

The Continuing Pacifist Menace

IT seems both illiberal and ungracious to speak of fellow-citizens and fellow-churchmen as a peril. Among pacifists are associates and friends, men and women who are public-spirited servants of society and devout leaders in the Church. But in the most critical hour in the nation's history, confronted with fanatical enemies who wage total war to enslave the world, we have to disregard personal admirations and to assess objectively the effect any, however lovable, exercise upon our country's will to withstand this threat to its life and to win a victory for itself and for mankind. We would not infringe anyone's liberty to think or speak or write. But we know that good people have often been the cause of tragedies; and today we must keep our eyes open and, if possible, open the eyes of good people who disagree with us, to the effect, both on the war effort and on the peace, that this influential group within the Church may have.

Among "pacifists" we include a miscellaneous company, from devout religious objectors to the use of force down to isolationists without sense of obligation for lands other than their own. Some are outspoken in their opposition to the war. Their frankness enables fellow-citizens to discount their opinions. Others pose as ex-pacifists and ex-isolationists and announce that they are with their country in this struggle. Undoubtedly a large number sincerely changed their minds after Pearl Harbor; and while we (and let us hope they also) regret their former blindness which delayed our nation's preparation and both increased our danger and helped account for impotence, we hail their present zeal. But there are others who profess that the attack upon our country altered for them the moral problem, and who declare that they accept the war as a necessity, but who remain half-hearted and unstable in their co-operation with its prosecution. Where many of them really stand is revealed in such a confession as that of the editor of the *Christian Century* in a recently published book:

"We may still believe, as the *Christian Century*

certainly believes, that the worst thing America could have done for herself and for mankind was to get into this war."

Such questionable supporters of our embattled nation are a menace, because their influence is negative, and it is subtly pervasive.

They are a menace now because by their attitude and their words they oppose a victory for the United Nations. Most of them hope for a stalemate and "a negotiated peace"! It is vain to point out that a stalemate would lead to an armed truce, not to a peace. It is vain to ask them what, in the light of Munich, negotiations with Hitler could accomplish, or what, in view of the deceitful mission of Kurusu, could come of negotiations with the present Japanese Government. It is also vain to inquire whether any world order, such as pacifists eagerly desire, can come to pass unless the Nazis and the element now dominant in Japan are first thoroughly defeated. The pacifist mind, especially that mind when it has juggled itself by moral and theological hair-splitting into a quasi acceptance of the war as "an unnecessary necessity," is not realistic.

When one listens to or reads what pacifists are saying, one finds them closing their eyes and lips to the Nazi killing of hostages and their brutal exploitation of enslaved peoples, to the savage treatment accorded by the Japanese to British or American prisoners against whom they had a grudge, or to the role which the Japanese leaders have in mind for Chinese, Koreans and other Asiatics in their "co-prosperity sphere"! Pacifists seem incapable of facing, much less of speaking frankly of, these ghastly facts lest they be forced to arrive at a moral judgment and be drawn into moral action. They are inhibited by their assumption that the only effective means to deliver the victims of attack and oppression cannot be thought of as "righteous" or in any sense "the will of God." By their premises they are compelled to deny the basic moral drive which animates our country and its allies.

We, who wholeheartedly support the war, know

that our country, and we, its citizens, are guilty of sins which were factors in causing the war, and we repent them. We accept the war as God's judgment on such sins. But we insist that the violators of their neighbors who started the fighting and whose sinister purposes and barbarous character are patent in their ruthless dealing with the peoples whom they have conquered are the foes of any righteous ordering of the family of nations. In the immediate situation it is futile to waste time over the past. We trust God's punishment is burning its lessons into men's consciences. But we see a present obligation to our country, to mankind and to the God of justice to thwart malign purposes and to seek a settlement which provides for a fellowship of free peoples. Every utterance which weakens this sense of duty imperils the spirit of our land and of the United Nations.

