

Christianity and International Politics.

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WHILE the issues of the present world-conflict are still undecided, and all men are anxiously scanning the details of battle and diplomacy, it may be well worth our while to emphasize the real principle at stake and to gauge the future in the light of the vast moral gains already achieved. I propose here to show that the allied nations are fighting, not merely for national right and liberty, nor even for democratic institutions, but, above all, for the establishment of a true Internationalism—that long-neglected ideal of Christianity; and further, that this war, appalling as it is, has already forced this ideal into a prominence it has never hitherto attained.

In the religious history of the world there have been three well-marked stages—savage or Tribal Religion, civilized National Religion, and finally Universal or International Religion. And to these correspond the three stages of morals—Tribal morality, National morality, and International morality.

First, in primitive tribal religion, the gods are merely local spirits of capricious character, and morality is little more than tribal custom. The ideal of the tribesman is to serve his chief or his tribe; and since he sees nothing but hostile forces in the world outside, his rule of conduct is, Destroy or be destroyed. Do all the good you can to your tribesmen, and all the harm you can to others. Be loyal to your chief and your clan, and for their sakes hate, crush, kill, or enslave the men, women, and children of other clans. While there is a genuine morality in such principles, it is exceedingly limited in scope: the same ideal which calls for loyalty, love, and faithful service within the tribe authorizes equally the exhibition of the opposite qualities—disloyalty, malice, and treachery—to all outside the tribe.

Then came the nations with their national religions, and their national ideals of morality. Take, for example, the ancient Persian, the Greek, the Brahmanic, the Jewish, or the Mohammedan religion. In all of these national religion and political nationhood grew up together. Thus it was in the enthusiasm of their Brahmanic faith that the Punjab tribes united for the conquest of India, and, spreading themselves over the lands of the Ganges, grew into a mighty nation. It was in the name of national religion that Saul and David

united the tribes of Israel, and made Jerusalem the political and religious centre of their people. So it was in the name of Islam brotherhood and of Allah, the one god, that the tribes of Arabia were brought together under Mahomet's sceptre, and developed a power that astonished the world. This development from tribal separateness to the larger unity of the nation carried necessarily with it the widening of the circle of moral obligation: the duties of brotherhood, faithfulness, and justice were now exercised on a much wider scale; and tribal morality gave place to national morality, tribal loyalty to national patriotism. A striking illustration of this development, and the new moral principle involved, is found in the teaching of the Greek philosopher Plato, when in his *Republic* he gives voice to the growing national sentiment of his country.¹ He pleads that the Greek states bear in mind that they have a common mother, the land of Greece, and observe the same religious rites; and that it is scandalous to treat any neighbouring Greek state after the manner of barbarians. When Greeks go to war with any barbarian people they may act without restraint, may devastate their land, burn their houses, and make them slaves. But when Greeks go to war with Greeks—that is not war properly speaking, but only civil discord, a conflict between natural friends. And in such conflict there must be neither wanton devastation of land nor destruction of houses, nor enslavement of captives; but as far as possible the single aim should be the punishment of the wrongdoers who originated the war. This protest of Plato illustrates the notable advance from local to the wider national morality, and it shows at the same time the inevitable limitations of a sentiment that is merely national. The virtues of local loyalty have now been widened into the larger patriotism. But beyond this wider circle of loyalties lies the still wider circle of relations to the rest of the world—to barbarians who have no rights and against whom all methods of war are justifiable. National morality retains, while reinterpreting, the old principle, Thou

¹ Cf. bk. v. chap. xvi. While possessing a national religion, Greece remained split up into little states, and never quite attained to political nationhood. Plato represents the wider ideal of the national consciousness.

shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. Love your fellow-Greeks, but hate the barbarians; love your fellow-Jew, but hate all Gentiles; love your brother-Moslem, but hate the infidels who reject the faith of Mahomet. We know how the principle was duly carried into practice. The Jew exterminated the Canaanite without pity; the Greek Alexander the Great made his tour of conquest in Asia; Rome sought her place in the sun, and enlarged successfully her national empire; while Islam later made almost world-wide conquest. Beyond the national borders no right or binding law was yet recognized; and thus the same people who could deal justly and generously with their fellow-countrymen could also without scruple deceive, rob, and murder those of other nationalities, and even feel that they were serving their gods in so doing.

