"Moral Injury: Origins, Assumptions, & Needed Improvements"

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I am a man of two worlds; caught between the world of academics and the world of activists. But I am also torn between the effects of war and the promise of peace. Stubborn since birth, I do not want to meet you where you are at; I want to pull you to where I have been. Many of you are college students who might go on in higher education, who might more quickly absorb this more academic presentation. Others might connect more easily with my more sermonic presentation later today (though even that will likely be a bitter pill to swallow). I hope the seeming duality is not daunting. That charismatic preacher Shane Claiborne and historian Jon Dominic Crossan have both presented at this annual conference gives me hope that the tension I feel as a scholar-activist is a tension you yourselves are able and willing to endure with me. The following lecture has grown out of my work on and experience of combat trauma, especially its most recent manifestation, which is being called "moral injury."

Before we can be innocent like doves, Christians are called to be wise like serpents. We must be acutely aware of our surroundings and question whether the ways things are are the way things really are or should be. It is in this spirit that I hope my lecture and sermon today will be informative as well as challenging, and I present them in the hope that it will forge new spiritual and intellectual ground in your hearts and minds, as I know researching and composing them has for me. I'm not much of a body builder, but I know that increasing muscle mass involves the pain of tearing muscles that allow new ones to grow in their wake.

If the pain or effort proves too much for any of you, feel free to raise your hand and I can repeat or clarify any of my remarks, which in total should take less than 30 minutes. About halfway through, I will pause for questions. I am also happy to share my transcripts with conference organizers to distribute to any who are interested in keeping copies for themselves.

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Since as early as 2007, it has been public knowledge that the United States military and veteran populations have been experiencing an epidemic of suicide.[1] Initially, veterans were found to have been taking their own lives at a rate of 17 every day. Beginning in 2009, active duty suicides during the last years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan outnumbered combat fatalities and in fact became the leading cause of death in the military community. More recently, the rate for veterans has been found to have increased to 22 per day[2] while active duty suicides still average about one every day. The issue of military and veteran suicides has made headlines in virtually every major print and television news outlet nation wide.

While Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can explain some of what we are seeing, a new dimension for understanding this epidemic has emerged. Several Veterans Affairs clinicians have ignited new interest around what they have called "Moral Injury," which they claim results from "perpetrating, witnessing, or failing to prevent acts that violate ones religious or moral training and beliefs."[3] Numerous religious leaders have similarly invested time, money, and energy into this phenomenon by creating an interfaith "Soul Repair Center" at Brite Divinity School in Texas.[4] Several major news outlets have lengthy feature articles on moral injury, including the Huffington[5] and Washington[6] Posts, TIME Magazine,[7] and Newsweek.[8]

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[1] http://www.cbsnews.com/news/suicide-epidemic-among-veterans-13-11-2007/
[2] http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf
[3] Litz, 697
[4] www.soulrepair.org
[5] http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/moral-injury
[6] http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/03/29/a-legacy-of-pride-and-pain/
[7] http://nation.time.com/2013/04/17/moral-injury-a-profound-sense-of-alienation-and-abject-shame/
[8] http://www.newsweek.com/new-theory-ptsd-and-veterans-moral-injury-63539

However, the language of injury can be unnecessarily constraining, and furthermore does not seem particularly theological. Widespread discussion on moral injury has not thus far ventured to describe the body upon which such an injury could be inflicted. In each of the aforementioned articles, it is from the mental health profession that "expertise" is drawn., and not moral philosophers, ethicists, or theologians. But any injury that is "moral" in nature must account for the moral self that is subjected to the injury, and this body emerges out of the particularity of its own moral community and formation. In other words, the moral formation of individuals must be accounted for in order to more fully comprehend, and subsequently diagnose and treat, moral injury. To address moral injury and wounds upon the soul of individuals, we must look first and foremost to the religious communities in which they are formed.

