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WAS JESUS A PACIFIST?

By Andrew Fulford

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

By Marc LiVecche

BATTLE HYMN OF RESPONSIBILITY

By Mark Tooley

AMERICAN POWER & THE WAYS THE WORLD ENDS

By Walter Russell Mead

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The Cleansing of the Temple, Edward Knippers, 1991. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” John 2:13-20

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BATTLE HYMN OF RESPONSIBILITY

MARK TOOLEY

Christ Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, has met recent controversy for announcing plans to remove from the sanctuary 150-year-old marble tablets recalling its two most famous parishioners, George Washington and Robert Lee. The tablets may discomfit some worshippers, the church frets.



Reverend Welles, Churchill, and Roosevelt at the end of service at Christ Church Alexandria, January 1942. Source: Christ Church Historic Archives.

On New Year's Day 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill gazed upon those tablets while seated in the Washington family pew and attending worship for the National Day of Prayer. The Reverend Edward Welles preached before the two statesmen a sermon called "Pardon—Power—Peace," urging repentance for America's longtime pre-Pearl Harbor isolationism:

We are well acquainted with the sins of other nations and we often talk about them, but we seldom think, much less speak of our own... [B]y far our greatest sin is the sin of international irresponsibility. We want our country and our people to have power and prestige, but we balk at the international responsibility which those privileges impose. Let us pray for pardon for past shortcomings; for power for the

present task of achieving victory; and finally, for peace.

Welles likened isolationist America to the priest and Levite of the Good Samaritan story who shunned the assaulted traveler. He warned America would now have to sacrifice even life itself for victory against enemies that scorned “God’s principles of honesty, justice, and freedom.”

After his sermon, the Episcopal rector announced the church would sing “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” unprecedented in the Southern congregation, to signify national unity. Churchill reportedly wept openly during the hymn, which he later included in his own funeral. Was it the first time he had heard the rousing song associated with Lincoln and the northern cause in the Civil War? Or had he heard it from American soldiers during World War I? Perhaps he knew it from his own extensive study of the Civil War. The hymn’s unabashed martial bellicosity unsurprisingly appealed to Churchill, who relished cosmic drama.

Julia Ward Howe’s evocation of the ultimate cosmic drama superimposed Christ’s return to judge the earth on the northern struggle to save the Union and free the slaves. As a schoolboy singing this song, I assumed the “He” who “died to make men holy” referenced not Christ but the assassinated Lincoln. A Calvinist who became Unitarian, Howe majestically arranged her post-millennial poem with an old revivalist tune. The purging of America’s sin of slavery was a providential step towards the advent of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Reverend Welles, in a similar spirit rooted in Calvinism and civil religion, chastised sinful America for neglecting global duties inherent to a powerful nation. Power and prestige cannot be sustained without accepting “international responsibility that those privileges impose.” Note the clergyman did not, as is the current Christian fashion, disparage power and prestige. Instead, he

warned they were costly mandates not long retained by the undeserving.

Christian clergymen of today typically prefer to disparage power and prestige as demonic ensnarements that Jesus shunned when offered. But Jesus rejected Satan’s offer of transitory, counterfeit versions of power and prestige. Jesus, as Second Person of the Trinity before whom every knee shall bow and for whom the world is a footstool, already had from the beginning all ultimate power and prestige.

Jesus exemplifies not the rejection of power per se but rather a godly deployment of it. In Howe’s hymn, the returned Lord sits on His judgment seat “sifting out the hearts of men, setting loose lightning and grapes of wrath, amid burnished rows of steel and the lanterns of vast encamped armies of saints and angels.”

Reverend Welles sermonized that America, while not of course enthroned on the divine judgment seat, still had a divine appointment for resisting the Axis Powers with its own lightning and grapes of wrath. America had resisted its divine calling not from godly principle but rather a false sanctimony rooted in pacifism, smugness, and self-comfort. Its attempted flight from duty had not saved America from war but only exacerbated the conflict and hurled the furies against the unprotected fleet in Hawaii.

Divine judgment had come to America, Reverend Welles warned, though it was not the final judgment but instead a chastising judgment to awaken the nation to its true redemptive vocation in the world. The Axis Powers were unrepentant in their aggressions. Now a chastened America would be God’s instrument for fierce judgment upon them. This awakened and well-armed America would be the Good Samaritan, saving the assaulted traveler from future highway bandits.

No doubt Churchill, like FDR a lifelong Anglican who knew the Bible and liturgy, wept in part because he realized the majesty, justice, and grace revealed in Howe’s hymn,



Our Banner in the Sky, by Frederic Edwin Church, 1861. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

confirmed in Reverend Welles' vision of divinely ordained victory for the Allies. FDR, who organized the worship event, must have been pleased.

But few are the prominent Christians today, clergy or lay, who willingly speak so boldly of God's justice and mercy operating among nations. More commonly, nations are regarded as at most baubles of little consequence to Christian concern. To speak of America as a divine instrument in global statecraft would typically today be ferociously denounced as idolatry.

Summoning America to armament and war would in today's common Christian thought be derided as rank militarism. And the Battle Hymn, though crafted by a courageous female social reformer, is seen as bellicose, bloodthirsty, and distorting of Jesus, the ostensibly nonviolent Savior.

But Welles, FDR, and Churchill were far better theologians and attentive students of historic church teaching than are many of

today's most outspoken Christian bloggers and podcasters. Christ is still Savior and Judge. Nations are still under his watchful sovereignty. Those nations have duties for the common good in the world. And Christians as a whole cannot be indifferent towards those national responsibilities.

Much of American Christianity today, or at least its thought elites, is where American Protestantism was before December 7, 1941: comfortably apathetic about the vigorous exercise of national power. The season in which this apathy is possible will not last indefinitely. And this apathy is morally and theologically errant in every season.

This journal's primary purpose is to summon America's Christians, especially Protestants and Evangelicals, to a greater sense of national purpose and international responsibility. May we be swift to answer His call, and jubilant in His service, as He marches on. P

Mark Tooley is the president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy and editor of *Providence*.



A JUST WAR LEXICON:
ON THE PROPER *JUS* OF WORDS:

Shalom [SHă' lōm, SHə' lōm]

The Hebrew word “*shalom*” traces its roots to several Semitic languages, including the Akkadian “*šalāmu*”, meaning “to be whole, uninjured, or complete”. The common Hebrew salutation “*Shalom aleikhem*” (“Peace upon you”), captures this sense of comprehensive welfare by conveying blessings most associated with the coming of the Messiah: justice, harmony, and flourishing. Real peace comprises the adequate enjoyment of material and physical need, the manifestation of just social and personal relationships, and, ultimately, right relationship with God.

Biblical peace, clearly, goes well beyond the mere absence of conflict. While *shalom* represents an eschatological reality unattainable in human history, it nevertheless remains the measure of the intent of the political community. We must never allow decent approximations of *shalom* to hamstring our resolve for justice. We must never be counted among those who complacently proclaim “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace.
