

Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War**Perry T. Hamalis****Publication Date**

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ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON WAR



Edited by
PERRY T. HAMALIS and VALERIE A. KARRAS

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CHRISTIAN
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To the Lelon Family

*whose vision and support made this book possible, the
second in an ongoing effort by the Lelons' Zacchaeus Ventures
to promote the voices of younger Orthodox Christian scholars
in important contemporary conversations*

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994. First published 1885–87.
- CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vienna, 1866–.
- FC* *The Fathers of the Church*. New York: Cima, 1947–49. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1949–60. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960–.
- NPNF*¹/*NPNF*² *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Series 1 and 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994. First published 1886–89.
- ODB* *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Edited by Alexander Kazhdan. 3 vols. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- PG* *Patrologia Graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–86.
- SC* *Sources chrétiennes*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1943–.

INTRODUCTION

PERRY T. HAMALIS AND VALERIE A. KARRAS

The reality of war, the fragility of peace, and both the uses and abuses of moral and religious reflection on these perennial phenomena have spurred a flurry of recent studies from a variety of religious traditions.¹ Yet, despite the relevance of the topic and the ongoing expansion of scholarship engaging it, there remains a paucity of resources available in English that draw directly from Eastern Orthodox Christianity's history and theology.² This is troubling for a number of reasons, ranging from the lost benefits that Orthodoxy's historical, ethical, and theological traditions could offer to current debates among political leaders and scholars, to the convicting acknowledgment within Orthodox communities that our present-day witness is falling short. Given the perennial significance of war and peace, as well as the current global challenges posed by nations and ethnic groups that include massive numbers of citizens who self-identify as Orthodox Christians—from Russia and Ukraine in Eastern Europe, to Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine in the Middle East, to Egypt and Ethiopia in north Africa, to Greece and Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean—the acute need for fresh, authentic, and sound resources lies beyond question.

The collection of essays in this volume helps substantially to fill the gap in the existing scholarship and enhances available Christian resources by engaging the subject of war through a prismatic lens. We use the term *prismatic* because, first of all, as light when passing through a prism is broken down into the individual colors of the spectrum, the vast topic of “war” is deconstructed in this volume into a number of its constitutive elements, with the contributors examining one or more of these elements from the perspective of their own areas of academic expertise: political science, history, biology/medicine, ethics, biblical studies, patristics, and systematic theology.³ All, nonetheless, are committed both to standing within the Orthodox Church and to practicing rigorous academic inquiry and research. Since war is such a complex phenomenon, and since Orthodox tradition includes numerous interwoven threads, we believe that a constructive work requires an interdisciplinary approach. Second, this volume is prismatic in nature because the contributors’ aim is not to reconstitute the spectrum into a unified whole, so to speak. In other words, the purpose is not to advance a single theory of “the meaning of war” or a comprehensive and normative stance purporting to be “the Orthodox Christian teaching on war.” To do so, we believe, would restrict—and even distort—a tradition whose value lies, at least in part, in its diversity of pertinent experiences and teachings.

In point of fact, Orthodoxy is theologically and ecclesologically distinguished from its historical sister, Roman Catholicism, in part because it has no unified ecclesiastical structure with a single bishop recognized as having the authority to speak decisively for the entire church on moral issues, nor is there the concept of a *magisterium*, that is, a specific and infallible teaching authority vested in and, more importantly, restricted to certain persons (e.g., bishops, patriarchs, or popes) within the church. The joint encyclical issued in 1848 by the “Patriarchs of the East” argued this point in response to the First Vatican Council’s declaration of papal infallibility, and renowned Orthodox theologian Fr. Georges Florovsky referenced this encyclical in his identification of infallibility with the church in her fullness: “The Church alone possesses the capacity for true and catholic synthesis. Therein lies her *potestas magisterii*, the gift and unction of infallibility.”⁴

While a more diverse and less reified set of perspectives on war characterizes Orthodox tradition, the contributors share at least three basic convictions that drive this work. First, the Eastern Orthodox tradition includes insights and teachings on war that are nuanced, relevant, and illuminative. While these insights and teachings do not present a systematic and wholly consistent witness, they express distinctively Orthodox perspectives on war. Orthodox Christianity's liturgical, exegetical, patristic, ascetic, theological, canonical, hagiographic, ethical, and artistic resources respond to war's challenges with teachings and practices that in some ways overlap and in other ways are sharply different from the teachings and practices of non-Orthodox Christian communities.⁵

Consider, as just one example, the following passage from a homily of the late fourth-/early fifth-century archbishop of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom, on the meaning of the biblical verse, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2b NRSV): "For there are three very grievous kinds of war. The one is public, when our soldiers are attacked by foreign armies: The second is, when even in time of peace, we are at war with one another: The third is, when the individual is at war with himself, which is the worst of all."⁶ One sees, first, that the most common meaning of *war* (armed conflict between states) is immediately complemented by two additional meanings in St. John's lesson, one interpersonal and one intrapersonal.⁷ Furthermore, and perhaps most surprisingly, Chrysostom contends that it is the intrapersonal that is "worst of all." This claim not only underscores a prioritization of the interior life; it also expresses his belief that all wars are, at root, caused by spiritual conditions.

In the passage one also notices that the only type of transnational war acknowledged by St. John occurs when "our soldiers are attacked by foreign armies," indicating an essentially defensive perspective. We offer this brief gloss on a late-fourth-century homily without further historical contextualization or analysis in order simply to hint at the kinds of insights that can be mined from the Eastern Orthodox tradition on the subject of war.⁸ Not only do the essays that follow draw expertly upon Eastern Orthodoxy's vast tradition, but they do so in dialogue with recent scholarship in Western Christian ethics, the humanities, and the natural and social sciences.

Second, 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. All of these unique elements factor into the characteristically "Eastern" perspective of Orthodox Christianity vis-à-vis the "Western Christianity" of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Protestantism. To provide just one example, the viewpoint of Arab Orthodox Christians toward the Crusades was often considerably different from that of the Frankish and other Western Christian crusaders attacking Jerusalem and other cities in the Holy Land.

Third, this work's contributors share the conviction that the English-speaking world has largely overlooked or dismissed Orthodoxy's potential contribution to critical reflection on this timely subject. With very few exceptions, courses, conferences, and conversations on "Christianity and war" in the United States tend either to restrict their scope to Catholic and Protestant perspectives, seemingly unaware of Eastern Orthodoxy, or simply to caricature the Christian East as the tradition responsible for "Constantinianism," understood simplistically as the inauguration and perpetuation of Christianity's sellout to political power and to justified war-making.⁹ Several of this volume's essays demonstrate that, even within its original historical context, Constantinianism was much more complex than typical Western perspectives acknowledge, and the Byzantines' efforts to balance a strong defensive militarism with a theologically grounded nonaggression policy are rarely noted outside of Byzantine history circles. Deeper questions of how Orthodox Christian cultures, both historically and contemporarily, develop positive or negative views of non-Orthodox or non-Christian cultures and, hence, develop cooperative or antagonistic relations with them, are often similarly ignored or stereotyped. Having said this, the contributors to this work also realize that we

cannot expect others to include an Orthodox perspective or to treat Orthodox tradition's many threads with care if so few scholarly Orthodox resources are available. We humbly hope that our offering here helps to rectify this state of affairs.

Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War 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 and contributing constructively to current scholarship in political science, ethics, history, biblical studies, patristics, and theology. Part of this task lies in showing that the dominant categories that currently structure Christian reflection on war cannot be appropriated easily within an Orthodox perspective, and in identifying untapped possibilities for constructive exchanges. Within the discipline of ethics, for example, many contributors to this volume show that "just war," "pacifism," "holy war," and "political realism" are problematized when applied to the layers of Orthodox tradition. They constitute a foreign moral language that cannot be assimilated easily or without compromising, to some extent, the tradition's integrity.

Secondly, this volume seeks to make Orthodox readers around the world more aware of the complexities and nuances of their own tradition. Due to the relative paucity of Orthodox works on this subject, especially in English, combined with the dominance of Western Christian rhetoric and models, many Orthodox leaders and thinkers have erroneously extrapolated from predominant Western Christian paradigms to Orthodoxy, not recognizing the incongruity—and at times, total incompatibility—of the two perspectives. We hope, therefore, to make contributions that are authentic, scholarly, theological, pragmatic, and pastoral for Orthodox and non-Orthodox readers alike.

The essays collected here are structured under three headings. In part 1, "Confronting the Present-Day Reality," the relevance and immediacy of the question is illuminated in two essays. First, the challenges of war are explored from the raw, personal level of soldiers and their families in Aristotle Papanikolaou's "The Ascetics of War: The Undoing and Redoing of Virtue." Second, in "Exposing the State of the Question: A Case Study of American Orthodox Responses to the 1999 War in Kosovo," 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. 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,” 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, “Chariots of Fire, Unassailable Cities, and the One True King: A Prophetically Influenced Scribal Perspective on War and Peace,” 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, in his essay “Herodian-Roman Domination, Violent Jewish Peasant Resistance, and Jesus of Nazareth,” examines the significance of the “popular king/bandit” phenomenon and trope within Jewish tradition to illuminate how both Palestinian Jews and their Roman occupiers perceived and responded to Jesus and to interpret Jesus’ teachings on war and violence in that context.

Straddling pre- and post-Constantinian Christianity, Valerie A. Karras’s essay, “‘Their Hands Are Not Clean’: Origen and the Cappadocians on War and Military Service,” compares and contrasts the views toward Christians in the military of the third-century Alexandrian theologian Origen with the fourth-century Cappadocian bishop St. Basil of Caesarea and his contemporaries St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In “Constantine, Ambrose, and the Morality of War: How Ambrose of Milan Challenged the Imperial Discourse on War and Violence,” 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-Constantinian Christianity to post-Constantinian Christianity is 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 no-

tions of “holy warriors,” comes into focus in James C. Skedros’s essay, “Lessons from Military Saints in the Byzantine Tradition.” Finally, a co-authored essay by Alexandros K. Kyrou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, “Debates on Just War, Holy War, and Peace: Orthodox Christian Thought and Byzantine Imperial Attitudes toward War,” rounds out part 2. Blending their respective specialties in Byzantine military history and international relations, Kyrou and Prodromou 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,” begins with two essays that center on the theme of providence and war. In the first, “War and Peace: Providence and the Interim,” Peter C. 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, “A Helper of Providence: ‘Justified Providential War’ in Vladimir Solov’ev,” Brandon Gallaher examines the writings of one of the most influential and creative voices from nineteenth-century Russia, Vladimir Solov’ev, discerning his distinctive approach to good and evil and expressing his normative teachings on war vis-à-vis the—by then—predominant categories of holy war, *realpolitik*, pacifism, and just war. Following these, Gayle E. Woloschak, in “War, Technology, and the Canon Law Principle of *Economia*,” centers her analysis upon the concept of *economia* and its constructive value for engaging in deliberations regarding both decisions to go to war and decisions on the use of various war technologies. And in his concluding essay, “Just Peacemaking and Christian Realism: Possibilities for Moving beyond the Impasse in Orthodox Christian War Ethics,” Perry T. Hamalis argues that the best next 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.

As editors, we appreciate the patience of our contributors and ask for our readers’ understanding as the publication of these essays was delayed due to multiple personal matters in both of our lives. We conclude now

with a word of humble gratitude to the Dr. Thomas Lelon family, the visionary leaders who brought us together as “LOGOS,” an interdisciplinary community of “next generation” Orthodox scholars, and generously supported this project. For most of the volume’s contributors, in fact, this is our second shared project completed as LOGOS; we began work after the successful release of *Thinking through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, edited by Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodrömu (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008). Dr. Lelon, Mrs. Alexis Lelon, and their son, Charles T. (Chuck) Lelon, together with other supporters they gathered, not only encouraged us enthusiastically and patiently throughout the process, but provided the funding that enabled us to meet face-to-face as collaborators on multiple occasions in order to read together some of the existing literature, present our ideas, discuss one another’s draft essays, and learn from each other’s disciplinary expertise and critical feedback. It was an atmosphere that nurtured scholarly insights, deepened friendships, and renewed faith. And so, we also want to thank our fellow contributors to this volume, all of whom, despite the teaching and research responsibilities of their academic posts, committed to offering this collection as a labor of love and with the prayerful hope “for the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all.”¹⁰

NOTES

1. A limited sampling includes Ahmed Al-Dawoody, *The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Anchor, 2015); Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alan Billings, *The Dove, the Fig Leaf and the Sword: Why Christianity Changes Its Mind about War* (London: SPCK, 2014); Caron Gentry, *Offering Hospitality: Questioning Christian Approaches to War* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013); Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); John Renard, ed., *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation*

of *Sacred Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Matthew Allen Shadle, *The Origins of War: A Catholic Perspective* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011); Ronald J. Sider, *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Timothy Sisk, ed., *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011); and Tobias Winright and Laurie Johnston, eds., *Can War Be Just in the 21st Century?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

2. Existing books in English include Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh, and Marian Gh. Simion, eds., *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012); William Joseph Buckley, ed., *Kosovo: Contending Voices on Balkan Interventions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Lucian N. Leustean, ed., *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945–91* (London: Routledge, 2010); Timothy S. Miller and John Nesbitt, *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); Radmila Radić, *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, trans. Paul Mojzes (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Alexander F. C. Webster, *The Pacifist Option: The Moral Argument against War in Eastern Orthodox Moral Theology* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998); and Alexander F. C. Webster and Darrell Cole, *The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 2004). In addition, volume 47 (2003) of the *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* is entitled *Justifiable War?* There are also two collections of source materials, both running the gamut from early church canons and commentaries through Byzantine and imperial Russian ecclesiastical literature and from civil legislation to modern synodal and patriarchal statements: Fr. Hildo Bos and Jim Forest, eds., *For the Peace from Above: An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, rev. ed. (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2011; 1st ed. 1999), also available at <http://incommunion.org/2004/10/18/table-of-contents-for-the-peace-from-above-an-orthodox-resource-book-on-war-peace-and-nationalism/>; and, including helpful commentary and analysis, Yuri Stoyanov, “Eastern Orthodox Christianity,” in *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions*, ed. Gregory M. Reichberg and Henrik Syse with Nicole M. Hartwell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 164–234.

