

The Practice and Doctrine of Holy War  
in the Eastern Roman Empire  
and Orthodox Church, AD 620–630

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Theology

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## Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	6
1.1	Heraclius.....	6
1.2	How Will A Christian Man War? .....	7
1.3	Contemporary views .....	9
1.4	Thesis Outline .....	9
2	Chapter Two – War and Holy War in Byzantium.....	11
2.1	Three Positions on Byzantine Wars.....	11
2.1.1	First Position: All Byzantine Wars “Holy” .....	12
2.1.2	Second Position: No “Holy Wars” – All “Just” Wars .....	12
2.1.3	Third Position: No Holy Wars, No Just Wars .....	16
2.1.4	Conclusion .....	21
2.2	Testing the mainstream Orthodox case .....	22
2.2.1	The Greek Fathers .....	23
2.2.2	‘The Stratification of Pacifism’ .....	26
2.2.3	Military Manuals .....	29
2.2.4	Conclusion .....	32
2.3	A New Position: Some Holy Wars, All Just Wars .....	33
2.4	Three Definitions.....	35
2.4.1	Webster .....	35
2.4.2	Dennis.....	36
2.4.3	Kolia-Dermitzaki .....	38
2.4.4	Conclusions.....	39
2.5	Definitional Issues .....	40
2.5.1	Sacralisation .....	40
2.5.2	The moral value of combat .....	46
2.5.3	The Authority of the Emperor .....	48
2.5.4	Conclusion: Matters of Degree .....	50
2.6	Conclusion .....	51
3	Chapter Three – Heraclius’ Persian Campaigns .....	52
3.1	Outline of Chapter.....	52
3.2	Introduction: Why Heraclius? .....	52

3.3	Historians' Objections .....	53
3.3.1	Kaegi's five objections .....	54
3.3.2	Addressing these objections .....	55
3.4	Introduction to the Greek Sources.....	56
3.4.1	List of Sources.....	56
3.4.2	George speaking through Theophanes .....	59
3.4.3	Propaganda and History .....	60
3.5	The Source Material – Identifying Holy War Elements .....	61
3.5.1	George of Pisidia .....	61
3.5.2	Theophanes Confessor .....	69
3.5.3	The Paschal Chronicle.....	89
3.5.4	Theophylact Simocatta.....	92
3.5.5	Summary .....	94
3.6	Addressing the Objections .....	95
3.6.1	Introduction.....	95
3.6.2	Religious Authority .....	95
3.6.3	Religious Motivation .....	97
3.6.4	Spiritual Assurance .....	102
3.6.5	Summary and Conclusion.....	102
3.7	Outstanding Definitional Issues .....	103
3.7.1	Spiritual Authority .....	103
3.7.2	Can a Holy War be Just? .....	106
3.8	Summary and Conclusions .....	107
4	Conclusion .....	108
4.1	Summary .....	108
4.2	Conclusions.....	109
4.2.1	Retrospective Pacifism .....	109
4.2.2	Heraclius.....	109
4.2.3	History: Assumptions and Openness.....	109
4.2.4	Theology: Variation and Aberration in Tradition .....	110
4.2.5	Suggestions for Further Study .....	112
5	Bibliography.....	115
5.1	Primary Sources:.....	115

5.2	Secondary Sources: .....	116
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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the definitions used by modern scholars to discuss war, particularly holy war, in the Byzantine empire and the Orthodox church between AD 312 and AD 630 (the earliest point that empire and church came into contact with Muslim *jihad*) with particular reference to AD 610–630.

In the introduction I observe the disjunction between Heraclius' apparent holy war in Persia and the early Christians' abhorrence of bloodshed.

In Chapter 2 I review the three mainstream positions among contemporary Byzantine historians and Orthodox theologians on war and holy war. I note that none of the three mainstream views on the nature of war in Byzantium admit of any variation in Byzantine ideology, due to a widely-held operating assumption based on the strong claim that the Orthodox church and people of the sixth and seventh century universally regarded war as always evil (2.1). I show in 2.2 that this key strong claim, though widely held, has very doubtful evidence. Rejecting the strong form of the claim allows the possibility that some wars may be different. I then examine the proposal of Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, who claims to describe a distinct Byzantine kind of holy war (2.3). I contrast the criteria used by Kolia-Dermitzaki to define her "holy war" with two other definitions (2.4). Heraclius presents a useful test case for exploring the definitional differences. Before proceeding to the case study in Chapter Three, I examine some issues on which scholars differ and the nature of that disagreement (2.5.4). Much of the evidence surrounding 'holy war' is a matter of degree.

Chapter 3 is a case study on Heraclius' Persian campaigns. Statements that Heraclius fought a holy war need to be properly defined, and conversely, the application of contested definitions to Heraclius' case illuminates those definitions (3.2). The specific objections of Laiou, Dennis

and Kaegi are discussed. The Greek sources for Heraclius' Persian campaigns were introduced (3.4) and their holy war elements were identified (3.5). These elements were then shown to meet each of Dennis's criteria. This study showed that Heraclius fought a holy war against the Persians from AD 622 (3.6.5), even under narrow definitions. On two definitional issues, I found that Heraclius operated with significant personal spiritual authority in the period (3.7.1), and that his holy war also met Thomas Aquinas' conditions for a just war (3.7.2).

In Chapter 4 I conclude with some suggestions for further research.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Heraclius

In AD 610 Heraclius's battle fleet reached Constantinople. The tyrant Phocas had been failing to deal with civil war and Persian invasions. Phocas was brutally executed and Heraclius was crowned on the same day.<sup>1</sup>

In 614 the Persians captured Jerusalem. After a revolt, the Persians recaptured and pillaged the city. Many Christians were killed, churches were burnt down and the True Cross and other relics were taken to Ctesiphon.

In 622 Heraclius led an army east to drive the Persians out and to rescue Christian captives and relics. For the first time in its history the church funded his campaigns. Heraclius campaigned for six years, seldom returning to Constantinople, fighting many major battles. He deliberately destroyed Persian religious sites and royal palaces.

Heraclius claimed to be 'filled with divine zeal'<sup>2</sup> – that Christian faith was his motivation for the Persian campaigns. He announced his final victory with Psalmic quotations, characterising it as God's victory:

And let all of us Christians, praising and glorifying (Him), give thanks to God alone, rejoicing greatly in His holy name. For the arrogant Khusro, who fought with God, has fallen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief popular history, see: John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, Byzantium 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 280-85; for scholarly history: Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia* 302, 27-30, translation C. Mango and R. Scott, (trans. & eds.) *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284 – 813* (Oxford: University Press, 1997), 435.

Popular historians tell the story of Heraclius' campaign to bring back the True Cross as a holy war. William of Tyre in the 1100s began his history of the Crusades with Heraclius.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 How Will A Christian Man War?

All of this history is in marked contrast to the attitude of the early Christians to military action.

Tertullian, writing four hundred years previously, ruled out any Christian military service at all:

...putting my strength to the question, I banish from us the military life...<sup>5</sup>

His authority for this was the life and words of Christ:

But how will a Christian man war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away? ... [T]he Lord... , in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier.<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian acknowledges that there are Christians serving in the military – he thinks they should leave at once. Heraclius' burning Persian fire temples contrasts starkly with Tertullian's words, 'away with the idea of a divine religion avenging itself by human fires'.<sup>7</sup>

Tertullian seems to represent the mainstream of Christian thought on this issue. The *Apostolic Tradition*,<sup>8</sup> Origen and Lactantius all agree with him.

Origen could concede in his *Against Celsus* that Christians do not fight in the army – evidence for general pacifism in the church. He expected there to be no need for armies if the whole

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<sup>3</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 727.20, Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N.C. Lieu (trans. and eds.), *The Roman and Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars Part II AD 363-630: A Narrative Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 220.

<sup>4</sup> George T. Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium', 31-39 in Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 2001), 34 note 13.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *The Crown* 11, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3.99-100, quoted in Ronald J. Sider, *The Early Church on Killing: A comprehensive sourcebook on war, abortion and capital punishment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2012), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19, *ANF* 3.73, in Sider, *Early Church*, 50-51.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 37, in Sider, *Early Church*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 16, in Sider, *Early Church*, 121.

Empire were Christian.<sup>9</sup> He argued that God, called upon by united Christian prayer, would guard the people and overcome their enemies.

Origen and Tertullian wanted the Roman empire to be secure. Origen argued that this was a reason for Christians not to enlist, but to dedicate themselves to prayer:

...keeping their hands pure [of blood], and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed!<sup>10</sup>

Tertullian claimed to pray for 'brave armies':

Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.

But although security was good, according to Cyprian war was crime in bulk:

... when individuals commit homicide, it is a crime; it is called a virtue when it is done in the name of the state. Impunity is acquired for crimes not by reason of innocence but by the magnitude of the cruelty.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman army after Constantine continued to fight wars even as the imperial bureaucracy and the army itself were progressively Christianised. By Heraclius' time, Byzantine civil society and the army that defended it had been subject to public Christian influence for three hundred years. This situation was utterly alien to Origen and Tertullian's. Did Orthodox Christian

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<sup>9</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.70, ANF 4.666, in Sider, *Early Church*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, 7.73, ANF 4.668, cited in Sider, *Early Church*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Cyprian, *To Donatus* 6, (trans.), Deferrari *Cyprian*, 12-13, in Sider, *Early Church*, 85.

attitudes to war change from the time of the early church to Heraclius' reign? Did Heraclius fight a holy war in the 620s? How else might he have conceptualised it?

### 1.3 Contemporary views

Church historian George T. Dennis explains away all of the religious elements of Heraclius' campaigns as religious trappings and concludes, 'These were imperial wars, not holy wars.'<sup>12</sup> He claims Heraclius is in continuity with pre-Christian Roman strategy, unchanged by Christian influence.

Dennis represents a view among historians that the Byzantine Empire and its Orthodox Church did not have a doctrine or practice of 'holy war'. This is echoed by Orthodox scholars such as Hamalis: 'the Orthodox Church never endorsed or practiced "crusades".'<sup>13</sup>

### 1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis examines the definitions used by modern scholars to discuss war, particularly holy war, in the Byzantine empire and the Orthodox church between AD 312 and AD 630 (the earliest point that empire and church came into contact with Muslim *jihad*) with particular reference to AD 610–630.

In Chapter 2 I review the three mainstream positions among Byzantine historians and Orthodox theologians on war and holy war (2.1). I show in 2.2 that a key claim, though widely held, has doubtful evidence. I then examine the proposal of Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, who claims to describe a distinct Byzantine kind of holy war (2.3). I contrast the criteria used by Kolia-Dermitzaki to define her "holy war" with two other definitions (2.4). Heraclius presents a useful test case for exploring the definitional differences. Before proceeding to the case study

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<sup>12</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 35.

<sup>13</sup> Perry T. Hamalis, 'War', 626-627 in John Anthony McGuckin (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Chichester: Blackwell, 2011.

in Chapter Three, I examine some issues on which scholars differ and the nature of that disagreement (2.5.4).

Chapter 3 is a case study on Heraclius' Persian campaigns. Statements that Heraclius fought a holy war need to be properly defined, and conversely, the application of contested definitions to Heraclius' case illuminates those definitions (3.2). I identify holy war elements in the primary sources for the Persian campaigns (3.5) and show that they meet the criteria of different (and conflicting) definitions (3.6). Heraclius' case also sheds light on certain other objections and differences raised in the secondary literature (3.7).

In Chapter 4 I conclude with some suggestions for further research.

## 2 Chapter Two – War and Holy War in Byzantium

This chapter reviews three views among contemporary Byzantine historians and Orthodox theologians on war and holy war: that Byzantine wars were all holy (2.1.1); all just (2.1.2); or neither just nor holy (2.1.3). These positions agree on most of the facts of history, but use different definitions of ‘holy’ and ‘just’. I show in 2.2 that a key claim underlying the second and third positions, though widely held, has doubtful evidence. If this claim does not hold, then other positions are possible. A fourth is proposed by Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, who finds some wars in Byzantine history that were fought as a kind of holy war (2.3). I consider the criteria used by Kolia-Dermitzaki and two other writers to define a holy war (2.4). Their work suggests that Heraclius presents a useful test case for exploring the definitional differences. Before proceeding to the case study in Chapter Three, I note a range of scholarly views on the sacralisation of war (2.5.1), combat, moral values and war aims (2.5.2), and the authority of the emperor (2.5.3). I consider to what extent these and other issues may be matters of degree (2.5.4).

### 2.1 Three Positions on Byzantine Wars

There are three main scholarly positions on war in Byzantine studies:

- all Byzantine wars were “holy” wars in some sense;
- it is better not to label Byzantine wars as “holy” wars, but all as “just” wars; or
- all Byzantine wars were neither “holy” nor “just”.

In this section I briefly review these positions as they are expressed in recent literature. The difference between the first position and the second is largely a matter of definition. I therefore concentrate on the second and third positions.

### 2.1.1 First Position: All Byzantine Wars “Holy”

Adolf von Harnack launched modern consideration of war in Christian social ethics.<sup>14</sup> He was explicit in his summary assessment of the Eastern church:

In the Eastern churches the people (eventually also the state) and the religion grew together again so that in case of emergency *holy war was proclaimed* to arouse the people to the defense of the ‘national god’.<sup>15</sup>

The church historian Tia Kolbaba holds a similar position:

The Christian Roman Empire, with God’s vicar anointed at its head, did God’s work on earth. Its soldiers therefore fought for God when they fought to protect or to expand the empire. It seems illogical to dismiss all of this as not really Holy War’.<sup>16</sup>

Holy War, here, means war for Christian institutions. While they are holy, it need not follow that the war, as framed by identity markers or marked by standard religious elements, is itself holy.

### 2.1.2 Second Position: No “Holy Wars” – All “Just” Wars

The difference between the first and second positions is largely of definition. Historians agree generally on the evidence of religious elements involved in Byzantine warfare and generally agree on their immediate function. They disagree on the overall significance of this state and military religiosity and whether it warrants the label, ‘holy war’.

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<sup>14</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, trans. David McInnes Gracie, Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress (1981) [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, (1963 – 1905)], 9.

<sup>15</sup> Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 29-30, my emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Tia Kolbaba, *Fighting for Christianity: Holy War in the Byzantine Empire*,” *Byzantion* 68 (1998), 210, cited in Athina Kolia-Dermizaki, , ““Holy War” In Byzantium Twenty Years Later: A Question of Term Definition and Interpretation’, 121-132 of Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (eds.), *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion: Akten des Internationalen Symposiums, Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung Band 30* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 131.

The church historian George Dennis recognizes that there were many religious elements in Byzantine wars. However, he claims that most warfare through history was not *truly* religious, but 'simply tribal conflicts motivated by revenge, plunder, or the acquisition of land or slaves'. Gods were invoked merely as an extra ally. The same is true of biblical models for Christian holy wars, 'with those of the Maccabees perhaps being an exception', and of many later Christian and Muslim wars. In keeping with this sweeping dismissal, Dennis does not see the Byzantine wars as truly religious. Thus he will not label them as holy wars.<sup>17</sup>

Historians such as Dennis,<sup>18</sup> Ioannis Stouraitis,<sup>19</sup> Angeliki Laiou<sup>20</sup> and Nikos Oikonomides,<sup>21</sup> regard Byzantine wars as a species of "just" wars. The term, 'just war', describes any war fought in accordance with some set of moral guidelines as to whether it ought to be fought (*jus ad bellum*) and how to fight it (*jus in bello*). Stouraitis sees a Roman pattern of war (following guidance from Aristotle and Cicero)<sup>22</sup> continuing into the Christian period, to defend frontiers against barbarians or to deal with rebels. While just war theory was later developed in the West from the thought of Ambrose and Augustine and systematized by Aquinas, nonetheless the common Roman heritage set the pattern for the wars fought in Byzantium.

As it had for Aristotle, peace legitimized wars by giving them a just cause. One definition of peace, the *pax Romana*, used Roman rule to define peace. This was combined with the

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<sup>17</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>18</sup> George T. Dennis (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 25, *Dumbarton Oaks Texts* 9 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Ioannis Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz (Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber, Ergänzungsband 5)* Vienna, 2009, cited in Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis, 'Byzantine Approaches to Warfare (6th-12th Centuries): An Introduction', 9-15 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 11 note 12.

<sup>20</sup> Angeliki Laiou, 'On Just War in Byzantium' in John S. Langdon et al. (eds.), *To Ellenikon: Studies in Honour of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, vol. 1 (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Oikonomides, 'The Concept of "Holy War" and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories', in Timothy S. Miller and John Nesbitt (eds.), *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honour of George T. Dennis, S.J.* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Stouraitis, 'Conceptions of Peace and War in Anna Comnena's Alexiad', 69-80 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 70 note 14.



concept of the *oecumene*, the worldwide community of Christians. Byzantium's wars were fought ostensibly seeking peace, either through defending the state's current borders, or (particularly after the losses of the fifth and seventh centuries) by restoring areas that had previously been Roman (and Christian). This was stable for a long historical period:

All efforts that were undertaken by the emperors of Constantinople after the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476) until the late twelfth century to expand the borders of their rule through the reconquest of former Roman territories were legitimized within the aforementioned ideological framework.<sup>23</sup>

Laiou differentiates between just and holy war by reference to the declaring authority. Using the first Crusade in AD 1095 as her model, holy war must be proclaimed by the Church, especially in the absence of a strong imperial presence. Yet in Byzantium the emperor was the only authority who could declare war. Since the church did not declare Byzantine wars, this precludes their being holy wars by Laiou's definition.<sup>24</sup>

Oikonomides claims that the Eastern Church refrained from blessing of killing as a laudable act, remission of sins on the basis of military service, or recognizing fallen soldiers *ipso facto* as martyrs. This positive view of killing in the right cause was a key feature of holy war, so Byzantium 'never knew a real "holy war"'.<sup>25</sup>

Dennis describes Byzantine wars as 'not "holy wars" but just wars, imperial wars'.<sup>26</sup> Dennis points out that the Byzantines were less interested than the Crusaders in recapturing

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<sup>23</sup> Koder and Stouraitis, 'Byzantine Approaches to Warfare', 11, citing D. Brodka, 'Prokopios von Kaisareia und Justinians Idee der "Reconquista"', *Eos* 86 (1999), 243-355.

<sup>24</sup> Angeliki Laiou, 'On Just War in Byzantium', 170, cited in Alexander F.C. Webster, *The Pacifist Option: The Moral Argument against War in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, Bethesda, Md.: International Scholars (1998), 86-87.

<sup>25</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, citing Oikonomides, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 39.

Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that the only acceptable 'holy war' would have been the spiritual struggle exemplified by the monks.<sup>28</sup> The phrase 'holy war' in Byzantine writings only refers to ancient Greek battles centred on Delphi.<sup>29</sup>

Dennis's last objection is not valid: Kolia-Dermitzaki demonstrates that the term 'holy war' is sometimes found in this sense – and yet it is similarly rare in medieval Latin or Arabic, but is a term from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century German poetry.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, we may reasonably suspect values dissonance in Byzantine theology and politics (2.2.3.1). As for Jerusalem, the Byzantines regarded Constantinople, the Christian and Roman capital, as the new holy city replacing Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> Their relative lack of interest in Palestine is better explained by this theological shift, and does not indicate either way what their views were on holy war.

From hints in Byzantine tactical manuals Dennis gleans a theological and a practical objection to war: it was 'evil and the greatest of evils', and on the other hand 'both hazardous and expensive'.<sup>32</sup> Leo VI refers to all men as in the image of God and insists that war must be defensive.<sup>33</sup> For Dennis, both *jihad* and crusade were aggressive, whereas even Byzantine offensive war was aimed at restoring what was 'rightfully' their territory.<sup>34</sup> Dennis claims that because of the Byzantines' theological objection to war, they had to justify any decision for war. This makes them by definition "just" wars:

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<sup>27</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 33-34.

<sup>28</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>29</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>30</sup> Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War' Twenty Years Later", 124-7.

<sup>31</sup> Penelope Buckley, 'Alexios Komnenos as the Last Constantine', 189-203 of Geoffrey Nathan and Lynda Garland (eds.), *Basileia: Essays on Imperium and Culture*, 202: 'Constantine himself had founded the new Rome and constructed a New Jerusalem "facing the famous Jerusalem of old".' citing *Vita Constantini* 3.33.1.

<sup>32</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 37, citing Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 37, citing Leo VI, *Taktika* 2.46 [sic – 2.31].

<sup>34</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 38.

The Byzantines believed that war was neither good nor holy, but was evil and could be justified only in certain conditions that centered on the defense of the empire and its faith.<sup>35</sup>

He concludes that all Byzantine wars were imperial, defensive and “just”.

### 2.1.3 Third Position: No Holy Wars, No Just Wars

Orthodox theologians, such as Perry Hamalis,<sup>36</sup> Stanley Harakas<sup>37</sup> and John McGuckin,<sup>38</sup> agree with Dennis that for the Orthodox church war is ‘evil and the greatest of evils’. So, spiritual warfare within the self ‘is the only legitimate “holy war”’.<sup>39</sup> Hamalis stresses the church’s normative ideal of authentic peace, with the consequence, ‘The Orthodox church never endorsed or practiced “crusades”’.<sup>40</sup>

The theological objection to holy war also makes Orthodox theologians averse to just war. An encyclopedia article must be brief, but this is a striking elision of 1,605 years of history:

Strictly speaking, the Orthodox church is not “pacifist” because, during the reign of the Emperor Constantine *and, subsequently, in other predominantly Orthodox nations*, military service by Christians *became necessary*...<sup>41</sup>

Having mentioned the necessity of war, Hamalis mitigates this necessity in three ways. First, he points to a canonical ban on clergy and monks serving in the army. Second, he claims that

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<sup>35</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 39. See also Koder and Stouraitis, ‘Byzantine Approaches to Warfare’, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley S. Harakas, ‘No Just War in the Fathers’, <http://incommunion.org/2005/08/02/no-just-war-in-the-fathers/> (no pages).

<sup>38</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, ‘Nonviolence and Peace Traditions in Early and Eastern Christianity’, <http://incommunion.org/2004/12/29/nonviolence-and-peace-traditions/> (no pages); Webster, *Pacifist Option*.

<sup>39</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 626.

<sup>40</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 627, citing Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 627 (my emphasis). I calculate from the Edict of Milan to the October Revolution in Russia. Other dates could be argued to the same effect.

Orthodox sensibilities gave Byzantine military practices a ‘pro-peace bias’.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, he rules out Western just war theory as ‘incompatible with both the spirit and substance of most Orthodox sources’. This incompatibility lies in the formal criteria used to justify wars, ‘which can easily be preempted by those in power’, and in “just war” theory’s alleged failure to call wars tragic and an occasion for repentance.<sup>43</sup>

Hamalis identifies the opinion that war is always evil, as held by Harakas, as the mainstream within Orthodoxy. The dissenting opinion, put by Alexander Webster, is that war may be a ‘lesser good’.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.1.3.1 *Stanley Harakas*

Harakas is an eminent Orthodox ethicist. He believes that it is better to speak of the Orthodox church’s broader teaching on peace rather than on war, because peace means much more than the absence of war. There is far more patristic discussion of peace than of war or military service. A distinctive emphasis of the patristic teaching is on peace as a personal spiritual phenomenon, ‘avoiding the turbulence of the passions’ in a spiritual sense that goes beyond the antecedent Greek concept *ataraxis*.<sup>45</sup> This personal spiritual peace has social and moral implications. Peace is closely related to love.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore a normative ideal for Christian ethics.

Harakas adduces evidence from Clement, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Origen, Lactantius, Eusebius and Chrysostom to demonstrate a ‘pro-peace stance’ in the Fathers. He

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<sup>42</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 627, citing Miller and Nesbitt. I examine forms of these claims in 2.2.22.2 below.

<sup>43</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 627.

<sup>44</sup> Hamalis, ‘War’, 627.

<sup>45</sup> Harakas, ‘The Teaching of Peace’, citing Basil of Caesarea, *Hom. on Pss. 29; 28; 33*; Origen, *Comm. on John* 6 1.

<sup>46</sup> Harakas, ‘The Teaching of Peace’, citing Chrysostom, *Hom. on Eph. 24.23*.

agrees that it is overly simplistic to say that the early Church was pacifist.<sup>47</sup> Yet he contends that the bias for peace continued even after Constantine.

Harakas finds no just war reasoning in the Greek Fathers or the Orthodox canonical tradition.

There are very few Fathers who write on war after the fourth century. He does find a consistent 'negative moral assessment of war' with an 'admission that war may be necessary'.

