

ARTICLE IV.

OUGHT FOLLOWERS OF THE GALILEAN TO
BE PACIFISTS?BY H. W. MAGOUN, PH.D.,
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IF the world now bristles with bayonets, it also bristles with questions. They meet the wayfarer on every side. Indeed, they are sometimes almost as pointed and as disconcerting as bayonets themselves would be or actually have been in the hands of the guards found everywhere in Flanders and Galicia. "Has Christianity broken down?" "What is it to be a Christian?" "Can we be Christians if we fight?" "Did Jesus ever preach the Sermon on the Mount?" "Is it practical?" "Can nations ever be governed on such a basis?" "Ought we to disarm?" "Would any one ever attack us if we did?"

These queries and others like them are causing men to throw up their hands, somewhat as the challenge of a sentry on guard halts a stray civilian and leaves him helpless and abashed. Perchance, the intruder wears a uniform. If so, the order comes, "Advance and give the countersign." Suppose he is unable to do that! It is his business to know it or not be there. What if he gives a false one? Soldiers act first and investigate afterward. They have to. What is likely to happen in such a case? Courts-martial are not held for pleasure or for the health of the offender.

What, then, is the Christian countersign? Is it "Peace at any price"? What is the answer to be when the challenge

comes? Come it will, sooner or later. Which side shall we take our stand on? If we are men, we must take it on one side or the other. Straddling an issue is the act of a coward. Is cowardice one of the virtues of a Christian? Are we Christians when we straddle? Will that solve the problem?

Men were never more at sea with regard to the fundamentals of Christianity than they are to-day. Commentators show a woeful lack of information and, at times, a singular dearth of common sense. They persistently disregard the basic principles of a careful investigation, and they often completely ignore certain vital fundamental elements which must be considered, unless their premises are to be worthless. Moreover, some of the worst offenders in this particular are preachers. They are not only myopic but also astigmatic.

Such men give the Sermon on the Mount a modern setting. That is nonsense. It belongs in an environment such as that found in Sicily, where the mafia holds sway; or, rather, in a country where the blood feud is a duty and personal vengeance is the regular and customary thing in life. Where justice in the established courts is the rule, its object has been attained in large measure, and its application is wholly one of principle. We have no laws making us go a mile to show a stranger the way. They are not necessary. Nor do we expect any longer to win a case by bribing the judge. If we did, the injunction to give the "cloak" also would still be in order.

Inaccuracies of interpretation are found even in supposed authorities. They actually talk of Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount as "the sermon on the plain"! Luke says that Jesus came down (from the mountain) along-with his disciples and took-up-his-position on a spot that-was-level. That is the meaning of the Greek. You cannot make *epi*

topou pedinou into *epi tou pediou*, which would mean "on the plain"; *topos* always has reference to some part of a greater whole; and "level spots" are not found on plains. Comment is unnecessary.

The trouble with many of our commentators is this. They spend their days investigating the Gospels with a microscope, hunting for fancied inconsistencies. By this means they expect to make a reputation. It is merely one of the tricks of the trade, and it is time we recognized it as such.

A real thinker is rare. He does not rush into print. He writes only when he feels that he must. And people do not pay much attention to him. It is too much like work. Such a man never skims the surface. He would ask, for example, what Jesus did, as well as what he said. He said, "Turn the other cheek"; but he did not do it himself. At the house of Annas, an underling (*hupēretēs*) slapped his face (*edōken rhapsima tōi Iēsou*), as we learn from John xviii. 22. Instead of turning the other cheek, he rebuked the man sharply for what he had done. Was he inconsistent? One-track men will say, "Yes." Thinkers will say, "No." Circumstances alter cases.

Two men fire a gun. Each kills a man by doing so. The first aims deliberately with intent to murder and accomplishes his object. The second is examining the weapon, has no idea that it is loaded, does not know that it is pointed at any one, and is intent on trying the hammer. He fires the gun by accident and incidentally kills a man. Each fires a gun and each takes a life; but one is a murderer, while the other is criminally careless. That is the worst you can say of him.

