

The Church and the War

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ONE cannot be at all sure that many Christians—and this includes the ministry—in the churches yet comprehend significantly the import of the war in its meaning either as judgment now or as the power which under Providence will, after the war, bring about a change of living methods both individually and nationally. If isolationism can mean “business as usual,” it is quite conceivable that even interventionism may intend that we shall later go on “just as we did before!” This means that neither one really discerns the spiritual issues of the fight now going on.

Some congregations have taken to singing “God Bless America” as if God owed America some kind of debt, or else as if the Gospel were “for God so loved America” or “God so loved the Democracies.” It isn’t the song, it is the singers that need watching. Lest the spirit which both the tune and the words of this song shall beget become that of an insufferable piousness, the Church must be quite firm about some discomforting truths. First, God cannot bless America unless she repents. We can cease being isolationists only when we realize that forsaking political isolationism is not enough. We must forsake the hypocrisy of moral isolationism. Sin and its fruits are a *family* catastrophe—no one has a monopoly; and by the same token none are exempted from the guilt of their share in this dark tragedy in the family of nations.

The Church’s first imperative is to scotch the ecclesiastical blessing of the scape-goat theory. Both the immediacy and the treachery of the national wound have instilled a hatred that is likely to blind us to the whole issue and bearing of evil’s antecedent to Pearl Harbor. But the abstraction of the post Pearl Harbor world from its concrete and causal relations in the context of a long history before that event can only succeed in both distorting the facts and in confounding our judgments as to present and future actions. We are growing familiar with the oft-repeated rehearsal of the features of the foe from whom we are so unqualifiedly distinguished. We represent Culture but our foes are the Barbarians. We are the lovers of Freedom, they are the believers in Slavery. We are the children of Light, they are the imps of Darkness. We are the Christians who believe in God while they are the Nihilists. Thus it goes. We are *not* saying, let it be clearly understood, that there is no difference between the Democracies and the Totalitarian Powers. We do emphatically affirm that the Church cannot allow the differences between the evils in history (which she must recog-

nize) to be treated as though these relative distinctions were *synonymous* with the absolute distinction between good and evil. The above distinctions are too absolute to be either healthy or truthful. They are bad theology and produce the self-righteous Pharisee. They are also bad politics for nothing can be calculated to sabotage so certainly the post-war peace than the establishment in the mind of the United Nations that we are the “Good” Boys who must somehow sit on the “Bad” little Boys. Repentance can alone forestall this for its spirit alone stands properly under the sober realization that “there is none righteous—no not one; not even the Israel of Democracy.”

We of the Democracies are not God’s favorites. God smashed the spurious gospel of “God so loved the Jew” for Paul and we can be sure we shall be no exception. The too prevalent spirit of complacency (which is apt to grow still more if victory comes to our arms), that we are the good saviours needs to hear the disturbing sacrament “not everyone that saith to me Lord, Lord; but he that doeth the will of my Father . . . he that is without sin let him cast the first stone.” The Church must confront Christendom with the truth that though the gospel may comfort the afflicted it most assuredly will afflict the too comfortable. We need to be exceedingly careful in our talk about the “Christian Democracies” lest we conceal from ourselves the real values by which we do live. If we examine the roots of our individualistic nationalism we shall find that actually our foes largely represent only a more developed form of a decadence which involves the whole of our secularized culture including the Democracies. It is in fact from the springboard of this truth of Democratic decadence that the whole revolution of the hour in various forms stems.

Task of Local Church

The local church and ministry have a large and most important task in contributing to a balanced piece of thinking by the Christian Community through keeping humble and sane our interpretations of the meaning of events in their full contexts during the war’s progress. Thus can the Church lay such foundations as are possible for the constructive spirit rather than a destructive one when the post-war settlement arrives.

It is a difficult role. While *recognizing* the relevance of all resistance to oppression, the Church must

also and simultaneously set the struggles for relative justice in the larger framework of the judgment of God contained both in the events of the hour and in the Spirit which brings all human motives under the scrutiny of a righteousness, whose Cause transcends all the causes of every earthly Cæsar.

