

an essay:

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, TAKE YOUR STAND IN CHRIST'S CHURCH!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Roman soldiers were the best soldiers in the ancient world. They were better equipped, better trained and better lead. But the individual Roman soldier was not the conqueror of the then known world. Rather, it was the Roman armies that marched across the face of ancient civilization to conquer all - each individual soldier fighting as part of a coordinated and powerful army. So too, Christians must be trained soldiers to use GOD's armour & weapons - not as individual soldiers of CHRIST - but as part of the army of CHRIST. That Christian army is The Church. It is the Church that trains the Christian in the use of the weapons of faith to march with the body of CHRIST on earth, which is The Church.

For our very earthly lives and eternal souls are at risk of utter destruction if we do not march as part of The Church. As Saint Peter says in I PETER 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour!"<sup>1</sup> The lions of Emperor Nero's amphitheatre of death, by the hand of the devil and evil men, seeks to devour the faithful Christian man in ever age, that the sinner's conscience not be pricked by the very existence of the saints of GOD!<sup>2</sup> We are called to the battle of life under the banner of The Cross. And so our daily prayer should desire, entreat and confess The Words of Saint Peter in I PETER 5:10, "But the GOD of all Grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by CHRIST JESUS, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you!"<sup>3</sup> So we shall see!

## II. THE CHURCH AS THE ARMY OF GOD ON EARTH

The Church, as an army of GOD, is the battle formation of the Christian. We do not march by ourselves, but rather within the ranks of The Church against our adversary the devil. The Christian's warfare against spiritual enemies of hell requires us to be always on our guard, ready to do battle. For the devil does not seek to devour formations of well armed and trained Christians, but rather the isolated and cut off single Christian

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<sup>1</sup> 1, KJV, I PETER 5:8.

<sup>2</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, I PETER 5:8-9, p 1452.

<sup>3</sup> 1, KJV, I PETER 5:10.

who fights alone apart from The Church. Our battles against evil must be within the corporate “we” of The Church and not as lone crusaders charging off into single combat. Saint Peter records the battle cry issued forth by our Lord in MATTHEW 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!”<sup>4</sup> Why will the gates of hell never prevail against The Church? Because, as Saint Polycarp says, “Our Lord JESUS CHRIST is The Saviour of our souls, The Governor of our bodies, and The Shepherd of the catholic [universal] Church in every place!”<sup>5</sup>

If CHRIST assures us that the very gates of hell shall never prevail against The Church, it follows then, that hell shall never prevail against the individual Christian, as long as he is safe in the arms of The Church. And why is this so? It is within The Church that we are encouraged to be true to GOD. It is within The Church that we are taught pure doctrine and worship. It is within The Church that we win the battles of life, not as lukewarm Christians, but as fully committed, earnest and thankful and dedicated members of The Church. Saint Paul counsels Timothy to be such a fully committed soldier of The Cross in I TIMOTHY 1:18-19: “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck!”<sup>6</sup>

Holding onto The Faith and our salvation, that we might fight a good warfare in CHRIST, requires us as Saint Clement says, to hold fast to The Church: “Let us choose to be of The Church of life, so that we may be saved. ...[For] the living Church is The Body of CHRIST. For The Scriptures say, ‘GOD made man, male and female’ [GENESIS 1:27]. The male is CHRIST, and the female is The Church. And The Books [of The Law, The Writings and The Prophets] and The Apostles declare that The Church is not of the present, but is from the beginning...” ordained of GOD!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 16:18.

<sup>5</sup> 3, 3, Early Christian Beliefs, The Church, p 146, 3<sup>rd</sup> entry, “Martyrdom of Polycarp (c. 135, E), 1.39.”

<sup>6</sup> 1, KJV, I TIMOTHY 1:18-19.

<sup>7</sup> 3, Early Christian Beliefs, The Church, p 146, 4<sup>th</sup> entry, “Second Clement (c. 150), 7.521.”

We must hold fast to The Faith in this spiritual battle of life. For if we do, and our conscience is purged of the guilt of our sins by the sacrifice of CHRIST, we shall triumph. And where but The Church does the Christian find the leadership to grasp these blessings so as to fight and win the battles of life? Where else but within The Church can we avoid the shipwrecks of life of those who have cast away their Faith? For The Church is ordained to help us hold onto our faith, to keep pure doctrine and to resist evil unto victory in our daily walk with CHRIST.