3. See the detailed contributors’ biographies at the end of this volume.

4. Georges Florovsky, “The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of the Fathers,” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, 14 vols. (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Co., 1975–88), 1:103;

cited in Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance, Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 222. For the patriarchal encyclical, see “Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, 1848: A Reply to the Epistle of Pope Pius IX ‘To the Easterns,’” Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham University, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/index.asp>.

5. *Liturgical* refers to the worship services of the church, *exegetical* to biblical interpretation, *patristic* to early Christian theologians (the church “fathers”), *ascetic* to monastic and other similar traditions and practices, *canonical* to the church’s religious law, and *hagiographic* to writings about the saints.

6. John Chrysostom, *Hom. 7 in epistolam primam ad Timotheum* (PG 62:554); English translation in *NPNF*¹ 13:429.

7. This is not, of course, unique to Eastern Christianity. Within Islam, e.g., there are similarly varied levels of spiritual and military meanings distinguishing between the “greater” and “lesser” jihad. See Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Weiner, 1996).

8. For a fuller treatment of St. John Chrysostom’s teachings on war, see Perry T. Hamalis, “Peace and War in the Thought of St. John Chrysostom,” in *Proceedings of the International Symposium “St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople: ‘Yesterday and Today’”* (Seoul: Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, 2007), 73–81. The symposium was held in Seoul on November 10, 2007.

9. For one of the best existing exceptions from a representative of Eastern Orthodoxy, see John A. McGuckin, “Nonviolence and Peace Traditions in Early and Eastern Christianity,” in *Religion, Terrorism and Globalization: Nonviolence; A New Agenda*, ed. K. K. Kuriakose (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2006), 189–201. A non-Orthodox, A. James Reimer, in *Christians and War* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 65–75, provides a helpful and accessible account of the “Constantinian Shift” and its impact on Christian war ethics that is more balanced than most, sidestepping the typical rhetoric of the “Constantinian fall” and acknowledging both the positive and negative ways of interpreting the emperor’s conversion and the development of the justifiable war tradition by St. Augustine.

10. Petition from the “great litany” found in most worship services of the Orthodox Church, including *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986).

PART ONE

CONFRONTING THE PRESENT-DAY REALITY

THE ASCETICS OF WAR

The Undoing and Redoing of Virtue

ARISTOTLE PAPANIKOLAOU

Contemporary discussions of just war theory in Christian ethics focus on whether Christians should be in the business of defining criteria for the decision to go to war and for the proper engagement in combat. There is very little attention to the way in which, debates about just war criteria notwithstanding, combat soldiers are forced to engage in practices, both in training before war and during war, that fine-tune the body to the constant threat of violence—what I term the ascetics of war. If war is seen as fostering a certain ascetics on the body, then the Orthodox notion of divine-human communion (*theosis*) is relevant to discussions of war insofar as divine-human communion is itself linked to an ascetics of virtue. Understanding the human as created for communion with God shifts the focus of the discussion from just war versus pacifism to the effects of war on the human person and the practices that undo such effects. After briefly discussing the current debate within contemporary Orthodox theology on just war theory, I will draw on the work of Jonathan Shay to

illustrate the effects of the ascetics of war on the body. I will then argue that the ascetics of virtue that involves the particular ascetical practice of truth telling has the power to undo the traumatic effects of war on the combat veteran. Insofar as this undoing is an embodiment of virtue, it is also an embodiment of the divine—*theosis*.

FORGETTING VIRTUE

When it comes to the question of war, the Orthodox are probably most well known for asserting that there is no just war theory in the Orthodox tradition. Beyond that negative assertion, it is very difficult to discern what the Orthodox think about war. For the just war naysayers, it would not be difficult to find among the Orthodox such statements as, “There is no just war, no just violence, no just revenge or recompense, no just accumulation of wealth.”¹ In this statement, it is a little unclear why—other than for rhetorical effect—war, violence, revenge, and accumulation of wealth are grouped together, since the whole point of the idea of just war is to differentiate morally sanctioned forms of violence from those that are clearly immoral, such as revenge. From one of the leading Orthodox voices in ethics in the past fifty years, one hears how

these two seminal writers [Ambrose and Augustine] led the Western Church not only to an acceptance of the military role by Christians, but to its enhancement into a positive virtue through the development of criteria by which a war could be distinguished from an unjust war, and be called “just.” It is my contention that the East developed a different approach to the issue. Rather than seek to morally elevate war and Christian participation in it so that it could be termed “just,” the East treated it as a necessary evil. . . . Contrary to Augustine . . . the Eastern Patristic tradition rarely praised war, and to my knowledge, almost never called it “just” or a moral good. . . . The East did not seek to deal with just war themes such as the correct conditions for entering war [*jus ad bellum*], and the correct conduct of war [*jus in bello*] on the basis of the possibility of the existence of a “just war,” precisely because it did not hold to such a view of war.²

This denial of any form of just war theory in the Christian East is often extended to some form of praise for the Christian Roman Empire for embodying a primarily defensive, nonaggressive ethos in relation to war.³

One is tempted to attribute this denial of a just war theory, together with its praise of the Christian Roman attitude to war, as another example of self-identification of the Orthodox vis-à-vis the proximate other—the “West.”⁴ Even though something like this distorted apophaticism—Orthodoxy is what the West is not—may be operative in some Orthodox denials of just war theory, it is irrefutable that a “theory” of just war, consisting of distinctions between conditions for entering war and conditions for conducting war, together with their respective criteria, is nowhere to be found in what has come to be known as the Orthodox trajectory within the Christian tradition. Such an absence makes Fr. Alexander Webster’s defense of a justifiable war tradition within Orthodoxy something of an anomaly.⁵ While admitting that the Orthodox tradition never developed a just war theory—on this point, there seems to be a consensus—Webster argues against the position that the Orthodox consistently saw war only as a necessary evil and never as a moral good. Webster amasses a pile of citations from biblical, patristic, canonical, liturgical, and imperial sources, which he believes point collectively to an affirmation of the moral value of war under certain conditions. As Webster argues, “We hope the abundant textual and iconic evidence adduced in the present volume will restore among them [Orthodox bishops, theologians, and activists] the longstanding traditional moral position that war may be engaged and conducted as a virtuous or righteous act, or at least as a ‘lesser good’ instead of a lesser or necessary evil.”⁶ In an ironic twist, Webster actually attributes the denial by Orthodoxy of its own justifiable war tradition to the “flurry of ecumenical contacts with Western Christians and an accelerated emigration of Orthodox Christians to Western Europe and North America.”⁷ Instead of blaming the West for poisoning the East with notions of just or justifiable war, the West gets blamed by Webster for influencing the Orthodox to forget its justifiable war tradition. One way or the other, the Orthodox always seem to find a way to blame the West.

