

Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1:3-7).

Isaiah was given a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and the blessings that would be introduced at its inauguration when he was inspired to write:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way,

and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (35:5-10).

If we keep these thoughts in mind, and walk in newness of life, then we shall be walking in the way of holiness, and it will no longer be necessary to ask: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”.



Reviews

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Standing against military service*

John Nicholls

WITH THE STORM clouds of war looming once again over the Middle East, and the threat of terrorist attacks upon nations worldwide, it is both timely and faithful that the Christadelphian Military Service Committee has published a book about the Brotherhood's position on conscientious objection to military service.

Jesus told his disciples that, among many signs of his return, there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Lk. 21:25,26). The reaction of the powers that be to the present troubles is to strengthen the armed forces, the police, and security in general. President Bush has “declared war on terror”, and most of the world's nations agree with the need to do this, although not necessarily with the means he proposes to use. But Jesus said to true disciples: “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (v. 28).

As we wait in these troubled times for the coming of our Lord, Brother Botten's book comes

as a service to our Brotherhood. It will strengthen the faith of an older generation who lived through the problems of being conscientious objectors in World War 2. It will remind a middle-aged generation of the principles of our separation from the world in the matter of taking up arms and defending the country of our natural birth. And it is an appropriate book for a younger generation, who will need, in faith, to make a stand should conscription again be introduced by the troubled nations in which they live.

The reviewer feels that for this latter group the book is particularly suitable. It is not a very lengthy book, but it is well written and illustrated, and many interesting documents and letters are included in the text. It is logically set out, and takes a comprehensive approach to the subject. It could profitably be given to people

* *The Captive Conscience*, John Botten, available from The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ; tel. 0121-777-6328; e-mail orders@thechristadelphian.com. Price including postage for a single copy £6.40, multiple orders will be invoiced.

interested in the Truth as an introduction to the beliefs and practices of Christadelphians in this area.

The origins of our position

The author begins by describing how the name Christadelphian was developed by Brother Thomas during the American Civil War in the 1860s. In a petition presented to the Northern Federal American authorities, who had introduced the draft (conscription), there was a need to give a name to the community of brethren and sisters who had responded to the Truth. Several names had been used, including The Royal Association of Believers, The Antipas Association, Nazarenes, and Thomasites, but Brother Thomas eventually decided upon 'Christadelphian', based on the two Greek words *Christou adelphoi*, Brethren of Christ.

The chapters that follow are history lessons in themselves, and Brother Botten leads us effortlessly over the centuries. The author goes right back to the first-century believers and the teaching of Christ and the apostles. He shows that from late in the second century there are references to 'Christians' in the Roman army, and that writers like Tertullian and Origen mention Christians in military camps. However, there are still examples of Christians who refused to serve in the army, such as Maximilian in A.D. 295. The author's comment at the end of the second chapter about some early Christians is worth quoting:

"As a result [of wanting the Romans to defeat barbarian invaders], their loyalties became divided, and it became harder to resist the argument for fighting. After all, if Christians were willing to pray for a Roman victory and to rejoice when the barbarians were defeated, would they not be a little hypocritical then to refuse to fight? . . . It is clearly inconsistent for the disciple of Christ to applaud military action by any power or party and then to refuse to fight".

During the Middle Ages it became Church (Roman Catholic) teaching that a Christian's duty is to fight in "a just cause", killing non-Christians—for example, infidels such as Muslims. The Crusades of the Middle Ages to liberate the holy places and Jerusalem from the hands of unbelievers were considered to be just and religious warfare. It was at this time that small sects such as the Waldenses in France and Switzerland came into existence. Many of their beliefs were Scrip-

tural, but it is not clear if they were conscientious objectors to military service.

It was with the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century that clear evidence of conscientious objection to fighting becomes available. The Brethren in Christ, the Polish Brethren and John Biddle, a headteacher from Gloucestershire, are some examples cited in the book.

