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SCRIPTURE AND WAR

Luke Timothy Johnson *on*
The Letter of James
and the Root of War

The Old Testament and War
by Dianne Bergant

plus
Scriptural Debates over Violence

The Case of Camilo Mejia

Conscientious Objection in Israel
a report *by* Kyle Smith

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors,

Your article "The Ordinary Soldier" in the excellent recent issue of *The Sign of Peace* is a fine article, but in the section "Used and Discarded: Not a New Story," the over 500,000 service personnel exposed to radiation in tests from 1945-1963 should have been mentioned.

It took until 1988 to gain legislation to compensate the veterans, their widows, and genetically harmed children for such exposure to radiation. The National Association of Atomic Veterans, the National Association of Radiation Survivors, the Disabled American Veterans, Legion and VFW all struggled for years to even obtain recognition by Congress and the various governmental agencies.

The present Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, is very well-informed and helpful on this issue of Atomic Veterans. During the 1980 era when the recognition was finally obtained, he played a very helpful role in his position as Counsel to the Minority members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

Much work still remains to be done and hundreds of Atomic Veterans or their survivors do not know that the V.A. does have procedures in order to handle such claims. For information, concerned veterans exposed to ionizing radiation should call their nearest Veterans Center or 800.827.1000

Sincerely,
 Walter G. Hooke
 USHC - Nagasaki Veteran 1945



RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

These summer months are filled with red, white, and blue. Flags are waving. Olympic scenes from Athens fill our television screens with athletes draped in the national colors. Both the major parties filling their convention floors with red, white and blue balloons. The blatant jingoism bring feel-good, made-for-TV distractions from the quagmire in Iraq. It's all designed to bolster our national pride.

We want to register our dissent from this nationalistic consciousness. Not that we are against any and all summer staples of Americana—baseball, hot dogs, days at the beach, nights by the campfire, and so on. But these are hallmarks of life in this “country.” They are not the same as devotion to this “nation-state.” It is this near-religious devotion to Holy Mother State, as Dorothy Day called it, that must be questioned. The best way to do so is to deepen our commitment to Christ as embodied in the universal, catholic bonds of the Church.

So this summer, we want to display the usual colors for a different reason, to signify our true allegiance: Red for Pentecost, White for Easter, Blue for Mary.

Red. As a church, we celebrated at the end of May the Feast of Pentecost. Visited by the Holy Spirit, the followers of Jesus became the Church. Those who were once strangers, even enemies, were united by the same Spirit. In the Church, as the Church, we receive wisdom and good counsel and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are not bestowed on us by Congress or distributed like straw hats at political conventions. They are given as we are inscribed into the story of Christ and the apostolic mission inaugurated at that first Pentecost. Red reminds us of the consuming fire of God, and for some, of the cost of the way of the cross.

White. The first giving of the Holy Spirit came in that upper room when the resurrected Christ spoke his first words to the twelve: “peace be with you.” And then he breathed on them the Spirit. (Jn 20:19-22) White is for us, then, a reminder of the purity of heart that comes as we are united with the Risen Christ. The United States had a starkly different beginning. It was founded not on Christian purity, but on the blood of countless natives and enemies killed in the name of the nation’s founding. In contrast to such death-dealing sacrifice, the white of Easter recalls the victory of God’s peace.

Blue. In August, Mary is honored with two feasts by the Church: her Assumption and her coronation as Queen of Heaven. In traditional iconography, she is depicted praying to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the color blue is used to symbolize her humanity, her dependence on God. She knew what so many in this country do not: security does not come from strength but from faith. Only a real turn—here and now—to the ways of God can secure our hope. The blue of Mary should caution us, humble us, lest we think that ours is the one indispensable nation.

At the most recent CPF retreat, Fr. Charles McCarthy pointed out a simple and significant fact: in the New Testament, the nation-state is not identified as redeemed by Christ. To be sure, love of country—appreciation of the beauty of this land and its people, affection for the communal ties history has woven—is a virtue. But it is Christ, not the state, who shows us what love looks like and what love does. To look to the nation for our meaning and mission is, in biblical terms, idolatry. We worship God alone.

Our ecclesial red, white and blue—if we are faithful to what they signify—can guard us against the flag-waving nationalism that blinds us from others living in other lands. It can open our eyes to the suffering of our brothers and sisters everywhere. Fired by the Spirit, we identify with people of every race and nation, every language and way of life. Witnesses to the risen Christ, we offer peace to a troubled world. And along with Mary, we declare that our souls magnify, not the greatness of national power, but the greatness of the Lord.

—THE EDITORS

CATHOLIC BECOMES FIRST TO REFUSE RETURN TO IRAQ WAR

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR CAMILO MEJIA SENTENCED TO YEAR IN MILITARY PRISON

BY CLAIRE SCHAEFFER-DUFFY

After just twenty minutes of deliberation, a military jury found staff sergeant Camilo Mejia, an infantry squad leader with the Florida National Guard, guilty of deserting his unit last October and sentenced him to a year in military prison and a bad conduct discharge. The verdict culminated Mejia's three-day court martial held at Fort Stewart, GA, May 19-21.

Even before his sentence was issued, the 28-year-old Catholic soldier knew prison could be in his future. After six months of combat in the treacherous Sunni Triangle and five months AWOL, he held a press conference on March 15. Wearing a medal of Saint Francis, he declared his refusal to fight, making him the first Iraq war veteran to publicly disobey an order to return to duty. "I went to Iraq and was an instrument of violence," Mejia said, "and now I have decided to become an instrument of peace."

His no-to-war declaration was immediately followed by his surrender to military authorities. The next day, Mejia reported to his guard unit in Miami, Florida, where he submitted his application for conscientious

objector (CO) status. The 53-page document is a detailed indictment of war's brutality. It is also the autobiography of a conscience that paradoxically came to life in a time of much killing. Mejia's case has garnered international attention, and on June 4,

moral or immoral or if they unnecessarily endanger soldiers or innocent civilians has no significance."

War's brutality made Mejia decide to quit his soldiering. But the exits from battle are never clearly marked and he said he spent much of his time in Iraq "trying to find a path to follow." There was no instant vision from God. The way out was more of a process, a realization, a dawning that "took place in stages."

A soft-spoken young man with Jesuit schooling, Mejia comes from upper middle-class households in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. His parents, Carlos Mejia Godoy and Maritza Castillo, were Sandinistas, members of Nicaragua's left-wing political movement that overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1979. Godoy, a renowned Nicaraguan musician, helped compose the Sandinista anthem and

served as the country's cultural ambassador during the presidency of Daniel Ortega. Castillo worked with the Sandinista Youth Movement. The couple separated after five years of marriage.

In his CO application, Mejia described his Central American childhood as "relatively stable" and he credited his Catholic education with giving him the ability to discern amidst the crisis of war. "I think God puts His voice into our



Photo taken in Iraq for Mejia's daughter. Sign in photo reads: Give Peace a Chance.

Amnesty International named him a "prisoner of conscience."

Like many Americans, Mejia joined the Army because of its promise to pay for an education. The deal worked well until the US invaded Iraq. Deployed in April 2003, he realized after six months on the battlefield what many cannot learn in a lifetime: there are no just or fair wars.

"I have learned from experience that the reasons for war are hardly ever a factor in the tactical intricacies of combat," he wrote, "Once soldiers engage in combat, they do what they are told to do. . . Whether orders are

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy is a member of the Saints Francis and Therese Catholic Worker community.

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conscience whenever we see killings and destruction and it just does not seem right. Many people cannot articulate this divine voice because they lack education and training but I who have experienced Jesuit training at an early age can listen to the Spirit calling for peace," he wrote.

In 1994, Mejia, his mother, and his brother Carlos went to the United States. The move, he wrote, "was not only a cultural shock, it was also a social shock." He lived from paycheck to paycheck, finishing high school at night while flipping burgers during the day. In 1995, Mejia, who was nineteen, signed up for a three-year stint in the Army to help pay for his college education.

He was a soldier with a developing appreciation for the sanctity of life. A vegetarian at nineteen, he remained so while in the military, and he changed his once pro-choice views about abortion after the birth of his daughter Samantha in 2000. Later in Iraq, he had a photo taken of himself for Samantha's sake. The picture, surreptitiously arranged while he was doing nighttime guard duty, shows Mejia, his face strained, staring into the camera and holding a handmade sign that reads, "Give Peace a Chance."

"If I was to die in the war," he wrote, "I would have wanted my daughter to know that her father had been against it."

But in 1995, Mejia's ambivalence toward the military was not apparent. Judging from his record, he was an exemplary soldier. While stationed at Fort Hood, Texas and Fort Benning, GA, he achieved the rank of E-4 and earned three awards including the Army's Good Conduct Medal.

In 1998, he re-enlisted in the Florida National Guard, hoping to complete his 8-year military obligation as a reservist while pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Three years later, he transferred from a community college to the Uni-

versity of Miami where he was awarded an academic scholarship that covered half his tuition. An energetic and successful student, he gained membership into three honor societies, served as an advisor for transfer students, and volunteered for two non-profit organizations.

And then, in 2003, during his last semester of college with just seventy days left of his military obligation, he was called up to fight in a war he hoped would not happen. "Just days before (the US invasion of Iraq), I did not believe there would be a war. How could there be an invasion without proof of the weapons and without approval of the UN?" he wrote.

