

# Christianity and Crisis

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## The Spirit and the Body in War

THE Germans will ultimately be defeated; but at the moment they are pressing the Russians with fury; their submarines are sinking our shipping; Rommel has executed brilliant coups in Libya; their Allies, the Japanese, still hold every island in the Pacific which they have taken, and are contemplating a Siberian invasion.

They are going to be defeated in the end because we have more potential power than they. But they are not going to be defeated until that potential power is made real and challenges them upon the battlefields and on the seas. They are going to be defeated because their new order is a system of slavery—holding millions of slaves in unwilling thralldom. But they will not be defeated until the slaves secure weapons of emancipation. They are going to be defeated because millions of their own people do not believe in the justice of their own cause. But, meanwhile, other millions fight for the Nazi leaders with fanatic zeal. They will not be defeated until they lose confidence in the possibility of their success. The hope of success and the fear of failure, the desire to be "Masters," and the consciousness that such mastery is evil are at war in the souls of many of these people. Conscience will not triumph until they know that they cannot succeed in an enterprise which conscience does not sanction.

The Nazis might not be defeated at all if we take their defeat as a foregone conclusion. The ultimate factors and potentials will not operate if they are not turned into actualities. What sacrifices will yet be demanded, what mistakes in strategy will have yet to be corrected, what a terrible contest of arms will yet have to take place before that which we regard as "ultimate" can become a reality!

History in other words is not ruled simply by ideals and ideas. History is a contest of wills and wills operate as incorporated and incarnated ideals and ideas. Power is set against power; and sometimes, when tanks and planes become the significant expression of power, tanks must be set against tanks, and planes against planes. Might, it is true, does not

make right. But right does not prevail if it does not have the will to marshall all the power of which it can avail itself to execute its purpose. For the evil, against which it must prevail, is strangely able to marshal such power to the utmost.

Idealists are shocked by these aspects of history; but if they understood the whole character of man a little better, they would not be so shocked. There is an intimate relation between ideals and power in the great contests of history because man is a unity of body and soul and everything must finally be enfleshed in history. To be sure, we can settle many an argument without throwing all our physical resources into the battle. But if the opponent is resolute and will not yield without using every available resource to execute his will, either we must yield or use all our resources.

That there should be such desperate contests of will between whole civilizations is really more shocking than that all resources to which human wills have access, should be used in the contest. The combination of the physical and the spiritual in a contest is determined by the double constitution of man, by the fact that souls are incarnate in bodies. But the contest itself is a result of the sinfulness of man and the consequent difficulty which men have in coordinating their wills and interests. If some men conceive the resolute purpose to enslave us, nothing avails but an equally resolute purpose, armed with all available resources, to prevent the enslaver from effecting his purpose.

In the present situation, all optimistic illusions that the Nazis would collapse this year, or possibly early next year, have been dissipated by their continued success at arms. We are, in fact, in graver peril than at any time since the fall of France. There is a possibility that the Nazis will come so close to success this summer, that the less resolute portion of the democratic world will be tempted to quit. At such points of temptation the spiritual character of the struggle is made manifest. For the will to carry on, whatever momentary discouragements, is spiritual. One may assume that a will, which is informed by a

genuine passion for the freedom of all peoples and a just relation between them, is finally more powerful and resolute than the fanatic will of enslavers, whose human tools are harassed by doubts and apprehensions. They would like to be masters; yet they cannot deny that they are themselves, slaves.

The hope of many idealists for a purely "spiritual" struggle, and their aversion to a contest in which guns, tanks, planes, ships, strategies, and geographic tactics are the instruments of will, rest upon illusions about the whole character of human society and of human nature. Sometimes the "idealism" is mixed with pure funk, with weariness and irresolution. Finding the actual contests of history tremendously taxing, they dream of a kingdom of the spirit, where minds meet minds without bodies, and where wills are coordinated to each other in perfect harmony

without previous conflicts. The vision of the Kingdom of God hovers, indeed, over all historical realities and tragedies. But, there is no simple road from history to the Kingdom. The way of pure sacrifice, of complete self-abnegation, and of surrender may indeed be a symbol of the Kingdom amidst the brutal and tragic conflicts of history. But if it is regarded as an alternative to these conflicts, it becomes abject, rather than noble, surrender.

We will have to carry on. The way will be long and the road hard. Locked in so grim a battle, we do not know when victory will come; or whether the price of it may not impoverish the whole world. That price will present new problems for the future. But sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof. Failure in resolution now would mean the enslavement of the world.

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