

Sacrificing the Sacrifices of War

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1. The Moral Practice Called War

War is a moral practice. By calling war a moral practice I am not suggesting that I believe war to be "a good thing." Drawing appreciatively on MacIntyre's understanding of practices, James McClendon quite rightly argued that powerful practices can be narrated through the New Testament notion of "principalities and powers." McClendon, moreover, is surely right to suggest that such powers are all the more dangerous because they can be perversions of God's good creation.¹

I use the phrase "the practice of war" to try to think through the ethics of war in a different manner than beginning with positions such as pacifism and/or just war. I do not want to be misunderstood. I think the kind of work done to clarify pacifism or just war is necessary and invaluable if it helps us understand better how Christians should respond to war.² But I am also impressed by the reality that no matter how hard we work to understand either the moral limits or the form war should take, it makes very little difference for the actual practice of war.

That pacifism or just war reflection have little effect, I think, is not because some people perversely think war is a good thing. Neither is it the result of some conspiracy of the military-

¹James McClendon, Systematic Theology: Ethics, Volume I. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp. 170-177.

²In his fine book Arguing about War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), Michael Walzer characterizes pacifists as those who deny war is sometimes justifiable because they believe war is a criminal act. (p. ix) I should like to think this paper suggests that the pacifist position can appreciate the complex moral character of war.

industrial complex. I certainly do not need to suggest, as the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan amply demonstrates, that for many war turns out to be a great economic boon. But surely something deeper is going on. Everyone confesses "war is horrible," yet we continue to have war. Sentimental appeals to peace too often turn out to be the grounds to justify the judgment that even if war is horrible and/or terrifying, sometimes we must be willing to go to war.

In the past I have argued that war continues to seem necessary because we have found no way to tell the stories of our lives in such a way that war does not play a role.³ We cannot get rid of war because war has captured the habits of our imaginations. We quite simply cannot comprehend a world without war. This is as true of the pacifist as it is for the just warrior. What would the pacifists do if they actually got the world they say they want? In an odd way pacifists can be as dependent on the existence of war to make their world intelligible as those who think war must be tragically accepted. That is why I have argued that pacifism and nonviolence are inadequate descriptions for the disavowal of violence required by being a disciple of Jesus. Peace is a deeper reality than violence.⁴ But if that is true, then we need to locate the peaceful practices that constitute our lives that too often fail to be named as such.

Yet to say that war is a habit of our imaginations does not tell us enough. Enda McDonagh and I have called for the abolition of war. But in order to appreciate why war is such a stubborn reality, I think we need to know better why war remains so morally compelling.⁵ War

³See "Should War Be Eliminated?" in my book, Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 169-208 and "Can a Pacifist Think About War?" in my book, Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements With the Secular (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 116-135.

⁴This was, of course, at the heart of Yoder's account of the peace made possible by Christ. For my explicit reflections on the issue see my Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), pp. 169-183.

⁵For more on our Appeal to Abolish War, see my essay "Reflections on the 'Appeal to Abolish War' or What Being a Friend of Enda's Got Me Into," in Between Poetry and Politics: Essays in Honour of Enda McDonagh,

is, in fact, not only morally compelling. It is also quite fascinating, if not beautiful.⁶ I want to therefore offer some suggestions about the very character of war as a practice, the loss of which would make the lives of many less full.

My strategy is not unlike that of William James in his famous essay, "The Moral Equivalent of War."⁷ James argued that, in spite of his pacifism, if war is to be abolished we must find a moral equivalent to war.⁸ According to James, war was the institution that "is the

edited by Linda Hogan and Barbara FitzGerald (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2003), pp. 135-147. I recently discovered a remarkable passage in John Keegan's A Short History of War--Past, Present, Future (Southampton, 1994). Keegan says, "War is now avoidable; war is no longer *necessary*. The poor may fight, but the right rule. It is with their weapons that the mad ideologies of peasant countries tread the path of blood ... at the threshold of a new era in history, can we but seize the opportunity, on the threshold of a genuinely new world order. We can stop now if we only choose, by a simple economic decision of the governments of the rich states not to make more arms than they need for their own purposes, and not to supply any surplus that remains to the poor, the have-nots. . . . The time has come to end war" (p. 8.). I discovered this quote in Jeremy Black's book, War: Past, Present, and Future (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Professor Black used the quote to exemplify what he took to be a great silliness. I believe debates among between military historians concerning how the history of war can or should be written to be quite important for those wanting to write about the morality of war.

⁶J. Glen Gray observes, "What are these secret attractions of war, the ones that have persisted in the West despite revolutionary changes in methods of warfare? I believe that they are: the delight in seeing, the delight in comradeship, the delight in destruction... That war is a spectacle, as something to see, ought never to be underestimated... There is a popular conviction that war and battle are the sphere of ugliness, and, since aesthetic delight is associated with the beautiful, it may be concluded that war is the natural enemy of the aesthetic. I fear that this is in large part an illusion. It is first of all wrong to believe that only beauty can give us aesthetic delight; the ugly can please us too, as every artist knows. And furthermore, beauty in various guises is hardly foreign to scenes of battle... If we think of beauty and ugliness without their usual moral overtones, there is often a weird but genuine beauty in the sight of massed men and weapons in combat. Reputedly, it was the sight of advancing columns of men under fire that impelled General Robert E. Lee to remark to one of his staff: 'It is well that war is so terrible--we would grow too fond of it.'" J. Glen Gray, The Warriors: Reflections on Men In Battle (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), pp. 28-29, 30-31.

⁷William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in The Moral Equivalent of War and Other Essays, edited by John Roth (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp. 3-16.

