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By Colonel Jeffrey C. Tuomala, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

As a judge advocate in the United States Marine Corps I grew increasingly unhappy with my inability to apply my new Christian faith more directly to the legal profession. So, in 1979 I left active duty and the practice of law to attend seminary with the goal of training and equipping myself for full-time Christian ministry. Much to my surprise and delight I found that the professions of law and arms are each full-time Christian ministries.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul explains that God has established the office of civil authority (13:1), that civil officers are God's full-time ministers (13:6), and that they are to use force, even deadly force, when necessary to do justice (13:3-4). Soldiers, policemen, judges and lawyers are civil officers. Just as we are to honor officers in the church (I Tim. 5:17), we are to honor officers of the state (I Pet. 2:13-14).

Because civil officers are God's ministers, it comes as no surprise that Christians should be uniquely qualified for military service. There are three character qualities that are particularly necessary in soldiers which all Christians are to possess and develop, not only for waging spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20), but mortal combat when necessary. These traits are an understanding of justice (I Cor. 6:2; Heb. 11:33), courage (I Cor. 16:13; II Tim. 1:7), and sacrificial love (I Cor. 16:14; Eph. 5:2).

Justice

Christ's death and atonement is the supreme demonstration of God's justice, and therefore, the model for civil justice, be it domestic or international (Rom. 3:25). God's wrath is against all sin, and he could not, consistent with his own charac-
ter, forgive sin without a satisfaction of the
demands of justice (Rom. 3:26). If He could have
forgiven sin without satisfying justice, Christ’s
death would have been in vain (Gal. 2:21).
Christ’s death satisfied justice in that He suffered
the punishment that we deserved (I Pet. 2:24) and
He paid the debt that we owed (I Pet. 1:18).
In a domestic legal system, justice entails
punishing criminals (Rom. 13:5), awarding
compensation for injury or breach of contract
(Rom. 13:4), and preserving the peace (Rom. 13:3;
I Tim 2:1-2). Because the civil officer is God’s
minister and agent of wrath, he must model civil
justice on God’s eternal justice within the limits
of his delegated authority. He is limited as to the
types of sin he may punish, the sanctions he may
impose, and the persons and territory over which
he has jurisdiction.
War, on the other hand, is waged as a special
kind of lawsuit between states with no common
political authority to whom they can appeal for
justice (Acts 17:26; Rev. 19:11). The objectives
of military force, however, are the same as domestic
police powers— to punish, compensate, and
protect.

Courage
There are two basic circumstances that all men
fear—things certain and things uncertain. As for
things certain, every man knows that he deserves
the death penalty for everyone knows, without a
doubt, that he deserves this punishment for his
sins (Rom. 1:32). There is only one way to deal
with this fear of certain punishment. One must
put his faith in Christ whose death vicariously
satisfied the demands of justice. Having done so,
one need no longer fear death (Rom. 8:31-39).
The other fear, the one caused by the uncertain-
ty of events which lie in the future, is experi-
enced by all men. In many ways the future is just
as uncertain for the believer as for the unbeliever.
The believer, however, is able to walk by faith, as
he lives in the knowledge that the world is not
governed by uncertainty, chaos, and chance but
rather by Divine Providence (Eph. 1:11). This is
the basis for his confidence that all things work
together for good for those who love God and are
called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
The circumstances of war make both of these
fears especially pronounced. Death is very near.
Confusion and uncertainty reign. The soldiers
who overcome the fear of death and who are able
to thrive in uncertainty have the decisive advan-
tage.
The courage demanded of soldiers is not limited
to a willingness to face enemy bullets. It includes
the courage to be honest and faithful in all one’s
dealings. This may entail refusing to act out of
expediency rather than principle, enforcing
unpopular standards when subordinates see only
their short term interests, being merciful when the
situation demands, or taking a position contrary to
conventional wisdom.
A Christian soldier should not fear those who
may only kill the body (Mt. 10:28) and he should
count himself blessed when he suffers for doing
what is right (Mt. 5:10).

Love
Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor (USMC
Retired), maintains that it is love—not hatred, not
ferocity, not the lust for violence—that sustains
Marines in combat. He wrote, “Love...sustains a
man in combat when every fiber in his being
shrieks at him to run and hide... It is love that
overcomes all other emotions and inspires a man
to lay down his life for his brother.”
The Apostle John wrote, “perfect love drives out
fear” (I John 4:18). Jesus taught, “greater love has
no one than this, that one lay down his life for his
friends” (John 15:13). Sacrificial love, like courage,
plays a critical role in combat, but it is often harder
to sustain in time of peace.

God commands that we love even our enemies
(Luke 6:35). But how do you go about loving
someone who is at war with you and is trying to
kill you? Jesus answered this question teaching,
“this is love, that you keep my commandments”
(John 14:15). Civil authorities are commanded to
execute justice, and in so doing, they are restraining
further evil that will result in even greater
condemnation. Execution of civil justice points one
to God’s eternal justice and its satisfaction in
Christ (Gal. 3:24).

If a Christian soldier ever has doubts, he or she
should consider John the Baptist’s counsel. “Then
some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we
do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t
accuse people falsely—be content with your pay’”

In other words, “You are ministers of justice, be
sure that you remain true to your calling.”

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presenting a Christian view of law and public policy. Used by
permission.

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The Christian soldier, especially, believing all things are directed by a
personal and loving Heavenly Father, wants nothing else than to act in
conformity with His will.