

Christian Soldier: An Oxymoron?

Samantha Sammis

The United States military is an institution that receives much respect, support and participation from observant followers of the Christian faith. (About 77% of all the individuals enlisted in military services claim to be Christian.) The following research explores the military participation of Christian believers whose sacred text includes various peace teachings from Jesus Christ as well as passages that encourage pacifism and love toward one's enemies. This paper addresses the dilemma which Christian soldiers face when they attempt to combine their Christian faith with military obligations that include warfare, violence, and killing. To explain this dilemma, I use the theory of role conflict, a sociological theory that explains the tension that one experiences when attempting to fulfill two conflicting social roles at the same time. Although productive tension can be held between religious and secular ideologies, the purpose of this study is to analyze how or if this tension is productive and what effect it has on the Christian soldier. The study tests this theory through the analysis of fifteen qualitative interviews with proclaimed Christian cadets at The Citadel¹ in order to examine the ways in which they balance their two conflicting identities.

The cadets use rationalization and compartmentalization in order to resolve their role conflict, and these solutions are explored throughout the remainder of the paper. Rationalization is the process of facing a dilemma and arguing away the conflicting elements. In order to rationalize their actions as Christians in the military, the cadets

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use the nature of divine obedience, the inerrancy of scripture, and the omnipotence of God's will to justify their duties as government soldiers. The nature of divine obedience requires that the cadets equate earthly authority with God-placed authority so that the act of disobeying one's commanding officer translates into disobedience toward God. The cadets further rely heavily on scripture to defend the legitimacy of their position as Christian soldiers, yet give unequal authority to the Old Testament versus the New Testament. Additionally, their belief in the omnipotence of God's will helps them to rationalize the idea that if God's will includes a military career, then God must be pro-military and has no contentions with the consequences of war.

The cadets also compartmentalize or separate their belief systems to avoid a conflict between their Christian faith and military obligations. They convince themselves, for example, that the obligations of their faith are only appropriate when they are not facing the enemy, or when their own lives and the lives of their fellow soldiers are not at stake. The cadets compartmentalize when and where they are to exercise Christian love, prioritizing patriotism and self-preservation and justifying them within the context of Christian ideology and belief. Alternately, they explain that their Christianity and military duties are constantly intertwined and absolutely compatible since the military provides an opportunity to spread peace, love and the Gospel to non-believers.

Rationalization and compartmentalization thus provide suitable solutions for cadets attempting to comfortably live their Christianity in a military environment. After discussing these solutions, I then cover the option of claiming conscientious objector and the influence of the church in the cadets' role conflict experience. I conclude by considering the tension faced by Christian soldiers in the context of role conflict and lived religion theory.

Research Methods

In order to explore the experience of being a soldier in the military while also a believer of the Christian faith, I conducted fifteen semi-structured qualitative interviews with undergraduate cadets at The Citadel who are pursuing active duty service after graduation. I wanted to know if the cadets were aware of an existing tension and how much importance they gave to this tension and its relevance to

their future. In order to recruit participants for this study, I contacted two Christian-based organizations, the Baptist Collegiate Ministry and Campus Crusade for Christ,² and communicated with the directors of these organizations about recruiting cadets for my study. Some cadets contacted me personally while others were referred to me by the BCM or CRU directors. After the first few references, I used the method of snowball sampling to recruit the remainder of my participants. (Snowball sampling builds a set of participants by asking those who have made a commitment to recommend others who might be interested as well.) I met with each cadet individually either at The Citadel campus or a local Starbucks, and recorded each interview with a cassette tape recorder. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour, and I then transcribed all of the interviews in order to effectively organize and analyze their contents. (One interview was not recorded due to technical errors.) I used the methods of open and closed coding, assigning roman numerals to major themes and organizing them accordingly into an index.

The goal of my project was to interview only cadets who were pursuing high risk positions, but it was very difficult to fulfill this expectation while also requiring that the cadet be an open, practicing Christian. Each of the interviews contained a variety of questions based on the cadets' personal testimonies and experiences. I questioned each about how they came to the Christian faith, how or if this faith influenced his decision to pursue the military and The Citadel, and how their religious views and career plans do or do not conflict. From these responses I was able to pursue more focused conversations that were particular to each cadet.

All of my participants were male, thirteen of fifteen were Caucasian and two were African American. I was interested in also interviewing female cadets, but the method of snowball sampling led each of my participants to recommend only fellow male cadets. Five were pursuing active duty service with the Army, five with the Marine Corps, two with the Air Force, two with the Navy, and one with the Coast Guard. The cadets' prospective careers ranged from high risk positions such as infantry (3), pilot (2), air battle manager (1), surface warfare officer (1), law enforcement (1), and tanker (1); to less life-threatening positions such as intelligence officer (2), chaplain

(2), medic (1), and logistics officer (1). One of the cadets mentioned growing up in a Catholic household, while the other fourteen cadets implied a Protestant background or faith. All of the cadets expressed the need to evangelize as a consequence of their Christian faith.

My sample included one freshman, two sophomores, one junior, and eleven seniors. I found this sample to be useful as the seniors had very obviously given more thought to the proposed questions and issues, as opposed to the underclassmen who were less likely to be immediately confronted with any relevant tensions between their faith and military career. My method of snowball sampling seemed to be the cause of this distribution as most of the underclassmen referred me to older cadets who had mentored them or led Bible studies, while the seniors referred me to their fellow classmates. The maturity of responses clearly paralleled class rank, and was evident through the depth of the cadets' reasoning and their support from real-life experiences.

Theoretical Tools

The theory of lived religion asserts that daily practices and behaviors provide the best evidence for observing the role religion serves in a person's life (Orsi 1997:7). Robert Orsi explains that this theory "situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religions as lived experience" (2002: xix). Lived religion thus illuminates the relationship between theology and practice. How these cadets "live" their religion is directly related to their ability to combine or justify the Christian world of irrational faith, divine obedience and scriptural authority with the secular world of war, patriotism, and justice for all. This combination of worlds is the very act that initiates their role tension. Through the cadet's behaviors and actions, how he lives the Christianity that he claims to believe in, we can gauge the importance of his faith and how it produces role tension in relation to his chosen career.

