

THE SOLDIER'S CATECHISM

Thomas Swadlin (1600–1670)

9 July 1645

Q. What profession are you of?

A. I am a Christian and a soldier. Only in this I differ: Christian soldiers fight against the flesh, the world, and the Devil; I that say I am a Christian and am known to be a soldier fight for my own lusts.

Q. Is it lawful for Christians to be soldiers?

A. Yes, for all Christians, save that party of ours that be Anabaptists; who in truth I wonder at, because I know they fight against their own principles; poor souls! They are strangely cheated into this rebellion, else they are strange cheaters in religion, for howsoever many soldiers have died martyrs; yet never did rebel die in an outward possibility of salvation.

Q. What does our Saviour mean then by those words, Matthew 5:19?

A. (1) You mistake but 20 verses, for it is 5:39. And there Christ does not only forbid private revenge and resistance, but also public wars for private ends, such as, in plain truth, betwixt you and me our war is. For one of our worthies, who is now God knows where, first raised the militia to extirpate episcopacy root and branch, and to be revenged on the King for ship-money. (2) Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, and we cannot find one place of Scripture that warrants taking up of arms either to abolish the high priesthood or to molest the Crown.

Q. What side are you of and for whom do you fight?

A. I am for the King and Parliament; i. e. I am for a faction in the Parliament against the King and Parliament. Or, in plainer terms,

- (1) I fight to take the King out of their hands who will keep the crown upon his head into their hands who will pull the crown off his head, out of a loyal Protestant company who would reconcile him and that very faction into a schismatic, malignant fraternity that drove and forced him from his Parliament.
- (2) I fight to destroy the laws and liberties of my country, which are now in danger to be recovered by them that have long laboured to keep this Kingdom from an arbitrary and tyrannical government. And so they did until that fatal year 1641, from which time we have groaned under both (1) an arbitrary government, as being plundered to maintain our estates and imprisoned to secure our liberty (2) a tyrannical government, as being hanged to preserve our lives and perjured to conserve our religion.
- (3) I fight for the preservation of a faction of a close and state committee. In the being thereof, if God forbid it not, consists the ignominy and undoing of this Kingdom. If this combination continue, we shall forever be the most slavish nation in the Christian world.
- (4) I fight in the defence and maintenance of the new directory and Presbyterian religion, which is now violently opposed and will be utterly suppressed and sent again to Amsterdam, and the Popish religion again advanced if the armies raised against the King prevail.

Q. But is it not against the King that you fight in this cause?

A. Yes, surely. Yet many have abused the world with their base and absurd objection that we fight not against him in his function though we fight against him in his person; i.e., we fight against Charles the king, but not against King Charles, our only aim is

- (1) To rescue the King out of the hands of his and the Kingdom's friends and to unravel his honour and just prerogatives.
- (2) We endeavour to offend that which the King is bound to defend both by his oath and office; viz., the hierarchy of the Church and the nobility of the state, and instead of both to bring in a parity.
- (3) We take up arms against the servants of Jesus Christ, who in His Majesty's name were forced to the Commission of Array to defend the Church and the people of God.

- (4) If the King join himself with them that seek the safety of his people and the preservation of religion, surely then we also ought to stand in the defence of both, as the people did with prayers and tears entreating Saul to spare Jonathan, I Samuel 14:45, [Master Ram, you are an ill textuary; here is your third quotation, and but two of them false] if Peter Martyr and all the Fathers' expositions be true.
- (5) We do no more than what our brethren of Scotland did when they came into the Kingdom with an army some three or four years since (by invitation, and for invasion) whose action the King and both Houses have declared to be a rebellion, and so they remain recorded for what they did then, and so will to all posterity, by an act of Parliament, I doubt not, when it shall please God, the King and three states shall meet in a free and full convention.

Q. Has not the King published many protestations that he will maintain our laws, liberties, and religion? Why then do we fear the subversion of them?

- A. (1) Many things have been published in His Majesty's name (since his being driven from his old broad Seal, and the making of a new) which in all probability he never saw or knew of.
- (2) Though the King himself does intend really and well (it were treason to think otherwise), yet the sons of Zeruiah, the new militia, have been too crafty for Him.
- (3) It is not to be imagined that an Anabaptistical army will defend the Protestant religion, or lawless Independents the laws of the land.
- (4) We find by joyful experience that he never failed in any of his protestations and promises.
- (5) They say it is a maxim now at Westminster that faith is not to be kept with heretics, and such do some there account all true Protestants. Witness those often promises of honourable terms by us made to the King's soldiers, and then most dis-honourably first hampering them and then haltering them.