The Sermon on the Mount did not cover such a case as the one in which Christ figured. It could not. The reason will be clear as the argument proceeds. Meanwhile, let it be said

that words have a content as well as a form. Men forget that and put into sayings things that their authors never meant or dreamed of. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" is thus taken to mean that we ought to squabble all the time with our neighbors. It cannot possibly have any such meaning.

Content of words is a vital element. What did Jesus mean? He was not talking to modern New Yorkers of the better class nor yet to Bostonese of the blueblood type. Galilean peasants formed the bulk of his audience, and their ideas were of the crudest sort. Scratching and biting and cursing one another were the regular daily occurrences in their environment, and that fact explains a large part of what was said. Their character and that of their contemporaries is only too patent — to him who takes the time and the pains to "read between the lines" in the Gospel narrative. On "Palm Sunday," it was "Hosanna!" A few days later, it was "Crucify him!" He had not lent himself to their selfish plans. He rode into Jerusalem as their king, but he failed to start an insurrection. That made him worthy of death!

Christ certainly never contemplated the encouragement of vice. That, however, would be the first and most natural fruit of an indiscriminate literal observance of his precepts as they now stand in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead of being "the natural allies of the grafters," the "good people" would inevitably become the natural allies of the criminals. They are now to some extent, as our youthful "bandits" plainly indicate. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." We have forgotten that. It is "brutal" to inflict bodily pain on a child. How about the moral consequences that are apt to follow sentimentalism?

This is the way an able Boston teacher puts it. If you and I touch a hot stove, God doesn't say: "Darling, if you do that again, I shall have to burn you." He burns, and He does it in a hurry. She is right, and if it had not been so down through the ages, man would have perished from off the earth. Some of us still realize that we are not yet very far ahead of the Almighty when it comes to the proper way of dealing with transgressed law. He makes us pay, not as a personal satisfaction to Him or as vengeance, but as a means of holding us back from self-destruction. That is true punishment.

We mix things up in a pitiful way, confusing punishment with vengeance and then denouncing it as criminal. Possibly we are criminal also in that we help produce a crop of criminals by our sentimentality. It is time we took stock of our inventions and made penalties fit crimes. If they did, they would be likely to cure. Gospel without law never will, because it never can. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill." These words have a much deeper meaning than the one that appears on the surface; but the one that appears on the surface holds good for all that. The law must stand. And it must be enforced.

We take some things too literally. That is what the Pharisees did, and they got their condemnation at the hands of Jesus. As Paul put it, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." That is what Christ really came to teach. Set rules develop hypocrites. They always have, and they always will. Consult your own experience and deny it if you can. If you happened to have a hypersensitive conscience, you may have escaped. But how about the other fellow? Did he never show any disposition to be a hypocrite? or a liar?

Christ came to make men free through a knowledge of the truth. That is what he definitely promised his followers. John viii. 31 ff. Does that look like a set of rules in the Sermon on the Mount? What is it to be his follower? Is it to observe a set of rules? Is it to seek peace at any price? If so, what makes manly men rebel and say, "I want none of it?" Have we found the underlying principle of the life that Jesus lived or have we merely toyed a little with some of the things he said?

There are other things. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Why? This is what he says: "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father." That was an awful condition of things in a Jewish household. Does that look like peace at any price? Was peace at any price the thing that governed his words and acts? Did he forget it when he drove out the animals from the temple and upset the tables of the money changers? That was violence and apparent lawlessness. The law of God was behind him; but those men had legal authority behind them, in a way, since the officers of the law connived at their practices.

"Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." That is what Matthew says he said in the Sermon on the Mount. But he also says that he said: "Ye fools and blind" (xxiii. 17), and he used the same Greek word for fool (*mōros*). How about the rule now? In the same chapter he said: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers." Moreover, in the preceding one he said: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Again, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" occurs repeatedly among his sayings. Did he make rules only to break them himself at the slightest provocation?

