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Intercontinental Voices on the War between Ukraine and Russia: An Introduction

This book brings together several diverse perspectives from different continents, disciplines and worldviews. All of them share the concern that war is a problematic means to address matters of political conflict. They differ, however, on how they evaluate war and violence in general, and on how they assess the war in Ukraine in particular. How the Russian-Ukrainian war is discussed, and how it is reacted to, is not independent of the regional and historical background that is at the center of one's life and academic experience – and those positionalities need to be negotiated especially when descriptive or prescriptive relativism is seen as problematic.

One such a regional background is Germany: When Russia started an all-out war (having waged hybrid war at least since 2014 and the annexation of the Crimea) in 2022, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke of a “turning point” [Zeitenwende] (Scholz 2022), and immediately a fund of 100 billion Euros was launched to empower the German army, to make it “warlike” [kriegstüchtig] (Pistorius 2023). The narrative was that Germany had slept and entrusted its protection to the US. The fact that Russia had launched an aggressive war against one of its sovereign neighbors and thus grossly breached international law became immediately connected to the idea of German rearmament – and of course the idea that all the world should rise and condemn Russia.

In German mainline churches, the course of action is strongly debated: while some call for an instantaneous cease fire and a stop of weapons delivery to Ukraine in the name of peace (Kramer et al. 2022), others vote for a theological re-endorsement of nuclear armament (Körtner 2024).

However, when the UN resolution ES 11/1 was passed with a sweeping majority of 141 votes and only five votes against (by Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, Russia, and Syria) on March 2, 2022, it was not often noted in Europe that the 35 abstainers (among them Algeria, Bolivia, China, India, South Africa) represented roughly half of the world's population. And looking at the map of armed conflicts going on in the world in the last decades, one could argue that neither the breach of international law nor armed conflict was great news to the Global South.

Despite the official German talk of a turning point, which is at least to a large degree politically programmatic if analytic at all, war had not been absent from Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union – and of course, war has been a common occurrence on other continents, too. The idea of a turning point, then,

is deeply contextual, and it may make sense to ponder that contextuality – a step necessary to decenter Europe (Chakrabarty 2007): it marks the end of the delusion that Germany is somehow automatically exempt from dealing with the immediate threat of armed conflict on its territory, and Western Europe is a basically peaceful place. It is not and has never been. There is the involvement of European states in armed conflicts on other continents – be it the Afghanistan war, the Iraq war, the Falklands, on the one hand. But there is also a very self-interested policy in Global legal and economic questions, highlighted by authors like Mutua Makau (2016), Anthony Anghie (2005) and Thomas Pogge (2008), on the other hand. All of these authors mark Europe, and also Germany, as anything but not involved in Global conflict, where all-out violence is often an imminent threat.

The articles in this book revolve exactly around these topics, from different angles. One main intent – and the reason why Europeans need to be interested in international perspectives on that topic – is to discuss the role of peace ethics in political and Christian thinking worldwide. To put it more pointedly, we wanted to ask what role a European-Christian peace ethics deeply embedded in contextual perspectives can play and how it intersects with theories and ideas from other disciplines and regions. The focus was on bringing together theorists from the Global South and the Global North, with different disciplinary backgrounds within theology and beyond, all of them internationally experienced in many ways and aware of the necessity of intercontextual dialogue and discourse, to discuss their take on the subject. The objective was neither to immediately draft one universally valid peace ethical approach, nor to give in to some sort of normative or epistemic relativism, but to commence an intercontinental conversation on this controversial topic exactly in the interest of exploring the possibility of universal moral principles and the merging of descriptive perspectives. More concretely, we wanted to ask: Are there normative reasons for those different perspectives? And if so, what are they, and is there a way of reconciling them? How is this conflict conceptualized politically, normatively, and, of course, theologically, especially by those who are not immediately involved? And how do we deal with the fact that those waging an aggressive war – as well as those defending national sovereignty – are in the majority Christians?

