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THE OPPOSITE OF WAR IS NOT PEACE

Healing Trauma in *The Iliad* and in Orthodox Tradition

In his Social Ethics seminars at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, Dr. Timothy Patitsas, Assistant Professor of Ethics, provides invigorating and thought-provoking lectures on the Orthodox ethics of war. In the following interview, he utilizes fresh and unexpected sources from Scripture and the Holy Fathers, classical Greek literature, and contemporary psychotherapeutic research to show how an Orthodox worldview anticipates and complements the most original insights of scholars in the wider academy.

RTE: Dr. Patitsas, it's not surprising that as an ethics professor you have a theoretical interest in the Christian ethics of war, but do you also find this topic compelling as, specifically, an *Orthodox* Christian?

DR. PATITSAS: As both an Orthodox Christian and an American, yes. I was born and raised in the United States, with its huge military—slightly larger in terms of expenditure than that of the next thirteen countries combined. I was raised to respect this might, to be grateful for it, and to honor our soldiers. But of course as Americans we are not only experiencing the aftereffects of wars fought in the twentieth century, but already in this new century we've been fighting in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Pakistan, Yemen, and other places—sometimes mainly with our drone strikes.

For centuries the Byzantines waged similarly amorphous struggles against similar opponents, and I think that if this were widely known many people would wonder what they would have to teach us. The one book to draw this

Opposite: Achilles Slaying Penthesilia, c.460 BC, Greek Attic red-figured decorative plate, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich, Germany.

comparison explicitly is Edward Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*. Byzantinists have qualified portions of Luttwak's work, but in the main it is familiar to anyone who knows Orthodox theology and Byzantine history.

In reading Luttwak, I was most impressed by two things about the Byzantines. First, the great lengths they went to avoid actual combat engagement with their enemies. What we call the Byzantine army was really the Christianized Roman army, the most experienced army in history to that time, and yet their attitude was, "Even if you are really powerful, in battle things can still go terribly wrong." They also knew that morally war is a questionable enterprise, and although they certainly fought wars, they also used all sorts of negotiations and devices to avoid them.

RTE: What else impressed you about Luttwak?

DR. PATITSAS: How eastern and western Christians each thought about the ethics of war. For the West by the time of the Crusades, war might in certain cases not be morally ambiguous. A blessed cause for war makes the war an unqualified good, and therefore participating in it is not a sin. Even killing in war is not a sin, but can in fact be part of a holy service that absolves you of your sins.

What the Orthodox Byzantines retained was an older Greek notion that war inevitably damages the soul. Even in a just cause, in self-defense or to protect innocents, participation in war still harms the soul in some measure. And so I came to the realization that the Byzantine employment of religious rituals around war—inviting priests to bless troops and weapons, to pray before battles—was not a blessing of warfare as such (although they certainly prayed for victories, partly because they saw them as the quickest route to peace). Rather the reverse: the primary purpose of such prayers was to inoculate the soldier against a particular kind of damage that could occur to his soul during war—what we refer to as traumatic stress. These acts of blessing, still retained in Orthodox countries, are not to be understood as the Church pronouncing war good, but exist precisely because we know that war is always evil.

Let's put this more intimately: These soldiers aren't strangers to us. They are our kids, our relatives. And moreover they are not disposable—we want them back when this evil has passed. So of course we don't just send them into battle spiritually defenseless. We give them every armor so that when

they experience the horror of war it won't destroy them spiritually, psychologically, or emotionally.

Again, the Byzantines were not saying that war could be made holy, but that its innate destructiveness would overwhelm us unless we bound ourselves tightly to our ultimate holy values. For the Byzantines, that meant the Cross of Christ, the Church. American soldiers also defend their psychic integrity by binding war to their most sacred values. Since we are Calvinists, that means above all that we interpret battle in terms of "work": it's not "killing," it's "completing the mission." Cartoonist Gary Trudeau quipped in the first Gulf War that so many soldiers were describing their own involvement with the words, "I've got a job to do," that the NBC News "theme" for the war should be amended from "America at War," to "America at Work."



Dr. Timothy Patitsas.

Other supreme American values are also called upon to make the chaos meaningful and save the soldier's soul. Cleanliness—and we say of the enemy, "Waste him." Discipline of the weak as an unavoidable duty, and we call upon our soldiers to "hurt those little people," or of their own comrades soldiers in Vietnam might say, "He screwed up." And of course sex, as in, "We ***** them up."

Clearly work, cleanliness, discipline of the errant, and sex can be positive values, but they won't safeguard your soul in a time of trouble the way the Cross will.

Today in the secular West, we are recovering that ancient understanding. For every war America has fought for which we have data, we have sustained far more psychological casualties than physical casualties. In his book, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, David Grossman—a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, and a practicing psychologist—talks about periods in World War II where the Army was discharging psychologically wounded people as fast as it could bring new soldiers in. The old notion that because a war is "just" it is somehow not going to hurt you is gone. No serious person in the psychotherapeutic or American military community accepts that at this point.

Maybe we will persuade other Christians as well of our crazy Orthodox view and maybe we won't, but for now a major component of the Orthodox position has become part of both secular science and official U.S. policy. Although they don't yet know how to inoculate people psychologically against war or to treat them, everyone accepts that war always causes some setback spiritually and psychologically.

