

12. The Church Militant (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Rev. 2:1–7, Hos. 2:13, Rev. 2:8–17, Rev. 2:18–3:6, Isa. 60:14, Rev. 3:14–22.

Quotes

- We belong to the Church militant; and She is militant because on earth the powers of darkness are ever restless to encompass Her destruction. *Pope Pius XII*
- Church militant: those Christians on earth who are engaged in a continuous war against evil and the enemies of Christ. *dictionary.com*
- In some cases non-violence requires more militancy than violence. *Cesar Chavez*
- I believe there are too many practitioners in the church who are not believers. *C. S. Lewis*
- Church isn't where you meet. Church isn't a building. Church is what you do. Church is who you are. Church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let's not go to Church, let's be the Church. *Bridget Willard*
- The churches must learn humility as well as teach it. *George Bernard Shaw*

Questions

While the church may be committed to mission, how do we avoid a spirit of militancy? Is it important to be “right” at all costs? How is the Great Controversy settled—by show of force or divine dictate? In what way does the church need to better reflect the character of God in its witness? How do we fit in individually?

Bible summary

The major criticism of the church at Ephesus is that it has lost its first love (Rev. 2:1–7). Similarly the Lord condemns his people through Hosea for going after other lovers (Hos. 2:13). The other churches mentioned in Revelation also have problems, so it is hard to conclude that the church has ever been a good representation of what God intended (Rev. 2:8–17; Rev. 2:18–3:6; Rev. 3:14–22). Despite this it is worth examining the commendations and criticisms to see how we too fit into God's analysis of his church. Isa. 60:14 looks to the time when God's people are respected.

Comment

“Onward Christian soldiers” is a favorite hymn of many. Whether it is militancy or militarism, there are dangers. We need reminding that the battle belongs to God, that this is a war over *his* nature and character, and that it is not solved by force or compulsion. This is in complete contrast to the way we usually think about wars and violence. So when it comes to the church militant we need to get away from our usual preconceptions of what this means. The church is the body of Christ who told his disciples, “put away your swords.”

Paul in Ephesians speaks of battle and armor, but these concepts are not designed to make the church militant or military. Quite the opposite. He states that the battle is with “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” So, faced with such foes, he wants to comfort us, the terrified victims in such a conflict, where the power imbalance against us is so great. The armor is primarily defensive, for protection. Even the

broadsword was used to ward off blows. Paul is saying that despite the enormity of the conflict, we can have confidence because of God's care and protection for us. He is not saying "get busy fighting!"

The repeated emphasis is on "standing firm," not attacking or going "on the offensive." It is also of vital importance to examine what this "armor" consists of. The belt of truth—the first thing of primary importance in God's universe—speaking and being the truth. The breastplate—going over the heart—is righteousness, being and doing right. Interestingly for all the warlike imagery, the feet are shod with the gospel of peace. The shield, another defensive piece of the armor, is faith, our trust in God. Only by our complete trust in God are we safe from the lying attacks of the devil. On the head is the helmet, the assurance of salvation, another gift of God, while the sword is the sword of the spirit, the spirit of humility, gentleness, and love that is exemplified in the Word made flesh.

So while we are "at war," as is God and his faithful followers throughout the universe, this war is not waged using force and threat on the part of God. His way is totally opposed to such compulsion and intimidation. He seeks to win the spiritual war not by might, nor by power, but by his loving Spirit. Consequently while we recognize the spiritual warfare all around us, we are not to resort to our ideas of conflict but to rely on the same spirit that seeks to win through demonstration—a demonstration of self-sacrificing love that sees the "other" as most important.

Ellen White Comments

Now the church is militant. Now we are confronted with a world in darkness, almost wholly given over to idolatry. . . . But the day is coming when the battle will have been fought, the victory won. The will of God is to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. . . . All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving --the robe of Christ's righteousness. All nature, in its surpassing loveliness, will offer to God a tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. The years will move on in gladness. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, "There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death." {CG 568}

When difficulties arise in any branch of the cause—as they surely will, for the church militant is not the church triumphant—all heaven is watching to see what will be the course of those who are entrusted with sacred responsibilities. Some will stumble; some will give heed to seducing spirits; some will choose darkness rather than light because they are not true to God. Like their Master, those who are abiding in Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. . . . {CTr 123}

The Christian life is a constant warfare. The church militant is not the church triumphant. Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We must meet human beings of power and influence who are on Satan's side of the controversy; and we must also meet unseen agencies of evil. Let us be found in the right position. {PCP 23-24}