

The Literary Digest

April 14, 1917

(this is an excerpt from a larger, uncredited article titled
"The Churches and War"
~which can be found on this site under the title,
"The Christian Church and World War One")

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The anti-war note, however, was sounded by the Rev. Dr. John Haynes Holmes, of the Church of the Messiah, who said that more than two years of world-conflict had failed to shake his conviction that strife among God's children was never right and never would be countenanced from his pulpit. He is quoted in the press as uttering these words:

"No man is wise enough, no nation is important enough, no human interest is precious enough, to justify the wholesale destruction and murder which constitute war.

"These words, spoken in this place more than two years ago, I must reaffirm this day. Nothing has happened in this period to change my opinion of war. On the contrary, much has happened to confirm it. If war is right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. If Christianity is right, then war is wrong, false, a lie.

"No order of a President or a Governor will persuade me or force me to this business of killing. So long as I am your minister, the Church of the Messiah will answer no military summons. Other clergymen may pray to God for victory for our arms—I will not. In this church, if nowhere else in all America, the Germans will still be included in the family of God's children. No word of hatred shall be spoken against them, no evil fate shall be desired upon them. I will remember the starving millions of Belgium, Servia, Poland, and Armenia, whom my countrymen may neglect for the more important business of killing Germans.

"If you say that this is a war of defense against wanton and intolerable aggression, I must reply that every blow which we have endured has been primarily a blow directed, not against ourselves, but against England, and that it has yet to be proved that Germany has any intention or desire of attacking us.

"If you say that this war is a life and death struggle for the preservation of civilization against barbarism, I must ask you why we remained neutral when Belgium was raped, and were at last aroused to action, not by the cries of the stricken abroad, but by our own losses in men and money.

"If you say that this war is a last resort in a situation which every other method, patiently tried, has failed to meet, I must answer that this is not true—that other ways and means of action, tried by experience and justified by success, have been laid before the Administration and wilfully rejected.

"I deny without evasion that anything that I have said, or may say, can be interpreted as traitorous or disloyal. In time of war, as in time of peace; in the hour of sin, as in the hour of glory, I shall love my country and serve her to the end. Nothing that America can do can quench my passion for her beauty or divert my loyalty from her service. In this impending crisis with Germany I believe that she is wrong."

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