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IS THE IDEAL OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS TO ENFORCE PEACE CHRISTIAN?

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IT may be that this is a strange and unnecessary question. It is surely not an extravagant statement to affirm that ever since the morning when the angels sang, Peace on earth, Good will to men, the influence of those who profess to call themselves Christian has on the whole, in spite of many failures and backslidings and many resorts to carnal weapons, been exerted against war. It was the dream of Isaiah and Micah, and possibly of an early prophet whom they both quote, that the time would come when swords should be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and nations should learn war no more. If there ever was a man of peace, it was the Lord Jesus, and though he foresaw that one result of his work would be to send a sword upon the earth, he never authorized his followers to use such a weapon in supporting his cause. During the gloomiest periods of the dark ages, the Church, which assuredly had faults enough, put at least some restraints upon the violence of men, and her sanctuaries and monasteries were a refuge in a time when fighting was the principal business of life. And in our own age, a great poet whose Christian faith and hope were the constant inspiration of his verse, dips into the future:

"Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furl'd

In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

—*Tennyson.*

The belief in the possibility of a Truce of God, world-wide in extent and permanent, would seem to be due to the influence of the gospel.

But unfortunately there are evidences enough that the question is not an entirely gratuitous one. Some at least of the advocates of certain popular eschatological views are given to saying that there can be no peace until the Prince of Peace comes, and they view with suspicion governmental or international plans to substitute arbitration and the rule of reason for the appeal to arms, as a thing which is not only futile but almost irreverent. It would be quite aside from the purpose of this paper to attempt to discuss favorably or unfavorably current theories regarding the coming of the Lord. The hope of His advent certainly does not of necessity lead to such discouraging conclusions with respect to the present world situation, and not all, perhaps indeed no very large proportion, of those who make this expectation the center of their teaching are opposed to treaties and leagues which tend to maintain peace. But that the number of those who take the attitude indicated is considerable, that their influence because of high character and devotion is great, and that thus many Christian people throw their weight in the scale, against rather than in favor of, one of the most Christian proposals of modern times, is probably not open to doubt.

Others approach the question without these presuppositions, but give an answer which is much to the same effect, and which, so far as it controls religious thought, destroys its power to secure social and national righteousness. Jesus Christ, it is agreed, is the Prince of Peace, and he brought peace, even at the cost of his sacrificial death. But how is that peace to be obtained? Only by faith in Him and union with Him. That peace can be entered by the door of regeneration alone. It must be an inner experience. He whose service is perfect freedom, must set up His throne in the heart, and the kingdom of God will thus be established. As compared with this, all else is merely external. Better social relations, arrangements for securing justice between man and man, government by the consent of the governed, fair and

honorable dealings between nations—all this is good in its way; but there can be no real and lasting peace on earth until Christ is everywhere enthroned as Lord of all.

Now with these statements, so far as they concern the relations of the individual to the Father in heaven, I most fully agree. But if the practical application of them is, that all social reform, all attempts to establish that righteousness that exalteth a nation, and all agreements between different governments by which force shall be made to give place to reason, must be deferred until all men are converted, then surely these are hard sayings. There were many Christian men in this country in what John Fiske calls the Critical period of American History. The States had gained their independence, but were united only by sentiment and by representation in a congress which had no power to enforce its decrees. Jealousies and divergent interests were driving them apart. There was danger that after having fought as brothers in arms, the patriots might have to fight one another, and Liberty should devour her own children. The lovers of God and of their country believed then that the way to cure the distempers of the body politic was to form a more perfect union—an external, political arrangement—and to accomplish this object the constitution was adopted. But had these devout souls reasoned as some reason now, they would have said, “It is useless to seek peace by legal enactments, by paper constitutions, by the meetings of representative bodies and the establishment of courts. True peace can come only when the people of America seek it through the atonement of the Cross.” And could they have looked into the future and foreseen the war of the Sixties, they would have felt that their scepticism concerning the new proposals was triumphantly vindicated. But no one doubts that if the fathers of our land had acted upon such pessimistic considerations, one of the greatest forward steps for freedom and for righteousness would have been prevented.

