CURRENT OPINION
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HAS CHRISTIANITY BEEN HELPED OR HURT BY THE WAR?

ONE of the obvious results of the war has been the victory of Christianity, as a world-religion, over Mohammedanism. The New York *Herald*, in a recent editorial, speaks of Christianity standing to-day "the triumphant religion of the universe." That Christianity has attained this pinnacle by the use of the sword is frankly conceded by the *Herald*, which points out that "Christianity was born in the midst of war and waxed strong in the lap of war." The *Herald* continues:

"The birthplace of Christ was under the shadow of the Roman swords. Persecution and war made Christianity live.

"From Constantine to Charlemagne repeated attempts to crush Christianity by force failed. From Charlemagne to the Middle Ages the power behind Christianity was force. Charlemagne's wars were waged for the extension of Christianity.

"The oppression of Christianity by the Turks called forth the Crusaders against the Saracens to deliver the Holy Sepulchre from the infidels. Inspired by a holy zeal the Crusaders gave to the world the Christian motto *'In hoc signo vinces'*—in this sign we conquer. The morning sun on the plains of Mesopotamia cast the shadow of the Cross over a continent wet with blood and torn with strife.

"The Middle Ages witnessed controversies arising from doctrinal differences leading to force and war. The Thirty Years' War in Germany was over Christianity. The struggle for religious freedom was a contest through centuries to release the consciences of men from worship founded on dogma and force. For eighteen centuries war marked the progress of the doctrine of the Prince of Peace."

To those who argue that Christianity is a failure because it does not bring peace to the world, the *Herald* retorts:

"The richest prizes in human affairs are those that cost the greatest sacrifice. Measured by that test, the most valuable asset of mankind is Christianity. The sword has been a weapon of Christians, for righteousness can only triumph against wrong by the exercize of force. Wars have accompanied the rise of Christianity because war is the supreme test of loyalty to a righteous cause."

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The view taken by the *Herald* runs counter to much of the current comment in the religious world. A mood of spiritual disillusion, as a result of the war, is widespread. We find, in many quarters, the opinion expressed that Christianity's influence, in connection with the war, was negligible. At the thirty-fifth annual church congress of the Protestant Episcopal Church, held in New York, Bishop Israel, of the Diocese of Erie, who served in France for more than a year as a chaplain with the American Forces, said: "Through all my service I was haunted with the question—should we have met might with might, horror with horror, slaughter with slaughter? What would have happened if Christian nations had endured the cross, despising the shame? Might not the world have gained more and lost infinitely less, if we had suffered a national crucifixion?" On the same occasion, the Rev. William Austin Smith, editor of the *Churchman*, declared: "I think it heartless, unchristian and indecent for clergy and philosophers to glow over the spiritual benefits of a war that laid seven million boys in their graves, starved and maimed from twenty to thirty million human beings, and bathed the world in hate and darkness. I cannot share the easy enthusiasm of these gentlemen. I see in this war a tragedy pathetic beyond words or tears. The Church would do well to leave war in the unpretentious category where General Sherman placed it."

Substantially the same position is taken by the Rev. George Willis Cooke in an article entitled, "Effect of the Great War on Religion," in *Unity* (Chicago). He states, flatly, "Christianity has betrayed itself body and soul," and he supports this statement by the following argument:

"The attitude of the churches in this country, and in even a greater degree in the other countries, has not been such as to inspire faith in their sincerity. To a very large extent they have abandoned Christianity for patriotism. They have been committed to a brutal, revengeful and savage lust for war and all the worst that war demands. The demands of love, forgiveness, mercifulness have in large degree been cast aside and condemned as standing in the way of a true patriotism

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The most cruel, harsh and revengeful demands made in behalf of war have come from Christian pulpits on both sides. Any suggestion of sympathy towards enemies or any hint of forgiveness to seventy times seven, as was once taught, has been severely condemned. It has been declared to be not only unpatriotic, but unchristian. All the milder, humane and humanitarian features of Christianity have been cast aside as unworthy, and no longer in harmony with the demands of war time.

"Those persons and sects who have tried to live up to what they regarded as Christian teaching in the way of non-resistance, forgiveness and regard to the rights of all peoples, have been persecuted and imprisoned, perhaps driven from their homes with great loss. The humanitarianism which Christianity was supposed to represent has been abolished as an evil and as the worst heresy. Men who hold themselves to be Christians, who accept the creeds of the churches, and who find in Christianity the foundation facts of the ethical life, have sent their fellow Christians to prison for even so many as twenty years; and because they wished to live as consistent Christians.

"Who can have watched these developments of the last five years without coming to marvel at what war can accomplish in the way of hatred, revengefulness and lust of power! . . .

"The men who have been settling the affairs of the world during the last few months are probably all of them desirous of being known as Christian and charitable men, and yet they have shown a ruthless disregard of the needs of millions of persons who have been in no sense guilty of bringing on or carrying forward the war. In the true war spirit they have punished the non-guilty with the guilty, the victims of war with those who have been its causing agents. Such ruthless contempt for all Christian principles as they have shown, in their hatreds, in their utter disregard of anything approaching a forgiving attitude, it would have been impossible to believe until we had seen it with our own eyes. Even now it is so far unbelievable that we must suppose some mitigating circumstances may be brought forward.

"What conclusion must we reach: What other than that Christianity has betrayed itself body and soul! It has been both powerless to prevent war and to bring it to a conclusion in a spirit of humanitarian regard to the rights of millions of men, women and children."

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