### III. WE ARE CALLED TO ENDURE HARDSHIPS IN CHRIST

Saint Paul says further in II IMOTHY 2:3 to all who claim The Name of The Lord, “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of JESUS CHRIST!”<sup>8</sup> How can we endure the hard battles of life, but as a faithful soldier of CHRIST within the ranks of The Church? The soldier of The Faith offers his service to The LORD within the formations of righteousness, of which CHRIST is the head and The Church is the army. St. Paul, as an officer in Army of CHRIST, told Timothy to endure harsh training and fighting under the authority in Church as a faithful soldiers of CHRIST.

So, too, we are called to endure hardness as good soldiers of our Lord under the authority of The Church. But we do not endure those trials and battles alone if we are in CHRIST and faithful to His Church on earth! Under The Cross of our Lord, we may pray daily as Saint Augustine prayed, “Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep..., and give Your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend Your sick ones, O Lord JESUS CHRIST, rest your weary ones, bless Your dying ones, soothe Your suffering ones, shield Your joyous ones and all for Your love’s sake” for us!<sup>9</sup>

### IV. THE VASTNESS OF THE HOSTS OF THE LORD AND THE LORD OF HOSTS

The Old Testament Patriarch and saint Job and his friends who came to comfort him all knew, as mere men may know, of the greatness and vastness of The Hosts of The LORD. So Bildad declares, and Job and the others concur, in JOB 25:3, “Is there any

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<sup>8</sup> 1, KJV, II IMOTHY 2:3.

<sup>9</sup> 4, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Prayers for The Sick, Saint Augustine, p 305.

number of His armies? and upon whom doth not His light arise?”<sup>10</sup> For the forces of GOD are as vast as the righteousness of His Son. Within The Church the saved in CHRIST need fear no enemy, for the omnipotence of GOD knows no bounds and the love of The Father knows no limits for those who love His Son. We are not called by GOD to fight the good fight of faith as an army of one, cut off from GOD’s innumerable army of saints. Rather, the Christian is called to take his place within the ranks of the LORD’s saints on earth, which is only to be found within The Church. And so within that vast host of saints, let us each take our place!

Matthew Henry observes that JEHOVAH is “Dominus”- Lord over all things. For “GOD is The sovereign Lord of all, and with Him is terrible majesty. Dominion and fear are with Him... He that gave being has an incontestable authority to give Laws, and can enforce The Laws He gives. He that made all has a right to dispose of all according to His own will, with an absolute sovereignty. Whatever He will[s] to do He does, and may do; and none can say unto Him, ‘What doest thou?’ or ‘Why doest thou so?’...”<sup>11</sup> Such is The Almighty One Who keeps and sustains His Church and His saints!

So also the prophet sees in, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that The everlasting GOD, The LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength... [For] they that wait upon The LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint!”<sup>12</sup> Such is the vastness of The Hosts of The LORD and the vast might of The LORD of Hosts!

## V. THE CHURCH’S SOLDIERS ARE CALLED TO OBEDIENCE AND DISCIPLINE

The writer of HEBREWS calls Christians to submit in obedience to those in lawful authority over them within CHRIST’s Body on earth – The Church – in HEBREWS 13:17, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy,

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<sup>10</sup> 1, KJV, JOB 25:3.

<sup>11</sup> 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, JOB XXV, Vers. 1-6, I, 1.

<sup>12</sup> 1, KJV, ISAIAH 40:28-31.

and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”<sup>13</sup> The officers and commanders of the army of GOD are accountable to Him. They issue the orders of battle to the obedient ranks of Christians within The Church. As long as our superiors within The Church command in accordance with The Scriptures, they stand in GOD’s place over the soldiers of faith within the ranks. And so we are to accept the discipline in the army of GOD with joy and not grief, that it may be a blessing for us.

