

## THE CHURCH AS CONSCIENCE

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All through the writings of Thomas Carlyle run explicit or implicit references to fundamental and basic ethical demands. In the soul of him is something which persistently cries out for the doing of "the decent thing." In part, it is perhaps an inescapable inheritance. That sturdy old mason of Ecclefechan and his godly wife made an indelible imprint on the mind and soul of their gifted son. He never, even while wandering about in the immensities of the new learning, got away from their "spiritual" presence. I use that word "spiritual" in its widest connotation. Students of his life have been profoundly impressed by this fact; especially when they have stood by the side of the bed on which grim, sturdy Thomas Carlyle, well up in the eighties, lay dying.

Nobody can stay long with Carlyle without becoming aware that with him conscience is magisterial and mighty. All through the stately corridors and regal halls of the structure he builded out of sonorous phrases and sound philosophy, booms, as it were, the voice of a great bell. It tolls unceasingly this simple sentence: "Some things are right; some things are wrong." As Carlyle sees it, there is no way of escape from the everlasting "rightness" and "wrongness" that attach to human life. "There is moral value, moral reality," asserts Carlyle. "It is intertwined inevitably in the decisions and in the deeds of men and nations," declares Carlyle. Of course, as every student of his writings knows, he was not always crystal clear as to details; he floundered at times in the vast clouds of the thinking which characterized his age, but notwithstanding, he never got away from the deep conviction, "Some things are right; some things are wrong." In many ways, he was the voice of conscience for his generation.

The Christian Church is, or should be, the voice of conscience for our time and for all times. It is her mission and function to stand on the "watch tower" and in the "market place" crying out: "There is right; there is wrong. The wages of sin (individually, nationally, internationally) is death. The wages of righteousness is life and health and peace and well-being." She is "set in the midst" to do just that. She is "called of God" to witness in that way. To do otherwise is to play the part of Jonah. She must not yield to prejudice, nor to an easy way out. She must even be willing to create a sense of uneasiness, if not of irritation. Conscience does not always "soothe." Sometimes conscience scourges, as with a cat-o'-nine-tails. The voice of conscience cries out against the "drabs" and "the dull greys" of compromise and expediency. She insists on "right" and "wrong." Conscience finds it hard to be all things to all men. Conscience has a way of "colliding head-on" with many "mighty and great." One needs only to recall the "Magnificat," as recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, to be forcibly reminded of that fact; or to read about John Baptist and Herod in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, or about some early disciples and the Sandhedrin in the fourth chapter of Acts.

Our times need a resurgence and a reinstatement of conscience. Both men and nations should cry out: "How can we do this great wickedness and sin against God?" What wickedness? Any wickedness. I am not concerned at the moment with the concrete. I am seeking only at this point to set forth the fact of conscience; her place and function in life — all life. And particularly am I concerned in the "Church as Conscience." Today and tomorrow and the day after summon her to do her part

in declaring the moral imperatives. She must be evermore insisting on "right" and "wrong." On her banner is inscribed "Idealism." The nail-pierced hand traced the letters of that word on that banner. We must not rub them out; nor so wave the flag that they are blurred before the eyes of men. Can we do less than Thomas Carlyle, staggering along at times half-blinded by the immensities and magnificences of a newly-discovered natural and intellectual universe? In the midst of all the blinding splendors, he held on to the bell whose intonations always were: "Some things are right; some things are wrong."

The Christian Church cannot escape some such mission in an age of moral confusion and spiritual astigmatism. As a matter of fact, she cannot dodge such a function in any kind of an age. She must, in addition, do many mighty works. That goes without saying. Her responsibilities and opportunities are many. If "alive," she will seize them all. But, I am particularly interested in the "Church as Conscience" in the current national and international scene. I have agreed to discuss briefly the "Peace and the Post-War World" for this issue of *The Iliff Review*. I approach this theme from the angle of the Church. As one serving God and man through this institution, I feel it to be my duty and privilege to approach my own country and the world as one commissioned to speak for Jesus Christ and in His stead. Many men who represent the Church and speak out on the situation today, seem to be getting much of their inspiration and authority from certain characters and passages found in the Old Testament. Their quotations of a robust type come from the earlier and rougher era mirrored in the Old Testament, rather than from the New. I want to steal up as close to the side of my Lord as I can and to catch the words and also the accents of His voice, so that I may relay His mind

and spirit to a generation in desperate need.

