

WOMEN IN COMBAT:

DOES GOD'S WORD GIVE GUIDANCE?

by David W. Wollenburg

As I write this article, we are at the very brink of war. By the time it is published, the war may be over. This is not the best time to be talking about the subject at hand. But in response to an assignment, I offer the following with the prayer that it will serve the "ministry of reconciliation" to which we have been called.

We live in a world infected irreparably by sin; a world condemned to chaos and uncertainty; a world in rebellion that leads to decay. Ours is a world racing toward the end of time as we "hear of wars and rumors of wars," and we see "nation ... rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," and we witness "famines and earthquakes in various places" (Matt. 24:6-7).

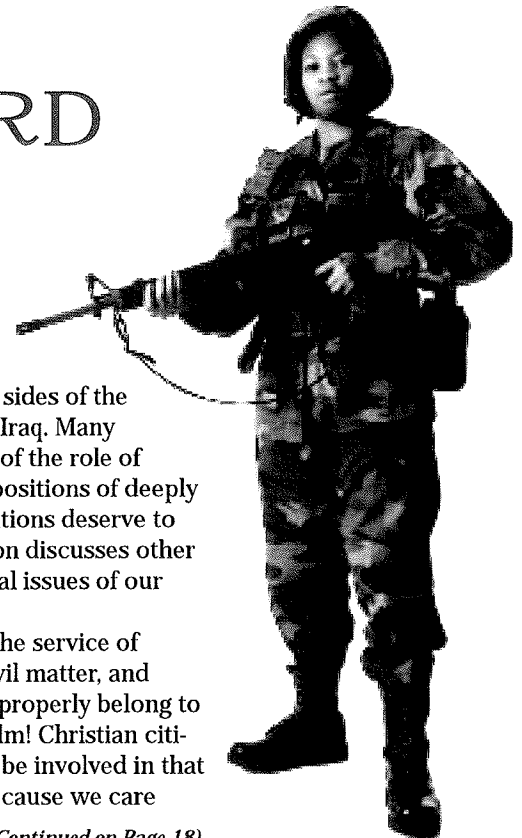
Into such a world God sent His Son to redeem those who live in this present chaos. Jesus fulfilled the Law in our place. He died for all in order to satisfy the Father's justice. He rose again to assure us of this fact. He sent us His Spirit so that we might know that we are not alone as we await the end of time. He says, "See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen" (Matt. 24:6).

It is in these times that we are considering the question of the church addressing the issue of women in combat.

Unquestionably, this is an emotional topic. There are men and women of good faith on both sides, even as there are peo-

ple of good faith on both sides of the question of the war with Iraq. Many approach the discussion of the role of women in combat from positions of deeply held faith, and these positions deserve to be heard just as our nation discusses other societal and constitutional issues of our day.

And that's the point: The service of women in combat is a civil matter, and discussions pro and con properly belong to the civil and political realm! Christian citizens of the State need to be involved in that discussion as citizens, because we care about the answers. *(Continued on Page 18)*



'What does the Bible teach about wo

"Where does The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod stand on women serving in combat?"

In response to such questions directed to his office, Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick has asked the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations to study the issue on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessional writings.

In response, the commission invited individuals who have had experience serving as parish pastors, military chaplains and as professors at the Synod's seminaries to make presentations on the topic.

The members of the commission feel that the insights shared in these presentations merit wider exposure. They believe that the contemporary discussion of the topic of women serving in the

TWO VIEWS

IS GOD INDIFFERENT?

by Leroy Vogel

Remember Norman Rockwell's painting, "The Tearful Farewell," that depicts a young man in military attire striding forth to action and adventure amid the tears of mom, dad and sweetheart?

Today, the tearful farewell may likely portray a young woman in military attire departing for combat while dad and the kids stare out the window with bewildered looks.

How did this change come about?

A brief history

World War II military planners ascertained that some non-combat positions could be filled by women and "free a man to fight." Thus, the Women's Army Corps (WAC) was organized. In 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Act, which authorized permanent status for women in the military. This law stipulated: 1) The number of women in the military may not exceed two percent; and 2) a Combat Exclusion Law stating, "Women may be assigned to all units except those with a high probability of engaging in combat. ..."

In 1973, President Richard Nixon decreed an end to the draft. Men did not volunteer in sufficient numbers to meet Defense Department quotas. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird waived the two percent stipulation of WASA. The number of women in the military burgeoned. The Service Academies and ROTC units were integrated.



