# The Churches and the United Nations

W E of the churches shudder at the portent of war, and variously complain against the human and the material burdens of defense. But do we put shoulder to the wheel in the one great enterprise of international cooperation?

The *Covenant* of the League of Nations and the names of Wilson, Cecil, Smuts, suggest the significant Christian component in that important piece of pioneering. Christians and church bodies in the British lands, Scandinavia and a number of other countries, paralleled Americans in their enthusiasm for the idea and their interest in voluntary associations to popularize and to support the League. Archbishop Söderblom is a worthy representative of the attitude of many church folk: "The fundamental idea of the League of Nations thus constitutes in my judgment a continuation of the divine work of creation" (1926). Granting the earnestness of such declarations, the churches did far too little in practical politics to support their sense of the consummate importance of the League.

Indeed, American Christians, divided by partisan dispute, shrinking in perfectionism from the necessities for compromise in the peace settlement of 1919, slumped into the rut of isolation. We never made an effective demand for the entry of the United States into the League, but contented ourselves with looking through the knotholes at Geneva and whispering here at home about the desirability of joinnig the World Court with reservations. Much more congenial than tackling the actual problems of international relations was escape into the Kellogg-Briand Pact, promoted in church circles as the Christian outlawry of war and signed in Gilbertian ink by Mussolini, the Japanese Emperor, and Stalin's regime. The pet Devil of the thirties was the private armament firm—by no means the perfect dove, but harmless compared with the scarce-perceived eagle of state armaments in totalitarian scale, already mounting for the attacks of the Second War.

God knows that the international relations of those years were too confused for indifferent Christians. He also knows that church folk did not, in the several countries where they had the potential strength to do so, insist that their governments regularly, dependably act together in the League of Nations, so well suited to put the larger and the long-term interests above the narrower and the momentarily expedient. At last Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese forces drove their victims into cooperation for common defense, and drove many Christians into active commitment to international organization for peace and mutual aid in human welfare.

The San Francisco program was broadly and ably planned, though it confronted horrendous problems dimly foreseen. The churches made some contribution to that program, and generally backed it. On the whole, they have stood for UNRRA, for the Marshall Plan, and for necessary measures against aggression. Naturally, many church people have been more certain of their interest, as Christians, in relief and welfare enterprises than in NATO and the military resistance in Korea. But as Christian citizens of the United States and of the United Nations, a strong majority have felt that cooperative defense was a service to peace, as well as to justice and freedom. As the practical decisions multiply, however, with inevitable errors and differences of judgment, there appears to be a faltering of devotion to the major principle of international cooperation for the agreed purposes.

Christians need to be alert to increasing risks in American policy and in the United Nations. Foreboding over the war in Korea, resentment and fear over taxes and prices, complaints about allies, perplexity and controversy over the piebald problems of Germany, the Near East, Spain, colonialism—all these and other troubles tend to exhaust the understanding, the faith, the spirit, of American citizens. Neither of the major parties has supplied an adequate group of leaders able to win and to hold the confidence of the public in their wisdom, ability, and

character in the area of international affairs.

Under these circumstances, serious irresolution in foreign relations is a present danger. Dissatisfactions and anxieties can easily be channeled against the United Nations, especially if, at a difficult moment, an important group of member states does not agree with the United States. MacArthur's "go it alone" is the latent slogan for many an impetuous man. But in fact, here is one of the indispensable values of the United Nations, that it dramatizes the necessity for the United States to be so thoroughly considerate of world-wide interests, so patently trustworthy, so consistently cooperative, that a strong majority of free humanity will be with us, and we with them, in honest, mutual partnership through one or twenty crises.

Without that kind of relationship, liberty can be lost from the earth. Communist totalitarianism plays for the globe, and for keeps. No cool head can be sure that liberty could be regained from a regime that monopolizes employment, food, minds, under absolute policedom. And there is not one encouraging precedent in the conditions of our time.

The Charter of the United Nations represents the true, long-term concerns of all, including the United States. Its galaxy of cooperative agencies for doing needful, fruitful tasks; its machinery for conciliation and adjustment, and for combined protection in the last resort; its forum of world opinion open to small and great alike — these institutions, even while crippled by abuse, are of priceless value. We of the churches dare not forget that the Charter is closer to a Christian program in global affairs than the conduct of states could otherwise approach. This is "the responsible society" in the international sphere. If some stormy morning we awake to find that United Nations' practice is disappearing, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And before that morning?

The Department of International Justice and Good Will (National Council of Churches), the Council of the Churches on International Affairs (World Council and International Missionary Council), and certain denominational offices have done good service along the road. But surely we need now a broad-based, persistent, vigorous campaign of education and commitment, undertaken by these agencies and by the church press, organs of religious education, and other allies, to mobilize Christians on behalf of the values represented in the United Nations. The twin peril is nationalist isolation and nationalist militarism. The stakes are bigger than we know.

M. S. B.

# "The Unity of Christendom": an Historical Footnote

Bishop Parsons' editorial in CHRISTIANITY AND CRISIS for January 21, calls attention to the fact that recent advance in Christian Unity has had, as one of its unexpected and certainly unintended results, an intensified denominationalism sometimes misnamed "ecumenical confessionalism" (a contradiction in terms unless "ecumenical" is used merely in its original literal meaning of "world-wide" and not in its richer contemporary connotation as a synonym for "catholic," i.e., transdenominational). It is well to note that this is not the first instance of this paradoxial cause-and-effect sequence in modern Christian history. It has happened at least twice before, in the case of the two earlier movements which were the principal progenitors of present-day ecumenical Christianity.

The events most generally recognized as marking the initiation of the impulse toward Christian Unity on either side of the Atlantic were the founding of the London Missionary Society in 1795 and of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. Neither was, strictly speaking, "interdenominational" or "superdenominational" but rather "nondenominational." Each owed its origin to individual Christians of different communions, not to official action of their church bodies. But, for a number of years, each served as the agency through which the several denominations sent missionaries abroad. The later effect of each was to quicken within these denominations a conviction of missionary responsibility leading them to found their own missionary bodies. Ultimately, both the London Missionary Society and the American Board virtually lost their original nondenominational character and became agencies of the Congregational Church as one after another of the cooperating denominations threw its strength into its own Mission Board. As Dr. Richey Hogg has pointed out in his *Ecumenical Foundations,* "With rising denominational consciousness and vigour in the nineteenth century, most of the cooperation was lost."

Again, toward the end of the century, fresh vitality flowed into the churches and the missionary enterprise through the birth of the Student Christian Movements. They, likewise, were not interdenominational or transdenominational but nondenominational in character, sponsored and supported by in-