

Christianity, Christi-Anarchy and Killing

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I've been reading a book *On Killing*, written by soldier psychologist Dave Grossman¹

Grossman cites research that suggests that - contrary to some of our most famous cultural stereotypes - 'the vast majority of men are *not* born killers.'² At most only 2% of men could be considered aggressive psychopathic personalities with a predisposition towards killing.³ A figure reflected in the kill figures of fighter pilots in World War II, where only 1% of fighter pilots accounted for more than 40% of all enemy planes shot down.⁴

Brigadier Marshall, whose study of soldiers' conduct in World War II suggests 'that the average healthy individual has such a resistance towards killing a fellow man he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility.'⁵ A view reflected in the shots-per-soldier and the kills-per-shot recorded in every major war from the Civil War through to World War I up until World War II. During this period, when it became possible to measure shots fired in combat, research has showed the vast majority of soldiers - between 75 and 95% - either did not fire their weapon – even when fired upon – or only fired into the air – refusing to kill the enemy – even when given orders to do so.⁶

Colonel Milton Mater's uncle said the most significant fact he could remember about his combat experience in the World War I was 'draftees who wouldn't shoot'⁷ Gwynne Dyer says that most soldiers on both sides of World War II were interested mainly in 'damage limitation'⁸ And 'all forces had somewhere near the same rate of non-firers'⁹

According to Brigadier Marshall 'At the vital point' (when a soldier has to decide to fire or not) the average healthy individual '*becomes a conscientious objector.*'¹⁰ (emphasis mine)

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Since World War II, the military has embarked on a program to turn soldiers into killers.

1. Reframing killing as saving lives

As it has become clear that most men are motivated to serve and to preserve life, the military has taken the desire to serve and preserve life and used it to make men killers by telling men that killing is the only way they can save the lives of those they love. Soldiers in Iraq are told killing terrorists is the only way to save the lives of civilians.

2. Portraying the enemy as sub-human

In World War II it became clear that soldiers found it harder to kill people they could identify with; but easier to kill people they couldn't identify with. Only 6% of Americans said they wanted to kill Germans; while 44% said they wanted to kill the Japanese.¹¹ So

the military has encouraged soldiers to see the enemy as ‘ragheads’ rather than humans.¹² As it has become clear it is harder for soldiers to kill people who are innocent; but easier to kill people who are guilty, ‘ragheads’ are deemed bloodthirsty, baby killers in advance.¹³

3. Increasing the distance between the trigger and the target,

Most soldiers find it difficult to kill up close and personal. ‘Where you hear ‘em scream and see ‘em die, it’s a bitch’¹⁴ It has always been easier to kill from a distance and to pretend its not personal. Sailors shoot up ‘ships’. Aviators shoot down ‘planes’.¹⁵ The artillery attack enemy ‘lines’.¹⁶ ‘They can pretend they are not killing human beings.’¹⁷ So the military is increasing the distance between the trigger and the target technologically as quickly as it can. Through night goggles for example when a soldiers shoots someone they say its just like shooting on a TV show - ‘as if its happening on a TV screen’¹⁸

4. Demanding every soldier’s obedience to their leader

Most people presume that ‘being fired upon’ was the reason most soldiers fired. But veterans say being ‘ordered to fire’ was the reason most soldiers fired.¹⁹ Without an order to fire many soldiers would not fire, even when they came face to face with the enemy.²⁰

Through social learning men have been socialized to imitate role models like the ANZAC legends who obeyed orders to attack impregnable positions in Gallipoli - even when it was obvious to everyone that the orders were insane and to obey them was suicidal.²¹ Through the classical conditioning²² devised by Pavlov to make dogs salivate at the sound of a bell.²³ soldiers have been conditioned to associate obeying the orders of drill sergeants²⁴ with rewards (pleasure), and disobeying orders with punishment (pain)²⁵ And through behavioural engineering²⁶ devised by Skinner to make rats through mazes²⁷ soldiers have been engineered to increase their automatic quick shoot reflex²⁸ by repeatedly shooting at targets which look like people in simulated battlefield conditions²⁹ to such a degree that an average infantryman now has a 95% shot-per-soldier rate³⁰ and a marksmen now has a 1.39 kill-per-shot ratio.³¹

5. Developing each unit’s capacity for collective violence.

Research has shown that the greatest fear of a man in combat is not the fear of death but of ‘letting others down’³² ‘You can’t turn around and run the other way. Peer pressure, you know?’³³ So the military have used peer pressure – along with the intensification of power³⁴ and the diffusion of responsibility that a group provides³⁵ (‘there were so many guys firing, you can never be sure it was you’ who killed someone³⁶) - to turn men into killers.

