

# Spiritual Warfare

By Charles Upton

## I: The Warrior and the Monk

*For the “esoteric youth of the Right”*

A story is told (whether from the Zen tradition, the Bushidō tradition or modern Japanese cinema I don't remember) of an encounter between a Samurai warrior and a Zen monk. The warrior approaches the sitting monk and draws his sword. The monk remains impassive. “*Don't you realize that I have no qualms about killing you?*” roars the warrior. “*Don't you realize that I have no qualms about dying?*” quietly replies the monk.

Which of the figures in this story exhibits the greater courage?

Certain modern writers who exalt the warrior ideal have gotten the idea from somewhere—undoubtedly in part from Nietzsche, Julius Evola, and the fashionable anti-Christianity of our times—that the ability of the martyr to calmly face death is somehow *servile*, rather than being an example of manly courage in the highest degree. And this misconception is also accompanied by the notion that while *cowardice* is a betrayal of warrior virtue, the Christian idea of *sin* is not—as if self-indulgence of every sort were not the very thing that saps the warrior spirit, producing not the manly warrior but the effeminate debauchee.

How such a misconception could ever have grown up is puzzling—though not, as we shall see, entirely so. Was Thomas á Becket servile when he defied King Henry II in the name of the prerogatives of the Roman Catholic Church, and gave his life in defense of it? Speaking as

plainly as I can, anyone who believes that the sort of courage exhibited by Becket was somehow groveling or unmanly is seriously out of touch with reality. There may be such a thing as a pathological, masochistic piety, as is sometimes portrayed in bad religious art, but this sort of mental illness has nothing to do with the courage and virtue of the saints.

Between the courage of the warrior and that of the monk we cannot easily decide, because these two renditions of the one virtue exist on different planes, guarded and exemplified by different castes. The courage of the warrior is of the lesser *jihad*, that of the monk a fruit of the greater: only the man who has triumphed in single combat over his own self-concept can let go of his life the moment his Lord demands it, as if releasing a captive bird from his grasp. And of course the greatest warriors owe their pre-eminence in the lesser *jihad* precisely to their successful conclusion of the greater one. A story is told of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the son-in law of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon them), fourth Sunni Caliph, first Shi'ite Imam and the greatest metaphysician and warrior of his time. During a battle he at last had one of his greatest enemies at his mercy, and drew his sword to slay him. At that moment, however, the defeated enemy spit in his face—at which point Hazrat Ali sheathed his sword, turned and walked away, it being an unseemly violation of *adab* (etiquette) for a true warrior—as for a true *arif*, a Knower of God—to kill in anger.

The Brahmin or sacerdotal caste is intrinsically higher than the Kshatriya or warrior caste precisely because the Divine Intellect within man is higher than the will. The strength of the will, the very root of its power, is *certainty*—and certainty is intrinsic to the Intellect; if Meister Eckhart was able to say “the soul is an aristocrat”, it was because he knew with unwavering certainty that “my truest ‘I’ is God”. Without contact with and loyalty to such metaphysical certainty, whether via direct Intellection or through that virtual Intellection known as Faith, the will becomes a mad dog—no longer the virtue of a cultivated gentleman, only the aimless impulse of a blind barbarian or a vulgar clown. It should be obvious that only the Intellect can tell the will *what* to will; a will that consults only its own intent, not those objective factors that alone could vindicate or invalidate that intent, becomes a meaningless, destructive impulse. All objectivity has its roots in the Divine, but when the will loses touch with objective reality and sinks into its own subjectivity,

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