British and American Approaches to the Peace

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THIS paper is based upon the assumption that a first essential for a stable and enduring peace is the achievement of unity in policy and program by Great Britain and the United States. It is based further upon the recognition that differences in viewpoint between representative and parallel groups in Britain and the United States are wider and more fundamental than is often admitted in either country, and that frank confrontation and fuller understanding of these differences are prerequisite to the achievement of the desired unity in action.

These differences spring partly from conflicts in *immediate national interest*. But they arise also partly from dissimilarities in national temperament. In part, they reflect contrasted *experiences with government,* both their own governments and rule over subject peoples. Behind these contrasts, again, lie even more fundamental divergences in overt or unrecognized theological presuppositions—in the *understanding of man,* and of the fashion in which, because of man's nature, government should be ordered.

In so far as deviations in British and American policy represent conflicts in national interest, agreement must be reached, if it can be attained at all, by political compromise. That is the task of statesmen. But in so far as divergences spring from the deeper levels of contrasts in temperament, in past political experience, or in philosophical outlook, there is a task in mutual understanding in which Christians of the two countries may take an important role.

II

Quite naturally, each people tends to project onto the world scene that type of political procedure and structure which has worked most satisfactorily in its own history, and with which in consequence it feels most confidently at home.

The British constitutional system, with the empire it governs, has grown like Topsy. Hence the British aversion to blueprints, the British distrust of written instruments of government. So progressive an outlook as that of the sponsors of Political and Economic Planning feels no hesitancy in dogmatizing about the peace:

"The post-war settlement of Europe should be along the lines of the British Commonwealth rather than a written constitution. . . . It would be against all the weight of the only successful experience of creating a Commonwealth of free nations if we were to begin with any attempt to devise a European written constitution. It would be unfortunate if Britain were to substitute for her own tested methods an approach based largely upon obsolete political thought."

Again, the characteristic British method of advance is by trial and error, often described, not without pride, as "muddling through." It has been marked by few drastic changes but by steady experimental growth. Hence the British distaste for the radically different and the drastically new, their natural employment of conceptions which are organic, developmental.

Furthermore, this pragmatic cast of mind leads the British to be indifferent, if not suspicious, toward broad general declarations of political principle, cast in ideal or normative terms. They prefer to take political sincerity and good intentions for granted rather than to proclaim them to the world in highflown affirmations.

In all these respects, the British viewpoint speaks out of an experience of centuries. And it speaks out of experience in government across the earth and over many peoples.

In contrast, the American people speak out of political knowledge to be measured in decades rather than centuries, from the perspective of a nation born fullgrown in revolution, and from experience confined almost entirely to a relatively homogeneous

people within a single continent. To the British misgiving of sudden change, they point to their own origins in answer—not to speak of the example of the French and Russian Revolutions. To the British antipathy toward written instruments of government, they reply by citing their own experience under a written constitution—a method which they would hardly recognize as wholly "obsolete." To the British faith in natural development rather than forced conformity to abstract principles, however admirable, they instance their own growth under the aegis of the lofty generalities of the Declaration of Independence and the foreword to the American Constitution. Related to this particular variance in political methodology lies perhaps the deepest temperamental contrast between these two peoples—the British preference for understatement, the American tendency toward exaggerated extremes and absolute professions.

III

There is also a characteristic contrast in scale of values between Britons and Americans of which full account must be taken. It is epitomized in the relative weight to be given to *law* and *liberty*. Each people cherishes both values, but there can be no question as to the position of supremacy accorded them in both the regard and the practice of the respective nations. To the British public, American equanimity in the face of the successive epidemics of "bandits," "carpet-baggers," "robber barons," "hijackers," "bootleggers," "kidnappers," "muggers" must seem quite incomprehensible evidence of retarded development in a people otherwise approaching cultural maturity. The existence of such groups within modern Britain is unthinkable. To Americans, the acquiescence in fixed social stratifications which has been so characteristic of British middle and working classes has often appeared inexplicable.

This dissimilarity, likewise, is intimately related to divergences in national history. The great struggles to which Britain looks back with justifiable pride were those of a people relatively secure from external oppression who had to win security at home through the acknowledgment of law. Thus Britain became a nation. Of this achievement, Magna Charta is the supreme symbol. But Americans trace their existence as a nation to successful revolt against external constraint. They glory in their *Revolution* and their Declaration of *Independence*. They honor the integrity and valor of the vanquished in the War of *Rebellion*.

This contrast inevitably leads to quite different attitudes toward backward and subject peoples. The dominant British concern is for the establishment of law and justice. Capacity of any people for self-government is measured almost wholly by their loyalty to and ability to maintain the institutions of western order and jurisprudence. Americans, on the other hand, are instinctively sympathetic with the longing for freedom. They are less horrified at lawlessness or insurrection; how could it be otherwise in view of their own history? They are less dubious of the power of an inexperienced and disunited people to work their own way to liberty under law by way of liberation through lawlessness.