To explore such a formation, we must look to experiences gained by individuals that constitute the "moral and religious training and beliefs" acquired prior to injury. Such experiences would include catechesis and other religious doctrine and ritual, but also the cultural experiences that inform, contrast, or complement them. After all, moral formation does not occur in a vacuum, but within a broader context with its own ceremonies, liturgies, and other religious experiences.

Troublingly, modern mass media, especially film (in light of its popularity), has proven more formative than scripture and tradition in forming moral agency in American Christians. Our fighting forces themselves often rely upon a religious lexicon that simultaneously creates and reinforces explicitly Christian imagery. The problem serious Christian peacemakers face is the loss of meaningful moral discernment and formation, which has produced profoundly uninformed expectations about combat that cannot possibly equip men and women in their early 20's for the lived experience of war. We have let movies teach us what it means to go to war, instead of looking to our own ecclesial history and traditions, or relying on our (ecumenical) scriptural imaginations. What dominates the minds of young soldiers-to-be are startlingly problematic phrases ranging from "God bless America" to "kill 'em all, let God sort 'em out."

This evacuation of contemplative and thoughtful language in public discourse and media has created deep rifts in moral coherency and integrity between what is collectively believed and what is individually found to be true by those who do eventually see combat. (Pacifists are as guilty in their deafening silence as patriots are in their overwhelming platitudes in maintaining these polarizing binary assumptions about war and peace.)

This catastrophic stratification of ones moral self that occurs in the absence of meaningful public and private deliberation is what I call "moral fragmentation." It is this schism between perception and practice, between popularized accounts and embodied reality, which frequently gets brought up in VA mental health clinics and "rap sessions" amongst veterans of varying generations. Those we send to war number less than 2.3 million, representing less than 1% of the American populace, but they are three times more likely than their civilian counterparts to commit suicide, often as a result of moral fragmentation resulting from inadequate moral formation and sustainment within their religious communities. Theological reflection has been miscarried, and our young are boiling in the milk of our culture's inability to reflect theologically on scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

Fragmentation does not have to carry the day, however. While some frameworks like "moral injury" and Soul Repair are helpful, they are also deeply flawed. More generic language of "pain" is more widely applicable and less problematic. In the military community, after all, the language of "injury" is heavily stigmatized, and military personnel and families must retain primary authority in determining the terms of their own rehabilitation, moral or otherwise. Proper moral formation works to prevent fragmentation and injury, and similar tactics can also create safe spaces for moral pain to be expressed and individuals to be reintegrated more fully into the life of faith in Churches. For moral reintegration after war to occur, churches must mine their own traditions for the stories, people, and rituals that tell a more coherent account of war and its effects, which can have the added effect of displaying for morally fragmented wounded warriors that their stories fit within the Christian narrative. Dark memories must be given space to be heard without judgment, to be absorbed into the life of the congregation in which our veterans find

themselves, recognizing that the Christian faith is a complicated story of both joy and grief. "Where two or more are gathered,"[9] after all, joys are shared, but so are our burdens. Truly I tell you, what we do for the least of us, the other 1%, members of our very own church family, we do unto Jesus.[10]

Thankfully, the work to stem the epidemic of suicide has begun in earnest in secular places like the VA and in religious places like the Soul Repair Center. Peacemakers must continue to leverage every possible resource that our common history as Americans or as Christians can offer. To do that, we must understand the phenomenon on its own terms so we can engage decisively with public discourse related to combat and the traumas it inflicts. To understand the language we inherit, let's look very closely at this thing being called moral injury, its origins, and assumptions.

Moral Injury – Origins and Assumptions

Despite its recent resurgence, moral injury actually has a lengthy trajectory worthy of interrogation and helpful in correcting certain shortcomings built into its history. If we only have what we see before us, the popular usage of "moral injury," let us work backwards and try to get at what is behind it all. Doctors do this all the time; having only the obvious symptoms a patient expresses, they attempt a diagnosis working from effect (symptoms) backwards to cause and, therefore, the origin.

