

Christianity and Crisis

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Hatred and Morale

“**W**E must hate with every fiber of our being. We must lust for battle. We must scheme and plan night and day to kill . . . you must hate more and more.”

We wish we could say that this quotation came from a speech by Adolf Hitler or from the leaders of the “Education for Death” of which Dr. Ziemer wrote recently in his blood-curdling book of that title.

It came, however, as most of our readers will be aware, from a speech broadcast on Armistice Day by Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair, commander-in-chief of the Army Ground Forces of the United States. He was addressing the troops under his command.

The peroration of his speech, which we have quoted, was intended to show how American soldiers could enter the “peerless class.”

If General McNair means a hot surge of anger over gross wrongs to humanity by the Axis power, that is one thing. If he means what his language says, it is only necessary to look through the records of the utterances of America’s greatest generals and admirals of the past to see how utterly out of keeping with the historic spirit of this country are his admonitions to his men who are fighting in a war to protect not only liberty and justice but the sacred rights of humanity. How seriously they clash with all Christian convictions is too obvious to need comment.

But one does not have to go only to past military authorities to find sound condemnation for this baneful doctrine. As we informed our readers some months ago, the same issue arose in England when certain officers in training centers uttered sentiments similar to those of General McNair. Protesting against it, as we now protest, the leaders of the English Churches and the Moderator of the Scottish Church voiced not only a Christian but a psychologically sound reason for the dissent. In

the words of Dr. Cockburn: “This inculcation of hate is wrong from every point of view. It is wrong spiritually; it is wrong psychologically. It is a descent to the level of the Nazis. [How we laughed in the last war at the Nazi hymn of hate!] And if it is persisted in, it will end in the pervasion of human nature and will have results which its authors little dream of. . . . It is entirely unworthy of our Christian professions, of our high cause, and of the men who are willing to give up all in the defense of civilization, human rights and the decencies of life.”

This protest in Britain was immediately supported by the highest commanding officer of the army, General B. C. T. Paget. In a letter to the seven officers in command in Britain, including at that time General Montgomery whose men have won such distinctive victories in Africa, General Paget said: “Such an attitude of hate is foreign to the British temperament, and any attempt to produce it by artificial stimulus during training is bound to fail as it did in the last war. Officers and NCO’s must be made to realize the difference between the building up of this artificial hate and the building of a true offensive spirit combined with the will power which will not recognize defeat.”

A high officer of our American force commenting on this statement wrote: “He exactly states my feeling which has already been embodied in instructions issued to my officers . . . designated to strengthen the soldier’s personal resolution in this great fight for liberty and decency in the world. We are doing it, but, put forward the rightness and the importance of the cause.” We believe in this struggle there is the basis for the strongest kind of moral indignation. We know full well that the prosecution of the war involves killing on a vast scale. Those who fight in righteous indignation are no less in earnest than those who fight in hatred, and their earnestness had the advantage of greater stability. How puerile it is to imagine that men

can risk their lives and can maintain their resolution to resist evil over long and weary months and years of exertion with nothing better to sustain them than personal animosity toward their foe.

For effective military morale, judgment and a clear head are requisite. They are impaired by hate and the train of emotional reactions hate induces. The military officers who profess to believe that hatred is a necessary ingredient of a good morale might study some of the war books of the last world conflict with profit. They prove how frequently the soldiers on the battlefields maintained an attitude of personal respect and pity for their foes and left it to frustrated souls at home to do the hating. Yet there was little, if any, indication that this attitude was a deterrent to a firm military morale. It is well known, furthermore, that the air forces in both the last and the present war are particularly characterized by an effort to maintain an unemotional and even chivalrous attitude toward the foe. Yet their heroism is a matter of history.

The inculcation of hatred is useless for winning

the war and baneful for winning the peace; and our military leaders should understand that a military victory, while indispensable, is nevertheless but a negative condition for the creation of just international relations. The international justice which we require for the health of the world must rest partly upon careful discriminations, which can never be made by hate-intoxicated souls.

There is always a tendency in war-time to give too much moral authority to army officers. They have often been wrong even in the technical questions which belong to their special sphere of competence. They may be most grievously wrong in both the large political and the still larger moral implications of a conflict.

Enough of the lower ranking army leaders have talked nonsense about hatred as a prerequisite of morale. The Christian Churches ought to demand a disavowal of this doctrine from their superiors, both military and political, quite apart from General McNair's statement.

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