In the historical sequence, the next period is from the American Civil War to World War 1. Brother Robert Roberts, the first editor of *The Christadelphian*, followed the stand made earlier by Brother Thomas, and when in 1875 the British Cabinet discussed the possibility of conscription due to the Afghan crisis, he proposed making a petition to the Liberal Prime Minister, W. E. Gladstone. The crisis passed, but in 1903 Brother C. C. Walker, the next editor, prepared a similar petition against the background of the Boer War.

Two world wars

With the outbreak of World War 1, patriotic fervour ran high, and in 1915 many ecclesiastics presented a petition to Parliament via a helpful Member of Parliament, Arnold Rowntree. In 1916 conscription was introduced, but with provision for objection on grounds of conscience. Brother Botten describes how the London Standing Committee was firm over the issue of noncombatant service in lieu of combatant service. They advised young brethren to seek absolute exemption from military service, since noncombatant service such as ambulance and medical work involved oaths of loyalty to the Crown, and would lead to combatant service in the last resort. Tribunals were set up and Brother Botten cites some of these. Of particular interest is Brother Gordon Ramsden's letter of application for exemption from both combatant and non-combatant service. This resulted in Christadelphians being granted exemption, subject to being prepared to engage in work of national importance, such as agriculture, forestry, mining, transport and education.

The Brotherhood did indeed gain a privileged position compared with other conscientious objectors, and certificates of exemption were granted to many hundreds of brethren. This was due, under God, to the consistency of the Christadelphian position, and the willingness of brethren to suffer hardship rather than give up their convictions. One issue that arose then, and still arises today, is the need to choose work and occupations furthest removed from work linked

with the military—munitions work, for example. Today, many firms in telecommunications and similar areas are directly or indirectly linked to arms and weapons and guidance systems, so there is need today, as there was then, nearly one hundred years ago, to avoid employment in these areas that can compromise our position.

The chapter on World War 2 is the second longest in the book, and also one of the most interesting. Conscription was reintroduced in Britain in April 1939, and once again tribunals were set up, in the words of one of the judges, “to plumb the depths of the convictions” of conscientious objectors. There is much interesting material in this chapter. There were fifty actual questions asked by tribunals carefully noted by brethren who attended them. The letter written by Brother Derrick Banyard, now of the Bury St. Edmunds ecclesia, applying for exemption is reproduced in full. Some judges’ comments on the Christadelphian stand are interesting to read because they present an ‘outsiders’ view; their comments are not all complimentary and remind us of the need to lead a consistent life of separation from the present world and to be as completely loyal to our Master, the Lord Jesus, as we are able.

The experiences of brethren who had to undertake work of national importance are also related. Writing as one who lives in the comfort of the Western world, the reviewer feels humbled by the real day-to-day sacrifices made by these brethren on account of their faith, and prays that the present generation will be as steadfast in whatever trials they may experience.

Other issues

One issue that arose, and that will rise again in times of national emergency, is that of Civil Defence. Brother Botten sets out clearly the main ideas held in the Brotherhood on this issue. “Where does loving our neighbour end and compromising our citizenship begin?”, he aptly asks (p. 74). This question is one that needs to be carefully considered in the light of Scripture, and a rational decision made before any national emergency and conscription arise. In the emotion and patriotic fervour of war, it may not be possible to make the right decision. And all should recognise that this is an issue for individual conscience; as Paul put it: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

The Second World War also involved conscription of women aged 19–31, and the experi-

ences of sisters are related. Other interesting issues also emerged from this war. The provision of youth circles and groups amongst ecclesias arose partly because of the Registration of Boys and Girls Order in 1941, designed to help the war effort. The reviewer remembers the popularity of Scouts, Guides and Boys’ and Girls’ Brigades in the postwar years. Who can doubt the valuable service that youth circles and groups provide for younger brethren and sisters who might otherwise be attracted to the numerous worldly organisations available today? The war years brought ecclesias together because of the hardships experienced. Some conscientious objectors remained in their wartime occupations, and carried on successful careers and businesses as a result.

