

The Cultural Sphere

The Role of the Church in the Post-War World

By LISTON POPE

IN a much-discussed speech made recently at the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Archbishop of Canterbury urged that "the Church has both the right and the duty to declare the principles which should govern the ordering of society." His admonition reflects and strengthens the growing concern of the churches in Great Britain and North America, as well as in many other parts of the world, for the problems of social reconstruction. This concern has come to sharp focus in discussion of postwar possibilities and plans, under the convictions that the victory of the United Nations will bring an unparalleled opportunity for a new ordering of society and that advance preparation for meeting this opportunity is neither detrimental to the successful prosecution of the war nor premature until peace actually comes. It is urged, to the contrary, that a clear definition of peace aims (which are really inseparable from war aims) will greatly strengthen morale and will win valuable support from millions of people who are wondering about the alternative to the Nazi New Order. While many details must be left in abeyance until the concrete realities of the postwar world have become evident, the churches believe that alternatives must be surveyed and guiding principles must be formulated in advance if postwar opportunities are to be met successfully. To this end, scores of proposals and statements have already issued from religious circles, with the pronouncements of the Malvern and Delaware conferences being most influential.

No attempt will be made here to summarize in detail the thinking or the activities of the churches with respect to postwar problems, though considerable

unanimity has been attained and the task would be relatively easy. Instead, an effort will be made to depict a course of action which seems necessary and appropriate for the churches if they are to implement realistically their professions of concern for the future of society. Current attitudes of the churches provide a constant presupposition of the proposals made, but responsibility for the proposals devolves upon the writer alone.

1

First of all, the Church must accept some responsibility for the conduct and victorious outcome of the war if it is to play any decisive role in the shaping of the peace. This necessity arises both from the nature of the present struggle and from the distinctive character of the Church itself. Victory by the United Nations is no guarantee of a better society, but it is an indispensable prerequisite. Certainly the churches will have little influence over future social policies unless the Axis forces, which comprise a threat to the autonomy of the churches as well as the autonomy of nations, are decisively defeated.

The responsibility of the churches for victory must be viewed, however, in terms of the distinctive character and function of the Church. During the first World War pulpits were often transformed into recruiting stations (with God as the principal enlistee) and booths for the sale of war securities. The churches have come to feel, almost universally, that activities of this sort are incongruous with their own character and are inexpedient for the effective accomplishment of their own task in the war. Rather, the Church has two distinctive jobs to do: that of passing moral judgment on the relative merits of the

conflicting sides in the war, and that of strengthening the faith and morale of the people.

Unless it is to abdicate its position of moral responsibility, and thereby lend credence to the cynical doctrine that no moral issues are involved in the war, the Church must render direct and fearless judgments concerning the avowed purposes and known practices of the contending forces. The courage of many bishops and pastors in Germany and in the occupied countries of Europe in denouncing Nazi purposes and methods, at the risk of their very lives, has provided a shining example for their ecclesiastical brethren in other parts of the world. The churches must not hesitate to sit in judgment on the policies of the United Nations as well as the Axis in the conduct of the war. No license is given for conducting military operations from the pulpit, and none should be. But public opinion must be made aware of the moral implications of various war policies, such as indiscriminate bombing, the treatment of enemy prisoners and interned aliens, the provision of food for starving peoples, the curtailment of civil liberties, methods of rationing and of taxation, and the like. Procedures adopted for the prosecution of the war will largely determine the possibilities of the postwar society, and they must be carefully examined from the very beginning rather than justified without question as matters of military necessity.

The task of preserving moral perspectives in the midst of brute struggle is the special responsibility of the churches, and in fulfilling it they will make a significant contribution to the outcome of the war and to the shape of the peace. The morale of a nation at war can never be dissociated from well-grounded moral judgments; wars cannot be fought successfully or brought to happy issue in peace on the basis of public cynicism and blind hatred. Moral judgments which transcend the opposing forces are never irrelevant in power struggles. While every pressure demands partisan loyalties the churches must continue to uphold divine purposes and ethical standards

which transcend all nations and are common references for judgment upon them all. Confessing themselves unworthy and inadequate vehicles for the transmission of these higher standards, the churches must nevertheless seek and proclaim them or prove ultimately to have been traitors both to themselves and to their nations. As against the fascist exaltation of war as a positive good, for example, the churches must adjudge war as at best a necessary evil, a grim necessity rather than a holy crusade, justified only insofar as it promotes freedom and justice among men. When human life is cheapened while millions of bodies are piled up in Russia and on the other fighting fronts, the churches must continue to proclaim that men are sons of God, and that life has indestructible meaning and significance. As against the threat of power dominance by any class or nation, the churches must proclaim social justice and human freedom, and must remind all those who are mighty and powerful that authority is always subject to the higher authority of God.