RTE: How much of our Orthodox view is from the New Testament and how much goes back to the classical Greek philosophy that fed into Byzantium?

DR. PATITSAS: In Romans, St. Paul commands Orthodox Christians to respect soldiers and the government, and their divinely appointed mission to keep the peace. In the narrative of Christ's crucifixion and in the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch, there is respect for the office of a soldier. "This is what you have been appointed to do"—and even Pilate is reduced to that necessity. A soldier is in a position where he may be ordered to use violence and there's not much he can do about it. More positively, in Church hymnography we understand that the timing of Christ's Incarnation was related to the fact that most of the known world was then gathered into one family by Caesar Augustus. The Christian empire became an image of God's oneness—there is one God, and with a Christian emperor, there is one earthly ruler.

And yet, the Church still maintained that killing is always wrong and that Christians should not, if possible, get involved in these things. We have many examples, including the Russian passion-bearers Boris and Gleb. As the grandsons of Prince Vladimir, they were raised and trained to battle, but as Christians, they wouldn't fight to save themselves or their birthright.

RTE: Do you have any thoughts as to why the East and West diverged in their ideas of warfare? Even before the schism, the West constructed the just war theory and then went on to develop the idea of a Christian holy war with the Crusades.

DR. PATITSAS: Just war theory provides a necessary check-list so that our fighting will rise above the level of pure brigandage and murder. There must be a legitimate authority involved and the cause must be defensive, or at least have a valid morality to it.

But where does this go wrong? You know, once while I was picking up my godson from school I overheard two fathers speaking. Both were apparently professional men, and well-educated. The first dad was very earnestly mak-

ing the point that, if something couldn't be avoided, if acting in some way was a part of nature, then clearly that act could not be immoral. The other father wholeheartedly agreed. As men of the world, this made perfect sense to them. But of course as Christians the argument from nature is insufficient because nature itself is fallen. There is an inherent tragedy to our existence in that we are often forced to do wrong things to survive and to protect our children. Rationalism loses this appreciation for tragedy, tries to talk itself out of what poetry, religion, and music know so well: the world is not what it should be, and life is not reducible to linear syllogisms.

Ethicists have a concept known as "moral luck"—that sometimes we are blamable for our action or character, even though we were powerless to act or be otherwise due to bad circumstance. Rationalism hates luck, and ethical rationalism hates moral luck; its existence would frustrate logical reflection. Well, war involves a whole skein of bad moral luck, and so any attempt to create a perfect intellectual ethical system about it is going to drive you very quickly away from the tragic (and let's face it, sometimes tragi-comic) reality of actual war. It is going to lead you in rational, logical steps to absurd conclusions.

RTE: If the West is more rational, more linear, how then would you describe the East? Irrational? Ortherworldly?

DR. PATITSAS: Christian Rome—Byzantium—was a perfect blend and balance of three modes of being in this world. They had the mind of the Classical and Hellenistic Greeks; they had the heart and personalism of the Semitic world, of the Jews in particular; and they had the practical rationality and organization of the Romans. And while the Greek mind and the Jewish heart might both seem to us more important, in fact it was the Roman body, the Roman system, that remained their primary cultural identity in Christ.

Some have argued that the West lost one aspect of the Semitic personalism, while retaining the Greek respect for intellect and the Roman reverence for law and power. What the West lost or minimized with time was a particular emphasis on the way of the heart. The intellect became primary.

RTE: Yet the West has had mystical saints down to the present day.

DR. PATITSAS: At some point, though, there occurred a slight separation between the mystics and the theologians, between the cloistered prayer of the heart and the university scholars. The slightest such gap would be fatal for

truly Orthodox life. When the mind is no longer submitted to the heart, it becomes irrational through an excess of rationalism, and the heart becomes dull through an excess of passion and imagination.

The unity of mind and heart, of mind stationed in the heart focused on the Name of Christ, is far more than a concept—it is a hard-fought, spiritual force-against-spiritual force, bodily achievement. For this reason the true Orthodox Christian must always become a Roman first, at least in his *élan*.

Without experience or victory in this struggle, a university scholar like myself will arrive at the false conclusion that the intellectual sins are the worst sins—pride in particular—since the intellect is higher than the appetitive and incensive powers of the soul. But in the East the memory endured because the practice was preserved—it is the lowest part of the soul, in the appetitive powers, where the battle will be won or lost. Sensuality—which in the context of the Jesus Prayer means chasing after images, sensations (even holy ones), failing to keep the basic fasts of the Church—is the gateway to all sin. Such self-love is the mother of the passions; pride, merely her most developed and insidious child.

RTE: But how does knowing this affect ethical deliberation about war?

DR. PATITSAS: You can't do ethics of war with your mind in the first place, nor even with your heart, shall we say. Rather, starting with your body, from your duty to protect your loved ones who are forced by circumstance into combat, you must not deny that they return from war wounded *through no fault of their own*. They have changed, and some of them will struggle terribly in trying to re-enter society. Everything begins there.

Putting the intellectual sins first misses the point of everything, because if on paper you can justify a war, then supposedly these intellectual sins aren't involved and it won't hurt you. From our eastern Orthodox perspective, just to witness combat is already a terrible burden on the soul. Whereas the mere fact that a particular war can be proved intellectually to be the lesser of two evils—and therefore unavoidable—doesn't resolve anything.

