

# ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS: THE CHURCH AS A MILITANT BODY

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## Introduction

As the human race approaches the twenty-first century, an increasing number of individuals are speculating as to what society will be like in the next millennium and what factors will be significant in influencing its developments. J. Naisbitt and P. Aburdene note that humankind is at the threshold of the third millennium, and there are clear signs of a worldwide, multid denominational religious revival. The American baby boomers, noted for their having rejected organized religion in the 1970s, are now either returning to church or are becoming involved with the New Age movement.<sup>1</sup>

New Age groups share no orthodox theology, but many adopt the East's belief in reincarnation. Unlike the Judeo-Christian God pictured far above humankind, there is a strong sense that humanity partakes of the divine.

This drives fundamentalists mad. "This notion that man is somehow God is just blasphemous," most would say. Yet even the most orthodox catechism states that man is made in the image and likeness of God . . .

Fundamentalists may dominate the cable channels, but New Agers have sewn up the market in channel mediums — individuals who say they permit their bodies and voices to be used as vehicles for teachers and messages from the great beyond — and sometimes grab a lot of the headlines.

Charlene Pittman, in Tampa, channels for a spirit named Boyaed, a teacher born in India A.D. 324.

Jack Pursel of San Francisco grosses more than \$1 million a year on seminars, counseling, and videocassettes as the channel for "Lazaris, the consummate friend."

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J. Z. Knight, a women [sic], channels Ramtha, a thirty-five-thousand-year-old man. Some reportedly pay \$1,500 to attend her seminars.

To your average fundamentalist, this is the devil in action.<sup>2</sup>

Rivals to the New Age movement are numerous. These may range from astrology to Tarot cards, or from religious cults, such as the Hare Krishna or Mormons, to outright Satanic worship. What effect do these trends have on the Christian church and on its view of itself and its role in society? Perhaps a more significant question is whether they have any effect at all.

At times, it almost seems that the secular world grasps the essence of certain religious issues better than the church. In a newspaper editorial, C. Reese describes how Christians, much like General George Custer, are under attack but have been slow to counter due to their lack of understanding the gravity of the situation. He notes that historically Christians in Europe and America have been part of the power Establishment, and they have grown complacent. By the first two decades of this century, Christianity had become impotent and lifeless in terms of its power to affect society and individual behavior. Reese notes that society's priests have become psychology and social science, and Christianity is viewed as the enemy, as it represents a rival faith.<sup>3</sup> Even the mental health field is becoming aware of these issues. L. Cidylo describes how the prominence of cults has increased since the cult suicides of Georgetown, Guyana, under Reverend Jim Jones on November 18, 1978. She notes how cults have gained momentum in the last decade, but that even most psychiatrists are unaware of the potential destructiveness of cult involvement.<sup>4</sup> In a world groping for answers to life and struggling with issues of evil on a daily basis, one naturally asks, "How has the church responded to meet these issues?"

To understand the church, its functions, and its response to the world, A. V. Burkalow notes that symbolism is one of the primary means of expressing the beliefs and practices of the church, with this symbolism being especially evident in the hymns and music of the church. Images frequently have been drawn from nature ("rock of ages," "fount of every blessing") or from family relationships, such as the description of God as Father and Christ as the brother of believers.

However, when symbolism is taken too literally, misunderstandings can occur. For example, "the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" seems to exclude women from the image, contrary to its intent. The Bible also would not intend to indicate that God is strictly male as we understand male, in that God is a spirit and

has no gender as we understand it. However, in an attempt to respond and accommodate those who see this literally, and thereby view it as discriminatory, whether it occurs in the Bible or in a hymnal, the church has attempted to create a genderless religion.<sup>5</sup>

A similar problem has risen around another traditional symbol as it relates to hymnology and, at a deeper level, how the church views itself and its mission. This relates to battle symbolism and the church as a militant body. Several years ago, the United Methodists were considering the elimination of the hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" from their hymnal due to its militaristic language and images. It was felt that singing it would be seen as promoting war, when the goal of the church is peace. If one compares the hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church of 1940 with that of 1982, one finds that formerly there were forty-two hymns with battle symbolism compared with only twenty-three in the more recent edition. Because of tradition and the popular outcry in the United Methodist Church, the hymn was retained; but it does not negate the fact that the church has found it increasingly uncomfortable viewing itself as a militant body of believers, in spite of Biblical and practical reasons for doing so. Burkalow reiterates the danger, previously warned about by Isaac Watts, that if our focus is only on praise and thanksgiving and little on the struggle of the Christian life, we begin to leave the fighting to someone else. She concludes

... if this symbolism is being neglected in hymns, is it perhaps neglected also in our sermons? Do not be afraid to speak and write about Satan and sin and to use militaristic symbolism to describe the personal and social warfare we must wage against them. Challenge us anew to carry on that spiritual warfare of ideas, for only when we have won the victory in this endeavor can we expect to put an end to the threat of physical warfare and achieve the peace we so much desire. Let us not forget that in pursuit of that end we as Christians are called to be the church militant. We must be spiritual warmongers.<sup>6</sup>

J. M. Wall concludes that there is a place for militancy in the church, in that we need to contend against the common enemies of hatred, ignorance, sin, warfare, and prejudice; and " . . . it may still be appropriate to put on the whole armor of God to defend ourselves . . . Onward, Christian soldiers — marching as to war, metaphorically speaking."<sup>7</sup>

It is the thesis of this paper that this battle symbolism must be ac-

tively embraced if the church is to accomplish the task of "going and making disciples," as instructed by Christ.

