

Moral Injury and Healing in the Great War

"The Dead weigh heavy on the hand and on the heart..."

G.A. Studdert Kennedy

"There's a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." Cohen

1

Moral Injury

- ❖ Jonathan Shay (1994 and 2002) First Used the Term
 - ❖ Violation and betrayal of "What's Right" by those in authority
 - ❖ Impairs or destroys the capacity for trust
- ❖ Bret Litz (2009)
 - ❖ "Events in which a person perpetrates, fails to prevent, bears witness to, or learns about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs..."
- ❖ U.S. Veterans Administration
 - ❖ "...A construct that describes extreme and unprecedented life experience including the harmful aftermath of exposure to such events. Events are considered morally injurious if they transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."
 - ❖ Often mistaken for PTSD, identified by the presence of guilt and shame.

2



G.A. Studdert Kennedy

- ❖ “Woodbine Willie.”
- ❖ 1883 – 1929 - Church of England pastor and First World War Chaplain
- ❖ Served 1915-1919 and probably suffered PTSD and Moral Injury.
- ❖ Three “brief” tours in trenches, and at various military infantry schools
- ❖ Wrote extensively regarding his war experiences, lived his “life out loud.”

3

Ethical/Moral Challenge

“...When I went into my study in August 1914 to decide what I as a Christian minister was to do about this business, I went into one of those horrible hours of my life...”

(Democracy and the Dog Collar, 47-49)

4

Idealism

Your place is in the Front. The line is the key to the whole business... The more padres who died in battle doing Christ-like deeds, the better for the church. Most of us would be more use dead than alive!... Raw, Theodore Bayle Hardy, 50-51.

❖

5

Moral Crisis: Messines Ridge

- ❖ Messines Ridge Battle was a Turning Point, Reported in *The Hardest Part*
- ❖ Messines Explosions: At 0317 – the mines were detonated in a great blast that was heard in England, thousands died.
- ❖ Cheered with the British troops - "That's the thing to give them!!"
- ❖ Realized that what thousands were dying: human beings, with mothers, wives! Murder! .
- ❖ Also recorded in "What's the Good?" a Sergeant who came to the same conclusion.
- ❖ Tripped over body of German Soldier and had vision of the Crucifix
- ❖ His assistant Roy Ferguson was killed by shell fire, and he was nearly killed.
- ❖ He was awarded the M.C. for gallantry under fire, but wanted only to escape the cries of the wounded.

6



German photo after a bloody skirmish,
1917

“From that moment I never saw the battlefield as anything but a crucifix...”

7

*The Suffering
God: “Absolving
God” of
Responsibility for
War*

- ❖ "What is God Like?"
- ❖ God suffers in the death of his son, God suffers alongside each soldier.
- ❖ To blame God would challenge his own identity as a chaplain and Priest. "If God is responsible for famine, pestilence and war, then anyone who fights for peace, justice, is fighting against God. Evil must be outside of God." (The Wicket Gate, 139)

8

Combined Weight of Death

*"The dead
weigh heavy on
the hand and
on the heart."*

- ❖ War brings with it the reality of death. Rule #2!
- ❖ Served with medical personnel, moving the wounded to aid stations.
- ❖ Was drenched in the blood of the wounded.
- ❖ He buried hundreds, if not thousands
- ❖ "My God, My God, Why?" (Word and Work, 55-56)

9

Bloody Hands

- ❖ The many soldiers he preached to who died in the war
 - ❖ Peter, kneeling in position facing the front lines, shot through the forehead
 - ❖ The death of a soldier he had criticized for his selfish prayers
 - ❖ The hundreds he had buried in a single grave
- ❖ The death of his own chaplain assistant, he had sent him to the rear with the wounded, a "safe" assignment
- ❖ His own near-death experience in the artillery strike on his aid station, most in it were killed.
- ❖ Chaplain Hardy's death who he encouraged to minister in the front lines

10

“Come Unto Me”

....
*How can we come? 'Tis Dark,
 So dark, the day has fled,
 And left a bloody trail back in the West.
 The way to Rest
 Is faint and hard to find,
 Like those dim tracks that wind
 Across a dreary battlefield at night.
 Men travel round in circles and get lost,
 Come back to where two tracks had crossed
 An hour ago,
 And so
 In weary circles wend their way
 Still longing for the light,
 Still calling in the night,...*

*Such is our plight
 Who search for Thee
 Across the bloody battlefields of Life...*

11

Waste

*Waste of Muscle, waste of Brain,
 Waste of Patience, Waste of Pain,
 Waste of Manhood, waste of Health,
 Waste of Beauty, waste of Wealth,
 Waste of Blood, Waste of Tears,
 Waste of Youths most precious years.
 Waste of ways the saints have trod,
 Waste of Glory, Waste of God.
 War!*

Studdert Kennedy, *More Rough Rhymes
 of a Padre*, 80.