Orsi further explains that "When people appropriate religious symbols, rituals and myths to understand, encounter, adapt and change specific cultural circumstances, religion is manifested in the human experience" (1993:3). The most recognized conflict the cadets must face is the potentiality of taking another person's life in combat. The cadets appropriate different passages in the Bible to understand and

defend such a scenario, while ignoring or refusing to confront other Biblical passages and their relationship to the same circumstance. Once a cadet can justify war and the action of taking another's life through rationalization or compartmentalization, then his world has been reinvented so that killing is justified and sanctioned by God, and therefore reaffirms his Christianity.

Clearly a tension arises when these cadets attempt to live their Christianity in a military setting, not in an isolated community where they are surrounded by authorities and peers who all hold the same beliefs and act accordingly. When these cadets attempt to live their religion on a daily basis, they are forcing their beliefs to mold to secular culture and contemporary society. Conflict will inevitably arise when one's Christian faith is being forced into a culture or environment in which it does not fit.

A social role is a "comprehensive pattern of behavior and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations, which is socially identified – more or less clearly – as an entity" (Turner 87). Everyone has a variety of social roles that must be fulfilled on a daily basis: mother, father, teacher, son, daughter, employee, athlete, lover, man, woman, student, etc. Role change is a sociological theory that describes the tension, boundaries, and consequences of transitioning in and out of different roles. A student fulfills a different role with different expectations in the classroom than he or she fulfills at the bar on a Friday night. One must recognize the boundaries of his or her roles and change behavior and etiquette accordingly in order to avoid social ostracism, deviance, or psychological consequences. For the Christian soldier, conflict occurs when he or she attempts to "live" religion while at the same time fulfilling military obligations.

The process of role change begins first when one is aware of the conflict, then identifies an impetus to change, negotiates, and then finally accommodates his or her behavior accordingly (Turner 90). Many of the cadets seemed to be aware of the role conflict of a Christian and a soldier, while others recognized it for the first time during their interviews. An impetus to change is hard to identify since these cadets did not perceive themselves to be rationalizing and compartmentalizing their roles, when in fact they did so even during their interviews. They wanted so badly for the role of a soldier and a

Christian to be compatible that they did not see change as a necessity.

Previous Studies

There are few studies that have been conducted on role tension in the military, and they specifically address the role tensions of military chaplains as opposed to enlisted soldiers. Instead of engaging in personal combat and warfare, chaplains hold an occupation in which their duty is to give Godly counsel to those who are on the battlefield. The tension occurs when the chaplain feels that his advice or counsel conflicts with his religious beliefs. In 1954, sociologist Waldo W. Burchard conducted a study of the role tension among military chaplains. Burchard demonstrates that military chaplains discovered three types of solutions to resolve their role conflict: (1) abandonment of one of the conflicting roles, (2) rationalization, or (3) compartmentalization of role behaviors. Burchard found five major tenets in Christian philosophy which initiate role tension for the military chaplains. These include the doctrine of love (love your neighbor as yourself, love your enemies, etc.), universal brotherhood, peace, non-resistance to evil, and the commandment “thou shall not kill.” All of these themes became very evident in my own research as cadets equated Christian love to military service, emphasized a type of Christian brotherhood on the battlefield, perceived the U.S. military to be a bringer of peace to other nations, clung to the semantics of “thou shall not kill” versus “thou shall not murder,” and actively avoided the Biblical teachings that advocate a non-resistance to evil. Burchard explains that these doctrines are, by definition, incompatible with any goals set forth by a nation at war, and it is therefore impossible for a Christian in the military to successfully put them into practice (530).

At the end of the study, Burchard found that military chaplains do experience a conflict in social roles, and sought to resolve it either through rationalization or compartmentalization of role behaviors. The practice of rationalization tends to reflect the privileging of the chaplain’s role of military officer at the expense of his role of minister of the gospel (530). Burchard explains that “every argument cited [by the chaplains] tends to assert the military claim and de-emphasize the religious claim” (535). Many of the chaplains argued that the soldier holds no other moral responsibility in the line of duty except to serve his or her country which, in a time of war, takes precedence over all

others. In this case, even chaplains cannot successfully live their religion in the military as it becomes too problematic with their obligations as a military officer. The prioritizing of one's military status over religion becomes even more pronounced in a later study on the role tension of a Christian soldier.

In 1969, Gordon Zahn conducted another sociological study on this tension, ultimately concluding that chaplains and commissioned officers resolve role tension by a "secularization of consciousness" through which the subject removes himself from the moral principles of warfare and evaluates his position from a pragmatic point of view (qtd. in Alex 1123). This is a prime example of compartmentalization, and in order to resolve any role conflict, the religious or moral component of the chaplain's role is de-emphasized in favor of the administrative aspects of military life. Zahn discovered that the interviewed clergymen saw themselves exclusively as clergymen, completely ignoring or choosing not to accept their military obligations. As will be shown in the following sections, this self-deception is very evident in some of the cadets' interviews as well. Zahn ends his research with a proposed question about how a radical Christian can serve in the military without his/her faith being "perverted and abandoned" (qtd. in Alex 1123). This very question is the basis of my own research and is an issue that has yet to be addressed.

The dated nature of these two studies emphasizes the lack of research that has been conducted on this example of role tension. Furthermore, research on role conflict in the context of the theory of lived religion is non-existent, and provides a valuable additional lens for studying Christianity in the military. The following research attempts to fill this hole in the literature regarding the role conflict of a Christian soldier in terms of rationalization and compartmentalization as coping strategies.

