

William Temple (as Archbishop of York) - 'Principles of Reconstruction' - April 1940

April 1940

No. 11 E/40

International Order

STUDY DEPARTMENT

of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work

(under the auspices of the Provisional Committee
of the World Council of Churches)

PRINCIPLES OF RECONSTRUCTION

By The Archbishop of York

The only excuse which I can have for taking part in a discussion of "Europe after the War" is the hope of illustrating one direction in which Christian principles seem to point us. I am far from claiming that the suggestions which I offer are the only available application of Christian principles; and I fully recognize that the right time for an action is as important as the quality of the action itself, so that even those who share my hopes may regard my practical suggestions as impracticable or premature. But I hold that Christians are responsible for endeavouring to apply the principles of their faith to the actual problems of life, regarding them not as a source of direct instructions, but as an indication of the goal to be aimed at and as a standard of judgment to which policy must be referred.

The relevant principles, I think, are these.

1. Every man is a child of God and as such has a status and dignity independent of his membership in any earthly state.
2. Consequently, personality is sacred, and freedom in whatever is most personal (worship, thought, expression) is to be safeguarded as among the primary ends for which the State exists.
3. As children of God, men are members of one family, and life should be ordered as far as possible with a view to the promotion of brotherly fellowship among all men, while each is called upon to use his freedom in the spirit of "membership" on pain of forfeiting his moral right to it.
4. But men are not dutiful children of God. They are from birth self-centred, and remain so in lesser or greater degrees. They can be delivered from this evil state only by

the active love (grace) of God calling out surrender and trust (faith). So far as this has not happened or has incompletely happened - (i.e. universally) - they need to be restrained in their self-assertiveness and induced by appeals to their self-interest to respect justice in their mutual dealings.

5. Nations exist by God's providential guidance of history and have their part to play in His purpose; but man's self-centredness infects his national loyalty, which in its own nature is wholesome, so that the nation is made an object of that absolute allegiance which is due to God alone. Thus, if there is to be any approach to a brotherly fellowship of nations before all men are converted to a life of perfect love, it must be by the same method of so organizing their relationship to one another that national self-interest will itself urge justice in action.

Approaching the matter in this way, I attach the greatest importance to the growing strength of the conviction and feeling among all Christians that they are united in and through Christ in a perfect fellowship. Without this I do not expect to see any living and enduring sense of fellowship between the nations. As yet this "ecumenical sense" is feeble; but it is growing fast. It is a main ground of hope for the Rebirth of Christendom in the future. If it continues to grow it will supply in every nation where the Church is planted a nucleus of the spirit of true fellowship which will be of priceless value in binding the nations together.

The two first principles stated above give strong support to some form of democracy as the constitution best suited for developing and expressing the quality of "personality" in its citizens. It would be excessive to say that they "demand" this, for the primary function of a political constitution is to ensure that good order without which free personal life is almost impossible. Insecurity due to outbreaks of mob-violence is if anything more incompatible with effective freedom of personal living than tyrannous rule by a Government of which the principles, and consequently its occasions of tyrannous action, are at least known. Not all peoples have been able to maintain order through democratic institutions; and unless they can, it is futile to say that a theological principle "demands" democracy.

But it can and must be said that where people are ready to work democratic institutions, they more fully conform to the principle of the sanctity of personality than any other type. The main point to be secured is that the people should have the opportunity to change the Government without breaking up the Constitution, so that effective "opposition" to the Government of the day is perfectly compatible with loyalty to nation and to state. Only so can a free play of personal judgment be encouraged and exercised.

Consequently it may be laid down that any new order which is established must be "safe for democracy". No nation will be coerced into democracy; but it must be open to every nation to adopt it. (It seems likely that a German victory would result in the exact opposite of this.)

The third principle - the unity of all men in the "family" of God - points to an organization of life which draws together in relations of mutual support the largest practicable number of persons. But emphasis must be laid on the word "practicable". It cannot be inferred from this principle without more ado that a large state is always preferable to a small state or that if any system of federation is adopted, the more states to be federated the better. The reality of mutual inter-dependence may be more complete in a small society, and the forcing together of those who have no desire to cooperate is a sure road to calamity. But the principle will at once put us on our guard against the notion of a state founded on and bounded by racial homogeneity; for such a state will be subject in a quite special degree to the temptations of self-centred acquisitiveness and aggression. On the whole the balance of advantage seems to lie with a union or federation of states, each small enough to give to the citizens a sense of individual responsibility for its welfare, while the whole group is large enough to combine many peoples of rather diverse traditions and interests, so that these may balance and check one another.

