

International Justice in Social Doctrines of the Orthodox Church

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The article considers international justice as a political issue in social doctrines of the Orthodox Church. The author focuses on the social doctrines of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Russian Orthodox Church and on the social-political provisions of the documents adopted by the Council of Crete (2016). Social doctrines of the Orthodox Church mention some issues that can be attributed to the discursive field of political theology. Thus, international justice is a part of the Orthodox Church concept of contemporary international relations and global human challenges. Such social doctrines state the impossibility of achieving international justice due to the sinful depravity of human nature. This human sinfulness determines all types of global discrimination not only against individuals or social groups (religious, racial, national, gender, etc.), but also against peoples and states. In social doctrines, war is defined as an unacceptable way to solve world problems. Orthodox churches call for fair international relations based on Christian values, thereby criticizing the existing world order based on the ideology of liberal globalism and secularism. Documents of the Council of Crete directly state that true peace (international justice) is possible only after the universal triumph of Christian principles. In conclusion, the author summarizes the features of the Orthodox Church approach to international justice and political theology.

Keywords: Orthodox Church, social doctrine, political theology, Council of Crete, Patriarchate of Constantinople, Russian Orthodox Church, international justice

Introduction

‘The return of religion’ to social-political sciences (Shtyokl, 2011) has revived the research interest in political theology in the contemporary academic discourse. However, Alexander Filippov rightly defines the term ‘political theology’ as conventional and requiring clarification for further scientific institutionalization (Filippov, 2019: 70). In this article, political theology is understood as a theological discipline (a part of the Orthodox Church theology) explicating the religious interpretation of the ‘political’ in its broadest sense¹. Today religious studies admit the problematic nature of any universal definition of religion and prefer to discuss the diversity of world religious traditions with their unique worldviews, thereby emphasizing the confessional specificity of political ideology, which determines the task of clarifying the subject area of political theology (in its confessional diversity) for its further scientific research (Assman, 2022: 53–54).

1. The features of the contemporary Orthodox Church political theology are perfectly described in the works of P. Kalaitzidēs (2012), V. Makrides (2021), A. Papanikolaou (2012) and K. Shtyokl (2021).

The study of social doctrines of the Orthodox Church allows to identify those political issues that are of interest to researchers of the confessional political-theological discourse. I support the Russian religious-studies distinction between ‘social teaching’ and ‘social doctrine’: the former “consists of both church provisions and works of numerous church and parachurch authors who are not always united in their views”; while the latter is “a set of the church official documents” (Ovsienko, 2001: 3). Thus, the article considers the official position of Orthodox churches on such an important concept as ‘international justice’.

According to the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, ‘justice’, like ‘love’ and ‘power’, is a basic concept for philosophy and theology. These concepts “are pertinent for every doctrine of man, they appear in decisive places of psychological and sociological treatises, they are central in ethics and jurisprudence, and they cannot be avoided even in mental and bodily medicine” (Tillich, 2015: 9). Moreover, international justice remains a relevant scientific issue due to the current international activities of states: the universal law of justice embodies the highest interests of a particular state rather than of the entire international community (Maritain, 2000: 177). Thus, the importance of the religious interpretation of global problems of our time, especially under ‘the globalization of religion’², determines the necessity to consider issues of international justice as a part of confessional social doctrines or political theologies.

In the Orthodox Church, two autocephalous churches have social doctrines — the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, there are social documents adopted by the Council of Crete in 2016. As canonical territories of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, of the Russian Orthodox Church and of some autocephalous churches that took part in the Council of Crete do not coincide with state borders³, I insist on the importance of the Orthodox Church understanding of international justice not only for research but also for practice.

International justice in the documents of the Council of Crete

The Council of Crete, i.e., officially “the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, was held on June 16–27, 2016 on the Island of Crete (Greece). 10 out of 14 mutually recognized Orthodox churches (Patriarchate of Constantinople, Patriarchate of Alexandria, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Serbian, Romanian, Cypriot, Hellenic, Albanian and Polish Orthodox Churches, Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia) sent their representative to the Council, while the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Russian, Georgian

2. See, e.g., P. Beyer (1994), H. Casanova (1994), R. Robertson (2000), whose works present sociological concepts of ‘the globalization of religions’.