Data

Rationalization based in Scripture: Divine Obedience

The use of rationalization by the cadets was most evident when they referenced scripture passages from the Bible, using the text as a legitimating device to defend their position as both Christians and soldiers and to argue that the Christian faith is accepting of, and even

encourages, military service and warfare. A passage that was used by five of the cadets was Romans 13:

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 judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

The cadets used this passage to defend any action that might be required of them in the military, killing or otherwise, since they equated the authority of their commanding officer with an authority that is purposely placed above them by God. Therefore, to disobey an earthly authority is to disobey a direction from God. When asked if the cadets knew of any situation in their military career where they might be required to comply with an earthly authority that was contradictory to God's authority, the few who were able to think of such a scenario referenced the Don't Ask, Don't Tell legislation and, for those pursuing chaplaincy, the possibility of ordaining homosexual marriages.

A cadet who is pursuing chaplaincy adamantly exclaimed that if he is ever expected to ordain a homosexual marriage, he will immediately resign from the military (I 12:132). A second cadet did not admit that he would resort to quitting the military, but made very clear his condemnation of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell legislation by stating, "[it's] something that I'm going to have to deal with that I don't agree with and I think is morally wrong. But for the most part, there's not really any large conflict, there's not any real significant conflict between Christianity and the military" (I 14:159). Intentional warfare and the killing of others is an earthly command that was not mentioned by the cadets as a scenario that can produce potential conflict with their faith, but if federal law allows for homosexuals to marry and openly enter into the military, these cadets will have serious qualms with their faith and career. Significantly, the cadets pick and choose which commands given by their earthly authorities are divine and which are not, regardless of what the passage in Romans 13 requires.

Obedience to divine authority is a consistent, motivating factor for the cadets' decision to comply with their military duties. In *The Virtue*

of Obedience, Joseph Shaw ultimately finds that what is morally wrong and what is contrary to God's will are equivalent according to the practicing Christian. This ideology is applicable for cadets who equate ethics and morality with the commandments laid out in the Bible, as evidenced by one cadet who emphasized, "We need to stop these people [Taliban, terrorists] because what they're doing is against what God says to do" (I 4:38). The cadet who condemned homosexuals in the military because "it is morally wrong" possessed a mentality that is in perfect alignment with Shaw's theory on divine obedience and morality. Ultimate faith is defined by complete obedience toward God, while sin is equated with disobedience to God, or acting contrary to his will.

Rationalization based in Scripture: the Old Testament

Thirteen of the fifteen cadets used defenses from scripture that came from passages in the Old Testament. One such passage is Psalm 18:34-40:

He [God] trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You [God] give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.

King David is assumed to have sung these words to God when he was delivered from his enemies and from the hand of King Saul who was attempting to kill him. God is credited with giving David the necessary strength and endurance for war and the ability to kill those who were trying to kill him. Since God provided David with the means and the mentality to engage in war, the cadets perceive that God must not be opposed to war and can also provide the same encouragement and resources for today's soldiers in their military endeavors.

Five cadets referenced passages like the one from Psalms quoted above, and five others used the examples of Godly warriors such as

David, Gideon and Joshua. Also a passage from Ecclesiastes chapter three was used by one cadet:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build...a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3, 8)

Such passages suggest that God is aware that war is an inevitable part of life and does not condemn it in any of these Old Testament passages. As a result the cadets deem it acceptable to pursue a military career, complete with its warfare and violence.

The distinction between killing and murder was an inevitable topic that further came up in six of the interviews as a type of rationalization for when killing is appropriate and approved by scripture. These cadets wanted to make clear that the original translation of the Ten Commandments states “thou shall not murder,” which is very different from “thou shall not kill.” (The King James Version, which is used by most conservative or fundamental Christians, states “thou shall not kill” [Exodus 20:13].) Furthermore, one cadet elaborated on his knowledge of the actual Hebrew translation of the passage which loosely translates into “thou shall not kill in grief” (I 1:6). The cadet interpreted this as a prohibition for one to kill in an emotional or angry state. (In fact, the verb that appears in the Hebrew is “ratsach,” frequently translated as “to murder” or “to kill without cause,” versus “harag” which means “to kill” or “to take the life of any type of victim.”) One cadet confidently explained,

I don't think God has ever been against killing, because he's killed his own creation. He's wiped them out before, or he's allowed them to be wiped out and told others to wipe them out. It's the murder part that God has always condemned. (I 11:116)

This distinction between killing and murder is crucial, as one interpretation allows humans to take lives in matters of just war and self-defense, while the other prohibits the extermination of human life regardless of the situation. Since the cadets are convinced that God is against murder, and not killing, they are confident in the permissibility

of taking lives in combat and there is no conflict between their faith and military career.

Three cadets further used prophecies from the Old Testament to claim that war is inevitable and “will only end at the coming of Christ,” or “when the world is evangelized” (Marsden 143). These cadets work under the assumption that humans will always experience war since “war is the judgment of God upon sin” (Dawson 149). Prophecies that support this claim in the Old Testament state that in the last days,

He [God] will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4)

Only when Judgment Day comes will war cease to exist and will nations use their resources to produce food instead of conflict. Verses such as this passage from Isaiah were frequently used to explain that there will be war and rumors of wars until Jesus returns to earth. Cadets explained that wars have always existed and, based on evidence from the Old Testament, that God has sanctioned warfare and the killings of countless people, tribes and even nations. The cadets used much of the Old Testament to explain that war is sanctioned by God.