A female United States Army private uses a fixed bayonet during basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton's Secretary of Defense ordered: "The services shall permit women to compete for assignment in aircraft engaged in combat missions ... develop a legislative proposal to repeal the existing Combat Exclusion Law and permit the assignment of women to ships that are engaged in combat missions." In 1994 the Army integrated combat occupations previously reserved for men.

The fiat was complete, a great social experiment was underway, as well as a great national debate.

Many analysts and commentators, military and civilian, saw this experiment as disastrous to national defense. The concern of many was that, in the military, traditional gender roles are there for a reason and gender neutrality/political correctness not only puts national security at risk, but endangers the lives of the very military personnel who provide that security.

Is Scripture silent?

Laying aside the pragmatic concerns, the question facing the Christian community can be stated as follows: Is God indifferent to the question of

(Continued on Page 19)

Women serving in the military?

military and in combat will be enriched by the perspectives presented in the articles by Rev. Leroy Vogel and Dr. David Wollenburg.

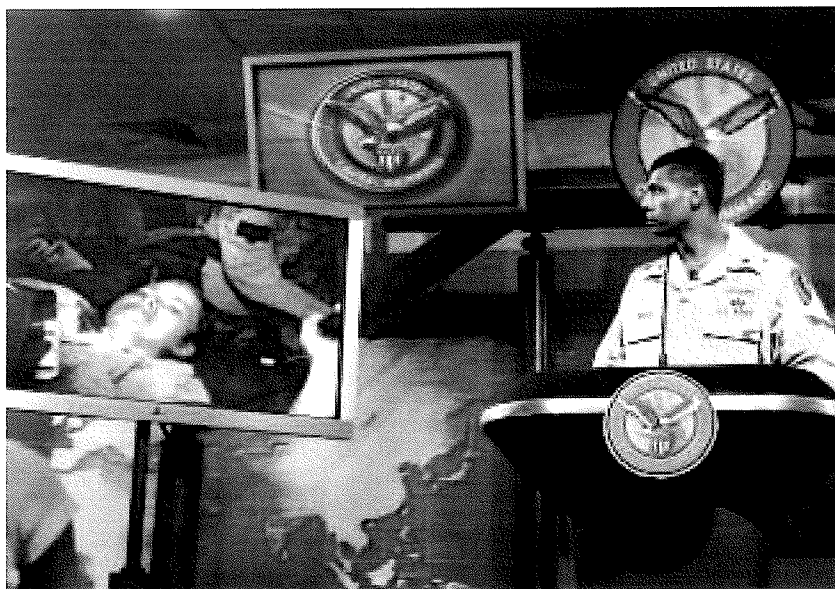
The Commission on Theology, as it has gone about its study of this topic during this time when our country is at war, is mindful of the debt of gratitude that American citizens owe to all of those dedicated women and men who have responded to their country's call to serve in the military, and who are willing to risk their lives in the service of their country.

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Executive Director*

Commission on Theology and Church Relations

(Continued from Page 16) But this is not an issue either of church polity or theology, and we as the church need to respect that fact. The church's job is to encourage, build up and serve the "ministry of reconciliation" that St. Paul describes in 2 Cor. 5:18ff. Our call is to follow St. Paul's example. He says it this way: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited" (2 Cor. 6:3).

We cannot, of course, ignore clear moral issues. Indeed, we must address them when and where it is appropriate and Scriptural. The "ministry of reconciliation" to which we have been called speaks the word of Law and Gospel for the purpose of saving souls and witnessing to God's work in Christ Jesus. Our responsi-



The capture and rescue of Private First Class Jessica Lynch highlighted the issue of women serving in the military. Here, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Vincent Brooks is looking at a picture of Lynch during her rescue.

bility is to proclaim, "That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). That alone is enough for us to do.

Having called us to faith in times of worldly chaos, Jesus adds another promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). And so, Christ says what the Spirit says through the apostle John, that is, we are to take the Word at face value, neither adding to nor subtracting from its message (Rev. 22:18-19).

Our own Lutheran Confessions hold such a view of the Scriptures. Indeed, in the Smalcald Articles, first printed in 1538, Martin Luther, referring to Gal. 1:8, wrote:

"It will not do to formulate articles of faith on the basis of the holy Fathers' works or words. Otherwise, their food, clothes, houses, etc., would also have to be articles of faith—as has been done with relics. This means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith."

