

**CHRIST NEEDS GALLANT SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS: BE A *SPIRITUAL*
GENERAL GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER!**

by

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George Armstrong Custer is remembered primarily because of his death at the Little Big Horn in the last great Indian battle of the 19th century (June 25, 1876). I recall most stories relayed his stand as foolhardy. This depends upon how you look at it. His Indian adversaries considered honour in battle fulfilled them. So did General Custer. He was quite a bit like them in that way and one of the most gallant, hard fighting officers ever to grace the annals of American military history. He was the first to fight leading his men from the front, something that is *still* a novelty; apparently, this is not very appealing to most! This “follow me men” approach earned him their lifelong loyalties.

“Yellow (or Long) Hair” excelled at horsemanship and was considered a tactical genius and true hero. Not bad for a lad who boasted that he was most proud of his last place finish in his graduating class at West Point. Come to think of it, John McCain’s grades were not much better at the Naval Academy; yet, he is also one of America’s finest heroes. In a remarkable book, James Donovan comprehensively portrays the ‘glory’ of Custer’s exploits. [*A Terrible Glory* (CUSTER and the LITTLE BIGHORN THE LAST GREAT BATTLE of the AMERICAN WEST), Little, Brown & Company, N.Y., First Edition March 2008]

General Sheridan even considered Custer’s bravery as instrumental in ending the Civil War:

Sheridan paid McLean \$20 for the small table on which the conditions of surrender had been signed and gave it to Custer as a gift for Libbie (George’s wife). In a note to her he wrote, ‘There is scarcely an individual in our service who has contributed more to bring about this desirable result than your gallant husband.’ [*A Terrible Glory*, p. 52.]

Custer was a very highly regarded Union officer:

Of the Union’s Generals, only Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan were thought of more highly by the American public. Among Custer’s peers, only the jealous would whisper that such a meteoric rise was undeserved. There was still plenty of boy in him, but he had matured. He seemed to many, inside the army and out, to be the very model of noble knighthood. Custer’s praise and concern for those serving under him filled his reports – to the virtual exclusion of any feats of his own. His men responded in kind, and anecdotes of his gallantry and modesty became the stuff of legend. After Custer’s death, one soldier who had been shot in the leg and helped off the field by the

Boy General summed up the admiration his men felt for their commander when he said, ‘I would have given my right arm to save his life – aye, I would have died in his place!’ [*ibid.*, p. 53.]

This soldier who had been helped off the battle field by Custer, his commander, would have laid down his life for him. Had he done so, he would have followed the Lord’s commandment in St. John:

These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (St. John 15:11-13)

The Boy Wonder was in his 20’s at the time. He was mustered out of the Union Army at the seasoned age of 26.

What Has Custer to Do With Being a Soldier For Christ?

He had zeal. In him you can see the drive all of us need to exhibit in soldiering for Jesus! Admittedly, most of us don’t make our living from routing “hostiles”. Yet, we are among people hostile to our Lord every day of our lives. Oh, they might not be directly offensive or atheists, but they, indeed, are worse than either of these. The worst so-called Christian is a lukewarm or hypocritical one. We need True Orthodox Christians who could be said to in fact make a spiritual living from routing the Evil One, who is the most hostile of all and only continues to exist because God allows him to tempt us.

We Have a Duty to Defend the Lord

Now, as Orthodox Christians, we have a duty just as Custer had to his men and his country. Our duty is nondelegable. I.e., we can’t pass it off to others, thus avoiding it. Our duty is to stand and deliver for Christ. This duty is not the hierarchy’s: it is everyone’s! What do you do when someone disparages the Lord in your company? Do you meekly stand by and keep silent, afraid if you say anything contra to the prevailing secularism you will offend anyone? I hope not. This doesn’t mean you should be insulting in your responses. Just speak up, correct the wrong against Christ. If the offender continues, simply keep firm in your beliefs, repeat your points backed by Scripture/Tradition and/or the Fathers. If the party persists, close your conversation civilly and gracefully exit the conversation. Two times you’ve tried to correct the heretic. After this, he is on his own.