⁸The war to which James sought to find an equivalent was surely the Civil War. One of James's brothers had been wounded in that war and in many ways never recovered. In his The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Idea in America (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), Louis Menand discusses the effects of the war on Oliver Wendell Holmes. Menand wonderfully observes that Holmes had gone off to fight because of his moral beliefs, but the experience of the war "did more than make him lose those beliefs. It made him lose his belief in beliefs" (p. 4). According to Menand, Holmes concluded from his experience of the war that certitude leads to violence. He was determined to avoid certitude about anything. Holmes assumed, of course, that we could not live if there were not some things we are certain about. Truth, therefore, is just the "name for what it is impossible for a person to doubt" (p. 63). Though not a philosopher, Menand I think rightly presents Holmes as the embodiment of the spirit that led to American pragmatism. James did not lose his belief in belief, but then neither did James experience the combat that shaped Holmes' life.

great preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible. Without risks or prizes for the darer, history would be insipid indeed; and there is a type of military character which every one feels that the race should never cease to breed, for everyone is sensitive to its superiority."⁹ Therefore "war is a permanent human *obligation*" we abolish to our detriment.¹⁰

James thought that war could not be eliminated unless some alternative were found to preserve the virtues war requires. He thought this particularly important in developing bourgeois social orders and what he quite wonderfully called "the pleasure economies" of such societies.

James proposed that:

If now there were instead of military conscription a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against *Nature*, the injustice would tend to be evened out, and numerous other goods to the commonwealth would follow. The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fibre of people; no one would remain blind as the luxurious classes now are blind to man's relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently sour and hard foundations of his higher life.¹¹

The line of reflection I take in this paper is analogous to James's suggestion, but I hope it will become obvious that I think James's understanding of war is inadequate. He failed to see that war is a sacrificial system and any alternative to war must be one that sacrifices the sacrifices of war. Indeed, I will argue that the greatest sacrifice of war is not the sacrifice of life, great as

⁹James, p. 7.

¹⁰James, p. 8.

¹¹James, p. 13. James's was the epitome of the ethos of the Victorian male. Every life should be the strenuous life; so testing oneself in "nature" was essential to being "manly." That "nature" was to be "tamed" was, therefore, a given. The significance of the "Moral Equivalent of War" for understanding James's position has seldom been developed. In his recent book, William James: On Radical Empiricism and Religion (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), Hunter Brown, rightly, I think, sees the continuity between this essay and James's The Varieties of Religious Experience. Brown notes, "Material self-abdication through the voluntary adoption of poverty is the strenuous life, James says; it is the 'moral equivalent of war' which transforms the ideal of selfless heroism, traditionally associated with military risk and self-sacrifice, into a strenuous heroism of ascetic identification with the disenfranchised through the personal abdication of one's material privileges" (p.98).

such a sacrifice may be, but rather the sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill. That sacrifice, that is, the sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill, is why war is at once so morally compelling and morally perverse.

By calling attention to the sacrificial character of war, I hope to show that the Christian "dis-ease" with war is liturgical. The sacrifices of war are a counter-liturgy to the sacrifice at the altar made possible by Christ. Because Christians believe that Christ is the end of sacrifice--that is, any sacrifice that is not determined by the sacrifice of the cross--we are free of the necessity to secure our existence through sacrificing our and others' lives on the world's altars. However, the sacrifice that war requires seems to mirror our lives as Christians, making war at once attracting and repelling to Christians.¹² A large claim to be sure, but one I hope to show is not without reason.

2. The Moral Logic of the Sacrifice of War

In his extraordinary book War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, Chris Hedges, a war correspondent, tries to explain why he became so addicted to war that he could not live without being in a war. War had quite simply captured his imagination, making it impossible for him to live "normally." Hedges observes:

I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is

¹²The grammar of this sentence gives the impression that war is a constant running through history. I think that presumption is problematic. The kind of war constitutive of the modern nation-state system is quite different than the wars fought between "kingdoms." "War" is a contested concept that requires analogical display. I continue to wonder, however, if a history of war can be written that does justice to the disanalogies between different kinds of conflicts. Moreover I continue to think that just war theorists owe us an answer to the question, "If a war is unjust, is it still a war?" That people continue to describe an unjust war as war still seems to suggest that war can be distinguished from systematic killing and, therefore, in some sense be "legitimate." Thus the assumption: "I had to kill X or Y, but that I had to do so is legitimate because it was war." That is the assumption that I think must be challenged. The need to describe unjust war as nonetheless war instead of state-sponsored murder seems analogous to the need to describe the American treatment of prisoners as "abuse" rather than torture. I owe this observation to Charlie Collier.

peddled by myth makers--historians, war correspondents, film makers, novelists, and the state--all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversities of smut and death. Fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our place on the planet are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface within all of us. And this is why for many war is so hard to discuss once it is over.

The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversations and increasingly our airways. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble.¹³

According to Hedges, war makes the world coherent, understandable, because in war the world is construed as black and white, them and us. Moreover, echoing J. Glen Grey's account in The Warriors, Hedges notes that war creates a bond between combatants found almost nowhere else in our lives. War does so because soldiers at war are bound by suffering for the pursuit of a higher good. Through war we discover that though we may seek happiness, meaning is far more important.¹⁴ "And tragically war is sometimes the most powerful way in human society to achieve meaning."¹⁵

The meaning often assumed to be given by participation in war, particularly in the West, draws on the close identification of the sacrifice required by war and the sacrifice of Christ.

¹³Chris Hedges, War is a Force That Give Us Meaning (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), p. 3. Hedges argues that war correspondents are crucial for the legitimization of war. The story of a war, a story that often belies the anarchy of battle, becomes the way war is legitimated. So newspapers and magazines are essential parts of the war machine.

¹⁴Interestingly enough, often the anti-war efforts function in a similar way for participants, that is, the anti-war movement needs an enemy if it is to have some common purpose.

