

## Whose Side Was God On?

By Louise Thomas

Religion in the South, at the onset of the War Between the States, was mostly Protestant. Most people of the South, attended church on a regular basis, if they were fortunate enough to live close to one. Church attendance was a social outing, which afforded them the opportunity to visit with neighbors. If they did not have a church building, they would have brush arbor meetings. Some people had to travel a great distance; therefore, church became an all-day event. Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist circuit riders rode the back country roads, preaching to, converting and baptizing thousands of people.

In the North there was a large influx of Immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and other countries. This caused a mishmash of different religions. Their population was mostly Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish.

President Jefferson Davis was a member of St. Lazarus Episcopal Church. He was known for being generous to those less fortunate. He encouraged his soldiers to fight the enemy with their entire God given power. He also instructed them to treat the enemy with respect, when they surrendered. He made an offer to the North to send their own doctor's South with necessary medical supplies. The South would pay for these supplies. These supplies would be administered solely to the Union Prisoners. There was no reply to his offer.

President Abraham Lincoln never joined any Church or ever made a profession of faith. He was a deist, and enjoyed reading the works of Thomas Paine. He drafted a pamphlet incorporating such ideas, which almost cost him his congressional bid. After this he decided to keep his unorthodox views private. His parents were hard-shell Baptist, which turned him against

religion, even though he often quoted scripture. A deist is a person who believes God designed and created the world and governs it through natural laws that are basic in everything. These natural laws can be discovered through observation, experience and reasoning.

Difficult times fell upon the South because of the Federal blockade. There were severe shortages of food and other supplies. The casualties of Shiloh and Antietam were devastating. During this time many people turned to their faith. Because so many men in the Confederate Army came from the same cultural and religious backgrounds, they had already made congregation. This consequently led to a great revival in the Confederate Army.

General Robert E. Lee was a devout Episcopalian. Two of General Lee's quotes are, "I can only say I am nothing but a poor sinner, trusting in Christ alone for salvation;" and, "In all my perplexities and distress, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength."

General William T. Sherman's wife was Catholic and raised their eight children in the Catholic Church. General Sherman attended the Catholic Church with his family until the onset of the War Between The States. He was discharged from his command in Kentucky because of his mental status, as he was thought to be unfit for duty. The Cincinnati Commercial Newspaper described him as insane. In the later part of his life, he did not hold to any organized religion. He was quoted as saying, "General Grant is a great General. I know him well. He stood by me when I was crazy, and I stood by him when he was drunk, and now, sir, we stand by each other always."#

The Preamble and Constitution of the U.S. does not mention God. "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." The Preamble and Constitution to the C.S.A. includes God. "We the people of the Confederate States, each state

acting in its sovereign and independent character, in order to form a permanent federal government, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity--invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God--do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Confederate States of America.”

The Confederate States of America declared itself to be a religious nation. The leaders of the Confederacy had no qualms about claiming that God had uniquely raised the South up to do His work in the world. Christianity held an exalted and powerful place in Confederate culture.

Northern clergy believed that their cause was ordained by God. Part of their mission in the conflict was to prevent the South from seceding from the United States, a political community that was indivisible, because it was created by God. Southerners prepared to engage in a war that would prove God was on their side. The Confederacy adopted the Latin phrase, *Deo Vindice* (“With God as our defender”) as its national motto.

So much suffering was caused by man’s inability to find a peaceful solution. Whose side was God on? I believe that God was greatly saddened by the entire conflict.