At bottom the issue involved, as it seems to me, is this: Has the gospel an application to social and governmental affairs, as well as to the individual? It is hard to see upon what principle this wider application of the principles of Jesus can be denied. There is certainly a Christian way in which the employer can deal with his employee and the employee with his employer. There is a Christian way of approaching the problems of the wages of toil, and of the rewards of capital, of rents and of railroad rates. The teachings of the Master have a bearing on marriage and divorce, on the use of riches and the care of the poor, on the division of society into classes and castes with their arrogant exclusiveness, on business combinations and labor unions, on strikes and lock-outs as methods of settling disputes.

And just as certainly great national affairs need the illumination that comes from that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. There is nothing in the nature of a bill, even concerning the tariff or taxation, which makes it entirely independent of the law of Christ. If all public officials, from the President to the Sheriff and the Justice of the Peace, would habitually, before they settle their problems, ask themselves, What would Jesus do? they would not be asking an irrelevant question, and our public life would be greatly elevated. Happy the people whose legislators make laws and whose judges enforce them "As ever in their great Task-Master's eye." There is a sense in which, to quote the title of Dean Freemantle's well-known book, *The World is the Subject of Redemption*.

The gospel has a personal and individual aspect; it also has a social aspect. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind"—that is personal and individual. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"—that is social. The first petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name," may be regarded as having to do only with the suppliant and his God. But when we

say, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are brought into relation with the needy and sinful world. There are those who have exaggerated one side of the teaching of Jesus at the expense of the other, but that is no reason why we should not hold the balance of truth and teach both applications of the divine revelation. In recent times there have been preachers who avowedly confine themselves to the social message of the New Testament, and the inevitable result is that the gospel is robbed of its power, and that even its social appeal becomes "weary, flat, stale and unprofitable." That is one extreme. The other is represented by a pastor who excused his indifference toward the efforts to maintain a certain righteous law in a State where corrupt influences were rampant, by saying, "I preach regeneration, not reform." For my part, I venture to affirm that the man whose message makes any approach to the breadth of the Evangel, will preach regeneration *and* reform.

This position is by no means weakened, if we concede that the personal side of the gospel is primary and fundamental, that it makes its appeal first of all to the individual. That was Jesus' method. He gave little attention to organization. He studiously refused to interfere in governmental affairs. His plan of producing better social conditions was to convert men and women and inspire them to elevate the life of the community and the state. But if the individual side of the Christian life is primary, the social is inseparable from it. A soul cannot develop in a vacuum. Our powers of thought and expression, our characters, the whole man in each of us, can grow only by contact with the external world and with other personalities. We are not the helpless creatures of our environment, but we could not have become what we are except in our environment. And it is the teaching of the New Testament that saved and sanctified souls can elevate their environment, can change evil conditions in society and nation, and that if they have no such influence, the salt has lost its savor.

Perhaps this truth has been somewhat obscured for us, by certain unjustifiable inferences which are sometimes drawn from the doctrine of the separation of Church and State. That each has its own realm and should keep strictly to it, is a position which is accepted with all its consequences in this paper. I am quite ready to confess that Ministerial Associations and Church courts have often stultified themselves and weakened their influence, by unwise interference in governmental affairs. But it would be absurd to say that matters which cannot be reached by ecclesiastical law, are for that reason outside the pale of the law of Christ. The Kingdom of God is a bigger and greater thing than the organized church. It is the ideal, for the attainment of which the church is one of the means, doubtless the most important of all, but not the sole means. Every functionary of government, as he meets the responsibilities of his position, ought to be controlled by the principles of the Master. The powers that be—secular as well as ecclesiastical—are ordained of God, and the ruler is a minister of God.

Others hesitate to give cordial support to plans for social and national betterment, because they question whether the men with whom these originated were Christians, whether the atmosphere in which they first sprang to life was such as a devoted follower of the Master could breathe freely. Does the instrument in question acknowledge God and the Lord Jesus Christ? Were the men who wrote it members of the visible church? Was the Conference in which it was prepared, opened with prayer? Now it would be extremely gratifying if such questions could always be answered in the affirmative. But, though the personal attitude to the Lord Jesus is the all important matter, is it not somewhat presumptuous, in dealing with a question which concerns the external relations of men, to attempt to analyze the motives and estimate the spiritual standing of responsible leaders. Who can read the heart but God only? The Lord Jesus refuses to stop the work of the man of whom the disciples complained that "he followeth not us." On a question

of public policy it is sufficient to raise the query, Does the plan proposed make for righteousness? We should have had to wait long for the prohibition of the iniquitous liquor traffic if we had insisted that no help should be allowed except from those whose names were on the Church registers.