## **Spiritual Warfare and the Christian Life**

Before one can examine potential models of the church, one must first examine certain aspects of the Christian life, both individually and corporately. One central characteristic of the Christian faith is that it is made up of many apparent paradoxes. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9.24). "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (Matt. 20.26). Perhaps the greatest paradox is how a sovereign, omniscient, and omnipotent God would choose to use mankind as the vehicle for ushering in His kingdom. Luke states, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12.32), while Matthew describes the kingdom being advanced through the efforts of the followers of God, as he states, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matt. 11.12). One can understand this apparent contradiction only by understanding a key element of the Christian life.

### ***The Christian Life***

God wants to give His kingdom to the believer and has made it available through the atoning death of Christ on the cross, but the appropriation of that kingdom in the living out of one's daily Christian life can only be done through commitment on the part of the believer. It is because Satan wants to keep the believer from receiving God's kingdom and all that it offers in the present life that spiritual warfare must be a part of the victorious Christian life. L. Lea warns that the greatest trick that Satan is playing on the American church is the lie that everything is all right. He states, "If we are to be the church triumphant, we must become the church militant in this hour."<sup>8</sup>

The essence of the Christian life is that the ultimate victory over Satan and evil has already been won by Christ through His death and resurrection, but the church must continue the daily battle in defending God's kingdom here on earth until Christ ultimately returns to claim it as his own. The essence of this struggle is encapsulated in the Book of Ephesians. A. T. Lincoln summarizes its themes, noting how the concluding exhortation calls the believer to appropriate her position of

strength and victory in Christ while living out her life amid the ongoing opposition of evil cosmic forces.<sup>9</sup>

Too often the church corporately, and believers individually, have wanted to ignore this aspect of the Christian life. The issue of spirituality, and hence spiritual warfare, begins at the personal level, and then expands outwardly to include one's family, church, the collective church within one's community, and then to the church at the national and even international level. The evangelical church asserts a belief in the Bible as being true and inerrant, and yet it often lives as though the battle being described exists only on some distant mission field and not in one's own town or city. J. Dawson emphasizes that the battle is ongoing in each city across our nation and is affecting believers, whether they are aware of it or not.<sup>10</sup>

With even greater urgency, F. A. Schaeffer states

Sadly we must say that very few Christians have understood the battle we are in. Very few have taken a strong and courageous stand against the world spirit of this age as it destroys our culture and the Christian ethos that once shaped our country.

But the Scriptures make clear that we as Bible-believing Christians are locked in a battle of cosmic proportions. It is a life and death struggle over the minds and souls of men for all eternity, but it is equally a life and death struggle over life on this earth.<sup>11</sup>

If this concept of spiritual warfare seems such a clear and necessary part of the Christian life, why isn't the church more openly involved with this area of the believer's life?

### ***World View***

One of the greatest influences on the Western view of the world over the past sixty years has been those philosophies and ideas arising out of the period of the Enlightenment, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century and most clearly seen in Germany in the eighteenth century. These philosophies opposed the concept of a supernatural religion and instead focused on the sufficiency of human reason to promote the happiness and well-being of people in this lifetime. The fundamental belief in the goodness of human nature resulted in the rejection of the concept of sin and evil in the world. By the late nineteenth century, "Higher critical methods" for examining Scripture were gaining prominence and eventually undermined the authority of the Bible in the eyes of many in the church. F. Schaeffer argues that living in a world where God is seen as being ultimately silent even-

tually leads to a universe that is seen as having no purpose or meaning and no real basis for determining order and morality. The final result is a world where the value of human life is lost, all is relative and arbitrary, and man is left to fill his growing emptiness "... hedonism or materialism or whatever other 'ism' may be blowing in the wind."<sup>12</sup>

One of the greatest effects of this "Enlightened" thinking is its tendency to remove from the mindset of society any consideration of the supernatural as an integral factor in the lives of individuals. Therefore, within much of the church, there has been a tendency to minimize the effect or even the existence of Satan and the demonic. C. F. Dickason notes how this thinking has hindered the church's effectiveness in reaching the world for Christ. He challenges the believer, as he states,

It is high time that Christians shake off the shackles of scientism. We must face the reality of God's world as it really is to deal with the stark realities of Satanic oppression and demonization. How else will we help this world for which Christ died?<sup>13</sup>

To believe Scripture requires that one recognize the supernatural, both good and evil, as an integral influence upon one's life. Therefore, it is crucial for the Christian to have an understanding of the opposition that he or she faces.

### ***Know the Opposition***

Within the New Testament, *kosmos* is used in two different senses, although frequently translated as "world" in each case. In one sense it is used to designate God's creation and the world of people, while a second refers to the spiritual agencies at work in the world. The latter reference relates to the fall of humankind, rather than creation, and to the world of evil and negative spiritual powers working through individuals and the natural order, resulting in world conditions such as hate, greed, selfishness, and violence. It opposes God, Christ, the church, and the Holy Spirit, as well as the individual believer (John 16.33). Frequently this opposition works in insidious ways, against which the believer must be on constant guard (Eph. 6.12). These spiritual forces of evil will often work through structures and objects within God's good creation, so that these objects may become idols which humans then either serve or worship;<sup>14</sup> and Satan gloats over his success!