The Orthodox, thus, agree that there is no just war “theory” in the Orthodox tradition in the form of distinctions between *jus in bello* and

jus ad bellum, and their respective criteria; there is also consensus that within the tradition there is discussion about the need to go to war; the current debate, however, centers on how going to war is characterized: For Harakas, it is always a necessary evil; for Webster, under certain conditions, it is virtuous and of moral value. This difference, however, reveals another, more implicit, agreement between Harakas and Webster: although both agree there is no just war theory within the Orthodox tradition, both seem to operate within the moral categories and framework of the just war tradition. What the just war tradition attempts to discern is whether both the action to go to war and the conduct within war fall on the side of right or the side of wrong relative to the moral divide. Although Harakas and Webster distance themselves from a just war theory, they are still looking for the moral categories that would establish certain actions to go to war and conduct within war as belonging on either one side or the other of the right/wrong divide. To characterize war as either a necessary evil, lesser evil, lesser good, justifiable, or as a virtuous and righteous act is to attempt to do the same thing that a just war theory tries to do—establish the moral rightness or wrongness of an act, given the specific conditions. Even such distinctions as that between killing as murder and killing for defense reinforce this particular moral framework that centers on the rightness or wrongness of moral acts. From a Christian perspective, the concern with the rightness or wrongness of moral acts has to do with one's positioning in relation to God and, in the end, with one's positioning within the eschatological consummation, or heaven.

What is remarkable about the entire debate is that there is little attention to what is arguably the core and central axiom of the Orthodox tradition—the principle of divine-human communion. Webster speaks of war as “virtuous,” and yet pays absolutely no attention to the tradition of thinking on virtue either in the ascetical writings or in such thinkers as Maximos the Confessor; in both cases, the understanding of virtue is inherently linked to one's struggle toward communion with God—theosis. How exactly is claiming to have fought in a virtuous war, or to have killed virtuously, consistent with this tradition of thinking on virtue in light of the principle of divine-human communion? Is it really the case that being virtuous in war means moving *toward* a deeper communion with God? Webster does not answer these questions. Although Harakas does argue

for the patristic bias for peace, approaching the issue from an eschatological perspective, his emphasis is still on how to label the action to go to war, or the conduct during war, and pays no attention to war from the perspective of the Orthodox understanding of creation's destiny for communion with God.

THE VICE OF WAR

To affirm that creation is created for communion with the uncreated is simultaneously to affirm that all of creation is sacramental, which means that it is always already shot through with the divine presence. There is no "space" between the created and the uncreated (to spatialize God makes no sense); creation is not given the capacity to "jump over" an abyss to meet the divine presence; it is given the task to relate to itself and to God so as to tap the potential of a created "thing" to iconically manifest the divine presence that is already there. Sin is not so much a missing of the target as it is a blocking of the divine that is "in all things and everywhere present." Whatever the motivation and whichever way it is directed, violence is a form of blocking of the divine presence both in a social sense, that is, in the space of relationships—human-to-human and human-to-nonhuman—and within oneself. War is a space saturated with violence, an engagement in a set of practices that are unsacramental in the sense that created reality is used to foster division, destruction, denigration, desperation, destitution, and degeneration; put simply, it is a manifestation of the demonic. This is not to say that there are not godly moments in the midst of war—loyalty, sacrifice, and even love. As a whole, however, war is the realm of the demonic.

Given this understanding of divine-human communion, one thing is certain: no matter what side one is on, to be complicit in violence of any kind is damaging to one's struggle for communion with God. Put another way, to be complicit with violence of any kind, even in self-defense, cannot but be damaging to one's soul. Violence does not discriminate—it does not affect only those who use it unjustly. Even if one were to engage in conduct with noble intentions, even if one were to exhibit moments of sacrifice, affection, and love in the midst of war, violence works

in the direction opposite to that toward which humans were created—divine-human communion. What discussions of labeling decisions to go to war and actions during war forget is that war is inevitably spiritually harmful. One result of understanding war from the principle of divine-human communion is attention to the effects of war on those who live through it, no matter what side one is on. Discussions of justifiable war may create the impression that as long as one is on the morally justified side of war, that should be enough to mitigate the existential effects of war and violence. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the “side” one is on makes absolutely no difference to the nondiscriminatory effects of violence in war.

In recent memory, the only war on which there is little debate about the “right” side is World War II. Much has been said about this greatest generation of soldiers, who sacrificed themselves in the morally justified cause of fighting either German or Japanese aggression. In the standard American narrative, going to war against Germany and Japan was the morally right thing to do, and few Americans would dispute this claim. World War II veterans should, thus, feel proud of their blameless service, and have since received unequivocal praise and adulation from most Americans.⁸ There is mounting evidence, however, that even given this unwavering support for their service in World War II, which would give the soldiers every reason to believe that they fought in a just war, many World War II veterans suffered from the effects of violence that was inflicted on them, violence inflicted on others near them, and violence they inflicted on the “enemy.”

In *Our Fathers' War*, Tom Mathews narrates the effects of World War II on his own father, who, after visiting the ground in Italy where his division fought the Germans, and describing his role for his division, eventually broke down, saying, “‘I killed a lot of people,’ . . . in a strangled voice that turned to a sob. ‘Jesus Christ . . . I killed so many people.’” Later at a restaurant, Mathews’s father looked at him “as if he’d just come out of electroshock. ‘What happened back there?’ he said. ‘I’ve *never* voiced that stuff. *Never*.’ . . . ‘Not to anyone. Not to myself.’”⁹ The father continues the reflection: “‘I hated the Germans. I did hate them. But it doesn’t matter. You look and you see something you hate in yourself, something atavistic, something deep in the bottom of the cortex. You

don't feel right. It doesn't make sense. You should feel victorious. You should feel triumph. You don't. Too much has happened. All you know is that you're a killing machine.”¹⁰ This confession of the effects of war on Mathews's father comes after a life marked by a strained relationship with his son, infidelity, and addiction. There are similar stories from other World War II veterans, but under the so-called code of silence, World War II veterans were not given the space to express the effects that war had on the soldiers who fought for the “right” side, or, as Webster would call it, the “virtuous” side.¹¹

There is no shortage of stories of the traumatic effects of war from soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War, or the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹² One might argue that because the “morality” of these wars is ambiguous, the traumatic effects experienced by these veterans were more acute than was the case for World War II veterans. There are a few problems with this argument, not least of which is the assumption that trauma was not experienced by World War II veterans; the other unsupportable assumption is that the degree of trauma experienced in war correlates with the moral clarity on the justifiability of the war itself. Evidence indicates that the trauma experienced by war veterans has little to do with the justifiability of a war. The effects of the violence of war do not distinguish between sides.

What stories from veterans of war reveal is that violence becomes embodied—its insidiousness seeps into the physiological infrastructure of the human person. If creation is created for communion, and if humans are the center of this divine-human drama, then divine-human communion itself is the presencing of the good into the deep recesses of the body—it is an embodied experience. Violence opens up the body not to God, but to the inhabitation of the anti-God.

