The Vocation of Soldiering

by Rev. Victor Morris

One of my favourite verses to use with the soldiers I serve is Psalm 144:1 – “Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.”

Their reaction is usually, “You’re kidding, Padre! That’s in the Bible?!” The shock value of this usually leads to some great discussion as we move to Romans 13. In the first seven verses we hear about God’s design of order, justice and authority in this world. In describing this authority St. Paul writes:

“…For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (vs. 4).

I wish Paul would have written, “Be afraid…be very afraid.” It would have been a bit more dramatic. Sigh. I will take that up with Paul in heaven one day.

The point here is that soldiering is a vocation. It is a calling of service to God and man. And much like reading Psalm 144:1 and parts of the Bible that talk about swords, some people might find the fact that soldiering is a vocation, well—rather shocking.

Luther had this to say about it:

“Some wicked people make it necessary for us to check them and to protect the pious; a Christian may go and slay as others do when God, and those who are in the place of God, call him to do so…. Then you must show no mercy but must act according to the nature of warfare. You must not dwell on the fact that you will make widows and orphans; you must consider that God so orders affairs in order to punish the country or the people. But if you are slain in the course of war, commit that to God” (W 24, 273- E 33, 289 – SL 3, 246).

Perhaps it makes us uncomfortable to speak of such things. And it should. War is hell; ask those who have been there or counsel those who have returned – who have seen the worst man can do to another. However, we would be remiss to confuse our feelings toward the things of war, with those toward the soldiers, whom we send into harm’s way.

Soldiers bear the sword of God, on behalf of God, in their calling from God. It is an incredible vocation.

Tonight, I will meet with fifteen soldiers from our regiment who have volunteered for service in Afghanistan. These are some of the finest, brightest and best our nation can offer. I will remind them of their vocation as soldiers. I will share with them, tonight, that their God goes with them. That He will hold them, and sustain them. That He will be their strength and consolation. That He will comfort them. That He will protect them. That they are called by Him to do this. Most of all, I will tell them of His love for them in Jesus. That is my calling as a shepherd soldier.

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Addresses are found in the November 2006 issue of The Canadian Lutheran, page 4, or may be obtained from Lutheran Church–Canada, Winnipeg.

“For additional information on the calling/vocation of soldiers and other professions see The Spirituality of the Cross by Gene Edward Veith Jr. Published by Concordia Publishing House.”

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment but also because of conscience.

“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour than honour” (Romans 13:1-7).”