It is also through the distortion of created structures of existence, originally intended for good by God, that Satan often operates. Within the Gospel accounts, one sees the disfigurement of human lives through the demonization of individuals as it affects their appearance, cognition, or emotional state (Matt. 8.28; Mark 1.23ff.; Luke 8.27ff.). Satan can also distort human perceptions of reality and truth, such as Paul's warning against the dangers of astrology (Gal. 4.10), which represents a distortion of the purpose and meaning of the heavenly bodies as God originally intended. Satan has the ability to negatively affect the course of events (1 Thess. 2.18), the functioning of governments (Rev. 12.9, 13.7, 14), and even certain activities within religious practice, such as when Jesus called the religious leaders of His day "children of the devil" (John 8.44), or when Paul warned against "false prophets" who masquerade as "angels of light" (2 Cor. 11.13-14; 1 Tim. 4.1). R. E. Webber asserts that to understand the function of the church, it is crucial to understand the two different usages of the word "world" in the Bible, as the church must relate in one way to God's created world but in a far different manner to the evil powers of the world ruled by Satan.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Believer's Bible***

Many in the modern church seem reluctant to believe that this battle with Satan and his followers exists and is real in modern Western society. Others simply refuse to be personally involved, either out of fear, lack of knowledge, or else a belief that this battle is intended only for an elite group of "spiritual warriors" within the church. None of these positions can be supported as a valid answer to the problem.

First, there is the question, "Is this battle really present in today's modern world?" Many have noted that there seems to be an increased fascination with witchcraft and the occult throughout the world. M. Harper notes that Ouija boards have become one of the most popular Christmas gifts, and that in 1969 a formal school of witchcraft was opened in Essex, England, to train witches. Divination for foretelling the future and for diagnosing diseases has been increasing, with over five thousand individuals working full time in the United States performing astrological forecasts for another ten million people (these would not even represent the most recent statistics). Law enforcement is making use of divinations and psychics to help solve criminal cases, such as that of the "Boston Strangler," and cults have significantly increased. Harper notes that many of these developments have occurred because the church has become increasingly uncertain of its

message to the world.

People are tired of pious platitudes; they want faith that works . . . There are Jehovah's Witnesses, with their carefully worked out prophecies, Christian Science, with its promise of health, and spiritualism with its "proof" of survival after death and its claim to contact dead loved ones.<sup>16</sup>

Satan is alive and well in the world today, and it often seems as though his followers are more committed to advancing his kingdom and rule than is the church in advancing God's kingdom.

Christians must realize that this struggle is not imaginary nor is it new; and it is not only a battle to be engaged in at the time of Christ's second coming. The battle for establishing God's kingdom has been present for centuries. Many believe that its intensity is increasing; and although not all scholars agree on the literal fulfillment of the events in the Book of Revelation, if the final battle does come together under a final false Prophet, the believer must understand that this represents the final chapter of a struggle that is going on *right now*.<sup>17</sup>

This spiritual battle is intended for all believers. R. C. Stedman describes how, outside of Christ, all humans are under Satan's control; but through Christ, believers

. . . are set free in order to battle. This is the call which comes to all Christians. We are not set free merely to enjoy ourselves. We are set free to do battle, to engage in the fight, to overcome in our own lives, and to become the channels by which others are set free.<sup>18</sup>

F. Frangipane describes how the church has known Christ as a shepherd and savior, but it must also recognize Him as a warrior (Isa. 42.13) and identify with that image. The struggle will culminate when Christ returns to establish His kingdom, but the battle is being fought today. He asserts that

. . . we are a pampered, undisciplined people who have not understood the day of warfare that looms before us. We must realize that in the last moments of this age, to prepare us for the raging of Satan as his time shortens (Rev. 12.12), the Lord Jesus will raise an army to whom He will be revealed in a manner unfamiliar to most Christians.<sup>19</sup>

Ignorance can be no excuse for a Christian's remaining uninvolved.



Not only does Scripture support images of God as warrior with His people battling under his authority, but it is also clear that the early church viewed their own experience in terms of warfare, with military terminology sprinkled liberally throughout the New Testament.<sup>20</sup>

Another factor resulting in a lack of involvement in this spiritual battle is fear. M. Bubeck notes that many Christians maintain the position that if one is not aware of Satanic attacks in her life, then it is best to avoid the active study of Satan in order to avoid provocation of Satan's harrassment. This avoidance is based primarily on fear.<sup>21</sup> The tragedy of this position is that while believers need to respect Satan and his demonic kingdom as adversaries, we do not need to be afraid of them. James 4.7 indicates that Satan will flee if we resist him, although this truth is prefaced with the condition that we be submitted to God, as it is in being yielded to God that we gain the power to resist Satan.<sup>22</sup>

J. Dawson describes to fundamental steps in spiritual warfare. The first is to discern the nature of Satan's lie, which often will relate to the degree of power or control he has over a particular situation, and which frequently is the source of one's fear. The second step is to exercise the authority of Jesus' power over the Satanic activity. One must remember that Satan was defeated at the cross (Col. 2.15; Matt. 25.41),<sup>23</sup> and therefore the Christian may enter an encounter against Satan and his forces without fear.

A final reason for the lack of involvement in spiritual warfare is a lack of knowledge. Although it is not possible to address all of the weapons of spiritual warfare in this paper, certain aspects will be examined as they relate to the church and to an effective model by which these may be fulfilled.