Rationalization based in Scripture: the New Testament

The New Testament was referenced by only two cadets who explained that in the book of Matthew, when Jesus is speaking to a Roman centurion, he never condemns the centurion for his occupation or reprimands him for his actions. Since there is nothing written against the soldier, the cadets make the conclusion that Jesus, himself, was never against the soldier’s occupation and therefore never against warfare or killing. Luke (chap. 7) and Matthew (chap. 8) elaborate on this story and tell of the faith of the centurion. These passages are also mentioned in a book titled *In His Service: A Guide to Christian Living in the Military* in which the author, a retired Air Force officer, states that “If Jesus wanted to condemn the profession of arms for all time, this encounter provided the ideal opportunity” (Bereit 11). The two cadets who are aware of this passage cling to it as evidence that Jesus was

indifferent to the military obligations of a soldier.

One cadet explained that “you can’t use something that’s not said in the Bible. I mean nowhere besides the fact that it says do not go to war for one year after you’ve been married, that’s the only place it says don’t go to war” (I 5:52). The passage this cadet is speaking of is Deuteronomy 24:5 which states, “If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.” I asked this cadet, who is engaged to be married, what he will do if he is deployed less than one year after his wedding. He gave no response.

Rationalization based in God’s Will

The cadets further used rationality to explain how they felt “called” or drawn toward the military as an occupation. If it is God’s will that a cadet pursue the military, then the killing, warfare and violence that takes place as a result must also be part of God’s will. God’s will, according to these cadets, is simply a feeling, sensation, or internal peace that they achieve when complying with some sort of divine instruction that may or may not be separate from their own desires. This feeling is confirmed through prayer, the reading of scripture, and Godly counsel or mentorship.

Most of the cadets spoke about proof of God’s will through an internal feeling or experience. They explained this experience through statements such as “I felt like God was calling me to be a pastor” (I 1:1), “I felt like it was what my purpose was...I felt like it was just my duty” (I 2:14), “for me that was a calling...I really felt a leading to go into the Marine Corps” (I 11:110). When asked how cadets knew that this “feeling” was of God, they explained that they had prayed about it and this feeling was confirmation of God’s will and a result of their prayers: “I’ve prayed about that and I feel that that is what God is calling me to do” (I 14:156). One cadet was enrolled as a student at Charleston Southern University until he felt “an urging, a nudging to come here [The Citadel] and then I was praying about it” (I 8:72). He transferred to The Citadel after one year in order to pursue a career with the Navy because of this particular calling. Another cadet elaborated on a physical experience that he had with his calling:

I just felt like a big gust of wind behind me, and I don't know if anyone else felt it but I did, and I guess I just knew that God wanted me to be a chaplain and he brought me here [The Citadel] to bring me back to him and he gave me this honorary scholarship to do whatever he wants me to do in the future to become a chaplain. (I 1:5)

Some cadets said they were still waiting to “hear” from God or to feel confirmation about their calling. The most definitive confirmation that cadets experienced was the receiving of scholarships. Many cadets explained that they knew it was God's will that they pursue the military or The Citadel due to a scholarship they received. In most cases these scholarships were not expected or were unrealistic due to the cadets' grades or financial situations. The irrationality of receiving these scholarships was even more powerful evidence of God's will. Cadets consistently used the logic that if God had thus called them to their military career, he must not have a problem with military obligations.

Since these cadets perceive God to be omnipotent, and nothing can happen that is outside his will, they also believe that they are carrying out divine instruction whether they are involved in logistics, engineering, flying, or infantry. One cadet explained that

I don't think that me having to take part in doing things in defense of our country, my government which God established to rule on earth till he comes back, I don't think that is contrary to my faith at all. (I 8:74)

This very quote is making a direct reference, again, to the submission to earthly authority which is placed over the Christian by God, as stated in Romans 13. Another cadet explained,

I don't think it's possible for us to change God's will or to do something that wasn't God's will. I mean it's not like if God didn't want something to happen, it would happen. So I'm not necessarily concerned about oops, God didn't want me to kill that person. (I 10:96)

The ease and confidence with which this cadet justifies any violent

action he might take is unnerving. Another cadet comments, “Clearly this is where he [God] wants me because this is where he put me... if he makes me an infantry officer, then he intends for me to be an infantry officer...if he wanted to make it to where none of us ever had to pull a trigger, then he would make it that way” (I 13:148). These cadets can comfortably accept that they are complying with God’s will since nothing can happen that is not in his control. Furthermore, since these cadets feel drawn toward their military careers and are convinced that these plans are part of God’s will, they are under the impression that God must be pro-military.

Discussion of Rationalization and the Tension with Christian Love

As evidenced by the above willingness to kill enemy soldiers, tension was very obvious when cadets explained their desire to love and serve God through their service in the military. Service and leadership are major themes that were evident in almost all of the interviews. One cadet explained the inner turmoil he was experiencing all summer about the very issue we were discussing. He passionately explained the “conflict for [his] heart”:

because I love to love people and things like that but I always see two arguments...that deal with pro-military and then there’s things like love your enemies as yourself...*but there’s nobody in the middle that kind of explains it all.* I think that the military isn’t like a negative thing like we just kill people and that’s it. I really want to help people and the things that we’re doing in Afghanistan has to do with killing insurgents, people who are intimidating the local populace, but also building schools and bridges and helping people diversify crops so they’re not just growing drugs, they’re growing wheat and things that supply for them...I don’t think that you can love the enemy of an Afghani woman who’s being suppressed by just letting her be suppressed or killed...I am protecting this woman by stopping the oppression on her... you can’t stop an oppressive force by just saying hey I love you, you should stop this. It kind of takes a forceful hand. (I 6:62; emphasis added)

One can empathize and feel the tension that this cadet is experiencing

and the passion that he has to truly serve and love others in a wartime situation. He is clearly trying to reconcile the tension that exists between exercising Christian love toward an innocent victim and also toward a life-threatening enemy. The example that this cadet gives of protecting an Afghani woman was common among the interviews. When cadets expressed tension with killing another person, distinctions arose between protecting women and children versus killing the enemy. It was never emphasized that the enemy was necessarily a male force, troop or person, but it was always emphasized that the innocent were women and children. These cadets want to help, they want to love, and they want to serve. The tension arises when they must choose who to love and serve – the civilians, their squad members, and their families, or those who are trying to destroy their lives and the lives of others.

