



F.A.C.S. REPORT

"A Monthly Newsletter on the Relevance of the Christian Faith."

Vol. 18, No. 8

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August, 1999

What's Inside:

"The feature article this month comes from Zimbabwe. Author Derek Carlsen has created a reputation for himself as an unwelcome critic of the government of that country.

Carlsen calls for a long-haul reform of broken systems caused by bad decisions in the past."

The rising persecution of Christians in Islamic countries gives rise to the second article this month. A little history, for those interested, in one of the great battles of Christianity. Those with a pietistic bent will find that the battle here is not a "spiritual battle" in the sense that is generally understood.

The Battle of Malta (1565) was, however, a real spiritual battle fought with canons, guns, and military strategy.

CHOICES AT THE FORKS

By Derek Carlsen

THE ANSWER TO OUR many problems is, in principle, simple, though in practice it is far from this. Our crisis, in Zimbabwe, is not unlike those faced by many others around the world, since all originate at the same place at the forks.

Life is made up of many, many moral choices (choosing between right and wrong) which touch every area of life. Whenever there is a moral choice to make, we stand at a fork in the road and one path is right and the other one is wrong. When we are called upon to make such choices, we cannot afford to make mistakes, for there will be consequences, both short and long term, for these mistakes. **There is only one reliable ultimate authority that has been given to show us which way to go at the forks and that is the Scriptures.** Everything we need to know with respect to righteousness has been revealed to us in the Bible. Thus, every moral choice we face in life should be determined by the Light of God's Word. All those who reject the Scriptures as the ultimate authority in life have to rely upon human wisdom to serve as this authority. This means some

"elite" group of people will serve as your "trustworthy" standard for determining morality.

Christ is the Lord of heaven and earth and expects all people, at all times, to bring their every thought and action into line with His mind. The Lord of life, has spoken about every sea of life and told us to walk in this light He has revealed no area of life and no one is exempted from His commands (Matthew 28:18-20). The only solution that exists, for us and all people, is to repent of our refusal to bow to every Word from God and begin making our choices at the forks according to the wisdom of God revealed to us in the Scriptures.

The problems we are now engulfed in are the consequences of making wrong choices at the forks. The solution, like I said, is simple, in principle we have to make right choices at the forks and work hard on that path. **There is no magic wand to wave that will instantly restore everything that has disintegrated.** The consequences for bad choices are destroyed lives, relationships and societies. Rebuilding in such cases is

normally a long, hard process and is not for the faint hearted.

Christ said His church is to be the light of the world and He expects us to apply His truth (light) to everything in His world.

This must begin with ourselves: what does the Bible say about me, my sin and the only basis for salvation? We have to submit to the absolute authority of God and His sovereign purposes and seek to live by every Word that comes from God's mouth and God has spoken about everything. Thus, all my thinking must start with the Word of God. My conclusions have to be in line with the mind of Christ at all times. The way I relate to people must be determined by the Word of God, not by the state, some union or the latest "politically correct" nonsense that wafts in and out of fashion like a bad odour. The way I treat my wife or husband, the way I raise my children and educate them, the way I relate to my employer or employee, banking, economics, debt, foreign aid, etc., all must be self-consciously based upon God's Word. What I think about the state, its role in society and its limits must be obtained from the Bible. My responsibility to stand for the truth and oppose evil wherever it is

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found is to become a controlling factor in my life. **We are to be light and this is a command, not a suggestion!** (Matthew 5:14). The sad fact is that the church has withdrawn its light from so much of life and has ignored many areas for so long that she is unable to determine what is right or wrong in these areas. Her cover-up has been to denounce these areas as irrelevant to the Kingdom of God and in so doing, avoid the embarrassment of being totally ignorant about what God's thinking is on such matters.

Anyone who lets the Bible speak for itself, cannot avoid God's clear emphasis that He rules over all of life and that He expects every individual and nation to obey His every Word. Nor can you escape from the "earthiness" of the Bible, that is, its focus on the down to earth, practical, every day aspects of our existence and how to glorify God in these situations. While we worship a transcendent God, for the most part, the worship He has ordained is for us to apply His truth to all of life (John 4:24). God has set the moral principles, boundaries and responsibilities for every individual, organisation and institution.