He concludes, 'war nevertheless remains an evil. Virtually absent in the tradition is any mention of a "just" war, much less a "good" war. The tradition also precludes the possibility of a crusade'.<sup>48</sup>

Harakas asserts a difference between East and West in their approach to the military. East and West share a peace emphasis in church liturgy and bans on the clergy taking part in war. He notes that the ban on clergy serving in the military – the 'stratification of pacifism' – leaves the problem of how lay people ought to handle involvement in war.<sup>49</sup> But Harakas claims that Western just war enhances war into a positive virtue, whereas in the East it remains a necessary evil.<sup>50</sup> He bases this on Basil of Caesarea.<sup>51</sup> He then makes the further claim that, rather than only the church hierarchy viewing war as a necessary evil, 'this view is characteristic of Byzantine society, even the military establishment'.<sup>52</sup> Having repudiated just

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<sup>47</sup> Following J. Helgeland, R.J. Daly, J.P. Burns, *Christians and the Military* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985)

<sup>48</sup> Harakas, 'No Just War in the Fathers', n.p.

<sup>49</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np.

<sup>50</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np.

<sup>51</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np., citing Basil of Caesarea, *Canonical Epistles*, Ep 13.

<sup>52</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np., citing 'Der Byzantiner Anonymus Kriegswissenschaft', in vol. 2 of H. Koechly and W. Rustow (eds.), *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*, Leipzig (1855), 56; *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, George T. Dennis (ed.) trans. E. Gamillscheg, Vienna (1981); *The Strategikon of Maurice*, trans. George T. Dennis, Philadelphia.: University of Pennsylvania (nd); Walter Emil Kaegi, Jr., *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, *Hellenic Studies Lecture* 1983, Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, (1983), 8-10.

war, Harakas dismisses holy war as an aberration: '[W]ith the possible exception of Heraclius' Persian campaign... crusades were noticeably absent from Byzantine imperial military policy.'<sup>53</sup>

Harakas concludes,

Thus in a strict sense [the East] cannot speak of a "good war", or even a "just war."<sup>54</sup>

Harakas's and Hamalis's arguments are the same. The mainstream of Eastern Orthodoxy see pacifism as a generally unrealisable ideal. Due to this ideal, war cannot quite be just, not at all good, and certainly not holy.

### 2.1.3.2 *Alexander Webster*

Alexander Webster is an Orthodox ethicist and army chaplain who has published extensively on war in Orthodox ethics. Webster differs from Harakas in accepting what he calls 'justifiable war' as a normative ideal.<sup>55,56</sup> Webster accepts both pacifism and justifiable war (the 'mainstream') as revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church through the centuries. For Orthodox moral agents they are norms, which require obedience. Yet the two approaches are *antinomical* – they disagree on the fundamental approach to war and peace, so cannot be systematized together. They can seldom both be obeyed at the same time.<sup>57</sup>

For Webster, holy war 'is problematic from an Orthodox historical or moral perspective'.<sup>58</sup> He engages with holy war at much greater length than most contemporary Orthodox theologians,

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<sup>53</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np.

<sup>54</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np.

<sup>55</sup> Webster, *The Price of Prophecy: Orthodox Churches on Peace, Freedom and Security* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 21-22.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander F.C. Webster and Darrell Cole, *The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West*, (Salisbury, Mass.: Regina Orthodox, 2004.).

<sup>57</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 21, 59-60.

<sup>58</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 83.

and treats it in the context of 'justifiable war' and pacifism.<sup>59</sup> The difference between holy war and just war is 'explicitly religious content and lack of reasonable restraint', but the lack of restraint dominates the religious content: 'In short, "holy war entails a religious extremism knowing no bounds on either means or ends[...] [O]pponents [...] tend to regard each other as cosmic enemies with whom compromise is impossible" ' .<sup>60</sup>

Webster claims, 'Although the history of Eastern Orthodoxy is checkered in this respect, it is safe to discard the holy war trajectory as non-normative in Orthodox moral tradition'.<sup>61</sup> He then briefly discusses eleven separate dated items, many of them examples of more general trends and tendencies. The trajectory begins with Constantine and Eusebius and stretches through Theodosius and 'the entire reign' of Justinian to the Russian front of the Second World War.<sup>62</sup> Yet Webster feels that he can claim, 'The *few* examples cited above are, however, the *exceptions* that prove the rule'.<sup>63</sup> He denies holy war as anything but 'sporadic', 'rare', 'isolated', and 'occasional'.

Webster finds holy war problematic because under the definition he uses it is excessively violent. He claims that it is discontinuous, but he cites a great range of incidents, often of very good pedigree. If he were to use a lower threshold to define excess violence, the tradition of such violence would appear even more continuous than it already does. Extremism and continuity are both a matter of degree.

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<sup>59</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, especially 82-89. The tripartite division comes from Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-Evaluation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1960), 13-15.

<sup>60</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 83, quoting David Little, "'Holy War" Appeals and Western Christianity: A Reconstruction of Bainton's Approach', in John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds.), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theological Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1991), 122.

<sup>61</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 84-86.

<sup>63</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, my emphasis.

Webster appeals to Oikonomides and Dennis to support his denial, using the arguments Harakas used to rule out just war: that killing was always seen as evil and never blessed, and that war was a great evil. Consequently Byzantine wars, though they had many religious elements, never ‘degenerated’ into holy war.<sup>64,65</sup> He approves Laiou’s argument from legitimate authority (that having an emperor precluded the Eastern church from declaring a holy war), although it cannot speak to his case, as his preferred definition of holy war does not mention authority.<sup>66</sup> On this authority Webster claims that holy war lacks ‘historical and theological consistency’ and thus rules out holy war as a viable moral option.<sup>67</sup> Webster picks and chooses from at least three different – at points conflicting – definitions in order to reach this conclusion.

#### 2.1.4 Conclusion

The three recognized positions on Byzantine wars are: that they were all holy wars because of their religious elements (2.1.1); that they were all just wars because of their classical heritage and “peace” ideology (2.1.2); and that they were merely a necessary evil, neither holy nor just (2.1.3). The first and second positions largely differ on terms. They agree on religious elements being involved in Byzantine warfare. They disagree on whether this religious involvement warrants the label ‘holy war’. **The Orthodox claim that war was *always* by nature evil in Byzantine thought drives the definitional change from the first to the second position (because *all* Byzantine wars needed to be justified) and from the second to the third (because *no* war could ever be fully justified for Byzantines).**

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<sup>64</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, citing Oikonomides, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, citing George T. Dennis (ed.), *Three Byzantine Military Treatises, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 25, *Dumbarton Oaks Texts* 9, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, (1985), 21; Maurice’s *Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis, Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania (1984), xiv.

<sup>66</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86-87, citing Angeliki Laiou, ‘On Just War in Byzantium’, 170.

<sup>67</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 87, original emphasis.



None of the three positions admit much variation, because of the same strong claim. The logic that takes a thinker from one position to the next applies in the abstract – it is not dependent on concrete specifics. Because of this widely held operating assumption, all the headings of this subsection could be rewritten in the form, ‘All Byzantine wars were...’

The evidence for this crucial claim is examined more closely in the next section.

## 2.2 Testing the mainstream Orthodox case

The previous section concluded that the assumption, shared between theologians and historians, that war was always by nature evil in Byzantine thought, is crucial for the shape of academic opinion on how the Byzantines thought about war, just war and holy war. In this section we examine the evidence for this claim. Even Orthodox theologians differ on its details – Webster is closer to the secular historians’ viewpoint, seeing war as able to be a lesser good, but he appears to have moved in that direction over his career. He is able to uphold just war and no war as simultaneous moral norms only due to his antinomical approach. I will concentrate on the case supporting the claim made by Harakas (see 2.1.3.1 above), with reference to other scholars as applicable.

Harakas’s case against war rests on three areas of evidence: a single patristic citation (Basil’s 13<sup>th</sup> Canonical letter); the canonical ban on clergy enlistment; and the ethos of Byzantine military writers.<sup>68</sup> It is largely an argument from silence: having established the pro-peace credentials of the pre-Constantinian Fathers and dismissed one saying of Origen and some of Eusebius as ‘not in the mainstream on this issue’, Harakas can only quote Basil of Caesarea. Basil interprets and applies just one saying of Athanasius. Harakas points to the ban on clergy warring but ignores the sacralisation of Byzantine warfare entirely. Finally his reading of the

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<sup>68</sup> Harakas, ‘The Teaching of Peace’, np.

Byzantine military manuals is questionable. This examination will therefore raise doubts about the overall claim.

## 2.2.1 The Greek Fathers

### 2.2.1.1 *An argument from relative silence*

Harakas demonstrates a pacifistic tendency, a ‘pro-peace bias’, in the Fathers through a wide range of patristic citations. But Greek patristic commentary on war dries up rapidly over the fourth century. Harakas quotes John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus on peace more broadly, but on war he can only refer to Basil the Great and an oblique saying of Athanasius. He admits that the Greek Fathers generally did not consider just war issues – he notes Louis Swift’s summary that they ‘were never serious topics of interest in the minds of eastern writers’.<sup>69</sup> Harakas argues that this silence is best explained by a positive reason, that the East held a darker view of war and no conditions or conduct would make it correct. This is still an argument from silence. Swift’s explanation for this is simpler, and others could be advanced. So the silence itself is not proof for an ‘Orthodox view on war’.

### 2.2.1.2 *The Canonical letter of Basil of Caesarea*

Basil’s canonical letter to Amphilochius reads:

Τοὺς ἐν πολέμοις φόνους οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν ἐν τοῖς φόνοις οὐκ ἐλογίσαντο, ἐμοὶ  
δοκεῖν, συγγνώμην δόντες τοῖς ὑπὲρ σωφροσύνης καὶ εὐσεβείας ἀμυνομένοις. Τάχα  
δὲ καλῶς ἔχει συμβουλεύειν, ὡς τὰς χεῖρας μὴ καθαρούς, τριῶν ἐτῶν τῆς κοινωνίας  
μόνης ἀπέχεσθαι.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, *Message of the fathers of the church* Vol.19 (Glazier, 1983), 96, cited in Harakas, ‘The Teaching of Peace’, n.p.

<sup>70</sup> Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 188, Canon 13; *Collected Letters* 3, *Loeb Classical Library* (New York:Loeb, 1930), 42,44. Harakas cites *The Rudder* (Chicago, Ill.: Orthodox Christian Education Society, 1957), 801: ‘Our Fathers did not consider murders committed in the course of wars to be classifiable as murders at all, on the score, it seems to me, of allowing a pardon to men fighting in defence of sobriety and piety.’

Basil assumes that killing defiles the killer – hence the ban on communicating for three years. Harakas takes this as a clear statement that war is always evil, based on his understanding of the principles underlying Basil’s logic. But Harakas argues first that Basil sees this as an example of involuntary sin, and second that he sees it as ‘less of an evil than a face-to-face killing between non-military persons, albeit involuntary’, based on the disparity in penitential terms with Canon 12. First, Harakas is wrong about the ‘voluntary’ aspect. Basil explores the ways a killing might be involuntary in Canon 8, working through Aristotle’s logic.<sup>71</sup> He then comes to cases ‘entirely voluntary and admitting of no doubt... for instance... the attacks of soldiers’.<sup>72</sup> The difference in sentence between killing in wartime and assault occasioning death is not about the will.

We must posit another principle for Basil to be working with. It seems possible to say that while *killing* is morally polluting, their *good intent* provides a mitigating excuse to those fighting. Basil’s expression, ‘in defence of sobriety and piety,’ ὑπὲρ σωφροσύνης καὶ εὐσεβείας, seems at a minimum to allude to ἀταραξία – in peace, people are free to live sober and pious lives. Maximally, it could be roughly equivalent to a just war ‘for peace’. The difference between Basil and Augustine would then be only that one emphasizes internal, personal peace, and the other external, social peace. This saying of Basil, then, may even mean that while *killing* is always defiling, just *wars* can be good enough to excuse this somewhat. This would be the exact opposite of Harakas’s reading.

It is the church’s later use of this passage that makes it ‘the *locus classicus* illustrating this view’.<sup>73</sup> The canon gave the synod of Constantinople a proof text to refuse Nicephorus Phocas when he wished to reckon soldiers as martyrs. Their reasoning was based on the detail of the

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Perhaps, though it might be advisable to refuse them communion for three years, on the ground that they are not clean handed.’

<sup>71</sup> Basil, *Loeb* edition, 30 note 2, citing Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1.

<sup>72</sup> Basil Letter 188 Canon 8, *Loeb* translation 33, Greek text 32:

<sup>73</sup> Harakas, ‘The Teaching on Peace’, n.p.

soldiers' hands being unclean. But prior to his reign, this canon 'was little regarded, as being contrary to general Christian sentiment. The mediaeval jurists remark that Basil 'gives advice, not directions, and regards the hands, not the hearts, of soldiers as defiled'.<sup>74</sup> Historian Paul Stephenson, in describing the worship life of soldiers in camp, notes : 'There is no suggestion that those who had killed in battle would be denied communion, still less for three years...'<sup>75</sup>. The period from Basil to Nicephorus Phocas extends across four centuries. If the evolving tradition of the church is the progressively revealed mind of the Holy Spirit, that is not necessarily a problem, and the synod has provided the correct reading, and the correct view to be held in the fifth or the seventh centuries. But for secular historians, or Anglicans, Basil's letter is very slender evidence.

Basil does not attest to a general Christian sentiment against *war* – though he certainly abhors *killing* in itself. This was Harakas's strongest example of the supposed general Orthodox principle in action. Its failure casts doubt on his case that war was universally morally abhorred.

### 2.2.1.3 John Chrysostom on War and on Virtue

Hamalis cites another Father, John Chrysostom. Chrysostom says that there are three 'very grievous' kinds of war, which I will call international, interpersonal and internal, and 'worst of all' is the internal.<sup>76</sup> What does this ranking imply about the Byzantine view of the *least* 'grievous' kind of war? In a homily on Matthew, Chrysostom sets forth sins typical of different classes of people. He begins with soldiers: 'What sin then do not these commit every day?'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Schaff, NPNF2:228 note 2646.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Stephenson, 'Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers and the Possibility of Martyrdom, c. 400 - c. 1000', 25-46 in Sohail M. Hashmi (eds.), *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges*, Oxford: University Press, 2012, 28, citing George T. Dennis, 'Religious Services in the Byzantine Army', 107-117 in Ephrem Carr et. al., eds., *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ* (Rome: Editrice Anselmiana, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> Hamalis, 'War', 626, citing John Chrysostom, *Hom. 7 on 1 Tim.*

<sup>77</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. 41 on Matt.*

The list of sins *typical of soldiers*, however, does not include violence, but eleven other sins. His central, summative assessment is that soldiers are troubled by passions. Soldiers are seldom at peace, but this is an internal matter, not about their external profession. Indeed, he says these things,

... not blaming [...] military service, but ourselves. Since Cornelius also was a centurion [...] and there was no hindrance hereby [...] in the way of virtue.<sup>78</sup>

For Chrysostom, war was a lesser evil. He makes no mention of international war in attacking the sin of soldiers in his congregation. Chrysostom's silence in this context goes against Harakas's case, not for it. Rather, he preaches that soldiering is not a hindrance in the way of virtue.

## 2.2.2 'The Stratification of Pacifism'

The second pillar of Harakas's case is the ban on clergy and monks serving in the military, what he calls the 'stratification of pacifism'.<sup>79</sup> But this may not have functioned in the way he thinks it did.

Harakas claims the ban on clergy serving in the military demonstrates that the Orthodox church viewed pacifism as the ideal:

[T]he Church preserved in its clergy an ideal standard that it somehow could not demand of its laity. I called this the "stratification of pacifism" in the Church. Clergy were to function as pacifists, uninvolved in any military activity, even *prohibited from entering military camps*.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. 41 on Matt.*

<sup>79</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', np.

<sup>80</sup> Harakas, 'No Just War in the Fathers', n.p., my emphasis.

Yet priests *did* enter military camps – Harakas is factually wrong here. Chaplains accompanied Byzantine armies, saying daily prayers and sharing the eucharist before battle.<sup>81</sup> The canonical ban did not operate in the way Harakas claims, so it may not have communicated pacifism in the way he claims, either. Even if pacifism is held up as the ideal, that would not necessarily communicate that the ordinary lay life was wrong, but merely less good. For example, even if celibacy is ‘better’, marriage is not sinful for a lay couple.

Other principles could be read into the canon law by Byzantines. Canon law forbade priests from getting involved with worldly affairs. But most of the canons are aimed at business involvement, which was not necessarily about moral pollution: while immoral business practices may have been a concern, all business involvement is ruled out. This suggests that the core idea was practical, not moral or ritual, to avoid distraction from more important spiritual duties. Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council combines the ban on government and military service<sup>82</sup> – nothing it says suggests pacifism. The exclusion of clergy and monks from the army may also reflect separation from the other direction – there was a ‘clear distinction between soldier and civilian in early Byzantium’.<sup>83</sup> Pacifism is not the only concern, so perhaps at times it was not the main concern – although the argument against Nicephorus II Phocas in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century (as in section 2.2.1.2) again encourages us to see holiness in retrospect.

Nor can we say certainly how closely the canons were followed in all areas and all eras. Long after Nicephorus II, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Greek uprising, priests left their churches to join the

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<sup>81</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 34-35; Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86. See 2.5.1 below.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Harakas, ‘The Teaching of Peace’, n.p.

<sup>83</sup> Christos G. Makrypoulias, ‘Civilians as Combatants in Byzantium: Ideological versus Practical Considerations’, 109-120 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 109.

rebels.<sup>84</sup> In our period of interest there are several incidents in the classicizing history of Procopius where religious persons, not in military service, are involved in mortal combat. In AD 502 the Persians captured Amida when some monks on sentry duty fell asleep.<sup>85</sup> The monks were assigned a tower 'by lot' – they appear to have been eligible for the same emergency militia service as the other residents.<sup>86</sup> In Africa ca 540, the Moors captured Hadrumentum. A priest, Paulus, got out, begged a company of eighty soldiers from the governor, got back inside and 'he slew all the enemy'.<sup>87</sup> Paulus takes the initiative, organizes and leads the killing. The letters of Synesius, bishop of Cyrene in AD 400, show that he hired and outfitted a group of locals to protect the city from Berber raids.<sup>88</sup> He is warned about legal trouble, not that his conduct is unbecoming a bishop, but a civilian. Incidents and persons such as these, though they may be exceptional, suggest that the 'stratification' was not always firmly observed and enforced.

Harakas claims that the 'stratification of pacifism' preserves and demonstrates the peace ideal of the church. The claim depends on the stratification communicating pacifism even as priests celebrate communion in military camps. It depends on pacifism being understood as not merely the best but the only morally right way. It depends on the canons being understood to be about moral pollution, though they have various parallels that have no such connotations. And it depends on the ban being observed and enforced, as universally and firmly as Harakas expresses the supposed underlying ideal. All of these are called into question by the primary evidence.

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<sup>84</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, citing Charles Frazee, 'Church and State in Greece', in John T. A. Koumoulides (ed.), *Greece in Transition: Essays in the History of Modern Greece 1821-1974* (London: Zeno Booksellers, 1977), 130.

<sup>85</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars* 1.7.22.

<sup>86</sup> For civilian defence of city walls, see Makrypoulias, 111, 113.

<sup>87</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars* 4.23.18-29.

<sup>88</sup> Makrypoulias, 112-13, 119.

### 2.2.3 Military Manuals

Recall that these arguments are not trying to show one strand of thinking, as Harakas shows for pacifism. Harakas wishes to demonstrate that the “pro-peace” ethic was comprehensive, held across Byzantine society. But as with the Greek Fathers, the argument is made from short, scattered pieces of evidence. Dennis reminds us: ‘No Byzantine treatise on the ideology of war, whether a holy or a just war, has come down to us, and it is unlikely that any was ever written. One must glean what one can from the military manuals and the histories’. In support of his universal view, Harakas can only cite two military manuals. Webster follows Harakas (in following Dennis) to argue from an anonymous military manual, ‘The Byzantines maintained a proper perspective on war as something *unholy*’.<sup>89</sup> Dennis extends this examination to Anna Comnene and Leo’s *Taktika* – but the texts do not support a reading of war as only a necessary evil.

#### 2.2.3.1 The Anonymous Manual

Following Dennis, Harakas reads the anonymous manual to say that, ‘war is acknowledged to be “the greatest of evils”, though *often necessary*’:<sup>90</sup>

I know well that war is a great evil, even the greatest of evils, but because enemies shed our blood in fulfilment of an incitement of law and valour, and because it is *wholly necessary for each man* to defend his own fatherland and his fellow countrymen with words, writings, and acts, we have decided to write about strategy, through which we shall be able not only to fight but to overcome the enemy.<sup>91</sup>

This is an acknowledgement at best, perhaps only a concession – not a declaration. The author gives two reasons for writing: ‘but because... and because...’ First, bloodshed incites two

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<sup>89</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, original emphasis.

<sup>90</sup> Harakas, ‘The Teaching on Peace in the Fathers’, n.p., my emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> ‘*Der Byzantiner Kriegswissenschaft*,’ 4.2 in *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*, ed. H. Koechly and W. Rustow. Leipzig, 1855, vol. 2, p. 56, cited in Harakas, ‘Teaching on Peace’, n.p., my emphasis.



positives, 'law and valour'. Fighting against this evil is not only lawful but also valorous. It may be done and ought to be done well. *Contra* Harakas, defence is not described as 'often necessary' but as close to universal, '*wholly necessary for each man*'.<sup>92</sup> The text is the writer's own discharge of what is necessary to each man. The concession may be mere lip-service, paid to a view that may be commonly heard from the church, but is less likely to be 'characteristic of [...] the military establishment'. Koder by contrast reads this as 'entrench[ing] the legitimacy of warfare as a means of politics'.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.2.3.2 *Maurice's Strategikon*

Dennis finds in the anonymous manual, and extrapolates from it, a general tendency to avoid war, and in war to avoid battle. Harakas links this to the slightly later *Strategikon* of Maurice. Harakas claims that the *Strategikon* 'shows that every means possible was used to avoid open warfare,' quoting Kaegi:

The object of warfare is the defeat and disruption, not *necessarily* the slaughter, of the enemy. In fact, the author of the *Strategikon* counsels against using the technique of encirclement because it would encourage the enemy to remain and to *risk* battle [...] which would be costly in casualties *to the encircling party*. There is no more eloquent testimony to the desire to avoid decisive battle.<sup>94</sup>

Harakas argues that this reflects Eastern 'pro-peace' theology,<sup>95</sup> but morality is not where Kaegi's analysis points. Battle was avoided because it was inherently risky: not out of care for the other, but safety and thrift. The precepts on maximising gains while minimising fighting are part of the continuity between Byzantine manuals and their Hellenistic and Roman

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<sup>92</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>93</sup> Stouraitis, 'Anna Comnena's Alexiad', 71.

<sup>94</sup> Kaegi, *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, , 8, my emphasis.

<sup>95</sup> Harakas, 'The Teaching of Peace', n.p.

exemplars.<sup>96</sup> Alarming similar advice can be found in Sun Tzu, as 'the art of *offensive* strategy'.<sup>97</sup>

'Little or nothing' of this aspect of Byzantine military practice is attributable to Orthodox pacifism.<sup>98</sup> It is classical, 'fully in the Roman tradition',<sup>99</sup> and paralleled in other non-Christian cultures. It is not evidence for the unitary 'Orthodox view' that Harakas seeks to demonstrate, of war as a necessary evil.

### 2.2.3.3 *Leo's Taktika*

In fact, Dennis's third military manual demonstrates the opposite view. From the *Taktika*, he argues that war *needed* to be justified, but the passage states simply that defensive war *is* justified, δικαίως αἰτίας προκειμένης. It should be taken up confidently, θαρσαλέως, and with eagerness, σὺν προθυμίᾳ – and God will help:

τότε ἄρα δικαίως αἰτίας προκειμένης ὥς καὶ ἀδίκου πολέμου παρὰ τῶν ἐναντίων  
ἀπαρχομένου, θαρσαλέως καὶ σὺν προθυμίᾳ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῶν ἐγχείρει πολέμου καὶ  
τὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης Θεὸν ἔξεις βοηθόν<sup>100</sup>

This is hardly proof that war was always evil for Leo VI. Defensive warfare (including reconquest of old "Roman" territory) was the usual Byzantine mode (2.1.2). It was always just, which was Leo's preference: 'It seems good to me for justice to be the origin of war. For the one resisting wrongdoers, he is just and has the divine righteousness as both his assistant and

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<sup>96</sup> Kaegi, *Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford: University Press (1963), 109-110, my emphasis.

<sup>98</sup> Koder and Stouraitis, 'Byzantine Approaches to Warfare', 10 with references given in notes 8 (on diplomacy), 9 (on ideology and economic reasons) and 10 (for a general overview).