Only by doing something of that kind can the Church be in a true sense the Christian Conscience of this troubled era. You notice my definitive; I have written in the word "Christian." Conscience, rudimentally, is universal. She is always, everywhere, saying: "Some things are right; some things are wrong." She is creating uneasiness and discomfort, if wrong deeds are being done. She is creating a sense of satisfaction and inner well-being, if right deeds are being done. Her work is elemental. Of course it depends on moral judgments; on ethical insights. To have a Christian Conscience operating in individual and national life, there must be standards. The Church is set to furnish these. She is more and other than a mere voice crying out: "Some things are right; some things are wrong." She must have vision. She must have prophetic insight. This involves hindsight, as well as foresight. The spiritual prophets have been students of history as well as of the recorded and intuitional revelations of Almighty God. Has it ever struck you, forcibly, that we can learn much from history? For years and centuries, men have been reading and studying history. We insist that it be taught in our schools. And yet, so often we refuse to let history teach us. The seers are not so. The prophetic men of vision search history and learn her lessons. It behooves all leaders to be doing just that in these days. Why make the same old mistakes? If we insist on the teaching of history, let us decide now that we shall let history teach us. Isaiah would never have been so great if he had not studied the story of events.

To bring all this down to the turmoil of these times, let us think of some particular situations. Take the "lust for power," the desire to dominate. It is old, old as the life of man. The lust for power, the passion for place, mark the pages of history. Not many pages where the signs of this pursuit are not

are to be discovered. Bad men have been "bitten by this bug;" also, good men. We are one-sided and have not read history with discernment, if we see only evil folks seeking to seize and exercise power yesterday, today and tomorrow.

There are many fine reasons for the piling up of power in the hands of a good man or in those of a group of good men. And if, perchance, there are few or none in given cases, the minds of men are filled with "rationalizing" arguments to make a dubious course seem to be a good or a necessary one. We shall have to cope with such problems as I have just indicated. Most careful scrutiny will be needed if we are not to be "taken in" by the specious statements of special pleaders.

Christ's men must be on guard against the half-truths that will be scattered abroad by those who want "idealists" to get behind and beneath many "realisms" that are essentially of the earth earthy. The same old methods all dressed up in camouflaging colors will inevitably move to the same old disastrous outcomes. The Church must not be deceived. She must not be seduced by flattery, cajolery or veiled coercion. She has a role to play — her own, a role given to her by God, not by the will or the might of men. She cannot afford to lend support to what happens to be the best that can be obtained under the alleged existent conditions. What crimes are committed against the uncompromising Christ by "going along" with the "practicalities" of a given situation! We as leaders, standing in Christ's stead, do well to "stop, look, and listen," before we move forward behind any program. We dare not risk saying or doing, at the direct or roundabout behest of power-seekers, what will bring to the Church a sense of shame ten years after the war shall have ended. Speaking for Him and in His stead, we dare not "come down."

The Church must be Conscience for a confused and chaotic generation.

Holding in mind the wide-spread and age-long lust for power, spoken of as "security" and what not, let me recall to your thought the "inner circle" that Jesus dealt with in the long ago. Those men wanted place and prestige. Yes, they did. They longed for the reestablishment of the kingdom. They wanted to rule together with Jesus. You remember the struggle for special preferment, when the Lord should "establish" the kingdom. It was to be "pomp and power" for Him — and for them. Finally, on one of the last days of His earthly association with them, Jesus said: "All right, I give you a kingdom; you have been wanting one with passionate eagerness. It will not be one after the order of David; but one out of the depths of suffering and shame. It will be as different from the Gentiles as day is different from night." The same Christ still lives. He has the same discerning insights. Have we? Can we stand by His side and get His slant on the maneuvering of men, who slyly seek power for themselves or for their self-centered governments? If the Church is to be conscience, then her leaders must be men who can see and can stand. This is no hour for Christ's men to be half-blind or to be unsteady on their feet.

Cognate with this, and in a sense a corollary to this lust for power, let us think, by way of bringing it all down to the surging situation of these days, about the much-talked-of "International Police Force." Someone has referred to this idea as a "siren song, subtly luring us to think, not about these world conflicts, but about the great day when they shall have been settled. It is not a plan for getting along with the rest of the world, really getting along with the rest of the world. It is a plan for preventing an explosion in case we don't." Only the gullible look upon a police force as a panacea, when it is created

and controlled by two or three or four or even fourteen nations out of sixty. Who would be the police chief? Whose orders would be obeyed?