This absence of the divine is evident in the staggering statistic that at least “one-third of homeless males are [Vietnam] veterans, with 150,000–250,000 veterans homeless on a given night and at least twice that number homeless at some time in the course of a given year.”¹³ It is also apparent in the study that showed that “35.8 percent of male Vietnam combat veterans met the full American Psychiatric Association diagnostic criteria for PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] at the time of the study, in the late 1980s. . . . This is a thirty-two-fold increase in the prevalence

of PTSD compared to the random sample of demographically similar civilians. More than 70 percent of combat veterans had experienced *at least one of the cardinal symptoms* ('partial PTSD') *at some time in their lives*, even if they did not receive the full syndrome diagnosis."¹⁴ This high rate of the experience of PTSD symptoms among Vietnam veterans demonstrates that the effects of war linger in the body long after a soldier's tour of duty. This lingering is in the form of "(a) hostile or mistrustful attitude toward the world; (b) social withdrawal; (c) feelings of emptiness or hopelessness; (d) a chronic feeling of being 'on the edge,' as if constantly threatened; (e) estrangement."¹⁵ Those who suffer from combat trauma often experience flashbacks to traumatic events, in which the primary image that is governing their emotional state is one of violence and impending threat to life.

One would hope that sleep would give respite to such suffering, but combat trauma often leads to recurring nightmares; and the lack of deep sleep leads to other inevitable emotional disturbances, such as increased irritability and tendency to anger. Beyond the recurring nightmares, combat veterans often simply cannot sleep because they trained themselves for the sake of survival to be hyperalert and to react to sounds that may, in combat situations, be life threatening; as any good ascetic would know, such training of the body is simply not undone by returning home.¹⁶ Add to all this "random, unwarranted rage at family, sexual dysfunction, no capacity for intimacy, [s]omatic disturbances, loss of ability to experience pleasure, [p]eripheral vasoconstriction, autonomic hyperactivity, [s]ense of the dead being more real than the living."¹⁷ What is most damaging to combat veterans who suffer from symptoms of PTSD is the destruction of their capacity to trust,¹⁸ which inevitably renders impossible any forms of bonding with others that are meaningful. If Jesus' greatest commandment was to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39), then experiencing PTSD symptoms simply makes that impossible. What is most demonic about the violence of war is its power to debilitate the capacity to experience love—both in the form of being loved and loving another.

Most frightening of the diverse forms in which PTSD is manifested in combat soldiers is that which is called the "berserk state." The state of

being berserk also poses a formidable challenge to Christian conceptions of the spiritual life, and, in particular, the notion of deification. Berserk is an extreme state of PTSD that is triggered by such events as “betrayal, insult, or humiliation by a leader; death of a friend-in-arms, being wounded; being overrun, surrounded, or trapped; seeing dead comrades who have been mutilated by the enemy; and unexpected deliverance from certain death.”¹⁹ Shay elaborates, “I cannot say for certain that betrayal is a necessary precondition. However, I have yet to encounter a veteran who went berserk from grief alone.”²⁰ The characteristics of the berserk state are “beastlike, godlike, socially disconnected, crazy, mad, insane, enraged, cruel, without restraint or discrimination, insatiable, devoid of fear, inattentive to own safety, distractible, reckless, feeling invulnerable, exalted, intoxicated, frenzied, cold, indifferent, insensible to pain, suspicious of friends.”²¹ Soldiers who go berserk in combat are often those who put themselves in the greatest danger and, if they survive, are deemed, ironically, the most heroic. There is growing research that indicates that the berserk state entails “changes in the parts of the brain that process incoming sensations for signs of danger and connect sensation with emotion.”²² Even after combat, a veteran can go berserk, and often have no recollection of it, as was the case with John, an Iraqi war veteran, who cut his fiancée and her mother with a knife after an argument over bus schedules, and after a long stretch in which John was showing progress through treatment.²³ After cutting his fiancée and her mother, John then cut himself, telling the police as they walked in, “see, it doesn’t hurt.”²⁴ John could not immediately recall the event; he had to be told what had happened; and, on being told, he was afraid that he had killed his daughter, which he had not.

What’s most troubling about the berserk state is that violence can imprint itself on the body—and, thus, on the soul—in ways that could be permanent: “On the basis of my work with Vietnam veterans,” Shay writes, “I conclude that the berserk state is ruinous, leading to the soldier’s maiming or death in battle—which is the most frequent outcome—and to life-long psychological and physiological injury if he survives. I believe that once a person has entered the berserk state, he or she is changed *forever*.”²⁵ He amplifies that “more than 40 percent of Vietnam combat veterans sampled in the late 1980s by the congressionally mandated

National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study reported engaging in violent acts three times or more in the previous year.”²⁶ The spiritually challenging question is, What meaning could speaking about theosis possibly have for someone whose physiology has been permanently scarred by violence?

More recently, Shay has distinguished between simple PTSD and complex PTSD. In simple PTSD “injuries can be disabling in the same sense that physical injuries are. But they do not *necessarily* blight the whole life of the person that bears them. . . . Their life is changed, to be sure, and often limited in specific ways, but the possibility of it being a good human life is not destroyed.”²⁷ There is hope, which is rooted in both the use of pharmaceuticals and an ascetics that undoes the undoing of character. More troubling from a spiritual perspective is complex PTSD, which “invades character, and the capacity for social trust is destroyed, all possibility of a flourishing life is lost. . . . When social trust is destroyed, it is not replaced by a vacuum, but rather by a perpetual mobilization to fend off attack, humiliation, or exploitation, and to figure out other people’s trickery.”²⁸ It’s not that complex PTSD is untreatable per se, but that because of the way in which the world is perceived, those who suffer with PTSD cannot bring themselves to relate to the people who could help them with this injury. Again, what does theosis possibly mean to those who suffer from complex PTSD?

It is very disturbing to hear the stories of combat veterans, which include not sleeping with their spouses for fear that a nightmare may lead them to physically harm their spouse; not being able to sleep in the middle of the night because of hypervigilance; not wanting to be outdoors for fear that a sound, such as a bird chirping or water running, may trigger combat mode; not being able to enter public spaces, such as grocery stores or elevators; having dreams of mutilating one’s children; alienating friends and families; not being able to hold a job, or even get a job for fear of public spaces.²⁹ These and many such similar stories reveal that there is an ascetics to war: either through the training received in the military, or through the practices that one performs in the midst of war to train the body for survival against constant threat of violence, war is the undoing of virtue in the sense that it impacts negatively a combat veteran’s capacity for relationship with family, friends, and strangers. War does

not simply cause “lifelong disabling psychiatric symptoms but can *ruin* good character.”³⁰ From the perspective of the principle of divine-human communion, the ruin of good character is not limited to the “soul” of the combat veteran; “character” is a relational category, and the ruin of character is simultaneously the ruin of relationships.

WHAT DOES THEOSIS HAVE TO DO WITH WAR?

