

## Service to God or service to the state?

Carlo Barbaresi

**T**HE PRINCIPLES involved in our attitude to military service are not simply developed when a crisis occurs in the country, but are at the very basis of our state of mind throughout our life in the Truth. At the time of writing, Britain is involved with the United States in the war against terrorism. Such a crisis as this gives us an opportunity to apply the fundamentals of our faith to the possibility of conscription in the armed forces.

The change as a result of our baptism is that at one time we were the servants of sin but now have become the servants of God and the servants of righteousness. We have been bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and therefore belong to God. A servant is one whose will and capacities are wholly at the service of another. This wholehearted service to God should be paramount in our minds as we consider this subject. Our only source of knowledge with regard to this service is the Word of God, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105).

Nonresistance to evil, which the Master taught in Matthew 5:38-45, is one reason why we should not take part in military service, and Jesus was an example of this (Lk. 9:52-56; Isa. 53:7). We must, however, appreciate that we are not pacifists. Hence the words of Jesus: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (Jno. 18:36).

Our position as bondservants of God and of Christ is brought out in the Abrahamic promises. These reveal to us an understanding of our citizenship, a principle more fundamental than nonresistance to evil.

As Abraham, in obedience to the gospel, left Ur of the Chaldees, an idolatrous city of darkness, so we have separated ourselves from the darkness of this world and have become citizens of the commonwealth of Israel (Gen. 12:1-4; Gal. 3:26-29). We are "strangers and pilgrims", as the fathers were (Heb. 11:13). Prior to our baptism we were aliens from the Israelitish commonwealth; now we in Britain are aliens from the British commonwealth. Elsewhere, wherever we

are, we are 'foreigners' (Eph. 2:12,13,19; Heb. 13:14). As Christ's Kingdom was all David's salvation and desire, so our patriotism now should be concerning the coming Kingdom of God, but not, we must add, to the State of Israel, which is still in darkness.

In joining the army we would have to give an oath of allegiance.<sup>1</sup> In so doing we would place ourselves at the disposal of the government under which we live. We cannot do this, for our lives belong to God and to Christ.

For this reason we cannot serve in the non-combatant services, because this involves service to the state. We also need to consider carefully our attitude to civil defence, because in the past this has been linked with service to the state. In the 1939-45 war the Emergency Powers Act, "passed in 1939 and extended in May 1940, requires the individual to be entirely at the disposal of the State as occasion demands". The seriousness of this was that the government placed citizens at the disposal of the state, and this applied to civil defence also.<sup>2</sup>

Can we, as bondservants of God and of Christ, place ourselves under the control of a monarch or government of the world? Let us answer from God's Word. The rulers of the world are described as "the rulers of the darkness of this world . . . spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).<sup>\*</sup> The Apostle Paul's mission was to turn men "from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). John says: "we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 Jno. 5:19).

Let us note the character of the world: "wickedness", "darkness", "the power of Satan". Can we become servants to a world such as this in its wars? Although the country in which we live may be nominally Christian, as far as the Truth is concerned it is in darkness. Brother Thomas wrote this of Britain:

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1. Halisbury's Laws 41, Royal Forces Para. 191.
  2. *Are We Ready for Another Time of Testing?* Brother Graham Pearce, available at 75p inclusive of postage (payable to Milestones), 76 High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE.

\* For an alternative view of this passage see ["In heavenly places in Christ"](#), p. 179.

“We have no ‘patriotism’ and are ‘loyal’ to no Gentile government under the sun. *Patriotism* is love and zeal for one’s native or adopted country right or wrong; and *loyalty* is firm and faithful adhesion to a king or sovereignty. Our love, zeal, and loyalty for the British daughter of the Italian Jezebel [the Church of England as an offshoot of the Roman Catholic Church—C.B.] found expression some twenty-five years ago in a solemn renunciation of her authority; and in obeying the gospel of the kingdom in 1847, we gave in all the love, zeal, and loyalty we had at command, to Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”.<sup>3</sup>

The British State, therefore, for example, is of the world as the nations of the apostles’ day were, and indeed as the Jewish nation was at that time.

Although world rulers are in darkness, God uses them as elements in the working out of His purpose, so the Apostle Paul exhorts us to be in subjection to them and to pay all their dues (Rom. 13:1-7; cf. Mt. 22:21). We must bear in mind, however, that our fear and honour are primarily due to God.

All world rulers will occupy their position only temporarily, until Christ comes. Then his

servants will fight, as we saw from John 18:36 (see also Psalm 149:5-9). Once we appreciate this we can answer the question, Why did Israel fight in the past? They fought because Israel was God’s kingdom, and when it had righteous kings they fought right wars. So when Goliath defied Israel he was defying God, as we see from 1 Samuel 17:45. David, therefore, a man of faith, went courageously against him and slew him. The most faithful in Israel were the most courageous in battle. Until Christ comes we must fight a spiritual warfare with all the courage with which Israel fought their battles. The faithful warriors of the past should be our inspiration (2 Cor. 10:3-6; 2 Tim. 4:7,8).

Our allegiance to Christ is far more important than the shame of being conscientious objectors. This allegiance is more important than education, which occupies us when we are young. We need to be educated in God’s Word and develop a Christlike mind so that we courageously uphold our principles should we be tried in a national emergency.

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3. *Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*, Vol. 10 (1860), p. 71.

## Jury service

Cecil Butler

**T**RIAL BY JURY has evolved over several centuries in the UK, and is prized as one of the chief safeguards of the liberties of the subject. A jury consists of a group of ordinary people, chosen more or less at random, who are sworn (hence ‘jury’, from the French *juror*, ‘to swear’) to give a ‘true saying’ (the root meaning of ‘verdict’) on some question, or questions, officially submitted to them.

The main qualification required of jurors is that they be ‘good and true’, a description that should apply to all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jurors are expected to be totally unbiased as regards the matter in hand, and in order to help to achieve this no member of the legal profession in any capacity may serve on a jury. The jury is, in fact, the only ‘lay’ element in the whole judicial process.

Juries are empanelled when the more serious offences against the law are being considered. Their function is to listen to the evidence pro-

duced by both prosecuting and defence counsels and witnesses; and, following the summing up of such evidence by the judge in the case, they retire incommunicado to consider without fear or favour the evidence they have heard, and to reach a verdict, sometimes unanimous, sometimes by a large majority, as to whether or not the accused did act as alleged by the prosecution.

The jury is not asked to say whether the action in question should or should not have been punishable by law, nor is it required to pronounce sentence on the accused if found guilty. It may, however, if considered appropriate, recommend a merciful sentence. Its sole function is to listen to the evidence produced and pass an opinion as to which side is telling the truth.

The question for the disciple of Christ to ask is, Are such duties compatible with the teaching of the Lord and his apostles? Unlike the case of