

FOREWORD

As the text that follows was being prepared for publication in the Winter of 2009, the armed forces of the United States were still engaged in conflict in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but also, for the first time in years, were meeting all recruitment goals. Families of those servicemen and women—and in many cases the companies and corporations for which they worked—were actively participating in all sorts of activities in support of their service. With the beginning of a new presidential administration, however, what the future holds for these conflicts, those serving within them, and their families at home, is anyone's guess.

Added to the mix of this reality are three movies from 2008 dealing with crucial aspects of military action remaining in wide release. The first, *Valkyrie*, a retelling of the plot by German officers to assassinate Hitler, raises the question as to whether or not a tyrant is to be tolerated, and if not, whose responsibility it is to depose him. The second, *The Reader*, a fictional account of the life of a former concentration camp guard in post-World War II Germany, raises the question of the responsibility of individual soldiers for actions taken while in military service. A third movie, *Defiance*, relates the true story of Jewish resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied Belarussian forests, and raises the questions

that come with armed resistance to an established authority. While all three movies deal specifically with German actions during World War II, they address questions of universal significance which in one way or another have confronted all Christians who have taken up arms for one reason or another.

Without a doubt the chief question posed is the morality of a given action by an individual in the midst of armed conflict. Specifically: How can a Christian know that what is being done is right or good in the eyes of God? If that Christian is serving in the military, does moral obligation cease to be an issue? If military service results in a chronically troubled conscience, can it ever be quieted?

This book offers answers to these questions. It describes chiefly how a Christian can indeed serve in the military, and serve in the military in the most dangerous and deadly of positions, with a clear conscience. It also addresses the role of armed conflict in general in Christian life. It is hoped that by offering this classic work in a new and fresh translation, it will provide comfort not only to Christian men and women serving in the military, but also to the Christian-on-the-street who himself is troubled by these questions.

Of course, the original work translated here (cf. Dr. Martin Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. by J. G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1885) Vol. 10 C., Cols. 488-531) did not have chapters or study questions. These have been added to ease reading, study and reference. The greater historical and current theological context is treated in the extensive Afterword. Special thanks are due

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Paul Strawn