### ***The Believer's Weapons***

The believer needs to understand that Satan tends to work secretly and does not like to be exposed. Discernment and balance are needed when approaching spiritual warfare. It is important that the believer not fall into the trap of a dualistic view of the universe, in which all events are seen as either evil and under the control of God. The potential danger is that one may set aside the role of human responsibility, while focusing more on the desire for a supernatural "deliverance" from evil rather than on obedience to the known will of God. In looking to gain every victory through God's supernatural intervention, "some people have been led to expect release from the disciplines, hardships and temptations of the Christian way of life."<sup>24</sup>

Equally important is the realization that spiritual warfare cannot be won with the conventional weapons or wisdom of the world. To a large extent, the battle originates in the mind, as the believer strives to bring every thought into obedience to Christ by the transforming of his or her mind (Rom. 12.2). This also seems true at the societal level. The usual methods for relieving society's problems are futile, as they do not address the basic issue of the world's being under Satan's domain. R. C. Stedman states, "All our efforts to correct the evils we see in life are simply rearrangements of the difficulties. We succeed only in stirring them around a bit until they take a different form."<sup>25</sup> Too often that has been the approach of the church, as it has attempted to change the evil in the world through the promotion of legislation, education, and the improvement of the environment, without addressing the underlying spiritual battles being waged within the lives of the people involved.<sup>26</sup>

A key passage regarding spiritual warfare is found in Ephesians 6.10-18, which provides instruction for putting on the "full armor of God." The meaning of this passage is found in the concept of appropriating all that was accomplished by Christ through His death and resurrection. This includes the concept that Christ represents truth in all that He said and did (6.14a) and is therefore completely reliable, coupled with the truth that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8.1), both of which are represented by the "belt of truth." The "breastplate of righteousness" (6.14b) represents Christ's righteousness that is accorded to the believer through faith and justifies the believer in the eyes of God. Having one's "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (6.15) indicates a readiness to walk in obedience and in the Spirit of God, as was Christ, and not simply to choose a life of comfort and ease. The "shield of faith" (6.16) represents our faith in Christ and our willingness to submit to Him as Lord of our life, based upon that faith (cf. Gal. 2.20). The verb tense indicates a constant attitude of faith, which will also serve to protect against unbelief and doubts that may arise, as represented by the "flaming arrows of the evil one." The "helmet of salvation" (6.17a) again represents the work of salvation carried out by Christ through His death and resurrection, and the fact that its complete sufficiency will serve to guard one's mind against the doubts and fears by which Satan might attack the believer. *Soteria* ("salvation") can also refer to physical well being and may also refer to physical protection from Satan. Finally, the only real offensive weapon afforded the believer is that of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6.17b), representing Christ and the truth given in Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

Although other authors may interpret certain elements of this armor differently, the key concept is that God has provided the believer with the necessary weapons and protection that he will need to engage in spiritual warfare. However, it is up to the believer to put on that armor in order to stand firmly against Satan (Eph. 6.13).

Another key element that God has given the believer to help battle Satan and his forces is other believers. This relationship is symbolized with the church as a single body that is integrally dependent upon all of its parts functioning as a whole. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . ." (1 Cor. 12.12-13). Therefore, the believer not only must be aware that he is involved in a spiritual battle, for which God has equipped him with spiritual weapons, but he must also realize that this battle is not intended to be carried out alone. Believers must realize their deep need for one another and that they are not in the battle alone.<sup>28</sup>

In light of the previous discussion, and the fact that Satan will do everything possible to thwart the purpose of God in the lives of believers, one must then question how the church *should* function in order to best equip its members for this struggle.

## **Models of the Church**

One purpose of a model is to provide a tangible representation of an object or system so that one can better understand how it functions. One goal of this paper is to examine several models of the church and then show that the model of the church as a militant organization, an image frequently neglected in recent years, represents one of the most functional and useful models of those available.

### ***The Role and Function of the Church***

Four of the most basic functions of the church include the following: to worship and glorify God here on earth (Eph. 1.4-6), to evangelize the world with the gospel (Matt. 28.19-20), to develop each believer and assist him or her in becoming more like Christ (Eph. 4.11-15), and to be glorified with Christ (Eph. 3.10, 21; Rev. 21.9-27).<sup>29</sup> Others would break these broader areas down into glorifying God, edifying and equipping members for living the Chris-

tian life in obedience to God's Word, purifying members through discipline, evangelizing the world through the telling of the gospel, and promoting good in the world while serving to resist evil.<sup>30</sup>

At times these roles have been characterized as that of an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5.20) in a foreign land. Often the church has failed when it attempts to forcibly take over the foreign land or else withdraws behind its "embassy walls" in attempting to avoid all contact with its neighbors. R. L. Saucy notes that the church has often failed in its ministry to the world whenever it has attempted to rule through secular power or else withdraw into personal piety and isolationism.<sup>31</sup>

One factor which has influenced the role and function of the church is its view of itself and the world. This view will influence one's conceptual model of the church, as certain models may be adequate for a world view which allows for no supernatural activity in the lives of its members, while others may require the supernatural if it is to remain consistent in its imagery.

We may define evangelical social concern as the application of the Christian world view to the political, legislative, economic, and moral life of society and individuals . . . It is an acknowledgment of the presence and permeation of evil in the structures of life, an attempt to reduce the influence of evil in society and an active promotion of justice and morality . . .

The person who takes a mythological view of the New Testament will inevitably interpret the present struggle between the church and world issue differently. The supernaturalist will regard the forces of evil as not only real, but having an ontological point of reference. Rather than interpreting the New Testament language as mythical and describing the existential experience only, the supernaturalist will view the battle between good and evil forces in a historical way, arguing that time, space, and history is the battleground, and that what the New Testament describes is in fact occurring now in the present.<sup>32</sup>

The "supernaturalist" view is assumed throughout this paper.

