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CHRISTIANITY TODAY



A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Editorial Notes and Comments

THE 147TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE outstanding feature of this issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY is its interpretative as well as descriptive report of the proceedings of the last General Assembly. While this report contains some statements that we would have omitted or modified, it seems to us that it paints a substantially correct picture of what happened in connection with the recent Cincinnati Assembly.

Those who did not attend the Assembly may be disposed to think that it is unfair to its Moderator. Those who attended any considerable number of its sessions will be disposed, however, if we mistake not, to think that it understates rather than overstates DR. VANCE'S faults and shortcomings as a presiding officer. His unfairness was so glaring that on one occasion at least he was actually hissed by the galleries—a hissing in which, if we mistook not, certain of the commissioners joined. Not only did DR. VANCE fail to exhibit that impartiality of attitude that is characteristic of every good Moderator, but he was constantly usurping the rights of members by engaging in the discussions from the chair. While there is no necessary connection between the two, yet in addition to being, as far as we have observed, the least satisfactory presiding officer that has ever occupied the Moderatorial chair, DR. VANCE also enjoys the distinction of being, as far as we know, the least orthodox of those who have been elected to this high position. Evidence of this latter statement may be found in an editorial that follows.

The relatively small vote received by DR. ROBINSON, the only candidate for the Moderatorship openly to oppose the Modernism and ecclesiasticism so largely dominant in our church, was very disappointing. We are far from supposing, however, that the vote DR. ROBINSON received is truly indicative of the strength of conservatism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It indicates rather the strength of those conservatives who approve the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Many expected that DR. ROBINSON would receive the votes of those who disapproved the action of the 1934 Assembly against the Independent Board as well as those who positively approved the Independent Board itself. It does not seem, however, that that happened to any appreciable extent. His opponents, according to our information, succeeded in making most of the commissioners believe that a vote for him was a vote for the Independent Board, with the result that he received only a few more votes than a candidate nominated on a straight Independent Board issue would have received. Only on the assumption that practically all thoroughgoing conservatives approve the Independent Board—in our judgment an unfounded assumption—is there warrant for supposing that the vote DR. ROBINSON received is truly indicative of the strength of conservatism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. If we mistake not,

the vote DR. ROBINSON received calls loudly to the conservatives of the church to get together on a platform on which they can present a united front against the Modernism and unwholesome ecclesiasticism that is cursing it.

Further editorial comment, in addition to that which follows, is reserved for future issues of this paper.

THE ASSEMBLY AND THE INDEPENDENT BOARD

THE 147th General Assembly reaffirmed the action of the 146th General Assembly relative to the Independent Board. It did this in a negative way by voting "no action" with respect to the various overtures that requested it to rescind the action taken by the previous Assembly and in a positive way by concurring in certain actions by presbyteries approving the Official Board and condemning the Independent Board, particularly that of the Presbytery of Niobrara, to wit: "Resolved, that this Presbytery go on record as sustaining the action of the 146th General Assembly relative to the Independent Board of Foreign Missions."

It should not be supposed for a moment, however, that the fact that the 147th Assembly reaffirmed the action of the 146th Assembly relative to the Independent Board has any decisive bearing on the question of the constitutionality of that action. The General Assembly is subject to the Constitution just as truly as is the session, presbytery or synod, and therefore exceeds its authority if it issues a mandate that is contrary to or beside the Constitution. In our opinion, it is perfectly clear that the action of the 146th General Assembly was unconstitutional, and, hence, so far from being obeyed should be ignored or rather protested by all true Presbyterians. In our May issue we enumerated some of the ways in which the General Assembly exceeded its lawful authority when it issued its mandate concerning the Independent Board. Its unconstitutionality is pointed out in a succinct but convincing manner in the "testimony" (printed in full in our June issue) to which the Ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., are subscribing in large numbers. But whether we and the nation-wide committee of Ruling Elders who are sponsoring this "testimony" (not to mention others) are right or wrong in holding that the action against the Independent Board is unconstitutional, the last General Assembly studiously avoided any discussion of this issue, despite the fact that it is basic to the whole matter. Such reference to it as we heard would seem to indicate that the "leaders" of the Assembly make no distinction between the action of the Assembly acting in an administrative capacity and the Assembly acting as a court. Because the action of the Assembly acting as a court is final, they seem to assume that its action as an administrative body is equally final when as a matter of fact, as the Report of the Commission of Fifteen to the 1926 Assembly correctly affirmed, "when the General Assembly as a non-judicial body makes deliverances, they are entitled to great respect and deference, but they are subject

Is America on the Road to Ruin?