For the fourth and fifth principles remind us that no system, however cunningly devised, will work smoothly to the general satisfaction unless it contains within itself elements which balance and hold back the unexercised egotism of individuals and, still more, of all collective groups of men. The civilized state secures a substantial measure of justice in the lives of its citizens by attaching penalties to unjust action, so that self-interest itself prompts avoidance of injustice and pursuit of justice. Even those of us who are usually honest on principle and by preference, are occasionally saved from lapses into dishonesty by the penalties attached to it when detected. But the egotism of a nation is infinitely greater than that of an individual; for in any individual there are instincts and impulses tending to generosity and social conduct. But the nation appeals first to those very impulses as it demands of its citizens self-sacrifice in its service, and then to the impulses of self-assertion as it urges them to gird themselves to battle with its and their enemies. It appeals to love and to hatred, both at once, with the result that the nation itself, in its contrast with and opposition to other nations, can become demonic in its egotism.

The cure for this, short of the leavening influence of an effective universal Church, seems to lie in a profitable union and organized cooperation of peoples sufficiently close in tradition and interest for this to be voluntarily accepted, yet sufficiently disparate to introduce some efficient checks and balances. How far contiguous national groups provide opportunity for this is a matter for the political specialist. But I suggest that some groups stand out as offering these characteristics in greater or less degree: a. the Danubian group; b. Germany, if freed from the Prussian domination over the other constituent parts of the Reich; c. the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles; d. the Scandinavian countries; e. Great Britain and France, with, perhaps, Belgium, Luxemburg and Holland.

It is not suggested that all these groups can be at once established after the war. But it seems most unlikely that a general federation of Europe can be effected then either, and to propose as a means to this (which would best accord with our principle) a number of smaller federations opens the way for advance. Some might be established before others. There is no value in uniformity of action unless it is also spontaneous. As nations long used to complete autonomy become accustomed to action within a federal scheme, they will become ready for the federation of the civilized world. (I am not a great admirer of Tennyson as a poet, apart from the shorter lyrics; but I am greatly impressed by the fact that in Locksley Hall he foresaw "the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World" as a consequence of the invention of aviation - itself then very far in the future.)

Within each federal or confederate unit which is established the federal Parliament or Council and the Executive responsible to it will, of course, take over the control of all matters of common interest, including Foreign Policy. And secession would be forbidden. If any State which is sufficiently aggrieved by the action of the federal authority is free to secede, the system becomes unworkable. Abraham Lincoln was quite right when he insisted that to permit the secession of the Southern States was in principle to approve the dissolution of the United States into its component elements. Any federal Government must have the use of full and effective "sanctions" against its own rebellious members.

But the federation of the civilized world and even of Europe lies far in the future, unless this war, before it ends, causes such distress and havoc as to drive men to drastic remedies. Consequently there will be need for the more comprehensive League of Nations which shall include the various local federations. This, as the all-inclusive body, should determine the constitution of the Court of International Justice,

and (if one be set up, as is urgently to be desired) the Court of Equity. What is to be the authority of these Courts - moral only or coercive also?

Here the lesson of experience is very plain. To entrust the application of "sanctions" to Sovereign States (whether themselves Federal or not) is to court disaster. It creates uncertainty, which is an effective irritant. If it is possible, as I believe, to recruit an effective international Air Force under the direct authority of the League Council, and if the nations are prepared to agree to abandon military aviation as part of their own equipment, the League might have at its disposal a weapon sufficient to enforce its awards or those of the Courts associated with it. But if the Council has no effective force of its own, then let all mention of "sanctions" be struck out of the Covenant. Let us have no "sanctions" of which the application depends on others than the Assembly or Council of the League themselves.

The moral authority of the League may count for very much if it stands alone. But if there is, so to speak, a stick in the cupboard, all attention is diverted from a moral censure to the question whether the stick is to be brought out.

Besides getting rid of uncertain sanctions, either by making them certain or by abolishing them we need to cultivate a stronger public opinion in support of League-loyalty than yet exists. On the whole this country has been a genuine supporter of the League system; but there are some bad patches in our record. It may have been so difficult as to be reckoned impossible to go to the help of China in Manchuria when Japan was formally pronounced guilty of aggression. But we might have avoided putting an embargo on the export of arms to both countries immediately after that judgment had been pronounced. That was a very severe slap in the face to the League's authority. It is pleaded that it was unintentional; but that only makes it worse. The action made it very clear that our Government did not regard the judgment of the League as a primary factor in the shaping of its policy.

In the crucial case of Abyssinia we took the worst possible course. We could, with some consistency, have refused to act at all. We had opposed to admission of Abyssinia to the League; that step was taken on the motion of Italy against our advice. When Italy proceeded to invade Abyssinia, we might have pleaded our former attitude and stood aside. That would not, I think, have been the highest ethical line; but it was defensible; and we might have retained the friendship of Italy. We took what I think the higher ethical line without counting the cost. It should always have been evident that no State

should resort to sanctions unless prepared to go to all lengths, including war, to uphold the authority of international law. What happened was that we imposed sanctions to an extent which did the maximum harm and stopped before they could do any good.