12

Betrayal by Military and Political Leadership: No Objective

What's the Good?

*But I keeps on allus askin'
What's the good and who's to gain?
When ye've got "a plain objective"
Ye can fight your fight and grin,
**But there ain't no damned objective,
And there ain't no prize to win.***

▶ *We're just like a lot of bullocks
In a blarsted china shop,
Bustin' all the world to blazes,
'Cause we dunno 'ow to stop.
Trampling years of work and wonder
Into dust beneath our feet,
And the one as does most damage
Swears that victory is sweet.*

▶ From, "What's The Good" in *Rough Rhymes of a Padre* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), 80.

13

Post-War Betrayal: Lies, Fed-Up, Disillusioned and Unmet Expectations

❖ *"Millions who gave up their all in a frenzy of self-sacrifice during the war are asking themselves bitterly what they gave it for. What's the good? And who's to gain? We are fed up."* **Food For the Fed Up, 7.**

14

Indifference



*When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed
 him by,
 They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die.
 For men had grown more tender and they would not
 give him pain,
 They only just passed down the street, and left him in
 the rain
 Still Jesus cried, "forgive them, for they know not what
 they do,"
 And still it rained the winter rain that drenched him
 through and through,
 The crowds went home and left the streets without a
 soul to see,
 And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for
 calvary.
 Studdert Kennedy, *Peace Rhymes of a Padre*, 37-38.*

16

Addressing Moral Injury: 3 Moves

- ❖ 1. Foundational Faith
- ❖ 2. Self Examination
- ❖ 3. Confession
- ❖ 4. Penance

17

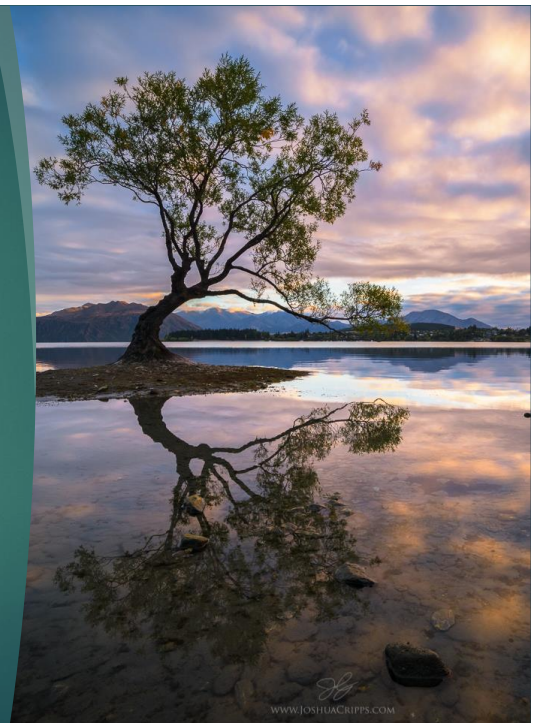
1. His Christian Faith

- ❖ 1. “Who Goes There?” to the universe, God!
- ❖ 2. His commitment to Christ
 - ❖ After Gommecourt -“Sure of only two things, Christ and his sacrament”
 - ❖ Incarnational life
 - ❖ His friends saw him as a prophet or a mystic.

18

2. Self-Examination: Thought and Reflection (1919-1921)

Because, although the horror of the battlefield has faded from my mind, **thought and meditation** have produced in my soul a dead and settled loathing of it as an evil, and not merely a very painful thing. **Thought and meditation** have convinced me that war is not only torture but that it is filthy. (Lies, 145-146)



19

Traumatic Memories



- ❖ Memories are a Mixed Bag
- ❖ Intrusive Memories – lack of control
- ❖ A decision to face our memories

“All life is a matter of life and death... Drugs are God’s mercy, a last resort. You must not presume on it or it will turn to poison. We must not forget. It’s suicide. **I must not forget...** “

(Lies, 228-229)

21

Pre-Trauma Events


- ❖ Studdert Kennedy’s brother’s suicide in 1898 may have contributed to the emotional toll the war took on him.
 - ❖ “If we love others we suffer for their sin, like a mother would feel a son’s sin; the only saints there are sin-bearers. (The New Man in Christ, 42).
 - ❖ All of us have griefs and regrets that impact our lives.