Diagnosing moral injury can be difficult since the communities and authorities doing so are diverse and multivocal. However, if there is any general consensus on the matter it is that moral injury is the effect of violating some basic notion of right and wrong. The following definition, from the press release for a conference on moral injury held a few weeks ago in the capitol of my home state, gives us a good starting point in understanding this phenomenon. In this description, moral "injury," springs not just from morally questionable acts themselves, but also mere proximity to or perception thereof. It states;

[9] Matthew 18:20, KJV
[10] Matthew 25:40, paraphrase

Moral injury results from having to make difficult moral choices under extreme conditions, experiencing

morally anguishing events or duties, witnessing immoral acts, or behaving in ways that profoundly

challenge moral conscience and identity and the values that support them. Moral injury is found in

feelings of survivor guilt, grief, shame, remorse, anger, despair, mistrust, and betrayal by authorities. In

its most severe forms, it can destroy moral identity and the will to live.[11]

The major force behind educating the public about moral injury, and the convener of this particular conference, is a group that operates out of Texas Christian University. The Soul Repair Center is a product of the vision of two theologians, Rita Nakashima-Brock and Gabriella Lettini. Coupled with the center's founding was their 2012 publication of *Soul Repair: Recovery from Moral Injury After War.* Relying on interviews from multiple soldiers and veterans, they describe moral injury as a "violation of core moral beliefs…[12] the result of reflection on memories of war or other extreme traumatic conditions… [that] comes from having transgressed one's basic moral identity and violated core moral beliefs."[13]

We find in their definition a brief gesture toward identity, toward the self in a particularly moral framework. But they only hint at the moral nature of identity being somehow inherent to the moral nature of this injury. Their broad understanding of moral injury comes as the result of a two-part conference that they convened in 2010, called The Truth Commission on Conscience in War.[14] The first part, held in the historic Riverside Church in New York City in March, featured expert witnesses and firsthand testimony about the moral costs of war upon human beings. The official report from the truth commission was released in December of that year at the National City Christian Church in Washington D.C. on Veterans Day, and represented the convictions of over 70 commissioners present in the New York city gathering. In it, commissioners called for interfaith and ecumenical education about moral injury and for taking seriously theological common ground, like Just War theories, as preventative measures for PTSD and moral injury. Indeed, the mission of

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[11] http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/03/02/3668216/raleigh-conference-to-address.html
[12] Brock and Lettini, xii
[13] Brock and Lettini, xiv
[14] www.conscienceinwar.org

the Soul Repair Center, currently co-directed by Brock and retired chaplain COL Herm Keizer, therefore focuses on public instruction about moral injury in religious communities.

Brock and Lettini co-convened the Truth Commission on Conscience in War after discussions provoked by two very important events that predate the Soul Repair center and book. The first was the 2008 documentary *Soldiers of Conscience*, which received official sanction and cooperation from the United States Army to record and interview numerous service members, both dutifully active soldiers and conscientiously objecting veterans.[15] The second, and more relevant to our discussion today, was the 2009 publication of a proposed treatment model for moral injury by numerous Veterans Affairs clinicians and academics across the country. Brett Litz and six other authors penned "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy" which was shared with Brock and Lettini prior to its release in the academic journal *Clinical Psychology Review*, and subsequently influenced their definition of and interest in moral injury. An evolution of the overall definition is evident in reading the peer-reviewed article, in which Litz et. al. see moral injury as "the lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."[16]

Finally, both Soul Repair and Litz' "moral repair" take initial cues from Jonathan Shay's landmark books on combat trauma, especially his 1995 *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. Cited for coining the term "moral injury," Shay seems to equate it with a "loss of humanity" and a "betrayal of what's right" (he returns to the betrayal portion frequently throughout his book).[17] Careful to make the case toward the end of his book for a universal "species ethic,"[18] Shay situates his argument firmly within a collective understanding of right and wrong, indicting the society that sent soldiers off to war only to turn their backs to them upon homecoming. A marked difference from later frameworks, Shay fundamentally assumes the individual injury is only possible within a

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[15] *Soldiers of Conscience*. Directed by Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg. Albany, CA: Luna Productions, 2007.
[16] Litz, 697
[17] Shay, 20
[18] Shay, 206-209

community responsible for dictating what's right such that it can be betrayed in the first place.

