

The Strife is O'er, the Battle Won

This is the Third Sunday of Easter and once again we sing “Easter Hymns” celebrating the resurrection of Christ. “*The Strife is O'er the Battle Won*” was published anonymously in a Catholic hymnal in 1695, and later translated into English by Anglican minister, Francis Pott, in 1861. The “Alleluias” (meaning, “Praise the Lord”) at the beginning and end of the 5 stanzas were added much later.

The hymn celebrates the battle fought and won at the cross. “The powers of death have done their worst,” but Christ has won the victory. “The three days (in the tomb) have quickly sped; (Christ) rises glorious from the dead.” The last verse is a prayer—a prayer that Christ, by his death, might set us free from death “so that we may live, and sing to thee: Alleluia!” Amen to that!

Some scholars believe the hymn expresses the biblical teaching behind the *Christus Victor* view of atonement. Here’s a summary of the biblical teaching behind the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement: “The Bible teaches that Jesus came into this world to “drive out the prince of this world” (Jn 12:31), to “destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn 3:8), to “destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14-15) and to ultimately “put all his enemies under his feet” (I Cor 15:25). Jesus came to overpower the “strong man” (Satan) who holds the world in bondage and to work with God’s newly liberated children to “plunder his house” (Lk 11:21-22). He came to end the reign of the cosmic thief who seized the world to “steal and kill and destroy” the life God intended for humans (Jn 10:10). Jesus came to earth and died on the cross to disarm “the rulers and authorities” and make a “public spectacle of them” by “triumphing over them on the cross” (Col 2:15). In short, Jesus’ main mission was to bring an end to the cosmic war that had been raging from time immemorial and to thus set Satan’s captives free (Lk 4:18; Eph 4:8). This is the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement.” (*Gustaf Aulen, Christus Victor, 1931*)

The point is that the incarnation of the Son of God was first and foremost a *military maneuver*. Jesus came to bring an end to Satan’s regime and reclaim the earth, humans and the entire creation as the domain in which God is King. He came to establish the Kingdom of God by vanquishing the kingdom of darkness. Everything Jesus accomplished – including revealing God’s character, dying in our place, and giving us an example to follow – can be understood as aspects of his military campaign to vanquish the powers of evil.

You can certainly hear and see the military images in the words of this powerful hymn. Perhaps that has something to do with “*The Strife is O'er, the Battle Won*” being sung by a soldier’s chorus at the funeral of General George Patton on December 23, 1945 after his death in an automobile accident.

1 *The strife is o'er, the battle done;
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun.
Alleluia!*

2 *The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions has dispersed.
Let shouts of holy joy outburst.
Alleluia*

3 *The three sad days are quickly sped;
he rises glorious from the dead
All glory to our risen Head.
Alleluia!*

4 *He closed the yawning gates of hell;
the bars from heaven's high portals fell.
Let hymns of praise his triumph tell.
Alleluia!*

5 *Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee,
from death's dread sting thy servants free,
that we may live and sing to thee.
Alleluia!*

Come and worship the Risen and Victorious Christ this Sunday at 10 AM.