Now notice something. It is the easiest thing in the world for shallow thinkers to mistake caution for cowardice or thrift for niggardliness or self-love for selfishness — we get that even from the pulpit — or courage for foolhardiness or faith for credulity or firmness for obstinacy or even religion itself for superstition. Some can never understand that liberty is not license but law; for they do not know what freedom means. Freedom is a community matter, not the affair of one individual.

Self-esteem is not self-conceit, and it is not vanity. Dignity is not snobbishness, although that is as near as some people ever get to it; and by no possibility can love be the same as lust. Men seem to regard it so in the talk they are guilty of; but that proves nothing, any more than zeal in a man stamps him as a bigot. Every virtue has its corresponding vice. That is the core of the matter, and the main-spring of Christ's life has been misinterpreted on exactly that basis. It was not "Peace at any price" but something as far removed from it as religion is from superstition.

A follower of the Galilean, then, especially a humble one, cannot be a peace-at-any-price man without caricaturing his Master. In effect he accuses him of the vice that corresponds to some virtue. What was it? Until we know, it is useless to suppose that we have any adequate idea of what such a follower is. But how can we find out?

The King James Version has various infelicities. It uses the single English word "kill" to translate ten different Hebrew verbs, although each of them has a fairly accurate counterpart in our own tongue. What is the result? Confusion. The sixth commandment is really this: "Thou shalt do no murder." That does not supersede the older commandment, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be

shed" (Gen. ix. 6). It confirms it. Each supplements the other, and the first is impotent without the second.

If the first had said "kill," then meat-eating had been a crime, and there are those who actually so interpret the command! They make it a set blanket rule. But Christianity is not now, never has been, and never can be the outward observance of a set of rules or precepts or counsels. It is an inner experience, a state of mind, a plan of living, a fundamental principle. Rules cannot formulate it. They can merely illustrate the spirit behind it. That is what the Sermon on the Mount actually did.

Men bungle it as badly as the young minister did his chickens. When all had died but one, a neighbor asked him what he fed them on. With unfeigned astonishment, he replied: "Why, I should suppose a hen could give milk enough for one chicken!" The thing actually happened; but it was not a whit more absurd than things men are saying of the Bible every day. Why does it not occur to them to take it as a whole and make it interpret itself? You cannot take it piecemeal without wandering off into error, especially if you know nothing but the English version.

In Hebrews, we read: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (xii. 4), and the implication plainly is that Christ did exactly that. Would a peace-at-any-price man be guilty of doing such a thing? He did teach that men should love one another, and we all believe it. He also said: "Love your enemies." And he was not unreasonable when he said it. President McKinley obeyed that command when he was shot, and so did Roosevelt. If either had failed to do so, the fury of the bystanders would have taken care that the courts were relieved of one burden at least.

Each victim "loved" his enemy in the sense conveyed by

the Greek verb, and each "prayed for" a man who had despitefully used him, in a sense, because each begged for the life of the dastard who had shot him. Personal animosity was thus excluded. Now we have it. That was the thing Jesus aimed at in the Sermon on the Mount. That was why certain things were forbidden. When they stood for personal animosity, they were wrong, *but not otherwise*.

He came to teach us a supreme love for God. But that inevitably results in a supreme hatred of evil. Each is psychologically impossible without the other. But hatred of evil is impersonal. It involves the *thing* that is destroying the sinner. If you fail to hate *that*, you do not love *him*. You cannot do one and omit the other. Any one can see that, if he thinks at all.

No man can be a Christian, then, unless he is a good hater, not of men but of things that ruin men. That means that he must be a fighter; for otherwise he will be an impotent coward who dodges every issue. Did Christ ever do that? Can you be his humble follower and keep on doing it? He openly defied the religious leaders of his own day in the interest of righteousness, until they were simply insane with rage and were ready to stoop to anything to destroy him.

Not much peace at any price in that! When he said, "Resist not evil" or, better, "him that is evil," he did not countenance a winking at unrighteousness. What he did do, in effect, was to tell his hearers that he had no use for a miscreant who was always fighting with or cursing his neighbors. It was personal animosity still that he was condemning, not a fight for principle. You *must* fight for principle or you are no follower of his. And that principle will not be a peace-at-any-price policy but plain old-fashioned righteousness.

