

Nationalized Churches vs. World Faith

Tenacious Efforts to Identify Religion With Patriotism Deeply Concern Western Section of Alliance of Reformed Churches



The Witches: Who'd ha' thought we three would meet again so soon?

The tenacious effort to identify religion with patriotism, evident in more than one part of the world, has alarmed men of all creeds, those who are engaged directly in the desperate struggle between Church and State and those who watch the battle from afar. It was of deep concern to the Biennial Congress of the Western Section of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Throughout the World, held recently at Richmond, Virginia.

The Congress, representing a constituency of 13,000,000, pointed out that national religions, such as that whose establishment is being attempted in Germany, are "synthetic," and dangerous to Catholic and Protestant churches alike.

This view calls to mind the declaration of Michael Cardinal Faulhaber that the Nazi religious program is a fight not against Catholicism or Protestantism, but a fight against Christianity itself. In the words of the Congress, gathered in the capital of the old Confederacy, the struggle in Germany, and elsewhere, is between a totalitarian State and a totalitarian Christianity.

A World View

In addition to taking a world view of conditions, and expressing concern for home missions, which must be endangered by extreme nationalism, the Alliance advocated American entry into the World Court and League of Nations.

A drive for strict observance of the Sabbath also was indorsed, and a resolution to join the Lord's Day Alliance in such a campaign was adopted. It was stated that a "tremendous drive" was under way by sport leaders and amusement, motion-picture, theatrical and other businesses to "commercialize the Sabbath," and that the effort was "increasing the growing disregard of the Christian Sabbath."

The Rev. Charles S. Cleland, D.D., of Philadelphia, Recording Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, was elected Chairman of the Alliance, and the Rev. Henry B. Master, D.D., of Philadelphia, was chosen Vice-Chairman.

Christianity knows no frontier. To nationalize it into separate State churches would be to destroy it, in the view of these earnest churchmen assembled on the banks of the historic James. To set up in its place national creeds based on national ideals, heroes and achievements, of course, would be equally destructive of religion.

Nationalism and Patriotism

Distinguishing between nationalism and patriotism, Dr. Charles E. Schaeffer, Secretary of the Board of Home Missions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, said that "nationalism makes the nation an end in itself, and has no regard for conscience and none for the rights of other nations. Patriotism has no selfish motives or purposes. It yields to nothing in devotion to the country, but it seeks to lift that country to high social, political and ethical levels."

As for antireligious communism, said Doctor Cleland, "In our missionary circles this is more to be feared than nationalism. The latter may be, and oftentimes is, a patriotic movement, while the former aims only at destruction. Communism of the type now referred to seeks not only the suppression of Christianity, but of all religions. Its purpose is to make governments entirely secular, and to free the national life from all forms of faith and worship."

Looking at the situation from the other direction, Dr. Samuel G. Trexler of New York, who had but recently returned from a visit to Central and Northern Europe, said Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia offer an example to American Christians which they can not afford to neglect.

The Nazis and Bolsheviks, he said, are doing their utmost to mold the young people of their lands to their own political and religious beliefs.

The success of the antireligious campaign in Russia, asserted Doctor Trexler, is partly due to the political entanglements of the old Russian Church, and the present struggle for religious freedom in Germany has a somewhat similar explanation.

"The Church in Germany has in the past been too closely bound to the State." Therefore, warned Doctor Trexler, the Church in America "should have no entanglements, whether they be political, financial, or social."



Dr. Charles S.
Cleland