

A Word to Sheepdogs

A CENTURY AGO the vacant stares of young doughboys returning from the hell-holes of the trenches in France were telltale signs of what was then labeled “shell shock.” In every war since, those who endure the atrocities of warfare have shown various degrees of the same phenomenon. Now we give it a more sophisticated label: “post traumatic stress disorder.”

Most soldiers, Christian or not, need help coping with their wartime experiences. Dr. Maj. (ret.) Harold Ristau, who pastored soldiers on the battlefields of Afghanistan as a chaplain in the Canadian Armed Forces, charts the direction for responsible pastoral care of those who answer the call to take life in order to protect life.

Outlining the parameters of Luther’s masterful “Two Kingdoms” theology derived from Augustine’s magisterial *The City of God*, Harold Ristau lays a foundation for responsible pastoral care of deployed soldiers and veterans alike. God calls on certain citizens to defend life by taking the lives of would-be attackers. Yet you can’t just walk away from killing someone as if nothing has happened. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is, Dr. Luther reminded us. Careful pastoral care never whitewashes sin and shame, but erases it in the shed blood of Jesus. For good measure, Pastor Ristau provides several instances of how he treated souls burdened with the residue of the fog of war. Reading this essay will help you immensely – whether you’ve ever pulled a trigger on another fellow human or merely are called to convey a clean conscience to those who are dealing with the spiritual aftermath of that terrible (yet essential) God-given vocation.

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The Pastoral Care of Killers: The utility of Luther's theology of the two kingdoms to the moral, spiritual and psychological considerations of engaging in a just war

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MOST PASTORS SERVE at least a couple of soldiers or veterans in their congregations. Counseling them requires not so much a unique set of skills as it does a mature appreciation for the complexity involved in our conflicting vocational identities. Christian soldiers suffer a unique set of challenges when recovering from the experiences of war, such as killing. As a retired military chaplain who has served extensively as a first responder and counselor in the Middle East, having also spent several years in the training system exploring the way soldiers are trained to cope with the mental and spiritual consequences of being killers, I have found Dr. Martin Luther's observations regarding the relationship between the two kingdoms to be an indispensable tool in offering this kind of pastoral care and counseling.

Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved

The issues that soldiers face today with regards to their identity as killers were very much the same during the late medieval period, when Luther was prompted to write *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* in 1526. Most people think Luther's main opponent was the Pope, but he was equally

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critical of what we would today call "generic Protestantism." He was not a radical reformer. His reformation was a conservative one in that it pivoted around one single question of doctrine. In fact, he was sometimes viewed by colleagues as a "papist" due to his conservative approach to church and polity regarding sacraments, liturgy, governance, and so forth. Yet it was his view of forensic justification or imputed righteousness that distinguished him from the Roman concept of grace as an infused righteousness (that is, that one spiritually progresses through a stratum of increasing degrees of holiness). Luther's belief that sinners were declared *completely* righteous by Christ as the basis for salvation distinguished him not only from Rome, but from other protestant movements as well. If individuals were truly saved by grace without anything worthy to point to within themselves, Luther believed that his forensic understanding of justification was the only option. Both the Roman Catholics' view of salvation and the non-Lutheran protestant understanding of salvation (contingent upon some version of fulfilling the requirements of the law in sanctification), demonstrated a huge difference in this regard. The confessional writings of the Lutheran church clearly demarcate the early Lutherans from both camps, as they perceived the same error ironically manifested: confusion of the two realms of faith and works, or two kinds of righteousness, with serious soteriological consequences. Yet in the case of ethics and war Luther was much more allied with Roman Catholics, and against the Anabaptist protestants.

Luther's view of the two kingdoms helps answer the question as to whether there is a moral or Christian way of killing. In doing so, we must delve into questions of Luther on vocation, which is highly influenced by St. Augustine. I suppose the wider question is: considering the complexities of being a soldier, can Christian theology help a soldier reconcile the obvious timeless metaphysical contradictions inherent to soldiering and war, while also offering them practical tools in coping with the struggles of conscience, when manifested in individual guilt and lack of faith in the mission, and if so, how? The first half of this paper focuses on Luther's theology of two kingdoms and its origins, while the second half on the practical applications to war and soldiering.

Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved was written to a counselor to a protestant duke who appears to have been troubled in conscience and unable to reconcile his confession of the Christian faith with his profession as a soldier. The pacifist Anabaptists took the position that a Christian could not bear arms under any circumstances asking: "How can a Christian practice such obviously unholy and 'unchristian' jobs?" I cannot count how many soldiers have said or implied to me, "Padre, what does God think about what I do for a living?"

Years ago, in Afghanistan, I served as chaplain for numerous helicopter repair technicians who saw nothing of war outside of a hangar, but struggled intensely with their role in contributing to a war effort in which they were no longer sure they could support, based on lack of situational awareness coupled with constant exposure to one-sided media report-

age. But even in the case of a just war, the questions were always reduced to how one can live with an ethic of love, or North American values, and yet help shoot other people. I think we could all agree that the question is worth losing some sleep over.

Yet Martin Luther responds with the classic argument of war as legalized use of violence as a necessary evil in maintaining order. Luther affirms the legitimacy of the military profession by identifying it with the divine institution of the sword to punish evil, protect the good, and preserve peace. Now Luther candidly admits that the military calling can be abused, but misuse by no means invalidates its legitimacy and function. Luther views just war in terms of self defense (which would include, today, pre-emptive strikes) and applies the same logic to justification of violence by police forces. After all, a ruler is charged by God to defend and protect his people when they are attacked, and to do this he needs soldiers who serve him:

What men write about war, saying that it is a great plague, is all true. But they should also consider how great the plague is that war prevents. If people were good and wanted to keep peace, war would be the greatest plague on earth. But what are you going to do about the fact that people will not keep the peace, but rob, steal, kill, outrage women and children, and take away property and honor? The small lack of peace called war, or the sword must set a limit to this universal, worldwide lack of peace which would destroy everyone. This is why God honors the sword so highly that he says that he himself has instituted it

(Rom 13:1) and does not want men to say or think that they have invented it or instituted it. For the hand that wields this sword and kills with it is not man's hand, but God's; and it is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights. All these are God's works and judgments.¹

A Holy Office

Luther continues by discussing how a soldier must execute his God-given office assuming that "it's a dirty job but someone must do it." Although the argument is not unique, *the way* that Luther justifies it *is*. He not only tolerates the position of soldier but *exalts* it to the level of a holy office/vocation/calling in the way he sees people as instruments of God *even in killing!*² In late medieval Catholicism, if priesthood was the highest office in the spiritual strata, soldiering or executing would have tied at the bottom with peasantry. Among Anabaptists, it disqualified you from the heavenly kingdom since Jesus preached forgiveness, not revenge, turn the other cheek, and so forth. But the way in which Luther makes distinctions between the *person* and the *office* that he holds, accompanied by the corollaries of his forensic justification (such as the principle of universal priesthood), allows him to elevate these offices as places equally dignified as those of clergy. Arguably, Luther is the first to

¹ Luther, Martin. "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved". *Luther's Works*. Edited by Harold J. Grimm, Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86. vol. 46, p. 96.

