CHAPTER XVI

A JESUIT COMEDY ON THE MORALITY OF SOLDIERS

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In the late 16th Century Jacobus Pontanus wrote a comedy by the title *Stratocles sive bellum* (Stratocles or War).¹ Pontanus (1542-1626) taught Rhetoric and Humanities at the Jesuit university of Dillingen (Bavaria) and at the Jesuit school St. Salvator in Augsburg.² The play was revised several times by the author on the occasion of various productions.³ The plot has the basic elements of a comedy, because it

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¹ This contribution utilizes introductory material to a Latin-English edition of this play. It has been translated by students of classics at Loyola University Maryland under the guidance of Thomas McCreight. Several students contributed to the introduction and to the commentary; specifically Katherine Bagley, Caitlin Engler, and Michael Mennis did research concerning war and morality. This contribution is therefore indebted to all of them. The edition is: Jacobus Pontanus: *Soldier or Scholar - Stratocles or War*. Translated by Caitlin Allender, Michael Campitelli, Caitlin Engler, Richard Gibbons, Sean Gloth, Elida Lynch, Irene Murphy, Nathan Zawie. Contributions by Katherine Bagley, Lorraine Cuddeback, Mark Meleka, Michael Mennis, Alexander Vaeth, Ashley Woodworth. Edited, with appendices and contributions by Thomas D. McCreight and Paul Richard Blum. Apprentice House, Baltimore 2009.


was used by the author as an exercise in poetry, rhetoric, and delivery of Latin prose. This is how the author summarized the plot:

An aristocratic young man, fed up with his studies, contemplates military service. His teacher is unable by any reasoning to call him back from the path he has embarked upon. The young man enlists another youth who commits himself to the journey, dressed in military garb, and he happens upon two deserting soldiers, unsightly and ill-used both in their dress and in their hygiene. Both young men are so moved by the deserters' remarks deploiring and reviling their lot in life that they return to their studies. One of the deserters, however, hopes to be welcomed back by the wife and small children he had deserted and left penniless and bereft of friends. She gives him a nasty reception, with verbal and corporal abuse, and he barely manages to have his sin forgiven and to return to her good graces.4

The young man bears the name Stratocles, which connotes war, whereas his teacher is Eubulus, the well-meaning advisor. Their conversation touches upon basic questions of the war theory of the time, and the conversations with the deserters and the comical interactions between husband and wife shed light on ethical problems and highlight the awareness of the Jesuit - while he was teaching classics - of the moral implications connected with the deliberate choice for enrolling in the military and the justification of war, in general.

Stratocles' teacher Eubulus, in the midst of his attempt to dissuade his student from going off to fight, acknowledges the existence of a debate about whether and under what circumstances war was justified. "Would you say to me, 'Do you therefore wish that war never be waged? Do you wish that we bare our throats defenselessly to the enemy?' I want nothing of the sort. There is a time when waging war is useful, and indeed necessary..." (219-223). The arguments for and against war that both student and teacher advance have their background in intellectual and theological debates in the sixteenth century and earlier that Pontanus will have known and exploited. The play can be seen as providing instruction in philosophy and theology as well as in Latin and rhetoric.

4 Translation from the 2009 edition.
JUST WAR AND THE MORALITY OF MILITARY SERVICE

The concept of a "just war" goes back to St. Augustine of Hippo. In a letter written to Boniface, Count of Africa, in 418 A.D. he wrote "You must will to have peace, and be compelled by necessity to wage war, in order that God may free us from the necessity and preserve us in peace. We don't seek peace in order to incite war but we wage war in order to obtain peace. Be a peacemaker even when you are waging war, so that by overcoming those who attack you can beat them to the advantages of peace."\(^5\) Thomas Aquinas further elaborated this concept in his *Summa theologiae*. He declares that it is not always sinful to wage war, and that a war can be considered just if (1) a prince gives authorization, (2) it serves a just cause, (3) the intention is rightful.\(^6\) Just wars are typically defensive in nature and are a response to some previous wrong. Therefore, the cause must be just in that it is avenging certain wrong actions that have been performed against a people, regaining something that was wrongfully seized, or if the offending nation is unwilling to make amends for some offensive action against the aggrieved nation. Right intention means that the purpose of the war is a just one, which is the advancement of good or the avoidance of evil. Proper authority means that a correct and legitimate authority for a principality, state, or nation is the only one who can declare this war. These requirements are commonly called *jus ad bellum*, or the justice/right to war. Related to these issues is the argument of proportionality, which mostly concerns actions in war and commands that no more intentional harm is done to one side than the other, especially not by the side that claims it is engaging in a just war. Obviously, both sides cannot claim to be fighting a just war unless one side is mistaken or a failure in initial diplomacy made the cause of the war uncertain. Therefore, it is expected that those who have proven they are engaging in a just war must remain just while the war is in progress, in accordance with *jus in bello* or justice/right in war.