By the Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, D.D.
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"And the nations that forgot God." (Psalm 9:17.)



HE Bible deals with individuals—their duties, sins, sorrows, judgments, and hopes. But it also deals with nations. The mission and destiny of one particular nation is a chief theme of the Bible; but much is said also of the rise and fall of contemporary nations. The most obvious fact of history is that nations rise and fall and disappear. The question is sometimes asked, "Why should one travel in foreign lands, especially in the Mediterranean world and Asia, when there is so much that is beautiful and interesting to see in our own land?" The answer is that in the old world you move amid the ruins of the empires and kingdoms of the past. As one walks around the huge pyramids of Egypt, or from the Mount of Olives looks down upon the rocky height, once the scene of the splendor of Solomon and the might of David, and sees it covered with a Moslem mosque; as one stands on the shore at Tyre, and looking down into the sea, beholds the waves breaking over great columns that once adorned the temples of Tyre; or when one listens to the wind making music in the reeds of the desolate marsh where once the Temple of Diana stood; or when one walks in the moonlight in the midst of a great solitude around the grand columns of the temples of Baalbek; or muses amid the fragments of the Parthenon, the whole panorama of the past of these kingdoms is displayed before one. Sitting perhaps in one of their theaters, always the best preserved of the ancient ruins, what you see before you is not the particular drama that was acted on that stage, but the great drama of the past, the rise and the fall of kingdoms and empires. The impression is the same, whether these ruins are in the midst of a desert solitude, or, as at Athens and Rome, in the midst of a numerous population. The dead speak more eloquently than the living. The kingdoms of the past march before you on their way to glory and to power, and then to corruption, decay, and death.

Their mighty shadows cast,
The giant forms of empire
On their way to ruin.

One by one, they tower and are gone.

What made these nations fall? How came it that populations so numerous, cities so splendid, and governments so powerful, disappeared so completely? Does a nation have a natural cycle of life like a man—childhood, youth, maturity, decline, old age, and death? Or was it changes in climate, or economic conditions, or the greed and violence of other states, that overthrew these kingdoms? Or is the reason to be found in the moral and social life of the inhabitants of these states?

It is needless to say that the latter is the view of the Bible. Nations perish because of iniquity. The ultimate cause for their overthrow is moral. The history of the world is the judgment of the world. This is the meaning of the verse from this Psalm: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Hell here is used not in the sense of the place of punishment, but the place of oblivion and destruction. The nations that forget God shall be forgotten.

One of the most eloquent of all books is Volney's "Ruins," the book which almost made an infidel out of Lincoln because of its effort to put a fool's cap upon Christianity and all other religions. Yet in his account of the fall of ancient kingdoms, Volney agrees with the Scriptures. They fell through their own sins and follies. Sitting one moonlight night on the shaft of a pillar, and viewing the rows of columns at Palmyra of the Desert, Volney invokes the phantom of the past, the genius of the tombs, who rebukes the mortal for complaining against heaven, declaring the destruction of the civilizations of the past was due to man's folly and sin. "I will ask," says the mortal to the Phantom, "the

ashes of legislators by what secret causes do empires rise and fall." The Bible makes plain to us the reason for the fall of empires. There is a moral law at work among the nations, for nations are made up of men. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; and whatsoever a nation soweth that also shall it reap. As the great historian of Rome, Mommsen, put it, "God makes a Bible out of history."

Wide, indeed, is the field of observation when we come to study this truth of the past, and the present, for nations are just as surely dying and sinking today, as they have in the past. Every monument, every broken arch, every heap of debris, every lonely pillar, becomes a pulpit from which we hear the Voice of the Past preaching the great sermon of national sin and national judgment.