² The nomenclature in the military for "killing" is "neutralizing," demonstrating an uncomfortableness by members of the organization with the notion that soldiers are killers, indirectly perpetuating the prejudice that killing is always intrinsically shameful.

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consistently envision soldiering as a “profession of arms.” He claims that soldiers, police, executioners are the *hands* of God; the *masks* of an omnipotent and merciful God in healing and ruling this broken world. How does one reconcile Christ Jesus’ warnings like “he who lives by the sword will die by the sword”? The simple answer was that Jesus’ vocation was as savior, and not soldier, which is why Christ can praise and endorse soldiering (as we see in the New Testament), even though he himself never practices violence. Although killing looks unchristian, as a necessary evil it is a Christian and, even, *loving* thing to do. Every individual has a multiplicity of vocations in life. A Christian may be a believer and soldier at the same time, to name just two. And although killing does not belong to the office of his being a disciple of Christ (practicing non-violence), killing is intrinsic to his office of being a soldier (practicing violence):

Now slaying and robbing do not seem to be works of love. A simple man therefore does not think it is a Christian thing to do. In truth, however, even this is a work of love ... When I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves wife and child, house and farm, property, and honor and peace, then I see how precious and godly this work is; and I observe that it amputates a leg or a hand, so that the whole body may not perish. For if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world would be ruined because of lack of peace. Therefore, such a war is only a very brief lack of peace that prevents an everlasting and immeasurable lack of peace, a small

misfortune that prevents a great misfortune.³

Here we learn, firstly, that crisis in conscience occurs when the responsibilities and obligations that accompany diverse vocational roles are confused. One must therefore do one’s best to keep distinct the different hats that Christians must wear in accordance with their God-given vocational identities. For example, a Christian soldier kills, and well, according to his vocation as military personnel but not in accordance with his vocation as father of a family, member of a church, husband of a wife, and so forth. Conscience or intuition can be misleading when, say, a soldier feels personal guilt over a kill.⁴ In all likelihood, he has inadvertently “taken it personally” instead of hiding his individual personhood behind the uniform or “mask” (to use Luther’s word) of soldier.

Secondly, offices such as soldier or prince are *necessary evils* and thus *works of love, in spite of* who holds them: Christian or non-Christian, good or bad. Luther argues that one cannot judge the office by the person. For instance, Christians are to respect the office of king, even when you know he is a crook. God has put him there for a reason. Although we ought to pray for him and, when appropriate, rebuke him, when all is said and done, we mere mortals are

³ Ibid.

⁴ Because human beings are “nephesh” — creatures in which body and soul are intricately woven together — they cannot simply compartmentalize their popular and unpopular vocational identities. Ethical conflicts of conscience occur precisely because of their overlap. Similarly, although I can logically distinguish between the sinner and the saint that I am in eternity, my experience in temporality is as an undivided person (hence, the necessity of receiving the continual dosage of both the law and gospel in the present).

not authorized to judge God's ways. Even though Henry VIII ought to have been excommunicated for his unrepentant sins, he could still, theoretically, remain a legitimate king as civil head. Luther notes how most heads of state are evil people, and that it is next to impossible to find a truly Christian prince who is not occupied with his own greed or interests. Yet he is better than nothing, and remains an instrument of God in maintaining societal peace and protection. Luther roots his position in Augustine who says the same thing concerning the utility of pagan kings: that despite themselves, and lack of faith and true religion, they are still instruments of God. Even a bad king can make good decisions.

Two Cities and Dual Citizenship

Augustine argues that ethical obligations correspond to one's specific and diverse vocations through a division between divine and "secular" realities. In *The City of God* (or better entitled the "Cities" of God), Augustine makes these crucial distinctions between the "City of God" and the "City of Man" as the two realms in which an individual abides. Because all authority arises from God, Christians show allegiance to both secular and religious authorities as an act of love for God. In these two spheres one lives simultaneously as a citizen of *both* heaven and earth, yet with different allegiances applicable to each: "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." *The City of God* was written as a defense against the pagan accusations made during the decline of a "Christian" empire under the leadership of catholic Constantine with the accusations of the pagans who claimed that Christian theol-

ogy was responsible for creating a weakened society and army with its emphasis on love and forgiveness, etc. Augustine's response is that a pagan *would* think that way, judging spiritual phenomenon by physical ones (that is, temporalizing eternal realities or eternalizing temporal realities) *because* they only "see" one city, and operate according to a one-storey, as opposed to a two-storey, or "two cities," worldview. In this one-plane of existence the gods were a multiplicity and behaved as people do, without displaying qualities that transcended this one temporal plane. For example, reincarnation was a necessary consequence to death since souls had nowhere else to go, being "trapped" within the bubble of a one city cosmology. The Roman pagans believed that Rome *had* to be an *eternal* city since there were no other options, and naturally, the king then was a kind of incarnation of the gods. Augustine opposed theocracy, which collapsed the two cities into one with all of its attempts at realizing or establishing heaven *on earth*.

While critical of paganism, Augustine also sees the theocracy of constantinianism as a continuation of this pagan one-city worldview. Augustine argues that Constantine is still perceived, in a sense, as an incarnation of divinity (*albeit* the Christian one), as his view of "state as divine" does not change. Luther sees that continue with the belief in papal infallibility, but also with the Vatican by virtue of its identity as both church *and* "state" (for lack of a better word). The Vatican manifests a mixture between these two spheres of heavenly and earthly governance. Luther argues that God rules the world through different and often *contradictory* instruments applicable to

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each city. And confusing the tools of the heavenly city and earthly one, as in those religious crusades that were clearly driven by a view of spiritual conquest through physical victory, is inevitably destructive both physically *and* spiritually since all theocracies seek to materialize heavenly realities on earth and confuse one's identity as a citizen of both heaven *and* earth.

Augustine writes against deficiency in both pagan polity and constantinian polity. Both are theocracies of a sort. Because of a lack of a two cities worldview, the fact that Rome was declining as a "Christian" nation, demonstrated to the pagans that either the Christian God was weak or that Christians were weak. But Augustine argues that the demise of the empire was not occurring because Christians are too nice or too loving, or because Constantine worships the weakest God off the list (after all, the Greek religion fell to the Christian one!). Christians can "behave meanly" if that is what is required ethically *in their vocation* (that is, soldiers killing). They are both a citizen of heaven and of earth and one cannot judge one city by the principles applicable to the other. In other words, what you see is not always what you get! After all, the main Christian symbol is a crucifix: the glory of God is *hidden* in an executed criminal on a cross, a reminder of the invisible eternal realities that have a counter-intuitive relationship with visible temporal ones.