IV

Behind divergences in political practice and experience are almost always to be discovered contradictions, often covert, in basic philosophical and theological presuppositions. So it is here. Historically, British and American political outlooks are rooted in contrasted views of human nature.

It is not fortuitous that Anglican theology is prevailingly Arminian *and* that the British mind entertains a high estimate of the capacity of the strong and the advanced to govern and lead the backward or the weak. On the other hand, reverence for law and confidence in the Greek dictum that knowledge is virtue, education a guarantee of fairness, leads the British to view unprivileged and uneducated peoples sympathetically but somewhat condescendingly.

To the same strain of presupposition must be traced the profound British conviction that responsible authority should be directly proportional to power. For example, those nations upon whom in the last analysis will fall the task of policing world peace should be charged with authority in the direction of world order.

The view of human nature implicit in the traditional American view, though seldom made explicit or even acknowledged by most Americans, is more pessimistic as regards the strong, more hopeful as regards the backward. The British often charge Americans with being sentimental toward weak or unprivileged peoples. There is justice in the charge, although here likewise the whole weight of America's own experience vindicates the prejudice. What is not so generally seen is that this is only one side of the American mind. It is little known in Britain, as it is little remembered in the United States, that two traditions of political theory stand in the American tradition, and that they are rooted in antipodal views of man. In the great Declaration, Jefferson voiced the faith of the age of Romanticism and Revolution. But when the hour came to give the new nation its structure of government, the task was entrusted to James Madison. He sought to buttress the hard-won liberties of men by rigorous safeguards —safeguards which he had learned to recognize as necessary under the tutelage of that stern Calvinist, John Witherspoon. The American Government was deliberately constructed upon a system of "checks and balances," rooted in profound distrust of human nature, especially of the wielders of power. Each branch of the Government—Executive, Legislature, Judiciary—is to check the other two, and all are to

be held in leash by the Constitution. The National Government is to be checked by the states and vice versa. It would be difficult to conceive a scheme of representative government more directly antipodal to Britain's where virtually absolute power rests in a single organ inhibited in its exercise only by an unwritten tradition.

Thus, in the forms of government under which the two peoples live today, the underlying differences between them, historical, temperamental and ideological, come to typical expression.

V

These differences affect the attitudes with which Americans and Britons approach every major problem of the peace. Take, for illustration, two of the most thorny—the future of subject peoples and the securing of world order.

Britain's unique success in colonial administration has been achieved within the structure of an Empire under the ideal of "stewardship," supported somewhat covertly by the strategem of "divide and rule" through the manipulation of the balance of power. Apart from considerations of national interest which almost always bulk larger than even the most sophisticated Britisher recognizes and apart from assumptions of the beneficence of British rule almost always loftier than a dispassionate appraisal can fully justify, the British attitude is governed mainly by three presuppositions already noted—supreme valuation of law and justice, confidence in natural evolutionary development, distrust of the uneducated and the unprivileged.

In contrast, Americans are quick in sympathy for young and ill-favored peoples, having so recently themselves emerged from very modest beginnings. They entertain higher confidence in the potentialities of these peoples, once free, to work out a worthy destiny, having themselves hewn a continental empire out of intractable circumstance. They are less alarmed at the prospect of disorder during transition as they contemplate not only their own history but also the glorious outcome of China's internal birth-throes these recent decades.

But the American attitude is grounded not merely in a somewhat sentimental faith in the weak and the backward. It springs equally from a realistic distrust of the strong and the mature. Fated by geography to be a great power, many Americans retain an ingrained suspicion of massed power. Destined in spite of themselves to be an empire, they are still averse to empires and empire-building.

No feature of the present colonial discussions is more wounding to British pride than that their professions of intention toward their subject peoples should be accepted at less than face-value not only by Indians and Malayians but even by Americans. They regard this as a direct reflection upon British integrity. Their natural resentment might be considerably eased if they realized that American scepticism rises not from a jaundiced judgment upon any one nation but rather from an understanding of human nature deeply rooted in Christian faith and strongly confirmed by self-knowledge. For thirty-five years, the United States gave general assurances of ultimate independence to the Philippines. It is safe to say that these promises were never regarded as secure guarantees, not only by the Filipinos but by Americans themselves, until they were embodied in a precise pledge definitely dated. Americans did not trust the genuineness of their own professions until they were irrevocably sealed by specific commitments. Their misgivings about British intentions do not mean that they view the British less highly than themselves, but only that they view them no more highly. They cannot altogether forget that, had the principle which they are now asked to respect been accepted in 1776, they would today probably be an overgrown adolescent within the British family of nations—a possibility which few in either country would regard as a desirable alternative to present realities.

VI.

The differences in outlook which bear especially upon the problem of world order have already been suggested—the worth of broad idealistic declarations, the value of written instruments of government, drastic change versus gradual experimental advance, the kind of world order desired.