One of the most powerful empires of antiquity, and one of the most cruel, was Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh. The judgment which the prophet Jonah pronounced upon that city was postponed, but in course of time it fell. Through the Prophet Naaman, God says of Nineveh, "I will dig thy grave because thou art vile." That is an epitaph which might well be inscribed over the ruins of every ancient state. Their own wickedness dug their graves. Babylon falls when her king, Belshazzar, and all his nobles are in the midst of a drunken debauch. Then it was the king saw the handwriting on the wall. From age to age, that same awful Hand comes forth and traces over against the walls of the richest and most powerful states that same sentence, "Thou are weighed in the balance and found wanting." The moral law first weighs, and then judges and destroys.

In the history of Greece we can trace the cycle of early simplicity and strength; and then power, luxury, licentiousness, conquest, and death. The greatest voice of Greece in the day of her sunset, Demosthenes, attributed her fall to moral causes: the corruption and dishonesty of her public men and the death of patriotism.

But it is most of all in Rome, because its history is more open to us, that we see the illustration of the truth that nations die through moral disease. In the history of Rome we see the simple, rugged stock of the Latins, who founded the city; the place that public and domestic religion held, how chastity was guarded, marriage honored, women revered. Then came the age of expansion and power and conquest, and after that the history of decline and fall. Oriental cults with licentious rites were imported from the East and supplanted the simple worship of an earlier day. Depravity of manners and customs made itself manifest in the life of the people, in the stages and theaters, gigantic cesspools of iniquity and sensuality. Marriage fell into disfavor, so much so that the Emperor Augustus endeavored to take steps to compel marriage. The empire swarmed with Oriental mistresses. Woman threw off the ancient and honorable veil of modesty, and peering into the mysteries of sex became a fine art. With this went the brutalizing of life in the cruel sports of the circus and the amphitheater. Roman society reached the terrible climax of iniquity which is pictured for us in the first chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. A dark picture it is; but not as dark as that painted by the Roman historians themselves. When he comes to describe the manners and morals of that age, Tacitus says that he will not take us into the cavern itself, lest the foul odors should destroy us, but will conduct us only as far as the mouth of the cavern and let us look from a distance upon its iniquity and shame.

Thus was the stage set for judgment, and the barbarians poured in like a flood upon the splendor and glory of the Cæsars. "Where the carcass is," said Christ, "there the eagles will be

gathered together." Whenever a state is sufficiently ripe for judgment, then appear the eagles of judgment and destruction.

Such, then, is the history of the past. Can history teach us anything? When we turn from these ancient states to our own nation, what shall we think? The history of our nation is such as to make us believe that it is indeed a vine of God's own planting, and that He hath not dealt so with any people. In his great speech at Mars Hill, St. Paul declared that God is the Author and Appointer of the history of the nations, that He has appointed their seasons and the bounds of their habitations. The history of this nation is a great illustration of that truth. In the making of the nation, no one can question that part taken by religion, by the Ten Commandments, by the thought of accountability to God. The sanctions of religion have held society and government together.

Today we behold everywhere a breaking down of or disregard for those sanctions. Anti-Christian and anti-religious ideas are boldly taught. Man is not the special creation of God in the divine image, with wisdom, knowledge, and responsibility, who sinned and fell, and for whose redemption a great Atonement has been made; but is a beast climbing slowly out of the abyss. Religion has been almost divorced from education. The president of one of our greatest universities in his annual report declares that the American people, in the conflicts of opinions and interests as to the manner and method of religious instruction, have solved it by taking the view of a very small minority, that is, the pagan view, *no religious instruction at all*. A widely read columnist, who the other day at Reno, fifteen minutes after he had secured his divorce, married a woman who had just secured her divorce, declared at a meeting of one of the learned societies, that the Ten Commandments are to be obeyed only when they are found to square with the latest Science, and that is no sin because probably there is no God against whom to sin.

When we turn from the study of the ideas and principles which are being taught, to conditions, what confronts us? By common consent there is a theater and a literature which remind one in a striking way of the interest and themes of sex which engrossed the Roman populace. Pornographic books, which not so long ago would have been regarded as vile and unthinkable, lie on the tables of Christian homes and are discussed in the societies of the women of the day. As one has put it, speaking of this inundation of sex thought and literature, "You would think that the world was made in *sex* days, and not in six, and that Job suffered not from boils, but from sex repression."