Two cadets made references to the Gospel of John, especially the assertion that “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (15: 12-13). One of the cadets explained that “Jesus even said if you want to show someone that you love them, lay down your life for them and that’s what the military does every day” (I 6:60). However, the cadets are not loving or reaching out toward the enemy, and they are not laying down their lives for the opposing troops. The second cadet mentioned that

I’ve always wanted to serve, serve others, and I believe like it says in John that if you’re willing to die for others, that’s showing true love. And if we’re attacked, I believe in defending this country and what it stands for and that’s that best way I can serve others. (I 9:82)

Loving others and the action of self-sacrifice is evident in most of the cadets’ Christian beliefs, but this self-sacrifice clearly does not apply to the enemy in wartime. The cadets accept the potential of dying for their family, country and fellow service men and women – in most cases it is even an honor. However, this form of self-sacrifice is not a passive one and comes with stipulations. The soldier is still expected to exercise self-preservation, self-defense and protection with whatever weapons are available, and will kill to protect others when necessary.

There is clearly a disconnect between a commitment to die and sacrifice oneself versus a commitment to fight and kill for self-

preservation and the protection of others. The New Testament clearly states that Christians are not to show favoritism toward others and should love all people, even enemies and those who have intentions to inflict them with harm. Darrell Fasching, author of *Comparative Religious Ethics* emphasizes that “the teachings of Jesus...were anything but militaristic. In his Sermon on the Mount he taught precisely the opposite, that one ought to return love for hate, and do good to those who persecute you” (Fasching 198). He explains that a summary of Jesus’ teachings are simply to love God above all else and love your neighbor as yourself (Fasching 210). Speaking to his disciples, Jesus goes as far as to tell them, “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39). This proclamation must cause tension for the Christian soldier and raise the question as to who he is allowed to resist, if anyone, and who in fact is considered evil. When asked how the peace teachings of Jesus Christ are applicable to one’s military career, one cadet responded with the assertion, “Jesus says you shouldn’t kill people, but in the military you have to kill people!” (I 4:36).

One cadet gave an example of what he presumed to be an appropriate circumstance for turning the other cheek. He explained that when a Christian is persecuted for his or her faith, then he or she should absolutely turn the other cheek and return that persecutor’s hate with Christian love. However, when the Christian is being persecuted for reasons outside his or her faith, the same rule does not apply. This cadet admitted that if a person were to break into his house with a gun in attempt to harm any of his family members, then he would absolutely take out a gun first and shoot the trespassing individual. He explained that there are

two different perspectives. One, I would willingly die for Christ, but the other one I would take someone’s life without hesitation. Where is the difference? I think the difference is what you’re called to do which is to die for Christ, to die for Christ is to gain eternity. But that doesn’t mean you have to let someone come in and take your life because they want your TV. (I 11:121)

This compartmentalization that takes place will be explored in the following sections when the Christian soldier determines when it is

appropriate to exercise Christian love, and when it is necessary to exercise self-preservation on the battlefield.

As previously stated, the interviewed cadets constantly referenced Old Testament passages when asked about how their Christianity is compatible with their potential engagement in warfare and killing. None of the cadets volunteered the teachings from the New Testament that emphasize love and peace toward one's enemies, and when asked about these passages the cadets made comments about how they were not applicable or were very circumstantial. The contrast between the cadets' heavy dependence on the Old Testament versus the nonchalant dismissal of the New Testament is severe. Perhaps the cadets do not want to face such contradictions in scripture because they do not want to confront the consequences. For some of these Christians, to question the Bible is to question God, and to question God is to lack faith which can lead to disobedience and sin.

Compartmentalization: The Passivity of Love

A few cadets compartmentalized the roles of a Christian and a soldier with the reasoning that loving one's enemies and exercising peace represents the ultimate form of passivity and weakness. They find the exercise of such Christian virtues to be inappropriate and irrational in wartime. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (5:44). In the context of this passage, are these Christian soldiers then supposed to stand in their ranks and fall to their knees in prayer while the opposing troops are pursuing them with tanks? One can see why expressing love or peace might seem impractical in such a situation. But the New Testament emphasizes such impractical behavior. In Luke, Jesus again tells his followers, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also...Do unto others as you would have them do to you" (6:27).

Instead of abiding by the peace teachings of Jesus Christ, the cadets perceive a pacifist position as an extremely idealized notion. As one observes, "it sounds great but who's actually out there doing it?" (I 8:78). Another says, "I can make that [love and peace] sound all perfect and great but it's not going to work out like that" (I 10:99).

One cadet dismissed such a suggestion with the explanation, “if we do just go and try to talk to these Islamic extremists and say ‘listen I come to you out of love,’ then you won’t have a head” (I 2:16). The cadets thus separate their obligations as Christians from their obligations as soldiers through a perception that Christian love is circumstantial and cannot be exercised on the battlefield when facing the enemy.

The idea that loving one’s enemies during wartime is passive, weak, impractical and unrealistic marked a prevalent theme. One cadet became slightly offended and emphasized that “Christianity is not a passive religion, it’s a very active religion” (I 14:158). To these cadets, a passive Christian is an oxymoron because if all Christians were to die as martyrs during warfare, then the gospel could not be spread and the mission to be “ambassadors of Christ” could never be fulfilled (I 8:79). Here the cadets are strategically compartmentalizing their faith by using alternative passages from scripture to defend the impracticality of demonstrating love during wartime. Since their personal loss of life would inhibit them from sharing the gospel to non-believers, they must fight to stay alive in order to proselytize. Another cadet emphasized this idea by simply stating, “if we’re all pacifists and say we all died for the faith, then who would be there to spread the faith, you know?” (I 8:77). Ultimately, if a soldier refuses to bear arms or engage in combat for reasons related to Christianity, he will most likely lose his own life and will be unable to fulfill the Great Commission. The cadets are clearly exercising a type of compartmentalization since they recognize that the Bible advocates certain teachings of peace and love, but they instead use other passages to excuse themselves from such action or deem these ideals to be irrelevant and impractical in a wartime situation.