¹⁵Hedges, p. 10. Hedges book has been rightly celebrated as an honest and insightful account of war, but in many ways Grey's book remains the classical description of the moral power war has over our imaginations.

Allen Frantzen calls attention to the continuing influence of the ideal of chivalry for how English and German soldiers in World War I understood their roles. He notes that development of chivalry depended on the sacralization of violence so that the apparent conflict between piety and predatoriness simply disappeared. Instead the great manuals of chivalry "closed the gap between piety--which required self-abnegation and self-sacrifice--and violence rooted in revenge. The most important presupposition of chivalry became the belief that one bloody death--Christ's--must be compensated by others like it."¹⁶ Drawing on pictorial evidence, Frantzen helps us see that the connection between Christ's death and those that die in war is at the heart of how the sacrifice of the English, Germans, and Americans that died in World War I was understood.

Moreover, the language of sacrifice continues to play a central role in how war is understood, not only in WWII but in the current Iraq war. I think the language of sacrifice is particularly important for societies like the United States in which war remains our most determinative common experience,¹⁷ because nations like the United States depend on the story

¹⁶Allen Frantzen, Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 24. Frantzen's use of pictorial evidence to sustain his argument is overwhelming. After reading his book, war monuments become much less innocent than we normally assume.

It was only after I finished this essay that I discovered Ivan Strenski's extraordinary book, Contesting Sacrifice: Religion, Nationalism, and Social Thought in France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Strenski argues that Catholic Eucharistic theology of sacrifice, a theology in reaction to Protestant denial of the centrality of the Eucharist, provided the discourse for the French understanding of sacrifice for the nation and, in particular, for war. Strenski's story is a fascinating account of how the language of sacrifice worked for the way WWI and the Dreyfus affair were understood. His book is as good a documentation I could want for the argument of this essay.

¹⁷In his article in the New York Review of Books (May 13, 2004), "How to Get Out of Iraq," Peter Galbraith quotes the historian J. W. Chambers, who maintains that war has been "central to the way the United States has developed as a nation and a society" from the very beginning. Galbraith continues, "The conquest of Indian lands, the expulsion of first the French and then the British Empires, western expansion, the preservation of the Union, and America's accession to global power status after 1914 were all accompanied by, and in part accomplished through military exertion" (p. 41). But what has changed is American spending on the military. Before 1939 American spending was comparable to the standards of other great powers, but because of American wealth we can budget for guns on a vast scale while still allowing most of its citizens to enjoy a high standard of living. (I have to say, this may be changing.)

of our wars to narrate our history as a unified story.¹⁸ World War I was particularly important just to the extent that that war represented the reintegration of the American South into the union called the United States.¹⁹

Whatever one may think of Carl Schmitt's argument that all the legitimating concepts of the modern state--a state according to Schmitt that gains its moral intelligibility from war--are secularized theological concepts, I certainly think his analysis helps us understand much about America.²⁰ For example, Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle begin their book, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag asking:

What binds the nation together? How vulnerable to ethnic and religious antagonism is our sense of nationhood? What is the source of the malaise we have felt for so much of the post-World War II period? Above all, what moves citizens to put group interests ahead of their own, even to surrendering their lives? No strictly economic explanations, no great-man theory of history, no imminent group threat fully accounts for why members of enduring groups such as nations consent to sacrifice their immediate well being and that of their children to the group. Whatever does, tells us a great deal about what makes nation-states enduring and viable. This book argues that violent blood sacrifice makes enduring groups cohere, even though such a claim challenges our most deeply

¹⁸Recent American war fighting strategy, that is, the use of massive force to eliminate the need for American soldiers to be killed, has created a moral crisis in the American military and society. Michael Walzer critiques American war strategy in Kosovo by reminding us of Camus' dictum: "You can't kill unless you are prepared to die." This at the very least requires that American generals be prepared to risk the lives of their soldiers. Arguing about War, pp. 101-02.

I suspect the American unwillingness to sacrifice our troops has everything to do with the ethos that currently grips the American people. Russell Baker, for example, observes that a kind of sterility has crept into American politics. He continues, "In this atmosphere history has a dreamlike quality. A war is said to be in progress, and the President describes himself as a 'war president,' but, except for military professionals, no one is asked to fight or sacrifice or even, as in World War II, to save waste fats and grease. We are asked only to shop with a generous hand, to accept a tax cut, and to be scared." "In Bush's Washington," New York Review of Books (May 13, 2004), p. 25. One of the great divides in America is the increasing gulf between the moral commitments constitutive of the armed services and the general ethos of American society.

¹⁹In Women and War (New York: Basic Books, 1987), Jean Bethke Elshtain observes that nation states can exist on paper before they exist in fact. Accordingly she argues that the United States was an historical construction that visibly came into being as a cause and consequence of the "Great War." Prior to that war, America was a federation of strong local and regional identities in which the centralized federal government was fairly limited. The first World War reintegrated not only the South into the Union, but also the immigrants who had flooded into America in the nineteenth century (pp. 106-120).

²⁰Carl Schmitt, Roman Catholicism and Political Form (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

held notions of civilized behavior. The sacrificial system that binds American citizens has a sacred flag at its center. Patriotic rituals revere it as the embodiment of a bloodthirsty totem god who organizes killing energy.²¹

Marvin and Ingle argue that self-sacrifice is the central theme of the American civil religion of patriotism and that nowhere is that better exemplified than in the American fetish of the flag. They provide extraordinarily rich and diverse iconographic and textual evidence to sustain their argument. For example, they call attention to a quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower's published account of his induction into West Point. Eisenhower begins by describing the rough first day of initiation into West Point at the end of which he confesses to being weary and resentful. Eisenhower writes, however, "toward evening we assembled outdoors and, with the American flag floating majestically above us, were sworn in as cadets of the United States Military Academy. It was an impressive ceremony. As I looked up at our national colors and swore my allegiance, I realized humbly that *now I belonged to the flag*. It is a moment I have never forgotten."²²

²¹Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1. Marvin's and Ingle's argument draws heavily on Emil Durkheim, whose general account of religion I find quite unpersuasive, but it works quite well for their purposes.