Here we meet the contrast between the two main schools of thought on the organization of peace—those who espouse a single over-all solution and those who argue for a policy of "muddling through" by piece-meal solutions of specific problems. The disputants favor respectively a sharp break with the familiar methods and principles of traditional statecraft—a "New Deal" in world politics, *or* reliance upon slow but sure organic development in conformity with tested pre-War practice. While there are supporters of each method on both sides of the Atlantic, on the whole American idealism leans to radical novelty and over-all solutions, British sentiment toward "piece-meal" pragmatic adjustments.

These differences in national presupposition and viewpoint came to expression no less sharply in the last peace settlement than in this. On the whole, the specific provisions of the Versailles Treaty proceeded along traditional and established lines. The League of Nations represented radical departure. It was America's distinctive contribution. It was a characteristically American device—in its proposal to create world government *de novo,* in its grounding of that government upon abstract principles of justice and equity, and even in the details of its structural arrangements. In principle, the structure of the League was a closely parallel reproduction of

the American constitutional system—two legislative houses, the upper house representing the larger centers of power but its actions checked by a lower house in which all nations, great and small, were granted equal voice. In the Assembly of the League, there was a deliberate defiance of the principle, so clearly indicated by logic and so axiomatic to the British constitutional mind, that authority should be directly responsible to power and that those upon whom falls the task of enforcing international order should wield preponderant influence in determining the character of that order. As with the American nation at its inception, a lofty goal conceived in idealistic terms was to be translated into reality through a shrewd scheme of "checks and balances" based upon realistic appraisal of the weaknesses of human nature when possessed of great power.

Enthusiasm for the League was always warmer in the Western Hemisphere than in Europe, though never strong enough to bring the American people to assume the slightest responsibility for the child of their devising. Europe had the burden of wrestling with the League in all its inadequacies and ultimate futilities. In Europe in general, and in Britain in particular, disillusionment with the whole League idea and pattern is far deeper than among internationally minded thinkers in the United States. Most American idealists were profoundly committed to the principles of the League. Disappointed as they are over its comparative ineffectiveness, they attribute its so-called failure first of all to American abstention and then to manipulation of the League in the interests of the Great Powers. Their faith in the fundamental soundness of the "League-idea" is unshaken. They hold scant hope for enduring peace save through a return to the plan of world government.

In support of this view, American opinion may well point to an arresting parallel in its own early struggles for unity and nationhood. It is well known that the original union of the liberated colonies under the Confederation suffered lamentable failure, namely because it did not bind the several units into sufficiently responsible interdependence, and because it did not give their central organ adequate power for the successful discharge of its functions. With the recognition of that failure, two alternative courses offered—to return to the old situation of thirteen sovereign and independent states *or* to forge the intransigeant units into more binding cohesion by specific limitations upon individual sovereignty and the lodgement of adequate power at the center. In the debate over those alternatives, the whole future of America hung in the balance. Similarly, it may be claimed, the way of advance today lies, not in scrapping the inter-War experiment with the League and returning to the familiar, but discredited, principles of traditional statecraft, but in a courageous resumption of the recent pattern, revised and greatly strengthened from the lessons of its first experimental trial.

VII.

These two viewpoints have been analyzed and illustrated as though they were representative of British and American opinion respectively. Any such presentation, if left without further comment, would be seriously misleading. And, in two respects. *First,* while the "gradualist" philosophy is more typically British than American, it also controls the thinking of large numbers of the best informed and most influential students of the world scene in the United States. *Second* and much more important we have been speaking solely of political reordering. The most significant paradox in the present situation is that in Britain, it is universally assumed that we are going forward to radical reordering of economic and social life, while there is a preference for slow and careful readjustments in international arrangements. In the United States, there is a cry for a New Order internationally, but in the matter of economics the forces of reaction have already powerfully set in. In brief, each nation desires radical change where it has no present interest at stake or where its own interests counsel such change; each nation favors gradualism where its own interests appear imperilled. No nation is willing to advocate idealistic solutions which appear to cut across its own national interests. Conversely, nations will lend their support to right solutions, however clearly they may be indicated by the logic of events and the warnings of contemporary history, *only* if their own interests justify their support, or at least, if no great threat to national self-interest is involved.

VIII.

Thus we are brought to a final observation. If I may be permitted to repeat words written on return from Britain a year and a half ago: "In the making of peace, the significant divisions will not be, as will be made to appear, between victors and vanquished, or even between nations allied in victory. The real divisions will be *within* nations, within each nation. . . . The great necessity is that those who so envision the peace and are committed to its realization should discern clearly where our real problem lies—not between nations but within each nation; that we should acknowledge that the bonds uniting like-purposed people of every nation are more intimate and more commanding of allegiance than those which join us with fellow-countrymen; that we should have thought our way through to a common mind as to the peace we seek; and then that we should struggle shoulder to shoulder within our respective nations for the actual achievement of the common goals lest mankind's hopes again suffer shipwreck."