<sup>99</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>100</sup> Leo VI, *Taktika* (TLG 2944.007) 2.31 2-6, cited (as 2.46) in Dennis's translation ('Defenders of the Christian People', 39): 'Then you do indeed have a just cause, inasmuch as the enemy has started an unjust war. With confidence and enthusiasm take up arms against them... You will have the God of justice on your side'.

ally as he marches out against the unjust/wicked'.<sup>101</sup> Although Dennis and Webster recognize just war to a degree, Harakas's contends that war *could not* be called just. The church may have thought so – the emperor Leo did not.

To attempt to justify the 'necessary evil' claim produces a strained reading of the manuals. The evidence is not convincing.

#### 2.2.4 Conclusion

I have shown in this section that the historical evidence for the 'necessary evil' claim is questionable at best, and at worst contradicts it. The items of evidence gain strength from the claim rather than supporting it. Taken singly, they are not plausible.

If the theological objection to Byzantine just war has a poor basis, then this casts doubt on the blanket objection to holy wars by *e.g.* Oikonomides and Dennis (see 2.1.2). The claim on the nature of war in Byzantium is slightly circular: Theologians cite historians as their authorities on what should be a subtle distinction in theology, between just and justifiable war.<sup>102</sup>

Stouraitis doesn't see the claim demonstrated in the military manuals, yet he takes Orthodox theologians at face value when he says, 'In Byzantine mentality, warfare even when it was defensive and just, remained from a religious point of view a sinful situation and could not be understood as a means to salvation.'<sup>103</sup>

The claim that war was always only evil inexorably drives scholars away from holy war, and admits little variation in ideology. If the conclusion is questionable, then it is not universally

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<sup>101</sup> My translation of Leo VI, *Taktika* 20.58 2-6, Καλόν μοι δοκεῖ δικαίαν εἶναι τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ πολέμου. ὁ γὰρ τοῖς ἀδικήσασιν ἀνταμυνόμενος οὗτος δίκαιός ἐστιν καὶ τὴν θεῖαν ἔχει δικαιοσύνην βοηθόν τε καὶ σύμμαχον κατὰ τῶν ἀδίκων ἐκστρατευόμενος.

<sup>102</sup> For Hamalis citing Dennis, Hamalis, 'War', 626; For Patitsas citing Luttwak, Timothy Patitsas, 'The Opposite Of War Is Not Peace: Healing Trauma in The Iliad and in Orthodox Tradition', 26-51 in *Road to Emmaus* 14:1 (Jan 2013), 27-28.

<sup>103</sup> Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 12.

applicable. If war is not always evil, if it can be just, then perhaps it may sometimes be holy. I now consider such a position.

## 2.3 A New Position: Some Holy Wars, All Just Wars

Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki encountered in the secondary literature all three positions discussed in 2.1 above when, researching Byzantine attitudes to the Crusaders, she sought to describe the Byzantine attitude to holy war.<sup>104,105</sup>

Those arguing that Byzantium's wars were not holy wars tended to point to certain features of the Crusades in particular: for example, the Eastern church did not mobilize armies, and Byzantium's enemies were despised as "barbarians", not "infidels".<sup>106</sup> Yet crusading had an ideology and practices specific to its own culture, customs and political origin in the mediaeval West, not Byzantium. *Jihad* differs from the Crusades, as its milieu differed from the West, yet it may be called holy war. Kolia-Dermitzaki considered the characteristics of Byzantine offensive wars against infidels between 312 and 1204, and compared these to both Crusades and *jihad* instead of the Crusades only.

Kolia-Dermitzaki concludes that Byzantium fought a series of offensive wars with a common emphasis on the religious element: non-Christian adversaries, guilty of some previous injustice such as persecuting Christians, oppressing the Church or destroying churches, were to be driven out of the "Roman" lands they occupied.<sup>107</sup> The emperor was duty-bound, as God's chosen representative, to protect Christians, restore the religion and restore Christian *imperium*. Reconquest and restoration of the empire's borders 'was deeply rooted in

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<sup>104</sup> Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War' Twenty Years Later', 122, citing views from 1936 to 1955.

<sup>105</sup> Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, *'O Byzantinós Ierós Pólemos (The Byzantine "Holy War": The Idea and Propagation of Religious War in Byzantium)*, History Monographs 10 (Athens: S.D. Basilopoulos, 1991), 394.

<sup>106</sup> Although 'barbarian' is sometimes contrasted with 'believer' – see e.g. Theodora Papadopoulou, 'Niketas Choniates and the image of the enemy after the Latin capture of Constantinople', 87-97 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 89-90.

<sup>107</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 401.

Byzantine conscience'.<sup>108</sup> God was thought to command and help the army. The Byzantines were the chosen people of God, their leaders compared to OT military leaders. Sometimes the state assured soldiers of salvation. This was supplemented by praying, fasting and communion on the eve of battle.<sup>109</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki finds many Byzantine wars with some of the features, but 'the proclamation of the religious element' occurred when most or all were present.<sup>110</sup> She called these wars the Byzantine "holy war".

This kind of "holy war" and the Crusades had similar aims (though the Byzantines were more explicit in aiming to expand their rule over the *oecumene*).<sup>111</sup> Other common features were: Christian symbols, especially the cross at the head of the army, priests accompanying and leading the soldiers in the liturgy. Christians were seen as the people of God and God was the "commander" – the war was proclaimed after a divine command. The two kinds of war differ in that the state proclaimed a "holy war" in the East, while the church proclaimed Crusades, and that assurance of salvation for soldiers who died in battle was relatively muted. Assurance came sporadically, from the state and not the church –the church refused Nicephorus Phocas's request. Kolia-Dermitzaki suggests evidence that this might have been due to politics, not patristic tradition. The church had never condemned emperors for giving such assurances themselves.<sup>112</sup>

Kolia-Dermitzaki later restates her findings as four points:

- (a) The emperor was the authority who declared the war, as the political leader and at the same time God's chosen representative, responsible for his subjects' protection and the defence of the church and the Christian religion.

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<sup>108</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 402.

<sup>109</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 402.

<sup>110</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 402.

<sup>111</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 406.

<sup>112</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 407.

(b) The purpose was the protection of the Church and Christians, revenge for an insult to God or the recovery of lost Christian territory.

(c) Only the army, not the people, were summoned, but the morale of both was supported through propaganda means such as symbols on coins. As well as camp liturgy, soldiers were sometimes given assurances of salvation, usually by the state in the emperors' battlefield speeches.

(d) The Byzantines were God's "chosen people"; he was their "commander" who protected and led them as he had the Israelites.<sup>113</sup>

Kolia-Dermitzaki uses this four-part summary to distinguish particular Byzantine wars:

... only in case it shares all or almost all of the above-mentioned characteristics, otherwise one could argue that all the Byzantine wars should be considered as Holy.<sup>114</sup>

Kolia-Dermitzaki represents a mediating position between the researchers described in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 above. Her definition sets her apart from the first group in responding to the objections of the second. She does not consider all Byzantine wars holy wars – she only applies the label to those wars that meet her criteria. It is appropriate now to compare the conflicting definitions used by scholars.

## 2.4 Three Definitions

### 2.4.1 Webster

Webster uses four criteria to differentiate holy war from just war:

(1) religious motivation as the justification for military action

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<sup>113</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, "Holy War" Twenty Years Later', 122.

<sup>114</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, "Holy War" Twenty Years Later', 122.

- (2) the soldier's task is esteemed often to the point of effecting 'extrinsic religious rewards'
- (3) an erosion of restraints against hostility toward the enemy and
- (4) an absolutist spirit that mitigates discriminating judgments about involvement in and conduct of war.<sup>115</sup>

Recall that for Webster the lack of restraint, (3) and (4), dominates the religious content, (1) and (2).<sup>116</sup> For example, he says of the Second Serbian Insurrection, 'the excesses of extreme religiously-motivated and/or nationally-motivated violence *alone* would appear to relegate this revolt [...] to the [...] category of holy war'.<sup>117</sup> Taking him literally, whether violence is religious or nationalist, if it is extreme, it is holy war. This is the corollary of his claim that all three types of war can be grounded in religious *as well as secular* thought and experience.<sup>118</sup> William Cavanaugh picks apart this 'myth of religious violence' as a powerful construct legitimating the secular nation-state's 'monopoly on its citizens' willingness to sacrifice and kill'.<sup>119</sup> We may take Webster with a grain of salt on this.

#### 2.4.2 Dennis

Dennis uses a three-part positive test to define a holy war:

A holy war has to be *declared by a competent religious authority*, the obvious examples being a Christian pope or a Muslim caliph. The *objective must be religious* [...] [such as] the protection or recovery of sacred shrines or the forced conversion or subjection of others[...] Finally, *those who participate* in the holy war are to be

<sup>115</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 83, citing Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., *War and Conscience in America* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1968), 22-47.

<sup>116</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 83.

<sup>117</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 287 note 82, my emphasis.

<sup>118</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 83, my emphasis.

<sup>119</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 4.

*promised a spiritual reward*, such as remission of their sins or assurance of a place in paradise.<sup>120</sup>

Dennis formulated this test in response to Kolia-Dermitzaki. He cites the work of Oikonomides and Laiou.<sup>121</sup> Kaegi quotes it to summarise ‘the working definition of holy war laid out by [...] Oikonomides, Dennis and Laiou’.<sup>122</sup> Webster and Hamalis both refer to Dennis.<sup>123</sup> This test seems to have become representative of the “All Just Wars” position (2.1.2 above).

Recall from (2.1.2) that Laiou’s main contention is expressed by the first criterion. She disputes that the emperor, who declared Byzantine wars, is a competent religious authority.

Dennis modulates the test in use. He stresses his second criterion so that it functions as a powerful negative test, as follows:

...we might ask: Are they fighting this war primarily for religious reasons? If little or no religious motivation were present, would they still be fighting?<sup>124</sup>

Dennis considers that the crusaders’ long, arduous, risky expeditions to the holy land were holy wars. He does not demonstrate it for *jihad*.<sup>125</sup> Dennis rejects Heraclius’ campaigns against the Persians, as imperial wars that would have been fought regardless of religion.<sup>126</sup> Dennis sets a very high bar.

#### 2.4.2.1 Aquinas

Dennis’s definition is very similar to Thomas Aquinas’ for just war:

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<sup>120</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 31 note 1; 32 note 4.

<sup>122</sup> Kaegi, ‘The Heraclians and Holy War’, 17-26 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*,

19.

<sup>123</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 288 note 91; Hamalis, ‘War’, 626.

<sup>124</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 34.

<sup>125</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 34.

<sup>126</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 34-35.



In order for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged...

Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault...

Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil... <sup>127</sup>

Essentially, Dennis has replaced 'political' with 'religious' in the first criterion, and 'just cause' with 'religious objectives' in the second. His third criterion addresses the intention of those who fight (spiritual rewards in this case), as does Thomas'.

#### 2.4.3 Kolia-Dermitzaki

Kolia-Dermitzaki's four criteria for Byzantine "holy war", as in 2.2.4 above, are:

- (a) *declared by the emperor* as the political authority;
- (b) *religious purpose*, to protect the Church and Christians, to avenge an insult to God, or to recover lost territory;
- (c) *religious moral support* of the people and the soldiers, sometimes involving spiritual assurance; and
- (d) *"chosen people" motif*, with God as "commander" and comparison to Israelites

Kolia-Dermitzaki's 'religious purpose' criterion, (b), is very close to Dennis's 'motivation' (2) and 'Webster's justification' (1). In practice, it will be difficult to separate purpose, motivation and justification in the historical record. Dennis has set his bar very high (see 2.4.2).

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.2, 40.1. Accessed online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3040.htm> on 25 June 2016.

Kolia-Dermitzaki's (c) corresponds roughly to Webster's (2) and closely to Dennis's (3).

Webster talks about extrinsic religious rewards being 'often effected', as an indication of how much soldiering in the war is esteemed. Dennis requires promises of spiritual rewards. He has chosen as the third criterion an aspect that Kolia-Dermitzaki found to be less emphasized in the Byzantine "holy war" tradition.<sup>128</sup> I stress 'chosen' and 'found'. Dennis seems to have designed his test in order to exclude Kolia-Dermitzaki's cases from consideration, which is to beg the question. I would be more sympathetic to his choice if, as Kolia-Dermitzaki tried to do, he had built his test from a comparison of the different traditions of Crusade, jihad, and war in Byzantium. He has instead retrofitted Aquinas.

Webster's (3) and (4) concerning extreme religious violence might relate back to the authority questions of Dennis's (1) and Kolia-Dermitzaki's (a). Below (2.5.2.2) I consider briefly how war aims may affect the conduct of war. The Byzantine emperor had specific responsibilities (alluded to by Kolia-Dermitzaki's 'purpose', (b)) which, when translated into specific war aims, may have affected the conduct of a holy war. This concern needs to be considered, as scholars sometimes mention peace treaties without explanation, as if they were evidence that a war was not "holy".<sup>129</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Conclusions

All three tests are different, and will identify slightly different sets of conflicts as holy wars. There are several definitional issues that this comparison raises which will need to be dealt with in the next section.

As I noted with respect to Webster (2.1.3.2), the existence of more than one definition of holy war can lead to confused arguments. The academic discussion around Kolia-Dermitzaki's

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<sup>128</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 407.

<sup>129</sup> See for example, Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 18-19, or Evangelos Chrysos, '1176 – A Byzantine Crusade?', 81-86 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 83.

dissertation has not produced one rule to satisfy all comers as yet. A case study may achieve two things: it may serve as an existence proof for Kolia-Dermitzaki's thesis; and it may test the tests, so that our definitions can have more definition.

#### 2.4.4.1 A Useful Case Study

All three scholars express an opinion on Heraclius' Persian campaigns, AD 622-30. Kolia-Dermitzaki found them to be a "holy war".<sup>130</sup> Webster admits them as a crusade, 'vengeful "holy war"'.<sup>131</sup> And Dennis rules them out.<sup>132</sup> This suggests that Heraclius makes a useful case study. Chapter Three looks at the primary sources for Heraclius' Persian campaigns to see if they constitute a holy war, and to see whether these definitions are useful in answering that question.

## 2.5 Definitional Issues

### 2.5.1 Sacralisation

The mainstream academic opinion of 2.1.2 rejects the label "holy" war while agreeing that Byzantine war 'was almost by definition of a religious character'.<sup>133</sup> Kaegi in his review of Kolia-Dermitzaki asked, 'Is it better to speak of religious war than holy war?'<sup>134</sup> The Byzantines had many religious elements present in the way they went to war. Kaegi refers to this as 'the sacralization of warfare'.<sup>135</sup> In this section I consider the effect of such sacralisation.

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<sup>130</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 169-83, cited in Walter E. Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War": The Idea and Propagation of Religious War in Byzantium*,' *Speculum* 69:2 (1994), 518-520, 519.

<sup>131</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 84.

<sup>132</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34-35

<sup>133</sup> John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), 32.

<sup>134</sup> Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*', 519.

<sup>135</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War,' 17-26 in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*.

### 2.5.1.1 Was Sacralisation Meaningful?

Dennis brackets out *all* the Byzantine sacralisation as not transforming wars being fought for non-religious motivation.<sup>136</sup> But for the individual soldier, Dennis's examples and the functions he assigns them (confidence, morale, comfort, preparation, assurance of protection and a reminder of who one is fighting for) are all very closely connected to motivation.

Dennis argues against any real significance for Byzantine religious expression on the basis of modern analogies, such as modern chaplains, athletes' prayers, and the three crosses on the Union Jack. But there is too much difference between Great Britain and Constantinople ca. 624. Indeed, Dennis's very next paragraph is about the great difference in the Byzantine worldview which saw the kingdom of heaven as the only permanent reality. The argument by analogy fails.

Timothy Patitsas, who agrees that the Orthodox had irreducible moral objections to war, deduces that the elaborate sacralisation is a protective mechanism against the trauma of killing another human being.<sup>137</sup> So important is it to help soldiers cope with combat, Patitsas says, they structure their war effort around binding values. For Patitsas's contemporaries that means work, cleanliness, discipline and sex. Dennis may be looking at the wrong symbols to understand sacralisation of modern war.

Dennis has a strong post-Enlightenment opposition between the material: 'visible, tangible[...] solid[...] human' – and the spiritual.<sup>138</sup> With respect to his third criterion (spiritual rewards, replacing right intention with respect to soldiers' hearts), this becomes problematic. Rewards in cattle or gold are obviously material. But the Byzantines were conditioned by sacralisation to see God at work in events. Christian liturgy aims to express the invisible and mysterious in a

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<sup>136</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34-35.

<sup>137</sup> Timothy Patitsas, 'The Opposite Of War Is Not Peace: Healing Trauma in The Iliad and in Orthodox Tradition', 26-51 in *Road to Emmaus* 14:1 (Jan 2013), 28.

<sup>138</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 37.

located, human interaction over material elements such as bread and wine. So gaining even material rewards could be seen as the outworking of spiritual blessing – as a reward for the piety demanded of a Byzantine soldier. Dennis’s criterion of ‘spiritual rewards’ may be more visible, tangible, solid or human than he allows.

### 2.5.1.2 *Change and Sacralisation*

From AD 460 at the latest, chaplains conducted daily morning and evening prayer for soldiers. They heard confessions, and before battle they led Holy Communion. But, says Webster (relying on the strong claim debunked in (2.2)), ‘even that enviable, overt piety did not *degenerate* into the kind of religious fanaticism associated with holy war’.<sup>139</sup> The word *degenerate* alerts us to processes of change over time.

Two changes suggest sacralisation is meaningful. First, there was a point of change, concerning *which* god was with the Romans. The cross initially did not remind Constantine’s army of God’s protection. It had been a symbol of defeat and shame. This was a major change, which was clearly meaningful to the Christians in the empire and the army, if no-one else. The cross thus became a symbol of Christian victory.<sup>140</sup>

There was also a change over time in the level of sacralisation. Paul Stephenson outlines the evolution. Under Constantine, the worship of the Christian God was brought into the existing centralized ritual life of the army and the reverence of the standards. Theodosius insisted that all worship the same God, including in their private devotions.<sup>141</sup> Military religious ceremonies ‘would grow ever more central to late Roman and Byzantine military preparations’<sup>142</sup>. By Justinian’s time, soldiers in Africa go to a battle assured of victory and cleansing, after their

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<sup>139</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 86, my emphasis.

<sup>140</sup> Jan Willem Drijvers, 'Heraclius and the Restitutio Crucis', 175-190 in G. J. Reinink and B. H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven: , 2002), 179-180.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Stephenson, 'Religious Services', 26.

<sup>142</sup> Stephenson, 'Religious Services', 27.

general spends the night in a vigil of tears and prayers and they penitently join in a communion service. Later manuals show that 'military religious services would become increasingly complex...' <sup>143</sup> Ever more central, increasingly complex, and now concerned with the soldier's private devotional life and purity – these are not the signs of religious 'trappings'. Rather than ignoring mere sacralisation in Chapter Three, we need to notice changes.

### *2.5.1.3 Sacralisation and martyrdom*

Both Webster and Dennis feel that the decision not to venerate Nicephorus' soldiers as martyrs was a decisive sign that sacralisation could only go so far. Stephenson links that case in the 960s to Heraclius in the 620s and argues instead that 'the synod's ruling put an end to the practice that had endured for more than three centuries'. <sup>144</sup> He posits a long-running dispute between those who revered Byzantine soldiers, and recognized their deaths as martyrdom, and those who venerated the neo-martyrs who were suffering under Muslim rule in Syria and elsewhere. There is internal evidence of texts being edited based on such a dispute. Eventually, in Stephenson's assessment, the cult of the 'neo-martyrs' under Arab occupation became the dominant concept, and soldier-martyrs were repudiated.

Stephenson is convinced that fallen soldiers were usually remembered as fallen heroes and martyrs partly because of a conceptual progression. If victory went to the more pious Christian army, then defeat might be a sign of God's judgement and displeasure with the Christian soldiers' lives. But a strong belief in divine punishment goes with a strong belief in God's reward. That justifies a soldier's expectation of spiritual reward for good conduct. So, Stephenson argues, in some periods 'warfare became increasingly sacralised', and the state

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<sup>143</sup> Stephenson, 'Religious Services', 28.

<sup>144</sup> Stephenson, 'Religious Services', 38.

sought to extend spiritual rewards to 'those who fought the righteous war, suitably purified in advance and with the intention to defend their Christian brothers'.<sup>145</sup>

Where sacralisation increases to the point of promising spiritual rewards, it is meaningful for motivation. If sacralisation can change to promise spiritual rewards, then we should pay it some attention.

#### 2.5.1.4 *Levels of Religious Involvement in War – Procopius*

Procopius' *History of the Wars* offers evidence for and against Dennis's view. In a parley, Belisarius at first appeals to peace and is rebuffed by calls for justice, whereupon he invokes God in his second letter: 'we shall array ourselves against you with the help of God'.<sup>146</sup> The Persian responds: 'Neither are we entering upon the war without our gods...'.<sup>147</sup> Before and after this exchange, the gods are never mentioned, so it is likely that these are formalities.

Yet at times the wars are marked by *religious distinctions* made by the protagonists. Chosroes refuses to take ransom money from Carrhae, because most of its citizens are not Christians but are 'of the old faith'.<sup>148</sup> The Alani and Abasgi are 'Christians and friends of the Romans from of old'.<sup>149</sup> These distinctions may motivate particular actions. A Christian among the Persians' Saracen allies saves Sergiopolis by twice leaking information to the defenders.<sup>150</sup> The North African mutiny in 538 centres on Arian troops.<sup>151</sup>

Finally, and rarely, a religious consideration motivates entire offensives. Hellesthaeus, the king of the Aethiopians, invades the land of the Homeritae in order to stop Jews and pagans

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<sup>145</sup> Paul Stephenson, 'Imperial Christianity and Sacred War in Byzantium', 81-93 in J.K. Wellman, Jr (ed.) *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion across Time and Tradition* (Lanham, Md. 2007), 91, cited in Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 20-21.

<sup>146</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 1.14.9

<sup>147</sup> Procopius, 1.14.11

<sup>148</sup> Procopius, 2.13.7

<sup>149</sup> Procopius, 2.29.15

<sup>150</sup> Procopius, 2.20.10

<sup>151</sup> Procopius, 4.14.11-15

persecuting Christians there.<sup>152</sup> Chosroes besieges Edessa to prove a Christian prophecy wrong.<sup>153</sup> Justinian is convinced to 'protect the Christians in Libya from tyrants', *i.e.* attack the Vandals, by a bishop's vision.<sup>154</sup>

Sacralisation can vary from empty formality, to differentiated treatment of prisoners and finally strategic policy. Chosroes' treatment of captured cities according to religion is less significant than Justinian's decision to invade North Africa, but the dividing line is not clear. At the higher levels sacralisation is indeed a motivating factor – both for individuals and for states.

#### 2.5.1.5 Summary

Dennis's attempt to claim that sacralisation is not really relevant fails in its use of analogies. Patitsas's description of binding oneself tightly to one's highest values is helpful here. The more war is sacralised, the closer we come to 'holy war', with religious objectives and the soldier's role being esteemed highly (at least within the army). Sacralisation particularly at high levels can affect motivation for individuals and states.

The question of motivation links to the last two definitional issues to be addressed in this chapter. Motivation of the individual by sacralised reward assumes some moral value of combat (2.5.2). Motivation by sacred responsibility – to defend Christians or the *oecumene* – leads us to consider the nature of the emperor's authority (2.5.3).

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<sup>152</sup> Procopius, 1.20

<sup>153</sup> Procopius, 2.26.2-3

<sup>154</sup> Procopius, 3.10.18-21



## 2.5.2 The moral value of combat

### 2.5.2.1 Combat and moral point-scoring

What did sacralisation imply about the morality of combat? The answers we have seen cover a wide range. Basil of Caesarea's 13<sup>th</sup> Canonical letter says that killing in wartime defiles the killer, but is a lesser sin than manslaughter.<sup>155</sup> It requires a short period of penitence. But Basil's canon was not widely followed. Webster reads all the evidence to say that war can be just, but is necessarily still lesser than not fighting and killing. Perhaps we might classify this as neither bad nor good. The later Webster expresses a view of war as virtuous – good, but not the highest good.<sup>156</sup> Basil and the sacred camp rituals share a concern for the purity of the soldiers, but in the army purification happens before combat, not (only) after it. The army's concern is sharpened by the expectation that victory may depend on purity. This suggests (but does not prove) that *fighting* in the army was not seen as a purity concern by soldiers – otherwise purity would be impossible to attain.