God opposes evil in every sort of way. Penalties of greater

or less severity hedge in the evil-doer on every side. Sooner or later punishment overtakes him if he persists in disobedience. Are we to thwart God, as far as we can, by keeping the peace at any price? Did Jesus intend any such thing as that? He stood for righteousness at any cost, even the cost of his own life; and he ultimately paid exactly that price for his courage. He never dodged. He never flinched. He never stopped. He told the truth. And sometimes it was extremely unpleasant. He even told it bluntly. What do all these things mean?

Suppose we place peace first. What will it lead to? If we stick to our principles, we must be prepared to abandon every sacred obligation just as soon as peace is in danger unless we do. That should be plain. But a course of that sort may involve the loss of a man's personal honor, a woman's most priceless possession, and everything else that makes life worth living. We should be put in the position of countenancing such atrocities as are registered in the English "Black Book" and doing it in the name of peace! We could not put peace first on any other basis.

Did Jesus do that? On a Sabbath early in his ministry he saw a man in the audience who had a withered hand. He also saw something else. They were watching to see what he would do. Did he tell the man to come around the next day? He might have done so. Instead, he defied them all and healed him. Why? Because he stood for righteousness first, last, and all the time. He never said, "Let there be peace," when there was no peace. He knew that there could be no peace, until righteousness prevailed.

When you put that first, you become his follower. It was a passion for righteousness that dominated Bishop Myriel and helped him redeem Jean Valjean. A passion for peace

never could have done that. St. Francis had a passion for righteousness, and he conquered evil because of it. That might enable a man to turn the other cheek and do it honestly; but to do it merely for the sake of peace would be contemptible. Christ could not turn his other cheek without endorsing a wrong act. Therefore he did not turn it. It was not a personal matter between two men. It was a matter of principle.

Here, then, is the solution of the riddle. Righteousness at any cost was the dominating motive in the life of the Galilean. He came to make men righteous. He came to help them to be righteous, and every word of his and everything that he did had that end in view. Nothing else can be substituted for it. If moral rectitude is not the thing which you place above all other things, then you are no follower of his, however much you may labor for peace or for brotherly love. There can be no peace and there can be no brotherly love, unless there is righteousness first. These things are incidentals. The other is fundamental.

God puts righteousness first. Read your Bible and see for yourself. He does not countenance the view that human felicity is best typified by a drove of pigs in a field of clover. That is a human idea, and you can find it in the talk of men any day. Personal comfort and plenty to eat! That is their idea. The image of God. That is his. And it means righteousness at any cost! Their idea means a condition that invites the powers that prey. His means a willingness to suffer and die for righteousness, as our Lord did. If men will not do that, they must suffer and die for something else, such as the selfish advantage of those who are clever enough to exploit them for their own personal ends. That means perpetual instability.

Material good rests, in the last analysis, on rectitude. If that is excluded, it must rest on force. But with force as a basis, there can be no end to strife. Might will make right in the eyes of its possessors, and the weaker will go to the wall. There is nothing Christian in that. It is wholly pagan. Moreover, material good never satisfies. Solomon found that out. But righteousness does satisfy. Burns has pictured that in his "Cotter's Saturday Night." Experience verifies the conclusions of both. Horribly old-fashioned, isn't it? and Biblical! But can you dodge it?

Men who exalt peace or love or meekness or longsuffering or gentleness or even justice, so-called, instead of defending righteousness, are like the six blind men who severally declared that an elephant was like a wall, a rope, a snake, a spear, a fan, and a tree. Each had felt a part of the beast and then made up his mind what he was like. It took all the likenesses to make the elephant, and it takes all the virtues to make righteousness. That is the parent stem from which they grow. Without it they perish.