During the sixteenth century, there were two prominent just war theorists in the Catholic Church: the Dominican friar Francisco de

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\(^6\) *Summa theologiae* II—II 40 c.
Vitoria (1483-1546) and Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548-1617). Both Vitoria and Suárez expanded on St. Thomas’ justification of war under certain circumstances, and each used Biblical support as well as Catholic social thought for his arguments. They agree that war is acceptable and sometimes even an aggressive war is necessary, "for the right of self-defense is natural and necessary."7 Vitoria, however, also cautioned that while self-defense is perfectly understandable, it should be undertaken with "the minimum possible harm to the attacker," and that "if by resisting [a soldier] will be forced either to kill or gravely wound his attacker, it seems that he is required to take any possible opportunity of escape by running away."8 This is indeed what Strato- cles suggests towards the end of the first act, in a comic conclusion of his youthful bragging:

I will render some men lame by chopping their knees. The groans of the fallen will reach the golden stars. But I have nearly forgotten one thing, which is the most important, and more necessary than anything else. What will I do if I am forced to flee? This is what I think I'll do. [Shuffles and stumbles] I'm not an expert runner. I don't need to run right now; when I do need to, fear will give wings to my feet. (407-412)

An important question in the political climate of the 16th century was whether princes who are Christians are particularly justified in fighting wars against nonbelievers.9 The Jesuit Franciscus Toletus (1532-1596), who commented on Thomas’ Summa, identified three heretical positions: (1) every war is a mortal sin (allegedly the opinion of the Manicheans and Erasmus); (2) wars in the Old Testament could be justified through the "Old Law", but since the advent of Christ it is not legal to wage war (a position held by Johannes Oecololampadius, who died in 1531 and was one of the Protestant reformers); (3) even though some wars are justified, the war against the Turks was not, for Luther maintained that God had sent the Turks as a punishment for the Christians.10 Toletus referred back, among others, to Augustine, who

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9 Suárez, On War, section 5.
10 Franciscus Toletus: In Summam Theologiae S. Thomae Aquinatis Enarratio, ed.
in his *Reply to Faustus* (book 22) refuted allegations issued by Faustus, a member of the Manichean sect. The Manicheans believed in an evil deity that counteracted God and taught that Moses acted immorally when he waged war (chapter 5). From chapter 69 on, Augustine justified Moses' actions as prompted by zeal and divine command. Here Augustine also listed criteria for justified war. This text by Augustine was probably the source for Toletus's accusation: when he discussed the first heresy listed above, he thought that in opposing war Erasmus was siding with Manichean heresy. However, Erasmus distanced himself from Martin Luther's strict refusal of any military resistance against the Turks.11

In Pontanus's play the almost reluctant remark about the necessity of war and Stratocles' resolve to fight in Hungary against the Turks can be read, and was certainly perceived in the audience, against this theoretical backdrop.

**THE MORALITY OF SOLDIERS**

The debate about the justification for war, harkening back to Aquinas and Augustine, was not the only important question. Fiercely contested was also the issue of how military service affects the morality of individuals. Thomas de Vio Cajetan, O.P., (1489-1534) had declared in his handbook for confessors that the individual soldier does not have to question the justification of the war while he is enlisted in an army. However, it was considered sinful to join the battle only to get plunder.12 Toletus emphasized that from the right intention and the proportionality of warfare it follows that not only military leaders but also ordinary soldiers are involved in the morality of waging war. He mentioned expressly that there exist secondary intentions or moral dangers that run contrary to just war, such as looting and revenge. Therefore, if military leaders wage a war with wrong intentions, they encourage common soldiers to behave immorally.13 He concluded,

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12 Cajetan (Thomas de Vio), *Sammula*, de Lenis, Venice 1581, pp. 25-30; specifically p. 29.
13 Toletus, *Quaestio* 34, art. 1, dubium 1, pp. 227-228.
reiterating Cajetan's view, that (1) a soldier is not allowed to participate in a battle if its cause is dubious; that (2) soldiers who are in doubt about the justification of the war do not commit a sin while serving under a commander if they had enrolled in a time of peace; that (3) soldiers who are not bound to any command may not join a war while in doubt about its justification.14

Suárez also addressed the question of the morality of soldiers. He concluded that mercenaries, since they are a sub-category of the larger classification "soldiers", do not have to question the justification of a war as long as there is no concrete reason to do so; and even if there are reasons for doubt, mercenaries are still "bound to follow the course of action which is more probably just" in case they cannot ascertain the truth of the matter. In this way, using an argument of so-called probabilism, Suárez laid the ethical burden of justification on the shoulders of the Prince or military leader.15 A commonplace used in this context was the advice John the Baptist gave to the soldiers: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:14) This could be read as a condemnation of warfare, but also as a confirmation of the soldiers' submission to their leaders.