Grossman concludes his book *On Killing* by saying that the same techniques used by the military are now being used by the media in society at large - and that not only soldiers, but also civilians, are being socialized to kill without constraints by watching movie heroes like Dirty Harry kill outside the constraints of the law;³⁷ being desensitized to the act of killing by seeing thousands of people being killing on television;³⁸ and being engineered to kill

reflexively by shooting at human targets with model guns in life-like video games.³⁹
 Grossman says *'we are learning to kill and learning to like it.'*⁴⁰(emphasis mine)



I would like suggest that in our culture that while mainline Christianity supports the basic assumptions that make it possible to program men to kill like this, the sensibility nurtured by Christi-Anarchy would make such a social construction of killing totally impossible.

Christianity	Christi-Anarchy
Traditionally believes taking 'an eye for an eye' is biblical and therefore acceptable. And we should follow the bible.	Typically believes Moses said take 'an eye for an eye', but Jesus said 'turn the other cheek'. And we should follow Jesus
Traditionally defines faith in Christ in terms of boundaries of belief and behaviour that need to be defended against others passionately.	Typically defines faith in Christ in terms of a choice to overcome any boundary of belief or behaviour that might prevent us relating to others compassionately.
Traditionally encourages believers to disassociate themselves from others lest they be defiled through contact.	Typically encourages believers to associate themselves with others and work out conflicts face to face.
Traditionally teaches faith in Christ in terms of submitting to the authorities keeping the rules and obeying the leaders.	Typically teaches faith in Christ in terms of submitting yet subverting the authorities keeping some rules but breaking others and only obeying leaders up to a point.
Traditionally encourages believers to conform to the group in order to act with humility.	Typically encourages believers to not conform to the group in order to act with integrity. ¹

Christianity therefore aids and abets the training of men as killers by making it acceptable,

¹ For further details about Christi-Anarchy (as opposed to Christianity) see the author's article on "The Subversive Spirituality Of Christi-Anarchy" published in Kia Ngatahi (Vol.1 No.1) 9-12,16, 2009

if regrettable, to kill; increasing the distance between 'us' and 'them' so we do not see the humanity of the 'other'; teaching us to submit to the authorities, keep the rules and obey the leaders; and encouraging us to conform to the groups that we happen to be a part of.

However Christi-Anarchy critiques and challenges the training of men as killers by making it unacceptable to kill anyone in any circumstance; decreasing the distance between 'us' and 'them' so that we see the humanity of the 'other' - even our 'enemies'; teaching us to submit yet subvert the authorities, keep some rules but break others and only obey leaders up to a point; and encouraging us not to conform to the groups we happen to be a part of.

1. We need to be clear Christ calls us to be willing to die - but to never kill for our faith.

The patron saint of conscientious objectors must surely be the illustrious Martin of Tours.

Martin was born about 316 in Sabaria, in Hungary. His father was a tribune in the Imperial Horse Guard of the Roman Army, and named his son 'Martin' after 'Mars', the god of war.

Martin showed an interest in Christianity from an early age; but his father was suspicious of Christianity and discouraged his son from pursuing his interest. However, at the age of ten, against his father's wishes, Martin went to the church and begged them to baptise him. In contemplative prayer, Martin found the spirituality he was looking for.

At the time, there was a law that made it mandatory for the sons of veterans to serve in the Roman Army. So, at the age of fifteen, Martin was forced to join the military. Martin refused to cooperate. He was put in chains until he promised he would take the orders he was given. He was then assigned to a cavalry unit. In the cavalry, Martin tried to live like a monk rather than a soldier. As an officer, he was entitled to a servant, but he switched roles with his servant, cleaning his servant's boots instead of the other way round.

Around 334, Martin was sent to do garrison duty in Gaul (now France). There, Martin's struggle with the conflicting demands of trying to live as a 'soldier of Christ' in a Roman Legion came to a head, when the Franks invaded the northern borders of the empire, and Martin was ordered to the front. Martin refused to fight, saying: "Put me in the front of the army, without weapons or armor; but I will not draw sword again. I am become the soldier of Christ." His commander said he was more than happy to grant Martin's his request; and put him in prison until he was ready to send Martin to the front.