Compartmentalization: Self-Preservation

None of the cadets supported or were receptive toward the idea of sacrificing their own lives in order to exercise peace toward the enemy. The cadets justified war because it was either right or necessary, and killing was justified for reasons of self-defense. One cadet made this clear by stating, “I mean, its kill or be killed. I don’t think that in the moment if my life is endangered, I don’t think that I’ll have a problem at all taking that guy’s life, cause it’s me or him” (I 2:22). Again, the ultimate goal of these cadets during war is self-preservation, not

necessarily submission to any moral or religious compass. The killing of others is of no concern and holds no religious consequence for the Christian soldier since his own life is at stake. Therefore the Christian soldier compartmentalizes his duties as a Christian and a soldier so that he can take the life of an enemy without experiencing a conflict in roles.

The cadets further attributed naïveté to those who wish to return love for hate since the cadets who do so will inevitably lose their lives in the process. One cadet asks, “like what good would it do for me to just lay down my gun and die? Because he [the enemy] would just go on to the next guy and kill him too and kill the next guy, so I think that’s just part of war” (I 2:22). Death is an inevitable and necessary consequence of war, and to refuse to engage in killing is to refuse the right to one’s own life. Self-preservation ultimately motivates these cadets to kill the enemy without experiencing any conflict with their faith. Again, however, the cadets are compartmentalizing the appropriateness of carrying out Biblical passages that advocate peace and love toward enemies since doing so would be suicidal. One cadet who has struggled with this very question of how to kill as a Christian, consciously explained that “you can’t stop an oppressive force by just saying ‘hey I love you, you should stop this.’ It kind of takes a forceful hand” (I 6:63). Even in the midst of attempting empathy and an objective perspective, this cadet admits that the exercise of peace and love in a wartime situation is simply impractical and will result in the loss of one’s own life.

Another cadet became shamelessly honest and admitted,

If I were overseas, if I were deployed, the only thing I would care about would be protecting myself, protecting my soldiers, and getting back home to my wife and getting everyone back home to their wives and I don’t really care who I have to kill to get that done. I mean, that’s honestly the way I feel about it. (I 10:97)

The cadet’s Christianity is clearly not at all a priority in this situation. All that is important to him is his own safety, the safety of the soldiers under him, and everyone’s ability to return home in one piece. Some cadets emphasized self-sacrifice in a few interviews, but this was

a sacrifice for one's faith, for Christ, and for one's family, country and platoon or squad. Another cadet had no problem admitting his willingness to kill an enemy soldier because "That's killing someone who wants to kill me. And so for me, it's not a moral issue of right or wrong, because its right. You're defending yourself. You're defending your God, your country. And I think that's what God calls us to do" (I 11:116). The affiliation between defending God and defending America is very strong, and is a bold claim that is not based in scripture. Clearly if this is how cadets view their military service, then they are all the more willing to kill the enemy since such an action is done in the name of God and to do otherwise is disloyal and disobedient – to God *and* country. Self-preservation therefore becomes a broader issue of not just religion, but also patriotism and loyalty to one's country.

Compartmentalization: Christian Patriotism

Instead of applying the peace and love passages to one's enemies or opposing troops during warfare, the cadets used them to emphasize the necessity of spreading peace and love to civilians, their own squad members and their country. In times of war, as George Marsden elaborates, "Christianity and patriotism are synonymous terms and hell and traitors are synonymous" (Marsden 142). Since America is God's country, then to be a traitor of the country, or to be unpatriotic, is to be an enemy of God. One cadet explained that "when someone else threatens me, my family, my country and my God, I have no qualms about taking their life. And because of that I have never had a qualm with going into the military" (I 11:114). This cadet, among others, emphasizes a very direct and personal relationship between the United States and the Christian God which is not found in the Bible. The language of Christianity becomes the language of patriotism and America is perceived to be God's country. Obviously the cadets do not wish to "help" or "save" the enemy because this would label them traitors of their country, and therefore enemies of God. The cadets thus compartmentalize their love for their country so that it is made a priority over their love for all others – including for their enemies, as the New Testament requires.

These cadets persistently equate patriotism and loyalty to their country with a loyalty to God. Some of the cadets are convinced that the Christian God is an American God who will fight with Americans

for their country and defend against enemies or outsiders. One cadet insisted that “God is not just on our side, but he is literally protecting us” (I 4:36-37). This direct relationship between God and country is a type of religious patriotism that inhibits the cadets from pursuing peace or love toward the enemy, which would be considered a type of betrayal toward country and faith. Compartmentalization is necessary because the application of peace, love, and passivity in wartime is not only impractical and unrealistic to the cadets, but also a defiance of self-preservation and an act of disloyalty and disobedience toward God.