Victory in war, if God is at work to reward piety and purity, must show God's favour or disfavour – so it begins to imply something of the spiritual status of the victor and vanquished. The stronger the sacralisation, the stronger this effect will be.

Harnack opines, '...there are inalienable virtues which find their highest expression at least symbolically in the warrior's calling: obedience and courage, loyalty unto death, self-abnegation and strength (*virtus*)'.<sup>157</sup> Particularly in battlefield harangues – speeches immediately before a battle, aimed at rousing men to great deeds – we might expect to find language that suggests that warlike deeds are very good. As sacralisation increases, the sacral

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<sup>155</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 188, *Canon* 13, 44.

<sup>156</sup> See section 2.1.3.2 above.

<sup>157</sup> Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 27.

content of such speeches will likely also increase. Calling warlike deeds good using sacralised rhetoric will suggest that belligerence is morally positive.

So, there is a spectrum of possible moral assessments of wartime service. If it is necessary to believe that there was only one Orthodox Christian position, as Harakas seems to, then one will struggle with the variety in the evidence. I am prepared to say that people differed, and sometimes believed the 'wrong' thing.

#### *2.5.2.2 War Aims and Ethics*

If belligerence and great warlike deeds are good and perhaps win merit, is more better? Does more (or more intense) combat earn more of God's favour, however understood? Does a soldier face an incentive, in a holy war, to commit atrocities? These questions lead back to Webster's concern about extreme violence.

If holiness and justice inhere in the act of fighting, then the fighting may go on past any reasonable end. If the aim were only to kill the evil enemy, then more killing might seem like the better course of action. The personal motivation to perform a meritorious act can lead to religious extremism. But if the killing is merely necessary and excused by the war's good aims, then the fighting will have a natural end.

War aims are therefore important. Kolia-Dermitzaki suggests some standard war aims for Byzantine holy wars (2.3). Each can be limited for a particular war, although revenge or world domination can obviously be extended in extremist ways. In Chapter Three the aims of Heraclius's Persian campaigns will be considered.

There is good evidence that the Byzantines used peace as their justifiable war aim. This component of just war naturally limits the pursuit of war for its own sake. Anna Comnene

writes that wars should be fought for peace.<sup>158</sup> At times, there were conflicting versions of ‘peace’: a Christian ideal, and one that legitimated Byzantine invasions of long-lost territories (2.1.2). Leo VI’s favoured term is justice.<sup>159</sup> Justice has a natural limit, in that past a certain point, taking or punishing ceases to be just.

The war aim of “peace” as the extension of the Roman *imperium* brings us to our final definitional issue, the responsibility of the emperor for the well-being of the worldwide Christian community – or in fact, the obverse of this responsibility, the authority that went with it.

### 2.5.3 The Authority of the Emperor

It is not within the scope of this thesis to tease out the detailed constitutional balance of the Byzantine empire. However, some things need to be said here before we try to apply Dennis’s definition in Chapter Three.

Dennis follows Kaegi and Laiou when they say that the church must declare a holy war.<sup>160</sup> I agree with Kolia-Dermizaki against Laiou, that this is an unwarranted stress on crusade-specific features. If Dennis has simply replaced ‘political’ with ‘religious’ in the modern form of Aquinas’ test, this implies a strong distinction between the two which did not always exist in the late Classical age.

In Islam the political leader, the caliph, had religious authority. In Rome the religious leader, the pope, had political authority. Both declared holy wars. I see Byzantium, with its emperor and patriarch, as a ‘middle term’ between these two extremes. The ideal in Byzantium was *symphonia*,<sup>161</sup> which Harakas defines as church and state working with, supporting and

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<sup>158</sup> Dennis, ‘Defenders of the Christian People’, 38; Koder and Stouraitis,

<sup>159</sup> Leo VI, *Taktika*, 2.31; 20.58.

<sup>160</sup> Kaegi, ‘Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*’, 519; Laiou, ‘On Just War in Byzantium’, 170.

<sup>161</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 27-30.

strengthening each other as parts of an organic whole. Ideally neither one is subordinated to the other.<sup>162</sup> Webster, in summarizing Photius' *Epanagoge*, which describes the ideal for the ninth century, claims that Photius 'assumed too much of a positive religious role' to the emperor.<sup>163</sup> Even in the expression of the ideal there is some tension over the emperor's religious authority. It is unhelpful, then, to immediately dismiss the emperor as having no religious authority.

A strong personal spiritual authority was built into the emperor's office as early as Augustus. The Byzantine empire was the successor state of the Roman empire, in which the person of the *princeps* was also the *pontifex maximus* responsible for maintaining peace with the capricious gods. This only intensifies in the Dominate period.<sup>164</sup> Stephenson notes a shift during the fifth century from portrayals of the emperor's strength to the emperor becoming a model of piety, making tearful intercession for his people.<sup>165</sup> This could give some emperors strong personal spiritual authority.

The emperor had legal authority as the maker and enforcer of laws across the empire. At the very beginning of the Christian empire, the Edict of Milan is a statement from a religious authority, expressing how the authority will behave henceforth. Imperial power continued to be used against heretics, schismatics, pagans and Jews. Emperors had some authority over the church, to appoint and dismiss bishops, to call church councils (as Constantine had at Nicaea) and to make decrees. Runciman claims, 'No one in the East, however annoyed he might be

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<sup>162</sup> Harakas, 'Orthodox Church-State Theory and American Democracy', 399-421 in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21:4 (Winter 1976), cited in Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 74.

<sup>163</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 75.

<sup>164</sup> For a brief discussion see George Kalantzis, *Caesar and The Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes to War and Military Service* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2012), 16-18.

<sup>165</sup> Stephenson, 'Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers', 27.

that the Emperor [Justinian] did not show him sympathy, questioned the Imperial right to make pronouncements, so long as they were later endorsed by a Council'.<sup>166</sup>

The emperor was a unitary authority, because he represented the unitary rule of the one God.<sup>167</sup> Pope Gelasius asserted the superior authority of the Pope over the power of the emperor, and claimed that the emperor should not interfere in theology or church government, but Emperor Anastasius was insulted and unconvinced, refused to 'take orders', and continued to use the title *pontifex*.<sup>168</sup>

The tension between imperial power and the church authorities was long-running and not static. The church was under the legal power of the emperor. On the other hand, Ambrose of Milan was able to say that the emperor is in the church and *ipso facto* under church authority – under which he excommunicated Theodosius.<sup>169</sup> The power balance between a bishop as subject and an emperor as parishioner was not simple. It also was susceptible to personal differences in piety, persuasiveness, and so on. This dynamic tension makes a poor binary criterion for classifying a war as "holy" or not.

#### 2.5.4 Conclusion: Matters of Degree

Sacralisation is a matter of degree – not whether it is present, but to what extent. There are further matters of degree: how much the sacralisation changes (in its elements or its level) is meaningful. Both of these affect how strongly motivated by religion a soldier or a leader is. There is a range also of moral views of combat, and of how self-limiting war aims can be. Lastly, how much spiritual authority the emperor had is more applicable than whether or not

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<sup>166</sup> Stephen Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy: The Weil Lectures*, 49.

<sup>167</sup> Patitsas, 'The Opposite of War', 30.

<sup>168</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 45.

<sup>169</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Letter* 21.4: '...in a matter of faith – in a matter I say of faith – bishops are wont to judge of Christian emperors, not emperors of bishops.' *Sermon to Auxentius*, 37: 'For the Emperor is within the Church, not above it.' Ambrose excommunicates Theodosius in *Letter* 51.

he has any. As we consider the case study in Chapter Three, although we want a definite finding, all these variables can vary over a range.<sup>170</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

Chapter Two introduced the three dominant scholarly views on how the Byzantines viewed the wars they fought: whether they are all to be called “holy” wars, or “just” wars, or only “necessary but evil” wars. The differences between these positions come down to different definitions of terms, such as ‘holy war’ or ‘sacralised war’ and ‘just war’ or “just” war’. All three positions admit no exceptions. This is due to the strong claim by Eastern Orthodox theologians that the Byzantine church and people universally regarded war as always evil. I found that this strong claim rests on an argument from silence in the Fathers after Basil of Caesarea, a single advisory comment in Basil’s 13<sup>th</sup> Canon, the claimed intent and communicative effect of ‘the stratification of pacifism’, and a particular reading of three Byzantine military manuals. I found each item of this evidence, taken singly, to be very doubtful. This suggests that variation in Byzantine war ideology is possible. If so, Kolia-Dermitzaki’s position, that Byzantine armies sometimes did fight holy wars, becomes possible. Contrasting the definitions for holy war used by Webster, Dennis and Kolia-Dermitzaki raised issues with these definitions. Heraclius’ Persian campaigns emerge as a useful case study. I found that sacralisation can be meaningful as to motivation, and that religious objectives can affect Webster’s concern over religious extremism. I noted that the emperor is a religious authority *to some extent* – to what extent will depend on the emperor. I noted these and many issues under discussion are matters of degree.

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<sup>170</sup> Kaegi, ‘The Heraclians and Holy War’, 20: ‘The issue is much more complex than holy war yes or no’.

## 3 Chapter Three – Heraclius’ Persian Campaigns

### 3.1 Outline of Chapter

Chapter Two raised doubts about the strong historical claim, widely shared in the secondary literature, that the Byzantine church and people all regarded war as always evil. Rejecting this strong claim, Chapter Two suggested that it is possible that some Byzantine wars were holy wars of a distinct kind, as described by Kolia-Dermitzaki. As the definition and existence of ‘holy war’ in the Byzantine empire is contested, a test case was suggested. In assessing this against different criteria, rather than asking yes or no, judgements of degree will need to be formed. To what extent are these campaigns viewed as a ‘holy war’ in the Greek sources, and under what definition of that term?

Chapter Three tests the case of the Persian campaigns of Heraclius (AD 622-628). Statements that Heraclius fought a holy war need to be properly defined – conversely, the application of different definitions to Heraclius’ case illuminates those definitions (3.2). The specific objections of Laiou, Dennis and Kaegi are raised (3.3), representing most of the secondary literature (2.2.4). The Greek sources for Heraclius’ Persian campaigns are introduced (3.4) and their holy war elements are identified (3.5). These elements are then applied to Dennis’s criteria, as the hardest test (3.6). On two definitional issues, I ask to what extent Heraclius had personal spiritual authority during the campaigns (3.7.1), and whether (and how) his holy war also met conditions for a just war (3.7.2).

### 3.2 Introduction: Why Heraclius?

Heraclius is identified by popular historians such as Norwich and Regan as the ‘first Crusader’.<sup>171</sup> This reflects the mediaeval (especially Western) understanding of Heraclius’

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<sup>171</sup> Norwich, *Byzantium*, 284; Regan, *First Crusader*.

reign, what Drijvers calls its 'Nachleben'.<sup>172</sup> William of Tyre referred to Heraclius as the first crusader.<sup>173</sup> Webster concedes that Heraclius fought a 'vengeful "holy war"' against the Persians, one of his 'few examples' of 'crusades' in the East.<sup>174</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki found the concept of "holy war" in Heraclius' reign.<sup>175</sup>

Yet historians and church historians generally deny that Heraclius fought a holy war:

Contemporary Byzantine rhetoric and poetry praise the piety of Emperor Heraclius but it would be an exaggeration to term his external political and military strategy as holy war[...] this was no simple religious crusade...<sup>176</sup>

These were imperial wars, not holy wars.<sup>177</sup>

This contention makes Heraclius' campaigns, particularly against the Persians between AD 622 and 628, a useful test case.

### 3.3 Historians' Objections

As I said in Chapter Two, in response to Kolia-Dermitzaki's thesis, Dennis sets out a three-part test for a holy war:

- (1) The war must be declared by a competent religious authority;
- (2) The war must be fought **primarily** for religious objectives; and
- (3) The warriors must be promised spiritual rewards.

I have added the word 'primarily' to the second criterion, to reflect his use of it as a strong negative test (see 2.4.2 above).

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<sup>172</sup> Drijvers, 178 note 12 gives references to modern discussion of Heraclius' *Nachleben* in the Latin West; 179 note 13 summarises Hrabanus Maurus' *Homily LXX* on the subject.

<sup>173</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34 note 13.

<sup>174</sup> Webster, *Pacifist Option*, 84-86, esp. 84.

<sup>175</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 169-183, cited in Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*', 519.

<sup>176</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 18.

<sup>177</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 35.



Recently Koder and Stouraitis cite Dennis's test, as does Kaegi.<sup>178</sup> The test has become a basis for current academic discussion. It should be a good indication of the strength of “holy war” thinking in this instance. It should be decisive for the academic discussion. For these reasons, while I will refer below to Kolia-Dermitzaki’s definition and that used by Webster, I use Dennis as the framework for the discussion.

Recall that for Laiou, spiritual authority is the dominant criterion (2.1.2), whereas in Dennis’ use of the test, he stresses the religious motivation (2.4.2).

### 3.3.1 Kaegi’s five objections

Walter Kaegi concedes that Heraclius is presented as a pious ruler, invoking divine assistance and using religion to motivate his soldiers and subjects. He even concedes that Heraclius did promise eternal life to his soldiers in 624. But ‘it would be an *exaggeration* to term his external political and military strategy as holy war’.<sup>179</sup> Kaegi gives five counter-arguments to support this view. The first two (corresponding to criteria (2) and (1) above) he quotes from his book:

Heraclius was emphasizing participation and even death in this war as a means to heaven. Yet, this was no simple religious crusade; it was a multi-dimensional conflict of which religious zeal was only one component. It is Heraclius and his panegyrists, not the Patriarch or bishops, who are creating any crusade-like features and whipping up religious enthusiasm.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Koder and Stouraitis, ‘Byzantine Approaches to Warfare’, 12; Kaegi, ‘The Heraclians and Holy War’, 18.

<sup>179</sup> Kaegi, ‘The Heraclians and Holy War’, 18, my emphasis.

<sup>180</sup> Kaegi, ‘The Heraclians and Holy War’, 18, citing Kaegi, Heraclius, 126.

Thirdly, Heraclius and his successors, though committed to armed resistance, ‘were willing to consider diplomatic remedies’.<sup>181</sup> The unstated assumption appears to be Webster’s definition, that holy war must be irreconcilably hostile.

Though Heraclius sought to make his troops fight steadfastly, Kaegi contends, it didn’t work – many commanders might and did change sides. However, his evidence relates to the later Arab wars. Treachery does not feature heavily in the sources for the Persian campaigns, and if it did, that would not change what Heraclius was *seeking* to do.

Finally – and Kaegi gives no more detail than this – ‘We do not have any specific Byzantine Greek term for holy war in the texts for the seventh century’.<sup>182</sup> This objection was dealt with in Chapter 1 above.

### 3.3.2 Addressing these objections

Below, I examine Heraclius’ campaigns as they are presented in the Greek sources against Dennis and Kaegi’s objections, using the framework of Dennis’ three criteria for “holy war”. This illuminates some aspects of the definitions used for holy war in general.

I discuss various ‘sacralised’ war elements, though Dennis and Kaegi have argued they are not relevant, because (as discussed in chapter 1) they show where Heraclius is on a spectrum – the more sacralised elements appear and the more extreme they are, the closer Heraclius is to full-blown holy war – and beyond that, the more extreme that holy war may be. Kaegi’s use of the word ‘exaggeration’ above (3.3.1) suggests that, like Webster’s, some of his objections are a matter of degree.

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<sup>181</sup> Kaegi, 18-19.

<sup>182</sup> Kaegi, 20.

### 3.4 Introduction to the Greek Sources

Here I briefly introduce the Greek primary sources for the Persian campaigns. Other sources for Heraclius' reign include Arabic, Armenian and Latin histories, at times representing Persian and Syriac traditions.<sup>183</sup> These are crucial for determining events and chronology. However, the question here is the Greek-speakers' self-understanding of what they were doing (Kaegi calls this the investigation of *histoire des mentalités* rather than *histoire événementielle*).<sup>184</sup> For this purpose, the Greek sources are best, and give the main events within corrigible limits.

#### 3.4.1 List of Sources

##### 3.4.1.1 George of Pisidia

George of Pisidia was 'a poet of rare talent, with relatively few peers in classical antiquity'.<sup>185</sup> His earliest extant poem is from 610, his last must be before 638.<sup>186</sup> He may have died as early as 632.<sup>187</sup>

Based on his recorded titles, George of Pisidia was a church administrator. He was a deacon of St Sophia, at one time a clerk responsible for the patriarch's communications with the emperor, and later keeper of archives. He wrote epigrams, religious reflection, a *Life* of a Persian saint and doctrinal and polemical works.

Whitby calls George the 'official Constantinopolitan publicist for Heraclius and his deputies in the 620s'.<sup>188</sup> In this role, George wrote narrative poetry to commission, telling the stories of Heraclius' first Persian campaign (*De Expeditio Persica*), the Avar siege (*Bellum Avaricum*) or the whole reign from 610 to 628 (*Heraclias*), as well as panegyric, praise poetry extolling the

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<sup>183</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, 7-10. See also his *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1992) 15-17.

<sup>184</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 17.

<sup>185</sup> James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 27.

<sup>186</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 271.

<sup>187</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 18, 26 with references.

<sup>188</sup> Mary Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 157.

deeds and virtues of Heraclius, Patriarch Sergius, the Patrician Bonus and Heraclius Constantine. He therefore played an important part in maintaining the absent emperor's public image in the capital.<sup>189</sup>

In section 3.5.1, I consider the first and last of George's panegyric poems praising Heraclius, *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* and *In restitutionem sanctae crucis*.

### 3.4.1.2 Theophanes Confessor

The translators of the *Chronographia* or *Chronicle* of Theophanes Confessor (d. 818) describe it as 'our principal, if at times faulty, source' for the campaigns of 624-28.<sup>190</sup> 'It [...] can best be viewed as a file of extracts borrowed from earlier sources'.<sup>191</sup> Among other sources, Theophanes used George of Pisidia's poetry and Theophylact's *History*. He is particularly dependent upon George and one additional lost source for the Persian campaigns.<sup>192</sup>

Mango and Scott in the apparatus for each year note quotations from George of Pisidia's poetry: especially the *De Expeditio Persica*, but also other fragments.<sup>193</sup>

### 3.4.1.3 The Paschal Chronicle

The *Chronicon Paschale* (*Paschal* or *Easter Chronicle*) is a history of the world from creation (on Wednesday 21 March) to the year of its composition, AD 630 – the twentieth of Heraclius' reign, the year the Cross was restored (on 21 March). From 602 on, apparently using its

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<sup>189</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 249-251.

<sup>190</sup> Mango and Scott, 440 note 2.

<sup>191</sup> Mango and Scott, lxxiv.

<sup>192</sup> Mango and Scott, lxxxi-lxxxii and notes 98, 99. Also Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 253 note 33: 'Theophanes' narrative of the 622 campaign is largely dependent on George's poem.'

<sup>193</sup> Mango and Scott, lxxxii, citing 'The Official History of Heraclius' Persian Campaigns', in E. Dąbrowa (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East* (Cracow, 1994), 62ff. See also the discussion in Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 167-172.

compiler's personal experience and access to sources, the *Paschal Chronicle* preserves the text of many official documents.<sup>194</sup>

The *Paschal Chronicle* incorporates Heraclius' dispatch to Constantinople announcing the death of Chosroes.<sup>195</sup> The dispatch was recited to the public in St Sophia on Sunday, 15 May 628.

#### 3.4.1.4 *Theophylact Simocatta*

Theophylact Simocatta was 'the last in the succession of secular classicizing historians of late antiquity'.<sup>196</sup> His *History* is 'our major source for the events of Maurice's reign', although 'this importance reflects the lack of any other'.<sup>197</sup>

Kolia-Dermitzaki uses the passage examined below in 3.5.4, with the two harangues of Heraclius reported by Theophanes, to argue that 'the Byzantine [soldiers] were already provided with assurances for eternal life by the political authority'.<sup>198</sup> Her evidence for Church assurances dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>199</sup>

Kolia-Dermitzaki's use of an earlier passage in the *History* prompted Kaegi to object:<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Howard-Johnston, 41, 50-53; see also Mary Whitby, 'The Biblical Past in John Malalas and the Paschal Chronicle', 279-302 in Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron, Late Antique History and Religion* 1, Leuven: Peeters, 2007.

<sup>195</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 727.15-734.17. References to the English translation are to Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N.C. Lieu (trans. and eds.), *The Roman and Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars Part II AD 363-630: A Narrative Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 220-223.

<sup>196</sup> Whitby and Whitby, xiii.

<sup>197</sup> Whitby and Whitby, xxi. They suggest sources 'worth comparing' for the period, xxx.

<sup>198</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War' Twenty Years Later', 130 note 50.

<sup>199</sup> For analysis of 10-Century liturgies: Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 252-259, and "'Holy War' Twenty Years Later', 130 note 51 (noting her disagreement with Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', note 15, which reads, 'Three liturgical offices (*akolouthiai*) that have come down to us do not provide evidence for a Byzantine holy war; rather, they are prayers that God may look kindly on the faithful soldiers who have died in war, that he may forgive their sins and receive them into Paradise'). For Patriarch Nicholas I Mysticus: Kolia-Dermitzaki, "'Holy War' Twenty Years Later', 130-131, giving primary sources and discussion.

<sup>200</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 158ff.

She should consider the possibility that the purported speech of Bishop Dometianus may have been invented by the historian Theophylact Simocatta and be more a reflection of values prevailing at or near the court of Heraclius than of those prevailing in the reign of Maurice.<sup>201</sup>

It does not appear that Kolia-Dermitzaki addresses Kaegi's objection, but see 3.5.4 below.

### 3.4.2 George speaking through Theophanes

George's poems directly covering the Persian campaigns are *De Expeditio Persica*, which was written after the minor victory in 622, and *Heraclias*, which celebrates the whole reign to the end of the war.<sup>202</sup> *De Expeditio Persica* only covers the first year, and *Heraclias* summarises greatly. George's further narrative poetry on this subject is lost. Based on the existence of fragments in Theophanes and in the later *Suda* lexicon, Pertusi thought that the *Heraclias* was missing a third canto – Whitby suggests there may have been a fourth.<sup>203</sup> Howard-Johnson's theory explaining the form of the fragments is that in the later years of his career, George produced a mixed composition, interspersing prose from official dispatches with short poems, and that this was the source used by Theophanes.<sup>204</sup>

Given their length and the uncertainty around their final form and coverage, an analysis of these poems and the fragments is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is easier to access George through Theophanes' history, the *Chronographia*.

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<sup>201</sup> Walter E. Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*', 519.

<sup>202</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 254.

<sup>203</sup> Mary Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 167-172. As she notes there, against this, Frendo thinks that the poem only ever had two, and the reference to three cantos in XXX is an error.]

<sup>204</sup> James D. Howard-Johnston, 'The Official History of Heraclius' Persian Campaigns', 57-87 in Dąbrowa (ed.), *Roman and Byzantine Army*, here 70-71, cited in Mary Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 171 note 80.

### 3.4.3 Propaganda and History

George's panegyrics are deliberate propaganda. Heraclius can do no wrong, his army praises him glowingly, even his Persian captives pray for him with tears and so on. It is still valuable, even as propaganda. History may claim that Heraclius said something. Propaganda can show that Heraclius, Sergius or George wanted people to think that Heraclius said it. The latter is much more meaningful for our purposes. We want to know about ideology.

There are shades of post-Rankean positivism in Dennis and Kaegi, a preoccupation with 'what really happened' that distorts their approach to ideology. This is noticeable in Dennis's discussion of the wars that lie behind the Septuagint's record: he completely ignores the Bible's presentation of motives and objectives in favour of his 'final analysis' of a generic tribal war between semi-nomads over land.<sup>205</sup> Yet it is the Bible's presentation – as the Byzantines read it – that is more relevant to Byzantine ideology. Before Kaegi can state any conclusions of historical inquiry into whether the Heraclians 'engaged in *or sought to engage in Holy War*',<sup>206</sup> he feels the need to point out, 'Major questions exist about what really happened'.<sup>207</sup> As he sums up, he stresses that though Heraclius' religious propaganda was aimed at shoring up his alliances, 'seventh-century realities often involved the opposite'. This is a stable feature of his approach. He raised the same question in his review of Kolia-Dermitzaki in 1991: 'A basic question that is not answered in the book is how militarily effective the use of any such concept of holy war was'.<sup>208</sup> This reflects Kaegi's interests as an historian, but is less relevant to historical theology.

A concern for reality over ideals, while a fine thing, is misplaced in exploring the nature of those ideals. It is particularly odd that, although in the specific case of Heraclius' Persian

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<sup>205</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>206</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 18, my emphasis.

<sup>207</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 20.

