

New Series of Theological Methodological Seminars of the Eastern European Institute of Theology “Theological and Ethical Challenges of War”

In September 2022, the Eastern European Institute of Theology launched a new series of methodological seminars on the theological aspects of war and peace, international and interethnic conflicts, and approaches to their resolution.

Since the early days of the church, Christians have been in a state of constant tension due to their dual identity as followers of Christ and, at the same time, citizens of states engaged in military conflicts. Attempts to reconcile these identities, as well as to reconcile the unsettling biblical images of war and Christ's teaching of non-resistance to evil, have sparked long and intense theological debates. Their relevance is growing significantly in our time when the Russian aggression against Ukraine has called into question the entire system of international law and the principle of inviolability of borders established in the aftermath of World War II. Russia's war against Ukraine, accompanied by massive destruction of civilian infrastructure and numerous crimes against humanity, puts every Christian before the need to make decisions about his place and role in the new circumstances, encourages the search for effective ways to prevent violence and achieve a just peace.

Two events have already been held within the new series. On November 4, 2022, the first seminar, “Historical and Modern Approaches to War and Peace in Christianity,” was held at the office of the Institute and on the Zoom platform with the participation of theologians, ministers of the evangelical tradition, including Joshua Searle, Associate Director of Postgraduate Studies at Spurgeon College in London, Rostyslav Tkachenko, a freelance researcher at the Evangelical Theological University in Leuven, Oleh Bornovolokov, senior lecturer at the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary in Kyiv, Anatolii Bondarenko, head of the Bachelor of Pastoral Ministry program at the Odesa Theological Seminary. The speakers considered the question of how Christian theology substantiates the root cause of war and its nature, whether a person can resist evil that has a metaphysical nature; Christian theories of just war, the initial definitions, and their establishment; the understanding of war and the reaction to it in the evangelical churches of the Soviet and post-Soviet context, as well as how Christian communities carried out the practice of nonviolence and what conclusions can be drawn in the modern context of the Russian-Ukrainian war; how Christians can contribute to peacebuilding, etc.

On December 16, 2022, the second seminar of the series, titled “Security, Violence and Vulnerability in a Biblical Perspective,” was held with the participation of Helen Paynter, Director of the Centre for the Study of the Bible and Violence at Bristol Baptist College, John Heathershaw, Professor of International Relations at the University of Exeter, an expert in armed conflict and political economy of post-Soviet Central Asian states, and Pavlo Shevchuk, Research Fellow at the East European Institute of Theology, a researcher of contemporary political theology. Helen Paynter shared her research on contemporary patterns of violence, her thoughts on where violence comes from, whether the Christian faith is inherently violent, and how Christian language can be used to justify violence.

John Heathershaw introduced the main theses of his forthcoming book *Security After Christendom*. He presented a chapter on the tradition of Christian realism in international relations and theology, as well as shared his thoughts on the possibilities and prospects for the development of security theology in the modern world. Pavlo Shevchuk introduced attendees to various theological perspectives and critics of the ontologization of violence, ways to overcome it, and shared his views on models of contemporary political theology and their application in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

In 2023, the series of seminars will continue. This will include events on “The Biblical Theology of Reconciliation and Restorative Justice” (March 17) and “The Language of the Bible and War and Peace” (May 19).