Christianity in Army life

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Undoubtedly the army is not the very best school for commencing, developing & continuing the distinctive christian structure.

The philosophic reason for this appears to be that the ends aimed at in army & christian effort are not ~~identical~~ altogether coincident.

If we choose a civil calling; say that of the merchant; there is not a whit of what the merchant is called to do, that is not strictly consonant with the work of his own spiritual up-building. In fact in buying, his safest plan is to conform strictly to the Christian law — for if he deviate from it and it is found out his commercial reputation is lowered and his business will sooner or later be injured. It is worse for him still in selling, for there will be twenty witnesses against false sales to one against his false buying. The christian rule of hearty care

for other peoples' interest while he protects his own can only be arrived at completely by being a "christian". Of course I mean by "christian" ~~one~~ a man who stands in proper normal relation to his Heavenly Father.. This takes in every man, whether consciously or not, whose heart is right with ~~his~~ God.

The profession of the law is eminently fitted to find its best results in the most persistent conformity to christian ethics.. The trickster & the pettifogger leave no volumes of reference worth consulting... Their triumphs are like those of the spider - Their victims may be tortured & killed but their gossamer webs are but transient traps for the unwary. In my judgment No circumstances exist that necessitate the lawyer's departure from christian living.

The physician occupies, if anything will justify eminence in this matter, even a higher

vantage ground than the merchant or the lawyer, because of the increased opportunities offered him for applying the second table of the divine law, viz: "love thy neighbor as thyself".. No profession furnishes such multitudinous occasions for benevolent action. The highest skill of science & the tenderest care of the loving nurse, compass the range of his province. ~~The~~ True kindness of heart is not only good for him but essential to his ~~the~~ best results as a practitioner. Humbuggery & quackery may get many of the loaves & fishes, but it takes sincere worth permeated with divine help to secure eternal substance.

So we might examine minutely every lawful profession or trade and find the same truth emphasized. Our Heavenly Father is no respecter of persons.. He, of every nation, name & calling, who worketh righteousness is accepted of Him & helped by Him.

then there will be no self defense - no defense of home & loved ones - no police restrictions - no judicial, criminal findings, no executions and no armed host for State protection - That will be the beginning of the millennium - The wolf & the lamb shall feed together & the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpents meat. Every christian word uttered in sincerity - every christian effort put forth in honesty & faith, every new soul brought from a bad life to a good one is a step toward the desired consummation. While there have been wrong in them individually there will be wrong in them collected together - wrong somewhere involved in the practices of these men. whether they be farmers or merchants, lawyers or doctors, ministers or laymen. Our blessed Lord brot. his remedies to all classes.. To the centurion who believed & acted upon his belief he said: I have seen no such faith no not in Israel. Here

By a long experience in the army, both in the instruction at the academy and in the subsequent ~~experience~~ practical lessons in peace and in war, I am satisfied that christian character may be begun, developed & continued through a lifetime in the army or navy.

This conclusion is based more on long & somewhat careful observation than on any mere theorizing.

Before citing examples, which is rather the purpose of this address, let us first see if there is any satisfactory answer to the general inquiry. "Is not war itself wrong?" The friends or quakers assert the answer to this question as a direct & binding rule: "All war is wrong." They therefore refuse to enter army or navy & endeavor to keep their children from aiding in these means of defence. Still as they pay their taxes & vote for supplies & for the President who is the Commander-in-chief, they contribute largely, tho. perhaps under protest, to our war establishment.

Our New England metaphysicians & statesmen have set down the same theory in their books & speeches. Charles Sumner's greatest, most elaborate, most learned production was a speech against war — endeavoring to shew graphically its horrors, its enormous cost, its inadequacy to the settlement of national difficulties and trying to pave the way to a sovereign remedy. Yet, a few years later, Charles Sumner was foremost, on the floor of the Senate, in the advocacy of war measures against the southern rebellion; and the educated conscience of New England furnished the best of Captains to carry into execution his practical theories & proposed plans.

How are these apparent inconsistencies to be accounted for? I believe they arise from the too great strain of minds that are given to casuistic argument, attempting to generalize over much.

