

A Pastoral Letter from the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England in the Commonwealth of Australia.

To the Faithful of our Communion and to any others who may wish to read our message, Greeting.

We, the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England in the Commonwealth of Australia, in Conference assembled, are moved to write a Pastoral Letter to all our people at this time. We have met at a time of crisis which is unparalleled in our experience. Industry is disorganised, thousands are deprived of the right to earn their daily bread, the primary industries upon which the welfare of the Commonwealth depends are most seriously straitened, and in dealing with the consequent distress it is difficult for Governments to find methods which do not aggravate the very evils they aspire to cure. It is not surprising that in such circumstances men's hearts are failing them for fear, and that despondency in many cases amounts almost to despair.

But to those who believe in God there is no ground for pessimism or despair. To believe in God is to believe that behind all the changes and chances of this mortal life are the person and purpose of an Almighty Father Whose will for all His children is their welfare in body, mind and soul. The ultimate power which determines the destinies of nations and men is His, and He uses the catastrophes in which our human wilfulness involve us to recall us to Himself and to guide us towards that fellowship with Him which is the true end of human life.

We thankfully acknowledge that there is much ground for believing that His call is being heard and heeded to-day. From all sides we hear of a noticeable increase in the number of those who seek and use the means of grace, and of a disposition, amid the collapse of so much upon which we had accustomed ourselves to rely, to turn to the Christian Church as the custodian of the things which endure. We have likewise heard with profound satisfaction of a remarkable response to special efforts which have been already made in some parts of Australia to proclaim the message of the Gospel afresh and of preparations for like efforts elsewhere. We shall pray for God's richest blessings upon all such endeavours.

For indeed it is in the acceptance of the good tidings of God, proclaimed by Jesus Christ, that the hope of Australia lies. There can be no distinction between God's will and man's welfare. Human welfare is unattainable except by correspondence with the Divine will. When, therefore, human welfare is seriously interrupted, as it is interrupted to-day, there is a clear call to examine ourselves as to the ways in which we have failed to correspond with the Will of God.

THE DISUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

To begin with ourselves as members of the Christian Church, let us frankly admit that it cannot be God's Will that Christendom should be disunited. A divided Church cannot adequately represent the undivided Christ. The shattering of the unity which Christ intended His Church to have must be due to human wilfulness and sin, to our neglect of His purpose,

and our failure to correspond with His Mind. And the circumstances of to-day constitute a fresh call to every part of Christendom to earnest efforts to end the scandal of our divisions, and to regain for His Church the unity for which Christ prayed. So far as we of the Church of England are concerned, we are sincerely desirous of continuing to explore, in conference with the representatives of other denominations, the causes of our divisions and the means of overcoming them.

THE NEW CONSTITUTION.

Meanwhile, we are indirectly making what may well prove to be a definite contribution to the cause of reunion, by seeking to acquire for the Church of England in Australia a self-governing Constitution which will equip it with powers of negotiation more free and adequate than those which it now possesses. The Constitution adopted at the Convention held in 1926 will be submitted, together with amendments which have been or may be suggested by various Dioceses, to another Convention to be held in October of next year. At that Convention the Constitution will be open to free discussion and amendment, and we trust that the result will be a Constitutional document which will approve itself to every Diocese in Australia.

DISARMAMENT.

To turn from the Church to the world, we must strongly urge that it cannot be in accordance with God's will that War should continue to be used as an instrument of national policy. But there is all too little evidence that the nations of the earth are prepared to give anything but lip service to the truth that war is contrary to the mind of Christ. The competition in armaments still continues, though our own Motherland has given a most noble and adventurous lead in Armament reduction. But the competition continues with results most menacing to the World's peace. We can no longer believe that if you want peace you must prepare for War: rather is it true that if you prepare for war long enough and diligently enough you will most certainly get it. A Disarmament Conference will be held in Geneva next February, and upon the issue of that Conference the future of the world and of Christian civilisation would seem very largely to depend. We call all who will heed us to most earnest prayer that God will guide the deliberations of the Conference with His pure and peaceable wisdom, and that He will scatter the people that delight in War.

But our appeal must be an appeal for something more than prayer. "From whence come wars amongst you?" asks St. James, "Come they not even of your own lusts which war in your members?" The character of a nation is determined by the character of the individuals which compose it, and the only disarmament which can really be effective is the disarmament of our minds. It is hypocrisy to preach peace with other nations whilst fostering war between classes within your own nation. And yet there would seem to be many who are guilty of such hypocrisy. We are thinking not only of those who openly advocate bloodshed as a means of attaining their political ideal, but of all those, whether on the side of Capital or Labour, who have war in their hearts towards any section of their fellow-men, and who proclaim the fact either by word or deed. Class War is no less contrary to the mind of Christ than is international War, and all who profess and call themselves Christians must repudiate it. Hatred can accomplish nothing but destruction. The only constructive force is the force of goodwill. In calling men to believe in the Fatherhood of God and the consequent brotherhood of man, Jesus Christ was laying the only foundation upon which human society can be justly and stably built. In the first days of Christianity this belief revolutionised human society, and it will revolutionise it again when all who profess it really believe it in their hearts and practice it in their lives.