And why would the faithful soldier of The Cross not desire above all things in this life to be found safe and secure within The Body of CHRIST on earth? For what great strength and renewal has The Almighty decreed for us His saints within her, as Saint Augustine says: “[The Church] has received the keys of The Kingdom of Heaven, so that, in her, sins may be forgiven through CHRIST’s Blood and The HOLY SPIRIT’s action. In This Church, the soul dead through sin comes back to life in order to live with CHRIST, Whose Grace has saved us” so mightily!<sup>14</sup> So when we march as soldiers of The Church, only then are we partakers of the strength and victory of CHRIST. For when Christians march together, evil has no chance of prevailing.

## VI. EACH SOLDIER OF THE CROSS TO HIS POST

And for the proper function and governance of His army The Church, GOD equips and places each member of The Body of CHRIST in his proper place. So Saint Paul reveals in EPHESIANS 4:11-12: “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of The Body of CHRIST.”<sup>15</sup> Is it not The Church that is charged by GOD to arm, train and command the soldiers of CHRIST to withstand evil? Does not The Almighty equip different soldiers in The Church with different skills and various weapons? Does one soldier in an army have the expertise to use all weapons? When Christians march together as The Church, the ranks of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers compliment one another to form The Church victorious. Thus do the saints of GOD grow in righteousness, fulfilling the

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<sup>13</sup> 1, KJV, HEBREWS 13:17.

<sup>14</sup> 6, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 981, “Saint Augustine, Sermo 214, 11:PL 38, 1071-1072,” p 278.

<sup>15</sup> 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 4:11-12.

work ordained for them by GOD and building up The Church on earth and in heaven.

Saint Irenaeus echoes this truth: “It is said, “In The Church, GOD has set apostles, prophets, teachers,’ and all the other means through which The Spirit works. Those who do not join themselves to The Church are not partakers of these things. Rather, they defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behavior. For where The Church is, there is The Spirit of GOD. And where The Spirit of GOD is, there is The Church, and every kind of grace!”<sup>16</sup>

## VII. TAKE UP THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD FOR THE BATTLES OF LIFE

Life being a daily battle, and the salvation and keeping of our souls in CHRIST a daily warfare, Scripture records that we are to take up all the weapons of The Faith which The Almighty provides. So Saint Paul declares in EPHESIANS 6:11, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For 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!”<sup>17</sup> Those who have little or no power in CHRIST are the lone soldiers cut off from the formations of the army of GOD. And woe to them, for how will they learn to stand against such enemies? As A. Skevington Wood observes, “The ‘struggle’... is not merely against human foes, but a war to the death against supernatural forces” that would crush our lives into abject misery now and consume our very souls forever!<sup>18</sup>

In their spiritual battles, the lone soldier of CHRIST can not effectively wield the whole armour of GOD, nor can he be sure of standing victoriously against the attacks of satan and his minions. For he does not have the backup of his fellow soldiers of The Cross, nor the strength in numbers of his brethren, nor is he properly trained and drilled for the warfare itself, nor is he fully under the headship of The Saviour! Such lone wolves will almost certainly fall in spiritual battle. For the Holy Spirit, Who offers the armor and weapons of Faith to all Christians does so within The Church. Yes, it is The Holy Spirit that distributes those weapons to each Christian, but it is The Church that

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<sup>16</sup> 3, Early Christian Beliefs, The Church, p 146, 11<sup>th</sup> entry, “Irenaeus (c. 160, E/W), 1.458.”

<sup>17</sup> 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 6:11-12.

<sup>18</sup> 7, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11, EPHESIANS 6:12, p 86, paragraph 1.



offers discipline, leadership, teaching and training to each Christian, that he may learn to use those weapons effectively. Only in The faithful Church does the Christian learn to effectively, with one's brethren in CHRIST, stand with "immovable steadfastness in the face of a ruthless foe..." in the midst of life's daily battles against the world, the flesh and the devil!<sup>19</sup>

And of what does this spiritual armor of GOD consist that Saint Paul calls us to take up daily? He lists them for us in EPHESIANS 6:14-18, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of The Gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of The Spirit, which is The Word of GOD: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in The Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints!"<sup>20</sup>

#### VIII. THE LORD IS OUR REFUGE AND OUR STRENGTH IN THE DAILY FIGHT

Moses was a saint of GOD who knew about the daily battles of life and fighting the spiritual warfare of salvation for himself, his loved ones and for GOD's people. He declares this to us in DEUTERONOMY 33:27,29a: "The eternal GOD is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee... Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by The LORD, the shield of thy help, and Who is the sword of thy excellency!"<sup>21</sup> Earl S. Kalland observes here from Moses, "This twofold affirmation says, first that The Lord is their shield, helper and glorious sword and, second, that they will subdue their enemies" in obedience to and under the strong arm of The Almighty!<sup>22</sup> As within The Old Testament army of GOD Israel, so now also with The New Testament arm of GOD The Church. For we are safe from our spiritual enemies who would swallow us up in utter destruction when we are under His loving outstretched strong arm!