In April 2003, Mejia, who was now squad leader of seven to nine men, Charlie Company of the 124th Infantry Regiment, was deployed to the Sunni Triangle in northwestern Iraq where fighting was fierce and treacherous. According to Capt. Tad Warfel, the company's commander, only 98 of the 127 men in C Company made it back for the welcome-home ceremonies at Fort Stewart, GA last February. The remainders were "28 casualties and one deserter," Warfel told the Chicago Tribune.

In the numerous interviews given after his March 15th press conference, Mejia has challenged the conduct and morality of the Iraq war. The mistreatment of troops influenced his disaffec-



Mejia being led away after he turned himself in to military police.

tion with the soldiering life and much of his CO application chronicles what he described as the US military's "disrespect and inhumanity" toward soldiers as well as civilians. He reported that troops were poorly trained and poorly equipped. He thought his unit's pre-deployment preparation at Fort Stewart was hasty and inadequate. In order to meet troop quotas, "soldiers were ok'd whether they were ready or not," he wrote.

He accused his commanding officers of being more interested in seeing combat and "climbing up the military hierarchy than the safety of their troops" and he described being sent out on missions that were needlessly hazardous. "[Our commanding officers] were going for the glory even if it meant losing a few lives, our lives," he wrote.

In May 2003, his platoon of infantrymen, "who were never trained in how to deal with detainees," were assigned to Al Asad Air base in the northwestern Iraq where they were ordered to use sleep deprivation tactics on blindfolded Iraqis to "soften" them up for interrogation. According to Mejia, some of these prisoners had already been up for two or three days and keeping them awake required "pretty tough measures," like loading "a 9mm pistol next to their ear." Still a dutiful soldier, Mejia obeyed his orders at Al Asad well enough to merit a commendation from his military superiors. He would later describe his mission there as cruel and illegal.

He quickly learned that waging a war justly became irrelevant amidst the intensity of combat. Because of the desire to survive, soldiers killed indiscriminately. "The fear of dying has the power to turn soldiers into real killing machines," he noted, "and it becomes almost impossible for us to consider things like strictly acting in

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self-defense or using just enough force to stop an attack.”

In press interviews, Mejia gave several political reasons for his refusal to fight in Iraq. He called the “oil-driven” war illegal, unjustified and based on “lies about weapons of mass destruction, and the connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.” But ultimately it was the experience of war—its brutality and senseless loss—that Mejia found unbearable.

“When I saw with my own eyes what war can do to people, a real change began to take place within me,” he wrote. “I have held a rifle to a man’s face, a man on the ground and in front of his mother, children and wife, not knowing why I did it. I have walked past the headless body of a man right after our machine guns decapitated him. I have seen a soldier broken down inside because he killed a child.”

During this morally chaotic time, Mejia’s faith deepened. “I wasn’t very religious until I went to war. In Iraq, I lost faith in everything but God,” he said during a phone interview with The Sign of Peace. He read the Bible, prayed a lot and began attending Mass whenever possible. His prayers were initially self-centered expressions of gratitude for his survival, but gradually he began praying for “everyone who suffered from the war and their families. In getting closer to God, my faith became more humanistic. It wasn’t so much about me or my people,” he said.

His decision to leave the military was “not something that simply happened” because he was a Catholic, Mejia said. “It happened because war is a very intense experience.” While he was in Iraq, he didn’t know what to do. His allegiance to his squad was strong and the duress of being a sol-

dier under attack prohibited thinking much about morality.

Granted a furlough last October, Mejia, who is not an American citizen, went back to the US to renew his permanent resident card. According to the Chicago Tribune, while in the US, “he called the Army several times seeking a discharge based on a regulation limiting non-citizen’s service in the US military to eight years—a period that Mejia reached last May while in Iraq.” Those calls were ignored, he said, so on October 16 Mejia went AWOL. After an absence of thirty days, he was categorized as a deserter and it became clear that the once content squad leader wanted out.

Even if his phone calls would have been returned, Mejia would have been denied the discharge he initially sought. One of the “stop-loss” orders issued by the Department of Defense early in the war—these orders prevent the departure, or loss, of soldiers who otherwise could rightfully end their duty—suspended the normal regulation limiting non-citizen’s service.

For Maritza Castillo, her son’s decision to enlist was difficult to accept. An atheist, Castillo said her anti-war views were cultivated during the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. “Any use of force or arms is the cruellest thing that can happen to humanity,” she said and she knew “from the beginning that (the Iraq conflict) was an unjust war, waged by an imperial power.”

In August 2002, when Castillo heard rumors of her son’s possible deployment to Iraq, she wrote to President Bush and later became a member of Military Families Speak Out. In addition to supporting families with a loved one in Iraq or Afghanistan, the Boston-based organization has become an outspoken critic of policies that lead to the war. Through Military

Families Speak Out, Castillo learned of the Peace Abbey, an interfaith, pacifist community located in Sherborne, MA. It became a sanctuary for Mejia, a place where he began to recover spiritually from the trauma he had perpetrated and witnessed. Flanked by supporters and his entire family, he made his no-to-war declaration while at the Abbey. Before the dramatic press conference, his father played one of his most well-known compositions, “Misa Campesina” or “Peasant Mass,” a piece that draws on the ideas of liberation theology.

Although he is now incarcerated at Fort Sills, Oklahoma and his application for conscientious objector status is still pending, Mejia no longer considers himself a man confined. Minutes before his sentencing at the court martial in Fort Stewart, he told the jury that convicted him that he was in fact free. “I will sit behind bars a free man, knowing that I did the right thing. I was ready to lay down my freedom. I strongly believe it was something that had to be done.

I followed my conscience and provided the leadership I thought I should provide.”

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THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

A READING OF JAMES 3:13-4:10

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

The title of this reflection on the Letter of James comes from the Gospel of Luke, which portrays Jesus as lamenting over Jerusalem immediately before entering the city to royal acclaim: "If you had only recognized on this day," he cries, "the things that make for peace." Because they were hidden from their eyes, he continues, they "did not recognize the time of [their] visitation from God," and their experience of war and destruction was inevitable (Luke 19:41-44).

Christian rhetoric on war and peace tends to be ineffective for two obvious reasons. First, it responds to acute circumstances more than it does to chronic conditions. Threat of a military draft, or a proposed plan of attack, can mobilize preachers and marchers for peace. But quotidian patterns of aggression and violence fail to energize resistance. Second, even when attention is given to oppressive social systems and unjust economic practices as the deep roots of war, analysis remains superficial, because it does not deal with the seemingly intractable pathology that constantly renews such patterns.

Because we do not give close and consistent attention to "the things that make for peace," or, conversely, "the things that make for war" everyday on playgrounds and street corners, our speech is rightly heard (even by ourselves) as belated and shallow when nations clash in battle.

Perhaps the same tendencies account for the lack of attention paid to the one New Testament text that actually asks the question concerning

the source of war, "From where do wars, and from where do battles among you come?" and, more remarkably, proposes an answer, "Is it not from your desires that are at war among your members?" (James 4:1). The Letter of James proposes that human conflict and violence is directly connected to disordered and conflicted desires.

This does not, at first glance, seem terribly helpful for dealing with wars between nations. But the problem does not lie in James' statement. It lies rather in our short attention span. We always press for a quick and simple answer rather than the close examination of a question. The question concerning the source of battles and wars among us is always worth asking. And if we follow out the logic of James' argument, we discover a genuinely helpful way of thinking about violence on both the small and the great scale.

James' question and answer are placed within a call to conversion that extends from 3:13-4:10 and provides the basic framework for understanding this intensely dualistic moral exhortation. As everywhere in his composition, James seeks an integrity of profession and practice among his readers. His call is to those he calls the "double-minded" (*dipsychoi*) in 1:8 and 4:8, those who want to claim "the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1) but who also want to live in ways conformable, not to the measure of that faith, but to the measure of "the world" (see 2:1-6).

This call to conversion has two parts: an indictment in 3:13-4:6, and a summons to repentance in 4:7-10. The rhetorical climax of the indictment is 4:4: "You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world

is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be a friend of the world is established as an enemy of God." By calling his readers "adulteresses," James invokes the ancient prophetic metaphor of covenant as marriage: he suggests that his readers are promiscuous in loyalty, declaring that they are friends of God while seeking also to be friends of the world.

James' language about friendship has roots in Greek philosophy, which considered friendship the most serious of human commitments, one in which friends thought alike and shared all possessions in common. His point is that his "double-minded" readers want to be friends with everyone. But if "God" and "world" stand as two opposing measures of truth, it is impossible to be friends with both. Even wanting to be a "friend of the world" means to be established as an "enemy of God."

None of this language makes sense apart from a closer look at the terms of the indictment in 3:13-4:6 and the terms of the summons to conversion in 4:7-10. The first thing we notice is that the two parts correspond in many of their terms: the "purifying of the heart" in 4:8 matches the "selfish ambition of the heart" in 3:14, as well as the "purity" of the wisdom in 3:17; the "dejection" of 4:9 corresponds to the "arrogance" of 4:6; the "double-minded" of 4:8 is the opposite of the "undivided" in 3:17. Most obviously, the final command and promise, "humble yourselves before God and he will exalt you" (4:10), picks up from the "lowly" of 4:6 as well as from the pattern of the wisdom "from below/from above" in 3:13-17. The entire passage is set up in terms of an opposition between two ways of living in

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the world. One is according to a wisdom that is "earthbound, unspiritual, demonic," the other is according to a wisdom that is "from above," and is "peaceable, gentle, open to persuasion, filled with mercy and good fruits" (3:15-17). James insists that one cannot be "friends" with both views of reality. One must choose.

