

ACCTS Ethics Ministry Presents
Warrior or Warmonger:
Military Identity Themes of Watchman, Guardian, Peacemaker, and Savior
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Because many people in the younger generation in the USA have grown up without the cultural background of respect for military and police, it's important that we teach our young military personnel that their calling is a noble profession. They need to know that they are their nations' guardians, protectors, and defenders.

Their service can be listed under four different categories. All those categories include that describe what military personnel are tasked to do for their nation. They are guardians, custodians, buffers, ramparts, bastions, escorts, lookouts, pickets, peacemakers, defenders, protectors, peacekeepers, supporters, champions, shields, wardens, servants, sentinels, watchmen, and patriots.

1. **Watchmen:** In the Bible we have multiple stories that tell of people who were lookouts for their nation. In the book of 1st Samuel and in the Kings, there are lookouts standing on top of the walls of the cities, looking out for danger and enemies. Some of these terms are also used to describe prophets in the Bible. What do watchmen do? While everyone else is asleep, a watchman is a lookout for danger – and that's exactly what our military personnel do. They are society's representatives, standing on the frontlines looking out for danger.

2. **Guardians:** Nations entrust the protection of their citizenry, and particularly the vulnerable, to guardians. Citizens give up a bit of power and authority so that the armed forces can use power to guard, defend, and protect them. Guardians are in a self-defensive posture, not an aggressive posture. Their work isn't vigilantism – in fact, it is in accord with the idea of love. Love protects its neighbor.

Augustine wrote about what a just cause looks like, and he stated that it is legitimate authorities prevent wrongdoing, punish wrongdoers, or right past wrongs. Guardians protect and work toward justice, and that is what our armed forces do.

In my academic career, there have been multiple times that civilians have said to me, "Tell me what kind of blood and guts movies you show to people in boot camp to get them ramped up!" Civilians think that boot camp is about creating an antagonist thirst to kill and destroy in our military personnel, but those who've served in the military know that is not done. What we're doing is training men and women to use restrained force when needed, and to use lethal force only when it must be used.

In the Bible we once again see military personnel in those kinds of roles. We see Abraham, the *pater familias* of his clan, mobilizing people to bring Lot home. We see David and his men protecting large landowners like Nabal, who nevertheless treated them with contempt. When David asked Nabal for a small tax since they protected his flock, Nabal refused – but his wife Abigail understood the importance of David's protection and rose to the occasion to pay that tax.

3. Peacekeepers: This is a term that has become associated with the United Nations, but as Christians our teaching to be peacemakers goes back to Christ Himself and the early church. It highlights the fact that the purpose of war is to seek peace.

Thomas Aquinas taught that the object of war was to create a better state of peace. In the USA, we call our law enforcement “peace officers.” Whether its law enforcement or the military, our young people need to know that what they’re doing on citizens’ behalf is being our peace officers. Under good leadership, military personnel fight and win wars in pursuit of peace. Again, there are many biblical examples of this, such as when Roman soldiers asked John the Baptist advice. It is stunning that they would do so, since the Jewish people had been a thorn in the side of Roman for a century. Judea itself was considered the worst place to serve as a soldier in the Roman Empire. Those soldiers asked John what they should do as soldiers. His response was that they should, basically, be peacekeepers – that they were not to oppress the poor or seek bribes and should instead be at peace with their wages.

4. Those who save. In John 15:13, we see that the ultimate expression of love is sacrificing one’s own life. There’s no higher love than that. Armed forces personnel protect the defenseless and vulnerable as well as their comrades in battle. In our military traditions, our highest honors are not for the person who has killed the most enemies – they are for the people who save the life of their comrades at great risk to themselves.

Every time someone gives their life to save someone else’s, it’s a picture of the archetype of Jesus giving Himself for all of us.

St. Augustine wrote a letter to a senior Roman political military leader named Boniface. I’ll paraphrase here what he wrote in that letter: “Dear Boniface, I received your letter and your messenger is still standing here on my doorstep because you told him not to leave until I wrote answer to you and although I’m very busy I’m going to dash off a response to you because of my deep love and affection for you - and because your corporal is stuck on my doorstep.” It becomes clear that Boniface had told Augustine he was having doubts about being a Christian and serving as a warrior. Augustine answered (again, as a paraphrase): “First and foremost, we have many biblical examples of warriors, like David. Second, you have a vocation as a political and military leader to protect and defend against barbarians and lawlessness. My role as a priest is to wage spiritual warfare through prayer. Your role as a guardian is to wage warfare against the same powers of evil but to do so in the physical landscape. Both of our callings are needed. We’re fighting the same enemy.”

The Bible says that Satan, our enemy, prowls about like a lion who wants to kill, steal, destroy. Our ultimate enemy loves the rape, pillaging, plundering, and murder of warfare because it defiles people made in the image of God. So, Augustine, knowing our battle is in the spiritual and physical realms, encourages Boniface that we need the church and we need the military.

As Christians living in this century, we have many lessons to learn from Augustine’s advice to Boniface. We can encourage our young military personnel, our chaplains, and others in

the armed forces with biblical examples that they are not criminals and murderers. Instead, they are protectors, defenders, watchmen, peacemakers, and guardians for our cultures and nations.