It is still individuals who kill or at least experience those images and passionate feelings, and it is individuals who have to be cleansed, as St. Basil the Great says when he has soldiers who kill in battle refrain from receiving Holy Communion for three years.

RTE: So you are saying that war remains evil, even when justified. Is killing in war then murder?

DR. PATITSAS: Some early Christians called it that, but St. Basil does not agree, and his penance for a soldier is not the same as the penance for a murderer. So, the motives outlined in the West's just war theory do apply in the East as well when you are distinguishing types of killing according to logical criteria. Killing in war is ethically distinct from murder. However, the fulfillment of the just war criteria is not sufficient to inoculate us from war's evil; it still hurts us.

Achilles in Vietnam

RTE: Then what do you think is the spiritual reason behind St. Basil's penance? Many people see it as a sort of punishment, but I suspect that it has something to do with healing.

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, St. Basil was concerned with healing. Our best thinker about war and the healing of the soul after war is Jonathan Shay, an M.D., Ph.D. in clinical psychiatry, who wrote *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*.¹ Shay says that *The Iliad*, our oldest western epic, was designed as therapy for post-traumatic stress. It was written and recited to fulfill this role and it did so successfully. Simone Weil said that *The Iliad* is also the only epic in western history that doesn't take sides between the two warring parties. It mourns the death of the Trojans as much as it does of the Achaeans, the Greeks. Shay thinks that this may have been because it was performed for and in order to heal descendants of both sides.

Shay's point is that a culture that recited *The Iliad* orally, that had its combat veterans listening to *The Iliad*, was a culture that still thought that war is, as Simone Weil says, something that hurts not only the losers, but also the winners. The Orthodox position naturally grows out of this older Greek view and, in a sense, this view is older than the Church. Cultures that have taken the view, "This is for the glory of Rome, the other guys deserve it, and let's get on with it," tend to be cultures where off-duty soldiers spend a lot of time getting drunk. They are self-medicating in some other less effective way.

¹ Jonathan Shay serves as Visiting Scholar-at-Large at the U.S. Naval War College and holds the Chair of Ethics, Leadership, and Personnel Policy in the Office of the U.S. Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. In 2008-09 he was appointed to the Omar Bradley Chair of Strategic Leadership at the U.S. Army War College and Dickinson College. In 2007, he received the MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship to further support his work with trauma victims. Shay is the author of *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*.



Achilles and Ajax amphora by Exekias, c.530 BC, Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

RTE: Is *The Iliad*, then, an expression of remorse for the destruction of war?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, the Trojan War was a total disaster. *The Iliad* is a celebration of the bravery of both sides—the youth, the strength, the beauty—but these heroic men in fact are all too weak to escape being trapped in this conflict: it is a profound text that already has this Orthodox view of war that no one wins completely.

RTE: Was it a religious text? Were the Greek gods pleased or saddened by war?

DR. PATITSAS: Fascinatingly, the entirety of the *Iliad* occurs within a space marked by two profound desecrations of the classical liturgical program, of the religious belief and observance of the Trojan and Achaean peoples. As it opens, Agamemnon, one of the Greek commanders, has offended Apollo's priests by taking a priest's daughter as his concubine. As a result, plague has struck the camp. When the seers divine that Agamemnon must give the woman back he grudgingly does so, but instead takes Achilles' war-prize, a maiden named Briseus whom Achilles loves. Achilles then withdraws from



Odysseus and Penelope, c.450 BC terracotta relief from island of Milo, Louvre Museum, Paris.

battle, and without him the Greeks begin to lose until his friend Patroclus puts on Achilles' armor and goes into battle pretending to be Achilles. When Patroclus is killed, Achilles begins to suffer a complete breakdown, spiritually and mentally. He becomes a monster. Where before he had always shown compassion to enemy prisoners, now there is no stopping him, he's just a murderer. His murderous thirst for revenge is not slated until he kills the Trojan hero Hector, and desecrates his corpse, and then himself is killed.

While Agamemnon's sacrilege opens the *Iliad*, Odysseus' sacrilege ends the Trojan War itself. In fact, Odysseus ends not only the War, but the Heroic Age itself because he is so very human and because he intentionally subverts the ancient liturgy—in his case, not out of passion, but almost as an act of moral superiority over the capriciousness of the gods, who have caused the war to drag on for a decade. So, he devises the Trojan Horse, a deceptive liturgical offering. But because the sacral order is thus violated and Troy destroyed, Odysseus is punished. Nevertheless, this also says something good about Odysseus, because although that old heroic world was somehow superhuman, it was also therefore subhuman. The heroes were demi-gods, comic-book characters of superhuman strength and virtue and manliness.

Odysseus isn't. He's just a man who wants to get back to his wife, and by his action he brings the ancient world to its end. He is really our first modern, the first European. His "super-power" is devotion to home and his amazing cleverness.

Odysseus is a precursor of Christ, Who also subverted the liturgy of His people. When Christ was mistaken for a mere man and crucified, he is hidden in plain view on the wood of the Cross, just as Odysseus is hidden within it. They are both subverting liturgy (indeed, the Chief Priest was entirely unaware that his sentencing of Christ was the liturgical act for which he had been appointed) with the aim of making peace. If you take the Greek gods as demons, or as simpler, more childlike versions of the demons, then both heroes have tricked the demons. This idea of Christ hidden and tricking the devils was told to me by Fr. Maximos of Simonopetra here at the seminary.