At this point, much like a person watching a Hollywood movie, one is expecting the happy ending—yes, there is tragedy in war, but there’s a way to fix it and make everyone happy. If only it were so easy. The berserk state, as I mentioned, challenges easy happy endings. On the surface, it would seem that for those who suffer from PTSD as a result of combat, or any trauma, talk of theosis or divine-human communion seems like a luxury. To some extent, the Orthodox have contributed to this perception of the irrelevancy of theosis to those who are in the midst of perpetual suffering by predominantly linking deification to the monk in the monastery, in the desert, on a stylite, or in the forest; add to this the tendency to describe theosis in supernatural terms of being surrounded by divine light, battling demons, or eating with the bears. On my reading, one of the few places in the Orthodox tradition where one can hear stories of mundane theosis is the novels of Dostoyevsky, such as in the person of Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, and, ironically, of Tolstoy, such as in the person of Pashenka, whom the reader encounters at the end of Tolstoy’s short story “Fr. Sergius.” In order to have any relevancy for the experience of trauma, theosis must expand the boundaries of the monastery and be made more worldly.

This more mundane form of theosis is rendered possible in the Greek patristic tradition in its linking of divine-human communion to virtue, which can illuminate what Shay means by the “undoing of character” that occurs as a result of war. In the writings of Maximos the Confessor (d. 662), communion with God, which is an embodied presencing of the divine, is simultaneous with the acquisition of virtue: virtue is embodied deification. To say that the human is created with the potential to be godlike should not conjure up images of Greek mythology; within the

Greek patristic texts, it simply means that if God is love, then the human was created to love, and this love is simultaneously a uniting oneself with God, since God is love. In Maximos the Confessor, deification is the acquisition of love, the virtue of virtues, and his *Centuries on Love* is a treatise in which Maximos discusses a trajectory of the acquisition of virtues toward the acquisition of the virtue of virtues—love. For Maximos, the human is created to learn how to love and is in constant battle against that which weakens the capacity to love.

Virtue, for Maximos, is not a building of character for character's sake; it is not a state of being where one displays one's virtues like badges of honor; it is not simply the basis for proper moral decision making. The acquisition of virtue is the precondition for enabling the human capacity to love: "Scripture calls the virtues ways, and the best of all the virtues is love" (4.74).³¹ Virtues are necessary for the learning and acquisition of love: "All the virtues assist the mind in the pursuit of divine love" (1.11).³² Maximos does not restrict himself to only the four cardinal virtues—prudence, courage, temperance, and justice—but, consistent with the Eastern Christian patristic tradition, gives a wider catalog of virtues and vices that correspond to the three parts of the soul: the sensible, the irascible, and the rational. Particular virtues correspond to particular vices, insofar as each virtue is meant to neutralize a particular vice. The hermeneutical key to Maximos's complicated detailing of the relation of virtues and vices to the inner life of the human person and to human agency is "progress in the love of God" (2.14), which is measured ultimately by how one relates to others, especially those to whom one feels hatred or anger (1.71).³³ This particular definition of virtue, then, illuminates the full force and terrifying implications of Shay's idea of war leading to the "undoing of character." What is being undone is the human capacity to love and to receive love. When something like the berserk state "destroys the capacity for virtue,"³⁴ this destruction is not simply an evacuation of a "sense of being valued and of valuing anything,"³⁵ as Shay defines it; according to the description of how combat veterans relate to their family, neighbors, friends, and strangers, what is impaired is the capacity for authentic relationships marked by intimacy, trust, depth—love.

If virtues are embodied deification, the precondition for the learning of the virtue of virtues, which is love, then vice impairs the capacity for

love. Maximos explains that “the purpose of divine Providence is to unify by an upright faith and spiritual love those who have been separated in diverse ways by vice” (4.17).³⁶ He elaborates that the “vice that separates you from your brother” includes “envying and being envied, hurting or being hurt, insulting or being insulted, and suspicious thoughts” (4.18–19).³⁷ Maximos is also astute enough to know that vice breeds vice; that is, that it is not simply the doing of vice that harms the capacity for love, it is being “viced upon”: “The things which destroy love are these: dishonor, damage, slander (either against faith or against conduct), beatings, blows, and so forth, whether these happen to oneself or to one’s relatives or friends” (4.81).³⁸ Vices produce and *are* such affective emotions as anger, hatred, and fear. Throughout this treatise, Maximos is attempting both to advise and to exhort a form of training that can overcome what are ultimately corrosive emotions, no matter how justified.

Also relevant to illuminating the “undoing of character” that war and violence potentially effect on a combat veteran is Maximos’s discussion of the relation of images to the cultivation of vices and virtues. According to Maximos, what often incites and reifies a vice is images or thoughts that present themselves to the human person. Maximos explains that “love and self-mastery keep the mind detached from things and from their representations. . . . The whole war of the monk against demons is to separate the passions from the representations” (3.39; 3.41).³⁹ He adds that the “virtues separate the mind from the passions” (3.44).⁴⁰ Maximos also warns, “[When] insulted by someone or offended in any matter, then beware of angry thoughts, lest by distress they sever you from charity and place you in the region of hatred” (1.29).⁴¹ “Detachment,” for Maximos, “is a peaceful state of the soul in which it becomes resistant to vice” (1.36).⁴² In terms of images that incite vice, this resistance is not a removal of the image, but disabling of its power to evoke such feelings of anger or hatred. To be virtuous is to experience in the face of images the emotions and desires that cultivate authentic relationships.

The problem that veterans with PTSD often face is that the images they confront, whether real or imaginary, trigger the emotion of impending fear, which leads to other negative emotions, such as anger-turned-to-rage and hatred, which then lead to a withdrawal from the other. The relation between images of impending threat and certain emotions and

desires is reminiscent of St. Anthony the Great's encounter with images of the demonic; Anthony's struggle was against those images and their potential impact on the passions.⁴³ In this sense, the acquisition of virtue has something to do with the affective response to certain images, either real or imaginary. Virtue is not the elimination of images—how could one forget a friend's head being blown off?—but, rather, an attenuation of the power of demonic images on the landscape of one's emotions and desires, a landscape that forms the basis for the shape of relationality. In combat trauma, the redoing of virtue does not mean forgetting one's friend's head being blown off; rather, healing is about acquiring a new kind of memory of the events.⁴⁴ The acquisition of virtue would be an affective response to the images of war and violence that does not destroy relationships but opens the path for a breakthrough of love.

If the ascetics of war is an undoing of good character, which is the destruction of the capacity for authentic relationships, then the challenge for combat veterans is to engage in the tasks that lead to a redoing of virtue, which would increase their capacity for such relationships and for the embodied presence of the divine—theosis. Maximus discusses the virtues in terms of the power to counter particular vices.⁴⁵ Insofar as virtue is related to love, virtues build relationships of intimacy, trust, compassion, empathy, friendship, sharing, caring, humility, and honesty: all that is apparently threatened by the experience of vice. Insofar as virtues build proper relationships while vices destroy such relationships, the ascetics of theosis must be relevant to those attempting to undo the ascetics of war. According to Maximus, the acquisition of virtue is a training realized in and through certain practices that forms both the body and the inner life (soul) of the human person; virtue is a wiring of the self as openness to love. Thinking about the healing of combat trauma along the lines of practices and virtues provides a way for intersecting the psychological literature on trauma and the ascetical/mystical tradition on the formation of virtue. The connecting category is that of practices, since the combat veteran must engage in a new kind of ascetics, one that replaces the ascetics of war in order to combat the demonic images impacting his relationships to self and others.