Let us start an argument in this way. Is self-defense ever right? Yes; shew that a man

purely in self-defense takes ~~the~~ human life and he is clear under all fine law. Is it ever right to defend the honor of wife and child even to the destruction of life?. Certainly! Shew by the circumstances an absolute necessity and the slayer is justified. A step further; Is it right to have a police so appointed & furnished as to arrest & restrain thieves, burglars highwaymen, murderers, incendiaries or any other persons who unlawfully put the community in peril of property & life? Yes, of course. Shall they have the means & the power granted them to capture such criminals, even if at times the criminal's life is endangered or taken! Certainly; The very existence of our cities depends on this award & exercise of this power.

Again after the judge has pronounced the sentence of the law that certain criminals shall suffer the extreme penalty of death. is it right to have an organized party of men solemnly bound to execute this sentence! Or even

where modern reasoners have so exalted human life into a divine essence, as to object to capital punishment altogether, is it wrong to have a sheriff & posse & all the necessary officers to keep just criminals within solid walls & prevent their escape therefrom even to the taking of life in emergency? Surely this must be so. Then step from the city to the next higher element in social living, the state.. The police of a state is an army.. By the use of it the chief officer of the state defends the very existence & well being of a state. This defense is war.

Now then will we reply to the inquiry: "is not war itself wrong?" The plain answer is no; it is true not always! There must be wrong somewhere; there always is where there is war. Sometimes it is on one side and sometimes on the other and often on both sides either in what went before or what immediately brought it on. and when human society shall become so perfected in all its individual members that there shall be no crime,

Then there will be no self-defense - no defense of home and loved ones - no police restrictions - no judicial, criminal findings - no executions and no armed host for state protection. That will be the beginning of the millennium. Then: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, & dust shall be the Serpents meat." Every christian word uttered in sincerity - every christian effort put forth in honesty & faith, every new soul brot. from a bad life to a good one is a step toward the desired consummation. While men have wrong in them individually, there will be wrong in them collected together - wrong somewhere involved in the practices of these men. This will be true, whether they be farmers or merchants, lawyers or doctors, ministers or laymen. Our Blessed Lord brot. his remedies to all classes. To the centurion, who believed and acted upon his belief, he said: "I have seen no such faith no not in Israel. Here

is all the demonstration that the soldier needs that he is not excluded on account of his profession from ~~his appreciation~~ our Lord's recognition.

A book.

The life of a young British officer who ~~was~~ had been remarkable prior to conversion in the circle where he moved ~~for~~ as a handsome, manly, hearty, social favorite courageous, and who showed increased evidences of courage & manhood by becoming a Christian, was put into my hands by a faithful friend quite early in my military life. The influence of this young soldiers' life was the main thing which brought me to take the stand I did in the Spring of 1857. When I came before the people & made a public profession of religion. He was killed in the Crimea while leading a charge of his Regiment.

The evidence of the practicability of Christianity in an Army is found eminently in the life of General Havelock. His Biographer has not told the story very well. probably from want of spiritual sympathy with Havelock in his own heart. yet there is quite enough to show how consistently, how—

faithfully and with what abundant success an Army officer may undertake & act the part of a pronounced Christian man.

It will subserve my purpose to select a few examples that have come under my own observation in our army both among officers of rank & officers of a lesser grade and also from among the enlisted men — to make of them a practical demonstration that, unlikely ~~unfavorable~~ as it may appear, the army of the United States, will bring in its sheaves in the great Spiritual Harvest of the world.

At the first post to which I was sent after graduating from the Military Academy there were two christian officers. One of them had been a long time in the Army. It took ~~them~~ one then fourteen years to become a Captain in the Ordnance Dept. This officer had been for some years a Major.

Of all the men with whom I have had to do both within & without the Army I think I have never

known as more thoroughly conscientious man. He lived a long & useful life, was faithful to our flag in the hour of her trial, though born & bred in the south. And he has left to the army & to his family the record of a christian example.. The other officer was then a Lieutenant - had gained brevets of distinction in the mexican war.. He was a decided christian in his family, in the church, in his intercourse with us all. I then thought him too particular in his habits & in his observances - but now brighter & pleasant now appears the record of his years of unceasing, unostentatious christian living. He would blush & cry out today against the bare mention of his name - yet God knows him, standing then with his own fidelity & charity unquestioned & unremitting.

Again when my conversion took place in Florida - an aged Colonel was there. His locks were already whitening and he shewed other marks of increasing years. He was pointed out to me as a man, who had in younger days been very

wild. When I first met him I was much pleased that he noticed me with so much attention. He often drew me into extended conversation. One day he said: "You appear to be of an inquiring mind. I think you would like to read this." Then he handed me a list of printed questions by which one might test himself whether or not his christianity had the true ring. I thanked him feelingly for it was just what I then wanted.