Placing James' statement about the source of war in the context of his call to conversion from one form of wisdom to another, we can look more closely at his discussion in terms pertinent to war and peace. Peace-seekers always look first for an expression of the ideal, and James provides a wonderful positive statement: "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by the makers of peace" (3:18). As so often in James, we can hear in this declaration echoes of the Matthean beatitudes: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. . . blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God" (Matt 5:6-9). But James offers the serious seeker after peace something far more: an analysis of those things that "do not make for peace."

Notice that in his short indictment, James speaks of "bitter jealousy" in 3:14, "jealousy and selfish ambition" in 3:16, "you are jealous" in 4:2, and climactically in 4:5, "does the Scripture speak in vain? Does the spirit he made to dwell in us crave enviously?" All of these references to envy are connected to the "wisdom from below" that "boasts and lies against the truth" (3:14), and which expresses itself in "disorder and every mean practice" (3:16). James links envy and social unrest. It is against this backdrop that we must read the difficult set of statements in 4:2. Immediately after declaring that wars and battles stem from the desires that are at war in our members, James says, "you desire and you do not have: so you kill. You are jealous and cannot obtain: so you battle and wage war." James seems to say that envy lies at the root of social dis-

order, violence, murder, and war.

For ancient readers, James's associations would have been neither new nor surprising, for Greco-Roman philosophy had long given careful attention to the vice of envy, and had consistently connected envy to social unrest, murder, and war. In many ways, envy was considered to be the opposite of friendship. If friendship tended toward the sharing of all things and harmony between persons, envy was regarded as the most disruptive of vices. Ancients regarded envy as the most ignoble vice. Greco-Roman moralists thought of virtue in terms of health and vice in terms of sickness. The status of envy can be gathered from Socrates' designation of it as "the ulcer of the soul." Aristotle defined envy as a certain sorrow that someone experiences because someone else has something. But why should another's possession cause me sorrow? And why, in these ancient discussions, is envy so consistently considered the cause of social upheaval and war?

To understand this, we need to move a little deeper into the logic of envy. It is based on the premise that being is a matter of having. Greater being (and worth and power) is a function of greater having (of whatever sort of possessions). To have more is to be more. Now, in a closed system, in a world defined in terms of finite resources, there is a limited amount of "having" available, and for one to be "more" means inevitably that another is "less." This is the world of quantitative measurement, of comparison, of competition. Envy expresses itself as "sorrow" because I experience grief when you have more than me. Why? Because I am necessarily diminished by your having more than me. Envy flourishes particularly among "near-equals" who compete on the same plane. Thus the proverb going all the way back to Hesiod, "Potter envies potter."

The grief and rage of envy at one's perceived loss and diminishment be-

cause of the success of another becomes active in the form of arrogance (hyperephania), which the ancients again consistently associate with envy, as does James as well (4:6). Arrogance "boasts and lies against the truth" (3:14), not because it is strong, but because it is weak. Arrogance is not the opposite of envy, as we might at first think, but its active expression. Arrogance seeks to dominate others, to seize their possessions, precisely because of the terror at non-being connected to not having the most possessions, or the possessions that are thought (at our particular potters' bench) to seem the most worth having, if we are to have real being and worth. Envy turns aggressive through arrogance.

Once we grasp the basic logic of envy, we can grasp as well the profound insight of the ancients into the roots not only of war, but of all competition that leads to violence and social unrest: "you desire and you do not have: so you kill. You are jealous and cannot obtain: so you do battle and wage war" (James 4:2). And we can see that this analysis applies not only to nations in armed conflict over real or perceived possessions (whether oil or land or "honor"), but as well to children killing each other in schoolyards over the best brand of running shoes ("to be is to own Nike").

Even more important, we can see that the logic of envy is at work pervasively in the competitive character of our culture, not least in the form of an economic system that has as its premise precisely the equation between having more and being worth more. Competition is at the heart of capitalism. And commercial advertising fashions its rhetoric precisely to appeal to the envy within every fearful human heart that is terrified at its lack of real being and real worth, and is easily convinced that being and worth can be purchased, or otherwise acquired.

The irony that James employs in

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this passage is intense. Friendship in antiquity, as I suggested, was all about commonality, sharing spiritually as well as materially. When James says that his readers' attitudes of envy and arrogance make them "friends of the world," he is deliberately mixing what in antiquity should not have been mixed. To be "friends of the world" was to think and act precisely according to the logic of envy, and therefore, in one fashion or another, to be in fundamental competition with other humans, and, at some level or other, to seek their elimination. The other parts of the letter show what this logic looks like. It is operative in the rich who oppress the poor legally by suing them in courts (2:6) and illegally by withholding the wages of the day-laborers in the field (5:1-6). It is at work in the arrogance of the businessmen who assume the future and reduce everything to a matter of gain (4:13-16).

The logic is also found to be at work, however, among those who claim to be "friends of God," yet live their lives as though defined by the same premises of envy and arrogance, only in a "double-minded" fashion: those who claim the "faith of Jesus Christ," yet scorn the poor man in the assembly while catering to the rich (2:1-5); those who tell the naked and starving "go in peace" without providing what they need to get through the day (2:14-17); those who bless God and then turn about and curse those created in the image of God (3:9); those who exercise the secret arrogance of slandering their neighbor in order to elevate themselves (4:11).

All these patterns are "the things that make for war," and, says James, God stands against them. Quoting Prov. 3:34, James says flatly, "God resists the arrogant" (4:6). And after describing those who oppress the poor through withholding their wages, James says: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. Does He not oppose you?" (5:6). James' call to conversion intends to turn those who are double-minded, who want to be friends with the world

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their elimination.**

as well as God, to singleness of devotion: "purify your hearts, you double-minded!" (4:8). Such conversion demands precisely the opposite of the self-exaltation and arrogance that are driven by envy: "submit therefore to God. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you" (4:7, 10).

In order to truly do "the things that make for peace," however, it is necessary to be "friends with God" in a single-minded fashion rather than double-mindedly. Following the understanding assumed by James, this means seeing the world from God's own perspective and acting in accordance with that "wisdom from above." What is this understanding of reality? The opposite of the logic of envy, which views the world as a closed system of limited resources for which all are in competition. James calls his readers to see the world rather as one drenched constantly with God's gifts. God is the one who "gives more grace" to the lowly (4:6). God is the one who "gives to all simply and without grudging" (1:5), and "every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights. With him there is no alteration or shadow of change" (1:17). Rather than a closed system in which humans must fight for position, the world is constantly renewed by the constantly renewed gift of existence, life, and worth, from the one who "by his decision, gave us birth through a word of truth, in order that we might be a kind

of first-fruits of his creatures" (1:18).

To be "friends of God," wholeheartedly, then, means to be generous and constant sharers of the goods of creation, knowing that having does not in the least add to our being or worth, and that the logic of gift-giving is to share the gifts given us. Such a view of reality generates a logic of friendship rather than of competition, a spirit of collaboration and cooperation rather than one of competition. It means receiving the poor man in the assembly with more honor than the rich man, because the poor have been promised the kingdom (2:5). It means clothing and feeding the naked and hungry, because "judgment is without mercy to the merciless, but mercy overcomes even judgment" (2:13). It means, like Abraham, that "friend of God" (2:23), being willing to give up even God's precious gift of life. It means, like Rahab, to welcome strangers as messengers of God (2:26). It means speaking the truth simply (5:12), gathering around the weak to support them (5:13-15), confessing sins each to the other (5:16), and offering mutual correction to those who stray from the path of truth (5:19-20). Such patterns of behavior form the "fruit of righteousness sown in peace by the makers of peace" (3:18), not in spectacular or even visible fashion, but in the quiet, "pure, peaceable, gentle, open to persuasion" manner of life that reveals the wisdom from above, "filled with mercy and all good fruits," by people who are "not divided, not insincere" (3:17).

James 3:13-4:10 is a call to conversion. It challenges each reader to consider the ways in which friendship with God is compromised by a friendship with the world that leads to strife and war. It demands of us careful consideration not only of James' words but also of the patterns of our everyday life. It reminds us that the things that make for peace may be simple but they are never easy.

IS OUR GOD A WARRIOR?

BY
DIANNE BERGANT, CSA

There is much talk today about 'holy war' and too often Islam is blamed for introducing this notion into today's conversation. In fact, the idea is much older than this religious tradition. While the Sacred Scripture of ancient Israel frequently present God as a God of peace, there is another image that cannot be denied. Exodus 15:3 reads: "The LORD is a warrior;/ The LORD is his name." The plan to wrest the Promised Land from the people living there appears to have originated with God.