Although there are many practices that enable the acquisition of virtue and thus the capacity for relationships of trust, intimacy, depth, and love, I will restrict my focus to one that is key to any redoing of virtue in

both the psychological and the ascetical/mystical literature—the practice of truth telling or confession. In the Christian tradition, truth telling is primarily associated with the sacrament of confession understood forensically as fulfilling a contractual obligation to tell a priest one's sins before forgiveness is granted, or with the moral obligation not to lie. When speaking about truth telling as a practice that enables the capacity for love through the acquisition of virtues, I am not referring strictly to either a forensic understanding of the sacrament of confession or the moral obligation to tell the truth. Speaking certain truths in the presence of another or other persons has the power both to reconfigure the relationships in which such a truth is spoken and to produce an affective effect on the landscape of one's emotions and desires. Truths spoken hover in the midst of a relationship with the power to affect both the speaker and the listener(s). It is not uncommon to think that one can protect oneself from a traumatic experience by simply attempting to forget it or by not verbalizing it to others. The irony is that only through a verbal acknowledgment or recognition, which cannot be revoked, can the power of the traumatic image be mitigated. It is also the case that the affective result of truth telling as an event depends on the listener, who can either use the spoken truth to iconically presence the divine toward mitigating the power of the effects of violence, or can image the demonic by adding violence to violence. In short, the event of truth telling to another is an iconically charged event, which can potentially presence either the divine or the demonic.⁴⁶

Both Jonathan Shay and Judith Herman, from their experience with trauma victims, attest to the basic truth that healing cannot occur until the trauma victim can begin to speak about the traumatic events. Truth telling in and of itself is not sufficient for healing, but it is absolutely necessary. Also, truth telling of trauma cannot begin until a safe and secure environment is established for the trauma victim, what Herman refers to as stage one of recovery.⁴⁷ Once such a secure and safe environment is established, it is absolutely essential that the victim of combat trauma speak the truth about the traumatic event and reconstruct a narrative of the event itself.

To even speak the truth about the trauma of war can be interpreted as an embodiment of the virtue of humility, in the sense that making oneself vulnerable is requisite to opening the self to loving and being

loved. The sixth-century Syriac Christian ascetic Dorotheos of Gaza analogizes the Christian life to building a house:

The roof is charity, which is the completion of virtue as the roof completes the house. After the roof comes the crowning of the dwelling place . . . [i.e., railings around the flat roof]. . . . The crown is humility. For that is the crown and guardian of all virtues. As each virtue needs humility for its acquisition—and in that sense we said each stone is laid with the mortar of humility—so also the perfection of all the virtues is humility.⁴⁸

As Shay declares, “The fact that these veterans can speak at all of their experience is a major sign of healing.”⁴⁹ The reconstruction of the narrative must also be in the context of other persons, in the form of a community. Shay argues that the “healing of trauma depends upon the communalization of the trauma—being able to safely tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community.”⁵⁰ The mitigation of the demonic, thus, depends on truth, even if such a truth has to do with the experience of the demonic; and this truth needs to be “communalized,” told and *listened to* by others.

Over the years, Shay has discovered that such communalization is most effective when the community itself consists of those who know, either directly or indirectly, the effects of combat trauma. As in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, the healing power of truth telling depends not simply on telling the truth, but on *who* is listening.⁵¹ The rebound effect of truth telling depends on the symbolic/iconic significance of the one listening. The healing power of this communalization of trauma is evident not simply in face-to-face encounter, but in a community-email conversation among Vietnam veterans.⁵² The symbolic/iconic role of the listener is so important, it leads Shay to argue that

restoration . . . of the capacity for social trust happens only in community. This simple and seemingly innocent statement is actually quite subversive, because it casts doubt upon a great deal of what mental health professionals do (following the cultural and economic model of medicine), how they find their value in the world, how the

mental health workplace is organized, and how power is used there. In fact, the overall effect of this simple statement is to push mental health professionals off of center stage in the drama of recovery from trauma, and to place them in the wings of stagehands.⁵³

In the end, the veterans heal each other.⁵⁴ Theologically, the veterans are iconically charged to presence the divine to each other, even in the midst of, and because of, their shared suffering.

The affective effect of truth telling might also require a listener beyond a community of combat veterans. Shay reports: “[Our] clinical team has encouraged many of the veterans we work with to avail themselves of the sacrament of penance. When a veteran does not already know a priest he trusts to hear his confession, we have suggested priests who understand enough about combat neither to deny that he has anything to feel guilty about nor to recoil in revulsion and send him away without the sacrament.”⁵⁵ What this need for a form of truth telling beyond the community of combat veterans reveals is that the experience of forgiveness needs another kind of listener other than the empathetic combat veteran. Although it is the same ascetical practice, truth telling to distinctive listeners does different kinds of work on the landscape of one’s emotions and desires. The chances are very high that the ascetics of war will lead some to engage in practices in which there is a felt need for forgiveness. Tom Mathews’s father felt this need, as did John the Iraqi war veteran mentioned above, who could barely speak about how combat in Iraq led to killing of kids who he realized “could be your kids.”⁵⁶ On the cosmic scale, other combat veterans cannot iconically symbolize that forgiveness; cannot be a kind of listener that enables the realization of that forgiveness as an affective event in the combat veteran. Someone like a priest is iconically charged to perform that role.

The importance of truth telling in the redoing of virtue only highlights how the military culture of denial and repression of the combat experience is corrosive. When mistakes were made and innocent people were killed rather than the “enemy,” the military thought it was helping by covering for the soldiers, who were told that it would be “all right.” Shay relays one story in which the soldiers involved in such a mistake were actually given medals as a way of covering up for the mistake.⁵⁷

When friends are lost, soldiers are told to “stuff those tears,” or “to get even.” Whereas in ancient cultures, dead bodies, including those of the enemy, were treated with respect, the US military had no mechanism in Vietnam for memorializing the dead. Ancient cultures also had rituals for reintegrating soldiers back into society after battle.⁵⁸ Such rituals did not depend on whether the battle was just or not. American soldiers return from war with little to no fanfare, trying to figure out what to do next.⁵⁹ What’s especially egregious is how the US military has not provided sufficient resources for combat veterans showing symptoms of PTSD, often making difficult the availability of such resources because of budgetary constraints. Although improvements have been made, what pervades military culture, and American culture in general, is a Pelagian-like “suck it up” attitude, with no realization of how a combat veteran is ultimately in the grip of the demonic until engaging in ascetic practices that undo the effects of war and violence.

