THE SHINING CROSS

An Easter Ceremony prepared for a thoughtful presentation of the meaning of Easter in the twentieth century.

FOR COUNTLESS YEARS, writers, ministers and lay people have been putting the meaning of Easter into expression. Each year at this time, the earnest Christian is deeply concerned with the meaning of the Easter story for himself.

Better than two thousand years ago, the civilized world was faced with personal, national and international problems. Today, the thoughtful Christian surveys the world in which he lives and is dismayed to find that the world is still faced with personal, national and international problems. For just a few minutes, let us examine these problems to see if there is any significant difference.

In the Beginning, Our Christian Religion Was in Its Infancy

At the first Easter, our Christian religion was in its infancy. Not too many citizens of the civilized world were actually aware that they lived in the dawn of the world's greatest era, the Christian Age. Those who had heard of the Teacher from Nazareth were, by and large, confused and uncertain.

Some had heard only the vaguest kind of rumors. They had heard it whispered about that heresy was being taught by traveling disciples. It would have been only natural that religious leaders should caution the faithful followers of established religion groups to be wary of such heresies. Doubtless, parents counseled the young to shun the company of any who voiced such radically different beliefs.

But, inwardly, the adult, thinking population heard the strange new approach to religious matters with mixed emotions. They had heard it argued that now it was being discussed that the old system of worship with its sacrifices and ritual were, in themselves, not sufficient. It was rumored about that faith and belief in the Son of God were essential if one were to achieve Everlasting Life. They were anxious and apprehensive, wondering if, after all, the faith of their forefathers had been incomplete somehow.

Many Skeptics in the Beginning

Among themselves, those who had heard the Nazarene or His apostles were frequently skeptical, "How are we to know." they asked themselves, "whether this man is truly the Son of God or if He is the most artful of Satan's deceivers?"

Those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead and those who had heard the story from reliable sources were deeply disquieted. Had not life here on earth been made possible for a man who had been quite definitely established as being dead? Was not this proof indeed that life was possible through faith in the Son of God?

To believe or not to believe, this was the question. Today, the question is still the same, deeply personal question which it was so long ago. It is true that the church, the family, and the Bible can provide the essentials to lead the individual along the path of enlightenment. But, it is also true that the final act of believing is a personal and solitary commitment.

Today, as we approach the Easter season, it is for the individual who contemplates the ultimate sacrifice made for him by Christ, in order that
Life Everlasting might be made possible, to accept of his own volition, this Sacrifice as his own personal act of faith.

**History Shows Christian Growth on the National Level**

But what has happened to the national effects of the Easter celebration? Here, perhaps we can see that there are some encouraging, hopeful signs of differences. When Christ was crucified, only a small part of the Roman empire, and this part concentrated on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, had any notion of what was actually happening. The means of communication were not only limited but they were extremely slow and inaccurate.

In this country, today, it is reasonable to assert that there are few, if any individuals who have not, at least, been exposed to the Christian concepts. While it is true that there are many who have chosen not to believe, it is also true that there are few if any who have not had the opportunity to believe if they desired to do so.

Throughout the world there are other nations which are also known as Christian nations. That there are other nations spread across the globe which are not Christian is quite true. Perhaps the challenge of the Easter season may be, not only a personal challenge, but a national challenge as well.

**Our Greatest Room for Improvement Is on the International Level**

It is only a short step from the national problem to the international problem. Two thousand years ago, nations lived in fear of conquest and extermination. Today the story is still the same. Nations live in dread of conquest and extermination. Only the means by which this disaster might conceivably take place have changed.

It is a grim and discouraging fact that the tensions and fear-fraught character of international relations are scarcely improved after two thousand years.

How does the balance sheet look from this perspective? There are a greater number of Christian individuals alive today than there ever were in years gone by. Two thousand and some years ago, there was not a single Christian nation. What does this mean? In a very simple way, it is that the means being employed for developing the Christian individual and the Christian nation are at least, having some success on these two levels.

But the challenge seems to be in the area of international relations: How can the Christian individual and the Christian nation extend the sphere of personal and national conviction? How can the Christian world relieve the tensions and frustrations that plague the world today?

**The Success of Our Organization Has Been Shown**

At Easter time, those of us who dedicate a part of our lives to this organization which has extended its chain of sister organizations across the length and breadth of our nation and across the seas that separate our nation from other nations, have cause to be proud. We can be proud of the fact that we have not limited ourselves to personal and national goals but to international goals as well.

As an organization, we have faced the challenge of the Easter Season in the modern world. There was a time when the Easter challenge was, necessarily, almost exclusively a matter of the personal level. There was an era when the national aspects of the Christian problem were of significant importance.
Today, the challenge, while still personal and national, is exceedingly acute at the international level. To these varied challenges, we, as individuals, as Americans, and as citizens of a world grown satellite-small must dedicate our energies.

Probably, one notion which has hampered the growth and development of the message of Easter as an international force may be attributed to a false notion of what is acceptable. Is it all right to champion the Christian values publicly? Or, is it an exclusively personal issue which each individual decides within the confines of his own soul? Perhaps it is time that Christian individuals recognized the simple fact that no one can develop a belief in a way of life of which he has no knowledge.

The Christian values which are our way of life have ushered in the age of greatest advance in all areas. These values, understood throughout the world, may, indeed, usher in an age of personal, national, and international progress which is unparalleled in the world's history.

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The Light from the Cross on that distant hill
Has spread its light in widening spheres
Parted the gloom of fear and distress
Soothed the eyes, all century-filled with tears.

Into the anxious, fear-fraught present
The Light of the Cross is brilliant and still
As a beacon in the night unwavering holds
Proud beckon to the wanderer's uncertain will.

Turbulent the scene, globe wide and deep
And over it all The Cross glimmering sweet
The Haven for Hope in a world gone down
The long incline of self-love and deceit.

The homeless, the hungry, the soul-starved men
That from far flung corners look up from despair
May find that for each The Cross still beams
Offering salvation from the abyss of care.

The God given hope for the Easter scene
Is the intimate knowledge of Eternal Life
The comfort of soul in the supremely divine
That awaits the believer after this world of strife.