

NATIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

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ONE of the significant facts of modern life is that nationalism, as we knew it in the days before 1914, is dead. There have been various efforts to revive the corpse, indeed there is one being attempted at present in Germany, but the revival can have no more reality than the application of a galvanic battery to a frog's leg. There will be a kick while the electricity is flowing, a simulation of life, but there can be no reality beyond the reality of the current. Nations can no longer live self-centred lives. We may not like this fact, in truth it is highly probable that most of us do not, but we are forced to accept it by the logic of events.

The rise and breakdown of nationalism is an interesting field for the historian. Its rise came with the Renaissance, when people began to feel their intellectual oats, and at the same time conquered the sea. Then it was that the Western World turned from competition between individuals for the gaining of honest and comfortable livings, to competition between nations for world power. The ideal shifted from the individual to a collection of individuals bound together by a loyalty to a leader, and from a competition which had at its heart co-operation between brothers to a competition which had at its heart exploitation of enemies.

With the discovery of the New World came a new conception of the value of national seapower as a means of exploitation. The Spaniards without doubt were interested in saving the immortal souls of the Indians. They said so, and we can accept the word of honourable men. But they were also interested in the gold of the Indies, and they could exploit that golden horde only by working together as a State, rather than by engaging in individual expeditions. It might indeed be argued that Spain was forced into modern nationhood by Drake on the Spanish Main, and that the birth of modern England took place in the English Channel, with the Armada acting as accoucheur. Seapower for the control of trade welded factions together as nations.

Having achieved power and wealth through trade, the nations proceeded to set up nationalism as a god to be worshipped. See what prosperity the nation has brought us, they said. The seas are clear of those scoundrelly Portuguese, and our ships are daily bringing us ivory, apes and peacocks. Nationalism is the great god, and trade is its prophet. No more than those who rode the

crest of the bull market in 1929 did they ask whether power and wealth were good things to have, or whether they were worth their price. They had them, and asked no questions about them.

The rise of nationalism was helped by the disruption of the Church in the West. As long as people went to the same church every Sunday, they could not get very far apart during the following week. The Catholic Church had its faults during the medieval years, and no one can deny it, but it had one virtue which outweighed all its faults. It tied men together into one great brotherhood, in which the petty things of life could be submerged. It stood for the unity of all men at the foot of the Cross. At the Reformation this unity was lost, and the theory of national Churches, at war with one another in the intellectual field, took the place of the theory of a single brotherhood at war with the evil in men's souls. Whether the Reformation was a good thing or a bad thing is too large a question to discuss here. The only point to be made is that one of its results was to assist the rise of nationalism bent upon exploitation.

From the time of the rise of Spain until 1914, nationalism continued steadily on its way, changing neither methods nor ideals. If anyone thinks that there were fundamental changes in these years, the capture of the Philippines during the Spanish-American War provides an illuminating incident. This was a bit of international piracy which is particularly charming because it provided a competition between two pirates, each bent upon stealing a valuable property from a neighbour who had not the strength to nail it down. If that imperialistic genius, Assistant-Secretary Theodore Roosevelt, had not grabbed them, it is certain that the Islands would have fallen into the hands of that equally sound exponent of the doctrine of take-what-is-lying-around-loose, William of Germany. We speak of Drake and Hawkins as buccaneers, as we look back at them through the vista of the centuries. It will be interesting to discover what the opinion of history will be concerning Roosevelt and Lodge, and above all concerning McKinley, who sincerely felt that he was commanded by God to annex the Philippines to the United States. The reason for their annexation was a trade reason. Power in the Pacific meant more commerce with the Far East, and therefore more prosperity and wealth for the United States. Nationalism has changed neither its ideals nor its methods.

The Great War was in its essence an attempt upon the part of the Central Powers to exploit the rest of the world. There were other, and secondary, motives behind it, but this one stands out

clear and plain. Germany in particular had been neglected in the distribution of the world in general among the world Powers, and Germany attempted in the good old-fashioned way to make up for that neglect. She was intent to take by force of arms her share in the exploitation of undeveloped countries and subject peoples. The old theory of international piracy was frank and open in her attitude.

There is this to be said for that attitude. The Great War was between pirate and pirate. Her opponents might be shocked by the war methods of Germany; but they could not be shocked by her ideals, since these ideals had been common property of all nations since the sixteenth century. Conquering countries first, and discussing the rights of man afterward, has been the regular programme of nationalism, which has fed upon the breakdown of the rights of others to its own aggrandizement.

The real victim of the Great War was nationalism. In the common defeat of friend and foe, the world learned that the old formula did not work. Fighting for control of trade... fighting for future prosperity... broke down, and all the nations were overwhelmed by a common economic disaster. The world is discovering, some twelve years after the event, that hitting your neighbour over the head and stealing his corn is not, in the long run, as good a proposition for you as giving him fair value in exchange for it. It is discovering that co-operation is better than competition, and that brotherhood pays in hard cash as well as in pleasant feeling.

