

A Call to National Repentance

By the Rev. Prof. James M. Coleman

refused it a century and a quarter ago when they officially denied Jesus Christ a place in the nation's law. The nation has followed out the same policy denying him the supreme place in our national life. Now, through the severest judgment that has fallen on the nations, he is calling them to repentance. He is calling from the desert where the bones of martyred Armenians are whitening in the sand; he is calling from the desolated fields and homes of Europe and from the graves of her murdered manhood; he is calling from the slums of New York and Chicago and the oppressed class of every land, by all the blessings America has known and all the judgments she must dread, to repent and be saved through the blood of Christ from the judgments of a righteous God. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his anger is kindled but a little". "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool". "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold a greater than Jonah is here". "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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The war in Europe was not caused by the murder of the Austrian Archduke at Serajevo. It was not caused by German ambitions in the Near East. It was not caused by the conflicting commercial interests of Germany and England. Neither was it caused by the desire of the Aristocracy to crush Democracy and Socialism. All these causes were there, but they do not explain the war. Back of all these causes, as the hand on which all these were fingers, was the major cause: SIN.

Individual sin was the cause of the first murder; national sin is the cause of this last and greatest murder which we call world war.

Now the nations long for peace, a real peace, which will not be a feverish preparation for another war. In all our plans for peace the fact to be kept in mind is national sin. War is an effect; sin is the cause. While the cause remains, the effect will be actual or imminent. Peace will come, abiding peace, when the real cause of war is taken away.

The Hague Conference did not end war. Arbitration treaties have not ended war. International societies have not ended war. Why not? Because they have been dealing with symptoms and have ignored the cause. They have ignored the cause of the disease called war in seeking the case called peace. We believe in the Hague Conference; we believe in arbitration; but we do not believe that treating symptoms will destroy disease. The cause of disease must be removed. It was in the midst of the hollow

peace which these things caused that war should not among half the human race. As long as states rule in national life, war will rule as a policy in national councils.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God.” Europe is furnishing a moving picture of that fact. War is hell and Europe is in war; Asia is in war; Africa is in war, and America through her so-called preparedness is getting ready for war. Unless the disease is removed, it will involve the whole world in the common tragedy.

There are two courses for a nation. Its people may trust in righteousness or in force. The latter means the appeal of differences to the arbitrament of war. The other policy places national confidence in Jesus Christ. The nation may choose either way; it cannot choose both.

What is the remedy for war? There is but one, that is to get right with God. To-day the nations deny God a dominant place in their life and in their laws. Mammon rules in the markets of the world, too often in legislatures and courts, and the rights of property are placed above the rights of man. In every land the lust of men is recognized in law. Witness the age of consent in the statutes of the States and the ease with which divorce may be obtained. In every land the Sabbath is profaned, a sin which the Jew expiated in foreign captivity. And what shall we do in the face of the piled up guilt of the legalized liquor traffic?

Every nation denies the right of Jesus Christ to rule in its policies, domestic or foreign. The nations say, Not justice and kindness, but force is the measure of right. America is willing to have the name of God on her coins where it is a sentiment, but refuses him a place in her laws,

disavowing his authority. The Jew said, “We have no king but Caesar”, and hurried Christ to the cross. America says, “We the people do ordain and establish”, barring out all recognition of the law of God and of his appointed King. The Jew’s denial of his Christ cost him his country; what price shall America pay for her rejection of the Christ?

How shall the nations get right with God? Jesus Christ is “The Way”. The nation that accepts the Way will be safe. And the entrance to the Way is through repentance for sin. The only authoritative code of ethics in existence says, “Except ye repent” ye shall never find the Way. Individual repentance gets the man right with God; national repentance gets the nation right with God. God brought us to our knees in the Civil War and President Lincoln, at the suggestion of the Senate of the United States, called for a recognition of this fact in a day of national humiliation and prayer. What God has done once in America he can do again. He can do it in Europe. The victorious nation may not be the one which can furnish the most men and shells; the winning nation will find victory on its knees.

“The times of ignorance God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent”. This will mean sorrow for sin; it will mean turning away from sin, the greatest sin of all, the rejection of Jesus Christ as the nation’s Lord. In such repentance is the real national defence. Turning America into an armed camp will not save us from the judgment of God; it has not saved Germany. A mighty fleet will not save us; it has not saved England. Industrial organization and efficiency will not save us; it has not saved Belgium. Genius will not save us; it has not saved France. There is a way. Our fathers