

Terrorism & Spiritual Warfare: from the Battle of Britain to 9/11

The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinth. 10:4)

Early in the fall of 1940, as Nazi forces blazed across Europe and stood poised to invade England, a small contingent of students at the Bible College of Wales was not only holding fast, but counter-attacking. Led by former coal-miner Rees Howells, these persevering prayer warriors blazed a trail for us today, when hideous acts of terrorism are at last revealing the truth not only that we battle a spiritual Enemy, but that the world's weapons--from atomic bombs to spy satellites--are not powerful enough to destroy terrorist strongholds.

When the Nazis came to power in 1936, these determined men and women in Wales began interceding tirelessly for God's victory. As Christians, they were not confused about who the enemy was—and it was neither the nation Germany nor the man Hitler. “In fighting Hitler,” Howells declared early in 1940 after war broke out, “we have always said that we were not up against man, but the devil. Mussolini is a man, but Hitler is different. He can tell the day when this ‘spirit’ came into him.”¹

Similarly, the terrorists we face today act not as citizens of a nation state, but rather, as self-proclaimed martyrs of a transcending religious faith, factions of which clearly encourage and celebrate their demonic deeds. This vital perspective on their deadly attacks cannot be gained until we renounce our arrogant, materialistic Western worldview and recognize that ultimately our enemy is neither the terrorists nor their commanders—though subdue them we must—but rather, the spiritual powers that animate them. As the Apostle Paul implored Christians 2000 years ago, “For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age” (Ephes. 6:12).

By no means does this spiritual worldview imply passivity. “We are going up to battle,” as Howells declared in May of 1940, when Nazi forces had overrun France. “God gets at the enemy visibly and invisibly, through the army and through us.”

All British troops had been committed to Europe, which had now fallen to Hitler. As the College fasted and prayed day and night, the vast majority were able to retreat to the English Channel. “God will not do a bit more through you than you have faith for,” Howells wrote the day afterward. “The victory last night was in seeing that no matter how near the enemy came, the Holy Ghost is stronger than he. You are more responsible for this victory today than those men on the battlefield. You must be dead to everything else but this fight.”

This proclamation came not from grandiose egotism, but a sobering recognition of the power and authority God was calling His people to exercise.

In their retreat, the British army yet remained perilously exposed, trapped between the waters ahead of them and the advancing enemy behind—strangely reminiscent of the early Israelites pursued to the Red Sea by Pharaoh's chariots. In that season, Britain alone stood between demonic Nazism and world civilization. America yet remained out of the war, distant and lost in a fantasy of denial—much as before the unprecedented terrorist attacks on our own soil. If the British army were wiped out on the shores of Dunkirk, the powers of darkness would invade not only England, but also North America thereafter.

The immense significance of the task ahead was not lost on God's regiment in Wales. "The next 24 hours will be the crisis in this great battle," Howells declared. "They are ready to take our country at any moment. Even before lunch-time the history of the world may be changed. Such a thing as this has not happened to us before, and you do not know how much faith is needed. We are coming to the Lord this morning, and telling Him our eyes are upon Him today. Unless He intervenes, we are lost."

Significantly, these intrepid believers in rural England saw themselves not merely as spectators, nor even helpful bystanders, but as major players in the action—indeed, as God's agents in history-making itself. "Don't allow those young men at the Front to do more than you do here," as Howells exhorted.

Yet even as they battled in the Spirit, Howells focused their ministry on God's perspective and connected it firmly to events at hand: "It is not you struggling, but God doing, and you coming to know what God is doing. Is it God who has drawn Hitler across that line with his 2500 armored cars? I want the Lord to discomfit this man and those armored cars."

At last, every available vessel in Britain--both private and military, from sailboat to steamer—raced across the Channel to the stranded soldiers at Dunkirk. To the world's amazement and cheers, a hundred thousand soldiers were safely evacuated to England.

As biographer Norman Grubb notes of Howells' intercessors, "Was there anywhere else in the whole of Britain or America or elsewhere among God's people another such company, maybe a hundred strong, who were on their knees day by day, holding fast the victory by faith, while our soldiers across the water were retreating mile by mile, whole countries surrendering and the enemy within sight of their goal?"

Unwilling to risk the losses of an immediate amphibious invasion, Hitler set out first to break the British spirit by ruthlessly bombing the populace, both with bombers and rockets. In this, the Battle of Britain, explosives rained on the country both day and night, striking homes, office buildings, and even the King's palace alike. Amid the blazing fires and crumbling rubble, some 60,000 civilians were killed. As the spiritual battle was fought in Wales, the nation held on.

