

basis of ethical effectiveness. On the negative side, this is too patent to be ignored. If, for example, Protestant Christianity is accused of deepening class cleavage, or if Catholic Christianity is accused of reinforcing Fascist tendencies, the necessity to meet the challenge is instantly felt. Can we exclude the converse of this principle: the authentication of Christianity by reference to the "fruits of the Spirit"? Who among us has not on occasion seized upon the German Confessional Church's resistance to Nazism as having apologetic value?

These questions defy any attempt at simple categorical answers. Perhaps they call for a reexamination of this word pragmatism. We all recognize the

pragmatic (judgment-by-consequences) basis of practical decisions. The pragmatist who consistently identifies "truth" with the "consequences of its being true" is a *rara avis*. Much of the current "social pragmatism" reveals an ethical dynamic that could not be generated through total preoccupation with "process." Rather, it suggests an inexplicit faith in the ordering of human affairs that puts "long-run" outcomes beyond hazard. Perhaps if this faith were rendered more explicit, and if the implications of "absolute imperatives" for Christian practice were clarified, the conflict between historic and "utilitarian" Christianity would be less acute.

F. E. J.

The Conflict Between Nations and Nations And Between Nations and God

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

THE Bible never denies that there are significant conflicts between good and evil forces in history, between just and unjust nations, and between righteous and unrighteous men. The prophets of Israel had no doubt about the special mission and virtue of Israel as compared with the gentiles; and they saw the meaning of history as partly derived from this conflict. They hoped for the victory of the righteous over the unrighteous.

But these distinctions did not prevent the prophets from understanding that there was a profounder conflict between all nations and God, and all men and God. They were not afraid to pronounce the judgment of God upon Israel in even severer terms than upon the pagan nations. The prophet Amos combined these two facets of prophetic interpretation in the classic lines: "You only have I chosen; therefore will I visit you with your iniquities." Jesus was later to justify the seeming perversity of the severer judgment upon the righteous with the words: "To whom much hath been given, of him much shall be required."

Nothing gives Biblical faith a greater consistency than this subordination of the struggle between good and evil men, to the more significant struggle between all men and God in "whose sight no man living is justified." If there was any inconsistency in the Old Testament upon these two strains of interpretation, it is certainly overcome in the New Testament. There only the one conflict is dealt with so consistently that one sometimes wonders whether the conflict between justice and injustice in history is considered at all. This is why in times of such

conflicts, as in the recent war, we turn with a certain relief to the Old Testament and thank God that it is a part of the Bible. For the faith of the New Testament which knows little of this distinction seems almost too sheer for us. The insights of faith upon the conflict between good and evil men and upon the conflict between just and unjust nations rightfully belongs to the Bible, and we have no reason to be ashamed for including it in our Christian life. In times when some Christians are tempted to evade their responsibility for maintaining a relative justice in an evil world, we must actually turn to this level of thought in the Bible.

But in times of victory, when the so-called righteous nations have prevailed, we had better not forget the words of our Lord: "Judge not that ye be not judged," and the words of St. Paul, written in the same spirit: "Who art thou that judgest thy brother; for we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." These words are spoken out of the ultimate insights of New Testament faith. They are furthermore remarkable sources of insight into our contemporary experience.

Consider our relations to our vanquished enemies. We were certainly righteous when we fought the Nazis, that is, righteous by comparison. But how quickly our righteousness runs out, not only because we have destroyed the evil with which we compared ourselves, but also because we inherited some of the irresponsible power through our victory, which tainted them with evil. As far as Japan is concerned we seem to have less reason for an uneasy conscience; for there the administration of victory has some sem-

blance to justice. In Germany it has hardly had a semblance to justice at all, unless we regard the meticulous impartiality of the Nuremberg court as a good symbol of justice. From every side the cry of the anguished comes to our ears, out of the chaos and confusion of Germany. People are dying of hunger. People can not find work. With millions of houses destroyed, others are now dispossessed to make room for the families of the army of occupation. The occupying powers do not trust each other and make the confusion worse confounded by their mistrust of each other, fighting as it were the next war over the prostrate body of the vanquished foe of this war. Every once in a while some self-righteous journalist takes a casual glance at this prostrate figure and pronounces that there is no health in it. The irony of such judgments is almost too perfect.