Martin Luther, an Augustinian Monk, returns to Augustine's concept of the two simultaneously existing arenas that he calls "two kingdoms," "two estates" or "two realms" and develops it further in its applications to the topic of vocation in general and vo-

cation of soldier in specific. Because of his forensic notion of justification, the Christian is simultaneously *ius-tus et peccator* (saint and sinner). In Holy Baptism, he remains both until death, when the sinner disappears and his identity as a saint is revealed and lived out for all of eternity. For now, although he constantly experiences life as a sinner, he *believes* that he is a fully perfected and forgiven saint. It is a paradoxical identity to be acquiesced by faith: that a Christian is simultaneously righteous and unrighteous at the same time. Each baptized Christian has a dual and conflicting identity with one foot already in heaven through faith, with the other still on earth, explaining why as a saint he or she lives a life of love and servanthood, yet as a sinner, he or she must not be surprised by daily sins.⁵

This spiritually dual citizenship corresponds with being a dual citizen of Augustine's two cities: a citizen is both a private and public individual with a complex multi-vocational life lived according to these two statuses of Christian and civil citizen. Luther holds that we all have different, yet equally important vocations simultaneously and that different rules pertain to each one, such as a father, who is also a citizen, who is also an employee, and so forth.

⁵ Neither should pastors, who counsel the Christian veteran who struggles with feelings of war guilt, due to conflicting feelings in light of this paradoxical identity (after all, so we reason, "saints don't kill people but sinners do!"), be surprised by his need to continually be re-rooted in his baptismal identity as a justified saint by the re-hearing continually of who he is already in Christ, despite the lack of moral, spiritual or mental progress that some feel the sanctified should exhibit. "Your sins are forgiven" is a means of validating Christian suffering as it occurs in the shadow of Christ's cross. If it is "good enough" for God, it ought to be "good enough" for us!

Each vocation, ultimately, is a costume of God in the divine orchestrating of a healthy society. If we were only saints, it would all be a perfectly harmonious song. But as sinners we resist our vocational responsibilities because the sinner and saint struggle against one another until death parts them. Yet submitting to God means submitting to *men* daily, privately and publicly, according to one's vocation which is indeed sharing in the attitude of Christ.

As saints, Christians have no need of law or government, but by virtue of being still sinners, and surrounded by non-Christian sinners, they require the law's threats and punishments. Thus, law, government, judges, police and armies all become necessary evils in controlling the consequences of unavoidable sinful behavior. In *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, Luther writes,

To such a one we must say, It is indeed true that Christians, so far as they themselves are concerned, are subject to neither law nor sword and need neither; but first take heed and fill the world with real Christians before ruling it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish; for the world and the masses are and always will be unchristian, although they are all baptised and are nominally Christian. Christians, however, are few and far between, as the saying is. Therefore, it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, nay even over one land or company of people, since

the wicked always outnumber the good.⁶

What necessitates the law is unfortunate; yet as a necessary evil it is a gift in that God minimizes the consequences of sin and evil in the world because of the simultaneous existence of, not just believers and unbelievers, but sinners and saints. This phenomenon drives Luther's social and political theology of the "two kingdoms." Here he envisions *one* sovereign reign of God ruling the earth, *by means of two* separate arms, or *through* two kingdoms: The kingdom of the left hand, consisting of the state ruled by civil authorities, and the kingdom of the right hand, consisting of the church ruled by religious authorities. He writes:

For God has established two kinds of government among men. The one is spiritual; it has no sword, but it has the word, by means of which men are to become good and righteous, so that with this righteousness they may attain eternal life. He administers this righteousness through the word, which he has committed to the preachers. The other kind is worldly government, which works through the sword so that those who do not want to be good and righteous to eternal life may be forced to become good and righteous in the eyes of the world. He administers this righteousness through the sword. And although God will not reward this kind of righteousness with eternal life, nonetheless, he still wishes peace to be maintained among men and rewards them with temporal blessings. He gives

⁶ Luther, Martin. "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed." *Luther's Works*. Edited by Harold J. Grimm, Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86. vol. 45, p. 91.

rulers much more property, honor, and power than he gives to others so that they may serve him by administering this temporal righteousness. Thus God himself is the founder, lord, master, protector, and rewarder of both kinds of righteousness. There is no human ordinance or authority in either, but each is a divine thing entirely.⁷

In Luther's socio-political expression of the two kingdoms, God rules the world with two hands through the "religious" vocations pertaining to the church and through the "secular" ones pertaining to the state. Yet really *both are spiritual!* God rules according to two distinct but complementary and divinely appointed orders. He rules them differently and according to different principles (that is, the difference between Moses and the law, and Jesus and the gospel).

These two orders of government through which God exercises his lordship over humankind are the two ways in which God governs. Each regiment acts as an instrument of God in maintaining order and peace in the midst of a spiritual war with the devil, which takes place in both realms of church and state. Roughly speaking, the weapon of the word belongs to the former, and the weapon of the sword belongs to the latter. One realm deals with the inward and invisible government, a government of the soul; for it is not concerned with one's external life but only with eternal salvation. The other realm consists purely of external government, a rule of force, and is only concerned with regulation of one's external behavior and not with the inward condition of one's soul. A

⁷ Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved, p. 99.

gracious God operates hidden under these masks of princely and ecclesiastical authority in his care for individuals' *bodies and souls*.

For Luther, both kingdoms are virtually equally important realms,⁸ which means that the secular authorities have almost the same qualitative value as the religious ones! God's hands are equally at work, with equal interest, through both prince and priest, but differently. It takes great skill not to mix the two hands and the instruments that they use (that is, the sword and noose in the left, and the means of grace in the right). When the arms are crossed, God's ruling is crippled, so to speak, and sinful abuses result: crimes may go unpunished and criminals set free (since God has forgiven them, after all), or priests being physically punished when the king disagrees with their theology (e.g., which is actually what occurred for Lutherans under the Prussian Union and via "emergency bishops" who were heads of state).