Students of history think of a parallel to such an exercise of force. A little more than a century ago, there was an international police force. Oh, no, not by name. But it was as much like the one popularly envisioned today as one pea is like another out of the same pod. It was the combined armed force of the "Holy Alliance," holy in name. The conquerors of Napoleon, after "unconditional surrender," set up a policing system. On the "continent," these friends in 1815 were Russia, Prussia and Austria, at that time on intimate terms of friendship with England. They even appropriated the language of religion and idealism to buttress their aims and purposes. They entered into an agreement, binding all the conquering powers to the use of Christian principles. Then these "Big Powers" proceeded to use force, not reason, to keep the peace. For a short time, it worked. But in 1848 the "peace"—and with it the Holy Alliance, "blew up." In keeping the peace by the use of a "policing army," the major powers had also been guarding the "status quo" of thirty odd years before. What happened in 1848 was revolution—revolution against the rigid maintenance of the "status quo" in the glorious name of peace, sweet peace.

All of which leads me to ask you to think of a third phase of our present predicament, viz., that of proposed "Alliances." Alliances "for" call for alliances "against." They always have. They serve well in times of war; in times of peace they are poison. In an alliance, each partner shares in the total international hatreds already accumulated by all partners. Never yet has any "alliance" failed to bring forth a "counter-alliance." Suppose Great Britain, Russia and the United States, in the world's drawing-room, with China in the kitchen or on a side porch, form an

alliance. What power! What overwhelming strength! Will the other fifty-six nations on the face of the earth not bow before such might? You say, "What else can they do?" For the time being, nothing. But they will bide their day. They are too proud to submit forever to what they deem vassalage. In spite of all the odds against them, they will dream and hope and plot and plan. Some day, another alliance will emerge; and then another contest, for a while, political and economic, and finally military. That is the way of alliances.

Now I come to the heart of it all. It is needless to say again what so many have said so well, that all the world is thinking about the ending of the war and the making of the peace. The minds of men, in our own land especially, are turning to this dear and longed-for event.. Our hearts are big with eagerness. What can we do? All of us would go far, would do much, to bring in "a just and enduring peace." The magic word just now is "collaboration." Most effectively, it is used as against "isolation." Again and again, the changes are being rung on "Collaborationism" versus "Isolationism." That may be fine. Or it may be something else. Collaborationism with whom, on what terms, to what ends? That is a crucial question. Christ's Church must ask it; must insist on an answer; one "without horns or hoofs," to use the phrase of one Martin Luther. To go along blithely repeating a catchword like "Collaborationism" may spell disaster for the nations, and devastating disgrace for the Church. We must be explicit. Definite aims must be set up for our co-operative support along the line of collaboration; and those aims must be consonant with the mind of Christ. You say such a position is silly. You say that the nations are not perfect and cannot be led along such "straight and narrow" ways. Then, perhaps, you would line up beside Lin Yutang, who said recently, "Will Christianity help?

I doubt it. What is the good of Christianity? In the western world, she has definitely no place in the practical affairs of men and nations." That is a bitter pill. Do you want to swallow it? I, for one, do not. But the only chance for the Church to count is by cleaving to certain everlasting truths. Then she must declare them with power as the only hope for a just and enduring peace.

In March of 1942, at Delaware, Protestantism of this country thought her way through this maze. Under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches' "Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace," four hundred carefully chosen representative churchmen—laymen and ministers—considered this entire question. "The Findings" arrived at were noble and commanding. Nothing finer has been said by any religious group. Many things not so fine have been said subsequently by other groups speaking for God. Even the Federal Council's "Peace Commission" a year afterward came down somewhat from the heights on which "The Findings" were framed in March of 1942 at Delaware, Ohio.

The foremost of all the significant declarations made by the Delaware seekers was the one which insisted, unequivocally, that any world organization, which would hold forth a reasonable expectation of a just and permanent peace, must be created by **all nations and peoples**. No alliance calling for counter alliance. No overlordship by the few. No dominating of the weak by the strong. Although an attempt was made by formal motion to substitute "Allied Nations" for "all nations and peoples," the Delaware questers, by a decisive vote, decided to stay on the "all-inclusive" high ground to which they had climbed. The notable 1943 Delaware Conference under the auspices of The Methodist Board of Missions and Church Extension formulated no "Findings"; yet, the same general

position prevailed in that meeting on "Bases of Peace."

