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Onward Christian Soldiers...?

**The United States and her allies are at war. Should we be?
And should a Christian nation fight? Should a Christian fight?**

by James McBride

Violent death has marked every generation. Mankind, however, is designed to live in harmony with one another. What happened?

It didn't take long before sin entered the picture, death followed - and then the first murder.

The penalty was the loss of the right to settle: Cain's sentence for killing his brother was that he become "*...a fugitive and a vagabond...*" He rebelled, and tried to "*build a city*" - a fixed settlement. It was the very first city state. Man has, ever since, sought - and fought - for territory.

Unseen Hand

But behind all people movements there is an unseen hand. Though men scoff, the Scriptures teach that "*...God divided the nations...*" And, "*He drove out the nations also before them [Israel], and allotted them for an inheritance by line*" (Psalm 78:55 ASV). The sovereign Creator oversees every nation, raises up some, causes others to fail. Boundaries change. Empires rise and empires fall. But all under God's watchful eye: "*...He changes the times and the seasons; He causes kings to pass away, and sets up kings*" (Daniel 2:21 LITV).

When borders are established, and within the context of divine sovereignty, every nation - Christian, atheist, Hindu, whatever - has an obligation to defend its sovereign territory, and to care for its own citizens abroad. When the leaders make unwise decisions the nation suffers the consequences. When they govern wisely the people flourish: "*When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked*

beareth rule, the people mourn" (Proverbs 29:2).

Holy War

Throughout history much unrest has been provoked by religion. A nation driven by fierce religious ideology will often turn to the sword to settle its disputes or to expand its territory or its belief system. Medieval Christianity is an example. And, of course, Islam was born in blood - and continues so, with the goal of worldwide dominion.

A billion Indians are unashamedly Hindu. Islam rules the Middle East, Indonesia, and much of Africa etc. Some two billion Americans, British, Scandinavians, Italians, and others, however, adhere to the title of Christian. Should these nations be pacifist? Should they look to divine intervention to fight their wars, to protect themselves?

In reality all such nations are armed to the teeth. They spend vast sums annually to protect their citizens. But *should* Christian nations bear arms? Is the God of Christians too weak to protect His people, to blot out all opposition?

Despite the massive Christian influence, it is generally recognized that a nation must defend itself. 40% of the U.S. population claim to be "*born again Christians*". Should they bear arms? Most accept the need to do so, though some few strongly object.

It is curious that Christians, Jews and Muslims claim the "*same God*" - yet each prays to Him to intervene for victory in battle for themselves. In World War II Christian Germans and the Christian Allies prayed to

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the same God for victory. Muslims cry out to Allah. Which prayer should God hear?

The military excesses of the Middle Ages passed away, of course, and with the rise of humanism, coupled with the powerful influence of the Christian Scriptures, some nations became less threatening. In the 9th century Britain King Alfred had established a code of laws after studying the principles of the Biblical book of Exodus. Though undermined by foreign influence, it underpins legislation to this day. The divine Law was, to a degree, incorporated in the United States Constitution. (And why not? It makes perfect sense.)

Who's In Charge?

Ancient Israel was selected by God as His model nation. They were to be a “*holy nation*,” and He promised to fight for them. Israel would have none of it, and wanted to be like the surrounding nations. (Ref. See I Sam. 8) He let them have their choice, and they suffered the penalty in occasional loss of sovereignty and often the loss of military manpower. The LORD, though, kept the option of the right to intervene in order to fulfil His overall purpose.

But divine sovereignty wasn't - isn't - limited to ancient Israel. God (JHVH, Jehovah, the LORD, the Eternal) works to a master plan, everywhere allowing the exercise of national sovereignty, but intervening to achieve His own ends.

As acknowledged by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon: “...*He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What are you doing?*” (Daniel 4:35). And he added, “...*to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the lowest of men.*” The Persian king Cyrus, too, acknowledged God's sovereignty: “*So says Cyrus king of Persia, Jehovah God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth*” (Ezra 1:2 LITV). Modern times have also witnessed His power, as at Mons (World War I) and at Dunkirk on behalf of the Allied forces.