Another role of the church is that of an eschatological community which is rooted in the saving event of Christ through his death and resurrection (Heb. 9.11-28), and yet it must prove itself and stand its ground while on earth (Heb. 10.32-36). As a part of this eschatological function, the church is often seen as a servant kingdom which has been given power over the forces of evil which Christ will destroy at His consummation. R. E. Webber notes that " . . . the church now sustains

a twofold ministry to the world. It witnesses to the dethronement of evil powers and acts as a responsible agent bringing the creation under the lordship of Christ."<sup>33</sup>

### ***Historical Models***

Early church fathers, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen were clearly aware of the reality of spiritual forces, both good and evil, as they work through the structures of existence in order to influence people. Exorcism was prominent within the early church liturgy.

Hyppolytus, writing about the role of bishop in baptism, declares: "And laying his hand on them he shall exorcise every evil spirit to flee away from them." Later, the candidate for baptism says before going into the waters of baptism, "I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy service and all thy works," after which the candidate is anointed with the oil of exorcism by the words, "Let all evil spirits depart far from thee."<sup>34</sup>

As the church became an accepted institution following the Decree of Toleration in A.D. 311 and the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, it became a wealthy institution, filled with nominal Christians who were more interested in being well-bred and socially acceptable than truly faithful. There developed confusion between the teachings of Christianity and those of pagan philosophers, and hope was displaced from that of God's kingdom to making the world a better and safer place for Christianity. Worship often became less of a prophetic proclamation of the gospel and of the defeat of evil and more of a symbolic repetition of facts about the life of Christ.<sup>35</sup> The church no longer viewed itself as a pilgrim in a foreign land, but as a power to shape society. God's purposes were now identified with the maintenance of human institutions, and the distinction between the church and world powers disappeared.<sup>36</sup>

The roots of thought during the Medieval period go back to Augustine's vision as expressed in *The City of God*, with the church having become an institution not so much interested in the eschaton as in establishing Christ's immediate reign on earth. W. E. Webber describes how ". . . the church was less interested in the coming of the Kingdom and the overthrow of evil because the adverse powers of evil had been conquered and tamed by the church. The kingdom was a present reality, not a future hope."<sup>37</sup>

One might view the model of the early church as “the church and world in antithesis,” that of the early Constantinian church as “the church and world in paradox,” while that initiated under Augustine and later developed during the Medieval period as “the church transforming the world.” Webber proposes that each of these views were then represented among the reformers, with the “antithesis” model being represented by the Anabaptists, the “paradox” model by Martin Luther, and the “transforming” model by John Calvin.<sup>38</sup>

Out of this historical tradition comes the question of how one is to see the church today. Is there only one valid view, or does the church change its model of functioning in order to meet the needs of the times? Or perhaps more worrisome is whether it often changes in order to accommodate to the times?

### *Potential Models of the Church*

From the writings of Protestant and Catholic theologians, A. Dulles has formulated five models of the church. In attempting to weigh their various merits, he concludes that a balanced ecclesiology requires the basic qualities of each of the models, as each one emphasizes certain characteristics which are less evident in the other models.<sup>39</sup>

Any large and continuing group requires symbols to hold it together. Dulles states that

The Biblical images of the Church as the flock of Christ, the Bride, the temple, or whatever, operate in a similar manner. They suggest attitudes and course of action; they intensify confidence and devotion. To some extent they are self-fulfilling; they make the church become what they suggest the Church is . . .

. . . A model is accepted if it accounts for a large number of biblical and traditional data and accords with what history and experience tell us about the Christian life.<sup>40</sup>

It should also be kept in mind that the following models refer to the church as a corporate body and not necessarily to the functioning of local congregations. J. Dawson notes that there needs to be a plurality of leadership and church styles relative to local functions, and that there can be no “absolute model” for what the local church should be in every situation.<sup>41</sup>

The five models proposed by Dulles include that of institution, servant, herald, sacrament, and mystical communion. The church as “institution” represents an expression of the stable organizational features

needed to carry out its mission. This includes a hierarchical conception of authority, along with the church having a sense of jurisdiction over its members with regard to rules and laws of conduct. This model is triumphalistic and tends to focus on the church as an army against Satan and evil, and its strong clerical emphasis may foster an attitude of passivity in the laity. Relative to the institutional model, the biblical narrative places a greater emphasis on the prophetic role of the church, so that “. . . one may conclude that Christianity is not healthy unless there is room in it for prophetic protest against abuses of authority.”<sup>42</sup>

The “servant” model of the church is based upon the concept that the church announces the kingdom not only in word by preaching, but also in acts of reconciliation, service, and healing. D. Bonhoeffer stated

The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving.<sup>43</sup>

In the servant model, the church’s primary mission is not to gain new recruits or build great edifices, but to be of help to all people and to keep alive the hopes of its members relative to the kingdom of God and its values. The strength of this model relates to the church’s having become too secluded and out of touch with the society around it, resulting in a loss of numbers and influence. The servant model reflects an awareness of the needs of the church and the world and restores that contact, as it attempts to provide the church with a new sense of mission and relevance to the world around it. It has been noted that the servant model reflects an effort on the part of the church to overcome its pride and group egotism, along with its tendency toward callousness regarding human suffering.<sup>44</sup>