The results of the intense debates during the conference that served as a precursor to this book are gathered in this volume. The arrangement mainly follows the regional context from which the authors argue and is framed by the geopolitical situation in which the Russian-Ukrainian war is situated and peace ethical perspectives from different angles on that topic. We have arranged the conference and carefully read and revised the articles. The articles, however, express the opinion of the authors, which are sometimes in agreement with each other, sometimes at variance. In their entirety however, they illustrate some slices of

the variety of approaches worldwide and the necessity of engaging a conversation that brings those perspectives into contact in order to foster peace.

1 Part I: European Takes on the Geopolitical Situation

The first part takes the geopolitical situation into account from the viewpoints of European-based political scientists and philosophers. First, international relations scholar Jonas J. Driedger describes and assesses the Russo-Ukrainian war in his article *No Ought Without an Is: Prospects for Peace in the Russo-Ukrainian War From a Peace and Conflict Research Perspective*. In this context he addresses the nature of the conflict, the reason why there has been no peace agreement so far and the question of what the prospects for such an agreement are. He argues that the Russian-Ukrainian war is an interstate war over territory, continuing since 2014. Driedger establishes a threefold reason why the war is still going on. First, he maintains that there is still uncertainty that non-war options might turn out to be better than the war itself. Second, he indicates that the struggle for territory is an essential part of the conflict for both of the parties, leading to a situation where neither of them would want to make concessions in that regard. Third, there is a fear that concessions made in an agreement would not be honored by one side afterward, leaving the situation worse than before. With regard to peace prospects, Driedger hints at a possible change in leadership – which might, however, also turn out to worsen the situation. Moreover, he ponders the chance of military victory, which he perceives to be unlikely in the given situation. Finally, he explains that a situation might be reached where both parties find the continuation of open hostilities unbearable given the costs, so that they continue violence beneath the threshold of open war, which, however, would not mean that there is an outright situation of peace.

The philosophers Alexander Leveringhaus and Margaryta Khvastova, both based in Great Britain but with German and Ukrainian backgrounds, respectively, discuss that topic further and from a more philosophical angle in their contribution *Jus Post Bellum and the Russian-Ukrainian War: Ethical and Practical Challenges* by applying *jus post bellum* on that war. They point out that there are two major differences in that war in contrast to other wars, which are territorial restriction, as well as regime stability on the Russian side. For that matter, the classical tripartite distinction in beginning, fighting, and ending a war is contested, just as the idea that there is a clear winner and a loser in violent conflicts. They then apply these theoretical findings to four potential outcomes of the war, rang-

ing from a situation where Russia defeats Ukraine to a situation where Ukraine defeats Russia. As the authors argue, both of these extreme outcomes are unlikely. What is to be expected, in their view, is some sort of *modus vivendi*, where the conflict either freezes or a cease-fire treaty is negotiated. In any case, the authors apply and analyze the main intentions of *jus post bellum*, namely transitional justice, reparations, and reconstruction. With regard to *jus post bellum*, Leveringhaus and Khvostova argue that it is necessary to revise that theory or to develop a changed *jus*-paradigm informed by the Russian-Ukrainian war integrating scenarios that lack the clear structures presupposed so far. This addresses especially the issue of securing peace as a *modus vivendi*, as well as the crucial role of reparations and reconstruction.

2 Part II: Ethical Perspectives from a German Context

After outlining the situation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, three steps serve to conceptualize the war from different angles. In the beginning, German Christian views are represented from two Protestant perspectives and a Catholic one. In her contribution, *Just Peace and Revisionist Just War Approaches: Striking a Balance between Contingent Pacifist Conceptions*, Berlin-based theologian and ethicist Nicole Kunkel discusses the substantial commonalities between the mainly German and Christian approach of just peace and the concept of revisionist just war based on Anglo-Saxon discourse. She interprets both concepts to aim for a contingent pacifism. In her view, they do so by intertwining *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* closely. Against that backdrop she argues that both theories can enrich each other. On the one hand, the just peace approach puts the focus on the devastating ramifications of war in emphasizing that war and violence are always and inherently entangled with guilt. On the other hand, the transformation revisions of just war theory bring about lies in underlining the responsibility and the liability for belligerent undertakings of every person, be it civilian or soldier. With respect to the Russian-Ukrainian war, she maintains that, from a just peace perspective, peace cannot be achieved by unjust means. However, violent undertakings might sustain legal structures that in turn form the foundation for a process of growing justice and peace. In any case, because of the great difference in perspectives worldwide, it is necessary to discuss these topics internationally and intercontinentally.