Howells' journal of intercession during these months rings with impact, including the assurance from God, "The enemy will not invade Christian England." But his faith is tempered with humble honesty: "We have never walked this way before. The important thing is to find out where God is in this. When you are in danger every night, it takes you a long time to be sure that you are under God's protection. Can you say you are safe in the air raids? Has God told you? You may try to use the Word of God without having His power behind it. If God is going to deliver from this hell, there will have to be some power released. Unless you are sure of your own victory, you will never be able to pray for the deliverance of the country.

"We have bound the devil over and over again...If you can believe that you have been delivered from hell, why can't you believe that you have been delivered from air raids?"

On September 8, the Government declared a National Day of Prayer, which prompted a breakthrough for the forces of God. At the Bible College of Wales, the day began with repentance. "Our country has only the outward form of religion," Howells confessed in his journal, "neither cold nor hot, like the church at Laodicea. May God bring the nation back."

That afternoon, when he rose to speak at the College chapel, sirens wailed and *Luftwaffe* bombs blasted outside. Yet, as he preached, a profound sense of release fell upon everyone. "What victory!...What joy! What praise!" he recalled. "How the Holy ghost came down this morning in the communion service and told us of His victory!... We had never been in such victory before, carrying on exactly as if there was no war. How could we get victory for the world, unless we had first believed it for ourselves?"

Emboldened, on September 11 the College began to pray that “London would be defended and that the enemy would fail to break through.” Howells concluded, “Unless God can get hold of this devil and bind him, no man is safe.”

That very week, the Lord honored these prayers dramatically. Indeed, in his *War Memoirs*, Prime Minister Churchill noted September 15, 1940, as “the culminating date” in the Battle of Britain. Visiting the Royal Air Force Operations Room that afternoon, he stood stunned as wave after wave of *Luftwaffe* bombers and fighters poured over the Channel toward the vastly outnumbered British airmen.

“What other reserves have we?” he asked the Air Marshal anxiously.

“There are none,” was the terse reply.

After grave moments of silence, something very strange happened. “It appeared that the enemy was going home,” Churchill recalled. “The shifting of the discs on the table showed a continuous eastward movement of German bombers and fighters. No new attack appeared. In another ten minutes, the action was ended.”

Significantly, Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, declared shortly after the war, “Even during the battle one realized from day to day how much external support was coming in. At the end of the battle one had the sort of feeling that there had been some special Divine intervention to alter some sequence of events which would otherwise have occurred.”

God neither wanted nor caused tragedies like WWII or the New York terrorist attacks to happen. In Jesus, He has offered us not only an open door to our destiny, but power and protection to fulfill it. As a good Father, God has respectfully given us free will as individuals to walk victoriously through that door with Him. But to mature us in faith and fit us for His larger, Kingdom purposes, God has placed us in community—as families, nations, even citizens of this ever-shrinking planet--bound together for better or worse by a common destiny. In a world where deceptive powers of darkness and destruction lurk, nations that by consensus choose not God but their own desires and strength—who become self-satisfied in their faith, neither hot nor cold--will suffer the consequences of disengaging from the Almighty Savior. Even the passionately faithful in that nation will suffer—as Jesus, indeed *with* Jesus—precisely in order to bear that suffering to God in behalf of the nation, and seek its redemption.

Whether the Prime Ministers and Presidents, Commanders and Air Marshals of the world see it or not—indeed, whether the very people saved see it or not—Almighty God is present among men and women who humbly confess they have turned away from Him and cry out for His saving power. Because the Father wants only what is best for us, He is always ready to forgive and deliver, to revive and empower.

A century and a half before Hitler, Napoleon ran roughshod over Europe and boasted of his victories. When the Pope warned him to cease his destruction, the French emperor scoffed, “How many divisions does the Pope have?”

Similarly, Christians condemn today’s acts of terrorism. And the ageless Enemy at work in the terrorists sneers, “How many knives, explosives and suicidal slaves do the Christians have?”

To this, we affirm clearly and boldly: “We have none. For the weapons we use in our fight are not the world’s weapons (2 Cor. 10:4)--which can intimidate and destroy, but cannot free human hearts from fear, overcome our proud separation from God, and draw us back into our created purpose as His sons and daughters. And so, rather, we wield the mighty super-natural weapons of God, poured out through Jesus in His Holy Spirit—even now, to bind you, to reveal and destroy your strongholds!”

Our secular political leaders have at last recognized that we are at war. Christians, however, know that this battle did not explode suddenly on September 11, 2001. Rather, it began long, long ago in the spirit realm and is waged on earth unto today in the hearts of men and women who long to see God's rule restored to earth.