Only 29% of the Bible relates to our personal relationship with God, whereas 71% relates to the other God honouring, God glorifying governmental spheres of life. The focus of today's church has almost exclusively been upon the 29% of personal relationship with God. This neglecting of the 71% has produced

a very immature church, which in turn has contributed to the disintegration of society. If we remove the salt and the light from society, what can we expect to happen? Exactly what has happened to our nation!

If you refused to exercise the muscles in your leg, eventually your ability to use that limb would be gone. The church, in not exercising her responsibility to apply the standard of God's Word to everything in life no longer knows how to apply it and in many instances, doesn't even believe such an application exists — she has become lame. Due to this neglect, the church has remained immature and is therefore unable to discern between what is right and what is not. The writer to the Hebrews talks about people who had rejected the solid food of God's Word, wanting only the sweet milk, which was for babies (Hebrews 5:14). He said these people hadn't fed upon solid food and thus had not practised discerning between right and wrong, therefore, they were no longer able to distinguish between the two. Because they had not constantly applied the Word in certain areas, they were no longer able to determine what was truth in these areas. **The modern church, in claiming that God's Word is silent on many issues, is merely revealing her immaturity!** She does this because she is unable and unwilling to digest solid food or wrestle with difficult subjects in the light of God's absolute Word for all of life. Our ability to discern between good and evil is matured by constant practice and a diet of solid food. This means there are (if any), only a few "instant answers for Kings kids" — the rest require the diligent effort of searching the Scriptures and bringing all our thoughts into line with the mind of Christ.

Immaturity means that at the forks, wrong choices are being made all the time as the church, who is to be the light of the world, fails to supply moral direction for many areas in life. As the situation gets darker the church appears to despise strong food (sound instruction) even more, calling for sweeter and sweeter milk, thus becoming more and more irrelevant to life.

Our only hope is to be found in Christ, but Christ is the Word of God and expects us to apply His Word to every area of life. This means we have to make sure that every decision at the forks in life is based upon the truth in the Scriptures. We cannot rely upon our accustomed way of **thinking about things, but at every**

The World At An End

by Ian Hodge, Ph.D.

The Y2K issue has raised many alarms about the future of the world. It will be, say some, doomsday, the end of civilization as we know it. Advocating survival programs, retirement from the cities, and a survival mentality, these prophets of doom can only see the worst that is about to come.

This is not the first time, however, that some people have thought the end was near. While there are millenarian groups that have prophesied the end of the world, a small group of Christians at one time in history was convinced that the end had arrived. They had the environment and the circumstances to prove it.

For quite a few years a new "Lawgiver" had ruled a great part of Europe. Stretching around the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire had its sites set on western Europe. This was the prize that had evaded the Moslems since their defeat in Spain by Charlemagne's grandfather in the eighth century. At that time, superior military strength, attributed by some scholars to be the invention of the foot stirrup, had allowed the Europeans to defeat the Moslems to such an extent that it would be centuries before they could attempt the subjugation of Europe.

Almost 700 years later, the Turkish Ottomans had advanced to the gates of Vienna. Here they were stopped. The land advance to the shores of France was halted in its tracks. But Soleyman, the "Lawgiver," "The Magnificent," was not to be stopped. For him the prize was too great. For him, the desire to extend the Empire further west led him to conclude there was another route that could be used to secure their goal. The year was 1564, and the goal was to conquer Europe via the Mediterranean.

Looking at a map of the region, it is not too hard to see the sense in Soleyman's plan. To sail from Turkey through the Mediterranean, into Greece or Italy would allow the Turks to get around the fighting in

turn we need to insist upon having solid Biblical principles to justify what we do or think. Denying our total dependence upon God and His wisdom for everything in life and relying instead upon human wisdom, has led us into the hole we are now in. No matter how many people together agree which is the "right" choice at the fork, if that choice does not find support from the Word of God it will lead to destruction (Proverbs 16:25). To reject God's Word as the only valid foundation means a spiralling downwards into ever increasing darkness and it-rationality.