Q. How can you that are soldiers for the Parliament answer that place in Paul, Romans 13:1,2,3, etc.?

- A. (1) Indeed we cannot, nor can all the world. For that place and all other places of Scripture to that purpose require obedience, either active or passive, to all the commands of the higher power, whether they be lawful or unlawful. Where I cannot lawfully do what he unlawfully commands, I must patiently suffer. All the praise of suffering being when we suffer for well-doing, I Peter 2:19–20.¹
- (2) They are grossly mistaken which say the King is not the highest power, for his power and person are inseparable. The laws and courts of the Kingdom, as they are convertible terms, are above him only in a directing power, but all under him in a correcting and co-ercive power; therefore the high court of Parliament itself, being so made by virtue of the King's writ and presence, either his personal or consenting presence, contradicting and countermanding the King do thereby resist the ordinance of God.
- (3) Suppose the King to be what he is, the higher power, yet if he shall, to prove us liars, intend or permit the safety of his subjects. Why yet both nature and grace, nature as we have corrupted it and grace as we have exploded it, allow us, as rebels, to preserve ourselves and ruin them.
- (4) If the King be the higher power by constitution, yet is the power now in other hands by usurpation—the Lord Saye,² Master Saint John,³ Master Pennington,⁴ Master Venn,⁵ and other thorough statesmen have for a long time (four years past) and do still manage the greatest affairs of the new government so that it were a miserable thing to be subjected in conscience (as the text imports, if all the Fathers' exposition might pass for orthodox divinity) to such enemies and incendiaries both of Church and commonwealth.

...

Q. What do you think then of those Protestants which sit still and do not put forth themselves in these times?

¹ For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. (I Peter 2:19–20, KJV)

² William Fiennes (1582–1662), Viscount Saye and Sele

³ Oliver Saint John (c. 1598–1673)

⁴ Isaac Pennington (1616–1679)

⁵ John Venn (1586–1650)

- A. (1) Either they are not convinced of the necessity.
 (2) Or they are but lukewarm professors.
 (3) Or they are of base and private spirits, and love their money better than their God and His anointed.
 (4) Or they are faint-hearted cowards, and desire to sleep in a whole skin.
 (5) Or they are secret enemies to God and His Church.

...

Q. What say you then of those Protestants which fight on the other side and join with the enemies of our religion, Parliament, and country?

- A. (1) I say that they of all other men are worthiest the name of Protestants. They have protested allegiance and maintain it.
 (2) I say they maintain the cause of Christ and oppose the cause of Anti-Christ. For Christ says give unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, Matthew 22:21. Anti-Christ says take away all you can.
 (3) That they are the honour and glory of religion.
 (4) That weapons against them shall not prosper, so the words are quoted right, Master Ram.
 (5) That God will gather them and get them praise, Zephaniah 3:19. This is the right quotation still, Master Ram.
 (6) The sword of the wicked which was drawn to cast down the poor shall enter into their own heart, Psalm 35:15. It is so Master Ram, and not Psalm 30:15.
 (7) That all the blood that has been shed they are clear of.
 (8) That they are in the high-way to martyrdom.

...

Q. What is that you chiefly aim at in this war?

- A. (1) At the pulling down of antiquity, and rewarding her as she has served us.
 (2) At the suppression of an Apostolic prelacy, consisting of archbishops, bishops, etc.
 (3) At the extirpation of an innocent, industrious, famous, orthodox, soul-saving clergy.
 (4) At the pulling down of Christ's kingdom, and the purity of His ordinances; keeping children from baptism, lawful ministers from preaching, and all sorts from the communion.
 (5) At the bringing to injustice the enemies of our never till now heard of Church and state.
 (6) At the crooking of the courts of justice, which have for some few years past been made the seats of iniquity and unrighteousness.
 (7) At the upholding of our thorough-paced statesmen, which have taken the subjects' best inheritance and would too, if they could, the Crown of our nation.
 (8) At the privation and discontinuing of the Gospel to posterity and the generations to come.

...

Q. Do not many of them that you count your enemies stand for religion as well as you?

- A. (1) Yes, and better than we do, for we but pretend it and they intend it; for who but mad men can think Independents will fight in defence of the Protestant religion?
 (2) Who but simple men can expect any care of the true religion from the Presbyters and their party, who have been the grand persecutors of it ever since Arius?
 (3) Neither is it to be imagined that men so loose, lewd, and wicked as most Brownists are—witness their books published for divorce of the soul's mortality, Of no peace, etc.—should really intend the preservation of religion, or of anything that is good.
 (4) We know the Earl of Newcastle protested he fought for religion, and that the sixth of his army was not Popish, which we can never disprove; and he said not long since that men might talk of religion, and so forth, but religion that shakes off obedience is but a cloak for rebellion and an airy thing. These were his words, Master Ram.
 (5) Our rage and madness against those whom the world acknowledged to be most zealous and forward in the maintenance and profession of the Protestant religion—the bishops and all the orthodox clergy of

this Kingdom, whom we have imprisoned, slandered, and beggared—do sufficiently show how cordially we stand for religion.