Compartmentalization: Missionization

As previously covered, compartmentalization reflects a refusal to recognize any tension between social roles. This was true for eleven of the cadets, who confidently claimed that Christianity and the military are constantly intertwined and perceived no conflict between them. These cadets explained that by participating in war, the individual does not defy the peace teachings in the New Testament but in fact carries them out. As one cadet explained,

it’s kind of interesting how we’re winning and not only winning but bringing peace and ending terrorism and ending horrible, horrible things. There are so many horrible and unjust things that go on over there that it’s amazing to know that you’re a part of stopping that. (I 2:18)

By perceiving the battlefield as a mission field, the Christian soldier finds it possible to think of himself as spreading peace and God’s love by taking the opportunity to talk to foreigners about God’s grace. One cadet who struggled with role tension found peace in this revelation, explaining, “if anything, it [the military] is like a giant mission field” (I 13:146). Another cadet emphasized that “I feel like the opportunity for ministry is enormous there [in the military]” (I 10:94). However, love and peace were again only expressed in relation to fellow squad members and civilians – not the enemy. When the previously quoted cadet was then questioned about exercising his ministry toward foreigners while overseas with the military, he uncomfortably explained that

obviously ministry to those people in your platoon that are

closest to you, that are U.S. soldiers, are going to be the easiest ones to minister to. And I don't know that I could begin to come up with a way to minister to like an Afghani family or anything like that outside of...I mean...when you're wearing a U.S. military uniform overseas it's kind of hard to minister that way. (I 10:102-103)

It turns out that the cadets do not perceive the battle field to be an opportunity to evangelize to the enemy, but only to their fellow soldiers. The cadets equate doing good for others with spreading the Gospel, but only toward those who are not the enemy.

Proselytizing is huge for evangelical Christians and it is fascinating that these cadets perceive their military career to be a perfect environment for spreading God's love and the good news of Jesus Christ. However, the cadets themselves acknowledge the difficulty of exercising Christian virtues toward the enemy. This is where their compartmentalization supplies a justification. The cadets clearly refuse to recognize the conflicting elements in their two roles as a Christian and a soldier. Their role as a Christian requires them to love their enemies and bless those who persecute them, while their role as a soldier requires that they obey their commanding officer and bear arms in order to protect their fellow soldiers and country. By representing the battle field as a mission field, the cadets force these two roles to be compatible. Even when they attempt to missionize, they are doing so only to their fellow soldiers and not toward the enemy.

Conscientious Objection: A Solution?

In the 1965 case of *United States v. Seeger*, Congress specified exemption from the military draft to be granted only to "those persons who by reason of their religious training and belief are conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form" (Gaustad 354). Five years later, in *Welsh v. United States*, a majority of the court decided that citizens should be exempted from military service if their "consciences, spurred by deeply held moral, ethical, or religious beliefs, would give them no rest or peace if they allowed themselves to become a part of an instrument of war" (Gaustad 355). The Department of Defense further ruled that one can apply for conscientious objector status (CO) after he or she has already voluntarily enlisted and participated in any

military service. Claiming conscientious objector in the military would seem to offer the perfect solution for resolving the Christian soldier's role conflict – he could still serve his country through the military but without facing the potential conflict of having to take another person's life, bear arms, or compromise the morals of his faith.

When faced with this hypothetical option, however, the cadets did not embrace it. Seven of them simply expressed the opinion that if a Christian soldier chooses to claim conscientious objector, then that soldier just has a different set of religious convictions and a different calling of God to fulfill. The cadets who felt this way did not feel any misgivings about their own participation in war, even if other Christians excused themselves for faith-based reasons. One cadet explained that “it's all circumstantial...if they're using that because they really feel like God's calling them to do that, then that's what they're supposed to do” (I 1:8). Another cadet expressed the same opinion that “it's a personal conviction matter” (I 2:20). Believing that different Christians can reach different conclusions about warfare, they sense no conflict if other devout Christians act under a different set of convictions.

Despite these cadets' seemingly tolerant relativism toward other Christians who claim conscientious objector status, three of the cadets became very offended by the suggestion that Christian soldiers would have the audacity to claim CO. One of these cadets became very frustrated with this topic and explained,

I think if they signed up for the military they need to not do that. Cause that's what the military is for. It's to fight, it's to defend, it's to protect people who are working at home...I'd be really angry, I'd try to talk to them. Try to explain that it [the Bible] doesn't say that anywhere. (I 5:52)

Another cadet who expressed a similar opinion stated that “if you're a conscientious objector I don't think you should join the military” (I 6:66), and another used scripture to try and make the claim that “it doesn't make sense, it's contradictory to scripture. I mean look at Gideon, look at Joshua” (I 12:129). This particular cadet is again using Old Testament figures to rationalize the idea that war is biblically sanctioned. One of the younger cadets additionally explained,

I don't think you should join the military if you have an issue with defending your nation...if you put your life in a combat situation, the soldier next to you is giving you his life and you're giving him yours. And if soldiers can't trust each other with that under the basis that I might get scared or have a sudden change of heart, then you shouldn't do that. (I 3:30)

These cadets assumed that the claiming of conscientious objector might put the lives of fellow soldiers in danger.

Significantly, however, a soldier cannot simply declare, on the spot, in a war zone, that he or she is morally against firing a weapon on an enemy soldier. Therefore, no lives should be put at risk due to the claiming of conscientious objector. A soldier must go through the proper protocol and paperwork to claim conscientious objector status, and the process of approval is not an easy one. An applicant for conscientious objector status must submit a written application and be interviewed by a chaplain, military psychiatrist and an investigating officer. Individuals who apply for conscientious objector status must prove that they have developed a "firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms" based on moral, ethical or religious beliefs (Jurden) and present their case at multiple hearings. There is a negative stigma attached to soldiers who apply for conscientious objector status, and soldiers who do so risk losing military benefits and facing dishonorable discharge. This raises questions as to whether the military as an institution actively discourages a potential solution to the Christian soldier's role tension.

Addressing Role Tension

The presence of role tension within a Christian soldier is not entirely surprising since such a conflict and its solutions are hardly ever confronted in the cadets' personal or religious lives. For five of the cadets, I was the first person whom they had ever spoken with about such a conflict. Seven of the cadets were realizing for the first time the potential consequences of such a tension. This tension is apparently never preached about or discussed in the cadets' churches, Bible studies, faith based organizations, or even in their own families. When I asked if the cadets ever had a similar conversation with a fellow Christian or if such tensions were discussed in the church, they were very surprised

to be asked such a question. After thinking about it, some of them expressed concern that these issues have never previously been openly addressed. One cadet reflected, “I think that’s one of the things that’s kind of lacking in some of the ministry...that is something that doesn’t really get addressed all that often and I’m not sure why” (I 10:102). Another cadet explained that in church it’s all “Biblical, like just church setting stuff, no military involved” (I 12:133) and “it’s actually all based on love, the love of Christ. That’s a good point, we probably should [talk about the tension]...they’re more worried about our faith and not how we’re gonna deal with combat” (I 2:23).

