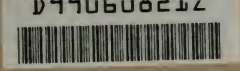


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ADDRESS

TO THE CHURCHES,

UPON

THE PRESENT CRISIS.

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BY THE REV. THOS. E. PECK,  
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EVANGELICAL TRACT SOCIETY,  
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This Address was originally published by the Synod of Virginia, October, 1861, as a Pastoral Letter to the churches under their care, but its timely and excellent suggestions are calculated to benefit christians of all denominations, and it is therefore issued by the Tract Society as an address to the churches generally. Its Author is the Rev. Thos. E. Peck, of the Union Theological Seminary.

## ADDRESS TO THE CHURCHES,

—UPON—

## THE PRESENT CRISIS.

Dear Brethren.—We feel it to be our duty to address you upon the dangers, discouragements and temptations which visit you in these times of trouble and distraction, and threaten not only to embarrass and hinder the progress of the Lord's work among you, but, in some of the churches, even wholly to arrest it. We are in the midst of a war which will task the utmost resources of the country, and make the largest draughts upon the patriotism and self-denying zeal and patience of our citizens, to conduct to a successful termination. There is great danger, in these circumstances, of our overlooking the immense and transcendent interests of the church of God, in the absorbing solicitude we naturally feel to establish the independence of our own commonwealth, and of those who are confederate with it. We ask your attention, therefore, as the followers of the Lord to some hints in regard to the claims of His cause upon you, in the present crisis.

1st. And, in the first place, beloved brethren, we are entitled to assert in regard to all the dispensations of Providence, that they are not designed to suspend, much less to arrest altogether the progress of the work of grace. This work in time is only the evolution of that great plan of salvation which was conceived in the counsels of eternity, and whose final consummation all other works of creation and providence are intended to subserve. "God created all things by

Jesus Christ to the intent that, now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." "All that the Father giveth to me," says our blessed Saviour, "shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from Heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And thus is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should loose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." The same Saviour who uttered these precious words has said also that "He came not to send peace on earth but a sword," and to make the members of a man's own household his foes.—The same voice which cried upon the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," has summoned the hosts to the field of battle. All power in heaven and earth is in His hands, as the Saviour of the elect; and it is as the Saviour, that He has stretched out the drawn sword over our land and has filled it with strife and blood. There is no incompatibility, therefore, between this war and the progress of His work of redemption. The covenant which secures the salvation of the church, is as sacred as it can be made by the blood which sealed it, and as sure as it can be made by the oath of Him who, "because He could swear by no greater, hath sworn by Himself"—"no weapon," saith the Lord to the church, "no weapon that is formed against *thee* shall prosper."

2. In the next place, as the work must go on, so also, it must go on by your means. No doubt that Christ our Head might dispense with all human instrumentalities, ministry, oracles and ordinances; and He might have done so from the beginning. He needed the use of no word, no preaching, no men, no money. But He has not chosen to dispense with your services, and it becomes you to bless His name every day that He has not; but, on the contrary, that He has given you the glorious privilege and fellowship of being co-workers with Himself; that He has with unsearchable condescension and grace, said to you all—*I will not do the work without you*. It is still true, and will continue to be true, till our blessed Lord shall come the second time, without sin unto salvation, that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of

God, and the word of God, mainly by the living preacher. The ministry of the word, therefore, must be sustained, the ordinances of worship must be continued, the church must shine on as a light in the world.

But some of you may say, "you are requiring impossibilities." "Have not our resources been crippled, our ministers been enlisted for the war, our taxes increased, while our ability to pay them has been reduced, &c. &c.?"

We answer, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" A majority of the people of the South, if they had been asked a year ago, whether it were possible for her to do, what is matter of history now, that she has done within the last six months, would doubtless have pronounced it impossible.—The trial has developed her resources in a manner which has astonished her own people. And this leads us to observe.

3d. In the next place, that we have good reason to believe and to hope, that this great tribulation which has come upon us, has been sent, not only not to cripple the church, but to increase her resources, and to make her a more efficient witness for her Lord and Master; and that in two ways:

(1) By bringing her to humble herself under the mighty hand of God in true repentance for her sins. No man who has the love of Christ in him, and is acquainted, on the one hand, with the talents intrusted to the church in the South and, on the other, with what they have done with them, can help seeing that we have come very far short of our duty, both in regard to the claims of our own population, and the demands of the nations which know not God. We have wasted more of the substance committed to us as stewards upon vanities and trifles, than we have given to save the nations from eternal death. Does not their blood cry out against us? Brethren, suffer the word of exhortation! Has it not been the rule with you when times were "hard," and there was necessity for retrenchment, to begin at the house of God? Have you not said "I can give nothing," when you had it by you?" When you have heard the cry for more ministers; and the thought has suggested itself that it might be the duty of your sons, to preach the gospel, have not your hearts preferred for those sons the pursuits and prizes of wealth and ambition? If so, is it strange that the Lord who loves you, and will, there-

fore, show you your sins, now compels you to give freely of your sons and your substance, for the protection of your fire sides and your altars? You refused these gifts for the eternal salvation of your fellow-sinners: you are now compelled to relinquish them for the deliverance of yourselves from that which is worse than the death of the body, *a tyrant's heel*. God, then, has shown you that the reasons you assigned for not sustaining His work, liberally, were neither true nor real. He has demonstrated this, *in your own experience*.

(2) The other way, in which the efficiency of the church is to be increased by this war, as we humbly trust, is by making all God's people see what the spirit of love truly is, and in what manner genuine love works. The love of country—what wonders of heroic fortitude, and of self-denial, of self-sacrifice, has it not wrought within the last few months! And yet this love of country is a natural feeling of man, so natural that the word of God leaves it to nature, and gives no commandment concerning it, any more than concerning the love of a mother for the child of her womb. Yet stronger than a mother's love has this love of country shown itself to be; for mothers, and even widows, have cheerfully given their jewels to their country. What then, beloved brethren, shall we say of the love of Christ; our love to Christ wrought in us by the Spirit of the living God? Will not that work by self-denial, if it be real? Will this love, any more than the love of country say, "I will give what I shall not miss?" "I will give this, because I can give and not *feel* it." "I will serve that which I love, only with that which costs me nothing?" No! no! Paul had no such conception of that love, when he was willing to trust it without a commandment: "I speak not by commandment, to prove the sincerity of your love," (2 Cor. viii. 8.) He had no such thoughts of it when he spoke of the example of Christ's love to his people being the exemplar of their love to Him. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. viii: 9) "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that they who live shall not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him

who died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. v: 15, 16.) The meaning of which sublime utterance is, that the design and the effect of Christ's self-sacrificing love in laying down His life, is the reproduction of that love in His people, or the production of living images of Himself, images of Him eminently in this, that they shall not live unto themselves but unto Him, in like manner as He lived not unto Himself, but unto the Father. Hence Christ himself makes the possession of this love essential to discipleship, and the law of self-denial the fundamental law of His kingdom. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up His cross, and follow me." It is also the law of honor in His kingdom. "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be saved, but to save, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Unless, therefore, brethren beloved in the Lord, you are prepared to say that you love your country more than Christ, you must make up your minds to lives of self-denial for Christ's sake. We hope and pray that you may come forth out of this furnace of war purified as gold, single-hearted, unselfish, self sacrificing servants of Christ, your Lord.

4th. Once more, we beg you to reflect upon the consequences of not sustaining the ministry of the word among yourselves. This war may be a long one; God can make it long, if we do not humble ourselves under His mighty hand. We say nothing of the frightful possibility of subjugation by the hand of them that hate us. At the close of the war, long or short, 300 or 400 thousand men will be restored to the bosom of society; men, it is to be feared, more or less corrupted in the horrid school of the camp, notwithstanding all the labors of chaplains and private Christians among them, men who have become reckless as to that most sacred thing, human life, profane, Sabbath-breakers, and what not. O how we should pray that our beloved countrymen may not become such! But if they should be such, and should return into the bosom of a community which has itself, in the meantime, been degenerating, and becoming more corrupt, under closed churches and silent pulpits, what must be the result? We shudder and shrink from answering this question. Our only hope of escape from such a doom is in maintaining a vigo-



rous spiritual life in the community at home; a life and constitution strong enough to remould the returning material.

We beseech you, then, brethren, by the mercies of God, by your love for yourselves and your children and your country, by your love to a lost race, and above all, by your love to our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and by the account you must render at his dreadful bar, sustain the regular preaching of the word, among yourselves; see to it that your preachers preach the *word of God*; save yourselves from the sin and curse of political preaching; let the Sabbath, at least, be sacred to the concerns of God and salvation. If one church cannot sustain a minister by itself let two or more unite for that purpose. If this cannot be done, let the officers hold meetings for prayer and exhortation; and let them visit from house to house, reproving, convincing, entreating with all long-suffering and doctrine. Pay special attention to the instruction of the young, the lambs of the flock. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing constant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Re-compense to no man evil for evil. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall, but so an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever! Amen!"

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