With this conviction, which has been growing deeper year by year since the war, until at last it has made it possible for delegates to sit around a council table without the nations pounding upon it with their fists, has come a realization of the unity of the world. This has been shown within the past few months very clearly in the matter of war debts. The nations have realized that the exploitation of Germany cannot continue. They see that what is morally wrong is also bad business, and that the only future for Europe lies in a recognition of all nations as a single brotherhood, working together for mutual advantage. This also controls the official attitude of the United States, with its insistence upon reduction of armaments before the question of war debts due to her can be reduced. Nations cannot arm against each other in this modern world, simply because it is as poor a business proposition as it was a good one in the 16th century. We are living in a new age, and under different conditions.

This unity has also been shown in the attitude of the world toward the Japanese raid on Shanghai, which was abandoned

through the pressure upon Japan of the Great Powers. People in high positions, who ought to have known better, spoke of the moral sense of the world being shocked by this performance. The moral sense of the world was not shocked by the capture of Manila in 1898, nor is the world one bit more moral to-day than it was then. What the Great Powers realized was that Shanghai was bad business, because it was old fashioned nationalism gone on the rampage, and they quickly pointed out to Japan that it would pay her to withdraw. Though rather surprised, Japan did so.

International brotherhood, in the matter both of war debts and of the Shanghai situation, has come down out of the clouds and become practical politics. It has taken to heart the teaching of Christianity, which has always maintained that the only possible life for humanity was the life of brotherhood, both individually and nationally. "To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" is the best rule of life, even if it has taken a world war for nations to find it out.

It is easy to talk about international brotherhood, but very difficult to be an international brother, for human nature is against the idea of co-operation and always has been. Brotherhood, in either its individual or international sense, is the gift of God. It does not come by people wishing to be brothers, but by people using the power of God to help them to be brothers. This is not religious platitude, but the experience of mankind in its quest of this particular ideal. The only reason for men considering themselves as belonging to a single family is the fact of the Incarnation, since that historical event set the seal of God upon the brotherhood of man. The only place where human brotherhood has even in a limited way been realized in history has been within the international Church. This is a fact of great significance in our approach to present-day problems. The Church has made many mistakes in the past, and will make many more in the future, but she has as the very reason for her existence the binding of all mankind into a single fellowship, as sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ. Since she is the only organization which, in past history, has been able to bring this ideal into the realm of practical politics, it is reasonable to suppose that she will be of use in the rebuilding of the world on its new basis. It is even reasonable to suppose that she will be a necessary factor in this rebuilding.

The Western Church is in a difficult situation to-day. She was caught by the rising tide of nationalism in the 16th century, and she split up along national lines in a way that has ended in tragedy. The Reformation resulted in a disruption of the fellow-

ship which is obvious to any observer. There has been a steady civil war within the Church for the past three hundred years, and the end is not yet. The whole ideal of brotherhood is in danger of being lost, through the enthusiasm of the fighters for such tremendous issues as the number of lights upon a table, or the correct cut of ecclesiastical tailoring. The throwing of a stool at the minister of St. Giles's Church while he was reading prayers out of a book, instead of making them up as he went along, is the classic example of the way in which the Church as a whole has gone after false gods in the attempt of her members to serve the true One. Nor is this spirit dead. The Churches are still fighting among themselves upon issues that should have had decent burial long ago.

With the ebb of the tide of nationalism, the divided Church has been left stranded on the beach. Whatever message and influence she had for a divided world, she has none for a world that is making a brave attempt toward unity. She cannot lead toward an international brotherhood, which is her only reason for existence, until she herself becomes once more a fellowship.

That there have been attempts toward unity since the war cannot be denied, nor can it be denied that as far as the Western Church is concerned they have been singularly unsuccessful. The Roman Pontiff has thundered, and Protestantism has answered with derisive cries. The various Protestant communions have talked at one another from long range, to the edification of no one except the talkers. The Lambeth Appeal to All Christian People, issued twelve years ago, died in its cradle. Meanwhile, civilization itself is threatened through the lack of an international fellowship which a united Church alone can provide.

The war led to the establishment of a League of Nations, which is steadily making toward international unity. The present need in the religious field is an international and intersectarian League of Churches, within which the problems which have arisen through disruption can be ironed out, and which can speak with the moral authority of the whole Western Church upon the issues which are confronting the world to-day. There can be no outlawry of war until it is outlawed by the authority of the undivided Church. There can be no permanent international peace until the Peace of God is enforced by the moral authority of a united Christendom. With civilization itself in the balance, it is time for united action upon the principles which really matter to the Church of God.