In order to maintain their primary loyalty to God and to provide unfettered moral guidance for their nations, the churches need to preserve relative independence from the State. In total war the demand for national unity tends to reduce all autonomous institutions to a position of servitude to the government. Unless carefully guarded, this tendency leads a nation to totalitarianism even while it is fighting against totalitarianism. The Church loses its meaning when made wholly subject to the State, as the protests of numerous pastors in Germany testify. It is precisely at this point, many Protestant churches declare, that the symbolic significance of the religious conscientious objector becomes clear. Conscientious objectors comprise a very small minority within the churches—probably less than 2 per cent of the total membership in the English-speaking churches. But the Church must defend with its own life the principle for which they stand, namely, the final obedience of the individual conscience to a Power that is above all political regimes. The

conviction of the individual objector needs careful examination, but the principle to which he appeals must be upheld at all costs unless the State is to be acknowledged the final arbiter of all moral questions and the highest object of human loyalty.

The churches also have peculiar responsibility during wartime for the spiritual health of the armed forces and for the general well-being of the civilian population. Through the chaplaincy, provision of appropriate devotional materials, and the concern of individual churches for their men in the services, organized religion can do much to influence men who will be among the most potent factors in the postwar world. The character of war intensifies rather than diminishes the need for religious ministrations to the armed forces; it has been observed that there were "no atheists in the foxholes of Bataan." Of equal importance is the well-being of a civilian population upset by the exigencies of family separations and a war economy. In total war every street and home are a part of no-man's land, and the people at home are among its shock troops. To the degree that they emerge from war without the corrosions of fear and insecurity, the chances for a stable postwar order are improved. Justice for all classes and races is essential for the most effective cooperation in waging war, and is likewise an indispensable ingredient of an enduring peace.

II

The most significant contribution of the churches to world reorganization may well be that of keeping internationalism alive—an internationalism which transcends war lines and includes enemy nations with which some day the United Nations must make peace. The churches can foster an internationalist spirit in two main ways: by providing a worldwide fellowship in the Church, and by building an international ethos in which international law and institutions can grow.

The churches believe that they belong to a world fellowship at present—a fellowship which cuts across all military

barriers and exists internationally even in time of war. The World Council of Churches, organized on the eve of the war, is a symbol of the growing importance of the ecumenical movement in the life of the Church. Cooperation between various denominations and branches of Christendom has in many respects been increased rather than diminished by the impact of war. The Roman Catholic Church joins in the hope for a world-wide brotherhood among adherents of all religions, proclaiming that "love, universal, is a bridge to those not of the faith," and declaring that Catholics and non-Catholics, including Jews, can work together for the principles of a just and peaceful civilization.

Though physical communication with churches in the Axis countries has been largely severed, a community of spirit continues to bridge the lines of war. It is reported that English churches assumed responsibility for the support of German mission stations isolated from their homeland, and that German churches did the same for English missions. Prayer continues to overleap war barriers; prayer for enemies is a characteristic note in current worship. In provisions for war relief and for refugees the churches likewise manifest concern for people of all nations who have been uprooted, persecuted, and starved.

The rebuilding of an international ethos would be in keeping with the great tradition of Christendom in the Western World. Medieval civilization in the West was mainly predicated on common values and a common faith. This common heritage, resolving itself largely into dogma and depending heavily on external authorities, has been broken during the modern period of nationalism. Contemporary churches must help once again to encircle the world with common moral convictions—convictions, not dogmas or authoritarian theocracies. Only so can any system of international law or international government be expected to function effectively. As the Oxford Conference of 1937 insisted:

All law, international as well as national, must be based on a common

ethos—that is, a common foundation of moral convictions. To the creation of such a common foundation in moral conviction the Church as a supra-national society with a profound sense of the historical realities, and of the worth of human personality, has a great contribution to make.

The Church can make this contribution not only because it transcends national lines but also because of the universalism of its message. It declares that all men owe their primary allegiance to one Sovereign God who judges all nations. Under this Sovereign God all men are equal and are bound together in solidarity. Discrimination on the basis of race, nation, religion, or class is therefore presumptuous of judgment higher than God's judgment. Each man is a creation of God, and has rights more fundamental than political systems. In its universalism and in its individualism, the Church attempts to draw men together without losing the distinctive character of any individual. At the same time, the Church knows that the loyalties of men are divided and that their fellowship is broken, with the consequent necessity for regulatory and corrective institutions. In its traditional theology, therefore, the Church possesses convictions by which order and freedom may be related to each other throughout the world, and in terms of which international institutions may be justified and supported.