I think Marvin's and Ingle's book lends some support to my contention that one of the reasons war has become a habit is future generations feel the need to sacrifice their young to show they are worthy to represent those that sacrificed their youth to give them their life. It does not matter what the past war was about or what the present war concerns. What is important is the sacrifice be repeated to show we are rightful heirs of the sacrifices that we believe have been made on our behalf. Think of the oft made sentiment about those who have died in past wars: "We cannot let them to have died in vain."

²²Marvin and Ingle, p. 135. Marvin and Ingle quite rightly focus on the importance of the flag, but their case could have been made stronger if they had attended to the confusion in American churches between the cross and the flag. It is not uncommon for the flag to appear on church bulletins particularly on the Fourth of July. There is even an anthem entitled the "Statue of Liberty." The lyrics read: "In New York harbor stands a lady with a torch raised to the sky, and all who see her know she stands for liberty for you and me. I'm so proud to be called an American, to be named with the brave and the free! I will honor our flag and trust in God, and the Statue of Liberty. On lonely Golgotha stood a cross with my Lord raised to the sky; and all who kneel there live forever as all the saved can testify I'm so glad to be called a Christian, to be named with the ransomed and whole! As the statue liberates the citizen, so the Cross liberates the soul. Oh, the Cross is my Statue of Liberty. It was there that my soul was set free. Unashamed I'll proclaim that a rugged cross is my Statue of Liberty, my liberty." (Kansas City MO: Lillenas Publishing Co., 1974).

The crudity that often accompanies the identification of the flag with the sacrifice of war should not be used to dismiss sentiments like that expressed by Eisenhower, because I think there is something profoundly right that the flag should embody the moral logic of the sacrifice of war.

The battle for Pork Chop Hill in the Korean war nicely illustrates the moral logic at the heart of war. Pork Chop Hill was a strategic point that controlled access to the Inchon valley. In the course of the war Pork Chop Hill had changed hands many times. Late in the war the hill had been retaken by American troops, but at a terrible cost. By the end of the battle fewer than a dozen Americans were left on the top of the hill.

This was in the last stages of the peace talks and the Americans were afraid if they withdrew the dozen men left on Pork Chop Hill, such a retreat could be interpreted as a loss of the will to fight and could, therefore, prolong the war. They were sure the enemy would counter-attack and the dozen left would be killed. Yet if the Americans reinforced the men left at the top of the hill, more than the twelve would be killed. There was a debate at division headquarters with the result that the twelve were reinforced. The justification given for the decision to reinforce was that, if they had not done so, it would have dishonored the memory of all the men who had died on Pork Chop Hill. The more sacrificed to honor past sacrifices, the more the moral stakes for which the war (or battle) has been fought must be raised.²³

²³The necessity to raise the stakes for which a war is fought in order to do justice to the sacrifices made in the war is a troubling phenomenon for those committed to just war reflection. How do you keep war limited when it seems necessary to justify war using moral descriptions that can only make the war unlimited. This strikes me as particularly troubling for democratic societies in which the "real" reasons for going to war must be put in terms to justify citizen soldiers going to war.

In his extraordinary memoir of the war in the Pacific, William Manchester observes, "The longer the casualty lists--the vaster the investment in blood--the greater the need to justify the slain. Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2002), p. 242. For a poignant, novelistic account of the need to prevent civilian populations from knowing of the horror of war in order to guard the sacrifice of the ordinary soldier, see Anne Perry, Shoulder the Sky (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004).

There has been insufficient investigation of the relation between democratic societies and just war requirements. George Weigel has recently called for the development of a "Catholic international relations theory" that is surely a step in the right direction. Weigel argues that such a theory must accept the "enduring reality of the

In He Came Preaching Peace, John Howard Yoder wonders why it is so hard for political leaders to admit mistakes, to confess they were wrong. He asks, for instance, if it was necessary to withdraw American soldiers from Vietnam in 1975, or from Beirut in 1983, "Why can it not be admitted that it was wrong to send them there in the first place? Why can the statesman not afford to advocate peace without saying it must be 'with honor'? Why must the willingness to end the war be dulled or perhaps even denied by the demand that we must still seem to have won it?"²⁴ I think the answer to Yoder's perfectly sensible questions is quite simple: to acknowledge a policy or a strategy was mistaken is thought to betray the sacrifices made by those who as a result of the policy died.

It is often observed that the first casualty of war is truth, but how do you tell the truth without betraying the sacrifice of those who accepted the terms of battle? War is a sacrificial system that creates its own justification. Hedges is right that war creates its own culture, but that it does so indicates the moral power of war. No doubt war creates a comradeship seldom found in other forms of life, but it does so because war subjects lives to sacrifices otherwise unavailable. That is the moral practice and power war *is*.

3. The Sacrifice of the Refusal to Kill

I think it is a mistake, however, to focus only on the sacrifice of life that war requires. War also requires that we sacrifice our normal unwillingness to kill. It may seem odd to call the sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill "a sacrifice," but I want to show that this sacrifice often renders the lives of those who make it unintelligible. The sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill is

nation-state system" and argues the acceptance of such a system will not necessarily commit Catholics, and he also says American foreign policy, to a "realist" account of international relationships. And Weigel calls pacifists "naive." "World Order: What Catholics Forgot," First Things 143 (May, 2004): 31-38.

²⁴John Howard Yoder, He Came Preaching Peace (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 1998), p. 138.

but the dark side of the willingness in war to be killed. Of course I am not suggesting that every person who has killed in war suffers from having killed.²⁵ But I do believe that those who have killed without the killing troubling their lives should not have been in the business of killing in the first place.

