

Most serious of all. It is a notorious fact that people will confess one sin to keep from confessing others more grave. The guilt feeling then becomes a substitute for a sound critical estimate of one's errors, through which one may learn how to do better in the future.

Do we hear any personal confessions of guilt in connection with the ghastly arguments used over the last twenty-three years to prevent the adequate participation of this country in world affairs? We do

not. The generalized guilt feeling seems to furnish absolution for all. If this feeling actually should keep us from identifying the programs, political and religious, which have led us up one blind alley after another in the quest for peace, it will be one more instance of the kind of piety that makes the devils laugh.

All this is far from the godly fear leading to "the broken and contrite heart" that God will "not despise."

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The Local Church and the War

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THE Church will not bless war!" The theme was heard often and with many variations during the long Armistice from 1918 to 1939. It became a slogan. It was a good slogan, marking a forward step in the moral advance of Christendom. The ruthless character of modern "total war" made the sinfulness of all war stand out in sharper relief against the lighted horizon of the Christian gospel understood in its social implication. Oxford and Madras clarified and refined the issue, but for most Churches and most Christian people it was enough to unite upon the simple slogan, "The Church will not bless war!" It sounded forthright and unequivocal. The churches would not again repeat the scandals of 1914-1918! The slogan brought relief to sensitive consciences.

But the slogan did not go far enough! It was still ambiguous at two vital points. Even this brief formula contained seeds of confusion which have already begun to sprout, and the harvest may prove to be tares and nettles! On the one hand, it obscured the difference between sin and the fruit of sin. War is evil, as all sane men today will agree. Religiously viewed, war is sinful in the extreme. But the sin lies far deeper than that. War is but the deadliest fruit of the apostasy of modern life, the wholesale turning-away of mankind from God. The foremost danger among the churches is that, in withdrawing their moral support from war, they do not see that they are still giving support to things that make for war. In fixing their judgments upon war, they have failed to penetrate to the root causes of war, which are "sins" indeed. They have refused to "bless" war (who, I wonder, has seriously asked or expected them to bless it?) but they have given tacit or open blessing to national pride, to economic privilege, to racial inequality which have brought this war upon the world. They agreed, so to speak, not to "bless" typhoid fever, but went on condoning the poisoned water-supply which made the epidemic inevitable! In

condemning the dreadful symptom, they have failed to recognize the source of the disease afflicting the body of mankind. The second danger in the slogan is that, in resolving not to "bless" war, churches often did not go on to ask what they *would* do if war in fact should come.

When war came the World Church was prepared, at least in principle, to meet the impact with convictions freshly crystallized: "Let the church be the church!" But the local church in America, generally speaking, was unprepared. It did not know precisely how to apply in practice those broad, ecumenical principles to which its best minds had given assent. Perhaps it had taken too much comfort in the chorus: "We will not bless war!"

Pearl Harbor posed the question, bluntly, in a form that brooked no evasion. The local church has become the testing-ground of principle. Honest lay minds want to be shown whether any church has a word to speak (apart from pious repentance for past errors), that is truly relevant and worth hearing. They are impatient with hair-splitting, and scandalized by the internecine war of words once again disfiguring the body of Christ, especially among the Protestant "members of the Body" in America! The local church is the place, too, where social pressure will demand compromise in the name of patriotism, and where it will be hard to draw distinctions between the church and the disintegrating society with which it has become so fatefully involved. Unless a local church is prepared to withdraw into a monastic role, preaching a timeless perfectionism and trying rather half-heartedly to practice it, the slogan "the Church will not bless war" has very little meaning today. That is why it is so rarely used any longer, lest it give forth a hollow sound like a "tinkling cymbal."

Notwithstanding this ambiguous position, be it said that there has been marked advance in the realism and effectiveness of the churches under war-

pressure, as compared with their behavior in 1917. It is to the credit of most American Christians that, on the question of war, they "practice better than they preach." As the war wears on, however, the pitfalls will be wide and deep. The churches of America have a chance to do what the churches of Britain have so magnificently done, namely, to temper the spirit of hatred at the very time that they are striving to sustain morale. In America the opportunity is greater and the need quite evidently more urgent. There is yet time, for the hysteria of hatred and fear has been slow in reaching the danger-point among us. In the measure that a church recognizes both the opportunity and the danger, it may hope to fulfil the one, and avoid the other.