Nevertheless, there was something brave in what Odysseus did. He and his men could have been discovered inside the Trojan Horse and wiped out, so in a sense they are dying; they are a part of a sacrificial object. It's a liturgical death. Of course, we don't depict the story like this. We depict them as "clever guys", but theirs was a culture saturated in ritual. They knew what they were doing. They were both desperate and willing to be damned, not just physically, but spiritually, because they had to end the damned horrible thing that is war.

RTE: How does Shay take all this? Like you, is he a fan of Odysseus?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes. Shay's first book is *Achilles in Vietnam*. His second book is *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. In his first book, Shay's empathy and focus are with Achilles himself, and in the process Shay gives us this amazing corroboration of the Orthodox view that war may sometimes be the lesser of two evils, but it still remains evil and it is harmful to our souls.

There was a strain of work before Shay that pointed in this direction. S.L.A. Marshall, a U.S. army historian,² after World War II organized interviews with thousands of American soldiers who had been on the front lines, actual infantry who were doing the fighting in Europe and the Pacific. I can hardly believe that this is true, but he and his team found that about 85% of trained soldiers would either not fire their weapons in combat or, if they did

fire, would fire high or wide. Other historians subsequently found this to be true not only for World War II for the Americans, but for the other side and for any other war for which we have evidence. It also seems that reluctance to kill was well known to non-commissioned officers from the time of the Roman armies until now.

RTE: Amazing. So throughout history most soldiers will not kill?

DR. PATITSAS: Soldiers know that they are killing a part of their own soul if they do kill, and when it comes right down to it, most people would rather die physically than spiritually. There are a tiny minority of people who are psychopathic and sociopathic, and there are also a minority of sane people who can calmly neutralize those kinds of threats without much apparent damage to themselves, but that is a very small percentage. Grossman's estimate of those who can kill without suffering spiritually is very low—far less than the 15% who will fire at all.

Grossman said that in studying Marshall's numbers he was ashamed of American soldiers who didn't take the chance to help their cause, their nation and their friends, but he was also proud of them for this human response. As he points out, these World War II and Korean War soldiers were not cowards. In fact, they were exposing themselves to danger, treating their fellow wounded, bringing in more ammunition. They were doing all these things—but they weren't killing.

Grossman's book is now required reading for new DEA and FBI Agents, and, I think, non-commissioned officers in the army, because one of his findings is that most men won't fire unless their commanding officer is right there forcing them to fire. Meanwhile, Shay's book has become very influential for classicists, who now almost all agree with his premise about *The Iliad's* therapeutic purpose. No scholar now feels that they can understand *The Iliad* without Shay, but *Achilles in Vietnam* also changed the way in which the U.S. army is organized and deployed.

RTE: Are they reading these books because the army wants to find a way around this human reluctance to kill?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes and no. After Marshall's findings, the U.S. Army went to a new method of training, or rather conditioning, by having soldiers shoot at human-like shapes that pop up at you. After this, the incidence of post-trau-

2 S.L.A Marshall: A commissioned officer and U.S. Army World War II and Korean War historian who authored some thirty books about warfare.

matic stress in Vietnam skyrocketed, and hasn't stopped yet. But many of the changes in Army practice adopted from Shay are done in order to lessen the psychological burden of war. It has this positive, therapeutic side as well.

The danger would be that we Americans would understand this Greek and Orthodox view, but then become worse than we were before, by using it only—as you say—to kill more effectively and to involve still more of our young people in killing.

RTE: Have the firing percentages really changed with the new conditioning?

DR. PATITSAS: They claim it has, but I see anecdotal evidence that in a war like Viet Nam, firing percentages rose when you couldn't see the enemy in jungle combat anyway. Snipers and people with confirmed kills were still a small minority of even frontline troops. If the percentages have risen, it might be because today's soldiers are farther from traditional Christianity, or because they are all volunteers and there is a higher percentage who will shoot than among the draftees of former wars. Grossman also thinks that videos and computer games work exactly the way army conditioning does. He says that we are conditioning our young to kill, but without any of the social controls the army has in place. Conditioning that makes people more apt to kill will only deepen the psychological trauma and impact society as a whole, as we are seeing ever more clearly. But I am not sure if this is the case or not.

RTE: If Grossman is saying that our innate respect for life is being conditioned out of soldiers, how does this affect them as individuals?

DR. PATITSAS: Grossman focuses on the moral cost of learning to kill, and of killing. Shay is looking at a related experience: When in combat you have seen the violation of the moral order sanctioned by your own chain of command, what does that do to your character? Whereas in reading Shay you tend to focus on moral violations that are egregious—such as being ordered to kill civilians, in Grossman you are reminded that sanctioned killing in a justified war is itself a violation of human morality. Killing in war, even in a situation where the other soldier is about to kill you, will strike Marshall's non-firing 85% as a violation of social morality. The army perhaps didn't do anything *per se* that was a betrayal of its own code, as in the case of Achilles, but when a young virginal person who perhaps grew up as a Roman Catholic altar boy or as a devout Protestant sees the reality of killing, he feels that

the moral compact with which he has been raised is broken. He has been betrayed by the society that raised him, when they made him a soldier and told him to kill.