Our duty extends to everyone, including our bishops. In fact, we have a particularly strong spiritual impetus to stand on Holy Orthodoxy against the modernistic innovational shenanigans of the current motley crews of ecumenism. But you say, what about obedience? The Fathers reply that obedience is not owed a pseudo (meaning false) bishop, one who openly teaches or allows heresies against our

Lord's teachings. Canon XV of the First & Second Council (861 A.D.) is clear that such 'disobedience' is honourable:

... *But as for those persons, on the other hand, who, on account of some heresy condemned by holy Councils **or** (emphasis in bold supplied) Fathers, withdrawing themselves from communion with their president, who, that is to say, is preaching the heresy publicly, and teaching it barehead in church, such persons not only are not subject to any canonical penalty on account of their having walled themselves off from any and all communion with the one called a Bishop before any conciliar or synodal verdict has been rendered, but, on the contrary, they shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the honor which befits them among Orthodox Christians. For they have defied **not Bishops, but pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers, and they have not sundered the union of the Church with any schism, but, on the contrary, have been sedulous to rescue the Church from schisms and divisions** (emphasis in bold supplied)*

Ecumenism is the worst heresy in Christian history. A pseudo-bishop loses his claim to Apostolic Succession through this heresy.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union 'on equal terms'. On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases being a bishop the moment he *ceases* (emphasis supplied) being Orthodox.

[Dr. Alexandre Kalomiros in his classic *Against False Union*, p. 61.]

Don't Flinch When Secularism Slaps You In The Face!

Like Custer, stand in the breach, never step back but be Christian about what you are saying in reply to those living (even inadvertently) by the Devil's calling in this (the Devil's) world. Remember that these folks are not inherently evil. After all, they are the Lord's. It is our improper usage of His gift of goodness that is the problem. See in your neighbour the image of Christ. Even in an unbeliever or a bishop gone pseudo – become a false hierarch - Christ can manifest Himself and through His grace bring them to Him *if* they are willing to accept Him. See the other person as needing spiritual therapy not condemnation. Return ridicule with kind words, yet ones that do not compromise, or otherwise 'water down' the Faith. Demonstrate to the unbeliever or neo-Christian the merciful Jesus that we follow. Address him or them in nonjudgmental, yet firm, terms.

Be A Spiritual Leader: Prepare for Any Thing

Lead The Charge For Christ and be a spiritual officer for our Lord! Ask yourself what Jesus would do in whatever circumstance He throws your way to test you. Some Protestants wear a bracelet to remind themselves to ask what Jesus would do in any given situation. Excellent idea! But we don't really need a bracelet to remind us. Just keep the spiritual principle in mind constantly, and pray unceasingly the Jesus Prayer as you prepare for spiritual battle.. By increasing our focus on this question, we set a spiritual goal to face any issue in Christ's image. After all, we're made in His image. We strive for deification in His energies. We want to be "little Christs". Let's make a good faith effort to follow in His footsteps on the Royal Path. We may, and probably will, falter every now and then. As sinners we fall short. When we do, get up, dust yourselves off and stagger on in repentance praying that God will forgive you and your path will become steady. You can be assured that He will forgive you. His mercy is infinite. Throw yourself and your spiritual 'troops' on Christ's mercy. You need only ask and you will receive:

And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

[St. John 16:23-24]

However, the condition for receiving what you ask for is that you must ask it in the name of Christ. Blessed Theophylact, for the Fathers, states it this way:

But consider this: only he who asks in the name of Christ will receive. He who asks for what is worldly and harmful to the soul does not really ask in Christ's name; therefore, he will not receive. The name of Christ is divine and salvific. When someone asks for what is harmful to the soul, he has not asked in the name of the One Who saves.

[Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, USA, p. 253.)]

Pray To Him Seeking The Inner Strength To Accept His Trials For Us And Never Deny Him

On my web site, <http://www.stjamesthejust.com/> are many spiritual testimonies to the saints and martyrs laying down their lives for Christ. We can meet similar problems in our everyday lives. Consider a case that occurred several years ago. Such a terrible happening can appear at any time. The Devil is hard at his evil work:

Two young people in their late teens were walking in a park on a bright sunny day, holding hands and probably thinking and talking about their futures together. They were devout Christians engaged to be married. They were walking on the sidewalk when a man with a gun suddenly appeared in front of them. He ordered them to turn around and get down on their knees. This they did. The young man said goodbye with a loving softness in his words, and each began to pray to our Lord to forgive them, and perhaps they prayed also for their assailant as good Christians should do. They repented of their sins and in the midst of their prayers, the intruder shot the young man in the back of the head. He slumped over physically dead, but Christ has assuredly saved his soul. The killer then brutally raped the girl and left.

This tragedy played out in a few minutes in broad daylight, on a public sidewalk in a somewhat secluded area. The woman bears these scars forever, the loss of her future husband and the physical and emotional scarring coming from the attack.

Aren't these victims heroes for our Lord? Isn't he a martyr for Christ even if his form of Christianity might have been different from the True Orthodox Faith? The Lord's mercy is said to be infinite and 'trumps' His justice.

I have been struck by the fact that they appeared not to offer any resistance, just complying with the orders of the killer. This passivity emulated our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who voluntarily went to His crucifixion. How would we react if confronted by a similar event? We can only pray the Lord would give us strength.

George Armstrong Custer died doing his duty, fighting "hostiles". As savage as this sounds, he gloried in the physical and mental stresses of actual war. He understood and fully accepted its consequences and perhaps longed for his ultimate end. On the last day of his life at the Little Big Horn, he was 36 years of age. He lived and died a man doing his duty. Can we do any less for our Lord and Saviour Who voluntarily went to the Cross to save humanity?

Ask Him to save us from such a sacrifice but accept our cross if required: He 'asked' of His beloved Father in heaven a similar question, didn't He?

Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

[St. John 12:27-30]

The Lord shows by these words that He truly understands the weaknesses of human nature including our love for this world, that of its Prince of Evil, Satan. Yet, He was not to take Himself off the upcoming Cross "because it was for the salvation of the world":

'For this cause,' He declares, came I unto this hour: to take upon Myself the sting of death for all men.' By His own example the Lord teaches us not to flee from death incurred for the sake of truth even though it may terrify us.

[Blessed Theophylact, St. John, 12:27-28, p. 200.]

Jesus didn't beg His Father; rather, what He meant by "*Father, glorify Thy name,*" is 'May it be well-pleasing to You that I accept the suffering on the cross for the salvation of all.' [*ibid.*] The Father replied that He had glorified His name through Christ's miracles and will again when Jesus takes up His position on the Cross. After Christ's burial, the Father will then make even more miracles resurrecting Christ and sending down the Holy Spirit. [*id.*]

We are to live according to Christ's commandments and teachings. Thus, there may be a time in which we are called upon to make the supreme sacrifice in this world. Let's prepare ourselves *now* with complete faith to come to the Father through Christ:

*Jesus saith to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: **no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*** (emphases supplied). [St. John 14:6]

The Boy Wonder George Armstrong Custer went down in a blaze of 'terrible glory' as the book's title implies. No doubt he met his destiny which he had fought for and sought throughout his brief life. Probably, he wouldn't have had it any other way. Let us not model ourselves upon his love of honour through physical battle but apply similar zeal and determination to defeat the hostile Satan in our love for Christ! Lord, give us the spiritual courage to follow you, and humbly accept whatever cross you ask of us voluntarily, and distinguish ourselves as peaceful soldiers of Thy Way.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.