There are people in Germany fighting desperately for freedom against new totalitarian threats. We are not certain that we can support them because we are afraid they mean something different by freedom than we do. If they are going to have democracy it will have to be of a kind which fits an impoverished nation. We, in our pride, are inclined to identify democracy with luxuries of economic freedom which only a wealthy nation can afford.

The whole social and economic chaos of Europe, beyond Germany, is an indictment of our virtue, or at least of our wisdom. All the nations of the world who have the power of victory in their hands are too stupid to exploit the fruits of victory for the sake of justice. As Christians we ought to know, however, that stupidity is never merely stupidity. There is always a perverse taint of sin in it. In this situation the taint of national self-interest and national pride is very obvious.

As the proofs of the confusion in the wake of our victory multiply, we find some of our commentators trying to save our conscience by logic. Were we not righteous yesterday, they ask, when we fought the Nazis? Very well; quiet your conscience, we still are. But the logic of the Bible and the logic of history both run against this kind of reason.

Statesmen must work out the details for giving our vanquished foes the economic and political basis of a sane and healthy life. But certainly it is the business of the Christian church to create the spiritual atmosphere in which this can be done. The primary engine of injustice in victory is still the pride of victors who have no idea of the fact that the judgment of God is upon them as well as upon their foes. It is a question whether nations, as such, can ever have any other but a semi-pagan arrogance, though they call themselves Christian. But those individuals who are really informed by the mind of Christ must have some conception of the more ultimate conflict between all nations and God; and from that conception there must flow some decent pity and mercy, to leaven the arrogance of nations.

Unfortunately we face this issue not only with a vanquished foe but with the uneasy partner of our victory. The rift between the Western world and Russia is growing. Again it is a conflict between justice and injustice, or at least between freedom and totalitarianism. On the level of politico-moral judgments, I do not see how it can be denied that the distinctions between the Russian morality and our own are valid. The Russian tyranny is pretty vexatious. In a recent series of articles the *New York Times* correspondent, Brooks Atkinson, has come to the conclusion that the Russians do not want our friendship, that they look at the world through Marxist spectacles, that they expect the Western world, which we call democracy and which they call "monopoly capitalism," to be destroyed by its own mistakes and errors. There seems no doubt but that the Russians, beside other mistakes, are grievously miscalculating the residual health of a not too healthy Western world. These errors and stupidities may cost the Russians dearly, and us also.

But Mr. Atkinson also reports that the Russians are afraid. That is a different point which reveals the perpetual relevance of the Biblical viewpoint. They are, let us say, the unjust and we are the just. (One might stop to think, by the way, of the curious fact that no matter how the vicissitudes of history run, the Lord always puts us on the just side. Such qualms give this author a momentary pause, but he would still go on to insist that the distinctions between Western justice and Russian totalitarianism are significant). But the Russians are afraid and so are we. Those are the marks of our common humanity. Out of these fears they generate strategies of defense, and so do we. Those are the marks of our common sin. Sin is always trying to be strong at the expense of someone else. The Russians want to make themselves strong by dominating eastern Europe, and as much more beside as they can. They would probably swallow both Turkey and Iran if they thought they could get away with it. They deny that we have a will to peace; and their propaganda falsifies the almost pathetic desire of the Western world for peace most ludicrously. It is difficult to restrain one's self-righteousness when one contemplates all these facts.

Only we cannot be certain whether we are really more righteous than they, or merely stronger. Perhaps they are hysterical because they know that they are not really as strong as we. Some of our strength is actually derived from our virtue. The smaller nations will flock to us because they trust us a little more, just a little more. But some of our strength is derived not from our virtue, but from the atomic bomb and the threat of it.