Then came the third stage of religious history, in what is commonly called Universal or International religion. Of the religions that claim to be universal, one may safely say that Christianity is the only one that counts among the progressive peoples of to-day; for Christianity alone is positive and universal—positive, because it reaffirms the value of all home and tribal and patriotic loyalties, and yet universal, because its ideal is wide as humanity. Christianity was never a merely national religion; indeed, it was rejected from the first by the very nation from which it sprang. It distinctly set aside the old principle of national religion, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy'; it demanded from all men and on behalf of all men the exercise of justice, respect, faithful and helpful dealing. In Christianity the former limitation in the area of moral requirement has been absolutely removed; in Christ there is no distinction of Jew or Greek, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman, for all human relations whatever are to be pervaded by His Spirit.

One cannot but ask why Christianity as an international ideal has done so little to realize its universal aim. Indeed, there are many who fail to see any progress at all, and who pessimistically conclude from the present aspect of the world that Christianity has failed—failed as an effective power in the life of nations. A little patient survey of past history will, I think, lead us to an opposite—and much more hopeful—conclusion.

Look back for a moment to the rise of the modern nations of Europe. With the dissolution

of the Roman Empire under the crushing invasions of the northern barbarians, the old civilization gradually crumbled to pieces. For centuries chaos and anarchy prevailed; learning and science disappeared. The world had practically to begin the civilizing process over again. From this welter of ignorance and anarchy sprang first the feudal system, based on a network of personal loyalties. These loyalties were so weakly co-ordinated that petty wars everywhere prevailed. From this again grew up, with a developing national sentiment, the system of the modern nations, which were able to maintain peace and enforce justice within their several borders. And all this time Christianity was like the leaven, working slowly but surely through the centuries, enlarging the individual's outlook, and widening the circle of his loyalties, until now the patriotic sentiment has practically absorbed all minor and local considerations. In other words, Christianity has been lifting men up from barbarism to the stage of conduct already described as an ideal by national religion, which demands within the nation the recognition of mutual rights and obligations, and the relegation of all differences between individuals to courts of justice. But now the further ideal is being forcibly presented to us by Christianity as an international religion, and the special task laid on Christendom to-day is to bring its international relations into harmony with the laws that govern *inner-national* relations. The issue before us is clear. The old principle that right is might within the state, and that might is right elsewhere, is challenged by Christianity, which calls us to respect the rights of man universally, and to serve our country within the limits of our service to humanity.

I wish now to show that the international ideal has made wonderful progress in modern times; and further that this terrible world-war opens up the prospect of realizing Christianity to a degree that was never before possible in the history of the world.

In the first place, there has been gradually developing in the last century and a half a new international conscience. In theory at least the modern world has set aside the old nationalist principle that law and morality hold good only in civil relations, and that beyond the bounds of the nation might is right. We know that might is not right; that rights and obligations are universal, and that every one is summoned to respect the rights of humanity whether within or without the circle of

his own nationality. What else was meant by the declaration of the American States that 'all men are born free and equal'? What else meant the strong assertion of the French Republic that the end of all national associations is to preserve 'the natural and imprescriptible rights of man'? For these were declared to be the rights, not of Americans or of Frenchmen merely, but of man universally! And while Great Britain has never passed through such a crisis that it needed to restate its principles, there is scarcely a man among the people of that great Empire who does not cordially respond to the same sentiments. Even Germany before the war was advancing to the recognition of the same universal principles. Its greatest poet, Goethe, had so little sympathy with a narrow nationalism that he regarded it as a mere remnant of barbarism, and declared that 'national hate is strongest and most violent where there is the lowest degree of culture.' And its greatest philosopher, Kant, has emphasized the rights of humanity and the duty of man to man. He even characterizes as a 'monster' the state which seeks to aggrandize itself at the expense of its neighbours, and in his essay on Peace presents the ideal of a free States-Union, a great republic of free united nations where all despotism will be overthrown, and a new era of justice and international peace will become possible.

Not only has Christianity found new expression for its ideal of international morality, but practical evidence is not lacking that the ideal was beginning to permeate the actual relations of the modern states. For one thing, the necessities of commerce and the enlarging opportunities of commerce were bringing the nations nearer; for commerce demands mutual trust. The Church has also achieved much by its active missionary efforts, by international religious conferences, and by generous aid given to the weaker communities of other lands. The alliance of the forces of Labour has also done much to bring the nations together, and to remove some of the false barriers of nationalism. And international diplomacy has gradually followed suit. The imminent danger of war has been averted once and again by international arbitration; and the Hague conferences have made a modest contribution to the same end by evolving a definite code of international law. All these signs gave good ground for the belief that the international morality demanded by an

international religion was making slow but comfortable progress.