3. For instance, according to the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church (2017), its jurisdiction “covers all Orthodox Christians on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church: Russian Federation, Ukraine, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan Republic, Republic of Kazakhstan, People’s Republic of China, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvian Republic, Lithuanian Republic, Mongolia, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Republic of Uzbekistan, Estonian Republic, Japan, and all those Orthodox Christians who voluntarily join the Russian Orthodox Church in other countries” (Moskova Patriarchate, 2017).

and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches refused to participate. The official documents of the Council of Crete not only consider various issues of the intra-church life but also present the Orthodox churches' position on current problems affecting human life in the contemporary world. According to the Encyclical Letter of the Council, "the Church does not involve herself with politics in the narrow sense of the term; her witness, however, is essentially political insofar as it expresses concern for man and his spiritual freedom" (Council of Crete, 2018b: 23), which determines both intra-church and social significance of the Council's documents.

The issues of international justice are mentioned in the following documents of the Council of Crete: the Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Council of Crete, 2018b), the Encyclical of Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Council of Crete, 2018c), the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World (Council of Crete, 2018a). These documents state that the contemporary world is full of injustice, and its clear expression is various types of discrimination. The Orthodox Church "today finds herself confronted by extreme or even provocative expressions of the ideology of secularization, inherent in political, cultural and social developments." (Council of Crete, 2018b: 17). Moreover, today's world is characterized by the spread of the "contemporary ideology of globalization" (Council of Crete, 2018b: 22), which is the main cause of upheavals and leads to social injustice on a global scale. The ideology of consumerism and secular globalization contributes to the loss of peoples' spiritual roots. It is especially noted that the contemporary media often become conductors of the ideology of liberal globalism and are used not to unite but to manipulate peoples.

Secularization and globalization determine a false connection between human progress and the task of raising living standards (economic development to the detriment of spiritual values). Orthodox churches call to "to promote a new constructive synergy with the secular state and its rule of law within the new framework of international relations" (Council of Crete, 2018b: 24). This new framework should be based on the preservation of human dignity and rights, which would guarantee social justice on the national and global levels. However, human rights should not be reduced to the arrogant deification of individual rights or ignore the social aspect of freedom; it is especially emphasized that one of the basic human rights is religious freedom. Concerning the contemporary international injustice, the Council of Crete mentions such its manifestations as violence and armed conflicts, persecution, expulsion and murder of religious minorities, human trafficking, violation of the rights and freedoms of individuals and peoples, forced change of religion. The situation in the Middle East, Africa and Ukraine was stressed: the Council's participants expressed hope that peace and justice would prevail in these regions.

'The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World' states that the Church strives for peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love between peoples and for the elimination of racial and other types of discrimination (Council of Crete, 2018a: 84). The Church is to ensure not only a critical understanding of contemporary injustice, but also the recognition that real peace and justice are possible only if the Gospel principles are fol-

lowed in international relations. Orthodox churches argue that peace and justice must play a central role in the life of peoples. According to the Council of Crete, “the peace of Christ is the ripe fruit of the restoration of all things in Him, the revelation of the human person’s dignity and majesty as an image of God, the manifestation of the organic unity in Christ between humanity and the world, the universality of the principles of peace, freedom, and social justice, and ultimately the blossoming of Christian love among people and nations of the world. The reign of all these Christian principles on earth gives rise to authentic peace” (Council of Crete, 2018a: 90).

The Mission defines peace and justice as synonyms and emphasizes that both are possible only if people make efforts to fulfill the commandments of Christ. Therefore, injustice, including international, is considered a result of human sin, spiritual illness. One of the extreme manifestations of injustice is war and various conflicts; the Orthodox Church welcomes cooperation of peoples and states for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In addition, the Mission notes that the contemporary environmental crisis is a consequence of economic injustice which is determined by the consumer perception of nature. The Council of Crete suggests an alternative — an Orthodox-Christian model of the international unity of mankind, which can put an end to the existing global injustice, i.e., the Ecumenical Orthodox Church based on the equal honor of its constituent parts — autocephalous local churches (Council of Crete, 2018b: 23).