For this reason, these two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain; the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other. For no one can become pious before God by means of the secular government, without Christ's spiritual rule. Hence Christ's rule does not extend over all, but Christians are

⁸ One could argue that, by virtue of the priority given to eternal gifts over temporal ones, the kingdom of the right hand is actually superior for Luther, along with his attributing the ecclesiastical governance to the "right" hand, which is biblically and liturgically the side of divine favor (that is, consider the thieves on the left and right sides of the crucified Christ).

always in the minority and are in the midst of non-Christians. Where there is only secular rule or law, there, of necessity, is sheer hypocrisy, though the commandments be God's very own. Without the Holy Spirit in the heart no one becomes really pious, he may do as fine works as he will. Where, on the other hand, the spiritual government rules alone over land and people, there evil is given free rein and the door is opened for every kind of knavery; for the natural world cannot receive or comprehend spiritual things.⁹

The two kingdoms is not, however, to be confused with the American understanding of a separation of "church" and "state." No one could conceive, in medieval times, what we mean today in our modern democratic system of a complete and deliberate juxtaposition between church and state, as if God was only interested in ruling with one hand in the kingdom of the right instead of residing as Lord of both. According to Luther the tasks for the king were:

1. To guarantee the free and unhindered preaching of the Gospel; since secular authorities were divinely instituted in order to protect and preserve faith and the believer's freedom to believe.
2. To defend justice and rights of weak (through courts and police).
3. To guarantee societal order (through the military), in order to preserve peace and protect the poor:

What else is war but the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does anyone go to war, except

because he desires peace and obedience?¹⁰

The tasks of the Church were:

1. To pray for the king and government.
2. To encourage parishioners to obey and support their authorities.
3. To preach to the government, freely rebuking and advising on matters of morality, ethics and justice.

State and Church

Clearly, the "state" and "church" were not juxtaposed from one another, but subsided together yet with two different, but necessary, functions. After all, Christians are residents of both. Luther perceived these two kingdoms as manifesting the two hands of one Lord, exclusive *in function* but not exclusive *with intent*. For what Luther's understanding of forensic justification also does is *equalize* each Christian's status before God through the very protestant idea of "priesthood of all believers" or "universal priesthood." If everyone is *equally* righteous before God by grace, and God is *equally* at work in every one of them, then they all have an *equal* qualitative value as God's instruments on earth. Each good, legal and necessary vocation becomes a holy order! The hidden God who is at work helping, saving, and sustaining both the believing and unbelieving world through ethics of vocation is able to do it because all believers are priests (that is, all sinners are saints), and all good acts are thus holy and spiritually valuable. Membership in the universal priesthood in the kingdom of the right makes all acts ethically and

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⁹ Temporal Authority, p.92.

¹⁰ Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved, p. 95.

morally important in the kingdoms of the right or left. However, this notion, when combined with a worldview established on a foundation of one realm, can be a dangerous thing. When Luther emerged from his exile at the Wartburg castle translating the Bible into the vernacular German, he was horrified to discover that his colleague, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, had unleashed the Peasants' Revolt of 1524, an anarchistic and bombastic crusade and early communist revolution against all temporal authorities, both secular and religious, as a means for the lower classes to 'upgrade' their stations in life. When Luther's universal priesthood allows for a leveling in the kingdom of the right hand, his radical opponents, who lack a two realms' worldview and hence a two kingdoms' theology, extend this principle to a leveling in the kingdom of the left hand that includes political, economic and social equality. There is a complete leveling of distinctions among believers by the radicals who cannot fathom how freedom and equality before God in heaven does not necessarily imply freedom and equality before people on earth. When the radical reformers encouraged the peasants to revolt against their authorities — *albeit* abusive ones — by killing their lords and the priests, destroying churches, and so forth, they had crossed those arms of God. They had confused their vocational responsibilities and were wearing the wrong hats in the wrong places. To them, universal priesthood did not only mean that all the spiritual treasures belonged to all the people, but that all the physical treasures and property did too. For Luther, any view of establishing a visible kingdom of God on earth through puritanical efforts at estab-

lishing a theocracy confused the two kingdoms by carrying on a religious battle with a secular sword. Even today in Wittenberg stands a statue of Luther, as a priest, holding the word of God alone (that is, the sword of spirit as the only weapon fit for the kingdom of the right), while in Geneva stands one of his protestant opponents, Ulrich Zwingli, as a "priest," holding both a Bible and a sword. The Calvinist states had their own inquisitions of imprisoning and fining the impious due to the political corollaries of their soteriological theology.¹¹

For Luther, the belief in both a spiritual equality in the one kingdom and societal inequalities in the other were as simultaneously compatible as were the double truth that man is sinner and saint. Christian equality consisted of an inward disposition of the soul and did not include one's exterior stations in life. This again is precisely why he could praise all vocations, which in the eyes of the world varied in social value, as equally holy before God, since each soul was equally righteous towards God by faith. Sanctification is manifested within the realm of one's natural vocations and true spirituality is hidden in the seemingly meaningless tasks of everyday life. The service of a "poor maid" is equal to a priest since "her service [of others] is equal to cooking for God in heaven."¹² God's kingdom comes in

¹¹ The Calvinist model is then exported to England influencing the creation of the Church of England, and its own kind of theocratic polity. In practice, due to the influence of pietism, many Lutheran states were prone to the same errors, posing a constant challenge to Lutheran orthodoxy.

¹² Luther, Martin. *Luther's Werke; kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimarer Ausgabe). Weimar: Hermann Bohlau, J.C.F. Knaake, and Nachfolger, 1883, Vol. 52, p. 470.

ordinary stations in life as God works through them. This concept is important for soldiers in seeing themselves as passive instruments, since it alleviates the moral responsibility of what they do, with the caveat of when conscience convicts them (as we will see). Forensic justification and universal priesthood imply that one is already righteous and holy and thus an instrument of God. Even the smallest and necessary “dirty” acts are God at work. As counter-intuitive as it seems, *soldiers are holy in their killing!* Their killing is, in fact — when the war is just — an act of love. The problem for soldiers is believing it.

While the radical reformers mixed the two kingdoms by their political *activity*, the Anabaptists mixed them by their political *inactivity*. The pacifist requirements to withdraw from society, juxtaposed the church from the state. The former was holy, and the latter unholy. Ironically, these groups that rejected the membership in the state, became their own theocracies of a sort (that is, think of the political culture of an old-order Mennonite or Amish community). But for Luther, his theology of the two kingdoms required that Christians be active citizens in all legal vocations, as lights of Christ in a dark world. He permitted no room for the idea of keeping oneself pure from the evils of this world and society through any form of isolationism or monasticism saying, “some Christians are so heavenly minded, that they are of no earthly good.”