The church as “herald” makes the word primary and the sacrament secondary. “It see the Church as gathered and formed by the word of God. The mission of the Church is to proclaim that which is heard, believed, and been commissioned to proclaim.”<sup>45</sup> In this model, the church’s primary role is kerygmatic in passing along the gospel message of Christ. While it is responsible for being faithful in carrying out the proclamation, it is not responsible for the world’s accepting it. The result is a strong evangelistic emphasis coupled with a good Biblical foundation in the prophetic tradition. There tends to be a clear sense of

identity and mission within the "heralding" church, with a focus on God's sovereignty, which leads to obedience, humility, and a willingness to repent and reform. The primary weaknesses are that this model may limit the emphasis on Christ's incarnation as it focuses on the Word, and it may focus too much on the witness but with a relative neglect regarding actions oriented toward trying to establish a better society.<sup>46</sup>

The Church as "sacrament" focuses on the sacraments as signs of grace, with this grace becoming an existential reality in the lives of believers as they partake together. This cannot be mere ritual, however, as "... the institutional or structural aspect is never sufficient to constitute the church. The offices and rituals of the Church must palpably appear as the actual expressions of the faith, hope, and love of living men."<sup>47</sup>

The fifth model reviewed by Dulles is that of the church as "mystical communion." In this model, intimacy in groups results in a sense of fusion of the individuals into a common whole with common goals and will. There is a vertical as well a horizontal intimacy, with Christ as the head and the church under him, each living in relationship with the other. In this model the goal of the church is to bring people back into union with God and each other, not only in the future but also in the present.<sup>48</sup>

There are a number of criteria for distinguishing a successful model. It should have a clear and explicit basis in Scripture and be based upon Christian tradition, and the more universal and constant the tradition the more convincing the model will be. The model should have the capacity to give the Church members a sense of corporate identity and mission; and it should foster virtues and values admired by Christians, such as faith, hope, an unselfish love of God and a sacrificial love for one's fellow man, honesty, humility, and a sense of repentance. It should correspond with the religious experience of men and women today, and it should offer a degree of "theological fruitfulness." The successful model should also enable church members to relate successfully to those outside of their own group. It is clear that it is difficult to find a single model which will meet all of these criteria. Dulles notes that none of his five models can be accepted without qualification, as each suggests different priorities which frequently may conflict with one another. He questions whether a search should continue for some "supermodel" which would combine the strengths of each, but without the limitations and contradictions.<sup>49</sup>

F.A. Schaeffer would add a further qualification for this proposed model, as he issues a call for a "revolutionary radical message in the midst of today's relativistic thinking." He contends that the mentality



of accommodation on the part of evangelicalism today

is indeed a disaster . . . [and has] constantly been in one direction — that is, to accommodate with whatever is in vogue with the form of the world spirit which is dominant today. It is this same world spirit which is destroying both church and society. Balance must be considered constantly.<sup>50</sup>

It is this author's contention that the model of the church that needs to be revived is that of the military model. For reasons that will be seen, perhaps a preferable term is that of a "militant body."

### **The Model of the Church as a Militant Body**

To appreciate the metaphor of the church as a militant body, it is mandatory that one keep in mind that it represents an entity that is filled with paradox. It is clear that the individual believer, as well as the corporate church body, is engaged in a spiritual war; but it is equally clear that the weapons of our warfare are not the kind normally seen on the evening news. "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor. 10.3-4). The church is involved in a conflict over power and territory, the establishment of God's kingdom over that of Satan, and in this sense it represents a military conflict no less than the bloodiest war ever fought. But it is these historical images of the military that make it difficult for many to accept the militant model. It seems incomprehensible that a militant body would truly be striving for peace with the commission to "love one's neighbor as oneself."

The difficulty one has in comprehending this metaphor is demonstrated by J. Stott, who states

For the exercise of power is inherent in the concept of a kingdom. But power in God's kingdom is different from power in human kingdoms . . . The kingdom of God is his rule set up in the lives of his people by the Holy Spirit. It is spread by witnesses, not by soldiers, through a gospel of peace, not a declaration of war, and by the work of the Spirit, not by force of arms, political intrigue or revolutionary violence.<sup>51</sup>

This represents a battle for power and territory, but the weapons are different from traditional warfare. That, however, does not negate the

fact that it is still warfare, any more than one would try to deny the fact that ancient conflicts fought with crossbows and battle axes were military battles, simply because their weapons were different from those with which we are familiar today. War can be defined as “any active hostility or struggle”<sup>52</sup> without regard to the implements used, and the essence of “militant” is “fighting, [or being] ready to fight, especially for some cause.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, because the militant body of the church utilizes the weapons of love, words, and sacrificial acts does not negate the fact that it is still a militant body engaged in warfare.

It is clear that the early church saw its life and mission as a military service under Christ as the Emperor. In the early church, infidelity to God was even termed desertion. As the model of the church as “sacrament” focused on the symbolism of the sacraments as a manifestation of God’s grace, it had a broader meaning within the early church. The word “sacrament” comes from the term *sacramentum*, which was a technical term for the military oath one took upon entering the Roman army. The early church adopted this term as a designation for baptism, which was seen as analogous to a soldier’s oath and was taken upon entry into the militant church. Origen began to call Christians “soldiers of Christ” (*milites Christi*) and saw the church as “the military camp of the Lord” (*castra Domini*). The church also served to change the meaning of the Latin word *paganus* in the fourth-fifth century, from which is derived the word, “pagan.” Originally in the western Roman Empire it simply meant “the civilian” in contrast with “the soldier.” It is clear that the early church saw itself as soldiers, and anyone who was not a believer was a *paganus*, or “civilian.”<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the militant model is the abuse of power which has occurred by both the military and the church throughout the centuries. The New Testament church clearly broke the tradition of the holy wars of the Old Testament; and, although it used military terminology, it was decidedly pacifistic in practice. Prior to Constantine, Christians were never known to use violence to preserve the church or to advance its mission.<sup>55</sup> The Scriptures are clear that there are three things that believers are to do with their human enemies: love them, bless them, and do something good for them. However, one is to *destroy and resist spiritual enemies* and strongholds. There is no place in the Bible where it tells a man or a woman to be merciful or patient with Satan or his demonic powers.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, the church has at times confused this directive and been more tolerant with the demonic and harsh with their fellow man.