There is something fundamentally wrong in our modern viewpoint. To be a follower of the Galilean is not to be a craven but a man. Cowardice is not Christian humility, even if it does often pose as such. Dodging, flinching, squirming out of responsibility, — these are not Christian. Christ never did any of them. He faced issues, and he saw them through to the cross. He knew what was coming; for he mentioned it, in some way, at least twenty-five times during his ministry. Did he sidestep the outcome anywhere?

He even used force — in the temple. And we must use it so long as men are evil. Righteousness will bring peace into your house, but it will not keep thieves out. Jean Valjean stole the good bishop's candlesticks before his awakened

conscience was able to prevent it, even if he did repent; and we cannot dispense with the officers of the law. The gospel is helpless except as it follows the law. Without that as a background, it becomes ineffective.

It was the determined opposition of the police which enabled Judge "Ben" Lindsey to enlist the fighting instinct of the boys in his juvenile court to "Show 'em." That was the real source of his success. Copying his methods without his environment was courting disaster, and we are beginning to reap what we have sowed. Some of us saw it coming long ago; but it was useless to "preach." We were "old fogies." But we've got our "bandits" just as we expected to have, and we are now wondering how big the crop will be.

I knew a policeman once. He is now dead. He went to the boys and asked them why they broke into stores and did other things like that. They asked him why they should not do so. "All they can do to us is to put us on probation, and I'm on that now!" was the way one put it. With this premium on the excitement of robbery and a bit of friendly rivalry in artistic lying to the probation officer, the "gang" was started on its way. They had hilarious fun comparing notes. But that was only human nature gone wrong. And we are responsible for their moral delinquencies. In avoiding Scylla we have jumped into Charybdis.

Osborne methods and Lindsey methods have their place; but crime must not be made attractive. Prisons are still necessary, and so is punishment. The man who loves his boy in the Scriptural sense will use the rod when that is the medicine he needs. If he refuses to do so, he cannot expect that boy to rise up and call him blessed. If he does, he has another guess coming. Boys differ; but there is a period in the life of every normal healthy boy when he is better able

to understand force than anything else. If your boy never had it, he was a prig. Some people do not whip their children at that period: they hold them for an hour or two on the floor. That is all right — if you have the time. The boy prefers the rod.

As Dr. Gordon wittily put it, his “mother used to apply the idea to the foundation of things with her slipper, and it gradually percolated up to the seat of the understanding.” That is a way Scotch mothers have, and their offspring are found in responsible positions in every part of the inhabited globe. If you save your boy from physical pain and make him a moral weakling, what profit is there in the transaction? Foreign parents on the East Side in New York are threatened with arrest, by their young hopefuls, if they whip them. Is it hard to see where the “gunmen” come from? And we back up that sort of thing by doing it, for the children, when the complaint comes in.

Ethical well-being is the first consideration, no matter how much pain may be necessary to obtain it. That includes war. It is God’s scourge applied to a sinful world. We forget the horrors of peace. Death from a bullet in a trench is not half so terrible as death from starvation in the slums of a great city. And moral turpitude is far worse than any physical disability that may result from wounds received in battle. We do not understand.

Righteousness is a thing so priceless that God opened the doors wide to sin. If he had not done this, there could have been no righteousness at all. Righteousness is the deliberate choice of what is right regardless of the allurements of sin or the blandishments of apparent self-interest. Christ did it and showed us what God really wanted. He died to make

it possible. He gave his life, then, for the sake of righteousness, — not for the sake of peace.

To call him the Prince of Peace and put him on the basis assigned to him by modern German philosophy, is to slander him. He taught no doctrine for a population of slaves; for he did not teach submission to wrong. He did teach personal righteousness and that had to come in through the dismissal of the code of personal vengeance. No Personal Vengeance, therefore, is the proper heading of those particular portions of the Sermon on the Mount, and until that fact is mastered it cannot be understood. His real title is the Prince of Righteousness. That is what he came to establish, and every man who hopes or claims to be his follower must stand for righteousness, between man and man and between nation and nation. For evil men there must be police. And for evil nations there must be armies and navies. Are we Christians when we fight? We may not be Christians unless we do! It all depends upon circumstances.

