

Christianity and Crisis

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The Unescapable God

THE longer these tragic moments last, and the longer men have to face the issues which they raise, the miseries which they bring, the sorrow, pain and agony of spirit which are the undertone of each day's news, be it good or bad, the more certain it becomes to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear that God lays His hand upon the world. Men try to escape Him but they cannot. Men try to forget Him but no lethal stream flows by from which they may drink. The Psalmist was right. Neither the uttermost parts of the sea, neither heaven nor hell offers sanctuary. God is there. He lays His hand upon the little world of men. He lays it in power. He lays it in justice. He lays it in love.

And lest that seem but a few sentences snatched from a sermon with little substance of fact behind them, sentences prompted by longing emotion, consider the facts.

It is well for us now and again as we discuss the responsibility of the Churches in wartime or remind ourselves with Dr. Nixon that a guilty feeling may be but a poor apology for real repentance or discuss just wars and holy wars, or contemplate the dangers to democracy in our dealing with the Japanese on the Pacific Coast, it is well for us to pull ourselves out from these varied issues and face God Himself. We cannot see Him very clearly. No one of us can portray the impact of His hand upon our present world with the vivid phrase and prophetic insight of an Amos. The columns of a small journal are no pulpit. But perhaps all the more we should now and then speak as from a pulpit. For, we repeat, in all this tragedy we see above all else God laying His hand upon the world.

There is the inexorable certainty that from every act flow consequences consonant with the character of the act. Christian papers, sermons and prayers for wartime have been full of confessions of sin, but oftentimes one fails to get the sense of God's majesty, His power and inflexible justice. We repent because awful evil has fallen upon us and the world. We grieve for the tragedy of mankind, but we seldom

rejoice for the stupendous revelation of the glory of God. Our eyes catch no sight of the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. Our ears catch no echo of the cry from that throne: "Clouds and darkness are round about me. Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of my seat. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth."

And yet in all the tortured story of mankind there has never been a generation in which God has been so clearly revealed in His justice and His power.

The wages of sin is death. Men have sought in their pride to escape this eternal justice. "Moral and spiritual factors lie deepest in the causes of the failure of the peace"—so said the Committee of the League of Nations two years ago. Men try to build empires upon force but only justice gives a stable foundation. Force can go so far and no farther. It breaks down except as an instrument of justice. It is helpless today against the free spirits of the occupied nations. It is helpless to crush labor, to compel loyalty. For a little time it may prevail but the inexorable justice of God cannot be defeated. It is not that God is punishing Hitler and Japan and not punishing us. It is that the wreckage of the world is His witness. He has laid His hand upon us. Pride, fear, cruelty, lust, wherever they are found there is death and there too is the majesty of God.

But the strangest thing that happens as we try to face God in this world is the revelation of His love. His justice never acts save as an integral part of His redeeming love. In what strange ways He takes hold of the misery of man and makes it the vehicle of His love. As we watch the devotion, the readiness to bear hardship and privation, the courage, the loyalty to high ideals and indeed even the fanatical devotion of the Hitler youth to ideals which repudiate our noblest visions, as we watch we seem to see unfolding before us a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary. Very commonplace folk no doubt were the nurses on Bataan, very rough and hard are the guerrillas in the Serbian mountains, but they surely reveal the depths of love. Because of our sins all the high moments of devotion

are interlocked with terror and the doing of much that we hate. The fine readiness of so many Japanese-Americans to help in the sad evacuation of themselves and their people is made possible only by the hard necessity of what seems injustice. A fine flower from foul earth! "Shall we do evil that good may come? God forbid," says St. Paul. And yet it is this tangled world of misery which reveals the underlying redeeming love of God. The Churches are stirred as never

before by the vision of a new social order. They know that God has laid upon them a duty, that insistent summons to create a new world—what is it but the call of God, the pleading of His redeeming love. We cannot escape Him. He lays His hand upon us in awful justice but through the thunder of His wrath sounds the voice of His love. He will be exalted among the nations; He will be exalted on the earth.

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