Incidentally, today similar questions remain in the appropriate use of those two swords, where, when and by whom, with regards to the social gospel. As important as political reform was in Latin America, was it really the church’s mandate to

take the lead through well-intended priests like Archbishop Romero who used the pulpit to influence the political arena in the seventies? We are inclined to sympathize with liberation theology since the clergy had the necessary political influence and were often the only voice of the poor. Yet Luther would have seen this as a structural problem for all theocratic political organizations: they inevitably mix the instruments of the two kingdoms. When priests preach politics from the pulpit, even though it may be an effective means of changing society, are they not using spiritual influence for political ends, and is this not an invasion upon Christian freedom with dangerous soteriological consequences?¹³ We do intuitively believe in a separation: during the inquisition, the physical sword was enlisted to drive out heresies even though doctrinal disputes ought to have been fought with the spiritual sword of the word of God. Believe it or not, the inquisition was well-intended: torturing and murdering the body in order to mitigate the more severe pains of purgatory. What we believe about the relationship between the “two cities” or two kingdoms governs the way we see the world and our moral and ethical decision-making.

Political theorist Michael Waltzer unknowingly applies Luther’s paradigm in an application to multi-cultural societies like Canada, in his book *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, arguing that the confusion of the instruments be-

As counter-intuitive as it seems, soldiers are holy in their killing! Their killing is, in fact — when the war is just — an act of love. The problem for soldiers is believing it.

¹³ Although the pulpit does function as a place for Christian instruction on matters of morality, its primary role is preaching the gospel of salvation and, thereby, leading lost and hungry sheep to the altar. When that main function is prioritized, all forms of political discourses and favoritism lose any meaningful place.

Vocational distinctions are important since they inform our moral compass and govern our ethics.

tween the “spheres” of civil society (that is, the kingdom of the left) is the source of most acts of injustice. By deploying a logic similar to that of Luther, he articulates how the ethical tools and principles of one sphere are not to be used in others. For example, we *pay* for groceries, but we don’t *pay off* a judge; we don’t let the murderer off scot free just because he is sorry; we don’t beat somebody up just because he doesn’t agree with us. A multicultural polity can tolerate the Islamic principle that women are, seemingly, morally inferior to the husband *in the family* and the private sphere, as long as this notion is not transferred into the public sphere. In other words, a woman can be submissive at home, but that must not interfere with, say, her position as a female bank manager supervising male Muslim employees at work. Otherwise a multicultural society’s values would be in jeopardy. There is a correspondence here with the mixing-up of the two kingdoms. Vocational distinctions are important since they inform our moral compass and govern our ethics. Otherwise, the temptation is to take the law into own hands when the justice system seems to be failing or view the death of a law-enforcement officer or military member as a work-place accident instead of as a sacrifice for our country.

The Soldier’s Calling and Conscience

So what does all of this have to do with soldiering? Well, strategically, the military minimizes a soldier’s exposure to the results of their kill, so as not to cause unnecessary trauma and circumvent them taking the results too personally. We prefer that the target looks like the silhouette of

the shooting range or a foam mannequin, instead of an actual human being. For this reason, the one who shoots is not the one who cleans up, or investigates, or processes the cadaver. However, at close range, it is impossible not to see the target as an individual human being (that is, not to link eyes with your enemy and interpret the exchange as personal). Psychologically, soldiers cope in two ways. For many, the tendency is to “demonize” the enemy: reduce him to the status of sub-human, making extermination easier. It became evident at the Nuremberg Trials how ingeniously the Nazis could do this systematically. People killing people because they didn’t view them as people. This is certainly the easy and comfortable approach as it does offer short term relief. Young, inexperienced soldiers are inclined to conclude their first kills with celebration, much like victory after killing the zombies in a video game. On the one hand, why shouldn’t they? We should love what we do. A fisherman loves to fish. A doctor loves to heal. A soldier loves to...kill? Well *if* there is no shame in being a soldier, if all vocations are good, they should be proud if they hit their target. However, as I have often taught, there is a difference between *loving to shoot versus loving to kill*. The moment we love to kill (not in achieving mission success but in exterminating human life) we have lost a piece of our soul. Just because you carry out a legal vocation, does not imply that you are responsible for the moral act (that is, the executioner may have no idea as to whether the decision made by the judge to execute the criminal was just or not, and, thus, he is not responsible for the outcome). But *you are* responsible for your belief in your heart and personal conviction.

tions (that is, is the executioner filled with a diabolical love of killing when he does his duty?). And you *may* be somewhat responsible depending how much you may know about the decision-making process (hence, the military is wise to practice a “need to know” policy which deprives soldiers of too much information).

The other way of helping soldiers cope with the inevitable “bloodiness” of their job, not taking their killing personally and suffering personal guilt, involves judging a human in accordance with their various vocational identities.

What, then, is a Christian way of going to war? According to Luther, if it is clearly a just war, both leaders at strategic and operational levels *and* soldiers at operational and tactical levels should do their best to minimize the necessary violence. The Israelites were instructed in their “holy war” not to rape and pillage, to minimize necessary violence, and to do their best to behave as a loving people of God in that difficult and horrible task (principles that continue to be reflected in the Geneva Conventions). In other words, we all have obligations to do the dirty jobs, but to do them in a certain “moral” way, a moral concept supported by a utilitarian ethic of means justifying ends, where, in fact, war is then an expression of loving one’s neighbor by maintaining peace and good order. Thus, the soldier should do his job well. He should have a good shot, just like a Christian executioner would ensure that the noose was as tight as possible, to minimize pain. A *Christian* soldier would be expected to do it prayerfully and missiologically, if it were possible. A Christian executioner may be compelled to whisper the Gospel into the ear of

the convicted criminal on death row, in the absence of a priest. But this would be *outside* the scope of his vocation as executioner but *inside* of his vocation as a disciple of Christ. That would be the most loving and merciful response to the necessary evil.¹⁴ What is interesting is that Luther is mixed on how responses would change in the case of a war where the cause is questionable, which we will explore below.

Furthermore, in accordance with Luther’s emphasis on universal priesthood and its implications for increasing the value of individual faith, and relatedly, the importance of an individual qualitatively (all are equally important in the sight of God: pope, priest and peasant), the role of a good conscience driving one’s vocation matters more than it ever did prior. By empowering the individual and equalizing his status as a saint, responsibility and accountability in decision-making is increased. Although we take most of this for granted, the U.S. government, founded on the idea of all people created equal, is a direct consequence of this reformation principle of universal priesthood coupled, again, with Luther’s emphasis on the high value he placed on the individual. The problem is, as we see in democracy, an uninformed vote has as much weight as an informed vote. It can be a dangerous thing when it is misinformed. The consequences of this are never fully dealt with by Luther as it falls into the realm of situational ethics. Lu-

¹⁴ The image would somewhat mimic Christ’s own responses in his undergoing of the necessary evils at Calvary. In his last words, he prayed (“Father forgive them,”) preached (“Today you will be with me in paradise”) and passively endured the necessary pains of a necessary atoning sacrifice for the sake of others, that is, the world’s salvation, embodied in those final words “It is finished.”