Therefore I have come to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the country of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.
(Exod 3:8)

How are we to understand this characterization of such a contentious God especially at a time when women and men of faith are looking to the Scriptures for inspiration and direction in their own agonized search for peace in the world? How are we to interpret a tradition that not only seems to take war for granted as a part of life, but actually grants it religious, even divine, legitimation? The issue is further complicated when we admit that there are vastly different reasons for engaging in armed conflict. Wars of aggression cannot be compared with struggles for liberation and freedom. Are socially sensitive believers today to dismiss this religious heritage as irrelevant and even forbidding, or might there be more than one way of understanding biblical statements that not only sanction but actually encourage war?

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IS 'WARRIOR-GOD' AN IDENTIFICATION OR A METAPHOR?

The first point to remember is that biblical language is metaphorical in character. All theology speaks of God and the things of God by analogy. Today we live in an empirical world of space and time where our belief is often explained in terms of philosophical abstractions and theological models and paradigms. Our biblical ancestors lived in a sacramental universe. Their religious language was imaginative and paradoxical, attesting to personal experiences of God and using whatever forms best communicated the revelatory character of that experience.

To ask: "Is God a warrior?" is not unlike asking: "Is God a father? Or a mother? Is God personal? Is God just?" These questions should be rephrased rather than answered. For example: "What is there in the designation 'just' that is like God? What is it in being 'personal' that is like God? What is there in being 'mother' or 'father' that is like God? Is there anything in the idea of a 'warrior' that can describe God?"

At issue here is the characterization of God as a warrior. Is this merely an unrefined image of God that Israel eventually outgrew, or did Israel really experience God as a warrior in the midst of its armed conflicts? If the former is the case, does this undermine the revelatory value of these early Israelite traditions? If the latter is true, can war be judged unequivocally immoral? Answers to these questions do not come

easily.

Was God actually encountered as a warrior, or did Israel merely sacralize its own violence by such a characterization of God? This is a very difficult, if not impossible, question to answer. Belief in God's protec-

CONTINUED TO NEXT PAGE



tion in times of strife may have been envisioned as God's offensive, even military, action on behalf of the nation. This interpretation neither denies nor excuses the fact of Israel's belligerence, but it focuses attention on the faith that underlies the characterization of God as warrior. To believe that God is a warrior who fights on their behalf may well have been the only way for Israel to understand and explain the provident and protective presence of God in the midst of the horror of war.

WHAT DOES 'WARRIOR-GOD' MEAN?

We may disapprove of the conflicts and wars that Israel fought; we may also find offensive the religious themes and imagery that was so much a part of their justification and narrative description, but we must try to grasp what was being voiced by means of this metaphorical language. At least three important themes are expressed in it. First, it is clear that God was perceived as the sovereign God with no rival. Therefore, in any battle God emerged as conqueror, the one who established order and ensured peace. Second, the people believed that God was personally present in their lives as patron God of the nation, willing to defend them against all other peoples regardless of the cost. Even in times of great crisis, God was always present, leading them to the victory, security, and prosperity that they needed in order to survive. Third, the image of God the warrior convinced the people that God would leave no stone unturned in the battle for justice.

This explanation of Israel's theological interpretation of its history does not diminish the dilemma facing present-day believers. Denunciation of ancient Israel's legitimization of armed conflict should not prevent us from revering the religious traditions that explained such incidents, for it is the theological meaning of the events that is revelatory for us and not the events themselves. Furthermore, as important as our comprehension of how Israel understood violence and the brutal events of its history may be, we need not be satisfied with Israel's understanding. Biblical interpretation is more than mere imitation. We may be like our religious ancestors with violence just beneath the surface of our own apparent composure and just beyond the boundaries that we have established for our ordered society. However, since our worldview is radically different from theirs, we cannot merely imitate their actions or appropriate their religious explanations. If their traditions are to shape our religious consciousness, they must be critically examined and carefully reinterpreted within the circumstances of our lives today.

DOES GOD REALLY FIGHT OUR BATTLES?

The image of God the warrior may have been the most apt way for ancient Israel to understand and explain God's uncontested superiority, ever-present providence and protection, and identification with the cause of justice and peace at a time of great crisis. However, we today understand the world and God's action within it in a different way. If we are to take seriously this image of God, need we take it literally? Are we not, rather, being challenged to bring the theology behind this image to bear on our world.

The three tenets of faith uncovered here (i.e., allegiance to the sovereignty of God, confidence in the uniqueness of election by God, and the conviction that God is on the side of justice) challenge us in new ways:

1) Today we are not confronted with the notion of different gods but with various understandings of the one God. Might our insistence on the sovereignty of our particular understanding of God be an example of arrogant religious imperialism? In other words, what does divine sovereignty mean in a context of religious pluralism? Looking at sovereignty from a slightly different perspective, we might ask just where our loyalty lies. Is it with power and comfort, convenience and material prosperity? Is it really God that is sovereign in our lives?

2) We may believe that God's call to salvation is extended to all. But then how are we to understand our claim to be God's chosen people? Does it imply privilege or responsibility? Does it give us power over others, or does it call us to service? Do we really believe that God has gathered women and men of all nations and races into the one divine embrace?

3) At the heart of the metaphor of warrior-god is the conviction that God stands on the side of justice. All of the biblical narratives presume that God's power and might are exercised in favor of the vulnerable or the oppressed. Might belief in God's commitment to justice be calling us to work harder for justice in our world?

AND SO?

This short reflection does not fully answer all of the questions posed by the image of God the warrior. It does not help us decide whether or not armed conflict is justified in a particular instance. It does not give us clear steps to follow on the road to peace. It only throws some light on one troublesome biblical metaphor. However, it should help us to see that we cannot use this characterization of God to make claims of theological superiority, to presume that some form of privilege gives us the right to enforce hegemony, to justify arbitrarily the exercise of military force. Fidelity to the Bible requires that we reinterpret the tradition handed down to us by our religious ancestors, not merely repeat the events of their history.

ON THE (MIS)USE OF SCRIPTURE FOR WAR

BY THE STAFF OF THE CATHOLIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP

Critics of Christianity are often the first to expose an embarrassing fact: much of history's killing has been done by, or with the sanction of, the scriptures. They have a point. Christians have long been adept at squaring their faith with their wars, and they have done so with the use, or misuse, of scripture. To this day, most of the support for U.S. war making comes from those who describe themselves as "religious," "Christians," as people whose lives are guided by Sacred Scripture.

Christians who support war read the same scriptures as Christians who oppose war. But they read it differently. The same sacred text can be used both as a manifesto for peace and as a call to arms. Thus the most important terrain for conversations within the Church is also the most contested. While it is rare for a serious scripture read to invoke Jesus as one who calls for a campaign of violence, it is also disturbingly rare for Christians to find in the New Testament an unequivocal rejection of war. And yet, as the Jesuit scripture scholar John L. McKenzie once said, "if you cannot say on the basis of the New Testament that Jesus was nonviolent, you cannot say anything about Jesus." One way that people avoid this truth is to claim that any text can be read any number of ways, so that no text says anything definitive about peace and nonviolence. The result is that the scripture itself—the norm that norms all other norms, as the Church teaches—loses its authority. And when that happens, other authorities will have their say, authorities such as History, National Security, and The Real World.

In an effort to stir up, and sharpen up, conversations about war and the scriptures, we now bring forward scripture passages often used, or misused, to justify war. We want to debunk such justifications. Consider the following comments on these texts as part of a continuing conversation in which you may well find yourself. Perhaps the next time you are debating about Jesus and war, these seven commentaries will help. We recommend them for use at home, in the office, on the picket line, and in court.

MATTHEW 10:34

"DO NOT THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO BRING PEACE UPON EARTH. I HAVE COME TO BRING NOT PEACE BUT THE SWORD."

Two aspects need to be clarified in this passage. First, the proper understanding of peace. When Jesus says that he does not bring peace to the earth, to what is he referring? Jesus wants to make clear that peace cannot be interpreted as mere comfort, quiet passivity, or naïve calmness. If that is your understanding of peace, then Jesus does not bring it. Christian

comprehension of peace necessarily includes struggle for justice, active opposition to evil forces, and creative solution of the conflicts we face.

Only then "[l]ove and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss" (Psalm 85:11). In other words, peace is active non-violence, which implies good doses of strength and courage.

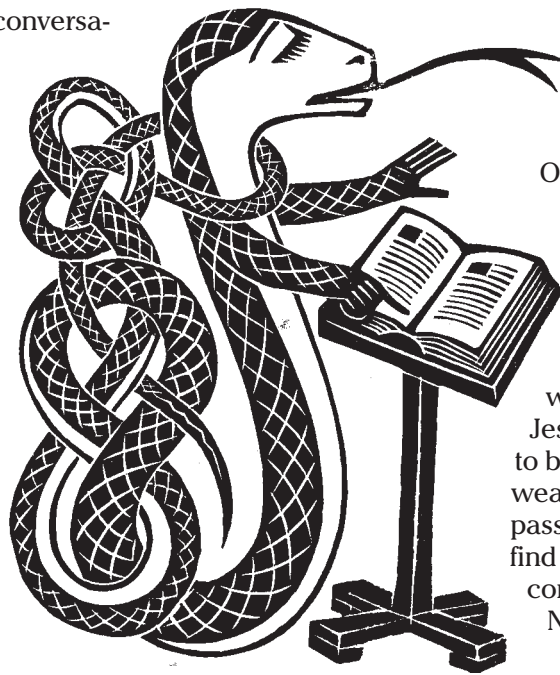
The second point has to do with the meaning of the sword.