I strongly affirm, then, that the gospel has an application to the social and national life, and that victories for righteousness in these spheres are its triumphs. And if this be true, we can certainly take one step in advance and say that the law of Christ has a direct bearing upon international affairs, that if the ruler is the minister of God in his dealings with the people over whom he is set, he is no less responsible to the King of Kings as to his relations with the governments of other lands. The powers that be have certain responsibilities that individuals do not have, so that they may rightly punish, and take away the liberty or even the life, of the enemies of society, but broadly speaking, nations have no more license to violate moral law than their citizens. National selfishness, to which an exaggerated patriotism easily leads, is not different in principle from personal selfishness. "Our country, right or wrong," may be good politics but it is bad ethics, and means the condemnation of James Russell Lowell for his attitude toward the Mexican War, and of David Lloyd-George for opposition to British policy in South Africa a generation ago. "America first" is, with the change of names, a pretty fair rendering of "*Deutschland ueber alles*."

What indeed was the meaning of the great World War for us and our allies, unless it was a protest against the unspeakable theory that nations in their relations to one another are not bound by the moral law? The leading Ambassador of our government has made the shameful statement that we did not enter that conflict to make the world safe for democracy, but only to save ourselves. The soldiers who did the fighting have very emphatically repudiated this base charge. Even now, when the idealism

of those days of danger has so largely evaporated, it is worth while to recall that the military autocracy which controlled the central powers of Europe, virtually avowed the abominable doctrine that might makes right, lightly designated treaties as scraps of paper, and in effect insisted that the most flagitious acts of violence and oppression could be justified on the plea of strategic necessity. And they acted upon this atheistic, Nietzschean philosophy. And so there was an orgy of horrors that recalled the practices of the Assyrians of old, or of the most savage of North American Indians, except that the work was more highly organized, more thoroughly done, more scientific. They needlessly bombed cathedrals, cut down forests, poisoned wells, wreaked such destruction upon mines that they will be useless for a generation; and they took innocent citizens as hostages and put them to death for alleged crimes of which they knew nothing, they carried thousands into captivity like the ancient oppressors of Israel, they committed the vilest enormities against women and children. And that infamous doctrine, thus put into practice, was the thing which determined America to draw the sword. The occasion which led to the declaration of war was doubtless certain very flagrant violations of our rights and the entrance upon a settled policy which meant a continuance of such violations; the cause was the defiance of the laws of God and man by the "Potsdam gang," their virtual assertion that Christianity has nothing to do with the relations of nations.

Now surely we have failed to learn the lesson of that cataclysm in which civilization was almost overwhelmed, if we are not willing to confess that there is a Christian way in which nations should deal with nations. A people can no more avoid relations with other peoples, than can a man be absolutely independent of other men. No country liveth to itself. If our government should attempt to make this a hermit nation, as some of our leaders seem to desire, the church of God would prevent it; for it has its missionaries in almost every country, Heathen lands have

been claimed for God, their soil has been rendered sacred by the graves of saints, and no administration dare be pusillanimous enough to refuse at least some measure of protection to its citizens who are messengers of life in these far-flung fields. Our land always has had, and will still have, understandings and treaties with other lands. There may be reasonable differences of opinion as to how far these should go. There are matters which do not concern us and in which we ought not to become entangled. But we cannot stand alone, and if we could, it would surely not be the Christian attitude.

For these reasons, the objections which devoted churchmen often make to schemes for social reform, for national improvement, or for international friendship, make little impression upon me except one of astonishment and bewilderment. It is true that the gospel appeals primarily to individuals, and that its influence upon society and government must be exerted through men and women who have caught its spirit. There is a measure of truth in the statement that as long as human hearts are evil, we shall have misunderstandings and crimes and those hatreds and passions which lead to war. This is only to make the indisputable assertion that the source of all our woe is sin. But if we must defer all attempts to better conditions around us until sin is banished, the prospect is depressing. That would condemn all external law and all government, as well as treaties and leagues, on the ground that all alike reach only the symptoms, and offer no cure for the deep malady that causes them. But the fact is that it is only because of the presence of sin that we require any of our social and political arrangements. There will be no need of charity organizations, of courts and legislatures, or of alliances to secure peace, in the Celestial City. The sort of logic with which we have been dealing would, if carried to its legitimate conclusions, leave no place at all now or hereafter for enactments and institutions to promote righteousness and to prevent violence and wrong. These half measures are

not allowable until the evil heart that is in all of us, is cleansed and purified; when all hearts are cleansed and purified, they will be useless. Such is the *impasse* into which we are driven by such singular reasoning. In opposition to all this, I insist that the spirit of Christ may be manifested in social arrangements, in governmental policies, and in the relations of nations one to another; and that in all these realms we should seek to place Him on the throne.

