps, however, it is well to counsel that those whose hands are not clean only abstain from communion for three years.” The basis that there was some defilement of the person is found in that David, who killed in war, yet had found favor with God, was not permitted to build the temple.

Starting with Justinian in the sixth century in the East, unlike the West, there was a disharmony between Church and state which caused the creation of a “just war” theory. In the Byzantine East, even after the schism, there was a consciousness that soldiers going to war had to do penance, but for the most part, there was a symphony between Church and state. The state concerned itself with political matters; therefore, wars were made by the emperor. The Church was the conscience of the state, and the patriarch had the right to intercede with the emperor. In practice, the Church had little direct influence on the decision to go to war, nor did she develop any “just war” theory.

The Crusades, which may have started with good intentions of liberating land for the Christians in the long term, harmed the relationship between the Christian East and West. Even Pope Innocent III commented: “the Greek Church now and with reason detests the Latins more than dogs.” Because the violence approved by religious authorities and lawful authorities could—and did—bring about great hatred and cruelty, which is the danger in any “holy” war. So most of these wars during the times of the Crusades, for the Orthodox East, were defensive, and they were against The Crusaders as one Alexander Nevsky defeated the Germans at the battle on the Ice. As Alexander stated, God is to be found not in violence but in righteousness.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Byzantine people fell under the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Although a positive note for the Byzantine East, the Ottomans forbade Latins to proselytize