MATERIALISM.

But the question of St. James applies to us all. The state of the world to-day is the product of the selfish individualism which is all too characteristic of our private, social, business, and political life. So long as the outlook of the individual is mainly self-regarding, so long as we are concerned to get rather than to give, to be ministered unto rather than to minister, so long we shall be exposed to the menace of War. And we are called to-day to examine ourselves as to our main motive and outlook upon life. If we are to correspond with the mind of Christ, we must put God first, and other people second, and ourselves last of all. Can it be said that we do? There is much disquieting evidence to suggest that we do not. The extravagance which encourages men to buy luxuries which they cannot afford, to mortgage land in order to buy more land often at inflated prices, to live beyond their means on borrowed money, is reflected in that national extravagance which has contributed more than anything else to our present distress. We have acquiesced in the habit of raising huge loans overseas: we have sought to keep up our standard of living by means of money which we have borrowed and not earned. And the result has been that for all the standard of living has been lowered and for very many has been totally destroyed. And for all this we have mainly ourselves to blame, because the habits of Governments are the habits of the people who elect them, and if the people's outlook is materialist, the outlook of Governments will be materialist too.

Materialism as a scientific and philosophical theory has now been almost entirely abandoned. The opposition which Religion has to face to-day does not come in the name of Science. The President of this year's meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science proclaimed that "Science to-day is the clearest revelation of God." But practical materialism is as rife to-day as ever it was, and there is special need to reiterate Christ's warning: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The failure to heed that warning has gone far to disguise the fact that industry exists for the service of the community, and in all too many cases has transformed it from being an honourable co-operation for the common good into a sordid competition for private or sectional gain. We cannot but regard it as a matter for profound regret that in such circumstances Governments should be encouraging a direct appeal to the motive of cupidity by the establishment of State Lotteries offering immensely valuable cash prizes.

THE CAMPAIGN OF ATHEISM.

But materialism is to be regarded not only as a tendency to be resisted, but also as an aggressor to be overcome. It is notorious that a world-wide attempt is being made to-day forcibly to overthrow the existing social fabric, and to re-constitute human society upon a basis of materialism and atheism. The attempt is being made with all the fervour of a religious crusade, and Christianity must rouse itself to meet it. For it is against Christianity that it is mainly directed. Herein lies a fresh justification for the cause of Christian Missions and an urgent call for their support. The other great religions of the world do not seriously count in this connection. No one who knows the facts is likely to suppose that the world will turn Buddhist, Mahomedan, or Hindoo, but there is every hope that it may become Christian, and the efforts of those who seek to frustrate this hope must be themselves frustrated. But we can never meet these efforts merely by opposition. Our part must be to inspire the reform of our present social system in terms of the principles of Christ. For Christianity does not stand for "things as they are," but for the rule of God in the affairs of men. The campaign of atheistic Communism would make but little progress in Australia, if, as a recent writer has pointed out, the nation would only

realise that the system which it seeks to introduce "implies the end of Christianity, family, home, Parliamentary government, democracy, liberty, and the protection of the British Fleet." The danger is not that the advocates of these things are so aggressive, it is that we who profess and call ourselves Christians are not aggressive enough. Our lives do not count for our cause as their lives count for theirs. And we are all called to-day to make our lives count for Christ in all the relationships of life as they have never counted before. We believe that He is the Saviour of nations as well as of men. We believe that in His Name only is the salvation that we seek. We believe that in the practice of the principles which He taught lies the only hope of securing for all men the liberty and justice which is their due. We know that the triumph of His spirit amongst men would right all the wrongs which man inflicts on man. Let us ask ourselves how far we have allowed it to triumph in our own lives. There is no room to-day for a profession of Christianity which is merely nominal. Those who are on the Lord's side must proclaim their allegiance and be prepared to follow out its implications. We call upon all who will heed us to examine themselves as to the amount of time and effort they are giving to the cultivation of the knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, to the business of prayer and worship, and the study of the Bible, to reflection upon the things that are pure and lovely and of good report, to the training of their children in the truths of the Gospel. We call them to ask themselves to what extent they are putting into practice the precepts of Christ in their social and business relationships. For it is by the answer to such questions that the sincerity of our Christian profession is to be judged.

We end our message, as it began, with a note of hopefulness. The cause of Christ is the cause which must ultimately prevail. He must reign till all His foes are made the footstool of His feet. And to all who are striving to identify themselves with the cause of His Kingdom and to offer themselves to His service, we address the apostolic encouragement: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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