Other religious doctrines, if taken seriously, may contribute immeasurably to an international ethos and world reorganization. A deepened sense of sin in past selfishness may help lift the United States above reversion to isolationism. Recognition of the redemptive possibilities of sacrifice is necessary if victorious nations are to avoid using victory for self-aggrandizement. Faith in universal purposes for an ongoing history will be a powerful bulwark against postwar social reaction. Above all, the injunction to forgiveness and the insistence that vengeance belongs to the Lord must be made to ring clear when fighting ceases and the opportunity for retribution arrives. Certainly individuals who have transgressed

most of the known laws of God and man must be punished, unless devotion to social justice is to become a mockery. But such punishment must proceed from justice rather than hate. A writer in the December issue of *Harpers Magazine* warns that "Never in history has such a volume of hate been generated as will be released on Armistice Day." He fears that orderly reconstruction may be delayed for years if this hatred is allowed to run amuck, and urges that it is the peculiar mission of the churches to allay the passion for retribution which will seem so fully deserved.

III

In addition to the tasks which pertain especially to their own tradition and genius, the churches must face directly the political and economic problems of postwar reconstruction if their moral judgments and international aspirations are to be relevant. Only so can they help to imbed their principles in social reality. To be sure, churchmen are not expected to be experts in these fields, but they can probably do as well as the professionals have been able to do in the past. Further, the Church is in an especially advantageous position for receiving the testimony of the people on such matters, and for representing to the people the alternatives involved.

Many religious groups are at work already on postwar problems, studying various proposals, seeking to accumulate and disseminate factual information, and striving to arrive at general principles for a just and durable peace. All the major faiths of Britain and America have devoted special attention to such pursuits during the last two years, in keeping with a concern for world peace which has been mounting steadily in religious circles since the first World War. Pope Pius XII has made several addresses pertaining to the principles of peace; Catholic leaders in several nations have joined other religious leaders in issuing manifestoes; many branches of the Roman church have set up special committees for study and action. The Jewish communities are similarly engaged, with a special incentive

to study the relief and rehabilitation of Jews after the war. Protestant committees and conferences to date are legion in number, ranging in size from small groups in local churches to large representative gatherings at Malvern and Delaware.

If judged by their public statements, the churches have come to substantial agreement on many principles, and must henceforth seek to influence public opinion and policy makers in favor of these conclusions. They agree that national sovereignty must be limited, and that international agencies of some sort are necessary for a stable and just world order. Little agreement has been achieved on the particular structures to be supported—a deficiency understandable in light of the general confusion of conflicting plans and of the experts themselves. The churches have also been especially favorable to mutual and progressive disarmament, provisions for peaceful change, and the fair treatment of colonial resources and peoples. In the economic field, they are virtually agreed that human need rather than the profit motive must be the basic regulative principle of economic life and that a better distribution of economic opportunity between nations is a prerequisite of international peace. They are demanding security for all groups in the population, and most religious statements urge that organized labor shall be given greater responsibility in economic affairs. In wider social fields, religious groups are fairly unanimous in condemning anti-Semitism and other forms of racial discrimination, and in urging assistance for the victims of war in many lands. Study has also been devoted to hundreds of other particular problems. To date the chief form of disagreement has been in respect to relative emphases rather than in direct contradictions.

A number of problems have been relatively neglected, including several of the more thorny ones. Concrete plans for the rehabilitation of wasted nations and the relief of starving populations must be made. The relation of capitalist countries and of the churches (and especially the

Roman Catholic Church) to Russian communism must be faced more frankly, with efforts to find avenues of rapprochement which go beyond a temporary military alliance. The possibilities of combining effective economic planning with basic civil liberties must be explored. Reintegration of the armed forces into civil life and the transition from a war economy to production for civilian demands will pose alternatives which must be studied in advance if public opinion is to be adequately prepared. Redemption of a "lost generation" in all lands, and especially of the Hitler Youth, will become a central task of religious and educational institutions. These and countless other questions challenge the churches to hard study and diligent preparation. As developments throw into clearer relief the shape of postwar conditions, the churches must become increasingly specific in their answers to the fundamental questions involved, and progressively more successful in winning public support for their proposals.

If the churches are to provide any significant leadership for postwar reconstruction, they must begin immediately to wrestle with the political and economic conditions of their own communities. Most of the problems of international scope are mirrored in miniature in a local parish, and the churches can hardly hope to contribute effectively to the solution of the larger issues unless they have demonstrated ability to work intelligently and courageously in their own back yards. Indeed, they may begin within their own corporate lives, recognizing their involvement in guilt for the condition of the contemporary world, and setting out to put their own house in order. The rich lord it over the poor and the mighty grind down the faces of the weak in many churches and in most communities. Peace begins at home; it comes when, as the Psalmist put it, "righteousness and peace have kissed each other." If the churches prove themselves faithful in little things, they will be more capable of influence and courageous of spirit in that great decisive moment toward which our world is hastening.