

## Dear Kailey

Concerned Aunt Says 'Make Love, Not War' Still Good Advice

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Australian female soldiers (left to right) Corporal Cindy Veenman and Captain Karin Cann patrol outside Multinational Base Tarn Kowt in Unuzgan Province in Afghanistan. In addition to the dangers of combat, military women face greatly increase risks of sexual assault and discrimination compared to civilian populations. | Photo Courtesy Australian Government Department of Defense

Dear Kailey,

I know you are aware of how much warring we do in this country, most recently, in the Libyan crisis, but also in ongoing war games off the coast of Korea, and of course, two long-term wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But, it is with great heartache that I hear you are considering joining the military upon graduation from high school. I am aware that good-paying jobs are scarce in rural mid-America, but I take my prerogative as your aunt and as a woman and clergy to tell you my reasons for concern.

Although it will seem harmless that the military teaches soldiers to shoot and kill people using video games like the ones you played as a child, the reality of war is far different. As one veteran, Shannon P. Meehan wrote, "The experience of killing your fellow human beings—whether innocent civilians or enemy combatants—fundamentally changes how you see yourself. War makes you doubt your own goodness: life itself seems cheap and meaningless." As a society we only now are beginning to grapple with what war actually does to our soldiers' mental and emotional lives and the nightmares that continue as a result of PTSD. I would not want you to have to suffer such emotional and spiritual pain.

I know that some of your uncles say killing is the only way to protect against an enemy. But, the last surviving World War I soldier, Harry Patch, said, "At the end, the peace was settled around a table, so why the hell couldn't they do that at the

start without losing millions of men?" And perhaps you have read that statesman Winston Churchill said, "It is better to talk, talk, talk than to war, war, war." Even U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied forces in World War II, warned us about the military-industrial complex that seeks perpetual war as a way to maintain political control and amass profit] in his last presidential speech.

And yet, despite these sobering admonitions, we still do not challenge the Pentagon's \$135 billion weapons program that spends more on U.S. military than the rest of the world combined!

We allow this gross expense for killing despite war's damage to ourselves. But as every good homemaker in our family knows, if you overspend in one area you have to cut back in another, so there is talk of cutting back on social security for the aged, welfare for the poor, and benefits to the immigrants, legal or not, but with little talk of decreasing wars even though that would make more sense. Why is that? As Christians we need to examine our basic assumptions about violence and human behavior. Is violence the only model for humanity? Shall we just accept this as the doom of our sinful nature and hope for heaven? I offer an alternative view; maybe we are perishing because we have no vision, as Proverbs 29:18 tells us.

## Physical Affection Cancels Violence

Researchers have found a surprising correlation between the warmongering of societal violence and sexual repression. Dr. James W. Prescott found that in those societies where infants are given many loving caresses and much attention and where later in their adolescent years if they are not forbidden or made to forego sexual expression, those tribes and societies do not engage in warring with one another... at all! In fact, he says the unlikely probability of a relationship between physical affection to infants followed by tolerance of premarital sex actually existing in violent societies is 125,000 to 1! But, of course, some women have been theorizing about this possibility as an alternative to male-dominated hierarchical violence for decades. You might want to read of the work of archeological anthropologist Marija Gimbutas in *The Language of the Goddess*, and Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade*.

You see, the sexual revolution's slogan "Make love, not war" from my younger days was absolutely on target biologically. Laboratory research with animals shows that when the brain's pleasure circuits are "on" then the violence circuits are "off," and vice versa. Prescott wrote that, "a pleasure-prone personality rarely displays violence or aggressive behaviors, and a violent personality has little ability to tolerate, experience, or enjoy sensuously pleasing activities." If this is true of animals, isn't it also possibly humanity's reality as well? This suggests there are alternatives to violence that sound like much more fun.

But if none of that convinces you, then consider that the military is a dangerous place for women soldiers because of the sexual assaults perpetrated by military men. Congress had to pass legislation to demand the military track these figures and it took three years to even find a committee to begin to do so. Military women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan experienced a 25 percent annual increase in sexual assaults according to Pentagon statistics from 2008, compared to a 9 percent increase for sexual assaults among civilian women during the same period. The Pentagon reluctantly admitted last year that 80 percent of the rapes are never reported to the military authorities but, even if they are, only 8 percent of rapes are actually prosecuted in the military compared to a 40 percent arrest rate for sex crimes among civilians.