Conscience needed to be treated carefully and fully informed by the word of God, or else it could become confused with emotion, pride and the personal opinions of the old Adam and sinner.

ther is known for his famous “here I stand” in the face of the ultimatum to renounce his doctrinal convictions or suffer death. However, Luther’s boldness is exaggerated since he took at least a day to make his decision and his response was probably more timidly put than the one suggested in the original Luther movie of 1953. Luther was a conservative priest and conscience *needed to be treated carefully and fully informed by the word of God*, or else it could become confused with emotion, pride and the personal opinions of the old Adam and sinner. The assumption that a refined conscience would be an adequate dissuader for doing evil alongside a strong government leads Luther to believe in the possibility of a stable society. Both are required. In case of conscience, a good conscience matters to being a good soldier:

For whoever fights with a good and well-instructed conscience can also fight well. This is especially true since a good conscience fills a man’s heart with courage and boldness. And if the heart is bold and courageous, the fist is more powerful, a man and even his horse are more energetic, everything turns out better, and every happening and deed contributes to the victory which God then gives. On the other hand, a timid and insecure conscience makes the heart fearful.¹⁵

But conscience can give trouble when plagued or misinformed, and then poisoned by guilt, which can incapacitate a soldier emotionally, psychologically or spiritually, and make him a less effective soldier. Thus, alleviating or addressing guilt

is not just in the philanthropic interests of the government, but in the operational ones! And as our society becomes increasingly “atomistic,” to use Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor’s word, this issue of conscience and guilt will become more of a problem: killing a fellow human being probably strikes us harder in the individual heart than long ago.

Accordingly, helping soldiers understand their multiplicity of vocations, and the conflicts therein, is addressed in military training environments in order to prepare them to cope with eventual feelings of guilt. For such discussion on vocation helps soldiers not to take their killing, as soldiers, personally. For instance, a uniform presents the office and hides the individual. Titles do the same. Uniforms are *that much more important* in trades such as soldier, prison guard, policeman, and other trades that practice the legalized use of violence on behalf of society, not only for the ones they serve but for their own sake also. When a soldier or police officer responds to violence in the capacity of their office, it is not always easy to be objective and suppress their emotions and feelings. The moments and days after a violent incident — like a soldier’s gunfight — require the soldier to undergo a phase of decompression so that these mixed emotions can be deliberately addressed. However, in our increasingly non-hierarchical and even anti-authoritarian society, where professionals prefer to be called by their first names so as to remove unnecessary obstacles with clients since it is friendlier, or where uniforms are simply viewed as traditional and adiaphora, it becomes increasingly difficult to reinforce this distinction between the office and the one who fills the office. Ameri-

¹⁵ Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved, p. 93.

can protests during the Vietnam War were as much directed against individual soldiers (who were conscripted and had no choice but to deploy to war) as they were towards the political authorities, demonstrative of how difficult it is to disassociate the holder of an office from the office itself. Ironically, during Iraq a decade ago, celebrities like Oprah Winfrey assumed that soldiers were anti-mission with rhetoric like, “support our troops and not the war,” as a way of alleviating a soldier’s personal responsibility. Yet ask most American soldiers today, and they will be insulted by the notion that they would fight a war in which they didn’t also personally believe! So, the relationship between personal convictions of the one who holds the office and his tasks as a soldier, is complicated by the variable of individual conscience, as well as the importance that Western societies place on it by those who hold a military office and by those who don’t. Luther attempted to deal with these cases of incongruity between the office and holder of office in instances such as when one served a bad dictatorial prince as ruler. Luther would say that although the office of prince is necessary, it is very difficult finding a wise, selfless “Christian” prince.

There are some who abuse this office, and strike and kill people needlessly simply because they want to. But that is the fault of the persons, not of the office, for where is there an office or a work or anything else so good that self-willed, wicked people do not abuse it? They are like mad physicians who would needlessly amputate a healthy hand just because they wanted to.... Ultimately, they cannot escape God’s judg-

ment and sword. In the end God’s justice finds them and strikes.¹⁶

Yet, at the same time, a competent and wise non-Christian prince is better than an unwise and incompetent Christian one. And any authority is better than no authority, for if all authority originates from God, God is at work *even through* the most unlikely candidates. Augustine, too, in *The City of God*, argues that God works throughout all of history, using even the worst leaders for his divine good. The Judeo-Christian Scriptures are saturated with episodes of God’s hidden hand through unbelieving leaders in both Kingdoms such as Cyrus the Persian, Caiaphas the high priest, and so forth. The office remains good and efficacious, despite the person who holds it. Yet when the person who holds it is good, the functioning of the office is obviously better.

Soldiering in a Broken, Blackened World

Hence, returning to the topic of soldiers, they are best *at* what they do, and recover best *from* what they do, when they do not take killing personally. Augustine would have argued that only a worldview of the two realms would allow one to do that, and this paradigm can only be supported by a monotheistic religion. In other words, because the pagans cannot help collapsing the two kingdoms into one, they cannot help collapsing the office and person into one. I get nervous as a chaplain when soldiers have tattoos of Viking gods and are serious about a devotion to them. Why? Well not just because these are war gods whose glory is in war as an end in itself (or, in

¹⁶ Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved, p. 97.

other words, demons), but because such a pagan worldview only leaves room for a war that *is* personal! Just as Augustine and Luther would have seen the mixing up of the cities or kingdoms as ungodly and counter-productive, prone to abuse by those holding the office, such soldiers are prone to abuses their own. Helicopter pilots that paint pictures of skulls and demons on their helmets do little for winning hearts and minds of civilian populations from our enemies and convincing them that we are “the good guys!” The pagan worldview cannot help but to heroize a soldier or demonize the enemy. A one-realm approach doesn’t easily allow for separation of the packages of roles and responsibilities unique to each vocation.

As chaplains we would argue that soldiers connected to a healthy spirituality are better at what they do, simply because they have navigated through these questions of vocational distinctions in some form or another. Luther would say that *Christian* soldiers are best at what they do, not only for that reason, but also because of the help available to them through the Holy Spirit due to their Christian faith in an incarnational view of a *transcendent and imminent* God personally for them. But, at the very least, whomever the soldier, we chaplains reinforce the distinction between their personhood and their office in carrying out their duties. In my experience, when a soldier hears that God is at work hidden through him whether he realizes it or not often makes him re-evaluate the importance of what he does, and usually makes him feel better about himself (we often treat objects lent to us with more care than those that we possess ourselves). When soldiers are unable to reconcile this

multiplicity of vocations driven by a two-realms’ worldview, they have difficulty understanding how they can kiss a wife on the lips, and yet shoot an enemy in the face. Psychologically, it happens from time to time that those wires get crossed mentally: the violence you show to your enemy when he resists your will *in battle* is transferred to violence shown to, say, your wife or kids when they resist your will *at home*, obviously resulting in disciplinary or legal action by civil authorities and psychiatrists. Speaking personally, after deploying to Afghanistan during a very active tour, I found myself, for a few weeks, as a *father and husband*, bossing around my family members in inappropriate ways when they didn’t do what I said, because overseas, as an *officer*, doing what I say was entirely appropriate and necessary. Again, the responsibilities and behaviors of one vocation are not necessarily the same as another.

