

# Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. IV, No. 4

@Institute for Christian Economics, 1980

July/Aug. 1980

## WHAT KIND OF ARMY?

By Gary North

"Onward Christian Soldiers" is a favorite hymn of most people. It is far better known than "Wayfaring Stranger," which begins "I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger, traveling through this world of woe." Yet the sentiments of the vast majority of professing Christians are with the second song, despite the fact that they are not very poor, and they are traveling in very fine style. The pilgrim motif is a lot more popular than the soldier motif.

There are reasons for this. "Pilgrim," in John Bunyan's classic 17th-century allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress* was basically an unemployed drifter before he was converted, and an unemployed traveller after. What did the man do for a living? Like the radio and television character of the 1940's and early 1950's, Ozzie Nelson, he had no visible means of support, no calling. Ozzie, however, must have done something for a living, but Pilgrim just plodded on and on through life. Bunyan, a wandering tinker for much of his life, and imprisoned for most of the remainder, to some degree resembled Pilgrim. But a tinker at least faced a market and delivered valuable services; Pilgrim was, as far as we can see, a vagrant.

This pilgrim motif stresses internal struggles over sin, rather than struggles with external enemies. The soldier motif is the opposite. The soldier gains his self-confidence and skills in boot camp, after this initial training, he is assumed to be ready for battle. He concerns himself with the enemy, who is a true threat to his life. The pilgrim is more like a newly reformed alcoholic, or a drug addict going "cold turkey." He wails, groans, struggles with inner horrors, writhes, and concentrates on what is going on inside him. He is at war with himself and his flesh, but not primarily at war with the external environment. The various allegorical characters in *Pilgrim's Progress* are external representations of internal enemies: vanity, doubt, despair, and so forth. The pilgrim does not bother much with his external environment, since he is only passing through. The soldier, on the other hand, is a conqueror, and he has to be concerned with what is going on around him.

Perhaps the most detailed Pilgrim manual is William Gurnall's *Christian in Armour*, the 17th-century book which devotes its 2,000 pages to a consideration of every conceivable personal temptation faced by the soul—except, unfortunately, the temptations of the battlefield. Gurnall did not involve himself in the theological battles of the day, which were literally life-and-death battles, and he signed the Act of Uniformity in 1662, thereby insuring his continued income as a State-certified pastor, while 2,000 Puritan ministers refused to sign and were thrown out of their pulpits and, in many cases, into jail. Gurnall preferred a life of irrelevance, warring with his own internal lusts, ignoring the external civil issues of his day. However harrowing his internal battles may have been, this pilgrim made his journey through his environment in comfort

and relative safety.

### The Battlefield

People get shot on battlefields. They get hurt. They aren't paid much, and what little they have is at perpetual risk. They can count on little from their external environment. They rely on their own wits, their past training, their experience under fire, their army supply system, and, most of all, the success of their commanding officer. The best-executed battle plan can lead to disaster if it is not the appropriate battle plan. The stakes are high. Yet the foot soldier must act in faith, obedient to his commanders, whether or not the plan is well-designed. The chain of command must function all the time, if it is to function at all.

Cromwell's forces knew this, and they were nearly invincible on the battlefield. Cromwell was a military genius, an innovative cavalry officer, and a forceful leader of men. They trusted his military skills, they executed his plans, and they toppled the British monarchy in the mid-17th century. When the New Model Army went into action, it was a true army.

Yet once the war was over, the splintering began. There was no real unanimity of goals and methods during the Protectorate. Men knew what they had to do to survive on the battlefield, but in peacetime, the unifying enthusiasm, as well as the unifying fear of military defeat, disappeared.

It is much the same today, except today's Christians have allegorized the language of battle. They have bled and died in the wars of humanistic Imperialism, but they no longer understand, or even recognize the validity of, the legitimately Christian battle. They have spiritualized and internalized the Bible's language of warfare. They are not willing to step out into a real battlefield, since they have never experienced boot camp. They are not fit for a war.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* makes it clear that a war is on, and that Christians are deeply involved. The same point is made by Kortikov's *Prisoners of War* and Richard Wurmbrands' *Tortured Christ*. In Communist China, the persecution after 1949 may have been even worse, as Raymond de Jaeger's *China: A Country Guide* indicates. Real battles, real life-and-death decisions, are being made in real battlefields, daily, all over the world. Nevertheless, American Christians cannot recognize the signs of battle. They cannot even recognize the threat posed to them by the public school system. They co-operate. They go along. They worry about the allegorical battles, not the real ones. Whether or not a county allows the sale of alcoholic beverages is a major issue in the South's more rural counties; whether or not to start a Christian school isn't, for the vast majority of Baptists and Methodists. They battle pink elephants, while sacrificing their children, tuition free, to the Moloch State.

“Shoot a Commie for Christ” is a slogan of ridicule used by secularists to impugn the motives of Christians. Yet the escalation of war tensions may make it necessary for Americans to be asked to “Shoot a Commie for America.” We have been asked to “shoot a kraut for Britain” twice in this century. What we take as a national duty-service to the humanist State—we regard as ridiculous in the field of religion. The holy wars of this century have been the most devastating, most ferocious wars in man’s history, but the holy gods have been the humanist gods of the State and Party. Armies were once asked to go into battle in the name of a transcendental god, but whole populations are called to self-sacrifice and self-immolation in the name of the *Volk*, the Proletariat, and the fatherland.