- (6) We stand for religion, but as the Ephesians stood for Diana, Acts 19. We sent our wives to lectures, but it was to bring customers to our shops.
 - (1) We stand for a Presbyterian clergy, which was never heard of in the Apostles' times, nor set up in any part of the world until Master John Calvin's time, and afterwards in Scotland Master John Knox his time. An omen that down they must again by Knockes.
 - (2) We stand for an ignorant clergy.
 - (3) We stand for a soul-starving and dumb directory.
 - (4) We stand against a company of decent and innocent ceremonies.
 - (5) We stand against admirable monuments of antiquity.
 - (6) We stand for a most un-Christian liberty.

...

Q. What is the reason, then, that there be so many lewd and wicked men in the Parliament's army?

- A. (1) Because commanders-in-chief are not careful in choosing godly officers.
(2) Because honest religious men dare not put forth themselves in this service against God and the Church.
(3) Because order and discipline is not more strictly executed by superiors.
(4) Because officers in towns and countries aim to press the scum and refuse of men and so, by easing themselves pester our armies with base, conditioned people. And indeed who are fitter for us if the proverb be true, cat will to kind, like to like.

...

Q. Is it well done of some of your soldiers (which seem to be religious) to break down crosses and images where they meet with any?

- A. Truly it is very ill done; for nothing ought to be done in a tumultuous manner. Nor has God put the sword of reformation into the soldier's hand, for He has not yet taken it out of the King's, and therefore I hold it much amiss that they should cancel and demolish these harmless and honourable monuments of antiquity and badges of Christianity. Especially seeing the magistrates and ministers who might formerly have done it thought it unfit.

Q. But what say you to their tearing and burning the Books of Common Prayer in every place where they come?

- A. Much may be said in their condemnation who show themselves so furious against that book.
 - (1) It has been the glory of a noble army of martyrs, as being compiled by Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury...
 - (2) It has been the nurse of that admirable devotion which flourished in this Kingdom and is the exactest liturgy that ever was in Christendom.
 - (3) It is great cause of our present calamity, for who are they that side with our Protestant enemies but Common-Prayer men?
 - (4) It was esteemed such an admirable jewel of religion in the world that whosoever said he thought well of the Protestant religion, and spoke ill of the English Common Prayer book would hardly have been credited; and therefore no wonder that people did prefer it before preaching, and are now offended for the want of it.
 - (5) It was ill-done therefore to remove this brazen serpent, then which nothing was of more reverence with the Christians in Turkey; no, nor with all the Reformed churches neither, not with Geneva itself.
 - (6) It is very likely, therefore, that the God of the air stirred up the spirits of some seditious soldiers to be his instruments for the destruction of such a masterpiece of devotion and religion.
 - (7) But that it belongs only to the Parliament's soldiers to remove all such Heavenly-inspired devotions they meet which cross their conclusions of polygamy, as the first prayer of matrimony, whereby the parties married are blessed like Isaac and Rebecca, not as Abraham and Sara; for he had his Hagar of rebellion.

As does the first prayer after the Commandments, that we faithfully serve, honour, and obey the King. Of false pastors, as does the collect for Saint Matthias' Day, of self-purity and Popery. As does the concluding prayer, Prevent us O Lord etc. They have covenanted and engaged themselves in this un-happy work of extirpating our religion.

...

Q. Is there any great need of skill and cunning in this profession?

A. Yes doubtless, for David the King does thankfully acknowledge the Lord's goodness for teaching his hands to war and his fingers to fight, Psalm 144:1.⁶ And this Psalm was penned after the defeat of Sheba, his rebel subject, and Ammon, his rebel contributory.

- (1) Great policy, wisdom, and experience is required in commanders, for want whereof we miscarried at Lostwithiel and Cropredy Bridge.
- (2) And no less skill and dexterity in common soldiers. They must know how to handle their arms, how to keep their ranks, etc. The want whereof was the cause of our miscarriage at Wickfield, Edgehill, and many other places.
- (3) Certainly a few well-trained soldiers are better than a multitude of raw and inexperienced men. Else how should the King with his few cocks of the game beat so many flocks of our Dunghill Cocks?

...

Q. What arguments have you to prove that such honour and respect should be done to our soldiers?

- A. (1) Truly none at all. For they fight against the King and so against the Church, and so against God.
- (2) They are the instruments of our injustice, though the rod of God's judgments, as Nebuchadnazer was.
- (3) They show themselves men of base and covetous spirits, fighting for half-crowns (for the whole Crown our good masters intend to share amongst themselves) and not for a holy cause. So they gain, they care not to ruin their country.
- (4) They show themselves rebels and traitors, which are very deserving, I should have said dementing, qualities.
- (5) No men commit so much rapine and villainy as these, our soldiers do.
- (6) None deserve worse than they, either of God, as transgressing His commandment; or the King, as vilifying his person; or the Church, as infringing her immunities and disobeying her canons; or posterity, as barring them, as much as in them lies, of Heaven.

FINIS

Thomas Swadlin, *The Soldier's Catechism, Composed for the King's Army* (Oxford, 1645)

⁶ Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. (Psalm 144:1, KJV)