The militant model of the church is valid and helpful only when we remember that the conflict is not of this world (Eph. 6.12). As an

example of the difference in "weaponry" utilized by the militant church, F. Frangipane describes the requirements for effective corporate warfare by the church body. These include worship and praise, Spirit-led intercessory group prayer, consistent times of prayer by the individual believers, and not being "presumptuous" in confronting Satan or his demons but relying on the power of Christ, as manifest through the use of His Word, Prayer, and calling upon His name.<sup>57</sup> Although these weapons are a far cry from bombs and bullets, within the realm of spiritual warfare they are far more effective and represent key elements in the armamentarium of the militant church body.

The militant church body may well serve the "heralding" and "servant" functions within society as well, as the words and actions of the committed, militant believer are seen as a witness to the gospel and to the life in Christ. F. A. Schaeffer proposes that not taking the "battle" seriously may have resulted in the church's failure to promote the Christian ethos in today's society and culture. To win the battle requires a ". . . life committed to Christ, founded on truth, lived in righteousness and grounded in the gospel."<sup>58</sup>

The militant model of the church, viewed properly with regard to its mission and its means of warfare, would seem to be most helpful in providing direction for today's church. One also gains a better understanding of the servant role of the militant church if one keeps in mind that destruction is not the only goal of any military body. The Roman military helped to create the empire and "was also one of the most important cultural factors," as it safeguarded Roman peace and thereby made possible social and cultural developments. By the end of the second century B.C., it was largely a volunteer force of professional soldiers, and, when not engaged in war, the legionnaires performed many civil service functions, such as construction and maintenance.<sup>59</sup> These same functions are still performed today by our military, through such groups as the Army Corps of Engineers. Unfortunately, these "servant" functions are often forgotten as one thinks of the military, but they represent key elements in the model of the church as a militant body.

The model of the militant church also seems consistent with its eschatological role, perhaps with the modification that one should view the present church as operating more as a resistance movement within enemy held territory, but then later to be incorporated into the main military body as Christ returns to the earth to reclaim His kingdom. The militant church in its conquering role is to gain victory now in its spiritual battles, but in the eschaton it will reach its final fulfillment as it serves to rule and judge the world with Christ (1 Cor. 6.2).

The church as a militant body also seems to fulfill the image of the

church as a mystical communion, with intimacy expressed both vertically with God and horizontally with fellow believers. Anyone engaged in military conflict can attest to the fact that serving together in dangerous situations, where one's well being and even life may depend upon one's comrades and one's commanders, fosters a sense of intimacy and trust that is difficult to match in any other situation. A good military commander is expected to provide guidance, sacrificial leadership, inspiration, and to always use his or her authority and power to advance the overall goals of the unit and to assure the well being of those under their command. In return, the soldiers under the leader's command are to respond obediently to the commander's orders, to remain loyal, and to perform sacrificially and diligently in order to accomplish the defined goals. In the process of carrying out these functions, an inexplicable sense of intimacy and closeness develops among all concerned; and for the commander who has actually laid down his life for his troops, the sense of love and devotion is even greater. Certainly this describes the communion, within the limitations of metaphor, of the church body and its relationship with Christ and with each other.

Finally, the institutional functions of the militant model have intentionally been left until the end, primarily because these functions have traditionally been most often associated with this model and have frequently caused some of the greatest difficulties within the church. It seems that the greatest danger in the militant model, particularly when performing institutional functions, is that the hierarchy of power may become centered in a few individuals who then, because of their own sinful nature, may begin to use the church for their own personal gain. This might occur with regard to material wealth or at times personal power, each occurring "in the name of God." However, this does not negate the value of the model, but rather it should serve to re-emphasize the need for spiritual discernment on the part of the church in evaluating its spiritual leaders. As Jesus so aptly warned, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7.15-16). A second danger is that part of the church may see itself as able to remain relatively uninvolved, as long as it is willing to pay its "mercenaries" to fight for them. H. Weber warns of this, as he states, "Instead of being the *militia Christi* on the march, the church thus became a bulwark for half-committed civilians with a staff of professional officers and some troops of mercenaries."<sup>60</sup> This represents a perversion of what a true militant body, including the church, is to be.

## ***Practical Implications***

Being a soldier requires that one know and understand his or her enemy. Certainly the church would need to educate itself regarding the struggle it is in and the adversary with whom it is contending. The position of seeing this struggle as entirely symbolic and mythological must cease if the church is to have any significant impact. It is one thing to be an army who believes that it will never be involved in anything more than “war games” for training purposes, but it is quite another when one realizes that the struggle is real and represents life and death. The militant church, more than any other model, should realize that this attack upon the church is real.