The priestly role and the prophetic role of the church have never been so clearly distinguished as in its war-time mission. Each has its peculiar dangers as well as its values, and where they are being consciously faced may be found the growing-points of Christian insight in our day.

The Local Church as Priestly Ministrant

As in every moment of catastrophe, the priestly office is primary under the impact of overt conflict. The first concern of the church is with the *inner life* of men. If the choice must be made between light and power, between clear judgment and calm confidence, power is clearly the more needful. That is why, in most cases where ministers and church officers gathered on and after December 7, the answer to the question "What can we do now?" was generally given in two ways: (1) To carry on normal church life without interruption, for the sake of steadying morale. (2) To arrange special services of prayer, attesting both solidarity and faith. Special services of intercession held on that first Monday night were impressive in their representative character and in their restraint. Acts of worship since December 7 have taken a vast variety of forms: church buildings have been kept open night and day, often with special permission and encouragement of the civilian defense authorities, as a silent witness to the resources of faith in time of stress. Communion in the early morning and services of intercession at noon have been welcomed by those who found spoken discourse inadequate or too poignant. Sunday worship has been of greatest value where familiar forms have been maintained, but filled with fresh intensity. The best way to build morale is now recognized to be, not in coining clever catch-phrases for the moment, but in re-affirming and interpreting the assurances of the ages. Wrought out of past days of storm and uncertainty, these carry the ring of authenticity which hearten men today. This is why pronouncements on the issues of this war, however eloquently issued by individual churches and repre-

sentative bodies, have been at a discount. Men and women in public worship crave eternal perspectives more than immediate guidance. Where the national flag is displayed in the sanctuary, and where "America" is played on the organ as the people stand in silence, it is to bring the national cause quietly into the presence of the symbols of God's judgment and mercy and loving power. Prayers of intercession, for men in the armed services and for all who live in special sorrow and danger, have leaped into a new prominence.

The primary task of the Church, in its priestly office, is to help men face the stress of war with the full resources of a vital faith, without sentimentality and without self-deception. The corresponding temptation is for a church to let religion become a form of escape from reality, or, still worse, to make institutional capital out of the war, by exploiting the frayed nerves of unchurched or half-churched people. Ecclesiastical war-profiteers usually wear a pious cloak. It is too much to expect the church-impresario to resist the chance to "use the war to build up the church." The Church Militant is already being summoned to "mobilization," "enlistment" and even "re-armament." The public as a whole, however, is quick to distinguish such exploitation from the authentic desire of most churches to employ their full resources, spiritual and material, for the strengthening of the inner life of the community.

To offer guidance to confused individuals who face war-time choices, and who are eager to link them with Christian standards but are perplexed in the attempt to do so, is a great and growing task. The pastoral office, of counseling and consolation, is by no means confined to ordained clergymen in such days. Religious ministry among men in the armed forces is still inadequate to meet the need, which will grow as the war reaches more tragic dimensions for America. Save for the able work of seasoned chaplains, it is still at the level of neighborly goodwill, rather than of adequate spiritual leadership, concerned rather with secondary issues of marriage, employment and education, rather than with the primary issue of life and death. Of utmost importance for the task ahead is the spiritual counsel that will help men in the fighting forces to keep the link unbroken between Christian ideals and war's grim duties. This same need is increasingly expressed by sensitive men in public office, from the White House to the local police department, who shoulder unaccustomed loads with more of inner tension than they like to admit. A footnote on the need for pastoral ministry is suggested by the growing problems of morale in the Civilian Public Service Camps, where scrupulous pacifists are finding it harder to justify their relative security, now that friends and classmates are being wounded and killed for the sins of society.