The Church, therefore, must lay bare the dangerous highway to self-righteous blindness. She must show that in resisting the foe, which is right, we can be duped into thinking that he alone is the wrongdoer, which is false. She must reveal that this illusion will appear all the more plausible since the antecedent and more remote, and so, less obviously non-mutual acts of our own doing can be so easily forgotten under the storm clouds of righteous indignation over the admittedly more barbarous but also more recent sins of our enemies. Our forgetteries are too conveniently robust!

The Church must not forget that in confronting the will to power of the foe with our counter power to arrest the expansion of his tyrannic pretensions, we may be tricked into mistaking what is always a *compound* of the will to power and the demand for greater justice for the work of mere will to power alone. The lesson *must* be learned that in so far as the foe is impelled by the will to power, he must be resisted in the name of "justice." In so far as there is a legitimate claim to a fairer share in the whole dimension of bread and butter, his contention must be listened to in the spirit of love which transcends mere human "justice." The Christian Church alone can provide the insights and confront man with the power by which alone this can become possible. Christian faith alone gives a conception of God and an interpretation of Man that can stop the recurring fallacy whereby we keep on selecting the *foe's* will to power and *our* righteous counterlimitation of that power as the sole and determining factors. This sort of reasoning always ends with the supine folly of "we are the judge, they are the judged." But it is written, "judgment belongeth unto God." This truth we sorely need to take to heart if we are ever going to overcome the nonsense which even some preachers are talking *i.e., that patriotism and religion are synonymous*. If we want to see what happens when this emasculating equation takes place then look at the Nazi and Shinto expositions and you have it. There the State and the Church are one because patriotism and religion are synonymous. Its meaning is simple but devastating. There is in fact no Church, no ecclesia. Wherever patriotism and religion are conceived as synonymous, the horizontal world of Cæsar has usurped the vertical role of God and the whole sense of judgment has gone. Patriotism may approve of ends that are consonant with religion but patriotism can never be itself true religion. "This nation *under* God" is both good theology and good politics.

Only the obedience to the discernment that the State and patriotism are subordinate to the constraints of the Spirit, that the two may agree but are never identical, only this can lead us to a healthy repentance and preserve us as a nation from the blasphemous attempt to stand above the sins of the history in which we are involved.

The Church must proclaim in full the stern meaning of the events of the hour as the acts of God in human history. History is always the revelation of the meaning of human freedom in terms of the righteousness and love of God. The collapse of the pre-war structure is the Divine handwriting upon the walls of our time in words which plainly read "No Thoroughfare." They are the moral contradiction and the Divine judgment upon the attempt of a secular and superficial civilization to erect a counterfeit structure of community which in fact was a denial of the spiritual laws of mutual conduct upon which community can alone be based. The interpretation the Church knows. It is as old as Amos: "I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people . . . and the high places shall be desolate and the sanctuaries . . . shall be laid waste." We *cannot* pull the plumbline out of plumb. We have tried an experiment on the universe and we now have our answer in terms of the nature of the universe. The answer is a thundering "No." A moral order cannot support and nourish an immoral civilization. After all, the breakdown of the visible structure is the revelation of the inviolable nature of the invisible order of Spirit. This then, we suggest, is the great and foremost function of the churches in America. To awaken the communities in which they are set to the truth that God can bless only the contrite. But that contrition can obtain only where we recognize that the stern hand of God has been stretched out to us as well as to our foes. Only the humble spirit of the sinner confronted with the realization of his own sinfulness can overcome the cleavage created by the division between the "good" and the "naughty." Only as this chastened repentance can temper the post-war tempers, can we hope that the peace will not be sabotaged again in a generation.

