

Christianity and Crisis

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Our Responsibilities in 1942

CHRISTIANITY AND CRISIS was founded a year ago to express the convictions of those Christians who felt that the Christian faith offered no easy escape from the hard and sometimes cruel choices of such a world as ours; but that it did offer resources and insights by which our decisions could be made wisely and our responsibilities borne courageously.

A certain inexorable logic of history has reached its culmination and the whole world is now at war. We believe that the logic was inescapable because the world had become one in terms of the economic interdependence of nations and their proximity to each other. If the tyrannies which have grown up in Europe and Asia were to succeed in dominating those two continents, they would also dominate Africa and America. If they are to be defeated, every area and every resource of the world which is still free must contribute to that defeat.

That is, in brief, the logic of history which has drawn us into the struggle. The attack upon Pearl Harbor was merely an event within this general development. The fact that we could not decide whether we had any responsibilities for the preservation of civilization and that our indecision was overruled by historical events ought to fill us with a sense of grateful reverence for the fact that God knows how to make the wrath of man to praise Him. Every nation has been reluctant to fulfill its duties toward a system of justice, so long as injustice did not touch its own interests too directly. This represents the egoistic corruption in all historical striving. No nation is good enough to do what is right, unless its sense of duty is compounded with its impulse of survival. We may be grateful for the fact that we are finally forced to be loyal to interests beyond our own by such a threat to our national life as we have experienced. Thus the providential elements in history have strengthened our reluctant will and overruled our recalcitrant will. We have been thrown into a community of common responsibility by being engulfed in a community of common sorrow.

We are now involved in a very grim struggle, the

end of which cannot be foreseen. It may be that a resolute foe, extremely formidable in military might, is beginning to betray the inner weaknesses which must finally spell the doom of all tyrannies. Nevertheless, the year 1942 will be one of "blood, sweat and tears" for all of us.

During the coming year we shall continue to interpret the world in which we are living in the light of our common faith and we believe that the following points will require special emphasis.

1. We must recognize the responsibilities which have been thrust upon us as citizens of a belligerent nation as solemn duties. They are no less compatible with our faith and our loyalty to God than many other duties and responsibilities which Christians face even when the world is not at war. We cannot support the war with an easy conscience, but we will resist and refute the delusion that we might have had an easier conscience had we permitted the world to sink into slavery. We know of no political strategy which can do justice to our social responsibilities and give us a completely easy conscience.

2. We must resist tyranny and help to establish justice without hatred or bitterness. This can only be done if we avoid self-righteousness; for hatred is the fruit of a one-dimensional moral fervor. Moral fanatics understand the distinction between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, between democracy and tyranny; but they do not know the God in whose sight no man living is justified.

We have sought to refute the illusion that hatred could be avoided by capitulating to tyranny rather than by resisting it. The bitterness of the subjugated nations, compared with the relative absence of hatred among the belligerent powers, proves that the spirit of forgiveness cannot be achieved simply by avoiding conflict. It is injustice not conflict which tends to engender the most bitter hatreds.

To love our enemies cannot mean that we must connive with their injustice. It does mean that beyond all moral distinctions of history we must know

ourselves one with our enemies not only in the bonds of a common humanity but also in the bonds of a common guilt by which that humanity has become corrupted. The Christian faith must persuade us to be humble rather than self-righteous in carrying out our historic tasks. It is this humility which is the source of pity and forgiveness.

3. We must harness all the resources of the Church to fulfill our religious responsibilities to the men in the armed forces and to the sorely tried civilian members of our churches. The Church has a priestly as well as prophetic function. In war time it becomes particularly important that the Gospel be so preached and all the means of grace so administered that men shall know Christ as Saviour as well as moral example, and shall find comfort, as well as moral challenge in the knowledge of God through Christ.

4. We must keep the consciousness of the universal Church alive among all Christians, and strengthen our sense of belonging to it. This Church, which is the body of Christ, is torn and wounded, as is Christ's body, by the sins and conflicts of human history. But wherever real loyalty to the Lord of the Church is maintained, there also a unity is achieved which transcends all historical divisions and conflicts. The Church is a community of grace and not of blood or nation. Its unity may become a resource for the nations when the day of reconstruction dawns. But it is a spiritual resource for Christian people everywhere, even before that day. For as men know themselves to be united in Christ, they realize that momentary historical divisions and conflicts, however important for the moment, are not final.

5. We shall deal at some length with the problems of post-war reconstruction. We must not forget that the task of defeating tyranny is, however taxing, only a negative one; that the world must find a way to just relations between the nations or we shall have fought the war in vain. We shall seek to bring the best minds in our nation to bear upon this problem, and to combine specialized knowledge in the field of economic and international relations with the best insights of prophetic religion.

We do not believe it to be sufficient merely to declare that national sovereignty is incompatible with the Christian ethic; yet we also know that national sovereignty must be abridged if the world is to have a durable peace. We believe that immediate perils have brought America into a responsible relation to the community of free nations. We hope that this relation will become one of continuing rather than fitful responsibility. As far as America is concerned the arrangements after the war must express the fact that we belong to the community of nations; but such

arrangements must not try to make a European nation out of us, when we are in fact a nation whose shores are washed by both the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. To raise this specific problem is to point out that the peace after the war must be informed by both moral purpose and political astuteness. We must not allow the cynics to make the peace. But they will dictate the peace if the idealists offer only utopian panaceas.

The problems which we face are so tremendous that they can be met only if we use all resources of mind and soul which God has given us and at the same time trust Him for strength for those tasks which lie beyond our powers. In this, as in every great crisis in the life of men and nations, we must "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling," and yet be grateful for the assurance that "it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure."

A Too Sudden Change

The sudden change of front by the isolationists from hysterical opposition to a policy of resisting aggressor nations to a jingoistic support of the war is a little baffling. Would not a studied silence be preferable to the flag waving of Senator Wheeler and the *Chicago Tribune*? Surely the attack on Pearl Harbor has not changed the total international situation so radically as to justify such an about-face. If, as Senator Wheeler has maintained, it is not possible to resist aggression without destroying democracy at home, would it not be better to buy Japan off at any price, even after her attack, than to face the dire consequences which Wheeler predicted? This sudden change may, of course, be prompted by a genuine patriotism. But in that case it ought to be accompanied by a more generous admission of past errors. If we are willing to face overt danger, as it presents itself in an actual attack, we ought to be willing to admit that covert peril (not so very covert either) preceded the actual attack.

Pure pacifism which maintains its purity without regard to political exigencies or historical catastrophes, surely stands on higher ground than this kind of political morality, which changes its course according to the obvious facts of history, but refuses to admit its errors in dealing with the basic facts of history. But the pure pacifists ought to be a little ashamed of their connivance with this political pacifism. Perhaps the pacifist clergyman who wrote us some weeks ago, declaring that Senator Wheeler was a truer exponent of the Christian religion than any interventionist minister, will be kind enough to write us again.



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