

## Let Us Sing the King Messiah

*John Ryland (1753–1825)*

Let us sing the King Messiah,  
King of righteousness and peace!  
Hail Him, all His happy subjects,  
Never let His praises cease:  
Ever hail Him,  
Never let His praises cease.

How transcendent are Thy glories,  
Fairer than the sons of men;  
While Thy blessed mediation  
Brings us back to God again:  
Blest Redeemer,  
How we triumph in Thy reign!

Gird Thy sword on, mighty Hero!  
Make the Word of truth Thy car;  
Prosper in Thy course majestic;  
All success attend Thy war!  
Gracious Victor,  
Let mankind before Thee bow!

Majesty, combined with meekness,  
Righteousness and peace unite  
To insure Thy blessed conquests.  
On, great Prince, assert Thy right!  
Ride triumphant,  
All around the conquer'd globe.

Blest are all that touch Thy sceptre,  
Blest are all that own Thy reign;  
Freed from sin, that worst of tyrants,  
Rescued from its galling chain:  
Saints and angels,  
All who know Thee, bless Thy reign.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **On Causes, Confederates, and Christ**

*Brett Williams*

One of my favorite books on the Civil War was written by a chaplain in the Army of Northern Virginia, Baptist preacher J. William Jones. Jones went from being a humble pastor to being named the Baptist missionary to Lieutenant General A. P. Hill's corps. Jones's book, *Christ in the Camp or Religion in the Confederate Army*, was originally published in 1887 and contains many letters and first-hand accounts from chaplains and soldiers in Lee's infamous army. These correspondences describe in great detail almost unbelievable revivals during which thousands were saved. Jones estimated that during the army's existence (1861–65), nearly 150,000 Confederate soldiers converted to Christ, representing almost one third of men under arms. This staggering number was not a mere guess taken from foxhole confessions, but reflected careful and copious records of personal testimonies, evangelistic services, and baptisms. The revivals were not only among the enlisted as Jones shared that "a large portion of the higher officers were men of faith and prayer."

Lest one think this was the result of wartime fervor, at the time of book's publication, out of the 410 men whom Jones had personally baptized, only three were known to have "gone back to the world." Twenty years after the war Jones reported that according to many seminary presidents, "nearly nine-tenths of the candidates for the ministry had determined to preach while in the army." Jones wrote of chaplains and generals alike who, after witnessing so many come to Christ, believed that this army held a unique providential blessing. Surely God would bless such piety and devotion. Convinced of the righteousness of his cause, Jones closed his book with the words, "Christian men of every section and of every creed will unite in thanking God that Christ *was* in the camps of Lee's army with such wonderful power to save."

While there are many historical and cultural complexities surrounding the Civil War, one of the most important questions to ask is, "How could this army bent on perpetuating the evil that is human bondage be so thoroughly infused with penitent Christians, many of whom gave their lives to Christ just before giving their lives, at least in part, for slavery? How could a cause so rooted in sin ever be mistaken as righteous or divinely blessed?"



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centalseminary.edu  
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Whether it was crusaders shouting “*Deus vult*” after a victory at the Siege of Antioch in 1098 or a man carrying a “Christian flag” onto the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on January 6, 2021, Christians have often employed Christ in defense of social and political causes. Sadly, I believe that many, like William Jones, have made egregious errors in so hastily engaging Christ to support their cause. While there are many that could be discussed, below are several fallacious assumptions that are all too common.

**Victories in a cause equals God’s favor on a cause.** Whether on the battlefield or at the ballot box, Christians often think that winning is the result of divine favor. The Army of Northern Virginia, for example, enjoyed extraordinary victories from Seven Pines to Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville, which many assumed were the result of divine favor. In fact, until Lee’s gamble at Gettysburg, his army rarely lost a fight, though facing overwhelming odds. Brilliant battlefield victories coupled with the aforementioned spiritual revivals led many Southern Christians to conclude that God was indeed on the side of the Confederacy. Similarly, in modern times, the church growth movement, built upon the premise that bigger is better, has ensnared many pastors with the faulty logic that *more* equals *more blessed*. Numbers, victories, and majorities are in no way an indication of God’s favor, nor do they indicate the righteousness of a cause. Causes are either good or bad based upon their reflection of either eternal truth, as revealed in Scripture, or earthly, bane wisdom.

**Christians supporting a cause makes it a Christian cause.** The fallacy of *honor by association* assumes that because a cause or movement (which is the actions done because of the cause) is made up of Christians or carries Christian themes, it is therefore a Christian cause. I once heard an evangelical declare from the pulpit that because some of America’s founders were Christians and often mentioned the divine in founding documents and monuments, America is a Christian nation and has therefore incurred God’s unique blessing. By this reasoning, the Vatican would be the most Christian place on earth. Thousands upon thousands of redeemed rebels fought for the cause of slavery. Just because a cause has Christians associated with it or uses the name of Christ does not make it a Christian cause.

**Causes are simple.** Causes are not simple; that is to say they rarely entail a singular principle or solitary moral outcome. They are as complex as the cultures, ideas, and times in which they arise. A cry for freedom by one may result in the enslavement of another. Clarity on one side may be confusion for the other. Even if a cause is straightforward and moral, the movements which it spawns may be twisted and immoral.

**God works because of a cause.** This is perhaps the most egregious assumption. Jones assumed that the blessing of spiritual revival within the army was the result, at least in part, of the Confederate cause. If God uses a cause, He therefore supports the cause. Many heresies have arisen with this line of

thinking. Monergism reminds us that in regards to humanity, salvation is always *despite*. God’s blessings and salvation are granted because of God’s own glory and for His own end. Divine favor within a cause should never be viewed, even tacitly, as divine acceptance of a cause. Often God works despite causes, not because of them. Christ saved me despite myself and my ideas just as He saved my tragically-wrong rebel brethren.

I wholeheartedly agree with Jones on one point, Christ was indeed in Lee’s camps with wonderful power to save. Not however, because of the Confederate cause, but despite it. Christians, be very cautious of causes, even if they contain Christian themes or have Christian leaders. Jesus Christ *is* our cause and should not be easily employed in so many earthly endeavors.



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This essay is by Brett Williams, Provost and Executive Vice President at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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