It remains to consider, in a more positive manner, the question whether the ideal of a league to enforce peace, can be pronounced Christian. That I may not seem to sail under false colors, I should here perhaps make a damaging admission. I confess that I have been, and still am, an admirer of the Hon. Woodrow Wilson, of course, "on this side idolatry," and that I think the rejection of the Treaty of Versailles was a deplorable blunder, from the consequences of which we are likely to suffer long. This, in the present state of public opinion, will no doubt be "caviare to the general." At any rate our relation to the treaty of Versailles is no longer a living issue. That instrument was far from perfect, but that need now give us no concern. We have made an agreement with Germany by which we are to receive all the benefits of the pact which the Senate refused to ratify, while we shoulder none of its responsibilities. Thus we have lost nothing, unless it be that intangible abstraction called Honor, and can let bygones be bygones. We are in a position to view the question without prejudice, if we will.

First of all, then, I hold it to be an unassailable position, that war is not the Christian method of settling international disputes. This is not to say that war is never justifiable. There may be conflicts, especially defensive conflicts, which cannot be avoided without the poltroonery of weakly allowing the right to be trampled down by brute force. There may be holy wars; the one from which we are just recovering was a holy war, if, as we believed, we were fighting to make the world safe for democracy,

and not merely to save ourselves. When a nation can be so led astray by evil leaders that it turns bandit and starts on a career of robbery and plunder, it must, for the sake of peace, be halted in its course. The sword is the only weapon that is available in such a situation.

But considered in itself, war is the most unreasonable, unfair, and unchristian of all arbiters in any difficulty. Its appeal is to might, not to right. We have no assurance that its decisions will be just; rather we know they often have been unjust. Napoleon impiously thought that God was always on the side of the strongest battalions. Many a true patriot has died on the gallows, branded as a traitor, only because his enemy defeated him in battle. Many an evil cause has won renown and been celebrated in song and story, just because it succeeded. So haphazard and unsatisfactory is resort to the method of the jungle, that the increasing purpose which runs through the ages, and maintains itself in spite of human folly and madness, can be accounted for only as the purpose of a God who can make even the wrath of man to praise him.

"Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the
Word; .

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim un-
known,

Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His
own."

—Lowell.

Since war then is irrational and unjust, we have surely reached such a stage of civilization that we should be willing to make an experiment with a different plan. And the only other plan that one can well think of is that of common counsels, of friendly agreements, of the submission of disputes to arbitration, with the desire to secure justice and not the mere triumph of might—in a word, a League of Nations. That that is the Christian ideal is evident, not so much from any single statement of the Master, as from the spirit of all his teachings. It is some approach to the prophet's dream of Jerusalem

exalted, of all nations flowing unto it, of Jehovah teaching them his ways, judging and arbitrating for them, so that they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. It would give some reasonable assurance that in coming to decisions, justice would not be forgotten, though no human tribunal can be infallible.

It may be objected that, as no stream can rise higher than its source, so no alliance of sinful selfish men, or of nations made up of such men, can afford any greater certainty of the triumph of right, than their separation into groups, that ten million fools cannot be expected to be the source of wisdom. Such a criticism can be made against the whole theory of democracy, indeed has been made by that man of genius, Thomas Carlyle. Of course, it is true to this extent that absolute fairness and perfectly equal treatment of all is not attainable, even when legislators and judges are honest and incorruptible—much less when they are dishonest and venal, as they too often are. But more than a century of history in an imperfect democracy in this favored land has proved to all who have eyes to see, that the rule of all the people combined does secure a measure of order and tranquility which could never be maintained by isolated communities, that states once jealous, discordant, belligerent, have, except for four terrible years, been kept at peace, and every true American is confident that that peace will now be permanent. Men are still imperfect and likely to think most of their own interests, even when they meet to make treaties and form alliances, but assuming that all high ideals, all generous feelings, all sense of honor, were lacking in the Parliament of Men, the Federation of the World, self-interest in the different groups would tend to neutralize itself. It might be thought to the advantage of one nation to seize the territory of another, but it would be to the advantage of the other to resist that claim, and it would be to the advantage of still others who might suffer in their turn from such violence to raise their voices against it. Such common counsel and adjudication of differences is

the only substitute for the arbitrament of the sword, and there can be no doubt as to which plan accords with the spirit of the gospel.