#### The Chain of Command

What modern Christians object to is the idea of an earthly chain of command. To some extent, the Mormons still believe in the idea, although I doubt that every Mormon has bought a year’s supply of food for each member of the family, which is what they have been instructed to do. Roman Catholics acknowledge the legitimacy of a chain of command but most of them practice contraception, in direct violation of the Pope’s orders. In other words, even those who say they believe in a chain of command are willing to acknowledge its legitimacy only when the chain of command refuses to enforce fundamental law. This is a century of conformity to the State, not conformity to the church.

Men will conform. It is a question of which agency or agencies will gain the subordination of the population. In Protestant circles, the chain of command has generally become mush, because it is truncated (as in Baptist and Congregationalist circles), or because it has become impotent (the denominations). The people have no real confidence in their elected elders, their seminary-trained pastors, and their collection plate-passing deacons. While some local churches may operate in rather strict conformity to the wishes of a dynamic pastor, this dedication is generally not transferable to his successor, indicating that there was no real chain of command. There was only the strong personality of one leader—a leader who may have refused to delegate basic decisions to subordinates in the first place.

Protestants are not used to exercising authority, probably because they are unwilling to accept the legitimacy of ecclesiastical authority. Any church hierarchy which attempts to exact conformity from recalcitrant members will face the inevitable competition of another church, right down the street, which opens its arms to any disaffected member who will transfer his membership and his tithe (or what pitiful giving that Protestants have substituted for a tithe). The competition is too stiff, and the competition has led to a ~~least-common-denominator~~ chain of command.

What kind of army functions without a chain of command? None. Then what kind of army is the church? A defeated army. An army which is told that it must suffer defeat, that any sign of victory is an illusion or else a lure into a subsequent defeat, that victory must be the Devil’s, will be a defeated army. Yet this is precisely what modern Christians have been told, and since they don’t like the rigors of battle, and since they don’t like the discipline of a chain of command, and since they really don’t trust the judgment of their officers, they prefer to listen to stories of defeat. Defeatism justifies their own softness. And since they are guaranteed victory in the internal battles (they think), and since the external warfare is simply allegorical (they think), they can dismiss as ridiculous the idea that we really should be training as soldiers—soldiers ready to do battle on a multitude of battlefields.

#### The Supreme Commander

Jesus Christ is our supreme commander, but He operates only through His word, which is unquestionably a training manual. However, He has many interpreters, and few people see the Bible as a true training manual. There are too many one-star generals in a peacetime army, all building up their local empires, all jealously competing against their peers, and most of them completely unprepared for a war. When the war comes, both superiors and inferiors recognize which generals are fit to lead, and the peacetime bureaucrats are rapidly removed from public scrutiny. Peacetime armies cannot tolerate men like Patton, or even MacArthur, in a shooting war. You cannot win without them.

Field-grade officers are numerous. That’s what Protestants have in large numbers. However, they all have the idea that they are generals, or if not actually generals, then at least they are as good as today’s generals. However, they know for sure that nobody is about to follow them into battle, so it really doesn’t make much difference how good or incompetent they are. Nobody recognizes that the war is on, because it’s not a shooting war yet. (A seminary professor is a light colonel.)

Second lieutenants are, as always, as expendable as tent pegs, and not much more useful. They are the deacons, seminarians, and elders in churches that are one-man bands. They know they are unprepared, and so does everyone else.

Noncommissioned officers, like Sunday School teachers, are ignored by everyone. They are assumed to be incompetent, but you need them in any bureaucratic system. We supply them with weak or corrupted materials, give them no training, and send them out to teach. Teach what? Well, whatever drivel the fundamentalists have recently published, or whatever socialistic, guilt-producing handbooks that have been issued by the denomination’s liberals.

The troops sit passively, confused, unaware that a war is in progress. They think their commanders are on top of everything. They “don’t even feel called upon to exercise minimal leadership, which is just what their superiors prefer.

We have no strategists, so far as I can determine. How could we? We haven’t fought a real war in this century. (When was the last time a theological liberal was removed for heresy by any church, other than by the Missouri Synod Lutherans, in this century?)

We have a few tacticians who have specialized in areas like starting Christian schools, or battling against abortion, or setting up small activist or publishing organizations, but their efforts are not co-ordinated, and they seldom respect any single leader. Even communications are lacking; the groups seldom talk to each other.

If we have any generals, nobody salutes them, especially bird colonels, who generally think that they are the true generals.

#### The War

When war comes—persecution, a Soviet victory, rioting in the streets, the visible attacks on Christian schools, a gun confiscation law, an economic collapse—then the generals will appear. There will be leaders only when the followers see the strategic necessity of following. When external conditions make mandatory a chain of command, we will see its creation. We have a reliable Supreme Commander. He knows what has to be done to win. His enemies cannot defeat Him or His troops. When commanders who are capable of leading join forces with followers who trust their judgment and who are willing to sacrifice for the sake of the war, we will see the light. And the market for books on the inevitability of external defeat will no longer be best-sellers. Psychological losers who don’t understand the stakes of this war are the buyers of such books. They will not survive the first volley.