Jesus is not saying that he has come to bring actual, material, lethal weapons. If we turn to a parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus saying: "Do you think I have come to establish peace on earth?

No, I tell you, but division" (Lk 12:51). Here we find a similar puzzle. Is Jesus endorsing

division instead of unity? Not at all. So then, how are we to understand Jesus as bringing not peace but the sword and division?

The answer is found in the letter to the Hebrews, where we read that "the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12), and then the author goes on to say that it cuts deep, as joint and marrow, bringing judgment to all our inner thoughts and emotions. The sword, then, is the word of God, as is indicated elsewhere in scripture, for example in Isaiah 49:2; Wisdom 18:15-16; Ephesians 6:17; and Revelation 1:16; 2:12. Taken together, these passages indicate that this sword, this



word of God, lays bare our souls, discerns the signs of the times, and identifies what runs contrary to the Gospel. On this score, we should note that just before Matthew 10:34, Jesus warns his disciples that they will face persecution, that they should be fearless in speech, and that their heavenly Father will protect them. And just after this passage, Jesus declares that anyone who loses his life for His sake will find it. The context shows us that everyone who hears the word of God has to make a decision—to accept it or reject it.

Thus the sword is not the kind that is used in wars. It is not made of iron. It is made of something far more powerful: God's word. It creates a division between those who cleave to God's word and those who pass it up, those who stand for it and those who are against it. The question this passage puts to Christians is: Have you been pierced by the sword of God's word?

MARK 12:17

"RENDER TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S..."

Oftentimes, only the first half of this verse is quoted: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." This gives the impression that Jesus wants us to be loyal to the king, the Kaiser, the Fatherland, the nation-state. But then comes the second half of the verse: "and to God the things that are God's." This is the punch-line. It confronts us with the challenge of figuring out what are the things of Caesar and what are the things of God.

The context gives some more specific clues: Jesus is asked whether or not the Jews should pay taxes. In response, he asks for a coin. "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" he asks, and they tell him it is Caesar's. It is then that he issues his puzzling command: "Render to Caesar . . ." The puzzle is solved, as Ireneaus, the second-century bishop of Lyons, pointed out, when we come to see that just as Caesar's image is on the coin, so God's image is on each human being. The coin belongs to Caesar. Each human being belongs to God.

This truth is the keystone of conscientious objection to war. I am made in the image and likeness of God; I

belong to God; therefore, Caesar has no right to hinder my belonging to God. Moreover, just as I am made in the image and likeness of God, so is everyone else; so who am I to take the lives of others?

John Milton once stated, "My conscience I have from God and cannot give to Caesar." And Dorothy Day remarked, "If we gave God all that belongs to God, there would be nothing left for Caesar." Clearly, Mark 12:17 calls for anything but unquestioning service to Caesar. Instead, Christ invites us to discern the extent to which we render all that is God's to God. And it challenges us to live in God's likeness, as revealed to us by Jesus.

LUKE 3:10-14

THE SOLDIERS, TOO, ASKED JOHN THE BAPTIST, "WHAT SHOULD WE DO?"

That this passage is used to show scriptural support for the military demonstrates how tricky scripture can be, in several respects. For one thing, the instructions, "don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely, and be content with your pay," are often taken as advice given by Jesus. In fact, these are the words of John the Baptist who, granted, was a prophet and

forerunner to Jesus, but not the Word incarnate.

Moreover, the legitimacy of soldiering is not at issue in these instructions. Rather it is the opposite: the fact that soldiers are seeking advice is one way Luke depicts the Kingdom as open to those of dubious professions. Accordingly, in this scene, John the Baptist says to the Jewish crowds, salvation history's ultimate insiders, "Don't just say,

'we're safe—we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves nothing." (Lk 3:8) Then we read that the crowd also contained some obvious outsiders, tax collectors, for one, and soldiers. This is in keeping with the overall theme of this particular gospel. Time and again, Luke shows that outsiders, those beyond the normal bounds of acceptability, often hear God's word with more attentiveness than the insiders.

Perhaps we too should ask the question of these outsiders. What should we do? This is the point made by Robert Karris in *The New Jerome Biblical Commen-*



tary, who suggests that the important feature of this scene is not the specific professions of the askers, nor even the specific answers they receive. It is the fact that they asked, they struggled, they wanted to know what to do. And so should we. In this sense, the soldiers are an example that we should emulate—not in their actual jobs, but in their desire to follow God. Moreover, if there is any relevant detail about John's answers to all the seekers, it is the emphasis on detachment from money and the importance of following Jesus' example.

And those who try to stretch this passage into a blanket justification for today's military should also note that John himself was executed on orders of the king, carried out by the king's guards.

LUKE 22:35-38

"...THE ONE WHO HAS NO SWORD MUST SELL HIS CLOAK AND BUY ONE."

Jesus' words here are immersed in a discourse to his disciples about the coming crisis: He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." He replied, "It is enough."

Two key aspects of this text render it impossible that Jesus is arming his followers with actual swords. First, the disciples' literal take on Jesus' words misunderstands (again) his message. "Since Luke narrates in his Gospel that Jesus not only preached love of enemies but also lived that teaching," writes Karris in the NJBC, "and since he narrates in Acts that Paul and other missionaries never use swords, he cannot mean by 'sword' here a lethal weapon." Rather, the sword here serves as a symbol for the danger and crisis to come.

Moreover, the ironic meaning of "It is enough" in verse 38 allows Luke to make a point. Though the Greek *hikanos* can mean "sufficient," it is employed here to mean "enough of this!" This sentiment is driven home in the scene that follows in verses 47-53. Upon his arrest, Jesus rebukes a disciple for using a sword to cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Rather than applaud the disciple for faithful obedience to his instructions, Jesus again echoes verse 38, responding "Stop, no more of this!" And in contrast to the slash of the sword, "he touched the servant's ear and healed him."

JOHN 2:15

"MAKING A WHIP OUT OF THE CHORD, HE DROVE THEM ALL OUT OF THE TEMPLE."

This passage is often used to justify Christians going to war. After all, the logic goes, Jesus himself took violent action in the cleansing of the Temple; so too Christians can follow in His footsteps in taking up arms to defend themselves. But this was not a case of Jesus defending Himself. Rather, it was a case of Jesus fending for the integrity of the Temple worship, which had been profaned by the moneychangers who had turned His Father's house into a den of thieves. Moreover, it was not a case of Jesus opposing the moneychangers with lethal action. Rather, it was a case of simply chasing them from the outer portion of the Temple.

It does seem that Jesus was angry, which might be troubling inasmuch as anger is a sin. But, as Aquinas points out, there are two kinds of anger. On the one hand, there is impassioned anger, which is anger properly speaking, whereby reason takes a back seat to the passions which have seized irascibly on some object of the sensitive appetites. Here, anger is directed by the passions and has the character of sin. On the other hand, there is a kind of righteous anger, which is directed not by passion, but by reason setting itself against vice and sin (*Summa Theologiae* II, 2, 158, 1, 2). In this scene, commonly known as the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus exhibits righteous anger, as is indicated in the note that he is acting in accord with Psalm 69: 9: "Zeal for your house has consumed me." This anger is not sinful. To the contrary, His anger is displayed for our benefit, so that we attend to the command not to worship strange gods (Deuteronomy 12:3). It was an instance of divine pedagogy.

Time and again, this passage has been used to trip up conscientious objectors in interviews to determine their sincerity. What about the cleansing of the Temple? The answer is simple. In that episode, Jesus was calling for the right worship of God; for me, the right worship of God entails not taking the life of another, for life is not mine to take. In any case, this is no justification for participating in war, particularly in modern war which is waged not for God but for the state. This episode does not lay any basis for any theory of just war. At best, it provides a basis for a theory of just cleansing of temples.

ROMANS 13:1-7

"OBEY THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES"

Far from an admonition to Christians to participate in the Roman Empire and its wars of conquest, Paul was advising the young Church in Rome to live out their Christian calling in a radically new way, a way grounded in love and suffering.

Romans 13:1-7, a small part of this large letter, presents the Christian's relationship with authority as one of nonresistant subordination. This nonresistant subordination is based upon the belief that all authorities have their place in God's instituted order for creation. Such a place in God's order in no way suggests that governments are somehow blessed by God or carry out God's will. For Paul, all governments are used by God in the order of creation. Just as in the Old Testament, God uses the governments in Assyria or Babylon, so now in the New Testament, God uses Rome. Christians, therefore, must simply tolerate governments with the indifference of a pilgrim people who believe that such earthly institutions are fleeting—not unlike Jesus' indifference before Pilate in John 18.

If we look at this passage in context, we see that rather than encouraging Christians to participate in governments and their wars, Paul seems actually to be challenging the notion of Christian participation in any government and war. Just before this passage, in Romans 12:19, Paul tells Christians "never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God." And then in Romans 13:4, civil authorities are said to have that power of bringing about vengeance. This means, as John Howard Yoder notes in *The Politics of Jesus*, that the civil authorities are not Christian. Rather, Christians are to maintain a posture of indifference to worldly powers, the kind of indifference that frees them to love as Christ love.