As counter-intuitive as it may seem to some military, seeing your enemy as what he really is (father, son, misinformed victim, and so forth) is healthier than demonizing him. It may be difficult at first but makes a soldier more resilient because it is aligned with reality. Those least resilient individuals tend to have a skewed perception of reality: either as overly optimistic or overly pessimistic, in this case pessimistic. When we view our enemy realistically, the celebration after a kill can then be limited to a sigh of relief (“just doing my job”), instead of penetrated by endless high fives (“I got him!”). Ultimately, it allows one to perform the surgery more professionally, cutting out the cancer without prejudice. I once had a soldier seek counseling because he was troubled by the fact that his fellow soldiers didn’t feel any guilt

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at all and would boisterously brag about their kills. This soldier, however, was dealing with his own feelings of guilt and felt totally unsupported. One may find such immaturity understandable in situations of long range killing, when the facial expressions of the target are indiscernible — just like video games, where the lines between realities can be easily blurred. But in short range combat, when surrounded by the horrific sounds and smells and other sensory activity not present in a video game, coping mechanisms need to be in place. Otherwise, unless a soldier lacks a conscience, he is likely to demonize his enemy. This is sure to backfire when, say, you are required to shoot a youngish soldier who looks a lot like your own son. Soldiers need to take a step back and objectify and remember that they practice a “profession of arms.” Luther calls this filtering through “the eyes of an adult versus a child”:

We must, in thinking about a soldier’s office, not concentrate on the killing, burning, striking, hitting, seizing, etc. This is what children with their limited and restricted vision see when they regard a doctor as a sawbones who amputates, but do not see that he does this only to save the whole body. So, too, we must look at the office of the soldier, or the sword, with the eyes of an adult and see why this office slays and acts so cruelly. Then it will prove itself to be an office which, in itself, is godly and as needful and useful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work.¹⁷

Biblically, Luther would argue that there is a way of celebrating victory versus celebrating death. God sees

going to war, however necessary, as evil and, thus, victory must always, in some sense, be tainted by grief.¹⁸ Israelite King David is ordered by God to conquer the holy land, as the place in which the Savior of the world would one day be born. And yet, David is not permitted to build the holy temple, but rather his son Solomon is, because his hands are bloodied with the stains of war, though God-ordained. As people created in the image of God, every death is in some sense tragic, even when there is no question that it was deserved. That being said, we are all often driven by emotions and tempted to thirst for justice not for justice’s sake, but for revenge. Demonizing the enemy is the coping mechanism when a soldier has difficulty distinguishing the man from the office. It then helps superficially suppress issues of conscience and guilt. This is why training soldiers on vocation is crucial. We build “muscle memory” and offer soldiers coping mechanisms before a deployment by having them wrestle with these questions in a classroom since there is no space or time for such philosophical or existential discussions in the foxhole. Moral injury, spiritual injury and forms of PTSD are often driven by a skewed worldview and too simplistic or idealistic view of humanity; polarizing the “good guys” and “bad guys.”¹⁹

Demonizing the enemy is the coping mechanism when a soldier has difficulty distinguishing the man from the office.

¹⁸ A surgeon can celebrate his saving of a life through amputation, while also cognizant of the fact that the amputee needs to grieve the loss of his or her leg.

¹⁹ Although PTSD is not a new phenomenon, it is seemingly “on the rise” due to the increasing lack of resilience in the West, attributed to various cultural features (e.g. a highly protected social and political environment, which minimizes our exposure to healthy doses of stress that can assist in preparing us psychologically for traumatic events) as well as religious ones. For instance, Christians have indispensable cop-

¹⁷ Ibid.

Seeing the world in terms of black and white (in which we ourselves are “white”) instead of gray, or better yet, blackened and broken,²⁰ can quickly result in cognitive dissonance not only when one observes the horrors in the world during war, but horrors between the battles of one’s own heart.

Now not all would agree with this argument. Psychology generally holds that preventing or recovering from PTSD arises from foundational beliefs that assert belief in a better world, and a better self. Christian chaplains have difficulty with these presuppositions due to their belief in original sin. The world and self are broken and dark, and a solution cannot be found by simply changing one’s perception but must be rooted *outside* of this world, and *outside* of this self to a transcendent, personal and omnipotent God. At a chaplain training exercise, a leading American military psychologist made the assertion that suffering soldiers require a more positive outlook on life and increased self-esteem, but then continued by mentioning how their practitioners were disappointed by a low success rate in suicide intervention, in contrast with chaplain success in this area. Perhaps this is because most Christian chaplains approach counseling in terms of the categories of sin and grace that is grounded in some expression of the forgiveness of sins. Optimism for soldiers to have a healthy “positive” view of life is contingent upon a realistic diagnosis and the gospel.

ing mechanisms in recovering from trauma in terms of meaning-making, inaccessible to the increasing number of agnostic and unbelieving soldiers.

²⁰ Or “sinful and unclean” as the traditional Christian liturgy of public or communal confession puts it.

Real Guilt, Real Remedy

Permit me to share with you a pastoral example. As a pastor, one often hears confessions from people who do not realize that they have entered a “confession box” in their conversation with the Lord’s ambassador. A military member reached out to speak with me in a war zone. He had been struggling with anger issues for several years. He had been prescribed medication to help maintain control. Anger is a secondary emotion, and is driven by fear, injustice or guilt as the most likely causes. These subjects all touch upon spirituality, in terms of one’s self identity and worldview that cannot be disassociated by one’s view of God, however formally religious that is articulated. The individual, a deist like most today (God exists but we cannot know him), began confessing his feelings of guilt caused by his kills. What really bothered him was that when he spoke to the mental health professional, he was told that he had distorted memory, and that he shouldn’t feel guilty since he wasn’t.²¹ The member insisted that telling him that he wasn’t guilty and shouldn’t feel it, made him angrier and feel even crazier. But my response was unexpected. I told him that if he felt guilty, there was no reason to believe that he wasn’t guilty (in some sense) and I wouldn’t argue with him. *He gave a huge sigh of relief.* During this unknowing confes-