Divine Correction

Historically, God used the Assyrian nation to chasten His nation Israel: “*Ho Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger,*

the staff in whose hand is Mine indignation! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isaiah 10:5-6 ASV).

Not that “*the rod*” is itself necessarily righteous. Assyria's national character, as with Pharaoh at the time of Israel's freedom from Egypt, lends itself to such a use: “*Howbeit he means not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few.*” God bends national character to His own purpose. Excess on their part brings punishment on them (vv. 12-13). Perhaps this is a lesson for modern invaders.

So whatever puny men in offices of state may think, they are but pawns in the hands of the Almighty! They play at global politics but can act only within the boundaries God establishes. A mighty empire today - tomorrow merely a memory of past glory. An apt warning to modern nations!

A Christian Response

In our sinful and fallen world armed conflict is inevitable. Certainly God warns all of us to refrain from *murder*. That is a sane and essential provision in any legal system. War, however, is not murder. But He has left it to us how to deal with our differences - individually and between nations. He has set out the ideal and it is for man to follow it or ignore it. God's record in history is not to interfere - unless He so wishes! And those who embark on a war (and, who knows, God may have stirred it up!) will answer for their conduct of the war before the bar of Heaven.

Individual leaders in our world may flaunt their “*Christian*” credentials. None, however, can claim to follow the faith of the Scriptures. Modern Christianity is far removed from “*the faith once for all delivered to the saints.*” Unlike the newly-formed nation of Israel under Moses, they do not have clear divine direction in times of war, though, as with any leader of any faith, they may simply be a tool in God's hand.

In all this strife of nations, how should Christians respond? Military service in defense of our nation is not a defense of Christianity, for there's no such thing as “*a Christian nation.*” True Christianity is personal, of the heart. “*My kingdom*” said Jesus, “*is not of this*

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world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). Adds the apostle Paul: "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (II Corinthians 10:3-5). Unlike other faiths, as Christians we don't take up arms to defend - or promote - the Gospel.

Christians at War

Yet equally with the rest of our fellow-citizens we are beneficiaries, dependent on our armed forces and our Government - even a "Christian" government - to maintain our peace and safety (Romans 13:1-7).

As Christians we are exhorted to pray "*...for kings, and for all that are in authority.*" And why do we pray? "*...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*" Not for victory in battle. It is reasonable, then, that we shouldn't object to serve in our country's defense. Of all people, Christians are not - should not be - cowardly. Said Jesus: "*For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it*" (Mark 8:35 ASV).

Self-preservation is not a reason to become a Christian - or to avoid service in the military. But the military is a killing machine, and that is where conscience may draw the line. It is a matter for personal informed conscience as to *how* we serve. Should an individual in all conscience object to *all* forms of military service then he or she must accept the consequences (Acts 5:32-40).

A Christian, for example, may draw the line at firing a weapon (or launching a Cruise missile). But the front-line military - laying down their lives, perhaps, to protect *me* or *you* - all too often also require front-line

medical treatment. They need food. They need respite and off-duty entertainment and a variety of support systems - including *taxes* to finance them! The Christian objection is to war as a general principle. It's not the way to lasting peace, but is the way this world turns. How we are personally involved is a matter of private conscience - not a matter of church authority or of salvation.

As Christians we live in a secular world. We use money bearing the Monarch's or the President's insignia. We interact daily with non-Christians - for transport, in restaurants, in the work-place etc.

We pay tax to our secular - "*Christian*" - Government - a large portion of which funds military adventures. As said Jesus, then living under a totalitarian regime: "*...render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's*" (Luke 20:25 ASV).

Spiritual Warfare

As Christians our real warfare as servants of Jesus the Christ is in the spiritual realm - against our sinful nature, against the "*wiles of the devil*," and in defense of the church of God in face of Satanic pressures.

To this end, we gird on God's armor and deploy in our war the defensive spiritual weapons of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:13-18).

(All Scripture references are KJV unless otherwise noted.)

Published by:

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
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www.cgom.org

November 2006

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