Talking about irrationality lets look at the present European crisis. NATO's bombing of Serbia has surely revealed the superpowers' concept of justice and authority. Each civil government (state) in the world receives its authority from God (Romans 13). The police power a state has comes from God and the limits of this power are defined by God and restricted to the boundaries of their own nations (Acts 17:26). Within these defined areas, the states of the world have authority to function and exercise their God-given authority. States have authority to touch someone's life and property only as they act within the limits God has set and according to the standards God has specified. Because they have the right to take life in a specifically defined area, this does not mean that they have authority to take life wherever they want to. To take life without God's authority makes you a murderer. While states have been given police powers to use within their national boundaries, this does not mean they can exercise these powers within any one else's boundaries. For me, as an individual, to take the life of someone without God's authority, even if that person deserved to die, makes me a murderer. No one, including states or groups of states, can assume authority for themselves that God has not given and for them to take life without God's sanction makes them guilty of murder. The leaders of NATO are murderers and are no different from any other murderous leader in the world today. Innocent blood rests upon those nations, their people and upon the church if she remains silent. Many of the NATO nations don't even believe in the death penalty, yet they have made themselves, judge, jury and

executioner in Serbia. These leaders talk about the value of life, yet clearly demonstrate how cheaply they value life they are prepared to carry out their execution according to out of date information (the Chinese Embassy bombing is a good example). Even if there was a moral basis for attacking Serbian military targets (and there is not), how can such negligence, as using outdated information for an *execution*, be excused? America alone allows the murder of one million babies a year, through abortion, and yet, talks about her "moral" responsibility to preserve life in Serbia.

Morally, NATO and those states who make up the alliance have revealed the rottenness of themselves. What is being demonstrated before the eyes of the world is the bankruptcy of human wisdom that has exalted itself above the wisdom of God. Here we have the richest, most powerful and self-righteous nations in the world, casting off the restraints of God in the name of, 'moral responsibility' (Psalm 2:3).

Civil governments are now so big and corrupt that they can manipulate the facts, cover up what needs to be covered up and Get you to believe their propaganda. **We have given them such powers and have done so gradually by repeatedly making wrong choices at the forks.** Yet, we still refuse to humble ourselves or admit how foolish man's wisdom is and how much we need God's wisdom (I Corinthians 1:20). Even now we stand before yet another fork: do we cry out for God's wisdom and mercy or do we place our faith in the wisdom of men, who, although they have led us to the brink of chaos, we trust will now produce an answer? Recovery for us all, begins at this first fork: **what is going to be our ultimate authority for all of life-God's Word or the "elite" group?**

Think about these things!

[Reprinted from *Muse Times*. The author lives in Zimbabwe and provides a Christian analysis of the events in that country. Requests to receive *Muse Time* should be sent to P.O. Box 3348, Paulington, Mutare, Zimbabwe. These will be produced occasionally Published by: Reason of Hope Ministries, Printed by: Quiver Press. Permission to reproduce is granted provided due acknowledgement is given.]

Vienna. There was only one small problem standing in his way: the Knights of St. John, now living on the island of Malta.

After the last Crusade failed to secure Palestine from the Moslems, the Knights of St. John emigrated first to Cyprus then later moved to Rhodes. From their arrival until 1520, when Soleyman forced them to relocate to Malta, the Knights of St. John had continued to harass the Turks as they sailed between Constantinople and Sicily.

The Knights were a group of people of mixed nationalities. They were united in their conviction that there was a religious war in place. For them, the enemy was the Muslim, and they had become a significant thorn in the flesh to the Turks. However, in 1522, after a great siege, Soleyman evicted them from Rhodes. After a spell in Sicily, they settled in Malta, close to the European land mass, and still able to inflict damage on Turkish ships that sailed the Mediterranean. Although they had become corsairs, some of the finest at the time, the prime motive of the Order was the development of hospitals, medical research and the training of doctors and surgeons. It was the Ottoman's expansionist policies that had caused the military side of the order to become predominant.

By the time of Malta, the Knights had organized themselves into a well-ordered community. Led by Grand Master, the Knights had structure and order in their community. All had taken vows of Chastity and Obedience. They had come from all over Europe to join this Order, to take their place in the hierarchy of the community, to serve one another in their respective posts, whether they were fighting men or serving priests.

By the year 1565, they numbered about 541 Knights and servants-at-arms, three to four thousand Maltese irregulars, and they had in their possession about 500 galley slaves. With support from the mainland, the numbers swelled to about 9,000. Against this number, Soleyman the Magnificent sent a force estimated to be between 30,000 - 40,000 men. This group was led by about six thousand Janissaries, the elite fighting force of the Sultan. Janissaries were men who had been taken from Christian parents in their youth then made to

serve the Sultan in an elite fighting unit. The troops were supported by 80,000 rounds of shot, plenty of gunpowder, and enough military supplies to allow a siege of Malta to last the summer months of the year. About 200 ships were used to transport all this for the battle.