22

*Moral Insight
and Acceptance
of Responsibility*

- ❖ There is in it (**the Truth**) the power to heal the gaping wounds of war” (Food for the Fed Up, 289)
- ❖ Everyone asks why... Yes, it needs a cross to meet it and it needs a Christ to bear it and not break. (Word and Work, 55)

23



“That’s how the light gets in...”

“When I went into my study in August 1914 to decide what I as a Christian minister was to do about this business, I went into one of those horrible hours of my life... **I know now that this was a delusion**, that war is not merely waste of life, but is degrading and brutalizing to the spirit of man...” (Democracy and the Dog Collar, 47-49.)

24

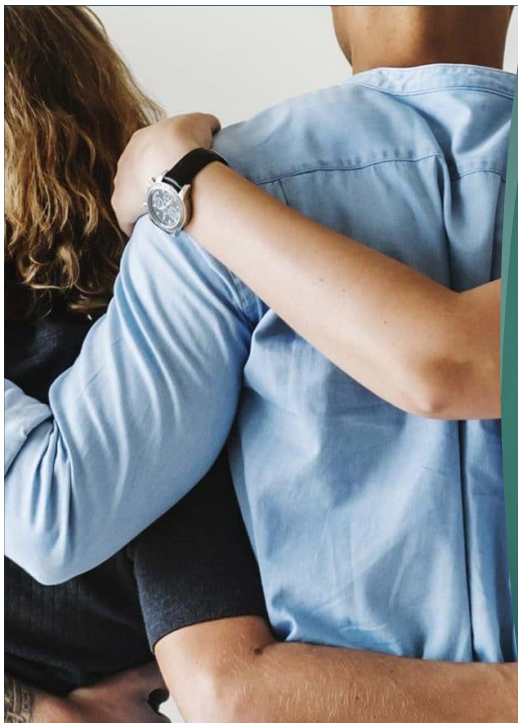
3. *Confession:*



“The Nation’s War Lie.”
Woodbine Willie’s Act of Penance
11 Nov 1921

- ❖ Acknowledge our own moral agency and Responsibility
- ❖ We Refuse to accept role of victim
- ❖ Choose the venue carefully, does not have to be a national audience.

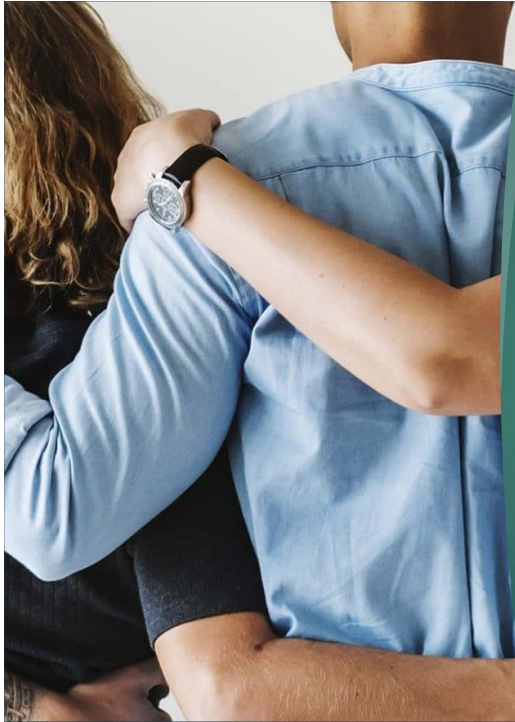
25



The Community: Trust & Care

- ❖ “The ancient practice of public confession sprang from and was filled with, the reality of community life...**But it was the community that absolved**, it was in the family that the power of healing and regeneration lay.”
(The Wicket Gate, 181-2)

