

NONVIOLENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AN ORTHODOX-HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study discusses the problem of the incompatibility between ethnocentric tendencies within the national Orthodox churches and the New Testament teaching on nonviolence. The three main parts outline the relevant New Testament teaching (1) in the four Gospels and the book of Acts, (2) in the Pauline epistles, and (3) in John's Revelation. The study concludes that in the New Testament texts, there is no room for the justification of violence on the part of Christ-followers against their opponents. Quite on the contrary, the New Testament views the world as having the potential to become ecclesia, and the "other" as a possible sister or brother in Christ. Unfortunately, this fundamental New Testament teaching is often forgotten in modern-day Orthodoxy, notwithstanding its claims for unbroken continuity with the apostolic tradition. As an example, the Greek-Orthodox church oftentimes emphasizes national identity and heroism over ecclesial faith and ethos. Although understandable, such ethnocentric tendencies clearly contradict the New Testament witness and should be abandoned.

Keywords: Nonviolence, Greek Orthodoxy, national Orthodox churches, ethnocentrism, national identity, heroism, martyrdom, New Testament era, Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, Revelation.

It is generally known and well-documented that since the birth of national Orthodox churches, there have been and still are powerful ethnocentric tendencies within the ranks of both their clergy and laity.¹ On the other hand, the same national churches claim to be in unbroken continuity with the early church as reflected in the New Testament witnesses.² At this point, the question inescapably arises about whether the above-mentioned ethnocentric tendencies are compatible with the New

¹ See the studies published in P. MEYENDORFF (ed.), *Ecclesiology and Nationalism*, in *SVTQ* 57 (2013) 235–540.

² See BISHOP K. WARE, "Strange Yet Familiar: My Journey to the Orthodox Church", in *The Inner Kingdom*, The Collected Works 1, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2001, 8–14; CH. KARAKOLIS, „Auch von den anderen kann man lernen und bereichert werden“, in S. ALKIER, CH. KARAKOLIS, and T. NICKLAS, *Sola Scriptura ökumenisch*, *Biblische Argumente in öffentlichen Debatten* 1, Brill / Schöningh, Paderborn, 2021, 171–188 (171).