International justice in the social doctrine of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

The basis of the social doctrine of the Patriarchate of Constantinople is ‘For the Life of the World. Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church’, which was written by the special theological commission created in 2017 on the initiative of Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople (Archdiocese of America, 2020). One of its authors is Aristotle Papanikolaou — an American theologian, who developed an original concept of the Orthodox political theology, including the issue of justice (Papanikolaou, 2012). ‘For the Life of the World’ presents not only the understanding of the social-political problems of our time by the Patriarchate of Constantinople but also an example of the further explication of the provisions of the Council of Crete. Moreover, authors of the document and the hierarchy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople hope for its pan-Orthodox recognition as a guide to social activities of Orthodox Christians all over the world.

The document does not have a special section on international justice, but relevant issues are considered in the sections ‘The Church in the Public Sphere’, ‘Poverty, Wealth, and Civil Justice’, ‘War, Peace, and Violence’, ‘Orthodoxy and Human Rights’ (Archdiocese of America, 2020). Foreword states that the Church is ill-prepared for facing the challenges of pluralism and globalization, individualism and secularization; therefore, the document aims at providing guidelines for Christians in the contemporary world. Introduction emphasizes that “the world we inhabit is a fallen order, broken and darkened, enslaved to death and sin, tormented by violence and injustice” (Archdiocese of

America, 2020), and one of the tasks of the Orthodox Christian is the fight against evil and injustice.

Part II 'The Church in the Public Sphere' defines today's racial and national injustice in the framework of international justice and reasons for its violation. This part combines issues of justice and legal order: according to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, today's laws do not correspond to God's plan; however, Christians must support the existing legal system as ensuring certain basic agreements, which contribute to the elimination of injustices. The Patriarchate of Constantinople believes that the language of law is necessary to preserve and develop social justice and argues that the contemporary democratic system tends to follow the principles of the common good and justice; therefore, the Church can use the Orthodox concept 'symphony' to promote these principles in society and the state.

Part III 'The Course of Human Life' focuses on various forms of discrimination in the contemporary world as manifestations of international injustice. This part pays special attention to sexual discrimination emphasizing that the Orthodox Church must resist all forms of discrimination against one's neighbors regardless of their sexual orientation.

Part IV 'Poverty, Wealth, and Civil Justice' describes forms of social injustice and civil inequality on a global scale, including in developed countries, such as poverty, lack of access to education, medicine or legal protection, etc. According to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, such social injustices are often the result of racial or class discrimination.

Part V 'War, Peace, and Violence' states that all peoples live by the law of aggression — either hidden or open. The contemporary world is dominated by violence, which means that injustice permeates the system of international relations too. The Patriarchate of Constantinople clearly opposes all forms of violence and welcomes peace but not as a truce imposed by brute force. Peace implies restoration of the created world in its true form. The Church admits that some situations justify the use of violence, but the duty of any legitimate authority is to promote peace between people and nations. The Patriarchate of Constantinople does not accept the just war theory of the Catholic theology (Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria, etc.) arguing that war is always a manifestation of evil. Nevertheless, this does not mean a pacifist attitude towards war or the Orthodox Church's ban on Christians' service in the police or army.

Part VII 'Orthodoxy and Human Rights' states that the contemporary concept of human rights was once a part of the Christian tradition and today can be used, among other things, for ensuring international justice. Human rights are primary and inviolable compared to the rights of classes, governments or power institutions. Orthodox Christians should exercise human rights in their countries of residence and use the concept of human rights to establish peace between countries and peoples. The Patriarchate of Constantinople supports the global practice of protecting and promoting human rights for ensuring universal justice.

Conclusion emphasizes that in the contemporary world, there is a common idea of the neutral and universal public sphere without any religious content, i.e., religion is considered a private matter not to be mentioned in discussions about the common good and

justice. The Patriarchate of Constantinople considers this idea incorrect and unacceptable: contemporary secularism turns into a new ideology with its own concept of goodness and justice. However, contemporary international injustice proves the impossibility of eliminating all forms of discrimination with the secular approach alone. Religious faith determines all aspects of our life, including social and political views; therefore, the position of the Orthodox Church on various social-political issues of our time should be taken into account in specific solutions to eliminate international injustice. Moreover, the position of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on international justice echoes the position of Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, on many issues of the social doctrine (Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch, 2008: 248–356).