This last point is important when it comes to the issue of conscientious objection to war. In obedience to civil authorities, conscientious objectors have traditionally accepted legal punishment for the crime of loving as Christ loved. With this in mind, we can see

that Romans 13:1-7 fits in well with the verses before and after it. As Yoder also points out, Romans 12 begins with a call to nonconformity, inspired by the mercies of God, and this refusal to conform to the world brings forth a new form of life in and through Christian community, one that is grounded in selfless service and dedication to the common good. And Romans 13:8, a verse that immediately follows this passage, shows that this form of life is based on love.

In this view, the instruction that we should obey all civil authorities can only mean that we should endure their power and discipline. And it can never mean that we should obey civil authorities when that means disobeying God. For as Aquinas taught, civil law, or as he called it "positive law," is truly law only when it conforms to the natural moral law as revealed by God (*Summa Theologiae* I, 2, 96, 4). Or as Pope John Paul II observes in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, "From the very beginnings of the Church, the apostolic preaching reminded Christians of their duty to obey legitimately constituted public authorities (cf. Rom. 13:7; 1 Pete 2:13-14), but at the same time it firmly warned that 'we must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)."

EPHESIANS 6:11

"PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD."

One is almost rendered speechless when this passage is used to justify warfare. It is obvious, in the plain sense of the text, that "armor" is used here as a metaphor for the life-and-death battle that Christians must wage against Satan. Indeed, we should be fully equipped, not to wage physical war against human enemies, but to wage spiritual war against the principalities and ruling forces who are masters of the darkness of this world (Ephesians 6:12).

Thus the belt Christians wear around their waists is the belt of truth. The breastplate is that of uprightness. The shoes on their feet are their eagerness to spread the gospel of peace. Their shield is that of faith. And their helmet is that of

salvation. (Ephesians 6:14-16). It is also important to note that this letter was written while Paul was in



chains. Even as he was held in custody of the Roman Empire, he understood himself to be an ambassador of the gospel (Ephesians 6: 19-20). The fight he fought throughout his life was a fight for the Lordship of Christ, to Whom he witnessed even in Rome (Acts 28).

What are we to take from these political and military metaphors? Exactly what Paul wanted us to take from them. We too are engaged in a similar battle. We too are to be truthful, faithful, upright, which in God's mercy will bring us and those to whom we minister the salvation for which we all long. It is a battle that will continue until the Day of the Lord (Philippians 1:10). Until that day, we must put on the armor of God, which begins with prayer. For the ancient wisdom of the church teaches us that war originates in our disordered passions, and that we can attain peace only when we overcome our sluggish and selfish spirits, and begin to live as Christ lived, for others and for God. Thus the road to peace opens up before us each morning as we rise and give glory and praise to God. And as we retire each night, we pray that God protect us from the Evil One, send his Holy Angels to dwell with us, so that we may rise again and put on our shoes, that is, our eagerness to spread the gospel of peace.

CONCLUSION

We offer these seven little commentaries as an exercise in reading the scriptures in accord with Christ's teaching and example of nonviolent peace-making. As Paul says in I Corinthians 10:11, everything in the scriptures is written down for our instruction. But this does not mean that everything there is immediately apparent. The Word of God is mysterious, puzzling, complicated, and demanding. It takes faith to read the scriptures rightly, and it takes work to embody the truths found there. The scriptures can be put to terrible misuse. But they can also be used for the greater glory of God. In this day and age, in this time of war and rumors of wars (Mark 13:7), there is perhaps no greater gift than we can give to our church than the message that the scriptures bring us in the Sun—that is, the Son—that has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those living in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:78-79).



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CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN ISRAEL

BY KYLE SMITH

For most of us who have opposed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, such political stands came at no great personal sacrifice. Perhaps we went to a few anti-war rallies, perhaps we wrote our congressman, surely we shook our heads when we read the headlines in the newspaper, but, in general, the wars in the Middle East came and went (and continued to go on) without seriously or directly affecting the lives of most Americans. In the US, a country which relies on a professional army of volunteer recruits, avoiding military service is the luxury of those who have no interest in training for war and who have the financial resources and education to pursue other avenues of employment. This is not the case in Israel: here, a war is on everyone's doorstep and if you aren't fighting in it, you definitely know someone who is.

In Israel, military service is compulsory for most Jews (three years for men and a little less than two years for women) and is looked upon by most of the populace with the highest esteem—regarded as a necessary element, along with the Hebrew language, of building national unity. Recruits enter the military at a young age: while America's best and brightest high schoolers are hoping for an acceptance letter from an Ivy League school, their Israeli counterparts are waiting to find out which elite military unit will accept them. Not serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), in addition to making one something of a social outcast, restricts everything from one's future job opportunities to the ability to get a home mortgage. Shirking what is thought of as one's duty to serve in the "people's army" is not looked upon lightly by Israelis; most still view serving in the army as a fundamental duty and necessary contribution to the Zionist dream of renewing a strong and independent Jewish state.

Since every able-bodied Israeli Jew is expected to serve, the IDF is in fact a melting pot of Israeli culture. Recruits cross every socio-economic and religious



The five Israeli CO's (l-r) Matan Kaminer, Adam Maor, Haggai Matar, Noam Bahat and Shomri zameret stand in front of a military court in Jaffa, near Tel Aviv, January 4, 2004, after being sentenced to one year in prison for refusing to serve in the Israeli army.

strand in Israel, making the military a rich mélange of American-Israeli kids from posh Tel Aviv suburbs, Moroccan and Yemenite Jews from government-funded pioneer towns in the Negev Desert, secular socialists fresh from collectivist rural communities ("kibbutzim"), and religious fundamentalists from settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There is even a good number of Arab soldiers from the Druze religious sect, a few Bedouins, and quite a considerable number of recent Russian and Ukrainian immigrants (many of whom are Orthodox Christians) serving in the IDF.

OBJECTORS IN ISRAEL

Since the beginning of the current intifada three and a half years ago, an estimated 2,000 Israelis have declared themselves conscientious objectors (COs). Traditionally, a "conscientious objector" is defined as a person who (on grounds of conscience) rejects all war as well as the authority of the state to compel military service. By that definition, however, only a fraction of Israel's objectors would qualify as true COs. Few reject service in Israel's military outright, and fewer still claim to be absolute pacifists. Rather, most Israeli COs are selective conscientious objectors (SCOs) who harbor no fundamental objection to the military, but only to military service in the Occupied Territories. Most of these SCOs have served (or are willing to serve) in the IDF, and most say that, if need be, they would defend Israel by force of arms against its foes. But, they argue, there is simply no moral justification for the occupation: it is not a war that should continue to be fought.

Even from the perspective of mere political calculation of interests, some COs argue that it is intellectually and morally incongruent to serve in the Territories if one at the same time regards the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people as the primary cause of anti-Israeli sentiment in the world and, indeed, the very source of Israel's domestic and regional insecurity. Many Israelis who reject serving in the IDF alto-

Kyle Smith wrote from Jerusalem, where he spent a year as a Fulbright Fellow studying Christian monasticism in the Byzantine period.

gether still qualify their refusal by noting that they are not "in principle" opposed to serving in the armed forces, but that, given the present troubles, they find mere association with an occupying army—even if one's service is not in an occupied area—as reason enough to refuse to serve.

Among the many individuals who have refused military service ("refuseniks" as they are called in Israel), there were several headline cases. In September, 2001, sixty-two high school seniors declared in a letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that upon graduation and induction into the army they would refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories (the number of signatories on the "Seniors' Letter" is now over 300). Shortly thereafter an open letter to Sharon from a group of soldiers calling themselves "Courage to Refuse" stated that they, too, would no longer serve in the Occupied Territories—at present 596 combat officers and reservists have signed this letter. In September of 2003, a group of twenty-seven Israel Air Force (IAF) pilots made public that they would no longer fly missions into the Territories since the "targeted strikes" against suspected terrorists in the Gaza Strip inevitably kill and injure civilians in the urban areas where the assassinations take place. And in December, 2003 thirteen soldiers from the elite "Sayeret Matkal" commando unit (akin to US special forces teams such as the Green Berets) issued their refusal to serve in the West Bank and Gaza. The Sayeret Matkal announcement carried particularly strong weight

thanks to the high respect its officers are accorded by Israeli society.

Though the total number of conscientious objectors to date makes up hardly 1% of all Israel's soldiers and reservists, the objectors are by no means a fringe group—indeed, quite the contrary: many COs are officers and battle-hardened veterans. And for every soldier who takes a public stand, several others quietly arrange with their superiors to avoid combat service or to be stationed away from the Territories. To a certain extent, the army realizes that it would be bad public relations to prosecute every conscientious objector; thus, if a soldier is subtle about voicing his moral objection to serving in the Territories, he usually can be accommodated. One peace group, "Yesh Gvul" (a play on words in Hebrew meaning, "there is a border" or, idiomatically, "there is a limit"), noted a drop in the arrests of its members, which they attribute to the fact that the army "either ceased calling them up for duty, immediately released them or assigned them to tasks within the Green Line [the pre-1967 Israeli boundary within which many COs will agree to serve]."

THE CONSEQUENCES

But for those who choose publicly to voice their discontent with the military, such dissent can be met with harsh consequences. In January of 2004, the high-profile

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HERO OF CONSCIENCE

BY BRENNNA CUSSEN

"Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil" (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no.74). In this statement, the pope broadens the definition of conscientious objection: any act which resists cooperation with evil gives witness to the power of conscience.