To be fair, the inclusion by Litz et. al. of "social impact" and "bearing witness" locates at least some causality external to the self, and therefore indicates a communal dimension of moral injury. Similarly, the definition proposed by the Soul Repair paradigm, makes mention of "witnessing" and "authorities," referencing the necessarily group dynamic of this particular kind of injury. But it is very hard to find in their bodies of work a robust and critically engaged exploration of the self in moral terms. Consequently, the moral self upon whom an injury might be inflicted remains troublingly ambiguous. After all, moral selves reside within a social context, and external factors are not just necessary for injury, but also for the creation and sustainment of the moral self.

Questions we might ask to illustrate this point include; "Where do Litz' so-called 'expectations' arise from" and "In what context do Brock and Lettini's 'conditions' and 'identity' exist?"

The external nature of these morally injurious factors must not be overlooked, and not just because (with the exception of self harm) injuries are inflicted by someone or something outside the self, but because the self is socially constituted and understood. Formation and context is therefore critical to evaluate in discussions of moral injury. In fact, there are important methodological distinctions between essentially therapeutic approaches of Litz, Brock, etc. and discussions of character that Shay draws from and which are far more instructive for any discussion of things moral, injury or otherwise.

After all, Litz is formed by clinical communities (like the American Psychopathological Association and the Association for Psychological Science) which his instincts and assumptions make evident. The paper that he is primary author of assumes certain clinical realities and uses particularly clinical resources like "working definitions, research… conceptual models, and intervention suggestions."[19] Brock and Lettini, trained in gender studies and theology (Brock from Claremont in 1988, Lettini from Union in 2004), are similarly products of their own contexts as women trained in liberation theologies that

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[19] Paraphrase of Litz and Maguen's own summary of their *Clinical Psychology Review* article, from "Moral Injury in Veterans of War," in *PTSD Research Quarterly*, Vol.23, No.1 (2012)

combat the invisibility of cultural minorities in North American discussions by elevating the significance of perspective and voice. They therefore understandably propose strategies based on dialog, requiring "people willing to listen compassionately and carefully to the moral anguish of veterans."[20]

However, 14 years before Shay's very helpful and obviously influential works, another model was proposed that warranted comparatively little attention. In 1981, Peter Marin wrote in *Psychology Today* not of moral injury, but "Living in Moral Pain." Writing against a TIME Magazine article that suggested veterans needed more social expressions of gratitude, Marin instead insisted that soldiers' moral pain erupted out of out of a "profound moral distress arising from the realization that one has committed acts with real and terrible consequences." On the surface it seems his definition is not far from similar ones later proposed by Shay, Litz, and Brock, but he continues in his article to cite the "inadequacy of prevailing cultural wisdom, models of human nature, and models of therapy to explain moral pain."[21] Marin already took issue as far back as 1981 with clinical and pyscho-analytical models in which the self is "seen as separate and discrete from what surrounds it – an isolated unit complete in itself, relatively unaffected by anything but inner or familial experience."[22]

Making the problem worse, according to Marin; the nature of our particularly American context is such that "the past is escapable, that suffering can be avoided."[23] Implicit in models of moral or soul "repair" are assumptions that, like machines, we can be restored to a condition more like our original packaging. We hide our scars and refuse to accept new forms of normal. The combined effect of these assumptions, of the autonomous self on the one hand and the evacuation of painful experiences on the other, had the effect of depriving veterans of what Marin insists is "precisely the kind of community and good company that make it possible for people to see themselves clearly."[24]

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[20] Brock and Lettini, xviii
[21] Marin, 68
[22] Marin, 74
[23] Marin, 74
[24] Marin, 77