Although this is a topic worthy of separate research, it is necessary to note that churches and faith based organizations avoid such a dialogue about Christianity and the military. If the cadets are receiving no outside support or guidance with this tension, then they are left to their own devices and resources to defend and justify the compatibility of their two social roles. This has the potential to increase the severity of their role tension since the cadets are implicitly receiving the message that such a topic is inappropriate for Christians to approach, especially in a church or religious setting.

Whether the cadets claimed that their faith and the military were easily compatible or if they admitted an obvious conflict between the two, a tension always arose through their responses. When asked, “what does being a Christian in the military look like to you?” one cadet responded, “Ok, I was actually very confused about how that was supposed to happen...it’s a troubling thing sometimes”(I 13:146). Furthermore, when asked about how various peace teachings in the New Testament are applicable to one’s pursuit into the military, the same cadet responded “well I have no idea to be honest! This is where the big conflict is for me” (I 13:152). Another cadet pondered, “it is something to think about but I don’t know it...I don’t know...I don’t really know...I guess it does kind of conflict...I think it’s necessary though because it’s...I mean...that’s just how it is. I don’t know, there’s always been war” (I 2:17-18). Clearly this cadet has given little if any previous thought to this tension, and is at a loss as to how to talk about such a conflict.

In one way or another, the tension becomes very clear in most of these interviews. One cadet revealed an identity crisis in which he debated

dropping out of The Citadel his sophomore year. He referenced one text that assisted him with resolving the conflict between his faith and desire to pursue an infantry position with the Marine Corps through a book titled *Jesus for President* by Shane Claiborne. Claiborne states that “dozens of soldiers who have contacted us confess a paralyzing identity crisis as they feel the collision of their allegiances” (Claiborne 20). As previously mentioned, these cadets are receiving no guidance or support from their religious institutions or the military, and are therefore forced to look toward other resources and literature in order to resolve the compatibility of their faith with their military career.

Conclusions and Interpretation

Ultimately the participants of my interviews seemed to force their Christianity to accommodate their military career. When they prioritized their Christianity over their military endeavors, the cadets chose passages from the Bible in order to rationalize their position, or found comfort in complying with what they perceived to be God’s will. The cadets immediately made references to Godly warriors and examples of what it means to be a soldier of Christ that are found in the Old Testament. However, they dismissed this same scriptural authority when asked about New Testament passages that advocate passivity, peace, and love. The theory of lived religion asserts that “people appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances...all religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed and improvised at the intersections of life” (Hall 8). This mentality was most prevalent as the cadets had no contentions when appropriating Old Testament scripture to justify their actions or to defend their warfare, but were less eager to use the New Testament for the same purposes.

When the cadets compartmentalized their roles, however, they put their Christianity on the backburner to give preference to their patriotism and militant philosophies. Compartmentalization provided an effective solution to the cadets’ role tension, since they simply separated their roles or claimed relativism when faced with potential conflict. Their military was made a priority when they compartmentalized their faith so that the practice of their Christianity was perceived to be impractical and based on circumstance, or they attempted to equate it with a type of Godly mission to proselytize their fellow soldiers. Their reasoning

was not based in scripture, and they ignored the task of incorporating concrete evidence from the Bible in order to justify their military duties. Even when the cadets mentioned passages to defend their patriotism or self-preservation, they used these passages to excuse themselves from exercising Christian love. They simply avoided using scripture at all when engaging in compartmentalization, since their military status was of greater priority and they based their actions in practicality instead of Biblical authority. The cadets' Christianity is only of concern when they intertwine it with the idea that the battle field is a mission field, but even under this reasoning the cadets only spoke of missionizing to their fellow soldiers and not to the enemy.

My brief analysis of conscientious objection in the military and of the influence of the church in the cadets' role tension clearly provides room for further study. Further research may need to address how military colleges and Christian based institutions reinforce the intertwining of military duties with the Christian faith so that the cadets are ignorant of a tension or have no outlet to resolve their conflict. It is important to address how other institutions influence the severity of the tension for these cadets and it would also be relevant to explore the presence of this tension among students at other military colleges. Further research may also benefit from a sample size that includes women, or that only focuses on cadets who are pursuing high-risk positions in the military. A more intentional study of the liberal or conservative nature of the cadets' Christianity would also prove useful so that one can gauge the effects of fundamentalist and modernist views on the Christian soldier's role tension.

The combination of role conflict and lived religion theories has provided a new and insightful lens for interpreting the identity crisis which the Christian soldier faces and how he resolves such a tension. The Christian soldier seemingly solves his role tension through a selective reading of scripture, confidence in God's will, the exercise of Christian love, and missionization. When the Christian soldier lives his Christianity in the context of the military, his actions become evidence of his faith and the fulfillment of his government obligations become sacred. None of the cadets completely abandons either of their roles (although one thought about dropping out of The Citadel) and all solutions for their role conflict were based in their Christian

faith. Even when the cadets use compartmentalization, elements of their Christianity are compromised but their ultimate faith is not. The abandonment of faith is not an option for the proclaimed Christian, and the military is an institution by which the cadets define and live their religion. Therefore, these two identities will constantly be strained as the cadets must choose to either rationalize their faith in the context of the military, or compartmentalize their conflicting roles to achieve a comfortable acceptance of both identities.

Notes

1. The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina located in Charleston, SC, is where I recruited my participants. The school has an undergraduate body of about 2,000 cadets and about one third of the graduating classes accept military commissions.

2. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the College of Charleston and The Citadel.

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