In Jerusalem this spring, I had the privilege of meeting a human witness to this power. Mordechai Vanunu spent eighteen years in prison (twelve in solitary confinement) for revealing the secret of Israel's nuclear weapons program. On April 21, he was released.

Vanunu had worked as a technician in Israel's Dimona nuclear research center for seven years (1978-1985), during which time he discovered that Israel was clandestinely building nuclear weapons. Moved by his conscience, Vanunu took extensive photographs of the plant in order to document his findings. He left for Australia, where he met and stayed with an Anglican social justice community, and soon converted to Christianity. The community encouraged Vanunu to make public what he knew.

In 1986, Vanunu flew to England to give his story to the *London Sunday Times*. His evidence showed that Israel had secretly stockpiled up to 200 warheads with no authorization from its own citizens. Afraid for his safety, Vanunu moved to Italy with an American woman he had met there. In Italy, he was kidnapped by the Mossad (the Israeli secret service) and brought back to Israel for a secret trial. Vanunu was sentenced to eighteen years in solitary confinement.

I was a member of an international delegation of over eighty people from seventeen different countries that

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case of five young and very vocal refuseniks concluded with year-long prison sentences for the teenage COs—each had already spent over a year in jail awaiting trial. Neve Gordon, a professor of politics at Ben-Gurion University, pointed out the most glaring discrepancy evidenced by the trial and sentencing: "COs are imprisoned for over two years, while not a single soldier has been convicted for wrongful killing since the intifada's outbreak—a period in which 113 Palestinian children under the age of twelve have been killed."

Rather than face the prospect of a trial in a military court, some objectors have asked that their cases be heard by the secretive and rather Orwellian "Conscience Committee", an internal military board which adjudicates exemptions based on claims of conscience. But, as conscientious objection is not a formally or legally recognized right in Israel (even though Israel signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a pact which demands that conscientious objectors be recognized by law), the government prefers military court to the Conscience Committee.

Ori Heilman, a conscientious objector who began to question IDF policies during his three years of obligatory service, ultimately concluded that he could no longer morally justify serving in the Israeli army. Heilman spent twenty-eight days in jail last year for refusing to report for reserve duty in the Gaza Strip: "To think that we [soldiers] are supposed to go into Gaza to protect a handful of settlers who shouldn't be there anyway, and then to have to

provide a military convoy when some kid has to go to a piano lesson—it's ludicrous." But when he tried to file a claim with the Conscience Committee he was told that "no such agency exists." After repeated calls, Heilman finally got the woman on the other end of the phone to acquiesce that, indeed, he was dialing the correct number, but that he would not be able to file a claim "until we hire a typist."

A War Resisters' International report published last year indicates that those who attempt to file CO claims are routinely harassed and given misleading or incorrect information by the military. According to the WRI report, even the Conscience Committee often asks potential COs (if they get a hearing at all) questions that have nothing to do with pacifism or conscientious objection. Heilman says he was asked if he tries not to "step on bugs" when he is walking: "They equate being a conscientious objector with being some sort of vegan-Buddhist who eats only leaves and grass," says Heilman.

Nearly a year after his initial imprisonment, Heilman's claim has made little progress, and he is anticipating spending another four weeks in a military prison this year. When asked about his situation, Heilman shrugged his shoulders and said, "I'm not too happy about the prospect of spending twenty-eight days in jail each year, but what else can I do? Israel is my home. I was born here and I've lived my whole life here. I can't just leave, but I know I won't serve in the Territories either."

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assembled in Israel to welcome Vanunu out of prison. Our presence helped to attract local and international media, which offered Vanunu some security from those who did not want to see him freed. A few days before Vanunu's release, the Israeli government informed him of the strict conditions under which he would be released: absolutely no travel outside of Israel; no travel outside his town of residence without prior authorization; no travel within 300 meters of any border or 100 meters of any embassy; and no contact with any foreigners, by email, fax, or phone (this restriction has since been relaxed.)

The day before his release, Vanunu's address was leaked to the press. Due to threats on his life, Vanunu was forced to seek asylum from St. George's Episcopal Cathedral in East Jerusalem. My group and I were fortunate enough to meet Mordechai at St. George's, where he currently remains. He greatly enjoyed hugging and kissing each one of us, hungry for human touch. He told us of his dreams to leave Israel, marry and find work. He spoke of the beauty of being free to make some of his own choices.

Vanunu continually voices his desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons. He would like to travel to different countries to speak about his experience. While in prison, Vanunu wrote a poem about the responsibility of each individual to act on his conscience:

I have no choice. I'm a little man, a citizen, one of the people, but I'll do what I have to. I've heard the voice of my conscience The world is small, small for Big Brother. I'm on your mission. I'm doing my duty. Take it from me. Come and see for yourselves. Lighten my burden. Stop the train. Get off the train. The next stop -- nuclear disaster.

Mordechai Vanunu would appreciate any contact from supporters.

You can reach him at vanunumvjc@hotmail.com.

COS, RELIGION, AND DEMOCRACY

The unique situation of public COs is apparent when one sees just how easy it is to avoid military service by means other than conscientious objection. Every year, even with the negative societal baggage, many Israelis get exemptions from their obligatory or reserve service: 20% of the total Israeli population is immediately exempt for fear of disloyalty (i.e., all Israeli Arabs who are not Druze or Bedouin), and nearly 20% of the Jewish Israeli population is exempt through other categories. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, for example, are all exempt from military service. (It should be noted that the few Druze religious scholars in Israel are similarly exempt, but that, on the other hand, Druze and Christian COs—such as Russian and Ukrainian immigrants—also tend to receive disproportionately harsh prison sentences).

The exemption for the ultra-Orthodox has little, if anything, to do with an entrenched, religiously-based pacifism among the community. Rather, because the ranks of the yeshivot (Orthodox religious schools for Torah study) were decimated by the Holocaust, the ultra-Orthodox rabbis demanded that a certain number of students be exempt from military service each year so that they could pursue religious studies and rebuild the yeshiva tradition. As part of the "status quo" agreement when the State of Israel was created in 1948, 400 ultra-Orthodox men per year were given exemptions from military service. But since 1948, the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel has ballooned enormously; what began as a token number of exemptions swelled over the years to become what is now a blanket exemption for all ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students.

Now, until they are past military service age, tens of thousands of ultra-Orthodox men opt to study Torah while most secular Israeli men are compelled to serve three years of active duty and at least another twenty in the reserves. As a result, secular Israelis bitterly regard ultra-Orthodox "draft dodging" with great animosity. The secular-religious divide is compounded by the fact that the ultra-Orthodox tend to have very large families and, because many men are in school until middle-age, the communities also tend to live off of public assistance. For their part, the ultra-Orthodox argue that they serve the

community better through prayer and study than through military service. Needless to say, secular Israelis find this logic a bitter pill to swallow.

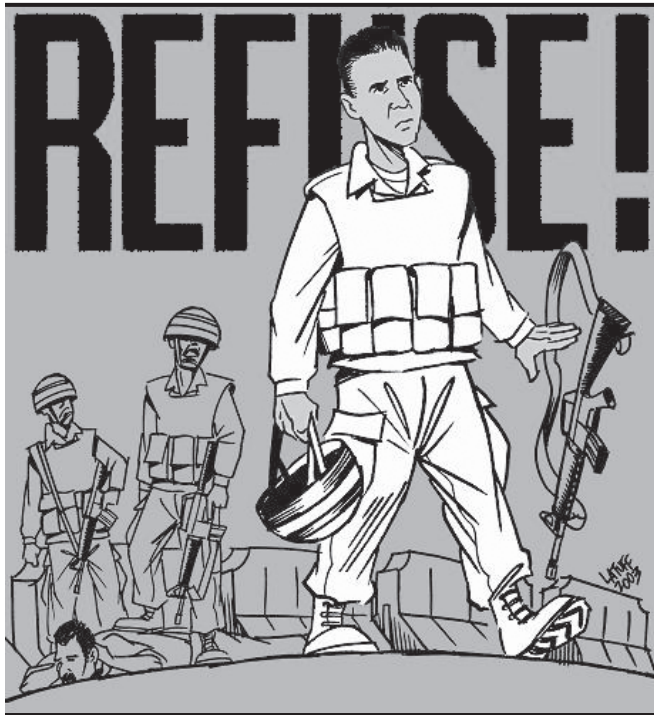
In addition to the ultra-Orthodox exemptions, other Israelis are exempt from service because they are studying abroad; others have physical problems preventing them from serving in the military; some are considered too undereducated or are categorized as "mentally handicapped." And some are discharged with "psychiatric profile 24" (referred to euphemistically as "unsuitability"), indicating that the army has judged that an enlistee "cannot fit into an organizational structure."

In the famous case of pacifist Jonathan Ben-Artzi, who was imprisoned seven consecutive times for terms of 28 or 35 days, the military told him he would be freed from prison and released from his obligatory military service if he gave up his pacifist principles and submitted to a psychiatric evaluation. As Yigal Bronner, a professor at Tel Aviv University narrates it: "The process would be simple: there would not be a team of experts this time [the Conscience Committee]. If he would only agree to see a psychiatrist, they would declare him mentally unfit instantly." Ben-Artzi stuck to his principles, preferring jail time as an ideological pacifist to an exemption for bogus mental reasons.