Antonio Possevino, S.J., (1533-1611) a diplomat and bibliographer, discussed the military in his annotated bibliography, Bibliotheca Selecta, where he drafted a potential manual for soldiers and their priests who are in military service, which offers a wealth of information on the vast amount of late medieval and Renaissance books on the topic.16 In his own book The Christian Soldier (Il Soldato Christiano), about the desired virtues of soldiers and officers in the war against the heretics and heathens of his time,17 Possevino presents a practical guide to honest behavior in war, including the dangers of being captured by the enemy. First and foremost, however, he stressed the maintenance of Christian piety in spite of the temptations of military life. This was certainly designed as an answer to Erasmus and other 16th-century opponents to war. At the same time, Possevino reinterpreted the metaphor of Christian life as militia or military service that had been

14 Toletus, Quaestio 34, art. 1, dubium 4, p. 229.
15 Suárez, sect. 6, nr. 12, p. 836.
17 Antonio Possevino, Il Soldato Christiano con l'instruttione dei capi dello esercito catolico. Libro necessario a chi desidera sapere i mezzi per acquistar vittoria contra heretici turchi, et altri infedeli, Dorici, Roma 1569.
employed most recently by Erasmus of Rotterdam in his *Handbook for the Christian Soldier (Enchiridion Militis Christiani)*, a metaphor dear to Christianity since St. Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians* (6:10-20).¹⁸

An otherwise unknown Hieronymus Spartanus (perhaps the Humanist Eobanus Hessus, 1488-1540) wrote in 1540 a poem *Miles Christianus* that was intended to be a commentary on *Ephesians*.¹⁹ It opened with remarks that resonate in Stratocles's attitude: "Dulcis inexpertis equidem Mars esse videtur, Ociam militiam turba cruenta putat" (Mars seems sweet to those who don't know him, and the bloodthirsty crowd finds military service entertaining.)²⁰ The comparison between life and strife was to be taken literally in the sixteenth century, when the Christians believed themselves to be endangered by the Turkish army and were forced to defend the faith in military actions, if necessary. The same overlapping of metaphorical and practical meaning of militia could already be found in the Dominican St. Antonine of Florence (1389-1459), who had interpreted the war between nations as an intensified version of human contention. Therefore he treated war under the heading of homicide.²¹

All those theoretical considerations are reflected in the discussions of Pontanus's play, specifically in Act I, the exchange between Eubulus and Stratocles on the horrors and honors of military life. In another play, which was produced at the Jesuit school of Ingolstadt in 1606, an allegory warned against joining the military: "A reckless and inexperienced soldier wants to go to Hungary and to fight there for several years. He equips himself with weaponry. He is approached by Time who announces his death. But the young and strong man doesn't want to hear about dying but, rather, challenges Death. When he turns to him and sees him he drops his rifle and gets shot by Death, who praises the rifle as a very convenient tool for killing people."²²

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¹⁹ Printed in Basel: Oporinus 1550 (http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camena/spartanus1/te01.html).

²⁰ Erasmus, *Adagia* 951 = IV.1.1: "Dulce bellum inexpertis", is paraphrased twice in *Stratocles*, lines 218 and 578.


1580 Pontanus had a student discuss the scholarly question: "What Is More Important in War: Virtue or Fortune?" The answer was that in war virtue and fortune are both necessary. Although fortune was interpreted as divine support, the disputation illustrated its arguments with examples from ancient battles and rituals in the humanist vein.23

Ethical concerns acquired a higher level of urgency during the Thirty Years War, when mercenaries were very frequently underpaid, starving, and got no share of the spoils.24 Therefore Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592-1667), the most significant Jesuit theologian after Suárez, complained in the middle of his treatise on just war:

Good Lord! What do we see these days with our eyes, how many captains ... increase the number of soldiers in order to have more stipends, which they keep to themselves...?... It is a miracle that God is not so disturbed by this kind of military that he destroys the whole world.25