In the United Kingdom, conscription continued until 1960, and many young brethren had to face tribunals and explain their convictions to judges. Many were granted exemption, but others were jailed. The Military Service Committee gave valuable support in this period, and the Committee is still in existence, ready to help should another emergency occur. It was indeed impetus from the Committee that led to the publication of this book.

Other parts of the world

The remainder of the book focuses attention on the experiences of ecclesias in other countries of the world: New Zealand, Canada, Australia, South Africa, USA, Guyana, El Salvador, Jamaica, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Russia. Brother Botten is to be commended on the careful research he has conducted into how such ecclesias fared in World War 2 and before, and their current position. As a UK resident, the reviewer found this section of the book extremely interesting. The amount of detail is impressive; in fact this chapter is the longest in the book, and accounts for a quarter of its total length. For the sake of this section alone, brethren and sisters worldwide are recommended to read this book and to appreciate the wider picture of conscientious objection by Christadelphians all over the globe.

Many of these brethren and sisters fared less well than those in the UK. There is much for us all to learn. A circular letter sent to Canadian brethren early in 1936 had this advice:

“FIRST, build up a character, based upon the Christ Law, which will be above reproach or question, as a testimony that you have

truly learned of Christ, to whose law you will appeal.

“SECOND, make sure and certain, by knowledge, that you understand the Scriptural grounds fully, which form the basis of your stand against civil and military service, where the oath of allegiance to any but God is involved”.

In South Africa many difficulties were faced, and conscription was not abolished until 1993. Several brethren were imprisoned for up to three years. An interesting letter, “Why Christadelphians are not pacifists”, is reprinted, setting out for the South Africa Board for Religious Objection the Scriptural position. In Germany, Brother Albert Merz from Stuttgart was shot in 1941 for refusing the call of conscription; the story is movingly related using original correspondence.

In some countries, such as Russia and Ukraine, conscription is still compulsory today, and imprisonment is likely for conscientious objectors. There is no provision for exemption because of conscientious objection. Our brethren and sisters in lands like these need our prayers and support; the coming of the Lord must be something they pray for with heartfelt hope.

Conclusion

The author’s conclusions are fitting for a topic of such momentous import. He cites a World War 2 tribunal judge who looked for consistency in the lives of applicants for exemption. Brother Botten stresses the need to consider carefully what employment we take and the need for care about the way in which we talk about and support the current political State of Israel. He offers Scriptural advice on how we can be ready for possible testing times ahead. Brother Botten is to be thanked for the careful research he has carried out and for presenting so compellingly a readable account of this subject.

The book comes with a bibliography (perhaps the booklet by Brother C. C. Walker, *Christ and War*, sets out most fully the Scriptural position), which includes the documents consulted for both the UK and other countries. The reviewer feels that all younger brethren and sisters should read it, and that ecclesias and youth group leaders might like to consider how this can be done. It is commended particularly to our new brethren and sisters in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa who need our special support and prayers, as well as to brethren and sisters worldwide.

Basic Bible Principles inserts

For the last eight years The Testimony has been publishing occasional single-page inserts covering basic Bible principles, one per magazine and extras for ecclesias to distribute. These were not intended to be permanent, and additional copies for later supply were not printed. Each leaflet has made it clear that readers are welcome to make copies for whatever use they wish. However, the wish has been expressed that these should be made available in a more permanent form. This will be considered when they have finished, but in the meantime they have all been made available on our Website (see rear cover), and readers are welcome to print them off for their own use.

The full list of titles is as follows:

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| Dual fulfilment of prophecy | Creation |
| Temptation and its conquest | The Kingdom of God |
| The verbal inspiration of Scripture | Satan and the devil |
| Signs of the times | The ecclesia |
| The Jews—God’s witnesses | God’s promises |
| Marriage—“only in the Lord” | God |
| Baptism—essential for salvation | What is the gospel? |
| Faith | The sacrifice of Christ |
| Prayer | Fellowship |
| The role of sisters | Love |
| The Holy Spirit | Sacrifice in the age to come |
| God-manifestation | Hell |
| Angels | Preaching the gospel |
| Military service and the disciple of Christ | |