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<sup>19</sup> 7, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11, EPHESIANS 6:14, p 87, paragraph 1.

<sup>20</sup> 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 6:14-18.

<sup>21</sup> 1, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 33:27,29a.

<sup>22</sup> 8, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3, DEUTERONOMY 33:39, p 232, paragraph 1.

CHRIST is the refuge and strength of The Church, within which the Christian is saved by the very hand of GOD from all spiritual perils. For what Christian casts away the shield and sword of The Faith in the face of the evils of this life and then cries, “I alone by my own power shall be victorious?” For as Saint Irenaeus says, “The Church is the alt of the earth. It has been left behind within the confines of the earth, and it is subject to human suffering. And even though entire members are often taken away from it, the pillar of salt still endures. This typifies the foundation of the faith that makes [Christians] strong and sends children forward to their Father [in Heaven]!”<sup>23</sup>

#### IX. CHRIST IS OUR GENERAL AND WE ARE HIS TROOPS

Every army must be commanded by a senior officer to function, fight and conquer. So too with The Church, whose Head is GOD The Son, Who called her into being with the sacrifice of Himself on The Cross. Saint Paul says in COLOSSIANS 1:18, “And He is The Head of The Body, The Church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence.”<sup>24</sup> So our master and commander as Christians is CHRIST Himself. And His very body is The Church. If we would serve The Saviour as reliable servants, we must be numbered within the ranks of His Church. Indeed, Christians are commanded by our Supreme Commander - CHRIST - to cherish the army of GOD, which is The Church, in which we are ordered to take our assigned place. And if we do not take our assigned place within The Church, are we not denying to The Saviour the preeminence, obedience, thankfulness and love that we owe Him?

Saint Paul says further in EPHESIANS 5:23, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as CHRIST is The Head of The Church: and He is the saviour of The Body.”<sup>25</sup> CHRIST is the husband and protector of His bride The Church. Can the lone Christian truly expect CHRIST to intervene on his behalf against the trials of life when he separates himself from the bride of CHRIST? Does not shunning and dishonoring The Church

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<sup>23</sup> 3, Early Christian Beliefs, The Church, p 146, 14<sup>th</sup> entry – p 147, “Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.505.”

<sup>24</sup> 1, KJV, COLOSSIANS 1:18..

<sup>25</sup> 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 5:23.

mean we also shun and dishonour our Lord JESUS CHRIST? To give glory to CHRIST we must give obedience to The Church. As it is with marriage, so it is with The Church. CHRIST Himself is the head of the army of GOD, which is The Church. And can any soldier love the head of his army, but despise his fellow soldiers? Can the faithful Christian give allegiance to his commander - CHRIST, but shun his fellow believers - The Church?

So if we truly belong to CHRIST our Lord, we will with burning desire to always and in everything be under His headship and command as part of His faithful Church on earth! As Saint Therese of Lisieux says, "I want to spend my Heaven in doing good on earth" as a faithful servant of The Body of CHRIST!<sup>26</sup> For "The Communion of The Saints" "...is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in Heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of The whole Church in The Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to CHRIST, so our communion with the saints joins us to CHRIST, from Whom as from its fountain and head issues all Grace, and the life of the People of GOD itself!"<sup>27</sup>

#### X. IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD WE STAND SECURE UNDER HIS COMMAND

David declares that our feet stand sure within the army of The LORD, and the love of his heart rests in the congregation of The Almighty. So David sings out in PSALMS 26:8,12: "LORD, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth. My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless The LORD!"<sup>28</sup> So in taking our place in the congregation of CHRIST, we find our true home of strength and joy in The Church. For if we are truly CHRIST's, we will desire to be where He is. William Walford observes here, "As a man whose feet are firmly fixed upon even ground is apprehensive of no fall, so the pious worshippers of

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<sup>26</sup> 6, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 956, "Saint Therese of Lisieux, The Final Conversation, tr. John Clarke (Washington: ICS, 1977)," p 271.

