

BENEATH THE SOUTHERN CROSS

By Mike Scruggs

The Confederate Battle Flag, sometimes called the Southern Cross, is held in disfavor by many who are unfamiliar with its origin and true symbolism. Many have been taught to treat it as an object of moral horror and political infamy. A deadly combination of ignorance and arrogant self-righteousness is constantly engaged in shouting down its true history and meaning. Demagogues freely defame it, while moral cowardice acquiesces to their outrageous distortions of the truth. The apathetic allow its true history to be buried under decades of slanderous propaganda. It is incumbent upon those who value truth, fairness, good will, reasonable tolerance, and charity in society to educate themselves on the true history and meaning of this famed banner.

In order to understand and fully appreciate the meaning and heritage of the Confederate Battle Flag it is necessary to reach back far into history and then come forward to the battlefields of its fame. Finally we must visit the hallowed resting-places of the fallen and of the veterans of that historic struggle.

The salient design feature of the Battle Flag is its diagonal cross or saltire. This has for many centuries been a preeminent Christian symbol. The first language of the New Testament was Greek. In the Greek alphabet the name of Christ begins with the Greek letter “X” or “Chi.” Early in the history of the Christian church the Greek letter “X” or “Chi” became a symbol for Christ and Christianity.

Furthermore, the unique martyrdom of Andrew, the first Apostle of Christ and brother of Simon Peter, reinforced the association of the letter “X” or diagonal cross with Christianity, especially among those people in Europe who would make Andrew their patron saint. According to ecclesiastical history, on November 30, AD 60, during the reign of the infamous Roman Emperor, Nero, in the town of Petrae in Greece, Andrew was put to death by Roman authorities by tying him upside down to a diagonal or X-shaped cross. This was later to influence the Christian symbolism of far-off Scotland. About 357 AD, during the reign of Constantine, some of the bones and relics of Andrew were removed from Petrae to Constantinople. According to various legends some of these were eventually moved to a monastery near a small Pictish village on the East Coast of Scotland. Some legends have these relics coming as early as 362 AD. A more reliable account has them arriving in 733, brought by Acca, Bishop of Hexham, a collector of such relics. The town that grew up there was renamed St. Andrews and became the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland and a center of learning. Hence there began to be an identification of Scotland with St. Andrew and the diagonal cross on which he was martyred.

In the year 832, Angus MacFergus, King of the Picts, with a combined army of Picts and Dalriada Scots, repulsed Athelstan, King of the Northumbrian Angles, driving them out of Scotland and back into Northumbrian England. Various legends attend this battle, including the

appearance of a white diagonal cross in the blue sky on that day. Whatever is behind the legends, the bottom line was that Angus, the Picts, and the Scots attributed their victory and route of the Angles to the intercessory assistance of Saint Andrew. All this is clouded in the fog of history and legend. There is also another reason that Angus MacFergus might have felt a particular connection with Saint Andrew. The meaning of Andrew, of Angus, and of Fergus is “strong” or “steady.” Saint Andrew was eventually recognized as the Patron Saint of Scotland. The Scottish national flag, also called the St. Andrews Cross, is a white diagonal cross or saltire on a field of blue. It has been the national symbol and flag of Scotland at least since early in the 12th century.



The important thing about the St. Andrews flag to the Scots was that it was an identification of themselves as a Christian people. Many European nations chose the cross in various designs to identify themselves as Christian nations. The English flag is a



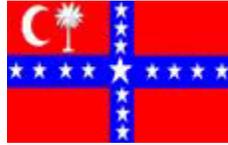
red perpendicular cross, called St. Georges Cross, on a field of white. The British national or union flag contains the English St. Georges Cross with the diagonal St. Andrews Cross of Scotland, and the red diagonal St. Patricks Cross representing Northern Ireland. All the Scandinavian countries including Finland use a cross in their flags. The Swiss and Greek flags also contain crosses. This was meant to identify themselves as Christian nations.



The Southern Cross or Confederate Battle Flag with its white trimmed blue diagonal on a red field is a descendent of the Scottish St. Andrews Cross. As we shall see it was meant to be a preeminently Christian self-identification of the Southern people.

On December 20, 1860, the elected delegates of the South Carolina Secession Convention met in St. Andrews Hall in Charleston. Note the irony of their meeting place. One of the 169 delegates was U. S. Congressman and future Confederate Congressman, William Porcher Miles. William Miles had a very keen interest and knowledge of heraldry. Besides their famous Palmetto Flag, the South Carolinians had prepared a special South Carolina Sovereignty Flag for the occasion. This flag was to be raised over the convention hall and at the same time at Yale University by

Southern sympathizers on the day of the convention. The South Carolina Sovereignty Flag, which probably had the touch of William Miles, was a white trimmed, blue St. Georges Cross on a field of red. It had a white Palmetto and Crescent in the upper left canton. On the blue cross were 15 white stars, probably representing the hope of a 15 state Confederacy. Again, the important thing about this flag was that its symbolism identified with Christianity.