This is the battle Jesus came to win, and through his life, death, and resurrection He has poured out upon us the power to walk with Him in that victory. As surely as He turned Hitler's bombers away from Britain, the God who split the Red Sea and raised His Son from death can locate diabolic terrorists and deliver them into the hands of justice. If you doubt it, read 2 Kings 6:8-23. If you don't, read it anyhow for encouragement and then for God's sake, let us join together as a battalion and pray for it!

Even when God has promised victory, however, war means suffering and loss until then. Thus Christians know that someday Jesus will return to claim the earth wholly for the Father, but meanwhile, "we groan" (Rom. 8:22).

Those who grieve faithfully will come to know not only the Father's Spirit of comfort, but also His Spirit of anger toward any who would harm His children (see 1 Samuel 11:1-6). Memorial flowers, flag-waving, and candle-lighting, that is, may be necessary to comfort the afflicted, but will not suffice to subdue the afflictor. When the lamb in us has wept faithfully the tears of God, it's time for the lion in us to roar His victory—that is, together to engage fiercely in deliberate spiritual warfare in the authority of Jesus and the power of His Spirit. Thus we move from hospital to barracks, and discover that the healing Great Physician is none other than the conquering Commander in Chief of the Lord's Army (Joshua 5:13-15).

Evil, flamboyantly destructive, has performed before us. As spectators, we have watched helplessly and trembled. But what if the Great Playwright of human destiny has allowed this drama in order to induct us into His story as act-ors, with a definitive role in its outcome? The battle against the evil in terrorism is not finished because our capacity to grieve has waned and the 24-hour newscasts give way to commercials and ball games once again.

We face no natural disaster, whose destruction is eventually contained and remedied by human effort, but a deliberate act sponsored by an elusive and enduring spiritual community. No natural borders insure protection for any country. As Howells declared, unless God can get hold of this devil and bind him, none of us is safe.

This is war, and it has only begun. We dare not succumb to the seductive call for "back to normal." Our comfortable norm has literally crumbled to a 10-story pile of dust. Let us allow God to use the awful pain of this cataclysm to recall us to His norm, lest in a complacent stupor we leave ourselves yet more vulnerable to future attacks.

Amid the rubble, we have discovered among us a heart to feel and hands to aid. But as Howells' prayer warriors in the Battle of Britain, we must now discover among us the Spirit to discern and overcome the Evil celebrity who has too long dominated the stage of world attention. Let it not be said of Americans simply that we grieve and rebuild well, but that we battle and overcome faithfully, with every powerful weapon Jesus died to give us.

Mere patriotism, even moral support, will not sustain our political or military leaders in the battle ahead. Today we must ask, as Howells' biographer--Is there anywhere in America or the whole of the world among God's people a committed battalion of intercessors willing to stand in the gap against demonic acts of terrorism?

It's too late to hide either in lukewarm religion as tolerant cowards, or in fiery politics as bombing avengers. Like the early Pilgrim settlers who fled the then-repressive Church of England, we Americans seek not vengeance, but freedom for God to fulfill His created purposes in, among, and through us. At times, this victory may require restraint, and at other times, armed conflict. But its fountainhead is a passionate and committed relationship with God.

This relationship and its crown of victory is born in surrender--not to the enemy or worldly circumstance, but to the saving God revealed in Jesus. Like the prophets of ancient Israel, the Apostle Paul in early Church, and the Wales intercessors, first we confess that as a nation we have fostered the outward form of religion, but not genuine relationship with the living God. Because the consequences are now unbearably painful, we cry. And cry we must, for indeed, this is the Spirit of a loving, grieving Father crying in us. Our tears begin restored relationship with Him, allowing Him access once again to our hearts and bodies.

Confronted thus with both the frightful limits of our own power and the limitless mercy of our Father, we beg God to receive us again and restore His covering. We renounce our natural vision, so hopelessly clouded by our human fears and desires. We ask God to fill us with His Spirit, so we might receive His super-natural vision "to see what God is doing," and join Him in it, armed with His powerful weapons.

To that end, we receive at last His blessing, from that ancient warrior in the Spirit, the Apostle Paul: "I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know Him. I ask that your minds may be opened to see His light, so that you will know what is the hope to which He has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings He promises His people, and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which He used when He raised Christ from death, and seated Him at His right side in the heavenly world" (Ephes. 1:17-20TEV).

¹ . All quotations are from Norman Grubb, *Rees Howells, Intercessor*, Christian Literature Crusade (Fort Washington, PA: 1980), pp. 246-262