It is important to understand this point as we address the question of women in combat, as well as other subjects of political debate. "Only the Word of God should establish articles of faith." And, the fact is, no matter how hard we try to discover clear guidance in the Scriptures regarding the subject of women in combat; it just is not there. We need to admit that.

It helps as we remember that God Himself recognizes the difference between the church and civil government and assigns different responsibilities to each. Jesus made this point when He responded to the question of paying taxes in Matthew 22, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," He said, "and to God what is God's."

St. Paul wrote, "The authorities that exist have been established by God ... He is God's servant to do you good" (Rom. 13:1, 4).

The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, says it this way:

"Since this power of the church bestows eternal things and is exercised only through the ministry of the Word, it interferes with civil government as little as the art of singing interferes with it. ... The powers of church and civil government must not be mixed."

We, as the Church have been entrusted with the ministry of the Word. We are to be about the job of reconciliation. We are called to share God's peace with one another, even in time of war.

Going to war is not an easy matter.

Individuals must be encouraged and comforted.

Provision must be made for those who are left at home, for the lonely, the scared and the anxious. That's where we need to turn our attention.

We need to talk about how we can help, support and instruct both women and men who are called to combat. We need to talk about how to help and support their families, friends and the communities from which they have been drawn.

And while we do, let's also recognize and give thanks for the fact that ours is not an immoral or unfeeling government. The United States military respects individual rights even as it encourages human excellence and advancement. It cares about the families of those who are sent to war. It cares about the unborn (pregnant women are not deployed to war so that innocent lives might

(Continued on Page 20)

(Continued from Page 17) women in combat?

The major issue that clouds theological engagement on the matter is the apparent lack of any definitive “proof text” of Scripture that addresses women as military combatants. A purview of Law, prophets, Gospels and epistles simply does not indicate this to be an issue about which God has spoken authoritatively.

But not too fast! Does silence automatically imply indifference?

Where to begin? At the beginning, of course. Gen. 1:26ff indicates that both sexes are created in the image of God, and Gal. 3:28 attests that there is no sexual priority or preference with respect to salvation in Christ. However, both Old and New Testaments identify a difference of rights, responsibilities and roles pertaining to the sexes.

Ignoring the Biblical account of creation, radical feminism identifies sexual differentiation and roles as social constructs, and, if society has created the distinctions, society can abolish them.

Lutherans believe, teach and confess that sexual differentiation and roles are part and parcel of God’s “Order of Being.” That is, if God is the Creator and Designer of the sexes as well as of their differentiation and roles, to overturn that order represents the abandonment of Biblical religion.

Ordered equality

Is not part of woman’s “glory” to be found in her God-given role as life-giver and nurturer—not as life destroyer? Is man’s role not to protect and nourish her in that glorious role? Does not the abandonment of the arrangement established in Eden fly in the face of God’s design for His creation?

These are questions worth pondering because an alien voice again has entered Eden: “Yea, hath God said there is a complementary differentiation between the roles of man and woman?”

Scripture is clear. God made two different sexes, equal but with assigned roles. Sexual equality is not the issue; ordered equality is. Scripture and the tradition of the Church assign to man the role of defender, protector, warrior. To woman is given the role of life-giver, nurturer, sustainer.

While it may be argued that there is no specific Scriptural passage that forbids a woman to serve as warrior, the apparent accommodation of some within the Church to the spirit of the age that turns warrior into a unisex role would appear, at a minimum, to be a departure from the divine wisdom of the Creator regarding the differentiation of the sexes.

While some may view it as a shaky premise upon which to hang the will of God, there is a curious Hebrew interpretation of Deut. 22:5 that is rendered in the New International Version: “A woman must not wear men’s clothing ... for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.”



A United States Marine Corps female recruit enjoys a short break during boot camp. The Marines train an average of 3,700 male and 600 female recruits a day at Parris Island.