Pacifists generally harp on and exaggerate anything unfortunate in the policy of our allies. Neither our country nor theirs is sinless, and we have to take ourselves for what we are, faulty nations aspiring towards a juster and friendlier order in the world. But pacifists cast up and publicize regrettable factors in the course pursued by Britain in India or by the Soviets. There is no reason to whitewash either Britain or Russia. In their past, as in our own, are stupid and dark wrongs. This is not yesterday, but today. For what are these nations contending? For what do the Axis Powers contend? Pacifists swallow the Nazi camel and strain at the British gnat.

And pacifists relieve their restiveness under unwelcome war by pouncing upon deplorable occurrences in our own national conduct. Wherever there is anything unfortunate, there they flock, finding satisfaction in using the situation to debunk the "righteousness" of their warring fellow-citizens. This has its value, for the worst moral peril of a warring people is self-righteousness. But pacifist fault-finding is extraordinarily irritating because it rarely shows the slightest appreciation of the difficulties in which a threatened nation finds itself. Further, many pacifists fail to recognize that they are suspected by government officials and leaders of community thought, and that their espousal of a cause may prejudice it in public opinion and impair the ability to help of fellow-churchmen not less sensitive to evils than themselves. It is the pacifists' preoccupation with regrettable items in the national effort, their presentation of them without reference to the national peril, and their patent lack of sympathy with the main national concern, which both provoke their fellow-citi-

zens and frustrate endeavors to end the particular wrongs of which they rightly complain.

More serious than the effects of pacifists on national *morale* and on the unity of the United Nations in the war effort is the probable harm they may do when the time arrives to make peace. Their type of mind is Utopian. They will have the kingdom of Heaven or nothing. That kingdom cannot be established by human effort alone nor will it be achieved in any historic situation. We can only expect and work for some approximation to the divine ideal—the best we can contrive under the circumstances. But absolutists abhor these relative goods, with their admixture of evil. And when men refuse to work with the best they can get under given conditions they force something far worse on mankind. A case in point was the rejection of the League of Nations by this country, led by an unholy combination of idealist pacifists with selfish reactionaries. Pacifists helped to sabotage the most promising element in the Versailles settlement. And unhappily they are likely to do something like this again. Hence their menace.

Both now when we plan for peace and then when the day for peace-making comes, Christians must be realists, aware of our own and all men's sinfulness and limitation. The best peace will not usher in the Millennium. It will be a compromise between idealism and self-seeking, an agreement reached among rival interests and aims. It will not embody perfect international justice; for what mortals are wise enough to know what that justice involves or good enough to seek it disinterestedly? Further to be too trustful, and not to provide means to coerce those who do not conform with the terms of the settlement or those who decline to submit their contentions to the arbitrament of the tribunal set up for the adjudication of differences between nations, is to court a repetition of the events which brought on this war. No Christian conscience will be wholly satisfied with the peace. It will be part of the Church's task to point out its defects and labor patiently for their amendment. That has always been the Church's duty, and pacifists can aid in it; but it is fatal when the Church does not also work heartily with the forces for righteousness in an imperfect order. It is the probable refusal of pacifists to do this because those forces will be obliged to use military power which constitutes them a peril.

Our disagreement ultimately is theological. Pacifists believe in a righteous God who stands over against mankind in judgment and manifests Himself in history only in completely righteous acts. They are, therefore, perfectionists. We share with them

the faith in a God who is as righteous as Jesus of Nazareth, before Whom we and all men stand adjudged sinners. But we also believe that God shares with us the morally mixed events of human history in which we rarely, if ever, face a decision between a perfectly righteous and an unrighteous course. And in these mixed situations we believe that it is His will that we should follow the more righteous course, as He reveals it to our consciences. We must be uneasy in conscience that it is not a course in all respects after His mind. We must keep sensitive to the evil in our most just and unselfish decisions. We

trust His grace to forgive our weaknesses, ignorances, and self-seeking. We know that all our human best is faulty and in need of His pardon. But nonetheless, we believe that it is His will for us to seek His loving justice in human affairs, to employ the means available to us to establish it, and to be confident that in our striving He will be with us, using our faulty service for His purposes and enabling us in time to do away with some of the evil in the means by which human society maintains its order and carries on its life in this mysterious world in which God has placed us.

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