Like Shay, Marin turns to archetypes in mythic figures in order to think through identity and character, but not to the same effect. Interestingly, Marin relies not on Achilles and Odysseus, as Shay does, but on Oedipus – in a direct shot across the bow of psychoanalysis' founder, Sigmund Freud. Freud, Marin claims, diagnoses the Oedipal complex poorly, for the epic archetype "suffered not so much because of what he had done, but because of what he had *learned* he had done."[25] Marin finds that life's best lessons and most powerfully transformative resources for moral pain are rarely couched in therapeutic or psychoanalytic frames, helpful as they might be, but in stories and narration, since identity forming and sustaining narratives are "more apparent in literature than in therapy."[26]

[questions]

Moral Formation & Reintegration - Character in Context

If I were to summarize the miscarried emergence of moral injury, it would be to identify an otherwise healthy start in its focus on character and the use of culturally significant literature as Shay does but to lament its adoption by the psychoanalytic community with its inherent aversion to the social reality of human life. Litz and Brock, in their persistent use of the language of "injury" reveal a distance from the very service members they otherwise hope to help. Discussions of "injury" are highly stigmatized within the military and any talk thereof immediately displaces itself from any internal deliberations by military communities. Shay himself only uses the term sparingly, and substitutes "injury" with other words, like moral "survival" or "luck,"[27] and "violation."[28] Indeed, the departure from early categorizations of combat trauma within a framework of character is noteworthy and not without significance. The earliest commentators, like Marin, instead focus on moral "pain," a much more inclusive term that soldiers and veterans might not be so reluctant to

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[25] Marin, 74. Emphasis my own.
[26] Marin, 74
[27] Shay, 197
[28] Shay, 208

adopt. After all, pain is merely weakness leaving the body, and can be experienced even by Congressional Medal of Honor recipients.

The Christian community, on the other hand, has a very short history of speaking of moral distress in this way. After returning home from battle, Holy Roman imperial knights of the medieval era were required to purify themselves, as Israelites of old were.[29] Though the prior century saw the language evolve in secular discussions quite quickly, moving from "soldiers heart" and "shell shock" to "operational battlefield fatigue" and "posttraumatic stress disorder," the Church has already had a narrative architecture in place for the constellation of acts performed in war. The word we have given to this was not "injury," or even "pain," but often simply "guilt," describing the violence inflicted in battle as some proximity to or manifestation of sin.

Tragically, Christian culture and syntax has failed to form mature moral agents such that they may identify and engage decisively with sin. Lewis Mudge, in his book *The Church as Moral Community,* observes that "from nursery school to adulthood a *secular* formation reinforced by peer groups at every age, reflected in the media, and needed simply to function in an advanced industrial society, functions far more forcefully than anything congregations can provide."[30] Indeed, mass media provides disturbing case studies in the de-evolution of thoughtful and morally coherent discourse into rhetorical exhibitionism; we need look no further than movies like *Sergeant York* and *We Were Soldiers*, aforementioned phrases like "God bless America" and "kill 'em all, let God sort 'em out," or books like *The American Patriot's Bible* and *A Table in the Presence.* The symbolism, rituals, language, and often beliefs of church-going Americans themselves, though passed off as Christian, frequently fail to express anything distinctive from the world around them. Born into a culture and its rhetoric, the Church too often cannot tell itself apart from the world it is called to be **in** but not **of.** This is caused by ineffective formation within Christian communities whose identity too often reflects the interests and expectations not of Christ, but of the world.