26



The Sin-Bearing Community

- ❖ Christ is our sin-bearer on the cross. We can only know the sin-bearer as we bear the sin of others. If the church is a church indeed, **it is a body of sin-bearing people**, people who love; They are a body of people who can forgive because they are forgiven, who have been loved into being lovers. The church exists to bear the sin of the world. (The Wicket Gate, 198-199)

27

Forgiveness and Absolution

- ❖ That is what the danger of detailed confession is; it tempts you to think more of sin than of God, and that is what must be avoided... It is the knowledge of the love of God, whatever our sins may be, that save us; **so come to confession with your mind fixed on absolution.** (The New Man in Christ, 23)
- ❖ By continual communion with God we may become cleansed and entirely cured. (Ibid., 24)

28

Forgiveness of Betrayal

- ❖ The Corporate Betrayal (Military and Political Leadership)
- ❖ Forgiveness is essential, to “let it go.”
- ❖ A “root of bitterness” that may complicate healing
- ❖ No evidence this occurred with Studdert Kennedy

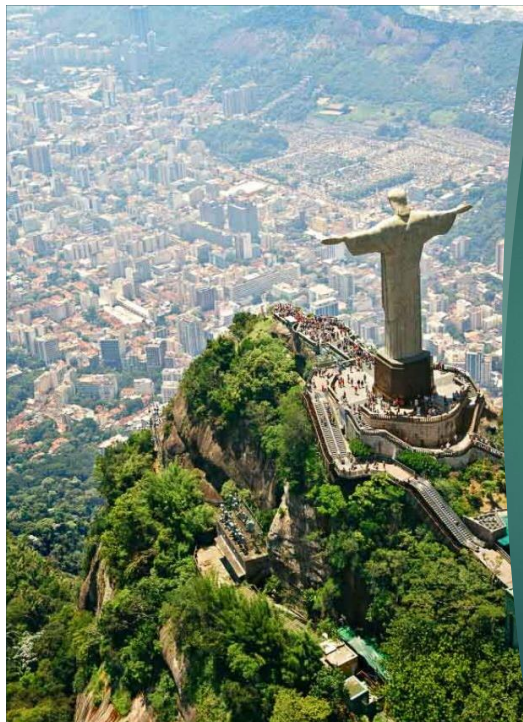
29

4. Penance



- ❖ Confessor often assigns penance (prayers, etc) and/or restitution correcting the wrongs committed.
 - ❖ Story of U.S. Sailor who returned to Thailand to assist villages there.
 - ❖ Ensure that penance is not self-destructive

30



Service and Post-Traumatic Growth

- ❖ Military leaders and politicians, he said, “bragged and boasted behind their armaments because they quaked with fear. . . ***They had got to abolish poverty and war.***”
- ❖ *“From that moment on I never saw a battlefield as anything but a Crucifix. From that moment on I have never seen the world as anything but a Crucifix. I see the Cross set up in every slum, in every filthy overcrowded quarter, in every vulgar flaring street that speaks of luxury and waste of life. I see Him staring up at me from the pages of the newspaper that tells of a tortured lost, bewildered world.”* (The Word and the Work, 57-58.)

31



Take-Aways: Addressing Moral Injury

- ▶ 1. Spirituality is a great aid to recovery and healing.
- ▶ 2. Self Examination
 - ▶ Silence is not the answer; is in fact harmful, as most soldiers learn over time.
 - ▶ Deal with memories
 - ▶ Recognize other issues that may complicate healing
 - ▶ Acknowledge moral responsibility
- ▶ 3. Confession:
 - ▶ Shay's experience is that a safe and trustful environment is required to provide veterans a place to reflect on and communicate their experiences:
 - ▶ Focus on the freedom of absolution not the wrong committed.
 - ▶ Importance of caring community of “sin bearers”

32



Take-Aways (continued)

- ▶ 4. *Penance – for wrongs committed.*
 - ▶ *Consultation with trusted advisor for best approach*
 - ▶ *Not harmful or hurtful. Restitution may be pursued.*
- ▶ 5. *Recovery and Post-Traumatic Growth are possible.*
- ▶ *U.S. Veterans Administration emphasizes a joint effort by Mental Health Professionals, Chaplains and others to treat moral injury.*

33

Studdert
Kennedy – A
final word.

‘My job is really doctoring people that doctors are no good to, and helping people that nothing on earth but only God can help, and striving all I know to give people faith and hope and power to be happy.’ (New Man in Christ, 234)

34