Shay's brilliance lies in describing what can happen when you experience the violation of the social moral order. A chain of events can be unleashed in your soul that culminates in "post traumatic stress." What happens, says Shay, is that you may undergo a progressive shrinking of the sphere of your concern for others, until the circle includes no one, not even yourself.

RTE: What would that look like? How would a person act and feel whose moral concern extended not even to himself?

DR. PATITSAS: Shay describes a phenomenon in war known as "berserking," in which a soldier undertakes desperately heroic actions, but without regard really for his cause or even the safety of his brother soldiers. At that point, the trauma victim has moved outside of human social relating; he is one part animal, one part god, and feels himself such, as he exposes himself to danger even if it compromises the mission. This is the state to which Achilles fell when his moral order began to unravel through his commander's betrayal of what was right. Shay says that true trauma *always* starts with the feeling that the moral order has been betrayed; it's not merely the carnage or the killing that harms us.

To begin with, the soldier will experience the shrinking of his moral horizon in positive terms—he would do anything for his brothers, those in his own unit. He is fighting for his buddy. He does not recognize that his deepening attachment to them may be a sign that his attachment to the rest of humanity—including his enemy—has weakened. But when this inner circle is violated—that is, when the hell of war results in one of them, particularly a best buddy, dying—then the sphere of moral concern can become quite narrow indeed. The person may eventually lose all interpersonal connection, which ends in the berserk state during which a traumatized person destroys everything around him in a god-like rage.

In Achilles' case, he first withdraws from the army of the Greeks, although he's still attached to his company and to his friend Patroclus. When Patroclus is killed in the mix-up, then Achilles' field of concern shrinks even more. Prior to these events, Achilles would defend or at least show compassion to the prisoners he took, but he now just slays them, ten or twelve at a time,



Detail of Achilles and the daughters of Lycomedes Sarcophagus, Marble frieze, c.240 BC, Louvre Museum, Paris.

trying to placate this berserk state. This berserking is a kind of ecstasy—or rather, its parodic reversal. It is not communion with all men and with all things, but the final death of communion. It is, we Orthodox would recognize at once, the very opposite of that which saves us—communion with God and others in liturgy. Shay doesn't use the word liturgy, of course, but he does show how this totalizing experience leads to a cutting of communion and the unraveling of character.

War for the berserker has become an anti-liturgy, and of course, many soldiers experience this in some lesser degree. As in liturgy, all five senses are fully employed; a kind of divinization is experienced; a letting go of earthly attachments occurs; there is a ritual of bloodletting. But the berserker undergoes all of it in the service of annihilation of the self and the other.

RTE: How has the army used these realizations in a good way, to inoculate soldiers from this ex-communication?

DR. PATITSAS: I'm glad you called it that. Now you know why the Church "excommunicates" the soldier who has killed in combat, or even experienced close combat. She is not "punishing," but rather "staunching" the wound.

She is not imposing a limit on communion, but by saying that the ban from the Eucharist will last three years, she is limiting the extent of the excommunication. The Church bans the soldier from the chalice—particularly in these kinds of extreme cases—temporarily—because the traumatized soldier himself will be tempted to make the ban permanent. I was so relieved when I understood this.

But back to the Army. Post-Shay, soldiers are rotated into and out of combat as part of the same unit they train with and will debrief with afterwards. In Viet Nam, we actually rotated soldiers individually. The cutting of communion and of combat brotherhood was built in. It was a system custom-made to produce deep combat trauma.

More still could be done. For Shay our major remaining mistake is the speed with which the bodies of dead soldiers are vanished out of the combat theater. Grieving for brother soldiers must be more prolonged, and more physical, if we are to heal properly.

By the way, Shay isn't saying that every soldier or every soldier in direct combat experiences trauma. It depends on factors that can't be predicted, but he is saying that when trauma occurs, it occurs in these specific stages:

almost always, the person first feels that something immoral is going on, and then comes this progressive shrinking of the social horizon. But we have to remember that no matter what a person did in war or in any situation, it's not the end.

RTE: What about other forms of traumatic stress—say after childhood abuse, or being in a plane crash?

DR. PATITSAS: Although Shay is very respectful of the uniqueness of the combat experience, he believes that when trauma victims insist that their own brand of trauma was uniquely horrible, that this itself is a result of the trauma. It is a way of trying to excommunicate ourselves, by showing that we have suffered as no other person ever did.

In fact, brain studies demonstrate that neglect of an infant or child can be as traumatizing as more explicit kinds of child abuse or any adult trauma. You cannot really distinguish people who have been attacked, assaulted or just neglected, because trauma is trauma. In every case communion has been broken, and the brain and soul are deeply wounded. Shay believes there is also a commonality in successful therapy.

RTE: This is all so heart-wrenching. How do your students react to it?