<sup>208</sup> Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*', 518.

campaigns we have far more evidence for what the Byzantines thought than for 'what really happened', Dennis and Kaegi both advance 'what really happened' as a reason to discount Byzantine testimony about what Byzantines thought.

Most wars have multiple motivations and objectives. Just because an explanation can be advanced without reference to religion does not mean that religion was not an important (even the major or the crucial) motivation for a war. The belligerents' mutual understanding and self-understanding must be considered in making such a judgment.

### 3.5 The Source Material – Identifying Holy War Elements

In this section, I am concerned to briefly indicate holy war elements as they occur in the primary sources. I will keep analysis to a minimum, leaving it for the next section, where I address Dennis's definition. George of Pisidia's poems with which I begin, however, require some analysis to observe the holy war elements therein.

#### 3.5.1 George of Pisidia

##### 3.5.1.1 *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*

*In Heraclium* is an early poem, with the full title, Πρὸς Ἡράκλειον τὸν βασιλέα ἐπανελθόντα ἀπὸ Ἀφρικῆς | καὶ βασιλεύσαντα καὶ κατὰ Φωκᾶ βασιλέως.<sup>209</sup> It was written soon after Heraclius' accession, judging by the hope that the Persians and Avars could be conciliated by the new emperor: 'Medes and barbarians [...] By your word are quenched, your mild word' (*In Heraclium* 21,23). Whitby also notes that George asks the emperor to accept this poem (72-75), whereas *De Expeditio Persica* is presented in a way which suggests a commission (*De Expeditio Persica* 3.374-80).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> My translation: 'To Heraclius, the king returned from Africa and reigning even in place of King Phocas.'

<sup>210</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 251 note 22.



Heraclius is described as having an ‘all-wise mind’, a divine ethos and inspired wisdom, with the full armour of God and his mind guarded by the Scriptures (*In Heraclium* 6, 7, 9 – 11). Rather than wild game, he hunts down and conquers his own passions and wrongdoing in the state, and even tames foreign enemies (14-23). ‘The poem ends with a return to the initial theme of Heraclius’ spiritual beauty, which will be transmitted to the hearts of his people (80-85)’.<sup>211</sup>

Within this framing theme there is another. George expresses *hope* that ‘even now the state through God is saved | by the good conduct of him who rules piously’.<sup>212</sup> He returns to this theme again after describing Heraclius’ decisive actions: he hopes God will be a saviour of his hope:

σωτήρα τῆς σῆς ἐλπίδος τὸ δεύτερον.

αὐτὸς γὰρ ἡμῖν τὰς πρὸς εἰρήνην θύρας

τοῖς σοῖς ἀνοίξει πανταχοῦ σπουδάσασιν

δεικνὺς ἐκείνην τῷ κράτει σου σύνθρονον.

...Saviour of your hope the second time.

For he to us the gates to peace

By your efforts will open everywhere

Showing it [*i.e.* peace] enthroned with your might.<sup>213</sup>

At the centre of the poem, motivated by his ‘burning for God’ (53), Heraclius’ killing of Phocas is presented as an act of ‘faith, murderess of murders’:

<sup>211</sup> Mary Whitby, ‘Defender of the Cross’, 252.

<sup>212</sup> My translation of *In Heraclium* 37-38: καὶ νῦν τὸ κοινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ σωθήσεται | ταῖς τοῦ κρατοῦντος εὐσεβῶς εὐπραξίαις.

<sup>213</sup> *In Heraclium* 66-69 (my translation).

οὐκ ἐσφάλης δὲ τῆς τοσαύτης ἐλπίδος,  
ἀλλ' ὡς ὁ πιστὸς Φινεὲς τῷ πνεύματι  
τὴν πίστιν ἔσχευ τῶν φόνων φονεύτριαν.  
ἀφ' οὗ γὰρ ἡμᾶς τῆς τυραννικῆς βλάβης  
ἐλευθέρωσας ἐκ Θεοῦ δούλους ἔχεις,  
τῶν αἱμάτων ἤργησεν ἡ δεινὴ χύσις,  
ἐξ ἧς τὸ ρεῦμα τῶν κακῶν ἐτίκτετο.<sup>214</sup>

But you were not foiled in your hope so great  
But, like faithful Phineas, by the Spirit  
You had faith, the murderess of murders.  
For since you have us, from the despotic harm  
(having) Freed us, as slaves from God,  
The particular trickle of the bloods grew idle  
From which the stream of evils was being brought forth.

Heraclius has hope and faith 'by the Spirit', and as a result enjoys the Constantinopolitans' subjection 'from God'. He is likened to 'faithful Phineas', a model of zeal and faithfulness from Numbers 25.

The Phineas story is a fruitful intertext for George's flow of ideas. Phineas killed two sinners as Heraclius killed Phocas. The killing ended a plague harming the Israelite people just as Heraclius stopped 'the [...] trickle of bloods' and 'harm' to the Byzantines. Phineas and Heraclius are each unique in his preparedness to tackle the problem: καὶ πρὸς τοσούτους

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<sup>214</sup> In *Heraclium* 56-62.

ἡδέως δραμῶν πόνους | τοῦ σοῦ κατεφρόνησας αἵματος μόνος,<sup>215</sup> (48-49). Phineas' zealous action was lauded as consonant with God's own zeal (Num 25:11,13).<sup>216</sup> The wider context of Phineas' story is of freedom for slaves from tyranny in Egypt: Heraclius holds his new subjects 'as slaves from God, having freed us'. Finally, as a result of his zeal, 'faithful Phineas' was promised a 'covenant of peace' – peace is the content of George's hope.

In Whitby's words:

The well-established theme of 'emperor with God's aid' is central to George's presentation, and vindicates Heraclius' most bloody enterprises. [...] His bloody murder of Phocas is presented as an act of piety like that of the biblical Phineas.<sup>217</sup>

Whitby points to a consistent theme in George's work:

This early work establishes the important conjunction of Heraclius' piety with his people's salvation: the expulsion of Phocas is | an act not of bloodshed but of piety, and offers hope in uncertain times of future salvation, above all through peace.<sup>218</sup>

In a later article, Whitby agrees with another George researcher, Daniel Frendo, that 'this unusual parallel is selected because it helps justify Heraclius' dragging of Phocas from sanctuary prior to murdering him'.<sup>219</sup> This seems to have softened her interpretation of the Phineas reference: 'Heraclius' murder of Phocas is *exonerated* by likening him to the Old Testament Phineas who committed a murder *justifiable* on religious grounds (56-58)'.<sup>220</sup> But Frendo's reading of Numbers 25 is flawed. Phineas did not drag anyone from sanctuary. He

<sup>215</sup> 'and, to such great toils gladly running, you alone thought nothing of your blood'.

<sup>216</sup> Num 25:11, 'when I was exceedingly jealous', ἐν τῷ ζηλώσάί μου, compare 25:13, 'he was zealous', ἐζήλωσεν'.

<sup>217</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 252, my emphasis.

<sup>218</sup> Whitby, 'Defender', 252-3.

<sup>219</sup> Mary Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 160 note 25, citing J.D.C. Frendo, 'The Poetic Achievement of George of Pisidia: A literary and historical study', 159-187 in A. Moffat (ed.), *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*. *Byzantina Australiensia* 5 (Canberra, 1984).

<sup>220</sup> Mary Whitby, 'George of Pisidia's Presentation', 160, my emphasis.

followed the man and killed him and his lover, either in the man's family tent or in the tent of meeting – most likely the former, as two different words are used for 'tent' (in both MT and LXX). If George were seeking to exonerate a king for dragging someone from sanctuary and killing them, the relevant OT comparator is Solomon (1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:25,28-34). A violent killing, unique faithfulness, zeal, ending a great harm, freeing God's people and recognition as the peacemaker are all fertile links between the two intertexts. Frendo's reading fails to link them and is untenable. George does not minimize the killing of Phocas as justifiable, but holds it up as a positive act of piety.

Already at this early date, when he hopes the Persian war will be swiftly and peacefully ended, George can frame bloodshed as the act of a pious peacemaker. In his later poems George continues to praise the emperor's piety, and his quest for peace.

### 3.5.1.2 *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis*

After the Persian war had concluded, George wrote his last surviving poem to celebrate the restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem.

The defeat of Persia is attributed to the presence of the cross there: 'for with the barbarian it did not wish to sojourn', τῷ βαρβάρῳ γὰρ οὐ παροικεῖν ἤθελεν, (32). This might suggest that the war represents the punishment of sinners, in which case more war might be good – yet peace remains the aim of these wars. Heraclius' campaigns are part of 'the struggles of the fight for peace', τῶν ἀγώνων τῆς πρὸς εἰρήνην μάχης (16).

George asserts that *barbarian* violence results in moral pollution:

Πάρθοι δὲ Πέρσας πυρπολοῦσι καὶ Σκύθης

Σκλάβον φονεύει καὶ πάλιν φονεύεται,

καὶ τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ἡματωμένοι φόνοις

πολλήν ἔχουσι φύρσιν εἰς μίαν μάχην.<sup>221</sup>

Parthians waste Persians with fire, and a Scythian

A Slav kills and again is killed,

And with the murders of themselves bloodstained peoples

Bring to one battle a great drenching.

These lines may reflect tribal conflicts in “Scythia” after the Avar siege (involving the Slavs) and the civil wars in Persia following the death of Chosroes. Φονεύει καὶ πάλιν φονεύεται suggests that this is cyclical violence, not in quest of peace.

But the same is not true for the Christian Romans. Standing in the middle is the Byzantine umpire – Heraclius, carrying wreath and sceptre, is present amid the wrestling, but only needs to nod to assign justice and victory (82-89). The Christian wars, it would seem, are *ipso facto* just. The emperor now represents the judge, not a disputant. His own violence (the need for which has passed) has not left him bloodstained or defiled.

It is possible that the ‘one battle’ of line 81 is an eschatological battle, the Armageddon of Revelation 16 (or that between neighbours in Zech 14:13). Then Heraclius would fulfil the messianic promise in Isaiah 2:4, to judge between the nations and settle their disputes. It is hard to be sure because the image breaks off in the missing lines from 90, but eschatology may help explain the apparent exceptionalism.

Religious opposition is strong in *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis*. There is an association throughout between Persia and fire – a flexible reference to the previous decades of pillaging and the religious undertones of the conflict. The enemy are ‘the insolent Magi’, οἱ θρασύστομοι μάγοι (11), who know the secret of ‘the fire that burns to untouched ashes’ (13-

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<sup>221</sup> *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis* 78-81.

14). This fire miracle occurred in Thebarmaïs in Persia and is mentioned in Theophanes Confessor as ‘the deceit of the coals’ (see below). George refers to it again at 66, to play with the natural opposition of fire and wood – Chosroes despised the wood of the cross as a stick, yet he found a lance for his own heart (67-68). Also opposed are the Jews, ‘bastard Israelites’, Ἰσραηλιῖται νόθοι (25), of ‘ancestral unbelief’, πατρικῆς ἀπιστίας (26). These lines reflect the anti-Jewish sentiment after the fall of Jerusalem in 614, when many Jews had collaborated with the Persians against the Christians. Heraclius banned Jews from Jerusalem in 630.<sup>222</sup>

Heraclius’ achievement compares to Christ, Constantine and David. The opening, ‘O Golgotha, leap!’, ὦ Γολγοθὰ σκίρτησον (1), echoes Psalm 114:4, a reference to the Lord’s entry into the promised land.<sup>223</sup> The entire creation is affected because Heraclius has returned the relic that first made Golgotha ‘God-receiving’ (1-2). The hill of Calvary is told to applaud:

κρότησον αὐτὸν τοῖς ἀοιδίμοις λόγοις·

ἀλλ’ εἴπερ οὐκ ἔχουσιν οἱ λίθοι στόμα,

νέους προευτρέπιζε φοινίκων κλάδους

πρὸς τὴν ἀπαντὴν τοῦ νέου νικηφόρου·

Applaud him [*i.e.* Heraclius] by the Word famous in song

But if the stones really have no mouth

Make ready new crimson olive branches

To meet the new victor.<sup>224</sup>

This alludes to Palm Sunday, when the stones would have cried out if the people had not greeted Jesus with branches. Heraclius is to be praised in the words of the psalms, which apply

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<sup>222</sup> Drijvers, 189; see also below on Theophanes Confessor.

<sup>223</sup> Ps 113(LXX):4, which begins, τὰ ὄρη ἐσκίρτησαν ὡσεὶ κριοὶ.

<sup>224</sup> *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis* 5-8.

to the messiah. 'Every land and city and the whole world [...] blesses the grace given' to him (44-46). Indeed,

'Constantine the Great sings your praises thus  
for no other eulogist is good enough for you'.<sup>225</sup>

τοῖόν σε Κωνσταντῖνος ὑμνήσοι μέγας·

ἄλλος γὰρ ὑμᾶς εὐλογῶν οὐκ ἀρκέσει.

Heraclius is Constantine's 'child' (50, 58, 61). He bettered Constantine in finding the cross, since this time it was 'not only hidden', but in 'Persian furnaces' (58-59), perhaps an allusion to Daniel. And Heraclius is better than David: the cross is seen as a new ark, but better – since it does more against the enemy (73-77).

Drijver notes the messianic themes – particularly of Christ's victory being restored. There is a trajectory from David, through David's greater son, to Constantine who recognized Christ – Heraclius is associated with all three great figures.<sup>226</sup> As he journeys back to Constantinople from Jerusalem, Heraclius is elevated to the first rank of kings. All three comparators are rulers of great spiritual renown, as well as being famous victors and founders. The same – better – is implied of Heraclius by the comparison. His achievement (in winning the Persian war and bringing back the True Cross) is of cosmic significance, and is implied to mark a new beginning, a new epoch in Roman history like the Constantinian settlement.

### 3.5.1.3 Summary

George finds new and interesting comparators for Heraclius in each poem. Phineas, David as he supervised the ark, and Jesus act as priests bringing blessing to the people. This boosts the image of Heraclius as a towering spiritual figure to whom his people should look for guidance.

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<sup>225</sup> *In Restitutionem Sanctae Crucis* 47-48.

<sup>226</sup> Drijver, 'Heraclius and the Restitutio Crucis', 186.

Phineas is also a model of godly, zealous violence. David and Constantine are victorious battle-hardened kings who brought peace to their domains through war. George finds material in the Bible that allows him to praise Heraclius as a warrior. Pious bloodshed, which achieves peace rather than defilement, is attributed to Heraclius in both poems.

### 3.5.2 Theophanes Confessor

In most years of his account of the Persian expedition, Theophanes includes material that suggests or is compatible with “holy war”.

#### 3.5.2.1 Preliminaries to the Campaigns

Theophanes recounts an embassy to Ctesiphon and Chosroes’ reply: ‘I shall not spare you until you renounce the Crucified one, whom you call God, and worship the sun’.<sup>227</sup> This gives the Persian conflict a religious motivation: Christian faith is at stake. The ‘you’, ὑμῶν, in Chosroes’ threat refers to more than the emperor. At the next mention of Chosroes, three years later, it is ‘on all men’ that he ‘hardened his yoke’.<sup>228</sup> His threat refers to (Roman) Christians in general.

Heraclius’ emotions and actions in response to increased persecution are described:

τότε Ἡράκλειος ζῆλον θεοῦ ἀναλαβὼν ... διενοεῖτο τῇ συνεργίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ  
Περσίδος χωρῆσαι.

Then Heraclius, becoming filled with divine zeal [...] was planning to move against  
Persia with God’s help.<sup>229</sup>

Both emotion and action suggest holy war. This is divine zeal, ζῆλον θεοῦ, like that of Phineas or Christ in the temple. He plans to move τῇ συνεργίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ – he expects God to be

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<sup>227</sup> Mango and Scott, 433. The Greek is οὐ φείσομαι ὑμῶν ἕως ἂν ἀρνήσησθε τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, ὃν λέγετε θεὸν εἶναι, καὶ προσκυνήσητε τῷ ἡλίῳ (Theophanes 301, 24).

<sup>228</sup> Mango and Scott, 435, my emphasis, ἐπὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους (Theophanes 302, 25-26).

<sup>229</sup> Mango and Scott, 435. (Theophanes 302, 27-30)



working with him. The campaign is presented as God's will in the voice of the Chronicler, not only in Heraclius' mind.

### 3.5.2.2 AM 6113<sup>230</sup>

Heraclius sets out the next year:

Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει μηνὶ Ἀπριλλίῳ δ', ἰνδικτιῶνος ι', τελέσας ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡράκλειος τὴν ἑορτὴν τοῦ πάσχα εὐθέως τῇ δευτέρᾳ ἑσπέρας ἐκίνησε κατὰ Περσίδος. λαβὼν δὲ τὰ τῶν εὐαγῶν οἴκων χρήματα ἐν δανείῳ, ἀπορίᾳ κατεχόμενος ἔλαβε καὶ τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας πολυκάνδηλά τε καὶ ἕτερα σκεύη ὑπουργικά, χαράξας νομίσματά τε καὶ μυριαρίσια πάμπολλα.

In this year, on 4 April, indiction 10, the emperor Heraclius, after celebrating the Easter feast, straight away set out against Persia on Monday evening. Being short of funds he took on loan the moneys of religious establishments and he also took the candelabra and other vessels of the holy ministry from the Great Church, which he minted into a great quantity of gold and silver coin.<sup>231</sup>

He sets out immediately after Easter, on the following evening (εὐθέως τῇ δευτέρᾳ ἑσπέρας). Having observed Lent and celebrated Easter, it was now an appropriate time for the Christian emperor to begin the new venture.<sup>232</sup>

Emperors had been 'short of funds' (ἀπορίᾳ κατεχόμενος) before – Phocas' revolt had been triggered by changes in army pay, while Justinian's outgoings and consequent fiscal pressures are well detailed by Procopius. But the loan (ἐν δανείῳ) from the church is a new

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<sup>230</sup> AD 621/2. Theophanes places the expedition in 620/1, which is incorrect (Mango and Scott, 438 note 1) so I have retained his AM dates rather than keep correcting the AD record.

<sup>231</sup> Theophanes 303, 34 – 303, 3. Mango and Scott, 435.

<sup>232</sup> Kaegi ('Arianism and Byzantine Army', 43) writes concerning Easter of 536, the date of the army revolt in North Africa: 'It is significant that it was the Arians (rather than the soldiers who were concerned with economic issues) who finally decided to start the revolt... The *religious conflict*, together with the likely exposure of Solomon while at church, probably *dictated the selection of Easter Day service as the original time and place* for the assassination attempt' (my emphasis).

development, and indicates very strong support from the patriarch (and his hierarchy) for the war effort.

At that time, material objects could have inherent holiness. Theophylact tells of a silver basin used in occult rituals, which was sold and on-sold to a church in Heracleia. The miracles that had been observed there immediately stopped and the pollution was traced to the bowl's owner, Paulinus, who was executed for sorcery.<sup>233</sup> This makes Heraclius' minting of coin from the metal of 'vessels of the holy ministry', σκεύη ὑπουργικά, more remarkable than the cash loan.

Heraclius swore an oath on an *acheiropoiotos* icon:

λαβὼν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐν χερσὶ τὴν θεανδρικὴν μορφήν, ἣν χεῖρες οὐκ ἔγραψαν, ἀλλ' οἶαν ἐν εἰκόνι ὁ πάντα μορφῶν καὶ διαπλάττων λόγος ἄνευ γραφῆς μόρφωσιν, ὥς ἄνευ σποράς κύησιν ἤνεγκεν, καὶ τούτῳ πεποιθὼς τῷ θεογράφῳ τύπῳ ἀπήρξατο τῶν ἀγώνων, πιστὰ δοὺς τῷ λαῷ, ὥς σὺν αὐτοῖς μέχρι θανάτου ἀγωνίσηται καὶ ὥς τέκνοις οἰκείοις τούτοις συναρμόσηται.<sup>234</sup>

The main verb here is ἀπήρξατο: the king *began* his ἀγώνων, his struggles or contests. Three participial clauses fill this out. The taking of the icon is the first, building to the second, Heraclius' trust (πεποιθὼς) in this very holy image. Thirdly, Heraclius promises the troops to undergo these struggles (ἀγωνίσηται) with them unto death (μέχρι θανάτου). The struggling to come is a joint activity begun with faith in God.

Heraclius' motivation, which he passes on to his troops, is religious:

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<sup>233</sup> Theophylact 1.11, Whitby and Whitby, 34-37, noting that similar stories are told by John of Nikiu, xcvi and in the *Life* of Theodore of Symeon, 42

<sup>234</sup> Theophanes, 303, 17-23, Mango and Scott, 436: 'Taking in his hands the likeness of the Man-God – the one that was not painted by hand, but which the Logos, who shapes and fashions, everything, wrought like an image without recourse to painting, just as He experienced birth without seed – the emperor placed his trust in this image painted by God and began his endeavours after giving a pledge to his army that he would struggle with them unto death and would be united with them as with his own children'.

ὁρᾶτε, ἀδελφοὶ καὶ τέκνα, ὡς οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ θεοῦ κατεπάτησαν ἡμῶν τὴν χώραν καὶ  
τὰς πόλεις ἠρήμωσαν καὶ τὰ θυσιαστήρια κατέκαυσαν καὶ τὰς τραπέζας τῶν  
ἀναιμάκτων θυσιῶν αἱμάτων μαιφόνων ἐπλήρωσαν, καὶ τὰς ἀδέκτους τῶν παθῶν  
ἐκκλησίας ἐν ἡδοναῖς χραίνουσιν ἐμπαθεστάταις.<sup>235</sup>

You see, O my brethren and children, how the enemies of God have trampled upon  
our land, have laid our cities waste, have burnt our sanctuaries and have filled with  
the blood of murder the altars of the bloodless sacrifice; how they defile with their  
impassioned pleasures our churches, which do not admit of the passions.<sup>236</sup>

There are elements here that are not ‘purely’ religious – the loss of ‘our land’ and ‘our cities’ –  
yet those who did any of these things (including the wasting and trampling) are ‘the enemies  
of God’. The separation a modern author might look for – how religious is this motivation? – is  
not one made by the source. If there is any distinction, it is used for effect: land, then cities and  
sanctuaries, up to the altars themselves. This crescendo effect emphasises the religious  
motivation.

Basil’s concept of fighting ὑπὲρ σωφροσύνης καὶ εὐσεβείας, is recalled by the last phrase.

Piety and sobriety need defending from ‘defilement’ and ‘impassioned pleasures’.

Heraclius concludes training in Cilicia with injunctions to piety and justice.

[...] παρήγγειλεν ἀδικίας ἀπέχεσθαι καὶ εὐσεβείας ἀντέχεσθαι.<sup>237</sup>

...he bade them abstain from injustice and cleave to piety.<sup>238</sup>

Here the pious conduct of war is not opposed but complementary to justice: to abstain from  
wickedness complements cleaving to piety. This suggests that, at least at the level of

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<sup>235</sup> Theophanes, 303, 29-33.

<sup>236</sup> Mango and Scott, 436.

<sup>237</sup> Theophanes, 304, 11-13.

<sup>238</sup> Mango and Scott, 436.

underlying vocabulary, the concepts of “holy war” and “just war” need not be distinct nor opposed. The relationship between pious and just conduct of war will be considered below.

When the first year’s fighting ends in a miraculous victory,

οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι πρὸς ὕψος τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείναντες τῷ θεῷ ἠύχαρίστουν καὶ τῷ  
στρατηγήσαντι καλῶς βασιλεῖ συντόνως προσηύχοντο.<sup>239</sup>

The Romans raised their arms aloft to give thanks to God and to praise earnestly  
their emperor who had led them well.<sup>240</sup>

The Roman soldiers praise the emperor, if not in the same breath as they thank God, then with  
the same hand-raising. The emperor’s person is closely associated with God.

### 3.5.2.3 AM 6114

At the start of the second year of the expedition, in keeping with just warfare, Heraclius  
suggests peace:

Ἡράκλειος δὲ ἔγραφε πρὸς Χοσρόην, ἥ τὴν εἰρήνην ἀσπάσασθαι, ἢ ἑαυτὸν ...  
εἰσβαλεῖν. ὁ δὲ Χοσρόης οὔτε τὴν εἰρήνην ἡσπάζετο οὔτε τι τὸν λόγον ἠγεῖτο...<sup>241</sup>

Heraclius wrote a letter to Chosroes bidding him embrace peace; if not, he would  
invade... But Chosroes neither embraced peace nor did he take any account of the  
statement...