A more politically oriented approach can be found in the article *Protestant Peace Ethics under Scrutiny: Does the War in Ukraine refute the Doctrine of Just*

Peace? by Hans-Richard Reuter. Reuter elaborates on how the war in Ukraine changes the idea of just peace, brought forward in the memorandum *Live from God's Peace – Care for Just Peace* published in 2007 by the Protestant Church in Germany. After outlining the main ideas of just peace, its focus on establishing peace through law, and explaining the concept of law-sustaining force, he turns to the changed political context. In doing so, he clarifies that Russia's attack on Ukraine needs to be understood against the background of a competition of values and Putin's radicalization of hegemonic attempts based on the fear of an ongoing democratization in Russia that could endanger his position. Reuter draws the conclusion that peace ethics needs to face these new developments by adjusting some of its ideas. In that respect he argues that, firstly, the concept of just peace must not be identified with an unconditional pacifism. Secondly, he holds that the essential paradigm of peace through law is a moral concept, meaning that it is neither a juridical nor a cultural term, but aims at establishing a legitimate legal framework, embodied in basic human rights. The current war, however, shows that there is indeed a major gap between the normative idea and the possibility to enforce that norm. Finally, Reuter turns to the possibility of assistance in self-defense, which he infers to be included in the ethics of law-sustaining force, as long as it is orientated towards establishing just peace in the aftermath of the conflict.

Andreas Trampota's essay *Non-violence and the Legitimate Use of Force: Recent Developments in the Peace Ethics of the Catholic Church in Germany* adds a Catholic viewpoint when reflecting the current peace ethical developments within the Catholic Church in Germany. To do so, Trampota zeros in on the Peace Statements by the German bishops, whose latest publication "*Peace to this household*" from February 2024 is in line with former statements. For elaborating on that topic, the author introduces the understanding of just peace as it is laid out by the German bishops, before he turns to the virtue-ethical foundation of that concept. In this view, the matter of peace ethics, virtue-ethics and deontology are combined, forming the foundation of a renunciation of violence that is not absolute but preferential. Against that backdrop, Trampota turns to just war thinking in order to show the necessity of the questions and criteria this theory invokes. He argues, consequently, that just war and just peace need to be seen as complementary, giving shape to a theory of law-preserving and law-restoring coercion.

3 Part III: Insights from a South African Perspective

Two authors, then, represent a South African perspective on the Russian-Ukrainian war. Taking into account a passage of 2 Kings, *Funlola Olojede* questions in her essay: “*What Have You to Do with Peace?*” (2 Kings 9:17–22): *Complexities of War and Peace in the Russia-Ukraine War and South Africa’s Position* the stance South Africa takes towards the war in Ukraine. To do so, she contextualizes the war from a South-African perspective, displaying the close ties South Africa and Russia have, not mainly because of their common BRICS membership, but because of the USSR standing alongside the African National Congress (ANC) in times of apartheid. However, she criticizes that still today Russian money flows towards the ANC, thereby compromising South African democracy. Against that backdrop, she reads 2 Kgs 9, asking under what circumstances peace can thrive, thereby bringing forward the issue that superficial peace is unable to erase the wrongdoings done in the past. As for assessing the issue of war and peace throughout time, Olojede demands to consider the sufferings of the victims and to regard the current war between Russia and Ukraine as a war of siblings that can be resolved only from within.

In his article *Balancing an Act: South Africa’s Non-Alignment Conundrum amidst the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, *Demaine Solomons* addresses South Africa’s non-alignment approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. He maintains that this stance has garnered significant domestic and international criticism, highlighting the contentiousness of this strategy, because it underscores the difficulties of navigating a deeply divided Global and political environment. Drawing from the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, Solomons delves into the historical and ideological foundations of South Africa’s position while assessing its practical contradictions. He investigates how *realpolitik*, historical ties, and current Global issues intersect to influence South Africa’s foreign policy regarding the conflict. His examination provides a framework for evaluating the efficacy of South Africa’s non-alignment as a diplomatic approach amid evolving power dynamics. In this setting South Africa’s stance on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict poses important questions about the interplay between ethical considerations and pragmatic decision-making in international diplomacy.