The task of the militant church is now to stand firm as God’s colony in the world and from the base of this colony to go on that apostolic mission of peace . . . The mere presence of the church in the world is a strong attack on the still remaining power and authority of devilish forces. No wonder, therefore, that the church comes immediately under attack.<sup>61</sup>

The greatest implication in viewing the church as a militant body is that it demands a renewed commitment on the part of every believer with regard to her Christian life. It requires sacrificial devotion to one’s commander and to one’s task, in this case the commander being Christ and the task being to advance His kingdom in the world against the resistance of Satan. Paul exhorts Timothy when he says, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Tim. 2.3-4). Such must be the focus of the church. Perhaps the greatest effect of the militant model is that it should motivate the individual believer to a life of greater discipline and sacrifice, but also of joy. Within the churches, there would need to be a greater emphasis on the spiritual disciplines to help develop that singleness of focus that is needed to be a good soldier; and, specifically, there would need to be a reawakening of the need for prayer, through which the Christian soldier is able to draw his or her power.

## **Conclusion**

A number of arguments have been proposed as to why the model of the church as a militant body might best symbolize the role and function of the church within the world. But it would seem, however, that

the strongest argument for accepting this model of the church is because none of the other models are able to adequately address the degree of conflict in which we are engaged, as the church strives to carry out the "great commission" given by Christ. L. Lea describes the problem and the challenge, as he states

A war is going on for our nation today. A war is being fought for our metropolitan areas, our great cities across this land. There's a war raging for our churches, for our families, and for each of us personally.

It's a war in the spirit realm, and this is the challenge you face: The devil has sent messengers, strong principalities and powers, to stand against you and to keep you from being and doing all that God has called you to be and do. So what will you do about it?<sup>62</sup>

That remains the question after examining the issues: What will the church body do about it? It can continue on, building bigger and better churches in which its members can huddle together, struggling to get by while living in a difficult world and feeling thankful that someday heaven will be better. Or the church can decide to fulfill Christ's commission to defend and serve his kingdom, in spite of the hazards and the opposition. Perhaps it might be helpful to have some marching songs to sing along the way . . . "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before! Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; forward into battle, see His banner go! Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before."

## END NOTES

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>3</sup>Reese, Charley, "Religion's Last Stand," *The Elyria Chronicle Telegram*, 1 July 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Cidylo, Lori, "Destructive Cultism Gained Momentum Over Last Decade," *The Psychiatric Times*, April 1989, 1 and 33.

<sup>5</sup>Burkalow, Anastasia Van, "A Call for Battle Symbolism in Hymns," *The Hymn* 38 (April 1987), 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>7</sup>Wall, James, "Marching to War with the Hymn Critics." *The Christian Century* 103 (July 2-9, 1986), 603.

<sup>8</sup>Lea, Larry, *The Weapons of Your Warfare: Equipping Yourself to Defeat the Enemy* (Altamonte Springs: Creation House, 1989), 19-20.

<sup>9</sup>Lincoln, Andrew T., *Ephesians. Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 42, gen. eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 460.

<sup>10</sup>Dawson, John, *Taking Our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Altamonte Springs: Creation House, 1989), 27-28.

<sup>11</sup>Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, 1984), 23.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>13</sup>Dickason, C. Fred, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 34.

<sup>14</sup>Webber, Robert E., *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension, or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 15-16.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>16</sup>Harper, Michael, *Spiritual Warfare: Recognizing and Overcoming the Work of Evil Spirits* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1984), 31-34.

<sup>17</sup>White, John, *When the Spirit Comes with Power: Signs and Wonders Among God's People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 238.

<sup>18</sup>Stedman, Ray C., *Spiritual Warfare* (Waco: Word, 1975), 37-38.

<sup>19</sup>Frangipane, Francis, *The Three Battlegrounds* (Marion, Iowa: Advancing Church Publications, 1989), 46.

<sup>20</sup>Harper, vii.

<sup>21</sup>Bubeck, Mark I., *The Adversary: The Christian Versus Demon Activity* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 79.

<sup>22</sup>Harper, 41.

<sup>23</sup>Dawson, 73 and 132.

<sup>24</sup>Harper, 75.

<sup>25</sup>Stedman, 27.

- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 28.
- <sup>27</sup>Lea, 95-96; Harper, 68-72; and Stedman, 68-114.
- <sup>28</sup>Bubeck, 155.
- <sup>29</sup>Evans, William, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, rev. ed. with additional entries by S. Maxwell Coder (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 187-188.
- <sup>30</sup>Thiessen, Henry Clarence, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 330-333.
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- <sup>32</sup>Webber, 13-15.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., 21-23.
- <sup>34</sup>Hyppolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, pars. 7-8; quoted in Robert W. Webber, *The Church in the World: Opposition, Tension, or Transformation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 58.
- <sup>35</sup>Webber, 66.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., 61-67.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 77.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., 81.
- <sup>39</sup>Dulles, Avery, Jr., *Models of the Church* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), 7.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 18 and 22.
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- <sup>42</sup>Dulles, 40.
- <sup>43</sup>Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 203-204.
- <sup>44</sup>Dulles, 92.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., 71.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., 72-82.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., 61-64.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 44-54.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., 183-184.



<sup>50</sup>Schaeffer, 149-150.

<sup>51</sup>Stott, John, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 42.

<sup>52</sup>*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 1984 ed., s.v. "War."

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, s.v. "Militant."

<sup>54</sup>Weber, Hans-Ruedi, *The Militant Ministry: People and Pastors of the Early Church and Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 5-7.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>56</sup>Lea, 174.

<sup>57</sup>Frangipane, 120.

<sup>58</sup>Schaeffer, 24-25.

<sup>59</sup>Ferguson, Everett, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 38.

<sup>60</sup>Weber, 10.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>62</sup>Lea, 157.

