

Christianity in the service of nations makes me uneasy as much, perhaps, as nations in the service of Christianity – or, rather, Christianity in the service of nationality when this is understood as more fundamental than Christianity itself. It's an age-old problem highlighted today by the vaunting of St George as a symbol of English national superiority and a forgetting of its original universal meaning of the triumph of good over evil represented by God and his angels over the dragon or serpent in the Book of Revelation and re-presented one might say in Christ's triumph over evil on the Cross. And so we get to the cross of St George and this battle remembered through the legend of a Roman soldier killed at Lydda, in Palestine for his adherence to Christ and re-remembered by King Richard the Lionheart in the first crusade, and Edward III reprising a story from the Golden Legend when he founded the Order of the Garter, under the patronage of St George and, perhaps most famously, by Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt when we have the unedifying spectacle of two Christian nations invoking two different patron saints in their competition for God's favour – St George for England and St. Dennis for France – and the pattern this has set so many times since. So instead of heralding Christ as the one who restores all people and all creation to an original unity we, in effect, allow the dragon to once again divide us. So let us praise God for St George *and* for St Denys and for all the many other saints who have slain dragons in the service of Christ who alone can do this service for us. The line of travel is not, then, towards only one particular identity, but towards transcendence, and knowing that this cannot be our own doing as we hear so clearly in that gospel passage from St John:

*If they persecuted me,
they will persecute you too,
if they kept my word
they will keep yours as well.
But it will be on my account that they will do all this,
because they do not know the one who sent me.*

It is in this sense that to be Christian is not to be of this world or its many nations.

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