We have not, I believe, been worse than our neighbours; but it is most profitable that each nation should pay regard to its own mistakes rather than to those of neighbours. The conclusion at any rate is clear and it is two-fold: a. no sanctions except under the direct authority of the League Itself; b. a new loyalty towards the League in the States-members of it.

One more illustration of the latter point may be given. The Disarmament Conference failed, and its failure was a major disaster. It failed, in part at least, because it worked under a formula containing two terms without ever deciding which of these was primary. The formula was Disarmament by Agreement. Is Disarmament the more important term? or Agreement? Clearly, Agreement. There is no more essential evil in a big gun than in a small gun. The evil is in the race in armaments. That is what creates tension, anxiety, panic. If once we can agree about armaments, we have taken the decisive step from regarding them as our means of injuring one another to regarding them as our joint equipment in the common enterprise of civilization. If that Conference had agreed to maintain the status quo for five years, without any disarmament at all, and then meet again, it would have taken a decisive step. When it met five years later, disarmament would have begun. When the nations cease to compete in armaments, and fix the amount of these by agreement, they will soon reduce their volume; the money is wanted for other purposes!

But to put Agreement first was really implicit in the whole idea of the League. To put Disarmament first was to follow the line of ephemeral national interest. Indeed the idea of the League implies that no State-member should take an action affecting its relations to other State-members except in consultation with them in the League. That leads us to the most conspicuous defect of the League - its failure to deal with Tariffs.

The League has done magnificent service in the social fields. Its medical work has been invaluable, and the International Labour Office, associated with it, has won universal confidence though not all its recommendations have been universally accepted. All this work must go on. The League has also won great honour by its occasional incursions into the economic field, as for example its reconstruction of Austrian finance. But its activities on this side have been limited by lack of authority in the Covenant. We pass on therefore to certain applications of our initial principles in the economic field.

The way to be followed in this field as indicated by our principles may be very briefly described. We have to find a way of ordering life which

- a. expresses the fellowship of all men in one family,
- b. gives sufficient outlet to the self-centred acquisitive tendency in men to harness it to the common interest,
- c. provides adequate checks and balances to prevent it from seriously injuring the common interest.

Of course that is easier said than done. It seems to me indispensable that States should consent to submit their Tariffs to the League and let free consultation concerning them take place. To impose a Tariff without so submitting it should be an offence within the competence of the Court of International Justice. Such consultation would of itself lead to many adjustments and generally to the lowering of tariff-walls. It would also tend to undermine economic nationalism which is an active part of the disease of Europe today. But behind all these contrivances is the question of motive in the economic world.

So long as we rely on the Profit-motive (as distinct from a secure but limited return on capital invested) as the mainspring of production, so long we shall be in a condition always verging towards faction within and war without. In the world we know, however great the need for an article may be, it cannot be produced unless it pays some one to produce it. If there is an idle coal pit and there are unemployed miners, even if they could pay the cost of working the plant, they may not do it unless they can also pay the owner. Supply of need is not now a sufficient motive; there must be also payment for ownership. We have reached a stage where that is become intolerable. And the profit-motive in industry and in finance, when given such freedom and prominence as it now has, becomes a profoundly and pervasively disturbing factor. The one thing that has become international in our world is Finance; it is arguable that it ought to have been the last.

Finance ought never to be in positive control. It exists for the sake of production. And production exists for the sake of consumption. The hungry and needy public ought to be the controlling group. Finance may rightly exercise a check, calling a halt to avoid bankruptcy; but for positive control it is functionally unfitted. Yet it exercises such control to a very large extent.

When we leave the realm of general principles for that of constructive action I have no qualifications to speak. Plainly we may cut the knot by following Sir Richard Acland

in his demand for universal communal ownership. I shrink from this, because I think that the administration of the communal property would tend to become bureaucratic and mechanical. But I would advocate a vast extension of public control of private enterprise; especially I would advocate a wide extension of the limitation of profits wherever liability is limited - a model scheme could be found before the war in the great glass-works at Jena. And I think the Bank of England, and probably all Joint-Stock Banks, should be nationalized; for I see no other way to stop the exercise of positive control through finance, which is false in sociological principle, or the speculation in money as though it were itself a commodity - a process which impairs its utility for its own function as a medium of exchange.

I need hardly say that I attach no importance to my opinions in this field; for my special knowledge of it is very slender. I put forward these views rather as illustrations of a political spirit than as a political programme. If we could see the Governments of Europe genuinely cooperate in the enterprise of securing for the mass of ordinary citizens the full benefit derivable from the ease with which mankind now produces wealth, we should have moved a long way towards both prosperity and peace. But I am very sure that those who hope to see a successful termination of our present effort and the salvation of Europe from re-current outbreaks must be ready for far-reaching changes in the political and economic spheres, and that these must be guided by the Christian understanding alike of the purpose of God and of the nature and destiny of Man.

* * *