<sup>27</sup> 6, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 957, "Lumen Gensium 50; cf. EPHESIANS 4:1-6," p 271.

<sup>28</sup> 1, KJV, PSALMS 26:8,12.

JEHOVAH feel no dread lest their adversaries should finally triumph over them!"<sup>29</sup> For it is in His Church that the Christian soldier finds his true peace and security; it is within The Church that our praises rise to GOD The Father corporately, by the power of GOD the Holy Spirit, under the saving grace of GOD The Son. For if we would love and honour CHRIST in our lives, we are called to do so as part of His household, which is The Church.

#### XI. WHERE ELSE BUT WITHIN THE FOLDS OF THE CHURCH!

Friends, let us ask these questions of ourselves: Are we an active member of a local Church? Have we enrolled under the banner of CHRIST, but stand alone and isolated? Do we feel the wiles of the devil overwhelming us as we resist him as a lone soul? Friend, we must take our place in The Church on earth without delay! For if we feel the fiery approach of hell and have nobody to stand with us to help us extinguish those flames, who is to blame but ourselves for cutting ourselves off from the army of GOD and His command? Is our faith in danger of being shipwrecked upon the dangerous shores of spiritual isolation? Are we cut off and surrounded by the forces of evil in our life with no reinforcements in sight? Friend, we must take our place in The Church on earth without delay, for where else but within The folds of The Church shall we stand secure and victorious?

Do we look about us and ask, "O LORD, where is Your army, that I might be rescued from peril?" Are we marching in rebellion to The Body of CHRIST on earth and her authority over our lives and souls, given to her by CHRIST our Commander and Head, instead walking on our own paths of righteousness? Have we prayed that GOD would give us the armour and weapons of faith promised in Holy Scripture to the redeemed in CHRIST, and having received them, find them useless because we refuse to sit under the teachings of The historic and faithful Church, making ourselves the impotent head of our own feeble and insignificant army? Friend, we must take our place in The Church on earth without delay, for where else but within The folds of The Church shall we stand secure and victorious?

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<sup>29</sup> 9, Treasury of David, Volume 1, PSALMS 1-57, PSALM The Twenty-Sixth, Verse 12, "On an even place," William Walford, p 427.

Do we complain to The Saviour, “O CHRIST, where are Your promised sword and shield, that I may be victorious over trials and temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil,” and yet turn away from the congregation of GOD? Are we trying to walk in the impossible contradiction of loving The Lord JESUS CHRIST, but abandoning His bride The Church, which is His very Body marching militant and victorious? Having we forsaken the gathering of ourselves with our Christian brethren within The House of The Almighty? Do we find our feet slipping out from under our in the face of the assaults of this fallen world? Friend, we must take our place in The Church on earth without delay, for where else but within The folds of The Church shall we stand secure and victorious?

## XII. IN CONCLUSION – STAND FIRM UNDER THE BANNER OF CHRIST!

And so we see that warfare is waged by armies and not by lone soldiers. The lone soldier will almost certainly lose his life in battle if he is not fighting as part of a coordinated and skilled army. Under the hierarchy of military authority the wise soldier knows he has the greatest chance of success in battle as part of a well trained, equipped and lead army. So, too, we see that the Christian is a soldier of CHRIST under GOD’s command within The Church. And as Christians, we are under the authority and command of CHRIST’s officers, which are only to be found within The Church. It is within The Church that CHRIST’s soldiers are trained, equipped and lead to be victorious in the spiritual battles and conflicts of life. And within The Church the Christian is not alone as a solitary soldier, but is always part of the vast host of the saints of GOD.

For it is only within The Church that we as Christian can expect to overcome the daily battles for our earthly lives and eternal souls! For only in CHRIST shall men receive the strength and deliverance to stand in the daily battles of life and, having done all, to stand with victory as in ZEPHANIAH 3:17, “The LORD thy GOD in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest [you] in His love, He will joy over thee with singing!”<sup>30</sup> In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

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<sup>30</sup> 1, KJV, ZEPHANIAH 3:17.