In On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society, Lt. Col.

Dave Grossman reports on General S.L.A. Marshall's study of men in battle in the second World War. Marshall discovered that of every hundred men along a line of fire during a battle, only fifteen to twenty would take part by firing their weapons. This led Marshall to conclude that the average or healthy individual, that is, the person who could endure combat, "still has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility."²⁶

Lt. Col. Grossman observes that to study killing in combat is very much like the study of sex. "Killing is a private, intimate occurrence of tremendous intensity, in which the destructive act becomes psychologically very much like the procreative act."²⁷ What, therefore, leads men to

²⁵It is equally true that those who return from war who have not killed may be deeply wounded both literally and figuratively. See, for example, Sara Corbett, "The Permanent Scars of Iraq," New York Times Magazine (February 15, 2004): 34-66.

²⁶Quoted in Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995), p. 1. Grossman has a chapter that deals with those who are "natural soldiers," that is, they have the predisposition of a killer. He estimates that "those who like to kill" comprise no more than two percent of the military. He concludes "Whether called sociopaths, sheepdogs, warriors, or heroes, they are there, they are a distinct minority, and in times of danger a nation needs them desperately." p. 185. Marshall's data has been challenged but the crucial issue for my case is the "necessity" of training people to kill.

²⁷Grossman, p. 2. William Manchester reflects on his returning to battle on Okinawa even though he had been wounded. He observes his irrational act "was an act of love. Those men on the line were my family, my home. They were closer to me than I can say, closer than any friends had been or would be. They had never let me down. And I couldn't do it to them. I had to be with them, rather than let them die and me live with the knowledge that I might have saved them. Men, I now know, do not fight for flag or country, for the Marine Corps or glory or any other abstraction. They fight for one another. Any man in combat who lacks comrades who will die for him, or for whom he is willing to die is not a man at all. He is truly an animal. Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War, p. 391. In an extraordinary letter commenting on this paper, my friend Fritz Oehlschlaeger observes: "I suppose I wonder if it's as difficult for us to sacrifice our unwillingness to kill as you suggest. I found those quotes

kill? Grossman suggests that what leads soldiers to kill is not the force of self-preservation but the power of another form of intimacy, that is, the accountability they feel with their comrades. Thus Richard Gabriel observes that "in military writings on unit cohesion, one consistently finds the assertion that the bonds combat soldiers form with one another are stronger than the bonds most men have with their wives."²⁸

As a result Grossman found it was very difficult to get soldiers to talk about having killed. Many would take refuge in the impersonality of modern war, attributing most deaths to artillery or bombing. The same process seems to be working in the attempt to depersonalize the enemy. Soldiers are often criticized for denying the humanity of the enemy by calling the enemy names such as kraut, Jap, reb, gook, Yank, dink, slant, or slope, or haji. Moreover, the enemy is not "killed" but knocked over, wasted, greased, taken out, mopped up, or lit up. But surely these attempts to depersonalize the enemy as well as rename the process of killing should be understood as a desperate attempt to preserve the humanity of those that must kill. As Grossman observes, the dead take their misery with them, but the man who killed another must forever live and die with the one he killed. "The lesson becomes increasingly clear: Killing is what war is all about, and killing in combat, by its very nature, causes deep wounds of pain and guilt. The

from General Marshall and Lt. Col. Grossman fascinating. If what they suggest is right, though, why, then, should war be so compelling? How does it square with the generally Darwinian image of ourselves we're almost inevitably disposed to adopt today--i.e. where we must, as successful survivors, view ourselves as the offspring of the apparently most efficient survivors (killers?) of the past? I notice all the accounts here of killing do stress its "private and intimate" quality (Grossman, Manchester, the powerful story of Harry Steward, etc.). But I wonder if that's the whole of the story; I wonder if the compelling quality of war resides precisely in the release from all that private inhibition. So that, in all the kinds of cases you cite, there is a tremendous psychological barrier to killing [it causes revulsion etc.], but it's the giving up of these internal restraints, the loss of oneself in the mass movement of force, the freedom to kill justifiably (or perhaps in some realm of war beyond good and evil where justifications no longer matter) that is the real source of the fascination and compelling quality of war."

²⁸Quoted in Grossman, p. 149. The analogy between killing and sex invites the thought that mass killing in war is comparable to pornography. For if one of the conditions of pornography is its anonymous character, it is exactly the same kind of anonymity that characterizes much of the killing in modern war.

language of war helps us to deny what war is really about, and in doing so it makes war more palatable."²⁹

Grossman's book reports conversations and interviews he has had with veterans who have killed. Often these reports include at first a euphoria that they have survived followed by a overwhelming guilt at what has happened, that is, they have killed another human being. Often this guilt is so strong that the one who has killed is wracked by physical revulsion and vomiting.³⁰ For example, William Manchester, the novelist and WWII veteran, describes his assault on a sniper in a fishing shack who was one by one picking off the Marines in his company. Manchester was terrified by fear, but he broke into the shack and found himself in an empty room. There was a door to another room he also broke down but feared in doing so the sniper would kill him. But it turned out the sniper was in a sniper harness so he could not turn around fast enough. "He was entangled in the harness so I shot him with a 45 and I felt remorse and shame. I can remember whispering foolishly, 'I'm sorry' and then just throwing up... I threw up all over myself. It was a betrayal of what I'd been taught since a child."³¹

Particularly agonizing are the occasions when the enemy has been shot but does not instantly die. Harry Steward, a Ranger and U.S. Army master sergeant, tells of a remarkable incident during the Tet offensive in 1968. He and his men suddenly found themselves confronted by a "guy" firing right at them. Steward was wounded in the arm, but the men on each side of him were killed. Steward charged with his M-16, mortally wounding the enemy. He

²⁹Grossman, p. 93.