Heraclius’ address to the army is more extreme than the previous year:

ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί μου, λάβωμεν εἰς νοῦν τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φόβον καὶ ἀγωνισώμεθα τὴν  
τοῦ θεοῦ ὕβριν ἐκδικῆσαι. στῶμεν γενναίως κατ’ ἐχθρῶν τῶν πολλὰ δεινὰ  
Χριστιανοῖς ἐργασαμένων. αἰδεσθῶμεν τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων αὐτοδέσποτον κράτος, καὶ

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<sup>239</sup> Theophanes, 306, 2-4.

<sup>240</sup> Mango and Scott, 437.

<sup>241</sup> Theophanes, 306, 23-25

στῶμεν κατ' ἐχθρῶν δυσσεβῶς ὠπλισμένων. λάβωμεν πίστιν τῶν φόνων  
 φονεύτριαν. ἀναλογισώμεθα ὅτι ἔνδον· ἐσμέν τῆς τῶν Περσῶν γῆς καὶ μέγαν  
 κίνδυνον φυγὴ φέρει. ἐκδικήσωμεν τὰς φθορὰς τῶν παρθένων, τὰ τετμημένα μέλη  
 τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἡμῶν ὀρῶντες πονήσωμεν τὰς καρδίας. οὐκ ἔστιν ἄμισθος ὁ  
 κίνδυνος, ἀλλ' αἰωνίου ζωῆς πρόξενος. στῶμεν ἀνδρείως, καὶ κύριος ὁ θεὸς  
 συνεργήσει ἡμῖν, καὶ ὀλέσει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν.<sup>242</sup>

Men, my brethren, let us keep in mind the fear of God and fight to avenge the insult  
 done to God. Let us stand bravely against the enemy who have inflicted many  
 terrible things on the Christians. Let us respect the sovereign state of the Romans  
 and oppose the enemy who are armed with impiety. Let us be inspired with faith that  
 defeats murder. Let us be mindful of the fact that we are within the Persian land and  
 that flight carries a great danger. Let us avenge the rape of our virgins and be  
 afflicted in our hearts as we see the severed limbs of our soldiers. The danger is not  
 without recompense: nay it leads to the eternal life. Let us stand bravely, and the  
 Lord our God will assist us and destroy the enemy.<sup>243</sup>

Heraclius begins by stressing religious feeling and religious motivation, the fear of God, τὸν τοῦ  
 θεοῦ φόβον, and the insult done to him, τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ὕβριν. Twice he tells the soldiers to  
 stand against the enemy (στῶμεν κατ' ἐχθρῶν). The adverb 'γενναίως' occurs in the Greek  
 Bible only in Maccabees, usually of the "Jewish martyrs" of that struggle. This is fitting for an  
 enemy who likewise had 'inflicted many terrible things'. In the second στῶμεν clause the  
 "secular" category of self-government, τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων αὐτοδέσποτον κράτος, is contrasted  
 with the "religious" category of impiety, δυσσεβῶς. There follows a second λάβωμεν: as they

<sup>242</sup> Theophanes, 307, 3-13. I have underlined words from George of Pisidia, *Her.* iii. frg 3.  
<sup>243</sup> Mango and Scott, 439.

were to hold onto the fear of God, here they are to hold onto faith. Faith is (again) τῶν φόνων φονεύτριαν, murderess of murders (see 3.5.1.1 above on the killing of Phocas).<sup>244</sup>

A more practical warning follows, of the danger in flight, then come two exhortations. None of these is overtly spiritual, unless τῶν παρθένων must be understood to be members of religious foundations.

The danger, presumably of fighting the war rather than fleeing from it, then becomes the basis for a promise of spiritual reward: it is ‘not without reward’, οὐκ ἄμισθος. The reward (or wage) is explicitly αἰωνίου ζωῆς, eternal life. He ends with a third exhortation to stand (ἀνδρείως, in a manly way, tying back to the typical rhetorical opening, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί μου) and a clear expectation of help from God against the aforesaid enemy.

Kolia-Dermitzaki gives this harangue and another the following year as evidence that the political authority in Byzantium promised spiritual rewards to its soldiers.<sup>245</sup>

It is hard to imagine a speech that might more clearly express a theology of “holy war”. ‘Let us fight to avenge the insult done to God’ is a succinct and very clear expression of religious motivation to battle. The speech promises spiritual payment for dangers endured. It relies on God and expects his help. It expresses throughout a strong contrast between “us” – God-fearing, brave, strong, faithful, and wronged – and “them” – outrageous, doing terrible things, impious, murderous, dangerous, rapacious and brutal.

An answering impious and destructive act is later perpetrated by the Romans:

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<sup>244</sup> George of Pisidia, *Her.* iii. frg. 3ε.

<sup>245</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, ““Holy War” Twenty Years Later’, 130 note 50. She mentions ‘more examples, mainly from the military treatises and imperial letters-harangues’, citing her monograph, Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine “Holy War”*, 157-58 (Maurice), 165 (Phocas?), 174-176 (Heraclius), 244, 248-251. I have only been able to access her English summary of this work, which does not detail sources.

ἐλθὼν εἰς Θηβαρμαῖς ... ἐν ᾗ ὑπῆρχεν ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Πυρὸς καὶ τὰ χρήματα Κροίσου,  
τοῦ Λυδῶν βασιλέως, καὶ ἡ πλάνη τῶν ἀνθράκων. [...]. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς [...] πυρὶ  
ἀνήλωσε τὸν τοῦ Πυρὸς ναὸν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν πυρὶ ἀναλώσας...<sup>246</sup>

At Thebarmaïs, 'wherein were the temple of Fire and the treasure of Croesus, king of  
Lydia, and the deceit of the coals,' the emperor 'burnt down the temple of Fire as  
well as the entire city'.<sup>247</sup>

The temple of Fire was a great holy place of the Zoroastrian religion of the Persians. Of the  
many towns captured this year, only this one is burned and the temple is mentioned in  
particular. This may have been in retaliation for the sack of Jerusalem. It may have been  
intentional irony on the Romans' part to fight one kind of fire with another. The 'deceit of the  
coals', ἡ πλάνη τῶν ἀνθράκων, Mango and Scott explain as the fire always burning but never  
leaving ash.<sup>248</sup> The miracle can only be seen by Christians as a deceit.

Heraclius took to divination by Gospel-book in order to decide where to winter:

ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐκέλευσε τὸν λαὸν ἀγνίζεσθαι τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ ἀνοίξας τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ  
εὐαγγέλια...<sup>249</sup>

The emperor ordered that the army should purify itself for three days. He then  
opened the holy Gospel...<sup>250</sup>

Aside from divine guidance, this is interesting for the need to purify the army. The soldiers may  
be fighting a holy war, but that does not make them holy in the required quality or degree,  
apparently. Purification for three days has many potential biblical parallels. It may have meant

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<sup>246</sup> Theophanes, 308, 3-9.

<sup>247</sup> Mango and Scott, 440.

<sup>248</sup> Mango and Scott, 441 note 8, citing Minorsky, 'Atropatene', 255. The wording is from George:  
*Her.* 3. 4α

<sup>249</sup> Theophanes, 308, 14-16.

<sup>250</sup> Mango and Scott, 440.

abstaining from food and drink for prayer (Esther 4:16, 2 Maccabees 13:12) or from sex (Ex 19:15, 1 Sam 21:6). It could mean washing to remove the pollution of bloodshed (Num 19:11-12, 31:19) but these texts require another washing on the seventh day. Recall that purification rites were a regular part of army life (2.5.1.2)

Heraclius continues to abide by *jus in bello*: in compassion and pity he frees his captives.<sup>251</sup> By the end of the year, even the freed Persians are praying that Heraclius will ‘slay Chosroes the destroyer of the world’, τὸν κοσμόλεθρον ἀνελόντι Χοσρόην.<sup>252</sup> George of Pisidia describes Heraclius as the deliverer of the world (κοσμορῦστης) in various texts – here is his appropriate antagonist.<sup>253</sup> The two are cosmic enemies (cf. 2.1.3.2).

#### 3.5.2.4 AM 6115

The third campaign year saw several important battles, one of which is summed up as, ‘he routed the barbarians with God’s help’:<sup>254</sup>

τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ συνεργίᾳ τρέπει τοὺς βαρβάρους,<sup>255</sup>

This is now the fourth occurrence of this phrasing, using συνεργία or its cognates.

The next battle is preceded by another harangue:

τὸ πλῆθος ὑμᾶς <τῶν ἐχθρῶν>, ἀδελφοί, μὴ ταραττέτω. θεοῦ γὰρ θέλοντος, εἷς

διώξει χιλίους. Θύσωμεν οὖν τῷ θεῷ ἑαυτοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν

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<sup>251</sup> φθάσας αὐτὸς ἐν Ἀλβανίᾳ ν’ χιλιάδας δεσμίους ἔχων τούτους τῇ εὐσυμπαθήτῳ αὐτοῦ καρδίᾳ ἐλέησας τῶν δεσμῶν ἔλυσεν, καὶ ἐπιμελείας καὶ ἀναπαύσεως μετεδίδου· ὥστε πάντες μετὰ δακρύων τούτῳ ἠὔχοντο ῥύστη γενέσθαι καὶ τῆς Περσίδος, τὸν κοσμόλεθρον ἀνελόντι Χοσρόην. (Theophanes 308, 21-25)

<sup>252</sup> Theophanes, 308, 24-25.

<sup>253</sup> See Mary Whitby, ‘Defender of the Cross’, 254 note 36, citing *Exp. Pers.* 1.70, *Bon.* 7, *Hex.* 1846 and *Sev.* 452.

<sup>254</sup> Mango and Scott, 442.

<sup>255</sup> Theophanes, 310, 11-12.



σωτηρίας. Λάβωμεν στέφος μαρτύρων, ἵνα καὶ ὁ μέλλων ἡμᾶς χρόνος ἐπαινέσῃ, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς μισθοὺς ἀποδώσῃ.<sup>256</sup>

Be not disturbed, O brethren, by the multitude of the enemy. For when God wills it, one man will rout a thousand. So let us sacrifice ourselves to God for the salvation of our brothers. May we win the crown of martyrdom so that we may be praised in the future and receive our recompense from God.

This is not a verbatim report: Heraclius encouraged the army ‘with these and many other words’, τούτοις καὶ ἄλλοις πλείοσι λόγοις.<sup>257</sup> Yet it claims to convey the message, ‘these words’. Theophanes’ source is probably the *Heraclias*. Two extant fragments are: ‘Be not disturbed, O brethren, by the multitude of the enemy. For when God wills it, one man will rout a thousand’; and, ‘May we win the crown of martyrdom so that we may be praised in the future’.<sup>258</sup>

Prior to the confrontation, the Persian armies were reinforced, while allied contingents had deserted the Romans. Heraclius defuses this by claiming good Scriptural precedent. The reference of one routing a thousand is to Deut. 32:30, ‘How should one rout a thousand... unless the Lord had given them up?’<sup>259</sup> This is an Old Testament promise of God’s help in war, applied directly to the Roman army. Given the circumstances, ‘God willing’ (θεοῦ [...] θέλοντος) seems like Heraclius’ working assumption rather than empty piety.

Nonetheless, against a more numerous enemy, deaths were to be expected. Heraclius again promises spiritual rewards. The first appeal, to the logic of sacrifice, is as interesting as the second, to martyrdom.

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<sup>256</sup> Theophanes, 310, 26 — 311, 2.

<sup>257</sup> Theophanes, 311, 2.

<sup>258</sup> Mango and Scott, 443, text-critical notes b and c. The fragments are Geo. Pisid. *Her.* 3. 6α-β,

6γ.

<sup>259</sup> Lancelot Brenton, *The English Translation of the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*, London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844, 1851, accessed in BibleWorks 7.

Describing death in battle as a sacrifice, either a gift or a sin offering, suggests that such a death is offered to earn God's favour. Rather than the reward being to the benefit of the individual as in martyrdom, sacrifice earns God's salvation for the 'brothers' who will survive. In this context, salvation means physical victory rather than eternal life: but this victory would be an outward and physical sign of the spiritual reality, God's favour.

Mango and Scott read λάβωμεν as 'may we receive'. Another option would be 'let us take' the crown of martyrs, στέφος μαρτύρων. This is a classic expression of spiritual expectation for a holy warrior, whether a Crusader or a *mujahid*: a martyr's death, with all the veneration that implies. The acceptance of this death has a dual aim. The first subjunctive clause after the ἵνα (καὶ [...] ἐπαινέση) describes what the people of the future will do: it reflects the high status of past martyrs in the liturgy of the church. The second subjunctive clause, on the divine level, implies that martyrs have earned something from God which he will pay *back* (τοὺς μισθοὺς ἀποδώσει).

The fragments of George of Pisidia do not cover all of the harangues, and in particular some key phrases are not attested as his. Yet even what can be seen in the fragments – 'let us take the crown of martyrs' – is fairly clear. It is also likely that the missing phrases are his.

Comparing the apparatus for the first year of the expedition (for which Mango and Scott can see the complete work from which Theophanes borrowed) with later years (when they cannot) suggests that Theophanes borrowed much more material from George. The known fragments are not the whole of George's material. Finally, it is more likely that Theophanes copied George closely (if uncritically) than that he invented such passages himself. Theophanes is

usually careful to reflect his sources' phraseology and elsewhere condemns a Muslim martyrs' paradise.<sup>260</sup>

### 3.5.2.5 AM 6116

This year sees religiously-differentiated violence. Chosroes persecutes Christians, as he had threatened years before (3.5.2.1):

ὁ δὲ Χοσρόης μανεῖς καὶ ἀποστείλας ἔλαβε τὰ κειμήλια τῶν ἐν πάσῃ <τῇ> ὑπὸ  
Πέρσαις ἐκκλησιῶν. καὶ ἠνάγκαζε τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς γενέσθαι εἰς τὴν τοῦ Νεστορίου  
θρησκείαν πρὸς τὸ πληῖσαι τὸν βασιλέα.<sup>261</sup>

Chosroes in his rage sent emissaries to confiscate the treasure of all the churches that were under Persian rule. And he forced the Christians to convert to the religion of Nestorius so as to wound the emperor.<sup>262</sup>

In extremity, Chosroes is using the wealth of the churches for funding. Yet he does it 'raging', while Heraclius was 'constrained' to do a similar thing (with consent). Chosroes strips the churches in all of the areas ruled by the Persians – at this stage of the war, that included many Roman cities. Persian armies often plundered churches: how much this represented a new policy or even was targeted at churches is arguable. Chosroes also forces conversions – not to sun-worship, but only to Nestorian Christianity, which was persecuted in the empire but tolerated in Persia. If he genuinely did these things to 'wound' Heraclius, then that suggests that the Persians had picked up, from Heraclius' conduct or at least his propaganda, that the

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<sup>260</sup> For editorial approach: Mango and Scott, xci-ii. For Paradise: Theophanes, 334, Mango and Scott, 465. Mango and Scott mark this passage as reliant on Theophanes' 'oriental source'.

<sup>261</sup> Theophanes, 314, 23-26.

<sup>262</sup> Mango and Scott, 445.

religious aspects of the war were important to him. On the other hand, any forced conversions may only represent more general polarisation over the course of the war.

### 3.5.2.6 AM 6117

In the fifth year, there are three foci of fighting: Heraclius himself in Lazica, a contingent he sends to defend Constantinople, and another with his brother Theodore.

Theodore is overtaken by the main Persian force under Sain (Shahin):

τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ διὰ τῶν πρεσβειῶν τῆς πανυμνήτου θεοτόκου συνεργήσαντος, καὶ πολέμου κροτηθέντος, χάλαζα παραδόξως κατὰ τῶν βαρβάρων κατηνέχθη καὶ πολλοὺς αὐτῶν ἐπάταξεν, ἡ δὲ τῶν Ῥωμαίων παράταξις γαλήνης ἀπήλαυεν. τρέπουσι δὲ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τοὺς Πέρσας καὶ ἀναιροῦσι πλῆθος πολὺ.<sup>263</sup>

With God's help (by the mediation of the all-praised Theotokos), when battle was joined a storm of hail fell unexpectedly on the barbarians and struck down many of them, whereas the Roman army enjoyed fair weather. So the Romans routed the Persians and slew a great multitude of them.<sup>264</sup>

This is another variation of the formula for the aid of God, this time using the participle *συνεργήσαντος*. More striking is the addition to the clause of Mary, *τῆς πανυμνήτου θεοτόκου*, interceding for the Romans. Because of her mediation, *διὰ τῶν πρεσβειῶν*, there is a miraculous selective fall of hail (see Exodus 9, esp. 9:25-26, Joshua 10:10-11), which brings victory. This year also saw the Avar siege of Constantinople, which Theophanes covers extremely briefly.<sup>265</sup> The virgin's prominence during the Avar siege may explain her claimed intervention for Theodore also. In the siege, the enemy are vanquished 'by God's might and

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<sup>263</sup> Theophanes, 315, 18-22.

<sup>264</sup> Mango and Scott, 446-47.

<sup>265</sup> Mango and Scott, 448 note 7

help and by the intercession of the immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God'.<sup>266</sup> Although much more could be said about the role of religion in the siege, in Theophanes at least it is merely what Kaegi calls heavily 'sacralized' war. Space does not allow an analysis that would test this in George's *Avar War* and *On the Resurrection*, the homily of Theodore Synkellos or the relevant year of the Paschal Chronicle.

### 3.5.2.7 AM 6118

Allies again abandon Heraclius. He encourages his men piously:

γνῶτε, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἡμῖν συμμαχεῖσαι θέλει, ἀλλ' ἢ ὁ μόνος ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἡ τοῦτον  
τεκοῦσα ἀσπόρως μήτηρ, ἵνα δείξῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δυναστείαν, <ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἐν πλήθει  
λαῶν ἢ ὀπλῶν ἡ σωτηρία ἐστίν, ἀλλ' εἰς τοὺς ἐλπίζοντας ἐν τῷ ἐλέει αὐτοῦ>  
καταπέμπει τὴν βοήθειαν αὐτοῦ.<sup>267</sup>

Know, O brothers, that no one wishes to fight with us, except God and His Mother  
who bore Him without seed, and this that He may show His might, since salvation  
does not lie in the abundance of soldiers and weapons, but to those who trust in His  
mercy He sends down His aid.<sup>268</sup>

As he did three years before, Heraclius resorts to a theology of force-comparison as a question of faith in God and of God's glory. This is a thread through the OT. It features in the stories of Gideon (Judges 7:2), David and Goliath (1 Sam 17:45-47) and Asa (2 Chron 14:10). The specific phrase οὐκ ἐν πλήθει is found only in Judith 9:11 and 1 Maccabees 3:19. The category of those who trust in God's mercy is common in the Psalms – some variety of this verb and noun pair occurs 11 times in 10 Psalms.

<sup>266</sup> Mango and Scott, 447, Theophanes, 316, 21-25: τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμει καὶ συνεργίᾳ καὶ ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῆς ἀχράντου καὶ θεομήτορος παρθένου ἠττήθησαν

<sup>267</sup> Theophanes, 317, 17-21.

<sup>268</sup> Mango and Scott, 448.

Heraclius says that God is *fighting with* the Romans, to show his might. This is a step beyond the rhetoric of previous years. There are several further references to God's help this year, of various forms. First, his *might* and help are credited:

καὶ προπηδήσας πάντων ὁ βασιλεὺς ἄρχοντι τῶν Περσῶν συνήντησεν· καὶ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμει καὶ τῇ βοηθείᾳ τῆς θεοτόκου τοῦτον κατέβαλεν· καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ προεκπηδήσαντες ἐτράπησαν.<sup>269</sup>

The emperor sallied forward in front of everyone and met the commander of the Persians, and, by God's might and the help of the Theotokos, threw him down; and those who had sallied forth with him were routed.<sup>270</sup>

The particularity is new – this is one instance of single combat. The word for help, βοηθεία rather than συνεργία, is repeated from the previous reference. It is used again in a general expression referring to the battle overall:

ἐνίκησαν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι· ἀλλὰ τοῦτο γέγονε μόνη τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ βοηθείᾳ.<sup>271</sup>

...and if the Romans won, they did so only by God's help.<sup>272</sup>

There is a sense of the miraculous about this battle, which was longer than any in living memory. The Roman army are twice shown as fully aware of divine involvement in the campaign:

καὶ ἀνεπαύσατο πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἀπολαύοντες καὶ δοξάζοντες τὸν θεόν.<sup>273</sup>

And the whole army rested contentedly and gave glory to God.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Theophanes, 318, 17-20.

<sup>270</sup> Mango and Scott, 449.

<sup>271</sup> Theophanes, 319, 21-22.

<sup>272</sup> Mango and Scott, 450.

<sup>273</sup> Theophanes, 321, 12.

<sup>274</sup> Mango and Scott, 451.

...Βεβδάρχ. καὶ τοῦτο καταστρέψαντες καὶ πυρὶ παραδόντες εὐχαρίστουν τῷ θεῷ τῷ  
διὰ τῶν πρεσβειῶν τῆς θεοτόκου τοιαῦτα θαυμάσια ποιήσαντι. τίς γὰρ ἤλπιζε  
φυγεῖν τὸν Χοσρόην...<sup>275</sup>

This [palace of Bebdarch], too, they destroyed and burnt, and they thanked God for  
having wrought such wonders by the intercession of the Theotokos. For who had  
expected that Chosroes would flee...?<sup>276</sup>

Again, there is a suggestion (coming from George of Pisidia)<sup>277</sup> that the war is atypical, the  
outcome unexpected.

After mentioning captives from Roman cities thronging to the emperor's trail, Theophanes  
includes a brief excuse for the wanton destruction of Chosroes' palaces and royal estates in  
Persia:

καὶ καταστρέφων τὰ τοῦ Χοσρόου παλάτια κτίσματα ὑπέρτιμα ὄντα καὶ θαυμαστά  
καὶ καταπληκτικά, ἅπερ ἕως ἐδάφους καθεῖλεν, ἵνα μάθῃ Χοσρόης, οἷον πόνον εἶχον  
Ῥωμαῖοι τῶν πόλεων ἐρημουμένων παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πυρπολουμένων.<sup>278</sup>

These priceless, wonderful and astonishing structures he demolished to the ground  
so that Chosroes might learn how great a pain the Romans had suffered when their  
cities were laid waste and burnt by him.<sup>279</sup>

We may assume that greed, malice, revenge and anger played some part in this. However, the  
motive actually admitted to is to teach the foreign king a lesson.

Heraclius continues to carry himself as a just warrior, claiming to be fighting in order to restore  
peace. Even at this stage of the war, the total destruction of the enemy is not his stated aim:

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<sup>275</sup> Theophanes, 321, 23-26.

<sup>276</sup> Mango and Scott, 451.

<sup>277</sup> George of Pisidia, *Her.* 3. Frg 48.

<sup>278</sup> Theophanes, 322, 18-21.

<sup>279</sup> Mango and Scott, 452.

ὁ δὲ Ἡράκλειος ἔγραψε τῷ Χοσρόῃ· “ἐγὼ διώκω καὶ πρὸς εἰρήνην τρέχω. οὐ γὰρ ἐκὼν πυρπολῶ τὴν Περσίδα, ἀλλὰ βιασθεὶς ὑπὸ σοῦ. ρίψωμεν οὖν κἂν νῦν τὰ ὄπλα καὶ εἰρήνην ἀσπασώμεθα· σβέσωμεν τὸ πῦρ, πρὶν τὸ πᾶν καταφλέξῃ.”<sup>280</sup>

Now Heraclius wrote to Chosroes: ‘I am pursuing you as I hasten towards peace. For it is not of my free will that I am burning Persia, but constrained by you. Let us, therefore, throw down our arms even now and embrace peace. Let us extinguish the fire before it consumes everything.’<sup>281</sup>

This speech is drawn from George of Pisidia. It is Heraclius’ propaganda, either directly from him for foreigners or indirectly for Roman citizens. The metaphor for ending the war, extinguishing ‘the fire’, seems to have religious overtones: it may hint to the emperor’s Christian subjects that Zoroastrianism is a target.

The war came to an end when Chosroes’ son Siroes [Kavadh Široe] led a coup and imprisoned the king. Chosroes was ‘cast... in the House of Darkness’.<sup>282</sup> A suspiciously similar prison, for political prisoners who became nonpersons, was called the House of Oblivion/forgetfulness.<sup>283</sup>

George of Pisidia may have reinterpreted the title to evoke Matt 25:29-30. But following George, Theophanes’ main emphasis is on Chosroes’ greed – Chosroes had fortified the prison as a treasury, and he was half-starved there. Chosroes was mocked and beaten by his former nobles, tormented with the death of his children,<sup>284</sup> then killed slowly with bows and arrows, ‘and thus in slow pain he gave up his wicked soul’.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Theophanes, 324, 16-20.

<sup>281</sup> Mango and Scott, 453.