DR. PATITSAS: We now have students who are combat veterans. And their major reminder to me is this: War can destroy character, but it can also refine it. The soldier is by definition a victim of what Simone Weil called "The Empire of Might." But in the right circumstances this will make him stronger and wiser than the man or woman who stayed at home. Many soldiers feel that they have risked their sanity and salvation for the sake of society, that there was a real sacrifice of self in that intent. As a society we do respect that. We think, "That guy has been in combat." We look up to him because he has been tested in a way we haven't. One of my students confessed that he was ashamed to still be suffering traumatic outbursts since the war. But I told him that this is exactly wrong; it is I who should be ashamed for not having dared to face the danger he faced.

And we should see other victims of trauma in the same way. At some point we have to look up to the person who was abandoned at age six months in an orphanage and not held for the first three years of their life. Their whole life may now be nothing but suffering and they can't get well, but that person

is more than us in a way. Their connection to that ultimate trauma victim—Christ, and Him Crucified—is greater than ours. Nevertheless, what Shay is after is not just the proud display of trauma scars, but genuine healing. The Church would agree.

The Opposite of War is not Peace

RTE: Taking all this together—Shay's work, Grossman's meditations, your wider awareness that many more people than just soldiers suffer the psychological wounds of trauma, your students' responses, what have you come to?

DR. PATITSAS: Above all, this: that the opposite of war, or of any kind of trauma, is *not* peace, and that it is bootless to try to find peace after these events. Our psychology, with its excessive faith in the therapeutic power of "getting it out," has reduced the human soul to a steam engine, and emotional healing to an elaborate system of hydraulic adjustments—"venting" about sums it up. This approach is reductive; there is something deeply wrong in it. Modern psychology has nearly destroyed friendship in this country.

After trauma there can be no return to a category as neutral as "peace." The opposite of war is not peace, but liturgy—the cognitive, bodily, totalizing act that steadily increases communion instead of cutting it. It's an act that purifies and knits the character together, whereas trauma unravels it. In liturgy I give my life for the brother and sister, I renounce retaliation, and I give my very body and blood for the life of the entire world.

Moreover, Orthodox Liturgy enacts and teaches you actual doxological truth, whereas trauma teaches you a heretical truth. War, then—like every form of trauma experience—has always been an anti-liturgy.

RTE: Can you explain this further? You aren't just saying that war is the opposite of liturgy, but that it actually enacts a false liturgy?

DR. PATITSAS: In any all-engulfing experience you obtain a knowledge that totally overtakes you, but when it goes wrong as in trauma, other effects are added, including the *cutting* of communion, the unraveling of character, and the learning of a heretical truth. The heresy of war is that a) my brother is not my life, but rather the opposite of my life and b) that God is not all-powerful, or at least will not exercise that power in a loving way in my case. Now, does my awareness that this is a lie mean that I myself wouldn't fight to protect

my own? I would, but because I also know that ultimately it is not my enemy, but other dark powers, behind his actions, I would recognize this fighting as, in part, misdirected. And moreover, even in a fallen world, the enactment of these heretical truths is a deep tragedy.

Another example is how these characteristics apply to sexual sin. Let's say that you are having a sexual event outside of marriage. It's still cognition ("knowing" the person, as Scripture says), it's still totalizing, but even at the moment that it's supposed to be the most intimate and ultimate experience, sexually immoral acts in reality "flip" and become the cutting of communion. This is why sexual addictions unravel our character, whereas sex within marriage helps us to knit it together. Sex outside of marriage teaches us a kind of heretical truth, even about—especially about—the goodness of sex itself, because people are left with these awful aftershocks of shame about their bodies and their desires; everything is inverted.

Healing of Trauma

The point is that what we've "learned" as trauma victims in any of these traumatic experiences isn't completely true because there is a truth transmitted to us in the moment of trauma that is a heresy. Trauma is practically the ultimate teacher—few other experiences so powerfully form our view of the world. And yet what it teaches is mostly lies. To be sure, it has a part of the truth, though, so the issue isn't to erase it, because that would be going too far in the other direction.

But the trauma victim is driven towards a point where their only communion, in a way, is with that false knowledge, that lie. It's a kind of reverse gnosis. So what we are saying applies not only to traumatized victims of war, but to any trauma sufferers, or all of the trauma that you or I may have experienced in our lives.

We can't expect the world to be the Church, but the point is that there is an awful lot for the Church to work with, and with trauma there is a whole fresh array of evidence around which to reflect theologically. We say often among ourselves that to have Orthodox theology is to have a "cheat sheet," to have all of the answers already, because everything in life can be explained so much better. When we experience trauma our very being is thrust from being to non-being—and this is hell. But Christ's liturgy can absorb any amount of chaos back into being.

Freud, the Mind, and the Heart

RTE: Is what Shay says about healing trauma applicable to the more general practice of psychotherapy and our wider social problems?

DR. PATITSAS: To be frank, I think that we don't have much of a psychotherapy in the modern West and that we will never get one until we "master" trauma. These same principles of healing have to be used in every psychotherapeutic situation. My mentor, the city-planner Jane Jacobs, said that the clues to what problems are piling up unsolved and will destroy a society are always to be found in the sufferings of the poor. Mother Theresa thought caring for the "poorest of the poor," including especially the unborn, was the gateway to social peace. Muhammad Yunus thought that lending to the very poorest was the only hope for real development. And our own St. Silouan summed it all up when he understood that he must pray simply, "All these will be saved; only I shall be lost." To me, the witness of the 20th century is unanimous: We will find all our answers in sacrificing for the "least of these my brethren."