³⁰Grossman, pp. 115-16.

³¹In Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War, Manchester describes why he had to write: "Abruptly the poker of memory stirs the ashes of recollection and uncovers a forgotten ember, still smoldering down there, still hot, still glowing, still red as red." (p. 3-7)

was still alive but would soon die. Steward reports he can still see his eyes looking at him with hate. Later as the flies were beginning to swarm over the dying man, Steward covered him with a blanket and rubbed water onto his lips. The hard stare started to leave his eyes. He tried to talk, but he was too far gone. "I lit a cigarette, took a few puffs, and put it to his lips. He could barely puff. We each had a few drags and that hard look had left his eyes before he died."³²

The pathos of such reports is how the very character of what is told isolates the teller. Killing creates a world of silence isolating those who have killed. One of the most poignant conversations Grossman reports took place in a VFW hall in Florida in 1989. A Vietnam vet named Roger was talking about his experience in Vietnam. It was early in the afternoon, but down the bar an older woman began to attack him.

"You got no right to snivel about your little piss-ant war. World War Two was a real war. Were you even alive then? *Huh?* I lost a brother in World War Two."

We tried to ignore her; she was only a local character. But finally Roger had had enough. He looked at her and calmly, coldly said: "Have you ever had to kill anyone?"

"Well no!" she answered belligerently.

"Then what right have *you* got to tell *me* anything?"

There was a long, painful silence throughout the VFW hall, as would occur in a home where a guest had just witnessed an embarrassing family argument.

Then I asked quietly, "Roger, when you got pushed just now, you came back with the fact that you had to kill in Vietnam. Was that the worst of it for you?"

"Yah," he said. "That's half of it."

I waited for a very long time, but he didn't go on. He only stared into his beer. Finally I had to ask, "What was the other half?"

"The other half was that when we got home, nobody understood."³³

³²Grossman, pp. 116-117.

³³Grossman, pp. 249-250.

Grossman observes that if soldiers like Roger are to regain some sense of normality they need to be reintegrated into society. Rituals of reentry, therefore, become extremely important. Grossman suggests that those that have killed need to have constant praise and assurance from peers and superiors that they did the right thing. The awarding of medals becomes particularly important. Medals gesture to the soldier that what he did was right and the community for which he fought is grateful. Medals mark that his community of sane and normal people, people who do not normally kill, welcome him back into “normality.”³⁴

Grossman calls attention to Richard Gabriel's observation that "primitive societies" often require soldiers to perform purification rights before letting them rejoin the community.³⁵ Such

³⁴Grossman, p. 272.

³⁵Of course one of those "primitive societies" was the church. Once even soldiers who had fought in "just wars" still had to confess and do penance before being allowed to partake of the Eucharist. See, for example, Bernard J. Verkamp, The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern Times (Scranton: Univ. of Scranton Press, 1993). In the same letter referred to above, Fritz Oehlschlaeger observes: "Something you comment upon on p. 22 reminds me of the (to me) most terrible moments of the Iliad. It concerns the observation by Richard Gabriel that primitive societies require soldiers to perform purification rites before rejoining the community. In Book X of the Iliad, Diomedes and Odysseus go on a mission in the night to discover what's going on in the Trojan camp and they run into a man, Dolon, who has been sent by Hektor to find out whether the Greek ships are guarded. Odysseus captures Dolon, who supplicates him; Odysseus, as I remember it, assures him he need not fear and then gets information from him about the camp, including some about splendid horses belonging to the Thracians who are sleeping nearby. Odysseus then kills Dolon, and he and Diomedes proceed to the Thracian camp, where Diomedes kills twelve of the men in their sleep, the resourceful Odysseus being careful to drag each out of the way as they're killed so that the horses do not step on the corpses after Diomedes and Odysseus take them. Diomedes kills the Thracian king and they leave just as the remaining Thracians are being aroused from sleep. After this particularly grisly and arguably not very honorable episode, Homer says of the two: 'And the men themselves waded into the sea and washed off the dense sweat from shin and shoulder and thigh. Afterwards when the surf of the sea had rinsed the dense-running sweat away from all their skin, and the inward heart had been cooled to refreshment, they stepped into the bathtubs smooth-polished, and bathed there, and after they had bathed and anointed themselves with olive oil they sat down to dine, and from the full mixing-bowl drawing the sweet-hearted wine poured out an offering to Athene.'" (End of Book X, Lattimore's translation) I must say this always causes a visceral reaction in me. I've never actually vomited in response to it but that's distinctly the basic feeling I have. How are we to regard this? Is what's to be washed away merely sweat? What is the inward heart of Odysseus? What is it capable of? Does this ritual enable the killing they've just completed? How can they so easily be refreshed? How can they even consider eating? How can these apparently "civilized" practices (those "bathtubs smooth-polished") be related to, or integrated with, or dependent on, what has just occurred? What is a human being that he can resourcefully draw aside the dead as his companion kills them in their sleep and then sit down to dinner and wine? I received Oehlschlaeger's letter before I read Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character (New York: Scribner's, 2003) by Jonathan Shay. Shay's book is an ongoing commentary on the experience of Vietnam through

rites often involve washing or other forms of cleaning. Gabriel suggest the long voyage home on troop ships in WWII served to give soldiers time to tell to one another their stories and to receive support from one another. This process was reinforced by their being welcomed home by parades and other forms of celebration. Yet soldiers returning from Vietnam were flown home often within days and sometimes hours of their last combat. There were no fellow soldiers to greet them. There was no one to convince them of their own sanity. Unable to purge their guilt or to be assured they had acted rightly, they turned their emotions inward.³⁶

I think it is a well attested fact that war veterans seldom want to talk about the experience of battle. No doubt the complex emotions of fear, the exhilaration danger produces, and the bonding between comrades, make speaking of battle difficult. But how do you explain to another human being that you have killed? No doubt there are mechanisms that allow some to create an emotional distance between themselves and what they have done; but, at least if Grossman is right, men often remain haunted by their experience of having killed in a manner that can have-- sometimes years later--destructive results.³⁷

the interpretive lens of the Iliad. His account confirms many of the observations I make in this essay. In particular he stresses the importance of how "homecoming" is done for the continuing "health" of those that have killed.