In some strange, and as yet unexplained way, the Federal Council's Commission on Peace seemed to come down from the commanding height of "all-inclusiveness" in the "Statement of Political Principles" issued in the late spring of 1943. These "Principles" have a second name. It is "The Six Pillars." The language used in the "First" one conveys the idea that the "United Nations," continuing their present (wartime) collaboration, are to go ahead and set up "the political framework" of a world organization, to which, "in due course, neutral and enemy nations" would be admitted. The comment accompanying the "Pillar" in the "Study Guide" mitigates somewhat the statement made in the "Pillar." But selfish or careless men can unquestionably quote Pillar One to align United Protestantism with a "United Nations" program that might be far from the heart of any true democracy or any real Christianity. A seeming "World Order" may cost too much. The Church must know what collaboration means, or else she must be a sensitive conscience until she finds out.

The institution that bears Christ's name and speaks in His stead cannot go along with much that is already being suggested in "compromise" blueprints of the shape of things to be. Our Lord was not a good compromiser. He went to his death rather than to go along with the "leaders" of His nation. He saw further and more comprehensively than did they. When they sought from Him a "blanket endorsement" of their plans and purposes, He refused. Maybe His Church will have to do the same sort of thing today, tomorrow, or the day after. This is no hour for the Church to be consulting the editors of *Time* and *Fortune*, or the *New York Times* or the *Chicago Tribune*, or even "high government officials" to find out what she shall say. Let her, instead,

turn again to the oracles of God. Instead of putting her trust in the judgment of presidents and prime ministers, and secretaries of foreign affairs, let the Church hear what the Lord God will say. Then let us tell editors and presidents and prime ministers and secretaries of foreign affairs what the will of the Lord God Almighty is.

Can the Church be the Church and rally to the creation of a new "World Order" set up by the "United Nations" alone? Even a secularist, quoting no Sacred Scripture, and standing on no Holy Ground, wrote in the December, 1943, issue of *The Reader's Digest*: "The only alternative to the poisonous system of alliance and counter alliances is a universal world body, in which all nations are represented on a plane of complete equality. Universality should include the 'bad' nations as well as the 'good.'" In those two sentences, William Hard manifested that he has been willing to be taught by history. We must be equally discriminating. We are constrained by our Christian Faith, as well as by historical wisdom, to speak forth only prophetic words. Vigorous protests against Pillar One, originating in the Rocky Mountain Region, and spreading over the whole country, influenced the thinking of the International Round Table of Christian Leaders held at Princeton in July, 1943. As a consequence, they affirmed in effect the stand taken at Delaware in 1942. In the July 26 issue of *Time*, a brief report of the Conference was printed. It was captioned "United Nations Must Go." The short news story ran in this wise: "The United Nations must be dissolved immediately after the war's end. So decided sixty-eight church leaders from fourteen nations, gathered last week at Princeton, New Jersey, for a round-table conference under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches. Reason: they want no

post-war military line-up of victorious big powers: they seek an all-nations world body instead." This Conference was presided over by the Honorable John Foster Dulles, Chairman of the Federal Council's Peace Commission. In late September of 1943, the Peace Commission seriously considered revising Pillar One. But many reasons impelled that body to let it stand. (Possibly face-saving may have had a bit to do with the conclusion.) Nevertheless, as a concession to the sound criticism from all over the country, the Commission adopted the following statement as a footnote to be published hereafter with the Six Pillars: "It is to be regarded as the assumption of the Commission that the Six Pillars shall be interpreted by the explanatory notes and comments, and with reference to the "Guiding Principles" (or Delaware 'Findings') from which the six statements are derived and abbreviated." It pays to be aware; to be alert to insidious lowering of our standards. Conscience must be sensitive.

If we are to have new wine, it must be put into new bottles, by all nations and peoples, not by some of them only. There must be no make-believe, or else the Church can have no part in the program. But must we not be moved by practical considerations? That depends. Surely we must not compromise the basic principles for which we are contending with principalities and powers of darkness. Of course, we shall be accused of being foolish victims of idealism. What else do we stand for? Long since, mankind would have rotted down save for Christian idealisms. Why not stand on the heights and speak forth the words of soberness and truth? Why not be the voice proclaiming: "Some things are right; some things are wrong?" Only thus can the Church be true to God and man.