

THE CHURCH AND A WORLD AT WAR

A Social Document of the
ULCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Statement of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1942

1942: Minutes, 13th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 144-46, 545-46.

The world today is torn with strife which, in its roots, is the product of godlessness. God has been left out of the lives of men. Therefore, mankind is reaping the harvest of its apostasy, in judgment, discipline, and vicarious suffering. All have sinned, against each other, against themselves, and thus against God. Our world has lost its religious moorings. In too many places its mind is perplexed and its motives confused because its soul is dark. In too many places it has lost the light of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our struggle is not alone or primarily against flesh and blood, it is against spiritual wickedness in the high places of man's being. As a first and fundamental step toward righteousness and peace we call all people to repentance and a rededication of their lives to the will of God. In His will alone is man's peace. Men will never get right with each other until they have first gotten right with God.

The storms and agonies of war have been brought down upon the nations of the world because they have in practice denied the sovereignty of the God of Brotherhood and Good Will. This worship of self and the consequent lust for power, ruthless of the rights of others, is man's fundamental idolatry. It is a plague, born of the devil, nourished by vaunting pride, with which the Christian Church and Christian people cannot anywhere temporize. Today, after years of guilt in which all have played their part, it threatens to extinguish from the earth those ideals of freedom and human brotherhood which are the fundamentals of our faith as Christians, and are the spiritual essence of all true national life. Therefore, we call upon our own people in particular, and all Christian people in general, to dedicate themselves wholly, with every resource of heart and mind and conscience, to the defeat and destruction of this evil wherever it exists.

Since we believe God reigns, and is working out His purposes, we believe that a better world order can be born out of the present travail. We believe that although he is "afflicted in the afflictions of His people," nevertheless, he is also using the "wrath of men to praise Him" to draw the nations together into a world family to show their interdependence to teach them the necessity for world cooperation. He wants His children to live together in brotherhood. These are the ideals of His Kingdom. We believe that Kingdom shall inevitably come, and that His Glory shall "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." To that end we summon our people to an earnest, searching study of the ways and means to an enduring world peace to a study of the implications of this goal with respect to national prerogatives, and economic

privileges and religious prejudices to a study of prerequisites, for such a goal, of world-law, world-freedom, world-justice, and an adequate world-authority, implemented with police power to maintain international tranquility. We urge every congregation to make such a study a part of its educational program in the coming year.

But a world peace will come only to men of good will. Peace is not an unconditional gift of God. It is a by-product of righteousness. Righteousness and good will are God's first goals. Peace is their flower and fruit. If enduring peace is to come to mankind it can come only to men and through men who are wholly dedicated, through faith in Christ, and by the power of His Holy Spirit, to righteousness and good will. This faith and power, bearing fruit in righteousness and good will, are the only real bases of a just and lasting peace. Therefore, all Christians are challenged as never before, by the spectacle of a world-agonies born of selfishness and hate, to cultivate in their lives the gifts of God's grace, through God's Word and Sacraments, that they may become more effective exemplars and evangelists of that righteousness and good will, which alone can produce a just and lasting peace.

The powers of evil generate special spiritual poisons to gain their end. Christians will need to be especially on guard against the passions of hate and revenge, which will inevitably arise to make men bitter and unforgiving, toward our enemies. To give these passions sway will transform any temporal victory into eternal defeat. We will then indeed win another war in the long, dark, tragic record of man's inhumanity to man and will lose the peace. Let all Christians pray for special Grace from God, that hatred in the days ahead may not frustrate His ends for us, and that the bright promise of a brotherly world for all mankind, now being bought at bloody cost, may not be betrayed by the spirit of revenge.

The end of the present conflict will find the war-torn peoples of the world in tragic want. The Church must be ready to bring to them a ministry of merciful help and relief in the name of Christ. Our Lutheran Church is already engaged upon such a program of help to the distressed areas of the world through Lutheran World Action. We call upon our people to a generous support of these relief programs, and to be ready to increase that support, commensurate with the growing needs of suffering peoples, in the days that lie ahead.

Great occasions call for great men. The plight of humanity today and the possibilities for the future call for great Christians and a more effective witness by the Church. Therefore, we summon our own people to a new and solemn dedication of themselves and all they have, of loyalty and love and life, for a renewed proclamation of Christ's Gospel, and a world-wide advance by His Church. We believe that God is plowing all the nations for a new Gospel harvest. The Church is confronted by an unparalleled opportunity to mold the new age after the pattern of the Kingdom of God. The time is ripe for a vigorous program of world missions. We can only seize the opportunity, as we give ourselves in sacrificial ardent witness, as we dedicate, more generously than ever before, our earthly goods, all that we are

and all that we have, to the cause of Christ's Kingdom and the conquest of the world for Him. Finally, the paramount service the Church has to render to a world at war is to proclaim the Redemptive Love of God, and to make men, indeed, the sons of God by the power of His Holy Spirit. To that end we call upon our people, and all Christians everywhere, to renewed prayer, and the cultivation of spiritual values through the preaching of the Word of God, and the Holy Communion, as the primary means by which we may gain the vision, faith, courage and patience needed to accomplish God's holy purposes for us and for all mankind.

The Church is praying that God may swiftly send His victory and His peace to suffering mankind:

Therefore, be it resolved that we pledge to our leaders and to the men and women in the armed services of our country, at home and abroad, whatever their need, the church's wholehearted help; and that we call upon our own people and all other Christians to give their fullest measure of support, under God, and in the light of their consciences, to our country in this critical hour.

1942: Minutes, 13th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 445.46, 454.

The Convention resolved:

That the Church urge all its pastors to examine prayerfully their preaching to the end that the Gospel in its fullness may be presented with increased vigor to all our people; and that the Church call upon its pastors and people to cultivate in their congregations and communities the spirit of peace and good will by exalting the Prince of Peace, engendering love for and forgiveness of enemies, respecting the personalities and the rights of peoples of other nations, races, and colors, and by giving prayerful and careful attention to the study and discussion of the bases of a just and durable peace for the nations of the earth. (See pamphlet, "A Message from the National Study Conference on the Churches and a Just and Durable Peace.")

That the Church encourage its pastors and congregations to intensify their ministry, spiritual and otherwise, to those who have been called into military service, those who have lost loved ones in the service of the nation, those who have left their homes and communities to engage in wartime production and those who have suffered privation and loss through economic changes and maladjustments. That the Church declare to the President of the United States, the Commander in Chief of our armed forces, its unalterable opposition to the evils of the liquor traffic, particularly as they relate to those in the armed services and in war industries, recognizing fully their dangerous and injurious effects upon the youth of our country, now removed from their homes, and urge that he take the most aggressive means at his disposal to protect them against these devastating evils; and, that the officers of the Church convey this action to the President.

That the Church urge our pastors in these wartime days to instruct their people and warn them regarding the social evils, now fomented by war conditions, particularly those of prostitution, intemperance, and gambling, in order that the Christ may be

exalted in the individual Christian life and the menace of these evils overcome in their communities and in the nation.