<sup>282</sup> George of Pisidia, *Her.* 3. frg. 52.2α.

<sup>283</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 1.5 discusses Kavadh’s imprisonment therein

<sup>284</sup> The death of Chosroes’ favourite son Merdanshah and his mother, the Christian Shirin, are not mentioned.

<sup>285</sup> Whitby and Whitby, 455. καὶ οὕτως κατὰ μικρὸν ἐν δεινοῖς παρέδωκε τὴν πονηρὰν αὐτοῦ ψυχὴν. Theophanes, 327, 9-10.



τότε ὁ Σιρόης γράφει πρὸς Ἡράκλειον εὐαγγελιζόμενος αὐτῷ τὴν τοῦ μιανοῦ  
Χοσρόου ἀναίρεσιν· καὶ εἰρήνην ἀειπαγῇ πρὸς αὐτὸν ποιησάμενος πάντας τοὺς ἐν  
φρουραῖς Χριστιανοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἐν Περσίδι πάση αἰχμαλώτους ἀπέδωκεν αὐτῷ σὺν  
τῷ πατριάρχῃ Ζαχαρίᾳ καὶ τοῖς τιμίοις καὶ ζωοποιοῖς ξύλοις τοῖς ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων  
ληφθεῖσιν ὑπὸ Σαρβαραζᾶ, ὅταν τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ παρέλαβεν.<sup>286</sup>

Then Siroes wrote to the emperor to give him the good tidings of the slaying of the  
foul Chosroes, and after making with him a permanent peace, he handed back to him  
all the imprisoned Christians and the captives held in every part of Persia together  
with the patriarch Zacharias and the precious and life-giving cross that had been  
taken from Jerusalem by Sarbarazas, when the latter captured Jerusalem.<sup>287</sup>

There is a glee in his suffering, and a continuing negative characterisation even in death, that  
marks ‘the foul Chosroes’ as an exceptional enemy.

This account telescopes the longer process of negotiations over the final peace. Zacharias had  
died in Persia some years previously. Thirdly, the exact itinerary of the True Cross as it was  
returned and brought to Jerusalem is difficult to reconstruct.<sup>288</sup> But Theophanes’ slipshod  
account does indicate that the war concluded with a peace treaty. There remained a  
substantial Zoroastrian Sassanid polity beyond the empire. In the next year Theophanes shows  
Heraclius reciprocally freeing Persian prisoners.<sup>289</sup> This is not an ‘all-out’ war, with death and  
destruction the only conceivable conclusion.

A peace treaty may have been the best way to satisfy all of Heraclius’ religious objectives.

Persian obfuscation, even in defeat, could have prevented the return of prisoners scattered

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<sup>286</sup> Theophanes, 327, 10-16.

<sup>287</sup> Whitby and Whitby, 455.

<sup>288</sup> Drijvers, 177 gives references.

<sup>289</sup> Theophanes, 327, 19-24; Mango and Scott, 457.

through Persian domains and of the True Cross held somewhere among the king's treasures. In Theophanes' history, the war created the conditions for such a peace treaty.

### 3.5.2.8 AM 6119

The war and its peace are compared to God's creation of the world – six years of war match to six days of creation, and the seventh is for God – and the emperor – to take his rest. This remarkable parallel, from George of Pisidia, again sets the emperor on a cosmic, semi-divine plane.<sup>290</sup>

Heraclius celebrates with a triumphant return to Constantinople and a visit to Jerusalem to reinstate the True Cross. Thanksgiving to God is a major component of each occasion, as is a cementing of Orthodox Christianity.<sup>291</sup> On the way to Jerusalem he converts and baptises a Jewish man and 'giving thanks' bans Jews from the city.<sup>292</sup> At Edessa he reverses Chosroes' gift of the main church, taking it for the orthodox from the Nestorians.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.5.2.9 AM 6120

In the following year Theophanes begins to discuss the controversy over monothelitism, drawing from very different sources. After a summary of councils, excommunications and exiles down to Constans II, he notes that:

οὕτω δὲ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τότε ὑπὸ τε τῶν βασιλέων καὶ τῶν δυσσεβῶν ιερῶν  
ταραπτομένης, ἀνέστη ὁ ἐρημικώτατος Ἀμαλὴκ τύπτων ἡμᾶς τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

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<sup>290</sup> Geo. Pisid. *Her.* 3, frg. 54α–β, cited in Mango and Scott, 458 note *a*.

<sup>291</sup> Theophanes, 328, 9,15; Mango and Scott, 457-59, with commentary on the chronological difficulties around the emperor's actual movements.

<sup>292</sup> Theophanes, 328, 26-27.

<sup>293</sup> Theophanes, 328, 28 – 329, 1.

καὶ γίνεται πρώτη φοβερὰ πτώσις τοῦ Ῥωμαϊκοῦ στρατοῦ, [...] ἥτις οὐκ ἐπαύσατο, ἄχρις ἂν ὁ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διώκτης ἐν Σικελίᾳ κακῶς ἀνηρέθῃ]<sup>294</sup>

‘while the Church at that time was being troubled thus by emperors and impious priests, Amalek rose up in the desert, smiting us, the people of Christ, and there occurred the first terrible downfall of the Roman army [...] and the devastation [...] did not cease until the persecutor of the Church [i.e. Constans] had been miserably slain in Sicily..<sup>295</sup>

Kaegi notes a strong theme of the judgement of God in monophysite Christian sources after the Arab conquests.<sup>296</sup> This is repeated in Theophanes Confessor (see 3.5.2.9). As I mentioned in 2.5.1.3, God’s judgement is the negative aspect of the God who rewards holy warriors.

### 3.5.2.10 Summary

Theophanes presents Heraclius as fighting a war with God’s help, in general and in specific circumstances. This theme develops over the war, to the point where God is even said to fight with the Byzantines against the enemy. They win by his will, by his might and help.

There are many interesting biblical allusions, particularly to the wars of the OT and the Maccabees. Whether one sees these comparators as holy wars may colour one’s perception of Heraclius’ own campaigns.

Heraclius’ religious motivations are very clear, both for himself and those he uses to motivate his soldiers. Two harangues clearly contain several promises of spiritual reward.

The period involves some attacks on religion or religious expression, such as Chosroes’ ultimatum to take up sun-worship, the burning of the sacred fire temple at Thebarmāis,

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<sup>294</sup> Theophanes, 332, 9-19.

<sup>295</sup> Mango and Scott, 462.

<sup>296</sup> Kaegi, ‘Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest’, section XII of Kaegi, W.E., Jr *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium, Collected Studies* 162 (London: Variorum, 1982), repr. of ‘Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest’, 139-49 in *Church History* 38:2 (1969).

stripping church treasures and forced conversions, a hint that ‘the fire’ needed to be extinguished and the conversion and exclusion of Jews.

Much of the religious material, including prayers before battle and after victory, is compatible with both “holy war” and sacralised “just war”. There are other conspicuous elements which ordinarily occur in a just war setting, such as the emphasis on peace as the goal of war, the negotiated settlement, the mercy shown to prisoners, or the general admonition to abstain from wickedness (and cleave to piety).

### 3.5.3 The Paschal Chronicle

The *Paschal Chronicle* incorporates Heraclius’ dispatch to Constantinople announcing the death of Chosroes.<sup>297</sup> The dispatch was recited to the public in St Sophia on Sunday, 15 May 628. It illustrates the state (and church) interpretation of the end of the war.

#### 3.5.3.1 The Victory Despatch

The dispatch begins with Psalm 99, quoted entire and verbatim, christianised by swapping Christos for chrestos, ‘good’ in verse 4: ὅτι Χριστὸς κύριος.<sup>298</sup> It is directly applied to the Byzantines as God’s ‘people and the sheep of his pasture’.<sup>299</sup> It calls ‘all the earth’ to be joyful and give thanks to God.<sup>300</sup> A verse from Psalm 95 follows with another general exhortation to praise and thanksgiving, still in psalmic terms.

The reason for this celebration is the fall of Chosroes: ἔπεσεν γὰρ ὁ ὑπερήφανος καὶ | θεομάχος Χοσρόης.<sup>301</sup> This is expanded (ἔπεσεν καὶ ... ) in the next sentences. A second γὰρ signals a description of Shiroes’ coup. This culminates in Chosroes’ execution:

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<sup>297</sup> *Chronicon Paschale* 727.15-734.17, Greatrex and Lieu, 220-223.

<sup>298</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 727.20. Ps 99 in the LXX is 100 in English versions.

<sup>299</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 727.18. (Ps 99:3): ἡμεῖς δὲ λαὸς αὐτοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ πρόβατα νομῆς αὐτοῦ.

<sup>300</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 727.15. (Ps 99:1): πᾶσα ἡ γῆ.

<sup>301</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 728.4-5.

μετὰ τὸ ποιῆσαι τὸν θεομίσητον Χοσρόην τὰς δ' ἡμέρας σιδηροδέσμιον ἐν πάσῃ  
 ὀδύνῃ, ἀνεῖλε τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγνώμονα καὶ θεομάχον καὶ ὑπερήφανον καὶ βλάσφημον  
 πικροτάτῳ, θανάτῳ, ἵνα γινῶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ τεχθεὶς ἐκ Μαρίας, ὁ σταυρωθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν  
 Ἰουδαίων, καθὼς αὐτὸς ἦν γράψας, εἰς ὃν ἐβλάσφημήσῃ, θεὸς παντοδύναμός  
 ἐστίν<sup>302</sup>

...after he had placed the iron-bound God-hated [Chosroes] in great pain for four  
 days, he killed this same arrogant, proud blasphemer, who fought against God, by a  
 most cruel death so that he might know that Jesus, born of Mary, crucified by the  
 Jews, as he himself had written in blasphemy, is almighty God...<sup>303</sup>

The rest of the dispatch is a detailed description of exchanges between the Roman and Persian  
 leadership after 15 March,<sup>304</sup> with copies of two diplomatic letters.

The 'news' sections of the dispatch are celebratory, revelling in the death of Chosroes. His  
 imprisonment, torment and death are all described – '[Siroes] treated [Chosroes] according to  
 how we [Heraclius] had written to him'.<sup>305</sup> This is followed by spiritual reflection on Chosroes'  
 eternal fate, expressed through biblical allusions.<sup>306</sup>

In fighting against the empire, the king of Persia has become the enemy of God. He is never,  
 here, identified as an enemy of the race of the Romans, of the empire of the Romans or of  
 Heraclius personally. The epithets used of Chosroes stress his enmity toward God or God's

<sup>302</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 729.3-8.

<sup>303</sup> Greatrex and Lieu, *Persian Wars*, 220.

<sup>304</sup> The date of the previous dispatch: *Chron. Pasch.* 729.18, 730.3-4.

<sup>305</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 729.8-9: καὶ ἀπέδωκεν αὐτῷ κατὰ | τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν γραφέντα αὐτῷ.

<sup>306</sup> A partial list is: Isaiah 14:11,15 ('He has fallen and has been overthrown, down to the  
 underworld'), Psalm 33:17(LXX) or 108:15 ('and his memory has been obliterated from the earth'), Psalm  
 9:6 ('has perished with a crash'), Psalm 7:16 ('His labours rebounded on his own head, and onto his head  
 descended his injustice'), Matthew 26:24 || Mark 14:21 ('it would have been better for that man if he  
 had not been born') and Revelation 20 ('he departed to the unquenchable fire prepared for Satan and  
 those worthy of him').

enmity toward him.<sup>307</sup> This must affect any assessment of the religious motivation of Heraclius' campaigns.

The Byzantine troops are 'our Christ-loving expeditionary forces' (three times), 'our most-successful army' and 'the Saracens who are in the control of our Christ-loving state', and their officers are 'most glorious' and 'most magnificent'. There is no shame in their profession. There is no sense in which soldiers are less Christ-loving (φιλοχρίστοι) than any other Christians.<sup>308</sup> God is working with them – they have the intercession of the Theotokos. They are successful by this divine and miraculous help. This does not seem to gel with Harakas's insistence that fighting was never a meritorious work. When carried to this degree, nor does it support Dennis's claim that such rhetoric is just trying to keep or claim God as onside.

The dispatch is unabashedly Christian. It opens with a Psalm applied directly to the citizens of the empire as God's chosen people and continues with psalmic language. It reflects on Chosroes' fate with repeated biblical allusions. The despatch signs off with a declaration of faith, a notification that the army has struck camp and is coming home, a blessing and a request for further prayer.<sup>309</sup> This is the voice of a thoroughly Christian secular state.

The appended peace arrangements agree that Persia will continue as a great power (in contrast to the 'little countries' around them).<sup>310</sup> They arrange for the free return of prisoners.<sup>311</sup> The Byzantine field army is immediately pulling back to Armenia and Roman Mesopotamia. There are to be no further reprisals, nor an occupying force in Persia proper,

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<sup>307</sup> Chosroes' enmity: 'arrogant' (ὕπερήφανος); 'who fought against God' (θεομάχος), 'puffed up' (ὕπεραιρόμενος); 'impious' (ἄσεβης); 'arrogant, proud blasphemer, who fought against God' (ἀγνώμονα καὶ θεομάχος καὶ ὑπερήφανος καὶ βλάσφημος). God's enmity: 'accursed' (καταράτου); 'God-hated' (θεομίσητος). Other combinations occur.

<sup>308</sup> Elsewhere in the Paschal Chronicle, φιλοχρίστος is used only of 'the pious and Christ-loving emperor Constantine'. (*Chron. Pasch.* 17.15).

<sup>309</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* 734.

<sup>310</sup> Greatrex and Lieu, *Persian Wars*, 220, 222; *Chron. Pasch.* 736.3-4, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ἐτέρων βασιλείσκων τῶν κύκλῳ ὄντων τῆς ἡμετέρας πολιτείας

<sup>311</sup> Greatrex and Lieu, *Persian Wars*, 223; *Chron. Pasch.* 736-7.

though we know from other sources some provinces and cities would be ceded.<sup>312</sup> With the death of Chosroes, the religious question appears settled and so peace is inevitable.

### 3.5.4 Theophylact Simocatta

#### 3.5.4.1 Justinian's Harangue

Theophylact describes the general Justinian speaking before a battle against Chosroes I in AD 575. The harangue contains many high-flown calls for the soldiers to show bravery and philosophical acceptance of bodily danger and death. Part of the climax is the clinching argument:

σήμερον ὑμᾶς στρατολογοῦσιν ἄγγελοι καὶ τὰς τῶν τεθνεώτων ψυχὰς  
ἀναγράφονται, οὐ μισθὸν ἰσοστάσιον αὐταῖς παρεχόμενοι, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ  
ἀπειροπλάσιον ὑπερβαίνοντα τῇ ὅλκῃ τοῦ δωρήματος.

Today angels are recruiting you and are recording the souls of the dead, providing for them not a corresponding recompense, but one that infinitely exceeds in the weight of the gift.<sup>313</sup>

The promise is of eternal life. As the soldiers fight, they are enlisted by angels as heavenly soldiers (cf. 2 Tim 2:3-4, Rom 6:13). Those who die will have their souls recorded and will be provided with a wage (μισθὸν) infinitely exceeding the value of one life: logically, this is eternal life. The word ἀπειροπλάσιον may reflect Jesus' promise of πολλαπλασίονα (Luk 18:30) or ἑκατονταπλασίονα (Matt. 19:29 || Mark 10:30), '*many/a hundred times* more now in this age, and in the age to come eternal life'. The infinite reward is eternal life in the age to come.

The theology behind the promise is less clear. Apart from the words of Jesus above, the use of στρατολογοῦσιν suggests an equation between service in the Roman and the angelic armies –

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<sup>312</sup> See for example, Greatrex and Lieu, 224ff.

<sup>313</sup> Whitby and Whitby, 93-94.

both serve God, and to die is to pass from one to the other. The recording of souls (τὰς ψυχὰς ἀναγράφονται) suggests the martyrs. The language of gift (τοῦ δωρήματος) is connected to sacrifice.

This late and very literary account is almost certainly invented. The translators doubt the entire battle:

It is probable that Theophylact's account of the battle (iii.14.1-8), which is highly rhetorical and is composed of stylized descriptions... is sheer invention...<sup>314</sup>

Whitby and Whitby show that the same problem identified by Kaegi with respect to Domitianus applies even more to Justinian. But this makes it much more useful evidence for Heraclius's reign. This evidence shifts into my period of interest, as a reflection of Heraclian values. Theophylact presented Justinian as noble, correct and attentive.<sup>315</sup> He thought such a man would or should have said these words.

Theophylact had a very successful legal career in Constantinople throughout Heraclius' reign – the current *termini* for his time there are 610 to 641.<sup>316</sup> He wrote his *History* under the patriarch's patronage:<sup>317</sup> Sergius may have created a teaching post for Theophylact.<sup>318</sup> Theophylact probably finished the *History* in about 630.<sup>319</sup> He was probably a sacred judge in 641.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Whitby and Whitby, 95 note 65, also xxii, '...in all probability, the pitched battle never occurred... the whole narrative is merely a literary setpiece: in Theophylact, grandiloquent language and bombastic imagery are often an indication of a lack of factual substance.'

<sup>315</sup> Theophylact, *History*, iii.12.6-7; Whitby and Whitby, 91.

<sup>316</sup> For details see Whitby and Whitby, xiv.

<sup>317</sup> George calls Sergius 'the great high priest and prelate of the universal inhabited world', τὸν μέγαν τῆς ἀπανταχόθεν οἰκουμένης ἀρχιερέα καὶ πρόεδρον: Theophylact, *History, Dialogue* 8. Whitby and Whitby, 4.

<sup>318</sup> Theophylact, *History, Dialogue* 10, Whitby and Whitby, 5: Sergius 'provided an advantageously sited rostrum and unthreatened freedom of speech', βῆμά τε προτέθεικεν εὐμενῶς ἰδρυμένον καὶ παρησίαν ἀκίνδονον; on the teaching post, Whitby and Whitby, 5 note 12 citing Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 59-60.

<sup>319</sup> Whitby and Whitby, xiv and 230 note 74.

<sup>320</sup> Whitby and Whitby, xiv and note 2.



Theophylact, then, represents the opinion of an educated legal mind in the continued good graces of the Patriarch of Constantinople. If Theophylact felt that Justinian would or should have promised eternal life to his soldiers killed in battle, this is more than 'a reflection of values prevailing at or near the court of Heraclius', in Kaegi's phrase.<sup>321</sup> He indicates the official view of Heraclius and Sergius.

#### 3.5.4.2 Summary

Theophylact shows that the court view of Heraclius and Sergius was that a good general should rouse his troops by appealing to their spiritual side – including by promising them spiritual rewards.

#### 3.5.5 Summary

Through Section 3.5 we have now identified many holy war elements in the Greek sources for Heraclius' Persian campaigns.

George of Pisidia uses Biblical allusion to praise Heraclius as a warrior. His comparators boost the image of Heraclius as a towering spiritual figure guiding his people. They also present models of godly violence that results in spiritual or political peace.

Theophanes presents Heraclius as fighting a war with God's help. This develops to the point where God is said to fight with the Byzantines against the enemy. There are many allusions to Biblical "holy wars".

Heraclius' personal religious motivation is clear and he clearly promises spiritual rewards to motivate his troops. Theophanes' account describes attacks on religion or religious expression, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish. Much of the religious material is compatible with both "holy war" and sacralised "just war".

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<sup>321</sup> Kaegi, 'Review of *The Byzantine "Holy War"*', 519.

Heraclius' victory dispatch preserved in the Paschal Chronicle is thoroughly Christian in its language and presentation of events and in the implied motivation underlying these. It articulates the state (and church) view of the end of the war as the downfall of Chosroes and the end of his anti-religious stance. It is the religious settlement, rather than the defeat of the rival empire, which is highlighted: Persia continues as a great power after the war. Chosroes is portrayed consistently as the enemy of God rather than of the Romans. The dispatch portrays Christian soldiers in entirely positive spiritual terms *as soldiers*, with no sense of disquiet about warfare as a necessary evil.

The speech of Justinian in Theophylact's history represents the view of Heraclius' court and Sergius' propaganda, that a good general should rouse his troops by appealing to their spiritual side – including by promising them spiritual rewards.

In the next section I apply these elements to the objections raised by historians to labeling these campaigns as a holy war.

## 3.6 Addressing the Objections

### 3.6.1 Introduction

This section applies the holy war elements identified in Section 3.5 to address the objections raised by historians to calling Heraclius' Persian campaigns a holy war. The objections are arranged according to Dennis' three criteria for holy war.

### 3.6.2 Religious Authority

The war is set up with Christian faith at stake under Chosroes' threats. Declaring war is a proper exercise of the authority of the pious emperor, who hunts down and conquers his own passions, then those of criminals and heretics within his kingdom and then tames threatening

foreign enemies. He enjoys this position 'from God' as a result of his hope and faith by the Spirit, and his zeal, his eagerness for the great toils that the responsibility brings.

Heraclius' imperial authority is buttressed by the authority of the church, which advances money for the campaigns and melts down dedicated objects for the war effort. Patriarch and emperor are working closely together in the proclamation of the war. This goes further than Dennis' 'prayers and blessings'. Runciman found this development decisive:

...in 615 the invaders took the holiest of Christian relics, the True Cross which the Empress Helena had found, from its shrine in Jerusalem. This humiliation was so deeply felt in Constantinople that the Patriarch Sergius of his own accord offered a loan from the Church to the State. Church revenues were handed over to the Emperor. Church vessels were melted down that he might have the metal in them. The war had become a Holy War.<sup>322</sup>

Kaegi's separation of Heraclian propaganda from Sergius is simply not credible. Sergius was one of the subjects of George's poetry, praised in terms that link him very closely to Heraclius and the emperor's public image – George is the patriarch's panegyrist just as he is the emperor's.<sup>323</sup> George of Pisidia and Theophylact were distinguished employees and associates of the Patriarch. This suggests that Sergius built and oversaw the absent emperor's propaganda machine in the capital.

Due to his successful carriage of the war, Heraclius is presented by AD 630 as a messianic figure, outshining David and Constantine. The emperor's person is closely associated with God in the striking 'mystical allegory' that compares six years of war to the six days' work of creation. A hint of such associations came as early as the celebrations after the first battle of the campaign.

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<sup>322</sup> Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 54-55, my emphasis.

<sup>323</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 266-70.

The patriarch and emperor worked very closely together during the Persian campaigns, so Dennis' first criterion was met. A holy war was declared by the competent religious authority of the emperor and patriarch working closely together.

This does not resolve whether a holy war can be declared by the political authority. We may speculate just how strong the emperor's spiritual authority was, apart from the religious authority of the patriarch. I return to this in 3.7.1.

### 3.6.3 Religious Motivation

Dennis doubts that the religious objectives of Heraclius campaigns are his *primary* motivation.

George of Pisidia's first panegyric is not totally unlike Dennis' description of the first crusaders: 'while [Heraclius] had a season to wait without toils' (*In Heraclium* 42), he chose to come from Africa to Constantinople, moving from safety into danger, in order to oppose and defeat Phocas. He 'thought nothing of [his] blood' (49) but was 'burning for God' (53). Heraclius' killing of Phocas is presented as an act of faith, and he is likened to 'faithful Phineas'.

Religiously motivated from the beginning, his pious rule, George hopes, will save the state.

Other motives could be posited – Heraclius gained more than most Crusaders – but they are not advanced. To George's mind, absent religion Heraclius could have stayed safe in Africa.

As I observed in chapter 1 above, Dennis' use of this test sets a very high bar. Even being exactly like an Old Testament model is not enough – we must scrutinize any allusion closely for mere tribal conflict over land. Best of all would be allusions to the Maccabees. At issue here is whether the bar is appropriately high.

Heraclius' soldiers are linked, by verbal allusions and biblical parallels, to the Maccabean martyrs and armies – who, Dennis was willing to concede, 'perhaps' fought holy wars.

Heraclius and his men, then, are similar to both the Maccabees and the Crusaders in their motivation – two groups that Dennis concedes 'perhaps' and definitely fought holy wars.

They are also encouraged by recourse to Deuteronomy. The reference, Deuteronomy 32:30, is from a song attributed to Moses, in which Israel's actions and purposes dominate for four verses (15-18) out of forty-three. For the rest, God's motivation and objectives in choosing, preparing and judging Israel are paramount. Dennis' 'final analysis' of the wars behind Deuteronomy may not be religious,<sup>324</sup> but such a reading of Deuteronomy does not match this historical source's use of this reference. Here, the analysis and use of Deuteronomy is religious.