²¹ Although psychologists and psychiatrists — especially Christian ones — offer an important contribution to holistic healing alongside the spiritual care offered by the clergy and the Church, there is a tendency in behavioral psychology to deny people the opportunity to fully own and/or confess their sin lest they contradict the often-unchallenged presuppositions of their trade and the philosophical underpinnings of their school of thought.

sion I didn't pry into the intricacies of his guilt (did he feel guilty because he killed, or because he enjoyed it, or because he didn't feel guilty enough), but I said that, at the very least we are all guilty for the messy state of this world, that, as a matter of fact, most people *should* feel guiltier than they do about it, and this *should* trouble us as a society (e.g. the grandmother on the chesterfield has no idea that *she* is fighting a war, though *you* pull the trigger). I couldn't resist sharing with him the truth that God had offered humankind a solution and forgives us all of our sins in his becoming one of us and that through His own sacrificial death, had made all things right for us, even when we don't see or feel it. The young man looked at me in shock, started crying, and then he embraced me saying, "Thank you. Finally, I feel peace." The age-old practice of confession and absolution has tremendous therapeutic corollaries that have largely been forgotten and ignored due to public stigma towards religion. But the reason it works is that it confirms what we know to be true, even though we wish that it were not. Unlike psychotherapy — which can be useful in diagnosis and helping patients define and self-identify their problems, but often fails in stating the limits of any tools and coping mechanisms arising from an internal solution — Christianity says that if the root of the problem resides deeply within, it is futile to find a remedy deeply within. The feeling of guilt is a blessing in disguise because it allows one to be made aware of one's need and hence receive the healing that only forgiveness can bring: exposing the critters so that they can be demolished, instead of strategies to help tame and control those critters.

All citizens are equally responsible for the warlike state of this world, though the soldier feels it more than the grandmother on the chesterfield who has no idea that they both, along with everybody else, just killed a man in a combat zone. Telling my soldier client that he was not at all responsible denied what he knew to be true in his heart as guilt. "You shouldn't feel bad" didn't make him not feel bad. But the gospel did: that it is as personal as communal sin is personal and that we all need to confess that. Believing that your enemy is pure evil and a monster may feel good at the moment, circumventing immediate feelings of guilt when you eliminate him, but doesn't help one cope with personal convictions in the long run, after realizing that he may be no more "demonic" than you are.

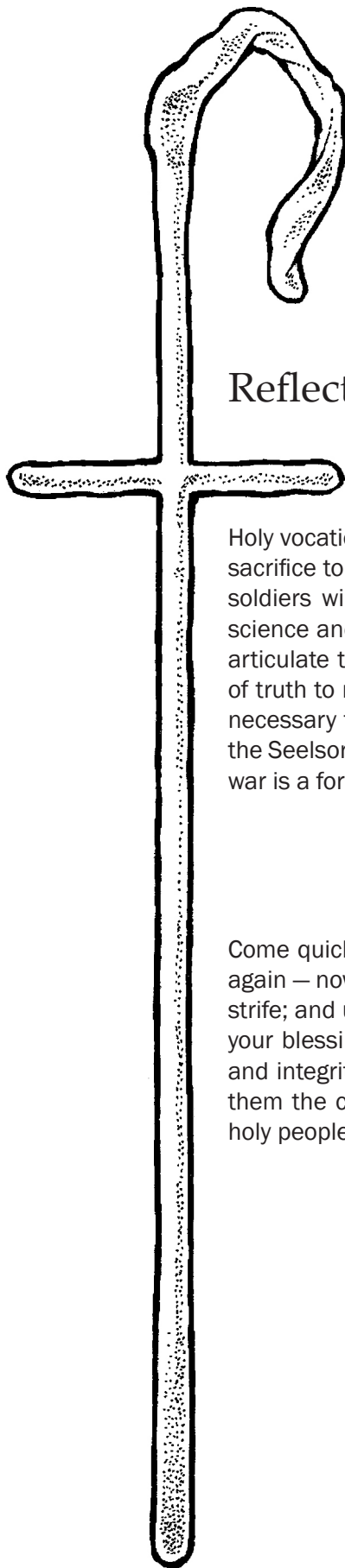
Although any profession that practices the legalized use of violence ought not take their killing "personally," it is hardly possible when both the world around us is not accustomed to distinguishing between the office and the person who fills it and our own feelings contradict the principle. While serving in Afghanistan, a newly deployed gunman on his first tour came to see me and said, "Chaplain, I had my first kill today, and am having a hard time with it." Thankfully, he was a practicing Roman Catholic and we underwent confession and absolution. Even though he wasn't personally responsible for the kill, he was as responsible as all of us are. Some of his guilt is legitimized by the fact that all of us as humanity are responsible for the sin of the world and all the evil consequences that necessitate us to engage in war and bloodshed. Veterans may be haunted by the necessary yet disturbing deeds of the past. But they are deeds for which we are all responsible, how-

The age-old practice of confession and absolution has tremendous therapeutic corollaries that have largely been forgotten and ignored due to public stigma towards religion.

ever incognizant non-combatant civilians may be about this communal guilt. Yet whether it is sin pertaining to the individual or the community, we remain absolved by the gracious blood of the One who was executed for our offenses and raised again for our justification, a promise, truth and reality that surpasses any and all negative emotions.

Unless we *Seelsorgers* of Christian soldiers and veterans understand the psychological and spiritual complexities inculcated by such conflicting vocational identities, we will not be able to fully express the forgiveness of sins and its practical relevance in a way that can bring this precious flock of killers the full comfort and peace that our dear Lord Jesus Christ seeks to give all of his precious children, in soul, body and mind. Yet, applying the logic of Luther's two kingdoms can definitely help them, and ourselves, navigate through the minefield of Christian conscience and feelings of guilt. After all, Christ reigns within both kingdoms. ☩

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Reflection

Holy vocations are under the cross, and those within them will endure suffering and sacrifice to fulfill their callings. Pastors who have heard confessions of battle-tested soldiers will know the damage done not just to mind and body, but also to conscience and soul. Dr. Ristau does a twofold service with this paper, both helping to articulate the vocation of soldier and assisting pastors in rightly applying the word of truth to members of the military. War is a plague, as Luther says, but one that is necessary to prevent greater plagues in a chaotic, dying world. What joy is given to the Seelsorger to speak peace to those who stand in harm's way, until that day when war is a former thing that has passed away.

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Come quickly, O Lord, Prince of Peace; for you — who died for all nations and rose again — now rule over them for the good of your people. Bring an end to all wars and strife; and until that day when nations may beat their swords into plowshares, grant your blessing to your people who serve in the armed forces. Give to them wisdom and integrity, courage and compassion, protection and peace; and above all, grant them the certainty that, though they serve in a violent vocation, they remain your holy people by your grace; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Pastor Timothy J. Pauls