Of course Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is nothing new for the citizenry. Japanese woman living near the U.S. military base in Okinawa, for example, have suffered some 350 sexual aggressions by U.S. soldiers annually since the base was established 64 years ago! One columnist, Chalmers Johnson, wrote, "The U.S. Military has created a worldwide sexual playground for its [male] personnel and protected them to a large extent from the consequences of their behavior." In these figures we clearly see the perverse linkage between militaristic training and sexuality. Giving training and permission to kill an enemy creates an environment that allows sexual violence and, as in war, there's little compassion for the victims. This violence-prone, death-dealing culture is truly dangerous for those on the inside. Are you sure you want to join? As Christians believing in God-in-the-flesh, we can take better care of our bodies and those of our neighbors than the United States' current state of perpetual war.

## A More Pleasurable Lifestyle

The Creation story says humans are to live in a time and place of sensual pleasure and abundance and I think, not coincidentally, the first humans were naked and unashamed. Researchers tell us that as long primary needs are met, bonobos and chimpanzees, primates who share 97 percent of our DNA, are peace loving rather than violence-prone, sexually free and egalitarian rather than sexually repressive and hierarchical, and are led by empowered female leaders rather than by male domination. Interestingly, this is also the common model of human forager societies, too. Indeed these societies, both current ones as well as historical ones, tend to work only half a day and spend the remainder of time in social and pleasurable activities. This sounds like a better way to be in the world than warring.

I know that you probably think that a clergyperson advising more sexual pleasure is bizarre, since it is mostly Christians who are pushing for a sexual repression. And, it is true that there is a correlation between those believers who are against premarital sex, science-based sex education, and access to abortions tend to also support the death penalty and justify war. But for the evangelical pastors who are aware of the justification of violence and war among their parishioners, they usually fail to suspect it might be connected to the sexual repression they themselves preach. As you know, there is no gospel story that supports the kind of body repression that the Western Church advocates.

But rather than focus on perversion and violence, let's embrace the vision of the Garden, the experience of foragers as well as bonobos, and embrace pleasure in our bodies. Let's give up policing, whether it's war in foreign lands or bodily pleasure. The Christian tradition, though it has its share of misogyny and sexual repression, teaches that the body is a temple where God dwells and where Jesus was incarnated as God-in-the-flesh. Since he was not an ascetic who denied the flesh, this indicates a divine sanction for our own flesh and our sensuality. You remember that one of the criticisms of Jesus' detractors was that he was too sensual, i.e. having too much fun partying and drinking with people they thought had bad reputations. But Jesus' priorities in life

did not include creating restrictions or laying down the law with an iron fist or picking up arms for self-defense. Instead, according to the writer of John's Gospel, he preached, "I come to give you life in all its abundance." That doesn't sound like someone restricting women from leadership roles or keeping young adults from exploring their sexuality. And, it sure doesn't sound like someone who would go after an enemy with weapons in a pre-emptive strike!

I disagree with those who embrace violence as a way to peace. If we want a less violent world it will not be found in warmongering or having the military offer the best-paying jobs available. Rather it entails a commitment to becoming more positive about the body in our society. The experience of body pleasure is just as important as eating and drinking. If we teach this principle, judging by the behaviors of foragers and bonobos, women will become equal with men and leaders in creating this new vision. I believe this is the spiritual vision of God-in-the-Flesh: to accept our human bodies as God's gift as it was in the Garden of Eden, rather than a curse, something to be enjoyed rather than controlled or repressed, as Jesus so clearly modeled. However, if we continue to identify ourselves as the policeman to the world, one who relies on force rather than peacemaking skills, then soldiers Meehan and Patch remind us we risk losing our souls and our lives. The research is clear; we don't have to choose violence. There are other ways of being in the world. If we embrace our bodies and pleasure more fully, we will find them.

There is a true story told that during World War I on Christmas Eve 1914 a truce was declared and the Germans and the Allied soldiers celebrated the holiday together. Though some suggest this was a fairy tale (because it doesn't fit with a mindset of "us versus them" that warmongering requires), it did happen. The war stopped for a time of peace, community, and even solidarity. That this happened in the "war to end all wars" makes it obvious that violence is a choice we make. No shots were fired on the Western Front that day because the players in the military game refused to play by its rules.

I propose that the violence of war is ultimately irrational and not in our species' best interest to pursue. But more importantly even, it violates the human spirit to destroy life just as it violates the spirit of humanity to restrict, control, and repress the sensual desires that move us toward one another in intimate connection. This pleasurable movement outward toward another releases our creative impulses, thus making it more likely that our conflicts will have a more meaningful and peaceful resolution. When we embrace bodily pleasure we are inclined to follow our hearts. And in so doing we will feel the connection and oneness of community that is so desperately needed in a hurting world that just keeps creating more hurt through violence.

The vision of wholeness exists in all faith traditions at their core: one humanity, many peace-filled communities. And, with this healing world of sensual and sexual abundance as our vision, who would want to pick up weaponry and go to war? I think this is a much more interesting and fulfilling life goal than joining up with the military. What do you think? -- Aunt Bev

***About the Author »***

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