One of the underlying causes of the war, which may have been peripheral to many people, but central to others, was the growing religious difference between North and South. By 1850 the original Calvinism of New England Puritans had been in steep decline for generations. The Calvinism and orthodox Christianity of the Puritan fathers was being eroded and displaced by Deism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and Transcendentalism, the antecedents of modern liberalism and humanism. A few strong bastions like Princeton remained, but the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the centrality of Christ's redeeming grace were fighting a rear guard battle against secularism and various heretical "isms." The Pelagian and man-centered preaching of Charles G. Finney further weakened the theology of Northern Christianity. The godly zeal of the first Puritans had been replaced by zeal to reform society by government force.

The South on the other hand was not only holding fast to its orthodox faith, the authority of Scripture, and the centrality of Christ, but was experiencing dramatic revival, culminating in more than 150,000 conversions in the Confederate Army alone during the war. A moderate to strong Calvinism prevailed in most denominations. These growing religious differences caused considerable anxiety and mistrust of Northern goodwill in the South, especially after John Brown's 1859 raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). John Brown, a self-righteous fanatic and cold-blooded murderer of innocent Kansas farmers in 1856 was hanged by federal authorities, but he was made a hero and martyr in the North by the press, and also, most alarmingly, many famous Northern preachers. Many famous Northern pulpits compared John Brown's hanging to the martyrdom of Christ. Here for example are the words of Unitarian Transcendentalist, Julia Ward Howe, who composed the words of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*: "**John Brown will glorify the gallows like Jesus glorified the cross.**" A few other famous admirers of this terrorist that became important in the liberal propaganda version of American history and culture were Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Those interested in knowing more about the shameful truth of the matter should read Otto Scott's thoroughly researched 1979 book, *The Secret Six-John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement*. Many statements glorifying such lawless violence in the name of abolition alarmed the South and intensified their desire to disassociate themselves with the North. It also further intensified in Southerners their desire to identify themselves as a distinctively Christian people.

Because of his knowledge of heraldry, the now Confederate Congressman from South Carolina, William Porcher Miles, was appointed Chairman of the congressional committee to select a national flag for the newly formed Confederate States of America. On the deadline date of March 4, 1861, the work of the committee was presented to the Confederate Congress. Out of numerous suggestions the committee had narrowed the field down to four choices.

One of these choices was William Miles' own. It was essentially the South Carolina Sovereignty Flag except that the cross was changed from a St. Georges Cross to a diagonal St. Andrews Cross, and of course, without the Palmetto canton. There were only seven stars on it, however, because on March 4th only seven states had properly seceded and joined the Confederacy. This made it asymmetrical and was one of the reasons it was rejected as the new National Flag. The flag chosen was the "Stars and Bars" which had a circle of seven white stars on an upper left, blue canton and three horizontal bars red, white, and red. One of the main reasons this flag was chosen over Miles' St. Andrews Cross was that the "Stars and Bars" was close in resemblance to the United States Flag. At that time the Confederate Congress wanted to keep its identification with the 1787 U. S. Constitution. They believed they had been faithful to it, but the Northern states, especially the Northeastern industrial states had continually tried to undermine it for Northern profit at Southern expense.



This is itself a clue to two other important causes of the war. The Southern belief was in a government of Law, i. e. strict constitutionalism versus majoritarian rule and manipulation of the Constitution. In addition the North had imposed enormous tariffs on manufactured goods that protected Northern industry at considerable expense to Southern agriculture, trade, and the Southern economy. The Confederate Congress passed over William Miles' St. Andrews Cross for the Stars and Bars, but Miles did not give up promoting his choice for some honorable Southern use.

In the early battles of the war, it was noted that there was often confusion on the battle- field because of the similarity of the Stars and Bars flag to the U. S. flag. After the First Battle of Manasas at Bull Run Creek both Generals P. G. T. Beauregard and his commander, Joseph E. Johnston were convinced that there was a need to change the flag. Battlefield commanders needed to be able to identify their troops and positions on the field despite the smoke and dust without confusion. As it happened Congressman William Miles was now serving on Beauregard's staff, and was also now Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee. As the Confederate Congress did not favor changing the national flag, Miles suggested the Army of the Potomac (later renamed the Army of Northern Virginia) should have a special battle flag. Hundreds of suggestions were received from Confederate officers and officials. Most of these were crosses of some sort. Miles prevailed in his suggestion that his original St. Andrews Cross choice for the national flag be used as the needed battle flag for the regiments of the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV). It was modified by putting a white border around the edges. Now that there were more states in the Confederacy the stars were more symmetrical and the flag was

very attractive. Johnston determined that the ANV battle flag would be square at the suggestion of the Quartermaster, General William Cabell, in order to save cloth and money. The Southern Cross was officially accepted as a battle flag on October 1, 1861. It was not used as the battle flag by every regiment in the ANV, however. Some already had battle flags they wished to keep. The first battle flags had only 12 stars, but the 13th was added in early 1862, making its symmetry complete. The ANV battle flag eventually spread to the Army Tennessee and other Confederate Armies. The Army of Tennessee typically used a rectangular version without the white edging. This also became the Confederate Naval Jack and is the most common Confederate Battle Flag seen today.