Self-expression, the centering of thought upon rights and not upon duty, upon pleasure and not upon destiny—all this already shows a ghastly harvest in the life of the homes of our land. The last reports show 183,000 divorces for one year, one for every five marriages. Fifty per cent of the cases of children brought into the courts of one of our great cities were children from broken homes. Divorce, by itself, in its reaction upon those divorced, is one thing; in its influence upon the children of broken up homes, it is another and still darker thing.

From the home we turn to the courts and the conduct of the people. In the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the World War, 112,751 of our soldiers were killed in action. But in the last ten years, 120,000 of our citizens were murdered. Almost 9,000 more men have been murdered in the last ten years than were killed in battle in all the wars in which our nation has engaged. A murder is committed in the United States every forty-five minutes. Thirty-seven murders every day, 12,000 every year. Since 1890 the murder rate in the United States has increased 350 per cent. We have an army of criminals of almost half a million, and an annual crime bill of \$15,000,000,000, or \$2.50 a week for every man, woman, and child in the nation. As if this were not appalling enough, we learn something even more distressing; that 39 per cent of the criminals fingerprinted in the country in a year were under twenty-four!

The scarlet thread of sensuality and license, under the guise

of liberty of life, runs through the social life of the people. A prominent citizen, speaking of what he saw at a recent public dance, summed it all up by saying, "This is not a new generation we are looking at; *it is a new race.*"

Side by side with this internal decay and corruption, there is being carried on a bold and open attack upon the government and the principles upon which it is founded. This attack receives no little aid from some of the pulpits and professors' chairs of the land.

To offset all these evil forces and influences which are preying upon the life of the nation, the nation itself is making no effort. Here and there, we hear of a League of Decency, or a Crime Conference; but the state as such is doing nothing, practically nothing, to conserve the higher life of the nation, without which the nation must perish. We have great national plans for the conservation of forests and water power, but apparently no plans for the conservation of the spiritual and moral life of the nation. Even in the Nazi state, with all its abominations and tyrannies, there is a definite program of action against the vices and immoralities which are attacking the people. But here the state does nothing. That is the most appalling fact of all. We hear of currency discussions and debates over World Courts in Congress; but not of measures to safeguard the rising generation from the inundation of liquor and the propaganda of licentiousness.

The picture is not a pleasing one; but it becomes all the more distressing when you place it alongside the pictures the historians have given us of the ancient states in the day of their decline. What is to be the destiny of this nation? Is there any reason to believe that we are to be exempted from the working of the moral law which overthrew the kingdoms of the past? Our own nation is teaching now, and will teach, the same old truth, Whatsoever a nation soweth, that also shall it reap. The nations that forget God shall be forgotten.

There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First freedom, and then glory—when that fails—
Wealth, vice, corruption—Barbarism at last.
And history, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page.

If a Volney, sitting amid the ruins of Palmyra, could imagine a traveler like himself sitting in solitude and mourning over the ruins of the civilization and cities of the Seine, Thames, and the Zuyder Zee; and if a Macaulay could imagine a traveler from New Zealand standing on a broken arch of London Bridge and sketching the ruins of St. Paul's, it requires no great flight of imagination to imagine an explorer and philosopher of a future age sitting amid the ruins of America's great buildings and writing of our history as we write today of the buried cities and civilizations of the past. Perhaps our Goths and Vandals will come from within, more than from without. But whensoever they come, the historian of the future will sum up the story of the rise and fall of the American republic in much the same way that we tell the story of the civilizations of the past—freedom, then glory, and after that wealth, vice, corruption, and death.

Whether national repentance and a revival of national morality shall long postpone the judgment of history only the future can tell. The one thing about which we can be certain is the future of the Kingdom of God. This is the nation and kingdom that shall never be destroyed. As the Christian church rose amid the ruins of the Roman Empire, so out of any possible or appointed catastrophes of the future shall arise with new power and new splendor the Kingdom of God.

It is a proud and happy privilege and distinction to be a citizen of the American republic. But it is a far higher privilege and distinction to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ. The American republic will go the way of all the nations of the earth; but the Kingdom of God endures forever. Are you a citizen of that Kingdom? Is your name inscribed there, written in the blood that was shed on Calvary for the redemption of mankind?