If ever there was a militant man, it was Christ. Single-handed and alone he started overturning the religious ideas of his own day, and he has been slowly overturning the religious ideas of the whole world. Rather a modest quest for a peace-at-any-price gentleman, surely! He began among the poor and lowly. Persecutions and threats soon followed. The cross loomed up in the distance. Did even that daunt him?

How about his early followers? Did prison bars stop Peter's mouth after the day of Pentecost? Did they silence Paul? Did shipwreck or stripes or threats of vengeance or being left for dead from stoning or the clamors of a mob or any other human contingency succeed in putting him out of

commission? Do you imagine that you are a better Christian than he was?

But there are two kinds of militancy. One is wholly selfish. The other is not. They have met to-day and are facing each other for a final decision. It is a struggle between the Galilean and the great of earth. Narrowed down, it amounts to this: Shall righteousness rule or shall self-interest? One or the other must; for the two can never reign in concert. If you elect self-interest, you belong in the camp of Nietzsche, even if you are an advocate of peace. The Galilean puts righteousness first.

Perhaps you think that you are a soldier in the Christian army. If you are looking out for yourself merely, you are only a camp follower. What one of the martyrs ever even thought of self-interest? What one of them ever submitted, as German philosophy would indicate that they should? Could fire or sword terrify them or stop them? Did it ever succeed in doing it? Where, then, was their submission? And how did they seek for peace? Did they want any peace save peace of mind in believing?

To ask for peace when He wills it otherwise is to be disloyal to him. To fail to see that physical horrors are less awful than moral ones is to come short of the stature of an imitator of Jesus. War itself is not too great a price to pay for national righteousness. Men brought face to face with death from day to day lose their flippancy and the blasphemous ribaldry of the market place. The claims of religion then have a chance of being considered seriously. Is it wholly evil to substitute that state of things for the wild orgies that mark the progress of peace with wealth?

Men are shortsighted. A slaughter house is an awful place; but most of us do all we can to make the business

profitable. We never think of the cruel side. But the cruel side is all that we do think of when it comes to some human being that suffers from wounds or exposure in the trenches or even from a whipping! When will men see things in their right relations? If we have a soul that will outlive the body, then that soul is of far greater importance than the body ever can be. Why not put its interests first?

If there is a God at all and if there is any truth in the Bible as a whole, it is more important that a man should recognize the claims of his immortal soul and make his peace with his Creator than it is that he should live any definite number of years or accumulate any definite sum of money or enjoy any particular amount of physical comfort. Such things may be a snare and often are, and their possessor may simply sink deeper and deeper into wickedness and sin because of the opportunity offered him in the possession of them. Under those conditions they are not a blessing but a curse.

If the peace is broken, men suffer in their earthly possessions. The bare prospect of a thing of that sort usually stirs them to action. They are loath to run any risks of financial loss. If war shakes them out of that bit of selfishness, it is not wholly bad. But if they work for peace from motives of that kind, let them not hug themselves with a smug complacency, as humble followers of the Galilean. They are nothing of the sort. They are parasites on his bounty and little else. He stands for righteousness, and he stands for it at any cost.

No. I am not a bloodthirsty swashbuckler. I am the mildest kind of a mild-mannered man; but I see things as they are. This present war was bound to come. It could not be avoided. And it must be fought out to a finish. If it is not,

then we shall make no progress in the paths of peace. And we must be ready to do our part — if necessary. God forbid that it should be necessary; but God forbid still more that we should dodge or shirk our duty! Let us by all means be followers of the Galilean. No nobler calling can await us, and we shall gain, not lose, in manliness.

It is no time for such persons to lose heart. Nor is it time for them to abandon high ideals. Let them work for peace, if they will; but let them remember that righteousness must come first. Peace without that, even if it is established among the nations now at war, will be a great disaster. It will be a dream and a delusion. Nothing short of international righteousness will answer, and we must be prepared to back up that position to the limit. If it means another baptism of blood for us, that can make no difference. If we are followers of the Galilean, we must be ready to pay even that price for righteousness in the world at large. On no other basis are we safe. And on no other is he honored.