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[29] Verkamp, Bernard. The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern Times (Chicago, IL: University of Scranton Press, 2006)
[30] Mudge, 72

Along with this dislocated identity comes descriptions of combat that fail to account for the actual lived experience of war which fails to properly form young men and women in the military virtues necessary to operate within the moral framework required by war. Cases in point abound, but for brevity we shall look at two in particular, both from the realm of cinema. The first involves a 2009 film that took both Best Picture and Best Director, the first awarded to a woman. Military and civilian communities perceived Katheryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker*, about an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team in Operation Iraqi Freedom, very differently. Upon its release, the veteran community largely agreed with their civilian counterparts that it was a gripping theatrical presentation, but objected to its portrayal of war.[31] One of the film's main subjects in development, EOD expert SFC Jeffrey Sarver, sued Bigelow and her team for defamation of character. Many other EOD personnel voiced similar concerns that the film was dangerously unrealistic. Blaster One, the main character, espoused a swaggering disavowal of military procedures and values that, according to numerous veteran-penned articles, represented an endangerment to unit cohesion and safety. Sentiments amongst the military community at large suggested that, were a character like Blaster One to actually exist, he would endanger the lives of his team as well as bring discredit to his unit.

Movies that depict violence cavalierly, without coupling it with its social and moral consequences, do a grave disservice to the consciences of the men and women we eventually send to fight our wars. That one can reference "John Wayne" and simultaneously evoke war films such as *The Green Berets*, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, or *The Longest Day,* illustrates my point well. The movies themselves are less injurious than the character Wayne frequently conjures up – the same swaggering solitary stoic figure that Blaster One evokes. Whereas the characteristics this kind of figure presents presumes to be virtues, the real people it fictitiously represents openly declare are in fact vices.

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[31] This is a disproportionately polite way of phrasing veterans' perception of the film. Reviews by veterans from such sites as *The Huffington Post*, *VetVoice*, *Defense Tech*, and *Variety Magazine* used phrases like "inaccurate," "nonsensical," "ruinous," and "absurd." A senior EOD team member wrote in Air Force Times that the movie was "grossly exaggerated and not appropriate." Christian Lowe, a civilian reporter for The Military Times and embedded with units in the time the film depicts, wrote "Some of the scenes are so disconnected with reality to be almost parody." Mark Boal, the Oscar-winning screenwriter for *The Hurt Locker*, boasted (ironically and insultingly) that no Army extras were used during filming.

Credibility, however, should rest not on figments of imagination, but actual war-torn experiences – the moral authority to speak of war belongs not to screenwriters or actors, but to soldiers themselves. The fog of war has formed their identities and we would be wise to follow the path they have forged before us. The character of the moral guides we choose should matter immensely. It is not Hollywood itself that is the problem, of course, as though movies themselves are inherently corrupting. But fictionalizing real lives, embellishing embodied realities, can have a corrosive effect. We too easily overlook important context and proof text ideological beliefs or impossible expectations about war.

John Wayne, my 2nd example, infamously swaggering and stoic in his many starring roles in war films, was too young for WWI and by the time WWII rolled around, he was Republic Studio's biggest moneymaker and had the all too eager help of his studio being made ineligible for the draft by being classified 2-A ("in the national interest").[32] Jimmy Stewart, on the other hand, left a lucrative movie career and sought help from his studio **to get into** the Army Air Corps, where he had to fight against being used as a USO propaganda tool or as a spokesperson for war bonds. After coming home from the war as a full colonel, including numerous combat missions over Europe, he remarked brazenly to LIFE Magazine, "no more war pictures."[33] The first picture he did star in after his wartime service centered on the story of a young man who wanted to end his own life, which directly contravenes the kinds of movies in which "The Duke" decided to invest himself. *It's A Wonderful Life* continues to be a classic movie and seems prophetic in light of the epidemic of real soldier and veteran suicide committed by my own generation and (more statistically significant) the generation influenced by John Wayne and his monetarily beneficial but malformative manliness.

