

# Foreword

“Veterans won’t confide in civilians about war.”

A military chaplain said this to me. I have been dealing with war for a long time, and I disagree. I’ve been granted chances to pray with, lament, and hear about resurrection joy, with war veterans. I listened as a veteran used distancing pronouns to tell us “one has to” and “one was trained to,” explaining how shooting animals for food allowed him to focus his aim and kill for D-day, when other men around him subconsciously aimed askew. A living witness to Patton’s infamous speech told our class “war is hell, and it doesn’t solve anything.” My father, a civilian pastor, helped veterans of the Cold War recover from their visceral reaction to a Cambodian family our congregation sponsored for immigration. A Gulf War veteran explained why he and his wife avoid church on two Sundays—Veteran’s Sunday and Mother’s Day. Their loss was discordant with the celebratory aspect of both. A soldier on leave from Afghanistan told me that parenting was the hardest work on return, because you can’t tell a resentful teenager to do push-ups.

Veterans will trust some civilians, given grace and opportunity. But trust requires being up close and uncomfortable, with neither the awe of “heroism” nor the fear that trauma is contagious. The book you are holding is just such a trusting gift.

I teach at a university where, for more than three decades, students have heard from Stanley Hauerwas about why they should take the national flag out of the Christian church’s sanctuary. Stan Goff’s *Borderline* digs radically (at the roots) into this matter. Why are veterans in the U.S. treated as uniquely heroic? Why does the American flag compete with the Lord’s Supper as a symbolic aperture of truth—the icon through which we can see the narrative of ultimate sacrifice?

Stan Goff has helped me see that, for much of Western culture, *war* separates boys from men. As the dividing line between merely potential manliness and actualized manliness, participation in war also divides men

from women. *Borderline* shows how the division of man from woman is vital in order for the imaginative power of war to conquer the Christian hope for love.

Years ago, Stan named something called “the ick factor” as an aspect of the warrior mentality. Women are gross, because we represent the lowest, downward point, a ladder up which boys must climb in order to become men. Because women bleed unheroically during menstruation, weep more readily, secrete fluids that can’t be measured for their potency, run less swiftly, ski downhill or race our bobsled in a less virile way, women are the “ick” that is, paradoxically, sexually desirable. *Borderline* unpacks this paradox.

The warrior mentality is *gynophobic*—a concept that Stan elucidates often in this book. Some young women I know also use the term *femophobia*, a useful notion for understanding the “decoy” aspect of the modern “female warrior” figure. Women can serve as warriors too, as long as we resemble men in the warrior role. We can join the *brotherhood* as contingently “honorary males.” The female warrior is a *decoy* suggesting war is no longer patriarchal.

These same women, however, must maintain the sexual order in all other ways. I am thinking now of the strange television warrior, the 2011 *Homeland*’s fragile Carrie Mathison. A woman can participate in warrior culture as long as she weeps copiously on screen, screams with apparent irrationality, falls in love with and has sex with a man who could and just might kill her, and variously makes clear that she can be flamboyantly feminine. She is decidedly not the usual male warrior. Stan’s writing has helped me to see that *Homeland* is a dangerously sophisticated *decoy* narrative.

I confess I am tempted to call Stan one of my heroes. I know. I am a Christian. Jesus should be my only hero. I am a feminist. I should eschew the entire concept of heroism. Perhaps there is a better term. But here’s the thing. When I write a note to Stan or when I write about his writing, I don’t flinch. I write as a feminist, without flinching. I can’t think of another Christian man writing today, at least not one who is older than thirty and not openly gay, about whom I can say that. I composed the paragraph above this one without flinching—without worrying that Stan will say I’m being cruel to men or trying to declare the end of men or being rhetorically prone to overgeneralization about the rules that govern “masculinity.” Let me put it even more plainly. Stan Goff is a man, a Christian, and a feminist. Full stop. Praise God, this is no small matter. This gives me hope for greater trust in real time, face-to-face conversations with men and women about the toll war takes on men and women.

There are several ways that this book is a major contribution, even a reset button, for Christians eager to talk about and write about pacifism, but

also about war and sex. Stan offers a gracefully truthful word to Christians who defend the canonical, Western tradition, especially Christians who admire Alasdair MacIntyre. Stan Goff is an admirer of MacIntyre, and so his correction to contemporary MacIntyreans is subtle, but significant. *Borderline* shows how chivalry turns on an axis of weakness versus strength with sex as the motor. If Christianity is cast as a pristine jewel, or a virginal hymen, to be protected with one's pen as a sword, then Christian scholarship becomes an honorable war. If chivalry provides the rule book for Christian scholarship, then women who are strong or sexually potent, or men who are obviously vulnerable or gay, are a threat to chivalry.<sup>1</sup> (Virginal, submissive women, or powerful, asexual men, can serve as useful ballasts for, rather than threats to, chivalry.) Writing as a Christian is not a matter of honor and dishonor. I need to live and pray and write in a different imaginative world than that.