Then—like a bolt from the blue—came this incredible war—devastating and withering the life of humanity. And as we follow with straining mind and quivering heart the outward stages of the awful conflict, it almost seems at times as though the age of barbarism had returned and the tide of human progress were set back for centuries. But several considerations lead to a more comforting conclusion, namely, that this wanton war which weighs as a nightmare on the heart of the world has forced the ideal of international morality to the front, and is thus accomplishing what might have taken centuries to accomplish by the slow processes of normal development.

In the first place, the Christian ideal has advanced immeasurably since the war began, and has triumphed to a degree that four years ago would not have been thought possible.

As General Smuts said in his London address, 'The battle-front is not merely on sea and land: the true battle-front of this war is in the soul of the nations.' We live in two worlds—the world of ideas and the world of conduct; and we are fighting a double war—a war of ideals and a war of guns. Looking at the inner side of the war, we find two theories in conflict. One is the theory I have presented as that of Christianity, namely, that international morality and good faith are the only foundations of progress and peace. The other—call it Prussianism, Pan-Germanism, militarism, jingoism, or what you will—is the theory that in international relations there is no moral law but the law of the strongest, so that might is right, and treachery and fraud and frightfulness are necessary and justifiable. Now can we doubt as to which of these ideals has prevailed in the soul of the nations? Looked at from this point of view, Prussianism is already doomed: the war of ideals has been fought and won! Place these opposing ideals before the bar of the world's opinion to-day—the national ideal with its obverse counterpart of barbarism, cruelty, and frightfulness, and the international ideal which calls for justice and equity between state and state. Can we doubt that the emphatic judgment of mankind is to-day in favour of the universal ideal? One may fairly question whether even Germany is an exception. The rank scum of literature which to-day professes

to represent the German mind cannot be rightly so regarded; nor can any one who knows Germany and the Germans believe that the dominating sentiments of the militarist and imperial party have permanently obliterated the more Christian sentiments of the nation. These better elements have been meanwhile forced to silence—the press is gagged—the universities all but closed; but no one can believe that the better soul of the people is dead. It may burst its fetters soon: I can imagine that there will yet be an explosion in that country that will sweep away the Pan-German ideal, and the accursed rulers that have tried to impose it on the people. But without building any argument on such a desirable consummation, one may safely assert that the world as a whole was never so much in earnest as it is to-day in regard to international ideals. Previous to this war the world was only playing with practical international problems; and the Hague conferences were not sufficiently backed by public opinion and authority to accomplish more than pious resolutions. These resolutions were doubtless of value; for the nations engaged themselves, once they happened to be at war, to conduct the war like gentlemen and not like beasts. But they did not yield any means of dealing with a state which wantonly broke the international peace; and there was no established united authority to reduce such a lawless state to submission. Public opinion is now demanding, as never before, that some international federation or league be established, whereby lawless states may be brought to judgment, and not only pilloried at the bar of opinion, but punished by international power.

But there is another fact revealed in the present situation, and obvious to those who can read the signs of the times. Not only has the international ideal acquired new force in public opinion; not only is there such a demand for international federation that even the German authorities are constrained to pay it a professed homage; but the ideal is already being *realized in practice*.

How do we expect international federation to come into being? Surely not at a stroke of the pen by some magnanimous and unanimous agreement of all nations! There must be at least one preliminary stage, in which some of the more powerful states ally themselves with a view to establishing a world-wide federation, and band themselves meanwhile to propagate the ideal among

other nations and to defend it if necessary by force of arms. It must come partially into existence before it can hope to be completely realized.

Can any one fail to see that this first stage has been reached, and that this war, instigated by nationalist aspirations, has really brought internationalism into being? It has brought into existence what no Hague conference was able to achieve—the first powerful federation of nations for the vindication of justice between state and state, the first serious alliance for the maintenance of the rights and liberties of all states and the punishment of aggressors. Not only has the great majority of states joined this federation, but even those which have failed to join it remain neutral because of their political situation rather than because of indifference or hostility. And further, when we consider how the allied nations have pooled their resources in this conflict, as well as their aims and ideals, and with what marvellous unanimity they have sunk their separate interests for the sake of world-wide justice, we can no longer doubt that internationalism has taken one mighty step forward to its goal. It is only because our minds are intent on the backward and forward turn of events in this terrible war that we fail to see so clearly as we might that *international federation is actually in process of formation*.

This war, then, marks the beginning of a new era in the world's history. Its issues are no longer doubtful, though the measure of the success of the allied nations must still depend on the thoroughness of their preparations and the determination they put into the conflict.

As President Wilson says, 'We are at the beginning of an age when it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among Nations that are observed among Individual citizens.' This war is going to make an end of false and self-interested nationalism: it has done something already to transform the dreams of our seers and poets into reality—the dreams of international federation, international justice and peace.

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that;
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that.