Well, the poorest, the weakest, the most vulnerable person psychologically is the sufferer with PTSD. Not only are they utterly excommunicated, but all of their human energies are recruited to the fundamental task of deepening and preserving that excommunication. You can't threaten this person with hell; they already live there, and they will fight with their last breath to remain there.

Shay is finding ways to re-commune these ultimately vulnerable people. The older psychotherapeutic techniques of exposure, self-revelation and self-analysis only dug them further in.

RTE: Out with Freud?

DR. PATITSAS: Freud is the death of the West—a statement which I promise to qualify! What he kills—together with Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and others—is the Greek-Roman West of modernism. He is part of that cohort of thinkers who deploy rationalist scientism to deconstruct rationalism itself. And this is only possible because the West in fact had become too Greek and insufficiently Jewish; when it focused on the intellectual sins over the sensual sins, it privileged the mind over the heart, an intellectually interesting category like human nature over the mystery of the actual human person. And without the heart and personal communion, the mind cannot preserve the



Odysseus and the Sirens, Roman Mosaic, Bardo National Museum, Tunis.

basic presuppositions of its own rationality. As we know, all of this is driving the modernist West in a number of contradictory directions—religious fundamentalism, nihilism, three-blind-mice scientism, and most especially political messianism.

But Freud and the others could also be taken in this positive way, as signposts that without the way of the heart, the other ways of science and of engineering—the Greek and the Roman—are adrift, rudderless. Through his idea of the unconscious, Freud gives you back something like the Jewish heart—the non-rational motivation for human action. However, Freud doesn't place the mind *in* the heart as does Orthodoxy. Rather, he just tries to drag the heart into the mind, which is what much of modern therapy does. And this is what Shay found: the intellectual retelling of traumatic experiences for his veterans led to an epidemic of suicides among his patients. That mentalist approach is always bad, but the trauma sufferers are your poor, your canaries in the coal mine. They are our clue as to why modern psychotherapy is so flawed.

The trauma sufferer himself or herself seems at first to agree with the conventional approach. They imagine that through something like cognitive talk

therapy they will be able to weep, cry, get it out, purge it all away. But Shay found that for trauma it doesn't work this way. Although on the surface, the therapist might think, "Wow, he really opened up to me today...", the problem seems to be that this talk therapy is only cognitive in a weak sense. It's just brain; it isn't yet a restoration of communion.

As I said, initially, Shay and his co-workers tried the reflective listening approach, but they found it went horribly wrong. For severe victims of trauma, it led to a rash of suicides among the people who had been encouraged to talk about what they had seen and experienced. Mere talking was not yet a restoration of liturgical communion. Instead it left them in total, killing isolation. As I said before, trauma is a deep excommunication, and thus the unraveling of your very being, which is constituted only through interpersonal communion. The worst thing that can possibly happen to a person who has been excommunicated in this ultimate way is to be treated in this cold intellectual manner. It is the death of the soul.

Only one kind of listening helps—listening in which the hearer is deeply empathic. The trauma sufferer is isolated even from himself; the therapist must actually feel *for* him, until he can feel himself.

RTE: But we've all had friends who tell us the painful scenes over and over, and although we listen with our whole heart, it doesn't help. Is there something lacking in our empathy?

DR. PATITSAS: I'll tell you how it's done, by the people who still know how to do it. But they are a small vanishing breed these days.

What they seem to somehow do, and really it turns out to be Christ acting in them, is that they take *all* of your pain, *all* of your isolation and trauma. They may do this through weeping where you can't, being outraged where you can't. Or, they may do it through a depth of inner life that I can scarcely imagine. What is crucial, though, at this phase, is that their intention is not to change you, to heal you, or even to help you in a sense. Their only aim is to suffer with you. Only then—and this may take years of close spiritual friendship—does it begin to dawn on you that they are suffering in your place, that they are taking on your burden. And then you yourself will demand to take some of this burden back. But now you will be ready.

But this is, as I say, a vanishing art.

RTE: Today it may be, but what you're saying reminds me of what I sometimes see in Russian and Greek village life, the way people listen intently.

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, they don't listen "efficiently" like we do, getting so quickly to the main points and the actual root issue and the blah blah blah. Friendship cannot be done efficiently. So when in the Greek village, you try to go too fast and say your story too completely and too all at once, they just won't let you. They'll stop you, and they'll try to make up what is lacking because of what you've suffered. Because you're in a state of excommunication, they will try to re-commune you in any other way—through food or touch. The talking is limited. You are not *allowed* to tell your story just yet.

Shay points in the same direction. He says that what is needed is not cognitive processing—a listener in a hurry to download all your personal data, find a solution, and move on—but a listener who weeps where you can't, a listener who feels your hurt in ways that you can't. And even before you get to this you need to establish good patterns of self-care for the person: a routine, decent food, a job to go to, friendships. Once the patterns are in place, then comes the empathic listening—reflective not in the sense of intellectual bounce-back, but heart bounce-back. In fact, you don't want to be cold while the other person reveals himself. You want to be touched, and this guy, who

maybe even isn't saying too much, sees that you are touched. He may not acknowledge what he's seeing, but he's secretly touched that you are crying with him. That is the aim of this therapeutic relationship: to feel the emotions that he can't feel—to re-communicate the person whose trauma has placed him outside of human communion.