End of Absolute Sovereignty of Nations

Again, the local church must awaken the Christian conscience and through it seek to fertilize the secular mind with the truth that we stand at the end of the era of the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of nations. Its fictitious and spurious nature has been manifest throughout the precarious life of international politics and treaty making. Its utter non-sense is placarded most blatantly in the present tempestuous hour. Nation A says "I am sovereign and absolutely autonomous. None shall cause me to do

what I do not wish to do." Then nations B, C, and D arm, make treaties and in various ways lead to the final coercion that imposes upon the erstwhile sovereignty of nation A the obligation to arm regardless of her desires. Sovereignty vanishes. In fact it never was. The Church must keep scrupulously clear the equal condemnation of an isolationism that would amputate itself from the limitation of its desires which the life of a responsible community imposes upon it, and of that type of interventionism which enters the fight simply to see that "our way of life" shall go on (by which is meant that our hold upon the economic levers of the world's raw materials and markets shall continue after the war without molestation or modification). Both are attempts to preserve an irresponsible freedom, and both are destined to failure in a world where all existence is existence within responsibility and not apart from it. All our international conferences have broken upon this theory of sovereignty. Each national delegate has gone not to give but to get. He has been commissioned to limit other nationals and their status, but his own, no. But no adjustment has been possible in a world of individualistic nationalism. When the possessors have felt like making concessions only the anarchism and the will to power has been awakened anew in the hearts of those nations to whom the concession is a removal of previous limitations. Thus, in a world of discrete national sovereignties the will to sacrifice at all has been lacking precisely because there has been no admission of a universal law transcending the individual nations as such. International conferences have thus been reduced to the hunt for some formula which will hide from the world the fact that in truth nothing has been transacted at all.

After all, it is not surprising when delegates have been forced to leave their minds at home before convening that the results of the conference should be simply political abortions. The Church must be clear. God cannot bless America unless she forsakes the habit, like the prodigal, of demanding that portion of the world's goods which belong, as she thinks, to her and then taking her prodigal departure from the home of national responsibility in the community of nations. The world of politics is rooted at last in the life of Spirit and the Church must seek to create a growing company of those who will see that when the national gamblers sit down at a table in the interests of a greater justice, the greater sacrifices will have to come from those who now hold the greater bag of the world's markets and resources; that in a world which is a living organism and not a mere juxtaposition of independent and atomic national units, our only hope lies in the passage from the world of treaties where each seeks individually, and as a law to himself, to outwit the others to that stabler world of international law where each nation's rights and obligations

are subject to a Law which transcends each particular nation.

"Thou Shalt Not Seek Something for Nothing"

Again the Church can preach the eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not seek something for nothing," with real point to it. The dangerous use in glib and parrotlike ways of the word "Freedom" needs careful attention. It is simply taking God's name in vain for the Christian to pray God's blessing upon a generation which seems so largely to think that the freedoms which it seeks are simply the absence of limitations upon its undisciplined desires. We are a generation of bargain hunters. We have been brought up erroneously to believe that we can have the fruits of life without rendering the work upon which the fruit rests. We have forgotten that freedom is not a vacation but a vocation. A false liberalism has initiated a foolishly stupid and a wickedly sinful trust in the automatic nature of freedom. So has our superficial age mechanized even the functions of the spirit! We hear a lot about the freedom for which we fight but we hear all too little about the discipline upon which freedom rests. We are exhorted to contend for our political rights, but what about our political responsibilities? The clamor goes up for economic rights but not much is heard about the commensurate economic responsibilities. Freedom, it seems, has in fact become a spurious one, a sort of cloak for the license which insists upon the right to do as it pleases. The concrete freedom where the freedom of choice is exercised within the limits imposed upon it by the rights and lives of other nations, this living freedom has given way to the atomic and pulverized world of abstract and therefore unreal existence. The nation's freedom, as the individual's, consists not in doing as it pleases but in so using its freedom of choice that it chooses as far as possible the authentic and mutual deed in the light of the international and social good. What we have now is a moment in History when a Freedom that has had all too little to do with Discipline has been answered by a Discipline that has determined to have nothing to do with Freedom. Both are false and over both stands the handwriting "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."

These three things then the Church must and can do. She must keep plain and mordant the discernment of God's judgment upon both the Democracies and the Totalitarian powers. She must make plain the spiritual basis for the imperative to abolish the fiction of the sovereignty of nations. Without mincing words she must preach the doctrine that Freedom is a noble and disciplined life where the will to power of each is limited by the rights of others, that Freedom is life in responsibility and not existence without limits.



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