Tragically, it is these stories that persist in our culture and even in our churches. They dominate our perception of war, and overpower those images the Christian community is otherwise engaged in providing its members. Hilde Nelson, a philosopher right here at MSU who is in the narrative school of thought, describes something she calls "master

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[32] According to
http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Hollywood/2010/02/28/John-Wayne--World-War-II-and-the-Draft
[33] "LIFE Comes Home With Jimmy Stewart," *LIFE Magazine* (September 24, 1945), p.127

narratives" as those "stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings… often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types." These overpowering paradigms are used "not only to make sense of our experiences, but to justify what we do." They are "repositories of common norms" that "exercise a certain authority over our moral imaginations and play a role in informing our moral intuitions."[34]

The problem with these master narratives about war is that one cannot be both swaggering and stoic while being realistic about the humbling and horrific experiences gained in modern war. Blaster One was not just diseased himself, addicted to the very thing that destroyed him, but is at the same time a disease threatening the moral imagination of communities both martial and ecclesial. The assumptions inherent in these types of characters and stories infect the hearts and minds of those we prepare for and send to war. Mudge, author of *The Church as Moral Community*, claims,

Certain moral principles or materials - both from the Christian tradition and from the worlds in which church members live - are drawn into congregational life and used to help build the sacramental household. These perspectives begin to participate in the moral substance of the body. They combine to produce the assumptions and principles that go into actual formation."[35]

Secular symbolism, which includes what Mudge calls "principles or materials" and what Nelson terms "stock plots and readily recognizable character types" informs Christian assumptions about war, its legitimacy, exercise, and moral content (or lack thereof). Dangerously young men and increasingly women are masculinized into superficial forms of life that cannot withstand the profound moral pressure impressed upon them in combat. Wayne's infamously unstrapped helmet would, as soon as a new recruit hit the drill pad, be violently smacked off their head by any self-respecting drill instructor interested in preserving the lives of his charges once they arrive at the frontlines; "better a cracked skull than a mothers broken heart" I often overheard my own drill mutter.

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[34] Nelson, 6
[35] Mudge, 84

Churches have at least some distinctively theological formative instincts, and it is important to explore the "moral and religious training and beliefs" which, upon violation, might produce something like a moral injury. The various doctrines of Just War are helpful in this regard, though they rarely are aired out in times of any significance, like on September 12th, 2001 or in March 2003, for example. In fact, Litz, Brock, etc. would find it encouraging that Saint Augustine, the ancient theologian often cited as being responsible for the conception of Just War, did not intend his scattered remarks about war to be leveraged for use as a "public policy checklist," as Daniel Bell recently laments in his *Just War as Christian Discipleship*.[36] Instead, Augustine's remarks were not issued as some public intellectual, but as a pastor responding to the deeply personal letters written by soldiers such as Boniface, Marcellinus, and others; not blanket statements, but specific responses to individuals within particular contexts.

The failure of moral communities like churches to engage meaningfully with those it participates in sending to war creates morally fragmented individuals. The stories we tell in our culture and in our churches do not reflect the actual lived experience of war and those we send are catastrophically ill-prepared to participate conscientiously in war as Christians should. Without taking extreme care to identify what war actually requires, without forming agents morally equipped for the extremes that war produces, the best our communities can do (and have been doing) is to repair the effects of our own shortcomings. But an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If Basic Anatomy classes are prerequisite to those like Intravenous Therapy or Cardiac Rhythm Interpretation that Emergency Medical Technicians must take, how is it that we claim to be able to identify moral "injuries" without first identifying the moral body upon which they might be inflicted?

To return to the methodology proposed by Marin and practiced by Shay, churches must mine our own literary (i.e. scriptural and liturgical) traditions for exemplars of moral persons worthy of leading the way to just wars (if there are such things). Such people will be those who descended to the hell of war and returned to tell the tale not only with their lips, but with their lives. Such individuals also abound, and are surprisingly well known, though

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[36] Bell, Daniel. *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather Than the State.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009.