This is not the standard reading of the Greek church, which preferred (after Clement and Origen) to read the OT war narratives 'as allegorically symbolic of the perennial quest to overcome evil tendencies by virtuous action'.<sup>325</sup> The non-standard nature of the comparison makes it more likely to be a deliberate and meaningful speech-act regarding religious warfare.

Many of the religious elements are explicable as sacralised warfare – the characterization of the enemy as devious Magi and pillaging Parthians would fit with the tribalism of wartime. Individual elements reflecting sacralisation are compatible with but do not prove holy war. Likewise Heraclius' seeking and assurance of God's help could merely be typical of the religious trappings that Dennis dismisses. Yet this invocation comes after a religious threat from Chosroes. The response reflects Heraclius' divine zeal – it cannot only be 'trappings'. Heraclius believes it himself. As discussed above, his motivational speech uses what Dennis would distinguish only to build to a crescendo: the Persians have done terrible things to land, cities, sanctuaries, even altars. They are defiling churches. The religious motivation is emphasized as primary.

Heraclius' stated aim in fighting in the second year is 'to avenge the insult done to God.' If we think of the Persian campaigns as 'imperial wars ...[of which the] objectives sometimes coincided with religious ones', then there is an apparent category error in talking about Roman

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<sup>324</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

<sup>325</sup> McGuckin, 'Nonviolence and Peace Traditions', note 12.

sovereignty and the state in the same breath as impiety. Heraclius puts the two together and (again) does not distinguish. The combination is not mere 'coincidence': the *function* of 'the sovereign state of the Romans' is to protect Christians from 'many terrible things'. The enemy of the state is 'armed with impiety'.

I pass over the many thanksgivings and mentions of God's help (βοηθεία and συνεργία) in the sources, except to note that they are at times called miraculous or unprecedented. They are applied not generally but to specific incidents and outcomes. Those doing the fighting (and the writing) felt strongly about 'enlisting the aid of powerful allies'.<sup>326</sup> This is not merely a matter of course, the formal 'trappings' of religion.

There are occasions where the motivations or objectives that begin a war are not retained over the course of the war – for example it is conceivable for a war to be continued for religious reasons, or along religious lines, when it had little initial religious content. Likewise a 'sacralised war' may have the effect of encouraging the religious into full-blown 'holy war'. Dennis does not allow for such an effect. Does this war become more sacralised over time?

Twice, giving thanks to God overflows into a specific action. The palace of Bebdarch is destroyed and burnt after Chosroes flees, 'and they thanked God for having wrought such wonders'. Heraclius restores the True Cross to Jerusalem and 'giving thanks' expels the remaining Jews. Religion amidst violent events develops into actions befitting holy war.

Thebarmaïs, the site of the Temple of Fire, is the only captured town burnt in that year's campaigning – this is a religiously-motivated action. If it were explicable in purely strategic terms without reference to its cultural and moral (i.e. religious) effect, we would expect others to have been burned also.

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<sup>326</sup> So Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 34.

The sacralisation of the war advances to the point where Heraclius makes a major decision according to divination. If we say, 'sometimes Heraclius and his army did things because he' – or even just 'they' – 'thought God was telling him so', we admit that religious motivations were primary.

It is possible that Chosroes genuinely pursued a policy of religious persecution – despoiling church treasures, forcing conversions to Nestorianism. The policy is believable: "Nestorian" (perhaps monophysite) Christians struggled in the empire and were sometimes sponsored by Persia for political reasons.<sup>327</sup> If Chosroes did this to wound the emperor, that suggests that both Chosroes and Heraclius were religiously motivated – or at least that Chosroes understood Heraclius to be so. Perhaps this was as a result of all the merely sacralised rhetoric on the Roman side.

On the other hand, if the emperor was not the particular target, then the forced conversions may represent the polarization that might be expected over the course of a long war. This persecution reads as a new development. Chosroes, who had been sympathetic to (some) Christians decades before, may have found it expedient to demonise them now. What then were Christian subjects of the Persians to do? Sacralisation in this way can lead to holy war, as 'tribal' motivations are infused with genuinely religious consequences.

If no one was really forced to convert, and no churches were really stripped? That is a matter of 'what really happened', when that was largely unknowable for most of the main actors at the time. According to the sources, religious motivation was where their attention lay – or where they chose to direct their people's attention.

The slaying of Chosroes is 'good tidings' – Heraclius is evangelized with the news. Siroes and Heraclius agree on a permanent peace, which enables all the religious objectives of the war to

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<sup>327</sup> S.A. Harvey, 'Persia', 717-718 in Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Garland, 1990).

be met – over and above the death of Chosroes the destroyer of the world, the man fighting God. All the world is urged to rejoice, especially God's chosen people in St Sophia listening to the emperor's dispatch. The war ends when the religious objectives are met.

It is possible that Kaegi's objection to holy wars that end in treaties and diplomacy (his third objection cited above) centres on complexity of motives. He may think (though he does not say) that diplomacy requires complexity, therefore the war was about more than religion. If this is the line of argument, then the primary sources' stress on religious factors in the peace settlement provide good evidence that religious motivation was primary at the end of the war.

Though the war was about more than religion, even if the sources mislead us about their own motivations, and religion was not primary, nonetheless it was important. Kaegi grants that Heraclius relied heavily on religious propaganda to motivate and invigorate the war effort. At the very least, then, if not 'primary', we can call it the 'decisive' factor for many of his soldiers and subjects.

The compelling nature of religious motives for the period is shown in the agency George poetically gives the Cross: 'with the barbarian it did not wish to sojourn' (*In restitutionem* 32).

It is apparently inevitable that wars be fought to retrieve it. Byzantine wars are qualitatively different from the barbarian violence around them, and *in their minds* religious status makes the difference – the empire is God's umpire.

Finally, there is a weaker (because far more contingent) argument to be made against Dennis' categorization of Heraclius' campaigns as 'but one phase of the geopolitical conflict between the Romans and the Persians'. This was not any one phase of that conflict, but the last. What really happened was penetration by Sassanian Persian armies to Achaemenid provinces of 900 years before – Egypt and the Bosphorus. Heraclius' counter-offensive was almost unprecedented, in sending the main Roman attack not through Mesopotamia but Armenia and



Azerbaijan, and in its success. In the final analysis, Persia collapsed into internecine conflict and weakness beyond the consequences of previous Eastern wars. Dennis's claim that these were imperial wars of the kind that had been waged for centuries does not fit the evidence. But the Arab unification and invasion processes that immediately followed make comparisons and counterfactuals difficult.

Religious motivation is stressed in all the Greek historical sources. It launches Heraclius from safety in Africa, it motivates the planning of the Persian campaigns and many battles and points of low morale. The sacralisation of the war ramps up over time. The war ends with a settlement that stresses the religious objectives and passes over territorial and strategic ones.

#### 3.6.4 Spiritual Assurance

The third criterion is the easiest to satisfy. Both the harangues identified by Kolia-Dermitzaki in Theophanes check out. Heraclius promised his soldiers spiritual rewards. It may have been the common practice of Byzantine generals (depending on the significance of Justinian's harangue). Even Kaegi admits, 'Heraclius did on 24 April 624 so address his troops'.<sup>328</sup> These spiritual rewards for the warriors are phrased in terms of discipleship, martyrdom and sacrifice. The danger is the way to eternal life. Death in battle is a sacrifice that brings salvation. And they can win the crown of martyrs. Any one would satisfy Dennis's criterion; all the more when taken together.

#### 3.6.5 Summary and Conclusion

In summary, even by Dennis's relatively demanding criteria, the evidence from the Greek sources is that Heraclius fought a holy war in Persia from 622 to 628. The war was declared by a competent authority, it had primarily religious objectives and the soldiers were promised spiritual rewards. Heraclius' Persian campaigns were a holy war.

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<sup>328</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 18.

Reaction to Kolia-Dermitzaki's thesis has been generally dismissive as it does not accord with current paradigms in the field. But this conclusion provides an existence proof for Kolia-Dermitzaki's tentative concept of 'Byzantine "holy war"', under a definition designed to exclude it.

There may be reasons to dispute this finding. Under an even tighter interpretation of Dennis's criteria, it is conceivable that Heraclius' Persian campaigns would not be a holy war. Or there may be other obvious reasons for dispute. But screwed much tighter, Dennis's test would break – it would cease to properly describe what other historians consider uncontroversially holy wars elsewhere, such as particular Crusades or episodes of *jihad*. Dennis hints at this when he comments that many Christian and Muslim (recognised, definite) holy wars were 'to a large extent, tribal or feudal conflicts with a lot of religious trappings'.<sup>329</sup> As section (2.5.4) warned, this is no longer a deep distinction between the nature of one war and another, but only a disagreement about where exactly to draw a line in matters of degree.

### 3.7 Outstanding Definitional Issues

#### 3.7.1 Spiritual Authority

As I noted in Chapter Two, the key difference between Dennis's criterion (1) and Kolia-Dermitzaki's (a) is the nature of the authority who can proclaim a holy war (the same applies for (3) and (c), to a lesser extent). Kolia-Dermitzaki claims that the emperor declares war, as an affair of the State, and can declare it as a "holy war" due to his spiritual authority in Byzantine political theory.

As in chapter Two, within the state's proper sphere, the church's authority is implicitly behind the political authority. Absent explicit contrary evidence here, I agree with Kolia-Dermitzaki and see Heraclius as a 'religious authority' for the purposes of Dennis' criterion.

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<sup>329</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 35.

The institutional example from the sources examined is the harangue of Justinian. Theophylact approved of a general, not the emperor himself, making promises of spiritual assurance to his soldiers. It was the prerogative of a commander, not his chaplain, to command and to motivate. But the commander's authority is tacitly endorsed by the church's authority.

What of the emperor's spiritual authority in his own right? It seems likely that the relationship between political and religious authority was dynamic: that it depended on the relative power of church and court at any one time, and on the personal qualities (popularity, piety, power, persuasiveness, persistence) of particular patriarchs and emperors. The personal spiritual authority of the emperor is relevant to assessing a case for holy war from the sources.

Heraclius, the war leader, is portrayed in the sources as having some spiritual authority.

Certainly he is typical of eastern Roman emperors in that the religious authority of the church backs up his own political authority. Yet the support of the church comes to an atypical degree – admittedly in extreme circumstances. Heraclius in his harangues may be propagandistic, yet is exercising – or arrogating – the right to make statements regarding his soldiers' spiritual standing. Heraclius' 'public voice' makes comments on further spiritual matters. In the victory dispatch from the front he directly applies the words of the Psalms to the people of Constantinople in calling them to praise. He makes statements on the eternal fate of Chosroes, directly and by allusion to biblical authorities. In speaking of his soldiers, his people and his antagonist, Heraclius speaks with spiritual authority, whether or not he "should".

George of Pisidia sees Heraclius as possessed of peculiar piety. In Mary Whitby's opinion, 'Heraclius' physical toils and sweat have[...] constituted a spiritual *athles*, and have given him a Christ-like status of immunity to passion through suffering and a secure place in heaven'.<sup>330</sup>

In relation to his political position, Heraclius' submission to God's guidance is 'the central

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<sup>330</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 257.

feature of [George's] portrayal of the emperor, the athletic piety of a true Christian who through it achieves not only personal but also cosmic salvation'.<sup>331</sup>

Phineas was a priest, not a king, and his murder of Cosbi is phrased by the LXX as 'atoning' for the people's sins. He is an interesting exemplar if the emperor had no spiritual authority. Too much could be made of this – there are, as above, ample reasons to use Phineas without this being part of George's purpose. However, it is interesting that Heraclius could do things that could be seen as 'priestly'.

Heraclius the quasi-messianic figure used his spiritual authority in his actions subsequent to the wars. He punished enemies of the Christian empire, foreign and domestic. He persecutes Jews and he sought to deal with heresy. His *Ecthesis* was an imperial religious proclamation, with the backing of his patriarch, in method entirely in the tradition of Constantine, Leo or Justinian. It was proper to his authority for Heraclius to declare a holy war, and it was in character – at least as that character is presented by his and Sergius' propagandists.

This begins to show why the Persian campaign was not exactly like other holy wars. There was an existing political authority – the emperor – who could make authoritative statements (including some religious ones), whereas the First Crusade was a movement organized with multiple contingents and rivalries. The Pope's authority to declare the war and to make promises was necessary due to the circumstances of western Europe, not the mission of the Crusade. Likewise, unlike a jihad, the Persian campaign is conducted without a clear verse from the holy book to which the leader can directly point. Again, the issue of authority comes up.

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<sup>331</sup> Mary Whitby, 'Defender of the Cross', 263.

### 3.7.2 Can a Holy War be Just?

Dennis' requirement for a competent religious authority to declare a holy war may reflect a concern for right order. An authority can be held accountable to the standards of *jus in bello*. It is at least liable to suffer retaliation, so may behave out of fear rather than high ideals. Such a reading would also seem to fit with Kaegi's concern for the impact of war on civilians, especially the tit-for-tat plundering of the late seventh century.<sup>332</sup> Dennis claims that both Islamic *jihad* and the Western crusades are 'aggressive by nature', in contrast to the Byzantines' defensive mentality.<sup>333</sup>

An extra step beyond Dennis is Webster, for whom holy war is defined by excessive hostility toward the other side – a viewing of their people as less than human, and a cosmic sense that they are destined to remain enemies. Peace treaties do not fit with such a view.

It is important, then, to note that Heraclius is not overly violent by the standards of the day. Heraclius *is* overtly religious – but he is not 'nationalist', he's a Greek-speaking Armenian Christian. He is *not* overly violent, disproportionate or unrestrained. The 'cosmic enemy' (see 2.1.3.2 above) is the king, Chosroes, not all the Persians together.

The Roman army under Heraclius retains its order even as it destroys temples and palaces. There are usually stated rationales: to end the 'deceit of the coals', to refresh and revictual the army, or to teach Chosroes a lesson. It is not a blanket policy, but it is a policy, not a breakdown in control. There is no mention (in the Greek sources at least) of rapine and murder connected with the destruction, certainly not as part of deliberate strategy or tactics.

There does not seem to be an easy distinction in this case between holy war and just war. Heraclius' holy war can be seen as a subspecies of just war: proclaimed by the political

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<sup>332</sup> Kaegi, 'The Heraclians and Holy War', 25-26.

<sup>333</sup> Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People', 38.

authority, aimed at restoring peace, and retaining high ideals as to the objectives. And while he is a long way across the spectrum of religiosity outlined in Chapter Two, there are features of some holy wars that do not occur here.

Heraclius treats his captives with compassion. They are not sub-human. In fact, because their prayers are convenient to his portrayal as the saviour of the world, they are taken seriously as prayers.

Conversion of the non-Christian enemy never comes up as a stated aim. Heraclius is concerned to halt persecution of Christians, to prevent their suffering, death or conversion away from (Orthodox) Christianity.

Not all Persians are the enemy. Chosroes is the enemy. Chosroes is the embodiment and source of Persian offences – the greed, the despoiling of churches, the declaration of war, the continued refusal of peace and so on. In fact, the scapegoating of Chosroes makes the war both more markedly “holy” and more just. The religious objectives are more concrete (punish him, shame him, teach him a lesson, regain what he took), so the war is more sacralised, yet the objectives are also limited (a coup immediately opens discussions for a peace treaty), so the war remains just.

In this particular case, the peace agreement that ends the war is presented by Theophanes as the realization of all Heraclius’ religious objectives.

### **3.8 Summary and Conclusions**

There may be reasons to dispute this finding. Under an even tighter interpretation of Dennis’s criteria, it is possible that Heraclius’ Persian campaigns are not a holy war under the test, then the test is not working and needs redefinition.

As Chapter Three has shown, Heraclius fought a holy war in Persia from 622 to 628. This conclusion holds even when our definition of holy war must conform to Dennis's relatively demanding criteria. The war was declared by a competent religious authority, it had primarily religious objectives and the soldiers were promised spiritual rewards.

## 4 Conclusion

### 4.1 Summary

Chapter Two noted that none of the three mainstream views on the nature of war in Byzantium admitted of any variation, due to a widely-held operating assumption based on the strong claim that the Orthodox church and people of the sixth and seventh century universally regarded war as always evil (2.1.4). I found that this strong claim rests on very doubtful evidence (2.2.4). Rejecting the strong form of the claim allows the possibility that some wars may be different – and indeed, Kolia-Dermitzaki claims to find such wars, a kind of Byzantine “holy war” (2.3). Dennis constructed a definition that, on his interpretation of the evidence, denies Kolia-Dermitzaki's findings (2.4.2). Rather than a question of holy war or not, this proves to be a matter of degree (2.5.4).

Chapter Three addressed the case study suggested by section (2.4.4.1). Statements about Heraclius fighting a holy war need to be properly defined – conversely, the application of different definitions of holy war to Heraclius' case illuminates those definitions (3.2). The specific objections of Laiou, Dennis and Kaegi were discussed (3.3). The Greek sources for Heraclius' Persian campaigns were introduced (3.4) and their holy war elements were identified (3.5). These elements were then shown to meet each of Dennis's criteria. Webster's reliance on extremism seems misplaced, and and Kaegi's other objections?] (3.6). This study showed that Heraclius fought a holy war against the Persians from AD 622 (3.6.5), even under

restrictive definitions. On two definitional issues, I found that Heraclius operated with significant personal spiritual authority in the period (3.7.1), and that his holy war also met Thomas Aquinas' conditions for a just war (3.7.2).

## 4.2 Conclusions

### 4.2.1 Retrospective Pacifism

The operating assumption, widely held among Byzantinists and Orthodox theologians, that the Orthodox church and people of the sixth and seventh century universally regarded war as always evil, has very poor supporting evidence. It relies in the end on taking the views of the tenth century and of church canons as definitive for the only possible reading of Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius, and the only view on war possible in the seventh. The canon of Basil would reward more careful reading, and allows for more possible views. Scholars should entertain the possibility of a range of possible views expressed in the sources.

### 4.2.2 Heraclius

Chapter 3 has shown that Heraclius fought a holy war in Persia from 622 to 628. This conclusion holds even when the definition of holy war conforms to Dennis's relatively demanding criteria. The war was declared by a competent religious authority, it had primarily religious objectives and the soldiers were promised spiritual rewards. This has implications for historians and theologians.

### 4.2.3 History: Assumptions and Openness

Academic reaction to Kolia-Dermitzaki's proposed 'Byzantine "holy war"' has been generally dismissive hitherto, as her proposal does not fit current paradigms in the field. I have demonstrated the problematic nature of a key assumption on which these paradigms depend – that the Byzantines regarded war as *always* evil – in section 2.2. This calls into question the



sweeping nature of classifications noticed in Section 2.1, that Byzantine wars were *all* of one kind or another. I have also suggested that the nature of many of the characteristics under discussion (the depth of sacralisation of war, the meaning of that sacralisation, the level of personal religious motivation, the perceived morality of fighting and the material or spiritual nature of rewards, the level of state religious motivation, the spiritual authority of the emperor and the relationship between political and religious authority) are a matter of degree or are affected by change over time. If there are many characteristics that can be true to varying levels across the period AD 312-630, that again calls into question the sweeping nature of classifications.

Kolia-Dermitzaki's proposal was for a uniquely Byzantine species of "holy war", which she chose not to label further. Her observations were built up over a much longer period than the focus of this thesis. Chapter Three tested her proposal against definitions designed to avoid labeling any Byzantine war as a holy war. I have found that in one specific case, there was a Byzantine holy war, even under narrow definitions. This functions as an existence proof of Kolia-Dermitzaki's claim. The summary dismissal of her claim by many historians is not warranted.

#### **4.2.4 Theology: Variation and Aberration in Tradition**

This existence proof presents problems for Orthodox theologians' denial of their own history. Because Orthodox theologians stress in their theological method the continuing witness of the Spirit through the traditions of the church, they take historical theology very seriously as a revelatory source. But a slightly absurd situation has developed wherein the modern Orthodox revulsion for just war, which has informed academic readings of Byzantine history (as for Dennis), then returns to Orthodox theology as a substantial reason to reject holy war and just

war. The modern Orthodox rejection of war as always evil has become self-reinforcing *via* the academy's taking up of that as an operating assumption. Change to the academic paradigm, due to the existence of holy war at least once in Byzantine history, may mean re-examining the roots of the rejection of just war. As section 2.2 showed, the evidence supporting this rejection is deeply problematic when considered one element at a time.

The existence proof also presents a particular problem for Webster (Sections 2.1.3.2 and 2.4.1). Webster's antinomical method of theological reflection allows him to hold both pacifism and just war as normative ethical ideals in Orthodoxy. But the two norms are contradictory (or at least antinomical). It is not enough, then, for him to show that holy war has some ethical content that contradicts either just war or pacifism. Although he chose a definition that includes religious extremism, which I have argued is not particularly relevant to defining holy war, even religious extremism cannot be dismissed merely by its incompatibility with the other two norms. Webster depends profoundly on the historical assertion that Byzantium never fought true holy wars, but only sacralised wars. This assertion in turn depends on Harakas's rejection of war as always evil. The existence proof of Chapter Three demonstrates how problematic both these assertions are.

So Webster may find it difficult to deny holy war as an Orthodox moral trajectory, unless he can show either that holy war necessarily involves unacceptable conduct (by some other standard, such as Scripture or experience rather than church tradition) or that holy war does not form a continuous tradition. Webster's claim of discontinuity was unsupported by the evidence he provided (2.1.3.2). His denial looks less firm than ever in the light of my findings in this thesis.

#### 4.2.5 Suggestions for Further Study

It is frustrating to try to research the historical processes of reflection and Christian practice that led to the Heraclian holy war ideology, when the Greek Fathers and the canonical tradition are largely silent. Since Heraclius' campaigns were a holy war, and holy war is a matter of such difficulty among Orthodox theologians and Byzantinists, where did this ideology and practice come from and where did it go?

##### 4.2.5.1 *The Roots of Heraclian Holy War Ideology*

What is required is an historical-theological exploration of the root concepts of Heraclian holy war ideology. In history before Heraclius, how and when did the process of Christianisation over three centuries affect Roman concepts, for example of peace and the *pax Romana*, (Ciceronian) just war or the policy, followed by Augustus and Hadrian, of ceasing to expand the *imperium*? When war aims and other goods are discussed in the primary sources, patristic or historical, what are their ultimate values? How does the goodness or more weakly, the justification, of a war affect the morality of taking part (for Basil and others)? What was the range of Christian expression of how God was understood to be providentially at work in history: in judgement, blessing, victory and otherwise? How far can stereotypically just-war concerns be moved along a spectrum of sacralisation before a just war becomes a holy war? What does this mean for Bainton's nice tripartite division?

In particular, Heraclian holy war ideology may prove the result of a long process of development from Christian and classical concepts and practices, just as pacifism and just war are. This would create problems for summary dismissal of holy war as a valid ethical response.

#### 4.2.5.2 *The Fate of Heraclian Holy War Ideology*

In history after Heraclius, what was the fate of Heraclian holy war ideology? Kolia-Dermitzaki suggests some reasons the concept could at times drop out of the tradition.<sup>334</sup> First, she only counts offensive wars – (including wars to reclaim old “Roman” territory). Where Orthodox nations lack the means to fight offensive wars, this path will be closed. Second, her sources speak of wars as proclaimed by God, as God’s will. Where wars were lost, the claim was disproven and any holy war aspects were not recorded (although I make a corrective note from Kaegi). Thirdly, where the emperor who proclaimed a holy war was of doubtful acceptance, sources will dispute or ignore the war’s claimed holiness. Had historiography not stopped dead for two centuries, this could have befallen Heraclius given the failures in the later part of his reign.

Kaegi notes a strong theme of the judgement of God in monophysite Christian sources after the Arab conquests.<sup>335</sup> This is repeated in Theophanes Confessor (see 3.5.2.9). This suggests that in the difficult conditions of the seventh and eighth centuries, other aspects of holy war theology, especially governing assumptions such as the contrast between victory and judgement, may have continued as the substructure of defeat-oriented ‘judgement’ theology rather than in the context of a more victory-oriented holy war ideology. Stephenson suggests that at least one aspect of holy war ideology, spiritual assurances, continues in existence as far as the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas (see 2.5.1.3).

Further research might combine these scholar’s insights to determine whether Heraclian holy war ideology disappears, is repudiated, or merely becomes a silent minority position

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<sup>334</sup> Kolia-Dermitzaki, *The Byzantine "Holy War"*, 384-85, 404.

<sup>335</sup> Kaegi, ‘Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest’, section XII of Kaegi, W.E., Jr *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium, Collected Studies* 162 (London: Variorum, 1982), repr. of ‘Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest’, 139-49 in *Church History* 38:2 (1969)

(somewhat similar to Webster's description of pacifism, 2.1.3.2) that sporadically emerges.

Such study might bear on the origins of *jihad* and the Crusades.

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