Relief to victims of war has always drawn heavily upon the well-springs of Christian compassion, and the churches have taken a major part since 1937 in meeting the emergency needs of civilian sufferers. If the gifts of American Christians seem disappointingly meager, as compared with what the Jewish community has done for its refugee blood-brothers, and with the response of war-burdened Britain to the appeal for winter-relief in Russia, the reason is not far to seek. The relative lack of response of American church people to urgent appeals for help, on a scale commensurate with the need, is due in part to the multiplicity of appeals coming in quick succession. The churches have been confused. It is due in part to dilemmas created by the nature of "total war," which makes it impossible, in certain vast areas, to hold out hands of mercy without lending material aid to our enemies. Most of all, however, it is due to the infection of the isolationist spirit which, up to December 7, was so fearful of arousing righteous indignation which might "drag America into war" that it preferred to seal up (or at least prudently filter) the springs of pity. The quick response to the Red Cross appeal shows how readily the American heart and purse can be opened once such restraints and fears are removed. Whether the church will retain its foremost place as an agent of mercy depends now upon the boldness of its leaders, and the degree to which individual churches make of their war-relief, not a "business of giving," but an act of sympathetic imagination by which Americans may share something of the burden of those who are "wounded for our transgressions."

In its priestly work, whether in worship, in pastoral ministry, or in corporate deeds of mercy, a church is not "blessing" war as such, but blessing, so far as it is used of God, those who must take part in war, or bear its heavy blows. In so doing it daily confronts the danger, on the one hand of lapsing into pious irrelevancy, on the other hand of uncritical absorption in the community's war-effort. To draw the line between proper and improper functions is not easy. To use church buildings for a blood-donor unit of the Red Cross and refuse them for the gathering of scrap-iron, to use the church as a place of instruction for air-raid wardens but not as a place to sell defense bonds, raises an ethical distinction that cannot be neatly defined nor consistently defended. The essential point of principle is *that some line be drawn* "for Christ's sake" lest the growing war-pressures obliterate all moral distinction, and that the community recognize the right of the church to draw that line, since it is unlikely that any other group will do so.

The Church in Its Prophetic Role

More than might have been expected, the prophetic note has been sounded in the churches since America

entered the war. The nature of the Pearl Harbor attack tempted every preacher, and not only the unscrupulous and sensational pulpiter, to oversimplify the moral issue. But there has been more of moderation than of denunciation. The net influence of the churches has been to restrain rather than to arouse hysteria, notably in Pacific Coast areas where violence against an innocent alien minority is still within the range of possibility. The "Father William fallacy," where the minister tries to stand on his head for the sake of keeping a strained consistency in his attitude to war, has not afflicted many churches. Most men who have changed their views have been honest enough to say so, or have appeased their consciences by claiming that the war America is waging is more obviously defensive than anyone believed it could be (a poor excuse, morally considered, but alas all too true!), and that they will therefore reluctantly support the national effort. The residual resistance of the churches to war, carried over from the era of utopian pacifism, will serve at least to check the rising demand for revenge and untempered retaliation.

The chief constructive task of preaching today is to undo the damage of long years of skepticism about the basic issues of this war. This skepticism, often encouraged from pulpits, has proved to be a double-edged sword. In laying bare the truth about totalitarian war, as judged by the Christian standard, it has cut the nerve of moral effort, and severed the arteries of confidence and hope. The result is a mood which can only be described as *impenitent disillusionment*. This mood for the most part is not religious in spirit at all, however often it may quote the words of Christ. Disillusionment concerning the glories and moralities of war is destructive so long as the finger of blame is pointed at some other person or group, at "the propagandists," at "the imperialists," at some fascist military clique. Disillusionment indeed is often only a sophisticated form of moral evasion. Not until a preacher helps to fix responsibility closer to the conscience of his hearers does he prepare them for that repentance, that "change of heart," from which inner integrity and renewal of life alone can spring. To confess the failures of others is a familiar and fruitless exercise; to confess our own shortcoming is always hard, and honest self-searching is obscured by the conventional language of penitence. It may be that a whole new vocabulary will be required before prophetic preaching can hope to bear fruit in "repentance for the remission of sins."