³⁶Grossman, pp. 272-73. William Manchester notes that Navy nurses were rare in the Pacific, which resulted in the scuttlebutt that the Navy thought depraved Marines might rape them. He observed the Marines "believed the story. We knew from our pony editions (small versions of American magazines) that there was some concern at home over how to handle trained killers like us when the war ended. One prominent New York clubwoman suggested that we be sent to a reorientation camp outside the States (she suggested the Panama Canal zone), and that when we were released there, we be required to wear an identification patch warning of our lethal instincts, like a yellow star." *Goodbye Darkness*, p. 273.

³⁷Grossman has a number of chapters in his book dealing with descriptions that allow the soldier to "explain" what they have had to do--e.g., "I was following orders," "He was killed by the group," "I was just doing my job." A recent letter reproduced by Deacon Stan Grenn in the *Jesus Journal* 88 (Spring 2004) makes poignant reading.

"Dear Sir,

For twenty-two years I have carried your picture in my wallet. I was only eighteen years old that day that we faced one another on that trail in Chu Lai, Vietnam. Why you did not take my life I'll never know. You stared at me for so long armed with your AK-47 and yet you did not fire. Forgive me for taking your life. I was reacting just the way I was trained, to kill V.C. or gooks, hell you weren't even considered a human, just a gook/target, one and

To kill, in war or in any circumstance, creates a silence. It is right that silence should surround the taking of life. After all the life taken is not ours to take. Those that kill, even when such killing is assumed to be legitimate, bear the burden that what they have done makes them "different." How do you tell the story of having killed? Killing shatters speech, ends communication, isolating us into different worlds whose difference we cannot even acknowledge. No sacrifice is more dramatic than the sacrifice asked of those sent to war, that is, the sacrifice of their unwillingness to kill. Even more cruelly, we expect those that have killed to return to "normality."³⁸

4. The Sacrifice of Christ and the Sacrifices of War

In Blood Sacrifice and the Nation, Marvin and Ingle assert that their book is a book about

the same.

Since that day in 1967 I have grown a great deal and have a great deal of respect for life and other peoples of the world. So many times over the years I have stared at your picture and your daughter, I suspect. Each time my heart and guts would burn with the pain of guilt. I have two daughters myself now. One is twenty. The other one is twenty-two and has blessed me with two granddaughters, ages one and four.

Today I visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C. I have wanted to come here for several years now to say goodbye to many of my former comrades. Somehow I hope and believe they will know I'm here. I truly loved many of them, as I am sure you loved many of your former comrades.

As of today we are no longer enemies. I perceive you as a brave soldier defending his homeland. Above all else, I can now respect the importance that life held for you. I suppose that is why I am able to be here today.

As I leave here today I leave your picture and this letter. It is time for me to continue the life process and release my pain and guilt. Forgive me Sir. I shall try to live my life to the fullest, an opportunity that you and many others were denied.

I'll sign off now Sir, so until we chance to meet again in another time and place, rest in peace."

³⁸Manchester suffered a head wound which means "you are never going to get the shattered pieces of remembrance just right. In addition [he] repressed what war memories [he did] have for so long that [he has] no way of knowing how distorted they are now." Goodbye Darkness; A Memoir of the Pacific War, p. 194. Later Manchester says, "it was somewhere on the slopes of that hill [Sugar Loaf on Okinawa] where I confronted the dark underside of battle, the passion died between me and the Marine Corps. The silver cord had been loosed, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher broken at the fountain, the wheel broken at the cistern. Half the evil in the world, I thought, is done in the name of honor. I now caught the jarring notes of the "Marine's Hymn"--which, after all, was a melody lifted from an obscure Offenbach operetta--and the tacky appeals to patriotism which lay behind the mass butchery on the islands. On Sugar Loaf, in short, I realized something within me, long ailing, had expired. Although I would continue to do the job, performing as the hired gun, I now knew that banners and words, ruffles and flourishes, bugles and drums, the whole rigmarole, eventually ended in squalor." (pp.381-82) This is why we so desperately need witnesses like William Manchester. We are just beginning to have those who have been in Iraq provide similar accounts. See, for example, Joseph Galloway's report as an officer of the actual experience of war in Iraq in his

religion, specifically, the religion of American patriotism. They acknowledge that nationalism is not usually considered a religion, but they claim that nationalism shares with sectarian religions the worship of a killing authority which they argue is central to religious practice and belief. According to Marvin and Ingle, that is why religions flourish when they are powerless and persecuted. The authors then observe:

In the religiously plural society of the United States, sectarian faith is optional for citizens, as everyone knows. Americans have rarely bled, sacrificed or died for Christianity or any other sectarian faith. Americans have often bled, sacrificed and died for their country. This fact is an important clue to its religious power. Though denominations are permitted to exist in the United States, they are not permitted to kill, for their beliefs are not officially true. What is really true in any society is what is worth killing for, and what citizens may be compelled to sacrifice their lives for.³⁹

This is a sobering judgment, but one that cannot be ignored if Christians are to speak truthfully to ourselves and our neighbors about war. I think, however, Christians must insist that what is true is not what a society thinks is worth killing for, but rather that for which they think it worth dying. Indeed, I sometimes think that Christians became such energetic killers because we were first so willing to die rather than betray our faith. Yet the value of Marvin's and Ingle's claim that truth is to be found in that for which you are willing to kill is how it helps us see that the Christian alternative to war is not to have a more adequate "ethic" for conducting war.