Agreements looking to limitation of armaments are causes for thankfulness especially when the peoples of the world are groaning under the burdens of taxation. Such plans are good as far as they go. But the absolute disarmament of nations is not desirable as long as there are powers that may become a menace to their neighbors, just as any community in which there are criminals—and what community is free from them?—would do an unwise thing if it took away the revolvers and batons of its police. Preparations for war can be made with considerable speed, and our hope must depend, not on the scrapping of weapons, but on the removal of the misunderstandings and strifes which breed war.

Arrangements for the limitation of armament, then, if they be nothing more than that, are of no great value except in relieving the tax-payers of the load which military establishments bind upon their shoulders. Suppose A, B and C, who are suspicious of one another, carry respectively twelve, nine and six revolvers. Such a number will be a burden and an expense. If they mutually agree to limit their armaments by two-thirds, that will be a relief to them. But as long as A has four revolvers, B three, and C two, the prospect for peace has not brightened, unless their consultation about the limitations of armament has led them to understand one another and to become friends. If the Conference meeting at Washington as I write shall serve to allay suspicions and to create confidence among the nations there represented, above all if arrangements be made for meetings of the same sort at fixed intervals, it will have done a greater thing than the scrapping of certain ships and the reduction of land forces; it may be the beginning of a League of Nations—no, I have forgotten myself, An Association of Nations. At any rate, I am of Juliet's mind,

“That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

This is a germ from which something great may yet develop. What form shall be given to it, what its relations shall be to the existing League of Nations, are questions for the future to solve. It seems certain, however, that an effective "Association of Nations" must be able, in an emergency, so to direct the power of its members as to compel the submission of an outlaw nation. The mere existence of this power would, it is to be hoped, usually be sufficient to prevent an unprovoked onslaught of a robber people, but to have this moral effect there should be no doubt of the ability to exert the force required. This seems to have been the opinion of President Roosevelt, expressed, of course, before the matter became a political issue.

For it must be recognized that there have been, and may again be, governments whose policy is a menace to their neighbors and to the peace of the world. Edmund Burke said that he did not know how to draw an indictment against a whole people, but again and again has an autocratic ruling class been able to sway vast populations, composed for the most part of honest, well-meaning men and women, and to make them the instruments of tyranny and oppression. Military cabals care little for the moral condemnation of the universe, if they can secure the spoils of victory, but if that moral condemnation be expressed in economic pressure, or at the last extremity, in the alliance of other powers against them, they will pause. Bismarck took care to provide against hostile combinations, before he entered on his predatory wars. Had the Kaiser known at the start that he would have to fight all the *entente* which finally was arrayed against him, he would probably not have invaded Belgium. We need, it would seem, nothing less than a league to enforce peace.

But at this point, unfortunately, we encounter prejudices which have been embittered because they have become an issue between political parties. The Treaty of Versailles was no doubt defeated in large part because of the cry that it set up a super-government—a cry which

was reiterated until it was believed. It is indeed doubtful whether it provided sufficient means to align the forces of civilization against an empire that is bent on plunder. However that may be, it evidently went too far in this direction for public opinion in our land. An exaggerated nationalism, which calls itself patriotism though it is really selfishness, is perhaps the greatest barrier in the way of the coming of peace. Officially we have in effect said that we are not our brothers' keeper. And so we refuse to be parties to any agreement by which nations of good will could effectively say to an aggressor, Thus far shalt thou come but no farther.

But we cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to have at the same time the benefits of association with other powers and the benefits of isolation; and world peace belongs in the former category. Every treaty into which we enter, limits our freedom of action in so far as it makes any promise as to what we shall do. But a pact by which we consent to compel recalcitrant powers to keep order, if necessary using force, would, it seems probable, be condemned by public opinion at the present time. We have still to learn the lesson, even after more than a century of modern missions for one thing, that in spite of differences in race, in language, and in government, we are members one of another. God grant that it may not be necessary that the world should again be plunged into awful war, to teach us this Christian ideal.