International justice and social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church

The social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church was introduced in 2000, when the Bishops' Council of the Moscow Patriarchate adopted 'The Basis of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church' (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000). This doctrine's further development can be traced in such documents as 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights', 'The Position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Current Environmental Problems', 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Position on the Reform of the Family Law and Problems of Juvenile Justice', etc.

The key document for understanding international justice in this political theology is 'The Basis of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church', in particular its sections 'War and Peace' (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 46–51), 'Christian Ethics and Secular Law' (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 26–32), 'International Relation. Problems of Globalization and Secularism' (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 97–105). The Basis states that the Christian's main goal is salvation, but this does not imply a passive position in the social-political life. Therefore, the Orthodox soteriology pays special attention to good deeds for fulfilling Christ's commandment to love one's neighbor (John 3:23).

Concerning international justice, the Moscow Patriarchate emphasizes that its basis is the golden rule: "So in *everything*, do to *others* what *you would* have *them* do to *you*, for this sums up the *Law* and the *Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12). The idea of moral truth in international relations presupposes the possibility of using force against other states and peoples to restore justice. The Moscow Patriarchate recognizes the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity as the basis of international relations but argues that all human regulations are relative before God: history proves the fragility of state borders and the contradiction between the principle of state's territorial integrity and the people's desire for state independence. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church welcomes voluntary unification of countries and peoples into a single organism and regrets destruction of multi-ethnic states. The Basis notes that the collapse of some Eurasian states led to attempts to create mono-nation states, which were the cause of bloody conflicts in Eastern Europe.

The Russian Orthodox Church states that "war is evil; just as the evil in man in general, war is caused by the sinful abuse of the God-given freedom" (Moscow Patriarchate,

2000: 46), but allows participation in war for protecting neighbors and restoring violated justice — when war is an undesirable but necessary means. The Russian Orthodox Church believes that today it is impossible to distinguish an aggressive war from a defensive one; therefore, the question of supporting or condemning military actions needs to be considered carefully in each specific conflict.

According to the Moscow Patriarchate, contemporary political-legal globalization has not eliminated international injustice. The Russian Orthodox Church emphasizes imperfection of the contemporary law compared to the perfect divine regulations. Therefore, if human law rejects a divine norm and replaces it with the opposite, this law ceases to be law and becomes iniquity. In the contemporary world, due to secularization, human rights are defined as individual rights without any connection with God; however, law is to help man to fulfill one's main calling — to become like God and to fulfill one's duties to people, family, state, nation and other human communities.

The existing global injustice is supported by the contemporary system of international relations, in which international organizations play a huge role. They were designed to ensure the interaction of peoples and states on principles of universal justice but often “become instruments for the unfair domination of strong over weak countries, rich over poor, the technologically and informationally developed over the rest. They also may practice double standards by applying international law in the interests of more influential states” (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 101). The Church stands for real equality of states and their full-fledged participation in resolving conflicts, i.e., decisions without the state's consent can be made only under aggression or massacre in the country.

The contemporary system of international relations is based on the priority of secular values over religious ones. The Moscow Patriarchate considers this a cause of the existing international injustice; thereby, the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church “seeks to assert Christian values in the process of decision-making on the most important public issues on both national and international levels. She strives for the recognition of the legality of religious worldview as a basis for socially significant action (including those taken by the state) and as an essential factor which should influence the development (amendment) of international law and the work of international organizations” (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 104–105). The existing injustice on the national and international levels makes the Moscow Patriarchate interact with states, various public organizations and individuals, even if they do not consider themselves a part of the Christian tradition, — to achieve peace, harmony and prosperity.

Concluding remarks

The results of the analysis of the issues of international justice in social doctrines of the Orthodox Church can be summarized as follows. First, they all present a theocentric understanding of justice: God is absolute justice in terms of cataphatic theology; thereby, His laws should be the basis of fair international relations. Only God is the “omnipotent lawgiver” (Schmitt, 2016: 34), His regulations are universal and binding, and the politi-

cal-theological discourse receives legitimacy only from God. Therefore, the contemporary international and national legislation is declared imperfect due to being unable to ensure international justice.