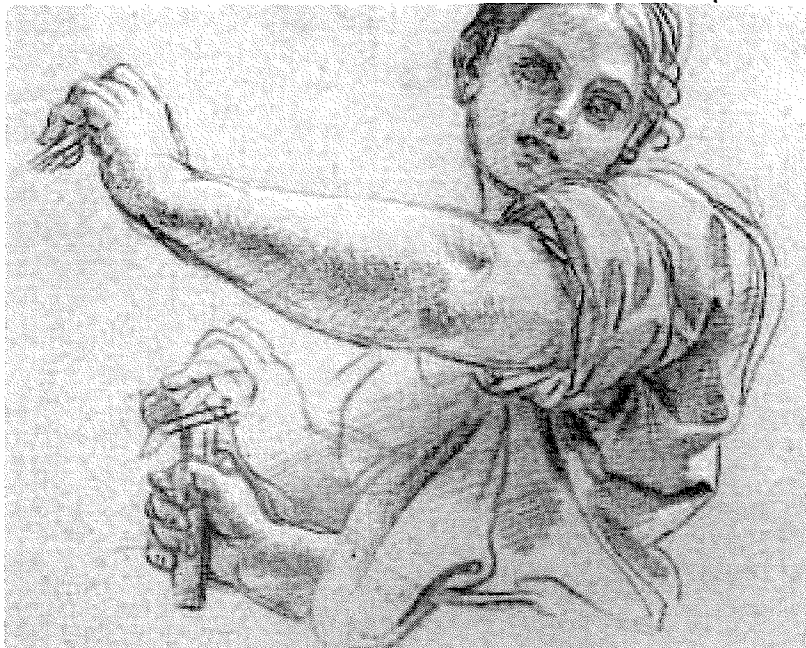
A prohibition against cross-dressing? Or is there more? The construct of import is the compound noun *keli-geber*, translated above as “men’s clothing.” In Hebrew, *keli* denotes “equipment,” specifically a soldier’s equipment. Further, the Hebrew noun *geber* denotes “mighty man” or “hunter” or “warrior.” Thus, a legitimate translation of the phrase uses language of a decidedly military flavor: “No woman shall put on the gear of a warrior.”

The church fathers understood it so, as did John Calvin and Martin Luther. Luther knew Hebrew and comments on the verse as follows: “A woman shall not bear the weapons of a man ... it is improper. ... Through this law [God] reproaches any nation in which this custom is observed.” Why? Because God created male and female with specific and complementary characteristics. It is in their relationship with one another that the two constitute the full expression of humanity.

To paraphrase Luther in another context, woman was created to be a vessel for life, not to kill and destroy.

(Continued on Page 20)

(Continued from Page 18) not be a risk). It cares about those who are orphaned, and those whose spouse or child never returns. It even cares about the sexual behavior of its members and seeks to encourage moral and ethical behavior.



Jael was an experienced tent-rigger. This drawing by Carlo Maratta depicts Jael as she lifts the hammer.

As the church we can do it better: That's our call. Our chaplains do it day after day; so do our pastors. Our call in these days is to pray for them, and encourage them even as we pray for and encourage the men and women who stand in the face of combat.

At the same time, we will pray for and encourage those individual Christian men and women who are engaged in the political process. They are addressing the social and civil questions of our age in the proper places—in the halls of Congress, in the courts and statehouses of our nation, and in all the places where public policy is decided.

That is their job, not the church's. The Savior has given the church other things to do.



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(Continued from Page 19)

What about Deborah?

Proponents of women in combat who point to the Deborah account in Judges 4 for support would do well to examine the Biblical text rather than a "Bible story" commentary. As Israel's enemies prevailed, God employed Deborah to communicate His command to a man, Barak, directing him to recruit an army and promising victory. Barak was recalcitrant and insisted that Deborah accompany him. God vowed to shame Barak by giving honor for victory to a woman. Deborah capitulates and accompanies Barak to Mount Tabor, but no further. Consistent with Deuteronomy, she donned no battle gear nor engaged in the conflict. Barak (unaccompanied by Deborah) led 10,000 men into the valley to a resounding victory. The rebuke for Barak's recalcitrance was rendered when a heroic woman, Jael, was given the opportunity to slay the fleeing enemy commander, Sisera. She did this in her own tent, with household equipment, not as a warrior on a battlefield.

The story of Deborah presents a condemnation of male cowardice in the face of God's command; it does not provide a glorification or endorsement of woman as warrior.

The sound of silence

This all-too-brief article is only an introduction to the Biblical implications of the question, "Is God indifferent to women in combat?" Yet to be mined are the riches of the New Testament with its beautiful depiction of the harmonious, God-pleasing relationship relevant to the complementary roles of men and women. It should be enough, however, to encourage a deeper exploration of the question.

At the very least, before a woman embarks upon a role as military combatant, she should consider this: If God is indifferent to the woman-warrior concept and a woman chooses to serve in a *non*combatant role, God is not offended. If, however, God is not indifferent to the woman warrior concept, and a woman seeks service as a *combatant*, does she not become a victim of her own will and disobedient to that of God?

The stakes appear to merit the expenditure of our church's finest and most diligent theological efforts.



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