It is encouraging, ironic, and a little troubling to contemplate how an ascetics of virtue in the form of fostering a community of people who learn to trust each other, who form bonds of affection through telling personal stories, who become friends, has the power to mitigate the effects of the ascetics of war. Beyond the debates over whether Christians should think about criteria for judging decisions to go to war, which this essay has not necessarily dismissed as illegitimate, the formation of communities of virtue both before and after combat has the power to mitigate the effects of violence on any one of the members in the community itself, especially if that community of virtue presupposes an open space for truth telling.⁶⁰

There is an even deeper theological significance to the necessity of truth telling as part of an ascetic of virtue that undoes the ascetic of war. First, it reveals that God meets someone in the truth of her concrete, historical situation. In the case of combat trauma, it is not a matter of first undoing the effects of war and then going off to the desert to achieve theosis; undoing the effects of violence is itself the desert in which combat veterans find themselves in their struggle to (re)experience the presence of the divine. The ascetical struggle toward divine-human communion is entrenched in a particular history and a particular body, which then demands the virtue of discernment on the part of the community of

combat veterans, the mental health professional, the priest, even family and friends in order to extricate the combat veteran from the grip of the demonic. As Shay argues, “Modern combat is a condition of enslavement and torture.”⁶¹ The formation of communities of virtue, which presuppose truth telling, mitigates and breaks the cycle of violence. Second, sin committed and sin that is done to us cannot be forgotten, repressed, or denied. It is part of the fabric of the universe that the truth must be recognized; otherwise it will haunt us in other forms. It is only by the integration of the truth of sin into our narrative that it can then be neutralized in its effect. In the end, God is the God of truth, which includes the unique and particular truths of our narratives; if God is truth, then God is found in the verbal recognition of the truths of our narrative, no matter how horrific those truths may be. Although “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39 RSV), to love and be loved by God and neighbor depends ultimately on the practice and virtue of honesty, which includes the courage to acknowledge and accept the truths of our own narrative.

NOTES

1. George Dragas, “Justice and Peace in the Orthodox Tradition,” in *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 42.

2. “The Teaching on Peace in the Fathers,” in *Wholeness of Faith and Life: Orthodox Christian Ethics*, part 1, *Patristic Ethics*, ed. Stanley S. Harakas (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 154. The bracketed Latin phrases are in the source.

3. Ibid., 156–57.

4. For such examples of self-identification, see George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013).

5. Alexander F. C. Webster and Darrell Cole, *The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 2004).

6. Ibid., 118.

7. Ibid.

8. In terms of unequivocal support for a decision to go to war and for the soldiers who fought in a war, World War II is the exception. The only other war in which soldiers received such unequivocal support was the War of 1812. In no other war in American history, including the Revolutionary War, were American soldiers treated as they were after World War II. For details, see Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 154.

9. Tom Mathews, *Our Fathers' War: Growing Up in the Shadow of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 268–69; emphasis added.

10. Ibid., 269.

11. See the HBO documentary *Wartorn*, directed by John Alpert, Ellen Godsenberg Kent, and Matthew O'Neil, aired November 11, 2011, produced by HBO Documentary Films in association with Attaboy Films.

12. For the Vietnam War, see especially Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994); Shay, *Odysseus in America*. For the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Vietnam, see Nancy Sherman, *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010). For the most recent war in Iraq, listen to the radio show *This American Life*, episode 359, “Life after Death,” July 18, 2008, <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/359/life-after-death>. For the existential effects of soldiering, see Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009).

13. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 179.

14. Ibid., 168; emphasis added. In *Odysseus in America*, 166, Shay distinguishes between simple and complex PTSD. On trauma, see also Judith Herman's classic, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

15. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 169.

16. One day in August 2010 at 4:00 a.m., a rock was thrown through the window of my home randomly by teenagers (confirmed by a neighbor who heard them outside his window). A few days later, and probably unrelated, the doorbell was rung at my home at 9:00 p.m., and when I opened the door, no one was there. A few days after experiencing those two events, I was awoken during the night by a dream in which I heard the sound of a police radio, which was vividly clear, and by another dream in which I heard the sound of a crystal-clear doorbell. In addition to this, for at least a month, I was “jumpy”—I made sure that

all the lights around the house were turned on in the middle of the night, I added a timer to the light inside the house so it could turn on in the middle of the night so as to deter any would-be rock throwers, I would wake up frequently in the middle of the night and check outside the window, close all the shades in the evening, and obsessively check all the doors before going to sleep. I am absolutely in no way comparing my experience to combat; but if something like a rock being thrown through a window can cause one to be mildly symptomatic, I can only imagine the long-term effects of experiencing the incessant violence of guns and bombs. This point is relevant not simply to war, but to those living in violent urban environments.

17. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 165–66. For the American Psychiatric Association's official diagnostic criteria for PTSD, see 166–67.

18. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 166.

19. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 80. In a brilliant analysis of the *Iliad*, Shay demonstrates how Achilles went berserk after the death of his friend, Patroklos.

20. *Ibid.*, 96.

21. *Ibid.*, 82.

22. *Ibid.*, 93.

23. *This American Life*, "Life after Death."

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 98; emphasis original. See also Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 149.

26. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 98.

27. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 150.

28. *Ibid.*, 150–51.

29. For many such stories, see Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*; Shay, *Odysseus in America*; Sherman, *Untold War*, especially 231. Also listen to *This American Life*, "Life after Death."

30. Shay, *Achilles at War*, xiii; emphasis original. See his discussion of the ruining of Achilles' character, 28–35. See also 169–87.

31. George C. Berthold, trans., *Maximos the Confessor: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 83.

32. *Ibid.*, 36.

33. *Ibid.*, 48 and 42. See also 37 (1.15).

34. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 86.

35. *Ibid.*, 85.

36. Berthold, *Maximos the Confessor*, 77. On the divisiveness of vice, see also 1.55; 1.58.

37. *Ibid.*, 77.

38. *Ibid.*, 84.

39. Ibid., 66. See also 41 (1.63), 57 (2.74), 58 (2.84), 63 (3.20), 74 (3.97).
40. Ibid., 67.
41. Ibid., 38.
42. Ibid., 39.
43. See Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).
44. As John, from *This American Life*, "Life after Death," poignantly confesses, "You can't forget."
45. On linking virtues and vices, but in a much less coherent form, see also John Climacus's *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).
46. For a more detailed account of truth telling, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 115–36; "Honest to God: Confession and Desire," in *Thinking through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 219–46.
47. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 168; Shay is drawing on Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*.
48. Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 203. Earlier, Dorotheos identifies humility as the mortar of the house of the soul, mortar that "is composed from the earth and lies under the feet of all. Any virtue existing without humility is no virtue at all" (203).
49. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, xxii.
50. Ibid., 4.
51. On truth telling in Alcoholic Anonymous, see Papanikolaou, "Liberating Eros."
52. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 180–81.
53. Ibid., 162.
54. Ibid., 166, 168.
55. Ibid., 153–54.
56. See *This American Life*, "Life after Death."
57. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 3–4.
58. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 152.
59. See James Dao, "After Combat, the Unexpected Perils of Coming Home," *New York Times*, May 28, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/us/29soldiers.html?_r=1&emc=eta1.
60. On the question of prevention, Shay has argued that the effects of war could be mitigated if the military changed its way of training and deploying

soldiers. If soldiers were to train in groups, be deployed in the same groups, take leave with the same group of people, and return home as a group, such a communal support system would be effective both in preventing and treating combat trauma. Although there are not official statistics of World War II combat veterans who suffered from PTSD, one of the reasons why one hears less about the traumatic effects of war on World War II veterans, in addition to the code of silence, could be that soldiers were never separated from the men with whom they trained. In the Vietnam War, soldiers were deployed individually, often forced to integrate as the new guy, went on leave individually, and returned home alone. See Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 195–204.

61. Ibid., 160.