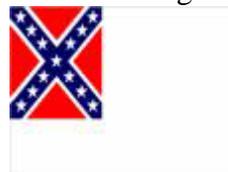
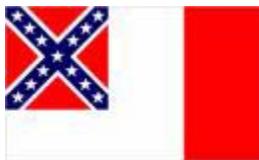


There can be no doubt that the Confederate Battle Flag or Southern Cross was intended to be a banner signifying the Christian heritage of the Southern people. The saltire or diagonal cross is the signal feature of that symbolism and is connected with the Christianity of ages past and of the martyrdom of the Apostle Andrew. The red field signifies courage. The blue of the saltire signifies truth. In Scotland it had come to have a special association with the truths of the Reformation. The white bordering of the cross signified the purity of their cause. One of the heraldic meanings of the saltire is strength, connected to the meaning of Andrew. A letter written by William Porcher Miles to Samuel Barrett of Georgia during the summer of 1861 clearly indicates the reasoning and intent of its principal designer and sponsor:

“The flag should be a token of humble acknowledgement of God and be a public testimony to the world that our trust is in the Lord our God.”

This meaning was widely understood by Confederate soldiers and the Southern people. That is why they frequently referred to it as “our Southern Cross.”

On May 1, 1863 the Confederate Congress changed the national flag to “The Stainless Banner.” This flag featured the Battle Flag in the top, left canton on a field of white. There was so much white in the flag, however, it was feared it might easily be mistaken for a flag of surrender or truce. On February 27, 1865, just weeks before the end of the war, The Confederate Congress added a wide, vertical, red bar to the fly end of the Stainless Banner. This was the third and final CSA national flag and contained the Battle Flag in the canton.



The Southern Cross then had a very strong Christian association to Confederate soldiers and the Southern people. As celebrated Southern historian, Shelby Foote, has said, it also came to stand for Law, in the sense of a government of Law rather than a government subject to the whim of tyrants or majorities. In that regard it stood for a strict rather than opportunistic interpretation of

Law and Constitutions. It also came to be a symbol of defiance against tyranny and the right of a free people to determine their own destiny. This may be one of its most enduring meanings. The flag has been seen all over the world in this regard, on the Berlin Wall, and in the capitals of the Baltic republics and Eastern Europe, wherever free people must resist tyranny and the modern scourge of political correctness. It stood for limited government and federalism (States Rights) against the dangers of concentrated and centralized power. It stood for the principles of the constitutional federal republic of 1787 that the South felt were threatened by Northern political philosophies and economic ambitions. It stood for the Rights gained and blood-sacrifices their forefathers had made in the Revolutionary War. If there was one word used more often than any other in the secession conventions, it was "Honor." The Confederate Battle Flag came to signify the honor of the Confederate soldier and the Southern people. It has come to symbolize the South itself with all its culture. These are not dead issues. It still symbolizes all of them. More than anything it must forever symbolize the sacrifice of fallen Confederate soldiers on the battlefields of their War for Southern Independence and also to the veterans of those fields of honor.

The Confederate Battle Flag ought to be the honored heritage of not only every Southerner, but every American.

Yet there are those who are willing to accept an ignominious degradation of truth and venomous slander against the honor of the Confederate soldier in order to maintain social peace in this and perhaps future generations. There are those who are willing to trample on the honor of noble ancestors, even their own ancestors, in order to promote such a social peace. There are those to whom heritage and honor mean nothing compared to present favor with the media and powerful political constituencies. There are those who know no gods but current prosperity, financial gain, and their own personal peace and outward respectability.

But how long would a prosperity or social peace based on such disrespect for truth last? How long would a peace based on suppression of a people's cherished heritage last? How long would a peace built upon suppressing the memory, valor, and virtue of the revered forebears of a great number of the Southern people last? Does anyone outside of madhouse believe such villainous stupidity would not in a very short time reap a whirlwind of social destruction? What could possibly be a surer cause of immense strife, bitterness, and economic and political turmoil? Can anyone believe that peace and prosperity can be achieved by discarding the heritage of a numerous people to gain the political favor of another? It is more likely to shatter all hope of peace. Can a society set itself against tolerance and mutual respect and have peace? Nay, no fair-minded person could believe such idiocy.