On Friday, May 18, the Turkish ships were sighted off Malta. They had been expected for several months, and the Grand Master had spent the time in careful preparation of the looming battle. Food was stored in the walled cities. Maltese farmers took shelter in these towns as well. Once the invasion force arrived, water-holes, wells and springs were poisoned, making them useless to the invaders.

The invaders had come expecting an early victory. They were to be disappointed. While part of the problem was of their own making by employing an inferior military strategy, they did not expect the fierce resistance they encountered from the Knights. For weeks the siege guns pounded the towns and forts of the Knights. Three months after arriving, the Turks had still not succeeded in stopping the Knights of St. John. By now, however, Autumn was approaching and the ships of the Mediterranean were suitable only for summer sailing. The Turks, if they hoped to return home, must leave soon. To do that, however, they would need to bring this battle to a successful conclusion – quickly.

The remaining shelters of Birgu, and Senglea became the target of a ferocious effort to dislodge the inhabitants. The Turks hurled everything they had at the Knights. Siege guns thundered as they attempted to knock down the walls. Foot soldiers and snipers did their best to breach the walls. To those inside, it seemed an impossible task to withstand the onslaught of the Turks. Their hospitals were full. Most of

the Knights were wounded. While sufficient food had been stored, there were simply not enough men to face the Moslem onslaught. According to one author,

[I]t seemed to the two garrisons “as if the world was coming to an end.” The conditions of the ramparts and fortifications were like those of St. Elmo in its last hours. Bodies lay unburied in the streets, there being no time between the successive attacks to spare a single man for burial duties. Women and children lay dead between Knight, soldier and sailor. There were not enough men to spare to look after the wounded in the Hospital.¹

The Turks tried a decisive campaign. They managed to drag their “infernal machine,” filled with gunpowder, iron chains, nails and grapeshot, up the battered walls of Senglea and let it drop into the midst of the Knights and soldiers. But the slow-burning fuse gave time for the defenders to drag it back to the top of the wall and let it fall back in the midst of the Turks. It exploded amongst the Turks, wreaking havoc, death and destruction amongst the troops. The defenders seized the opportunity and rushed down upon their attackers. The Turks fled.

Meanwhile, the defiant stand of the Knights, led by Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette, whose fierce determination dictated that surrender was not an option, had become the talk of Europe. He even burnt the boats that would have allowed retreat to St. Angelo. It was a stand-to-the-end position that took courage and more than a little faith in the cause for which they stood. “His inflexible resolve and his burning belief in the righteousness of his cause, proved the moral backbone which saved Malta.”²

At long last a little help came. Turkish supply ships were attacked and halted before they reached Malta. Turkish morale, after three months, began to falter. Bad decisions were made by the Turkish leaders. If they were to winter the troops in Malta, they would need to capture the capital, Mdina. The governor of the town, learning of the plan, dressed women in soldiers’ uniforms, let them patrol the ramparts, and placed every available cannon where they could be seen by the Turks. The demoralized invaders, thinking the town well-manned, faltered, then withdrew.

Soon a relief force for the Knights from the mainland caused the invaders to board their ships and return the 1,000 mile journey home to what some expected would be the wrath of Suleyman. It was the 8th of September. Nearly four months since their arrival, the Turks left empty-handed. And the Moslem expansion into Western Europe was halted. The world had not come to an end after all. Life would go on.

It would be a few centuries before the Moslem forces would again be able to marshal the forces to conquer the world. While this century has not seen the return of the Moslem world to a world-leading empire, Christians in a number of areas have learnt the hard way that Islam is an implacable enemy. From the Sudan to Indonesia, from Serbia to Pakistan, the persecution of Christians to the death has become a frequent occurrence, while the UN, NATO and other western countries have sat on the sidelines. May our persecuted brethren, like the Knights of St. John, stand fast to the end in the name of the King of kings.

1. Erle Bradford, *The Great Siege: Malta 1565* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), p. 193
2. *Ibid.*, p. 199.