Action bold enough to match prophetic preaching is less common in the churches, partly because the issues are so complex. To define and defend the position of minority groups is one way to affirm the primacy of principle over pressure, even in war-time. The churches have generally given understanding, sympathetic respect, and generous material aid, to

their pacifist members, whether in the Civilian Public Service Camps or in the local community. Churches have had a unique opportunity to serve as bridges of understanding and reconciliation in areas including large numbers of enemy aliens, where the maintaining of personal friendship has helped the morale of innocent persons in suspected groups, and where public demonstration and practical expression of good will have mitigated brutal and needless injustice. Many communities are being poisoned by ugly currents of prejudice, fed by underground streams of malice, and a church wins respect by standing firmly for fair-dealing toward suspected minorities, within the limits prescribed by federal defense authorities.

The prophetic office of public prayer is especially manifest in war-time, exposing the pretensions of self-righteousness, and raising basic questions as to the nature and moral requirements of prayer itself. Prayers of penitence cease to be safe when they begin to be specific. Some congregations are discovering that in war-time they do not feel penitent at all! Prayers "for our enemy as Christ hath taught" are met with the charge of unreality or hypocrisy. If prayer has not yet raised as many perplexing questions in America as in certain other lands, may it not be because so many Americans have ceased to take prayer seriously at all? And does it not follow that a frank facing of the issues of war-time prayer, in the light of our best understanding of the nature of prayer, might release a tide of spiritual energy to match that which accompanied earlier days of crisis, from the time of Amos and Augustine to that of Luther and Lincoln?

Much is being made of the role of the local church in crystallizing opinion concerning war-aims and peace-terms. It is impressive to find men appealing to the churches to withstand proposals, already being brought forward, for a war of vengeance and a peace of retribution. The obvious danger confronting the churches, in any popular study of peace aims, is that matters will fall into the hands of the utopians, who will make of the process a means of escape from reality and responsibility. It would be ironical indeed, after America helped to wreck the peace by two decades of political and economic irresponsibility, if the churches should now tempt her to shirk her primary duty to win the war. Only the Pharisees in America will presume to cast themselves in the role of peace-makers, so long as others are bearing the brunt of the struggle. It remains true, nevertheless, that the duration of the war and the durability of the peace depend more upon consecutive thinking done during the struggle, provided we win it, than upon the mood of ecstatic idealism or of enervated exhaustion at the moment when hostilities cease.

Three Crucial Questions

The church will not "bless" this war. No one has asked them to do so! But the slogan may itself become a blessing or a curse to the churches, depending upon their answer to three crucial questions:

1. Can a church do its duty humbly without pretension to be holier than the warring world? Men will give more heed to its word of hope if it sets an example of humility, by confessing ways in which it has itself helped to cause this war. Craving for power and prestige, institutional rivalry infected with the commercial spirit, material measures of success, divisive loyalties, isolation and withdrawal from world responsibility—these brought the war. They are found in every church, and it is well to confess it. To try to live by an absolute standard will mean cutting the church off from the men and women it is called to serve. But the church can give men an example of how to play a part in the world, and yet hold up a standard higher than the world.

2. Can a church help men and women to see the relevance of religion to the issues of war, without appearing to make institutional capital out of the war? It is hard for people to avoid the extremes of hopeless pessimism or of fatuous optimism. Either of these two forms of sentimentality will seek in the church a pious escape from the path of duty. The church will best meet this condition by helping people to face reality more squarely in the light of God's judgment, mercy, and grace.

3. Can a church help men and women to see the hopeful elements in the present situation without tempting them to utopian dreams? A familiar world is disappearing, and a new world will be born, the shape of which may be molded by men of Christian faith, if the churches offer leadership, inspiration, and channels of practical action.

Even if a church is true to its Gospel, there is no assurance that it will survive, in any recognizable form, the whirlwind which is sweeping so many institutions into the discard. But there is a chance, still more greatly to be prized, that the true "church within the churches" may be used of God as a lens to focus His judgments for men to see, and as a vessel to lift to the lips of a despairing mankind the cup of hope from which men may take refreshing, and find life inwardly renewed.

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