However, the next day the Franks made peace; and Martin was discharged from the army. Martin became a bishop and continued his campaign against killing for the rest of his life.⁴¹

2. We need to decrease the personal and relational distance between 'us' and 'them' and to see the humanity of the 'other' - especially the humanity of our 'enemies'

Following in the footsteps of Martin were a bunch of soldiers on the front in World War I.

In 1914, amid the muddy trenches and flying shrapnel of the Great War, an unlikely reconciliation took place in the middle of combat. Trenches occupied by French and Scottish troops lay a few metres away from their German counterparts. On Christmas Day a magical event occurred that would forever emblazon the history books with a moment of humanity in the midst of the brutality. The Germans placed Christmas trees above their trench, while Scottish bagpipers played along to the operatic voices they heard wafting over from the German camp. Then, miraculously, the men from both sides climbed out of their trenches and met one another in No Man's Land for a Christmas celebration. The enemies made friends, showed each other pictures of their lovers, and played soccer in the snow with one another. When ordered to commence hostilities again the next day the men refused to fire on one another. The officers were disciplined and their units were disbanded.

3. We need to submit yet subvert the authorities, keep some rules but break others and only obey leaders to the degree that their demands reflect real love for our neighbours.

Paying the price ultimate price to act like Martin was an unknown soldier in World War II.

'In the Netherlands, the Dutch tell of a German soldier who was a member of an execution squad ordered to shoot innocent hostages. Suddenly he stepped out of rank and refused to participate in the execution. On the spot he was charged with treason by the officer in charge and was placed with the hostages, where he was promptly executed by his comrades. He responded in the crucial moment to the voice of conscience (refused to obey his orders) and those who hear of the episode cannot fail to be inspired'.⁴²

Dave Grossman says: *'This – ultimately - may be the price of noncompliance for men of conscience. (In) overcoming obedience-demanding-authority and the instinct for self preservation, this German soldier gives us hope for mankind.'*⁴³ (emphasis mine) .

4. We need to refuse to conform to group pressure, the intensification of power and the diffusion of responsibility which turns groups of men (and women) into killing machines.

The best contemporary example of a Martin of Tours that I know is Bruce from Tasmania.

Bruce French was brought up on a farm in Tasmania, where from a very young age he had used a rifle to shoot rabbits which, he says, were real pests on his family's property.

When he was conscripted as a soldier to fight in the Vietnam War, Bruce joined the infantry, as he felt that as a follower of Jesus he should not use his conscientious objection to the war as an excuse to avoid the dangers other young men were being forced to face. However, as a follower of Jesus, Bruce decided that while he was prepared to face the dangers of combat with the unit he was part of, he was not prepared to pick up a rifle in anger, let alone fire it at anyone, regardless of how much pressure he was put under.

So Bruce went through basic training for the military at the Enoggera Army Barracks with a steadfast refusal to pick up his rifle. As you can imagine, Bruce was ridiculed, bullied,

and abused right throughout his basic training. But his steadfast refusal to pick up his rifle under any circumstances was unshakable – his rock-solid resolve absolutely unbreakable.

Bruce told me in his typically-Aussie laid-back laconic style that the other men in his unit really gave him a hard time - until the day they had to do bayonet practice. Then, when they were confronted with the brutality of thrusting the bayonet on their rifle into the vital organs of a living breathing human being, they were forced to face the violence of killing. And that night, he said, they came to him quietly, one by one, and told him, that now they understood why he had taken the stand that he had. And never gave him a hard time again.

The war was over before his unit was sent to the front, so Bruce never had the chance to test his resolve in combat. But as most soldiers say that their fear of letting their unit down is greater than their fear of facing up to enemy fire, I think Bruce would have stood the test.



If we want to stop the continued social construction of killing in our society, I believe the best way we can do it is to advocate Christi-Anarchy - the radical, sacrificial, nonviolent compassion of Christ, which is committed to the care of friends and enemies alike, over against the commands of the authorities and demands of their agencies to do otherwise.

Sources

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¹ Dave Grossman *On Killing* Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company New York 2009

² p31

³ p189

⁴ p110

⁵ p1

⁶ p3

⁷ p29

⁸ p6

⁹ p16

¹⁰ p1

¹¹ p162

¹² p161

¹³ p165

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³² p52

³³ p150

³⁴ p151

³⁵ p152

³⁶ p111

³⁷ p325

³⁸ p329

³⁹ p319

⁴⁰ p315

⁴¹ Dave Andrews 'Martin Of Tours' in *People Of Compassion* TEAR Blackburn 2008 p7-9

⁴² Dave Grossman *On Killing* Back Bay Books Little, Brown and Company New York 2009 p227-8

⁴³ p228