There are those who say that the display of the Confederate Battle Flag is insensitive. They say it is a symbol of slavery and offends many people. But their offense is based on ignorance of its true origin and history. Their offense and sensitivity is based on decades of unquestioned propaganda attempting to justify an unjust war and its deplorable tyranny and conduct. The men who carried the Southern Cross into battle never meant it to be a symbol of slavery. Their letters and diaries prove it was far from their minds. Not many of them owned slaves or favored its continued existence for very long in the future. Less than 25% of Southern households owned slaves. Only about 20% of Confederate soldiers owned slaves, and only about one-third came

from slave-holding families. So far as slavery was concerned they only wanted the right to deal with it in their own way in their own time state by state, just as the Northern states, all of which had slavery in 1776, had done. The Union Army did not invade the South to free slaves. They invaded the South to enforce political unity and Northern economic and legislative dominance by bayonets. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, on January 1, 1863, came after more than 19 months of war and did not actually free any slaves in the Union or Union held areas of the Confederacy. It was done as a war measure in hopes of causing disorder in the South. Only later was the slavery issue used in an attempt to give tyranny a pious justification. The Reverend James Power Smith, the last surviving member of Stonewall Jackson's staff had this to say in 1907:

“No cowardice on any battlefield could be as base and shameful as the silent acquiescence in the scheme which was teaching the children in their homes and schools that the commercial value of slavery was the cause of the war, that prisoners of war held in the South were starved and treated with barbarous inhumanity, that Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee were traitors to their country and false to their oaths, that the young men who left everything to resist invasion, and climbed the slopes of Gettysburg and died willingly on a hundred fields were rebels against a righteous government.”

What the Confederate Battle Flag did symbolize to Southern soldiers and their families was their Christian heritage and resistance to tyranny. They were fighting for the right of Southern States and their people to determine their own political destiny, just as their Revolutionary War forefathers had fought the British. They were defending the rights won in that war and guaranteed by the Constitution of 1787, which they believed had been betrayed by their Northern invaders. They were fighting against the evil of unjust taxation and many other abuses of power perpetrated by Northern political factions. They were fighting to free themselves of a Northern political dominance that had enriched the Northern states and oppressed Southern states. After many years of hardship and blood spent on the battlefield, the Southern Cross came to symbolize the courage and blood sacrifice of the Confederate soldier and Southern people. They believed in the justice and righteousness of their cause, and when the surrender at Appamattox came, they gave up their regimental banners with tears and weeping.

To the great credit of Union General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, a brave, honest, and compassionate Christian soldier, the Union troops at Appamattox gave a salute of arms to the surrendering Confederate regiments as they passed in final review before the Union victors. They had been their adversaries in war, but now these Union soldiers who had made blood sacrifices of their own, saluted the courage and honor of the defeated Confederate soldiers.

We must ourselves honor the memory of our fallen heroes and of all that served in that great struggle beneath our Southern Cross. The words of the South Carolinian journalist and poet Henry Timrod (1829-1867) in his moving *Ode at Magnolia Cemetery* should move our hearts to resolve:

**Sleep sweetly in your humble graves, sleep martyrs of a fallen cause,
Though yet no marble column craves the pilgrim here to pause.**

**In seeds of laurel in the earth, the blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth, the shaft is in the stone.**

**Meanwhile, behalf the tardy years, which keep in trust your storied tombs,
Behold! Your sisters bring their tears, and these memorial blooms.**

**Small tributes! But your shades will smile, more proudly on these wreaths today,
Than when some cannon-moulded pile shall overlook this bay.**

**Stoop, angels, thither from the skies! There is no holier ground
Than where defeated valor lies, by mourning beauty crowned.**

But now there are many who for political or economic gain would rather see every memory and symbol of that noble army destroyed and desecrated. There are still others who though being descendents of those noble soldiers by their indifference and moral cowardice would acquiesce to that destruction. In dishonoring the Southern Cross and suppressing a noble Christian heritage they heap dishonor on themselves.

Yet I cannot believe that Providence will suffer the memory and sacred honor of valiant men and righteous principles to be blotted out. I cannot believe their heroic banner will be suffered to be discarded and forgotten. I cannot believe that the blood of valorous heroes, still coursing in the veins of their sons and daughters and their future generations, will not continue to inspire and encourage the friends of liberty everywhere. Is there a heritage more honorable? Whatever storms may come, be our friends few or many, whether cannons roar or sabers flash, we will not surrender the honor or our gallant flag. We will take our stand beneath its starry waving glory. Let us first remember and honor Him, our immortal Savior to Whom our banners point. Then God will vindicate our cause, the memory of our noble fathers, and our beloved Southern Cross.

SUGGESTED READING

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“You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth.” Psalm 60:4 (NKJ, NASB) Article dated 17 March 2003

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