

Christianity and Crisis

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American Nationalism

A GREAT nation must always be a remembering nation. It must derive nourishment from the deep sub-soil of its own history. In the case of the American Commonwealth the roots go deep; for with the exception of Switzerland ours is the oldest democracy in the world. The seventeenth century, which witnessed the planting of the American colonies, was an age of unrest and migration. Men were just beginning to realize the nature of the opportunities which had been opened to them by the great voyages of discovery. Quite literally a *new* world lay before them for colonization. The story of their response is one of the most fascinating chapters in universal history. It belongs to sacred as well as to secular history, because many of the migrations which peopled America were of a religious character. The Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans who followed them came for the most part as religious refugees. The Pilgrims described their voyage as undertaken "for the glory of God, for the honour of King and country, and for the advancement of the Christian faith." The Mayflower Compact, which has been described as the taproot of representative government, was a religious document. The Huguenots who came to New Rochelle and elsewhere after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 also came as religious refugees. They came as French Protestants, exiled on account of their faith. The Quakers came to Pennsylvania as religious refugees, to become here as elsewhere the spearhead of social reform, the apostles of the doctrine of the "Inner Light" of conscience, and to enrich our literature with names such as those of John Woolman and John Greenleaf Whittier—so with certain other colonial migrations. To be an American it is not necessary to be a member of the Society of Mayflower Descendants, or of the Order of Founders and Patriots, or of the Sons or Daughters of the American Revolution, but it is necessary to recapture the spirit of the Founding Fathers. In times to come there will be those who will be proud to trace their lineage to refugees of the present day who share that

spirit. There are among us now scholars, scientists, physicians, poets who have fled the Totalitarian tyrannies to become beacons of hope for the free land which they strengthen and enrich by their coming. For such as these the Statue of Liberty in the chief harbor of the new world still holds high its welcoming torch.

And so, Nationalism, which has been perverted and degraded by ugly foreign ideologies to such an extent that the name has come to have dismal associations abroad, may still retain for Americans its true meaning and be for us a thing not only sane but even sacred. It means for us devotion to the general welfare, to the good of the whole nation as distinguished from any exclusive class or caste or bloc or section in it. And it may mean for us a consciousness of a covenant relationship to God and of national mission in accordance with His will.

That was undoubtedly what it meant to George Washington. It was as a nationalist that Washington pleaded with his own native State, Virginia, to forego certain great land-owning privileges in the then unopened Near West for the benefit of the Federal Union. The generosity with which Virginia responded to the appeal of her most honored son helped to make possible the Federation of the States. It was the nationalism of Washington which ensured the survival of the American Commonwealth during what John Fiske has described as "the critical period of United States history." For several years after the war it seemed that the quarrels of the thirteen colonies about trade and about boundaries would undo everything that had been done to bring a nation into being. Congress was without a shred of executive authority or of cohesive force at home and was despised abroad. The country was flooded with irredeemable paper money which produced a wild rush of speculation, and, as recently in Germany during the period of inflation, threatened to wipe out the middle classes and bring disaster to the poor. But the nationalism of Washington brought an end to the

conditions of disorder by making possible the Federal Constitution. James Madison has often been called "the father of the Constitution." George Washington might be called its godfather. He prepared the way for it by the memorable letters which he wrote to patriotic citizens from his retreat at Mount Vernon. He urged upon them the need of centralized Federal control. He presided over the Federal Convention, and although he spoke but little he kept the Convention to its purpose. He recalled them to it by words which have a religious import: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair: the event is in the hands of God."

American nationalism, when understood in this sense of devotion to the interests of the nation as a whole instead of the selfish pursuit of sectional advantage, is almost as much needed now as it was at the beginning of our national history. If those sections of our country or classes in our country which think they have little to gain from it and perhaps something to lose would follow the example of Virginia in Washington's day and think in terms of the general welfare, we should soon be well on our way toward that continued economic co-operation with the United Nations after the war which experts tell us is essential to a just and durable peace. Nationalism is no more in conflict with Christian ideals of worldwide fellowship than loyalty to family conflicts with duty towards the State. On the contrary, in a type of nationalism based as is ours upon the Hebrew-Christian tradition this is implied, and provides a mission and defines a goal.

It is true that we have fallen far short of realizing to the full the implications of the tradition in which we stand. Our treatment of share-croppers, our attitude toward racial problems, and many other transgressions witness against us. In particular, anti-Semitism has reared its ugly head here as in Europe. It should be trodden to death under the militant heel of American democracy for the toxic thing it is.

But failures, though cause for contrition and repentance, are no cause for despair. They should rather bring a profound realization that religion and religion only can make democracy safe in a crucial time by undergirding it with spiritual sanctions. This realization should weld into moral and ethical unity the religious forces of our country, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, where ecclesiastical unity is not possible. And it should lead to a revival of personal religion and a turning of hearts toward Him who has guided us throughout our national history, and in whose guidance we can keep faith with the past and face the future with strong resolution.

H. C. R.

The Anglo-Russian Pact

IN ORDER to appreciate the full importance of the new treaty between Britain and Russia and the implied understanding at which we as well as Britain have arrived with the Russians, it is necessary to consider the great peril to post-war reconstruction which this treaty has averted, as well as its immediate usefulness in providing for a united and effective prosecution of the war.

The peril which the treaty averted was common knowledge in inner circles some months ago when it became known that Russia was pressing Britain for immediate guarantees in regard to territorial concessions after the war. Russia not only demanded control of the Baltic states but also very generous territorial adjustments from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The purpose of these demands was obviously to gain the largest possible measure of geographic security in the event that no system of mutual security would be established in Europe or the world. The fact that Russia made the demands meant that she had no great confidence in the possibility of a genuine advance in international relations after the war.

On the other hand such territorial concessions on the basis of traditional diplomacy would have made it extremely difficult to establish any genuine system of mutual security in the future. A treaty between Britain and Russia along the lines proposed by the Russians would have been the same type of secret commitment which did so much to frustrate the peace-makers after the last war.

Though the British were not too inclined to grant the Russian demands they were also not in position to reject them; for the Russian determination to resist the Nazis at all cost had become a matter of life and death for Britain, and she could not afford any policy which might have imperiled the fateful comradeship which history had established between the two nations.

Cooperation of United States Necessary

The only escape from the vicious circle could not be taken by Britain alone. It required the cooperation of the United States. For the one escape was a system of mutual guarantees which would convince Russia that she would not stand alone in the post-war world and that she would not have to fear conspiracies directed against her. But American foreign policy is subject to so many complications, including Senate control, that it is not possible for America to make international commitments as easily as Britain.



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