Second, the main cause of injustice is human freedom, i.e., the ability to choose between good and evil. All social doctrines emphasize the impossibility of international justice due to the sinful depravity of human nature. Thus, international injustice is an ethical-anthropological problem rather than a problem of institutional or legal imperfections, and its solution is the key to eliminating injustice on a global scale. Sin is the cause of all types of global discrimination of individuals and groups, peoples and states; and war is an unacceptable way to solve world problems.

Third, justice is a part of the church's soteriological mission: social doctrines of two Patriarchates (Constantinople and Moscow) state the possibility of resistance to evil (injustice), i.e., justify the right to civil disobedience: "the Church remains loyal to the state, but God's commandment to fulfil the task of salvation in any situation and under any circumstances is above this loyalty. If the authority forces Orthodox believers to apostatize from Christ and His Church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the Church should refuse to obey the state" (Moscow Patriarchate, 2000: 20).

Fourth, social doctrines identify several levels of international injustice — individuals, social groups (national, religious, gender, etc.), political institutions/states (international relations). The multi-level nature of injustice does not negate the universal (Christian) ethics as a necessary condition for overcoming it, primarily from the position of the egalitarian norm (in the Christian sense).

Fifth, social doctrines of the Orthodox Church with their specific political discourses raise the question of institutionalizing the political-theological imaginary, the question about specific mechanisms for implementing doctrinal provisions, and even the broader question of including the Orthodox political theology in the contemporary political space. For instance, the Council of Crete states that the system of international relations should follow the organization model of the Orthodox Church as a community of autocephalous churches. However, history provides numerous examples of conflicts between different Orthodox churches (the latest one is the breakdown of communication between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople after the latter granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine), which indicates the controversial nature of the proposed model for establishing justice on a global scale. Moreover, Orthodox churches call for fair international relations based on Christian values, thereby criticizing the world order based on the ideology of liberal globalism and secularism. The documents of the Council of Crete directly state that true peace (international justice) is possible only after the universal triumph of Christian principles, i.e., after overcoming the spiritual crisis of the humanity.

Thus, the Orthodox Church understanding of international justice is based exclusively on its soteriological mission, which eliminates the state-legal meaning of international justice. The Orthodox political theology is conceptually different from the 'legal'

political theology of Carl Schmitt (Kondurov, 2019: 56–62), which questions the heuristic potential and theoretical-methodological boundaries of political theology (as academic discipline) in the contemporary scientific discourse.

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Проблема международной справедливости в социальных доктринах православного христианства

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В статье рассматривается проблема международной справедливости в контексте политической проблематики социальных доктрин православного христианства. Основное содержание исследования составляет анализ социальных доктрин Константинопольского патриархата и Русской православной церкви, а также социально-политических положений документов, принятых на Критском соборе (2016). В социальных доктринах православного христианства затрагиваются вопросы, которые можно отнести к дискурсивному полю политической теологии. В их число входит и проблема международной справедливости,

которая рассматривается в рамках православного понимания современных международных отношений и глобальных проблем, стоящих перед современным человеком. Общим для всех социальных документов является постулирование невозможности достижения международной справедливости ввиду греховной испорченности человеческой природы. Следствием греха является глобальная дискриминация не только человека или социальных групп на основании какого-либо принципа (религиозного, расового, национального, языкового, гендерного и др.), но и целых народов и государств. Война рассматривается как недопустимый способ решения мировых проблем. Вместе с тем православные церкви призывают к построению справедливых международных отношений на основе христианских ценностей, критикуя, тем самым, существующий миропорядок, основанный на идеологии либерального глобализма и секуляризма. В документах Критского собора прямо говорится о том, что подлинный мир (понимаемый в рамках международной справедливости) возможен только после вселенского торжества христианских принципов. В заключении конкретизируется проблемное поле православного подхода к проблеме международной справедливости и формулируется вывод о специфике православной политической теологии.

Ключевые слова: православное христианство, социальная доктрина, политическая теология, Критский собор, Константинопольский патриархат, Русская православная церковь, международная справедливость