not for their military service. Saints like George, Martin of Tours, Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Ignatius of Loyola, and Franz Jagerstatter would all prove deeply informative for Christian communities wrestling with how Christians respond proactively to wars and rumors of war. Many such individuals paid dearly for following their own moral and religious training and beliefs, but rarely did so in keeping with our own modern partisan impulses. George, the patron of such sprawling empires as England and Portugal, faced not a dragon (as the 12th century *Golden Legend* fictitiously recounts) but a gaggle of pagan Roman governors who insisted he confess Apollo as the son of God. Martin, famous among pacifists for refusing to fight, only did so after a full military term of over 20 years. Joan, the poor maid of Orleans, insisted, during her kangaroo court martial, that she preferred the standard to the sword and favored not leading with weapon in hand, but with guidon held high. Francis and Ignatius, each once formidable knights, became peacemakers and turned their back on war while persisting in their martial virtues. Francis would today be diagnosed with PTSD for hearing voices and wandering the streets at night. Ignatius' order, the Jesuits, was modeled on the obedience instilled in soldiers and to this day is referred to "God's Marines."

To recover a sense of moral selves in particularly Christian contexts requires we base our identities in scriptural and hagiographical literature. Narrative and character based ethical frameworks assume that we need exemplars, moral guides in the life of faith upon which to base our own self-understanding. Identity formation occurs within a community of fellow individuals engaged in constant creation or re-imagination of the moral universe based upon shared symbolism, rituals, and belief. According to Mudge, the challenge for the Christian is to "live authentically *both* within the church's reshaping of the moral imagination *and* among the corrosive pressures of political life."[37] Nelson describes identities as "complex narrative constructions consisting of a fluid interaction of the many stories and fragments of stories surrounding the things that seem most important" to a person or community over time.[38] Becoming a moral self takes place in a particular context within a community of shared values and convictions. Insofar as therapy is unable or unwilling to venture into moral and

[37] Mudge, 79
[38] Nelson, 20

social territory, it is inadequate for the task of genuine and lasting moral formation or reintegration.

It is not just therapy that Christian soldiers need, but churches' proactive adoption of their own existing liturgical resources. Rather than using Just War preemptively as justification for certain wars, pacifists and patriots alike would more accurately employ Augustine's gifts as elements to *form* morally robust and coherent agents prepared to engage in necessary evil with restraint and compassion for one's enemies.[39] Tragically, few Christian communities in 2001 and 2003 took responsibility for such doctrinal frames, and the stories of Just Warriors going AWOL to avoid violating their own "religious and moral training and beliefs" were distressingly sparse. The church does not need stories about John Wayne, but John of God, known as the patron of booksellers, who was also a 15th century Portuguese soldier whose penitential stress led the saint to scream incoherently in the middle of a sermon by John of Avila. He was committed to an asylum, where he heard God tell him to tend to the infirm, insisting upon remaining at the hospital even after he was discharged, eventually becoming its superintendent. A distinctively Christian participation in war is not expressed in stories like the one featuring Blaster One, but the one described by Bill Mahedy, whose own writings wrestle profoundly with the nature of God in the midst of combat in Vietnam. With Marin, Mahedy dismisses modern therapeutic assumptions by saying "The incessant search for a perfectly fulfilled self is nothing more than undisguised narcissism."[40] The emphasis on the individual within what he calls the "phoniness and inner emptiness engendered by the therapeutic mind-set" can double back and cripple a veteran's moral integrity by failing to account for what Marin called "the kind of community and good company that make it possible for people to see themselves clearly."[41]

Unclouded by embellishment and unencumbered by national or political self-interest, it is to this liturgically inclined literature that the church may turn to form its people more robustly, for, as Mudge rightly claims, "moral formation in the church seeks to generate communities in touch with the world and all its problems yet shaped in a daily telling and

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[39] Demonization of the enemy was cited by both Marin and Mahedy as profoundly destructive to ones sense of meaning and moral identity.

[40] Mahedy, 204

[41] Marin, 77

retelling of the *Christian* story."[42] It is people like these, integral to the community of faith, that have what Mudge calls the "formational density needed to enact the faith in its integrity."[43] Their firsthand stories can carry the moral content of war far more reliably than others outside the Christian cannon.

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[42] Mudge, 71
[43] Mudge, 79

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