4 Part IV: Brazilian Views

The final location-specific viewpoint comes from Latin America. It is first Curitiba-based theologian *Rudolf von Sinner*, who discusses three issues in his article *Ecumenical Lessons from the War Against Ukraine: Passionate Protest and Loving Patience*. These are, first, the political and academic positions in Brazil on Russia's invasion of Ukraine; second, the role churches and theology play therein; and third, what might help to strengthen agency and voices within the ecumenical movement that stem and speak from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. He finds that Brazil as well as other states in "active non-alignment" could be an asset with regard to their diplomatic status and means, as they are not in such a polarized situation as the (North-)West. Moreover, he demands peace ethical reflections in politics and theology. One way to endorse such an undertaking is to support voices from within Russia and Ukraine that are critical of the war. Each encounter, discussion, and critique, however, should be uttered in humility, because good and evil are intertwined so closely in this world.

In his essay, *Erico Hammes* asks, *Does Peace Ethics Make Sense, Even in Times of War?*, pondering the commandment to "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44). To address that question, he initially presents some exegetical thoughts regarding the commandment to love your enemy in both its variants, namely in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Against that clear-cut pacifist groundwork, he questions just war thinking, arguing for God to be understood as a triune God of peace. He exemplifies his thoughts with reference to the ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. and finds that the biblical and pacifist logics of Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King challenge established political considerations. He concludes that only peaceful means can help to establish peace and that, to achieve that goal, the main emphasis needs to be on peace education.

5 Part V: Peace Ethical Perspectives

In the final part of the book, five authors from different contexts and theological disciplines illustrate the abundance of theological perspectives and approaches. This part commences with a piece by US-based theologian *Nancy Bedford* who argues in her essay *Resistance, Otherwise: Considerations on Nonviolence in the Context of the Russian War on Ukraine* for nonviolent ways to resist violent undertakings. This includes perspectives that go beyond anthropocentric perspectives such as environmental issues. Resisting in a nonviolent way, however, is not the same as doing nothing, but it means rather to react to violence in a

way that is guided by God's love, even if that involves painful steps for the individual. For that matter, Bedford focuses mainly on three points, which are, first, the crucial question of where the money goes, namely who profits monetarily from war and violence. Second, she turns to imaginations and hidden scripts that guide our societal behavior, which she contrasts with the biblical example of Jeremiah. Third, she calls on the historical case of Michael Sattler, who, like Jeremiah, stood up against the violence of his time with nonviolent means. Finally, she points to several possibilities to react nonviolently that are far from being meaningless and passive.

Bedford's article is followed by the essay *Waging Peace and the Pragmatics of Force: On Being Christian in a Time of War* written by South African public theologian Dion Forster. Forster asks whether we can imagine a world without war. He discusses this topic through the lens of John Hauerwas, arguing that Christians do not only wait for God's peaceable kingdom to come, but already now live with the reality that war has been abolished in Christ. Nevertheless, while Christians live in a world of war, they cannot shy away from pondering the issue of violence and need to consider whether there are indeed circumstances in which choosing between two evils, violence might be the lesser one, even though it is never free of guilt. To navigate this difficult topic, Forster advises the reader to keep in mind four rationales, namely that, first, war and violence can never be desirable options for solving conflicts; second, that we should always position ourselves on the side of the victims; third, that every peaceful solution should be preferred; and, fourth, that everything we do should strive for justice, equity and peace.