Christianity cannot be primarily about protecting God's Word from those who would soil or steal it. Gosh, Jesus somehow appears all over the confounded globe at the Mass, in little pieces, with bits of him here and there, willy-nilly, neither ordered nor counted nor carefully distributed. Who can protect that?

*Borderline* offers a stalwart, brotherly word to Christian men who have come under academic fire as less than manly. This book invites unrepentant pacifists to shrug off their detractors as schoolyard bullies. I am thinking here of James Hunter's gussied up but still pugilistic taunt at Stanley Hauerwas, that Hauerwas is either insufficiently honest about his desire "To Change the World" or insufficiently courageous to take up a holy charge "To Change the World." It is hard not to respond to that sort of charge without getting into what my dad would call a "pissing contest with a skunk." Here at Duke, an apocryphal story circulates each year that both MacIntyre and Hauerwas have told audiences that they argue against violence because without a commitment to nonviolence, they might beat the living shit out of those with whom they disagree. As a woman, I have never found that terribly helpful, because it still trades on hyper-masculinity, stirred with a dash of stoicism. Not only could these two men kick your ass, so the story suggests, but they have the extraordinary self-discipline not to do so. Of course, that is neither of them at his best, right? It isn't representative of their scholarship or their better instincts. But, in a theological brawl, muscular Christianity is an alluring temptation. I myself have been known to compare myself to Madame Lafarge from *A Tale of Two Cities*, saying that, if I believed in the death

1. Chivalry is derived from the word for cavalry, a mounted soldier, the dominant form of soldiery in medieval war. *Chevalerie* means "of the horse," a horseman. The term is rooted in war.

penalty, I wouldn't know just where to stop. It is the same temptation. *Mea culpa*. If Christian writing is a battle of potency versus impotency, then it's difficult to resist the temptation to defend oneself as potent.

*Borderline* is also an antidote to a version of what Kara Slade has called an "add Eucharist and stir" recipe for theological ethics. This theological error goes something like this: diagnose problem X; prescribe more blood/wine and body/bread; bake at 350 for two years, and the problem will cook into a new cake. Sometimes writers toss in the brilliance of Mozart, or, alternatively, a Quaker form of slow, patient, democratic consensus; but the gist is the same. I've been guilty of it myself, especially when I am worn out from marriage or divorce, or from being a divorced mother of two daughters. At times, I am tired and have no better answer to my young, intensely inquisitive seminary students than "go to church, and consume yourself some Jesus with extra Jesus!" Sometimes it's right. Sometimes it's theological marijuana.

Sometimes, when I found myself giving blurry, exhausted, sincerely pious answers to the misery of war waged by the U.S. around the world, I would knock on Stanley Hauerwas's office door, invariably interrupting a phone conversation with one of his many friends, and ask him what he thought. He wouldn't give me a word about "abundance," or ask us to "pray together," or tell me I needed to "just trust in the power of reconciliation." He was never obnoxious that way. He would give me a stern and grouchy history lesson about who sold weapons to whom and where the bullets came from. He'd hand me a book I should have already read, about the many little ways that war is sold to people who are just trying to make ends meet. He'd sometimes seem a bit annoyed that he was having to teach a political science major with supposedly leftist tendencies and a Yale PhD about the basics of power and capitalism and war.

But mixing religion and politics is hard work, particularly as a teacher and an attentively present mother to two little girls. Mixing true prayer, un-sentimental piety, and micro-politics is even harder, especially when writing right here in the belly of the New South. *Borderline* combines many of those aspects in one place.

*Borderline* is a gift to civilians, veterans, students, pastors, and writers who try to write about our being holy together. Stan Goff has written a love letter of hope for those of us who are trying to hold fast to Christian feminism, or Christian pacifism, or . . . just plain Christianity. I say this as someone who has been shamed by the very Jesus who was supposed to be the source of our freedom.

I recommend a movie in case you are slightly overwhelmed by the historical detail in *Borderline*. It's a movie written about how to read Holy Scripture. This little 2009 movie is named *The Secret of Kells*. In this

intricately illustrated film, a little boy who is being trained to build an impenetrable fortress against the enemy learns instead a love for the beautiful, complex detail in the *Book of Kells*. And the battle for which this young artist is supposed to be training is not a pretty one. War in this movie is brutal, not sentimental. The scenes where the Vikings attack Ireland are so graphically horrible that my daughters still haven't forgiven me to this day for suggesting we all watch this on "movie night" five years ago.

War is a powerful aphrodisiac, Stan Goff writes, because it helps men feel like real men and some women feel like real women protected by real men. But that is not what Christianity is about. Warrior myths are not true, nor war beautiful.

The microcosmic Christian work of living faithfully in the U.S., of living in the shadow of American dominance and militarism, draws on the best we have to give. Living faithfully draws on my ability to hear the details of what Dwight D. Eisenhower called "the military industrial complex" as it lives and thrives and makes its beastly being. And it draws on my ability to hear and see and taste that, in spite of all that, the Lord is Good. God is Good. Indeed. Love without war is very hard work. And joy comes in the morning.

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