Amnesty International put the dilemma for Israeli COs more forcefully: "In a situation where each year in Israel thousands of recruits manage through legal means to avoid serving in the IDF, the imprisonment of a small number of conscientious objectors appears even more unreasonable." From the perspective of military strategy, Israeli authorities find it perfectly reasonable. The problem, from their point of view, is not that they are losing an inordinate number of recruits each year to conscientious objection. They are not. The number of COs over the past three years constitutes but a fraction of the number of ultra-Orthodox exemptees. And vocal COs like Ben-Artzi, who question orders and undermine the chain of command, are folks the IDF would rather not have in the military in the first place. To be sure, the problem is not even conscientious objection itself; as noted above, if one quietly objects to serving in the Territories it is generally

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known that it is possible to find a sympathetic officer who will help arrange alternative service.

The real problem in the military's eyes is that vocal conscientious objectors undermine troop morale, instigate others to refuse orders (or service entirely), and, worst, attempt to sabotage the government's policy in the Territories by making conscientious objection a matter of public concern and thus wielding it as a political axe. As one military prosecutor acknowledged, refuseniks who draw attention to their case are "dangerous precisely because they are idealistic." CO Matan Kaminer said as much: proudly defiant in his court testimony, Kaminer told the military judges that he is "well aware that the IDF does not make its own policy, that the occupation is a policy decided upon by the elected government of Israel."

So, "is [this defiance] a blow against democracy?" asks Uri Avnery, a writer and peace activist. "Most certainly. But this is a blow for the good. Israeli democracy is being whittled away with every day of the occupation . . . but the act of refusal shines like a beacon in the darkness . . . and a nation that has sons like these can have hope."

ON MY KNEES I BEG YOU TO TURN AWAY FROM THE PATHS OF VIOLENCE AND TO RETURN TO THE WAYS OF PEACE...VIOLENCE ONLY DELAYS THE DAY OF JUSTICE. VIOLENCE DESTROYS THE WORK OF JUSTICE...I SAY TO YOU WITH ALL THE LOVE I HAVE FOR YOU, WITH ALL THE TRUST I HAVE IN YOUNG PEOPLE: DO NOT LISTEN TO VOICES WHICH SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF HATRED, REVENGE, RETALIATION. DO NOT FOLLOW ANY LEADERS WHO TRAIN YOU IN THE WAY OF INFLICTING DEATH. LOVE LIFE, RESPECT LIFE, IN YOURSELVES AND IN OTHERS. GIVE YOURSELF TO THE SERVICE OF LIFE, NOT THE WORK OF DEATH. VIOLENCE IS THE ENEMY OF JUSTICE. ONLY PEACE CAN LEAD THE WAY TO TRUE JUSTICE. POPE JOHN PAUL II, DROGHEDA, IRELAND, 29 SEPTEMBER 1979

WHAT EVERY PERSON SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WAR

A BOOK REVIEW BY BENJAMIN PETERS

It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell.

—William T. Sherman

In the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, talk of the reality of war was rarely heard. Arguments for war, and even many against war, rarely included talk of just what happens in a war. The discussion became somewhat naïve and even causal. War became a term thrown around by people ignorant to its horrors. Some argue that this casualness was due to the modern nature of warfare. Unmanned "smart bombs" replaced boots on the ground in the rhetoric. In "modern" war, innocent civilians were spared, and more importantly, U.S. troops could fight safely from miles away. War became viewed as neat, quick, and easy.

The ugliness of war and its bloody aftermath still applied, of course, to less "developed" battlefields in Africa or elsewhere in the Third World, where antique rifles and machetes are the weapons of personal destruction. The U.S., with its \$400 billion military budget, would be spared all this, or so it was thought.

But then came the war-to-rid-the-world-of-Saddam's-WMD, turned war-to-liberate-Iraq, turned U.S. occupation. And quickly the harsh realities of war emerged into the light. Death and destruction of human beings, both Iraqi and American, began to flood U.S. newspapers and television screens on a scale not seen in over a generation. Flag draped coffins and maimed soldiers began returning to the U.S. in numbers that those of us under forty cannot remember. Roadside bombs and sieges of cities replaced "smart" bombs and precision guided missile strikes. Naked Iraqi detainees and beheaded American civilians replaced ticker-tape parades.

Chris Hedges' book, *What Every Person Should Know About War* (Free Press, 2003), appeared as this new awakening to the reality of war in the U.S. was dawning; and he intended to hasten this awakening. Hedges, a weathered war journalist for the *New York Times* and author of *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, states in his introduction, "There are few



books that describe in raw detail the effects of war; what it does to bodies, to minds and souls. The trauma of war is often too hard for us to digest. We find it easier to believe the myths about war; the exciting call to duty, honor, courage, and glory, those abstract terms that are rendered hollow in combat."

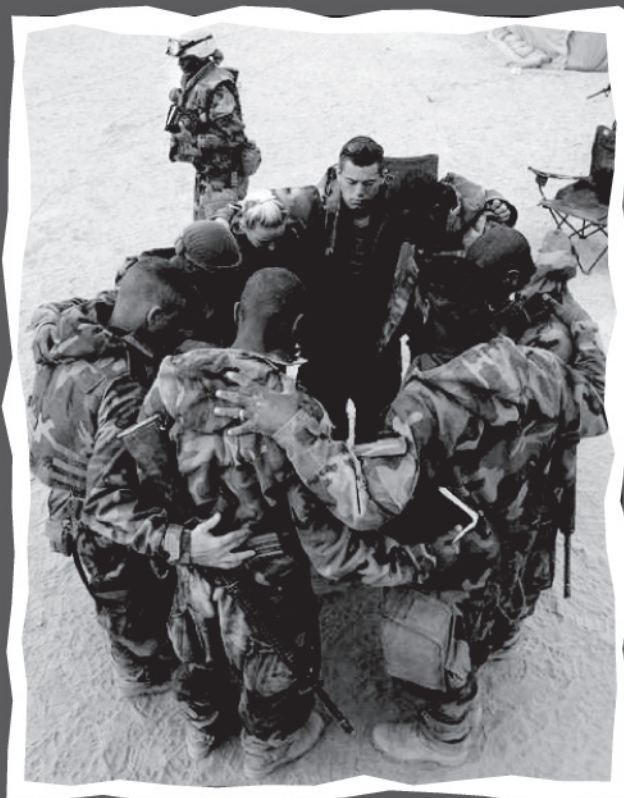
Hedges arranges his book as a "manual on war." It is broken into nine chapters: "War 101," "Enlistment," "Life in War," "Weapons and Wounds," "Weapons of Mass Destruction," "Dying," "The Moment of Combat," "Imprisonment, Torture, and Rape," "Dying," and "After War." Each chapter is set in question and answer format. Readers learn that "the United States is the world's largest arms manufacturer, supplying almost half of the arms sold on the world market," that the "Pentagon has disclosed that an average of one child or spouse dies each week at the hands of a relative in the military," and that war veterans are at "greater risk for drug-related disorders and alcoholism, as well as depression, hysteria, and hypochondria."

We also find out the effects of bullets, land mines, and artillery shells on the human body: "a 150-gram land mine will shred a man's leg to mid thigh," and "an AK-47 bullet can penetrate body armor." And in the chapter called "Dying," Hedges even gives a detailed account of death caused by blood loss (the most common reason for death in war), in answer to the question "What happens to my body and bodily functions as I die?"

"Your heart will start beating faster to compensate for the blood loss. It will send what blood is left to the body more quickly. You will probably also hyperventilate to get more oxygen into your remaining blood. Eventually you will go into a coma. Finally, your near-empty heart will stop altogether"

It is the clinical bluntness of the answers that gives the book its power and value; it is a bluntness presented with the desire to make the reader "conscious of the sacrifices we demand from those we send to fight." In a country where neither the current president nor vice-president have ever experienced war; where only a handful of members of Congress have children in the military; and where the vast majority of troops in Iraq comes from the lowest economic classes in the U.S.; this consciousness is needed now more than ever.

Ben Peters is a member of the Saint Peter Claver Catholic Worker Community in South Bend, Indiana and is a national coordinator for the Catholic Peace Fellowship.



the soldiers came asking

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TO OUR READERS



ATTENTION ALL FRIENDS OF THE CATHOLIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP: we need YOU to build Christ's peace in your parish, neighborhood or school. We are looking for people across the country to act as organizers for their regions. Regional organizers would coordinate workshops, protests, and prayer services in their area; help us get the word out about national CPF events; and communicate with the CPF staff to let us know how we can help your local efforts. Please contact us if you are interested.

We also need your help financially! Our bank account is small, and we need to have enough to provide materials for peace education, to run our office and field calls from soldiers calling on the GI Rights Hotline (800.394.9544). We also need money to send out *The Sign of Peace*. At a time when this journal can serve a great need in the church—with original essays by noted theologians, such as Luke Timothy Johnson and Dianne Bergant in this issue—we ask your help in making this work possible.

Finally, we are fully moved into our own offices. You can contact us at Box 4232, South Bend, IN 46634 and 574.232.2295 and, of course, at www.catholicpeacefellowship.org. The work continues, and we are looking ahead to more challenges in the coming months. So please think and pray about donating in whatever ways you can. Together, in a time of war, we can urge a mighty league of conscientious objectors!