

“There were, up to this time, many Christians connected with the military service, both in the higher and lower ranks; and they as yet had never been compelled to do anything contrary to their conscience” (295 A. D.) Neander, Vol. 1, page 146.

“The persecution having begun with those brethren who were in the army,” Eusebius, Book 8, chapter 1.

Cyprian and Tertullian also mention Christians serving in the army.

1. The Christians in the early ages of the church were in position to know what was right.

2. They engaged in military service.

3. Therefore military service is right for the Christian.

REPLY

The authorities cited simply show that Christians served in the army in the second and third centuries A. D. They do not show that it was generally accepted by the church, or that it was right. Neander, the historian quoted above, argues at length his opinion that the early Christians were wrong in refusing service. When he made the statement quoted, he referred only to certain individuals among the Christians. When treating of the attitude of the church in general toward military service, he says,

“Many Christians, again, from a conscientiousness worthy of all respect, thought themselves bound to take passages like Matt. 5:39 in the literal sense. *That tone of mind very generally prevailed. . . .* It revolted their Christian feelings to suffer themselves to be employed as instruments of pain to others, to serve as the executors of laws which, in all cases, were dictated and animated by the spirit of rigid justice, without any mixture of mercy or love. . . .

The Christians stood over against the state,

as a priestly, spiritual race; and the *only* way in which it seemed possible that Christianity could exert an influence on civil life was (which it must be allowed was the purest way) by tending continually to diffuse more of a holy temper among the citizens of the state.”

The time of which both Neander and Eusebius spoke (295 A. D., which, incidentally, was during Eusebius' lifetime) was after the apostasy and corruption of the developing Catholic Church was well under way. The entire selection from which the above sentence of Eusebius' was taken, describes the condition of the church at that time:

“But when on account of the abundant freedom, we fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another, rulers assailing rulers with words like spears, and people forming parties against people, and monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation rising to the greatest height of wickedness, the divine judgment with forbearance, as is its pleasure, while the multitudes yet continued to assemble, gently and moderately harassed the episcopacy. This persecution began with the brethren in the army.”

This passage proves that at that age of the church Christians were (1) lax, (2) slothful, (3) envying and reviling each other, (4) at the point of taking up arms against each other, (5) forming rival factions, (6) practicing monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation, (7) rising to the greatest height of wickedness, (8) serving in the army. It no more endorses one of these things than it does the others.

The reference to Cyprian does not mention military service at all. Tertullian mentions Christians serving in the army and states his disapproval of it.