He often spoke in the prayer meetings at the Methodist Church & participated in other services. Once I recall his fidelity in rebuking me. I had spoken in a meeting very boldly & very enthusiastically doubtless; and afterward in conversation with the Colonel made some remark that looked to him like boasting of my Bible acquirements. "Tut. tut", my friend, you have no settled faith - no theology ~~yet~~. I have studied the Scriptures for years & how little I know yet." This Colonel's christian life from the time I came to know him

in 1857, till his death since the war, was replete with good deeds. He loved to influence young people to enter promptly & thoroughly upon the Christian journey. I saw him tried in various ways. He always trembled in the presence of temptation; but he knew in whom he trusted; and was ever watchful & prayerful...

Christian officers & Christian ladies connected with the Army had often in the olden days spoken to me of General Mansfield. I mean in days before he became a General. He belonged I think to the Inspection department. He used to go from post to post on our frontiers and besides his professional duties hold religious services with the garrisons.

And it is a little remarkable that I never heard this course spoken of adversely. In 1861 when duty called me to Washington I found that General Mansfield was in command; and I had great curiosity to see a man who had the reputation of being a "Christian officer". It was not long

before I met him. He was sitting at a dining table at Willard's. He was a large, handsome full built man - with a high broad forehead, from which his hair then a little lengthy & purely white was brushed well back. I dont think one ever meets a pleasanter expression of face! And he could preserve that happy, gentle demeanor in these war scenes! amid the pullings & haulings & confusions confounded of the capital where hosts & hosts of undisciplined masses of men crowded in & out - before anything like any feeling of Order, or any meaning for it could be drilled into the heads of mankind!

I saw this aged man the day of his death while at Antietam. He led a desperate charge, ~~with~~ his pure white locks were waving back like a flag of peace in the wind - His blood soon after dampened the ground as he fell from his horse having as his friends said: thus given to his country "the last full measure of his devotion". No man will now deny him the completion of that rest that already no confusion could disturb.

"The rest that remaineth for the people of God."

¶.. Among the junior officers in the service during the war I had quite a number attached to my staff at different times who were decided Christians. One converted in a military prison was afterwards severely wounded ~~by my side~~ in battle and died after the war from the effect of this wound. His likeness hangs in our parlor; his name is given to one of our children and the memory of his pure, courageous, confident christian life is ever fresh & indelible.

Another is now preaching with great success the unsearchable riches of Christ.. He stood firm to the truth in the army even amid contumely. It was he that gave us the composition of: "Hold the Fort."

¶.. I knew a Sergeant before the war, (he writes me occasionally, now an aged civilian) who was the most faithful of christians. He had not much learning - but he gathered the

children of soldiers into the post Sunday school; distributed their little books & papers and won their love & confidence.

He is well known in the Army by all the older officers and was always trusted as the truest of men.

I am fond of referring to an orderly (or messenger) who was with me a long time during the war of rebellion. McDonald was a rough Scotch man; given (when I first knew him) to hard words & I fear at times to an otherwise hard life.

He came (by invitation) in 1862 to our "Tent-prayer-meetings" of a Sunday evening — at first with some reluctance. Soon I noticed he had a Bible — His life changed. McDonald (before long had) put on the whole armor of the Christian soldier.

He was mortally wounded in Georgia — Bidding me goodbye with tears (standing in his eyes), he said: "Oh, how glad I am General that I was wounded & not you!" (Such was his unselfishness!) Such was his tender devotion! ~~to me~~. Never say, nor feel, nor think

that a soldier cannot be a christian - for Mac Donald & thousands like him have done their work for their country faithfully & well - have suffered the loss of all things even of life itself; and have still preserved the clean record of Christian men.

Those men whose lives are fragrant with christian living are very useful after a battle. Few men like to go into eternity without a word of sympathy or love. One at such times does become a child again & would like the pressure of a mother's arms around him; and the gentle tones of her voice to hear. It takes the christian heart to be softened into well modulated tenderness at death's door. The ~~[illegible]~~ bravest souls are those that trust God and impart their own cheering spirit to departing comrades.

As with other men at death's door
so with the soldier. The Christian soldier answers this great want.