RTE: We started our discussion about Shay by saying that *The Iliad* actually healed combat trauma. Is this how?

DR. PATITSAS: *The Iliad* did this. It was recited to a group of veterans who felt those emotions on behalf of Achilles, Ajax and Odysseus, who in the story go through just what they had gone through. The listeners are healed because they are grieving for other, heroic and ideal, combat veterans. The first step in healing, of course, is to remove the person from the trauma, but then we engage this social aspect. If there are very good relationships in your life, then the bad relationships can be assimilated. If the person has this closeness to Christ, to Panaghia, to the saints, as well as to other people, then little by little, other things can be digested and find their place, because the person is not done. No one is done, especially at age twenty-two or twenty-five. But there have to be enough good patterns and relationships in place to help these other things fit in. The forces re-communicating you have to outweigh the forces ex-communicating you. Also, for those who are helping, God's grace has to be a living experience that is transmitted, not just talked about.

A society that has a means of therapy for traumatic stress is going to recruit into its functioning self-awareness many restored victims of traumatic stress. But these people are not like us, these people are better than us because they've been through hells that, God-willing we haven't experienced. So now, when they receive this healing and are transfigured, what they offer to the Church and society is really great. Now you have these people at your councils of war, and this is what Shay says that *The Iliad* leads to. You've got people who are healed from traumatic stress in the council deciding, "Is this war worth it?" That's not where we're at now. How many of those in command have faced what these people have faced?

From *The Iliad* to Christ

What Shay is arguing is that the performance of the text itself was the therapeutic act for Ionian society, 600 years before Christ. That act of listening to the recitation of *The Iliad* from someone who knew it by heart over days or weeks worked because it took place in a communal setting among other survivors and it showed a kind of universal compassion to all of the soldiers equally. Because in *The Iliad* there are no good guys or bad guys, its performance helps you to renounce resentment and villainization. It is the beginning of reversing this excommunication of resentment—"the wind of hate" that Grossman talks about. In *The Iliad*, the wind of hate is itself the villain. It is a force and everyone is the victim of the empire of naked force.

RTE: So, to bring this amazing conversation to a close, can you pull together Shay's principles of healing trauma in the context of Christ and the Church?

DR. PATITSAS: The first level of those who truly help is not only listening, but crying with them. If the healer is able he can go further and take my traumatized life on his shoulders and carry it, but this is much harder because you are often going to lash out at the person who tries to bring you back into communion. You may hate them before they are done loving you.

In a sense the Christian priest or therapist or friend doesn't have to take on the burden of me, because Christ does it. And in fact, if they do it in a wrong way, it could destroy them. They have to let Christ do it, and that is exactly what Christ did on the Cross. It's not only His trauma He is experiencing there—His torture and crucifixion—but all of our trauma from all of human history past and still to come.

This is real divine justice: you've been traumatized and you have the right not only to forgive, but to strike back somehow. The striking back doesn't accomplish anything, but that impulse is God-given, and Christ lets you do it to him. This is also the mission of the priest. He goes into a parish, he receives the chaos into himself and converts it into life. If he is able to do this it is because liturgy has become innate. He is not just the priest, but he is also the victim because he is going to take it from everyone.

When you go to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, it's an all-encompassing experience with Golgotha, the tomb of the Lord, and the place where St. Helena found the Cross all under the same roof at varying levels. But one thing you may not have heard about is a stone slab near the entrance. This

is the anointing stone. The present one is from the fourteenth century, but it is located at the traditional site where they anointed the Lord's body after taking him down from the Cross.

All kinds of people have experienced trauma or read about trauma and they think, "Where was God then?" Our intellectual, rationalist conception of God is that He is up in his remote perfection and we're down here taking it on the chin. But when you see that anointing stone, it is a visceral experience. If you are a trauma sufferer yourself, you may feel, as Shay says, "the overwhelming urge to weep, cry, vomit." Christ as the ultimate trauma victim.

(But notice that the Orthodox Church does not replay these events in a dramatic way; Holy Week is not a hyper-realistic passion play. For those who get it, the restrained way in which things are said is enough; and for those who don't get it—well, I hope they never do. In film today, if they are going to show you some traumatic event, it's a writing in flesh, almost a kind of pornography. They so spell out the traumatic event with music and camera angles that they try to put you through it yourself. The only way to tell you the story is to make you suffer. That is not what Homer or Holy Week is doing, but that's what a passion play, or a certain type of retelling of Christ's life can become.)

But when you see the anointing stone it all suddenly hits you and you wonder, "How can one person take that much?" There's even a message here for those wounded by rape, because on Holy Thursday when we process with the Cross we sing the antinomies, such as, "The One who hung the clouds... is wrapped in a shroud..." But another one is, "The Son of a Virgin... is pierced by a spear." His body is violated and abused, but we don't stop there. The point of Christ's suffering, His liturgy, is that He can take all of the chaos of the world—not just the chaos of non-being, but the chaos of fully-formed being acting evilly. He can take all of that, everything, and convert it into life. Now *that* is liturgy, and *that* is the opposite of the hell of war. I suppose that it is peace, also—but a dynamic peace that is both hard won, and a free gift of grace. ✦