No, the Christian alternative to war is worship. I am well known for the claim that the first task of the church is not to make the world more just, but to make the world the world. That claim is but a correlate of the assertion that the church does not have a social ethic. Rather the church is a social ethic. I am quite aware that such claims can lead to misunderstandings, but I think they are particularly useful in this context. The church does not so much have a plan or a

"Combat in Iraq: What's it really like?" Durham Herald-Sun (June 27, 2004), p. A13.

³⁹Marvin and Ingle, Blood Sacrifice and the Nation, p. 9.

policy to make war less horrible or to end war. Rather the church is the alternative to the sacrifice of war in a war-weary world. The church is the end of war.

For example, consider these words from Augustine:

It is we ourselves--we, his City--who are his best, his most glorious sacrifice. The mystic symbol of this sacrifice is celebrated in our oblations, familiar to the faithful. . . . It follows that justice is found where God, the one supreme God, rules an obedient City according to his grace, forbidding sacrifice to any being save himself alone; and where in consequence the soul rules the body in all men who belong to this City and obey God, and the reason faithfully rules the vices in a lawful system of subordination so that just as the individual righteous man lives on the basis of faith which is active in love, so the association, or people, of righteous men lives on the same basis of faith, active in love, the love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and loves his neighbor as himself. But where this justice does not exist, there is certainly no "association of men united by a common sense of right and by a community of interest." Therefore there is no commonwealth; for where there is no "people," there is no "weal of the people."⁴⁰

The sacrifices of war are undeniable. But in the cross of Christ the Father has forever ended our attempts to sacrifice to God in terms set by the city of man. We (that is, we Christians) have now been incorporated into Christ's sacrifice for the world so that the world no longer needs to make sacrifices for tribe or state, or even humanity. Constituted by the body and blood of Christ we participate in God's Kingdom so that the world may know that we, the church of Jesus Christ, are the end of sacrifice.⁴¹ If Christians leave the Eucharistic table ready to kill

⁴⁰Augustine, The City of God, translated by Henry Bettenson. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 889-890. Augustine's claims make clear that the aforementioned unity made possible by the spectacle of war (and anti-war) is really a false unity because it is founded on the injustice of established community constituted by false sacrifices.

⁴¹For those readers who may suspect I am underwriting a satisfaction theory of atonement, I need to say that is the last thing I should want to do. Not only do I think there are deep difficulties with satisfaction theories (and it is disputable whether Anselm is appropriately associated with such theories), but even more importantly I think such "theories" wrongly separate the person and work of Christ. I am simply not convinced that Christians need an "atonement theory." For my reflection on these matters, see my Cross-Shattered Christ (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005). It is interesting that the view of Eucharistic sacrifice Strenski suggests intimates that after the Reformation Catholic Eucharistic theology developed in ways that mirror Protestant sacrificial accounts of the atonement. See Strenski, Contesting Sacrifice, pp. 12-51.

one another, we not only eat and drink judgment on ourselves, but we rob the world of the witness necessary for the world to know there is an alternative to the sacrifices of war.

The silence that surrounds the taking of life in war is surely an indication, a judgment, that we were created to be at peace with one another and God. We were not created to kill one another. We were created to be in communion with one another. There is no more basic natural law than the prohibition against killing. When we kill, even when we kill in a just war, our bodies rebel. Yet that rebellion is a marker of hope. Christ has shattered the silence that surrounds those that have killed, because we believe that the sacrifice of the Son makes possible the overwhelming of our killing so that we might be restored to a life of peace. Indeed we believe that it remains possible that those who have killed can be reconciled with those they have killed. This is no sentimental bonding represented by the comradeship of battle. This is the reconciliation made possible by the hard wood of the cross.

War is a mighty practice, a power, that destroys those ennobled by the force of war.⁴² We are fated to kill and be killed because we know no other way to live. But through the forgiveness made possible by the cross of Jesus we are no longer condemned to kill. A people have been created who refuse to resort to the sword that they and those they love might survive. They seek not to survive, but to live in the light of Christ's resurrection. The sacrifices of war are no longer necessary. We are now free to live free of the necessity of violence and killing. War and the sacrifices of war have come to an end. War has been abolished.⁴³

⁴²This sentence echoes Simone Weil's extraordinary essay, "The Iliad or the Poem of Force." (The whole essay can be found in Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983, pp. 222-248.) Weil says, "Violence obliterates anybody who feels its touch. It comes to seem just as external to its employer as to its victim. And from this springs the idea of a destiny before which executioner and victim stand equally innocent, before which conquered and conqueror are brothers in the same distress. The conquered brings misfortune to the conqueror, and vice versa." p. 234.

⁴³In He Came Preaching Peace (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), John Howard Yoder observes that the gospel does not only imply an ethic of peacemaking nor does it merely lead to a nonviolent life-style. Rather, the

gospel proclaims a reconciled view of the world. Yoder calls attention to Phillips' translation of Ephesians 2:14-17 which reads: "Then he came and told both of you who were far from God (the outsiders, the Gentiles) and us who were near (the insiders, the Jews) that the war was over." Yoder comments: "That is the gospel--not that *war is sin*. That also is true, but alone it would not be the gospel. The gospel is that *the war is over*. Not merely that you *ought* to love your enemy. Not merely that if you have a "born again experience," some of your hateful feelings will go away and you maybe can love. Not merely that if you deal with your enemies lovingly enough, some of them will become friendly. All of that is true, but it is not the gospel. The gospel is that everyone being loved by God must be my beloved too, even if they consider me their enemy, even if their interests clash with mine." pp. 54-55

Dr. Alex Sider and Charlie Collier made invaluable criticisms and suggestions that have made this a better essay.