

**MEMORIAL SERVICE,  
50TH REUNION, USMA CLASS OF 1965**

INVOCATION

Eternal God,  
in whom we live, and move, and have our being:  
We give you thanks for the lives of those  
we remember here today,  
who have touched our lives  
in ways of which we are at times aware,  
but also in ways we might never realize.  
Help us continue to “grip hands with them  
from the shadows” —  
until we join them in your eternal presence.  
Amen.

MEMORIAL MEDITATION

As most of us are aware, “[Mansions of the Lord](#)” was written for the movie “We Were Soldiers Once, and Young,” — adapted from the book of the same title by Hal Moore and Joe Galloway, about the battle of Landing Zone X-ray in the Ia Drang Valley in Vietnam in 1966.

The title of the book, Galloway has said, was inspired by a short poem by English poet A. E. Houseman:

Here dead lie we because we did not choose  
To live and shame the land from which we sprung.  
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose,  
But young men think it is, and we were young.

Over the past month I have found myself unable to get out of my head the title of that book and movie — and the Houseman poem.

The first two lines of the poem aptly describe those whose lives are lost in war:

Here dead lie we because we did not choose  
To live and shame the land from which we sprung.

But in the last two lines:

Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose,  
But young men think it is, and we were young,  
Houseman got it wrong.

Life, to be sure, is very much to lose — while young men often tend to take life for granted, greatly underestimating their own vulnerability to death — as perhaps we all once did.

My fixation on the book and movie title had much to do, of course, with the fact that all of us were soldiers once, all of us were once young, and all or nearly all of us served in Vietnam.

But it also prompted me to a renewed awareness that while those of us here have aged considerably over the past fifty years, those who in Vietnam gave what Lincoln termed “their last full measure of devotion” remain forever young.

In his first letter to Christians in the Greek city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul engages the claim by some Corinthian Christians that there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead — a concept not only central to early Christian faith but also an important part of the belief system of the first-century Jewish religious party known as the Pharisees — of which Paul himself was a member.

“Someone will ask,” Paul writes, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” — then proceeds to argue that the body which is raised, which he terms a “spiritual” body, differs in form from the physical body which is buried — just as a plant growing up from the ground differs in form from the seed which is planted there.

Paul believed the resurrection of Jesus to be the first instance of something that would happen to all God’s

people who had died — Jesus being simply, as Paul put it “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

What Paul was arguing against in First Corinthians was not so much the idea that those who die simply cease to exist — which is of course a possibility. Instead, he was arguing against the Greek philosophical concept of an immortal soul — a conception which tends to undermine the value of the material world. Paul was arguing in support of the Hebraic affirmation of the goodness of the physical world created, sustained, and redeemed by God.

What is perishable, Paul says, referring to the physical body, must “put on imperishability,” while that which is mortal must “put on immortality” — not as some disembodied soul or spirit, but as a spiritual body.

All language about God is necessarily metaphorical. God is God, and we are not — and the limits of our intellect and of language itself prevent us from ever describing or conceptualizing the ultimate reality of God.

This does not, by the way, mean that you should not read Ron Walters’ excellent book “Theory of Everything.”

A metaphor used increasingly by some theologians, and some writers who are not theologians by training or profession, is God as the Self of the world — or from the other direction, the world as the Body of God.

This metaphor, like Paul arguing for the reality of bodily resurrection over the immortality of the soul, seeks to affirm the deep value of the material world, and all the living things in it.

Thinking of the world as the Body of God helps us see that indeed all lives matter — however short or however long they might be — and that although death does in a very real way separate us from those we love,

causing us the deep pain of grief, in another very real way we all continue to live as part of that inclusive body which is both material and transcendently spiritual.

We were all soldiers once — and young. But while some of those we remember today remain forever young, and forever soldiers, the rest of us, whether we stayed on active duty until retirement or left as soon as we could, have gone on to become many other things: physicians; engineers; lawyers; judges; professors; business and civic leaders; writers; teachers; preachers; active members of synagogues, churches, and other faith communities — and importantly, parents, grandparents, and maybe one or two of us already great-grandparents.

As soldiers once, and in our many other roles since, we have all had an influence upon the world as a whole — as well as upon each other.

The last time we gathered here, I told of how I never knew Dick Collins especially well, but found myself at a table with him one weekend in firstie year when our regular tables were closed — and there learned of Dick's rather surprising interest in philosophy. I told of how that was the first thing I remembered when I heard of Dick's death in Vietnam — and how I have wondered in recent years whether that interest of his might in some measure have influenced me toward a more philosophical approach to theology.

Things I remember about other departed classmates include Mike Deems' no-nonsense pursuit of academics, athletics, and cadet leadership; B. J. Mogan's warm, good humor; Charlie Brown's easygoing friendliness; the beautiful tenor voice of Chet Myers; the multi-talentedness of Jack Cooley.

As the names of all those whom we presently know to have died ahead of us are read aloud, one or more of us

will recall something specific about each of them. But we should also be aware that each of them, whether directly or indirectly, has had some influence upon each of us.

What we owe to all those who those who have preceded us in death is not only to remember them, but to continue living our lives in ways that contribute as positively as we are able, with the varied gifts we have from God, to the ongoing life of the world — the Body of God — God in whom we all, now and ever more, live, and move, and have our being.

Amen.