Amsterdam-based theologian Matthias Smalbrugge, then, moves beyond the topic of the book in his article *Memory Structures and the Choices in War and Peace: South-African and European Stances in the Ukrainian War*, extending the perspective to the future, thereby elaborating on the crucial role of morality. He explains that the West has been reluctant to address its memory of colonization and slavery, in contrast to its memory culture regarding the Shoa and its principle "Never again," asking why certain incidents are remembered, while others are not. This, however, does not mean that forgotten incidents do no longer shape our present. On the contrary, also repressed events shape our current epistemological concepts. Against that backdrop, Smalbrugge questions the sense of the adage "never again" because at least in cases of oblivion one cannot comply with this standard. In any case, the cultural context of memories also influences which incidents are remembered – and which are not. Being aware of these connections, the political significance of memory is highlighted. With regard to Christianity, Smalbrugge emphasizes that Christianity itself is a mnemonic structure from its outset. It structures the way things are remembered, as well as forgotten. This en-

tails that internalized mnemonic structures also deeply affect the way we deal with our past – and integrate our present, even if we are not aware of it.

With a focus on the concept of law, German theologian and ethicist *Lukas Johrendt* asks in his essay *Between Justice and Law: The Concept of jus within the Doctrine of jus ad bellum, jus in bello and jus post bellum*, what exactly is meant by law (*jus*) in each category, whether it refers to concrete legal norms or rather moral obligations. After clarifying what legal norms and moral obligations are, he discusses the respective theories in turn, finding that concerning *jus ad bellum*, there is only a negative juridical sense of this norm, while the question whether it is *just* to begin wars is discussed morally in great detail. With regard to *jus ad bellum*, the reverse is the case, because here the legal norms form the foundation of the debate, be it in legal or ethical terms. *Jus post bellum*, however, is solely discussed ethically, while it has no legal implication. Consequently, in each line of discourse there are different gaps in the ethical and juridical discussion, while the article clearly shows that law and morality are intertwined closely and both needed for assessing the use of force.

Finally, *Torsten Meireis*, based in Berlin, explores the question of Christian realism in peace ethics in his chapter “*Justice and Peace will Kiss*” (*Ps 85:111*). *Christian Peace Ethics: Delusional in a Multipolar World?* Since Christian peace ethics is theologically rooted in divine promise, and thus, faith, its plausibility in the arena of current political thought is at stake. As the Psalmist’s stance lies at the core of contemporary Christian peace ethics especially in Germany, the essay starts by discussing controversial interpretations rooted in differing hermeneutics and argues for a perspective that stresses the significance of the biblical text for the current situation especially in view of its historical context. Going on to the different contextual takes in the ethics of war and peace, Meireis relates the just war–language predominant in Anglo-Saxon discourse to the concept of just peace developed in different European contexts, epistemically prioritizing conflict resolution over battlefield ethics and resulting in a concept of conditional peace. In a final section of the paper, he contends that self-attributed *realistic* approaches in international relations are not all that realistic after all and that the just peace–approach aligns with liberal approaches in international relations that stress cooperation while not ignoring the threat of violence. In that view, a support of Ukrainian defense needs to be combined with a perspective for conflict resolution even after the end of outright violence.

By the time we are finishing the draft of this book, the war in Ukraine has by no means ended. In international attention, it has been overshadowed by the armed conflicts and atrocities in the Middle East, where attempts at regional military hegemony by different agents, civil war, terrorism and war crimes mingle, multi-faceted trauma abounds, and all of those factors render peace only a remote hope. However, in a Christian perspective, clinging to hope with faith in God’s promise of peace may well be the basis for politically sober and realistic efforts at a lasting, just peace.

The making of a book like this is always a joint effort. Many people have given their time and energy to make this possible. We thank first of all the contributors, who have taken travel and work upon themselves and bridged inter-contextual differences to make this conversation possible. No less thanks go to the members of the ethics chair who have tirelessly done the strenuous work of revising and editing, namely Bettina Schön, Wiebke Schulz, Julius Kost and the team of de Gruyter publishing house, Albrecht Döhnert, Antonia Pohl and Berenice Brüggemann, to name just a few. The book's current form would not have been possible without the meticulous editing work of Gabriele Faßbeck, for which we extend our profound gratitude. We are also grateful to the Open Access Funds at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin for a generous publishing subsidy and the European Association for Religion and Society for their support. We hope that all of those efforts will contribute to foster conversations paving the way to peace in our time.¹

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¹ Unless otherwise stated, the year of publication of a web article corresponds to the year after which it was cited. The year is not listed again separately. The exact information can be found under "last modified".