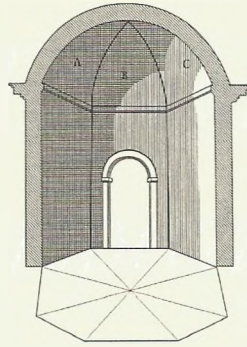


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Ethical Perspectives

Special Issue: Ethics of Military Action –
600 Years after Paul Vladimiri's Theory of Just War

Guest Editors: Adam Cebula and Magdalena Płotka

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INTRODUCTION: The Ethics of Military Action – 600 Years after Paul Vladimiri's Theory of Just War

On July 5th 1415, the participants at the Council of Constance – a historically pivotal gathering of the ruling and clerical elite of 15th century Europe – were provided with the first of a series of legal writings concerning a momentous dispute between the Kingdom of Poland and the Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem (the Teutonic Knights). The case centred around the legitimacy of military attacks undertaken by the State of the Teutonic Order on the region of Samogitia (north-west of present day Lithuania), whose inhabitants were the last ethnic group in Europe to resist conversion to Christianity. Arguing for the Polish side was Paul Vladimiri (Paweł Włodkovic), rector of the Academy of Krakow, who, following the most prominent theological and legal thinkers of the time, defended the rights of pagans to have their own states, safe from the attacks of Christians, provided they themselves refrained from attacking their Christian neighbours. Based on the idea of mutual tolerance and peaceful coexistence between different political communities, Paul Vladimiri's argumentation has gone down in history as one of the prototype versions of the theory of just war.

Vladimiri's main task, assigned to him by the administration of the Jagiellonians (the Polish-Lithuanian ruling house at the time), consisted in arguing against the appropriation of some parts of Lithuanian and Samogitian lands by the Teutonic Order. According to Belch, "[...] the problem he had to solve was this: are the international activities and politics depending solely upon the abstract principle with the result that whatever is done in international field is right if done for the sake of the idea; or, are the ideas and universal legal rules dependent entirely upon the material factual reality, so much that the universal principles are only a reflection or sum total of the factual reality, so that, in effect, the accomplished facts constitute law" (1965, 208). Vladimiri's master stroke amounted to presenting the general principles governing the relation