Letter from Holland*

L. H. RUITENBERG

We are so righteous that we offer the Russians a pretty fair solution for the control of the atomic bomb. We actually surpass ourselves by that offer which looks forward to the suppression of atomic destruction by international action. Yet in practically the same week in which the offer is made we demonstrate at Bikini the destructive power of the bomb, which we say we are never going to use any more. There is something very unlogical in this. It is in fact the lack of logic of a man or a nation which has a law in its members which wars against the law that is in its mind.

If the Baruch proposals prove our righteousness, the Bikini experiments prove that the Bible is still right and that the contest of greatest significance is not between good and bad nations, but between all nations or men and God. We do want peace, but we would like it to be our peace, just as the Russians. We are just; but we are also afraid. We are almost as inclined as the Russians are to generate false strategies out of our fears.

Perhaps the vicious circle of mutual mistrust between us will work itself out to the final chapter of another universal conflict. Such a conflict would give a new kind of vivid historical proof of the fact that the conflict between nations and God is more significant than the conflict between good and bad nations. For in that conflict we would call ourselves the "democracies"; but our enemies would call us "monopoly capitalism." We would call our enemies totalitarians and tyrants. But they would continue to think of themselves as the fatherland of a new utopia. We would of course condemn the pretension of their self-righteousness; but we would also have a sneaking suspicion, stronger than we had when we fought the Nazis, that only God could make a just judgment between these conflicting pretensions of righteousness.

If we could, by faith, somewhat anticipate this divine judgment, we might still avoid the conflict. For a very wise statesmanship does manage to insinuate some vestige of the divine judgment into human judgments. The Christian faith, insofar as it understands the conflict between God and men, stands right across and transcends all historical conflicts. But insofar as it can insinuate something of this ultimate perspective into the competing and contradictory judgments of men and nations, it introduces some leaven of pity, mercy and forbearance into the conflicts of men and nations.

We remind our readers that "Christianity and Crisis" omits two issues in the summer. The next issue will be published on September 16th.

WHILE North Americans, on being informed of the church situation in Holland are not in the least surprised about the great number of denominations here, the West Europeans, brought up in a church tradition, consider this diversity a painful and embarrassing symptom. The cause of this difference in appreciation is that many of our churches are the result of secession and schisms. Originally the Roman Catholic Church prevailed throughout the country; since the Reformation more and more smaller churches were formed, mostly after serious conflicts with the mother church. The process seemed to be endless. Meanwhile the authority of the churches dwindled and secularism grew stronger. Even within the churches an estrangement from church-life became apparent, showing itself both by a loosening of the ties among the members of one community and by lack of solidarity among the several communities belonging to one church.

The last census, held in 1930, shows that Holland can no longer be called a Protestant nation. By the side of 36 per cent Roman Catholics, 14 per cent of the population registered as belonging to no denomination whatever. In the remaining Protestant Sector, 34 per cent were found to belong to the Netherland Reformed Church (Nederl. Hervormde Kerk), dating from the time of the Reformation; 8 per cent belonging to the so-called "Gereformeerde" Churches (Fundamentalist dissenting Church), and the remaining 8 per cent belonged to the older churches (Mennonists, Lutheran and Remonstrant) and the younger ones (Christian Reformed, Restored Apostolic, Free Evangelist and Baptist).

Such was the state of things, when on the 10th of May, 1940, the fury of the war began to rage in Holland.

It is not yet possible to register all the changes in the Churches caused by the war; but I shall try to describe a few tendencies.

My starting point for this is the Netherlands Reformed Church. It was this Church that came forth from the struggle for freedom in the Low Countries in the 16th century as the Established Church. Although the existence of other churches was acquiesced in, the Established Church continued to take the lead in spiritual affairs up to the French Revolution. Only members of this Church could fill official posts and the authorities exerted great influence on Church affairs. Within it there was a broad stream of orthodoxy, sometimes divided by

*This letter, reporting upon the religious and political situation in Holland, is the first of a series of reports which we expect to publish by foreign authors. The author of this letter is intimately related with the group which expresses itself in the new monthly magazine *Wending*, which is seeking to relate the gospel and the church more creatively to the cultural and political tasks of the nation.



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