

PETER AINSLIE, CHURCH UNITY AND THE REPUDIATION OF WAR

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Few people have been more committed to the unity of the church than Peter Ainslie. He has been acclaimed as one of the "apostles of ecumenism." Ainslie was the first president of the Council on Christian Unity. In 1911 he founded and began editing *The Christian Union Quarterly* which he continued to edit until the year of his death in 1934. For 43 years he served as minister at the Christian Temple, a Disciples of Christ congregation in Baltimore, Maryland. Ainslie wrote prolifically and traveled and lectured extensively. No theme preoccupied him so much as did the oneness of the church.

Just as few have been more committed to church unity than Ainslie, so, too, few have seen more clearly than he the vital connection between church unity and the necessity of Christian nonviolence. If division is a scandal that has discredited the witness of the church, there is no more damaging manifestation of division than the Christian sanction of and participation in warfare. Ainslie could not separate his advocacy for the oneness of the church from his opposition to war.

Ainslie participated in a number of peace organizations, including the New York Peace Society, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the National Council for the Prevention of War to which he was elected one of the chairmen in 1928. Earlier Ainslie was given a crucial role in the Church Peace Union, a body founded and financed by Andrew Carnegie. On February 10, 1914 at the meeting in which the Union was formally organized, he was elected as a

trustee and given the responsibility for the use and distribution of several million dollars to further the cause of international peace. An exchange that took place on this occasion is indicative of the intensity of Ainslie's opposition to war. Unlike most of the others at this gathering, Ainslie was not at all optimistic about war in Europe being avoided. To the contrary, he believed that the extensive military preparations that were being pursued at the time made war inevitable.

Carnegie asked him, "Will you support such a war?" Ainslie answered, "No, long ago I decided that I would never support any war. Until there are enough people who refuse to use arms and to support war, we are going to have war." Carnegie pressed, "Have you counted the cost of your refusal?" To this Ainslie replied, "Yes, if my government sends me to prison for my refusal, I will endeavor to make converts of the prisoners to this ideal; or if my government orders me to be shot, I had much rather be shot by my government because I contend for a moral principle, than to be shot by the enemy whom I tried to shoot at my government's order. And I am not afraid of the test."¹

Ainslie recognized that a divided church was not adequate to offer healing to a fragmented world. Rather such a church too often sanctions war and war in turn deepens divisions in the church. He considered other theological disputes small things in comparison with what he considered to be the heteropraxy of Christians on the battlefield. Ainslie was without restraint in his condemnation of Christian complicity in warfare. Speaking of war, he wrote, "I can see nothing in this departure from [Jesus'] teachings other than the greatest of all heresies, for returning good for evil is a thousand times more vital than all the creedal pronouncements since the Council of Nicea... Hardly anything could be more extremely opposite of Christianity than war."²

¹ Peter Ainslie, *Some Experiments in Living* (New York: Association Press, 1933), 28.

² Peter Ainslie, *Working With God* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1917), 337.

Early influences

It cannot be said for sure what was the very earliest influence in the development of Ainslie's pacifist convictions. His father, Peter Ainslie II, was also a Disciples minister, as was his grandfather. On his father's library shelf was a notated copy of *Shall Christians Go To War?*, a written debate between Thomas Munnell and J.S. Sweeney.³ We can only speculate whether father and son ever discussed the contents of the work. Among the earliest influences explicitly named by Ainslie was Leo Tolstoy, whom he deeply admired. A Russian of noble ancestry and aristocratic privilege, he developed a deep faith which led him to abandon his social status and wealth. After a long and passionate probing of scripture, Tolstoy embraced a simplicity of lifestyle and commitment to nonviolence.

While Ainslie found himself intensely at odds with Tolstoy on some theological points, he had strong appreciation for his opposition to war and violence. Some of Ainslie's earliest published essays celebrated Tolstoy.⁴ His first encounter with the author occurred when he came across a copy of Tolstoy's *My Religion*. Ainslie said he consumed it as a starving man gobbles a meal. He found Tolstoy's words liberating in their faithfulness to Jesus. "There was no other such fine and free interpreter of Jesus in his day as the Russian idealist... Tolstoy released me from orthodox thinking on social problems."⁵ Along with Tolstoy, Ainslie named as contributors to his thinking about war a diverse band, including Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, Francis of Assisi, George Fox, William Lloyd Garrison and John Greenleaf Whittier. Ainslie also found insight and encouragement from the Society of Friends and their forthright condemnation of war as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

³ Thomas Munnell and J.S. Sweeney, *Shall Christians Go To War?* (Cincinnati: Bosworth, Chase & Hall, Pub., 1872). This copy is preserved in the library of the Disciples Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴ Peter Ainslie, "Life and Teachings of Tolstoy," *Christian Evangelist*, September 19, 1901, 1192; September 26, 1901, 1230.

⁵ Peter Ainslie, *Some Experiments in Living*, 6.

A turning point event in Ainslie's view of war came when he was 27 years old. He was to deliver a sermon at the annual encampment of the Soldiers' National Reunion of the Grand Army of the Republic. Those who invited him to speak knew him only by reputation, having no idea either that he was so young or that he was Southern. The welcoming delegation who were to meet Ainslie's train inadvertently came and left without him. When he finally connected with the head of the delegation, it was evident, Ainslie later wrote, "my Southern accent and my youth were causing him painful embarrassment." ⁶ There were several meetings held by members of the encampment's organizing committee before it was decided that - with definite misgivings - they would keep their commitment to have Ainslie speak before the veterans. He delivered his message in one of the smaller churches in front of a highly suspicious audience.

In his sermon Ainslie called for mutual appreciation and respect between North and South, and he honored soldiers on both sides of the conflict. He spoke of the battlefields as "sacred ground" and expressed thanks that God "threw the dice of battle and lifted the nightmare of human slavery from the American Republic and preserved our sisterhood of states into a compact union." He suggested that the sword of U.S. Grant and Robert E. Lee be lifted side by side, that the children both of North and South may revere them. He eloquently concluded his sermon by declaring,

Then from the battle fields of Bull Run, Shiloh, Chancellorsville, Vicksburg, Cold Harbor and Gettysburg I would gather the burst balls and broken bayonets, rusty swords and old worn-out muskets, and I would pile them into a great heap, but above them all I would place the document of emancipation that broke the shackles of American slavery as far greater than all the battles in the war between the states, prophetic of the time when the arts and implements of war shall be declared as remnants of a

⁶ *Working With God*, 40

barbarous age, and human mind and human heart, under the meridian splendor of Divine grace, shall solve all the problems of human justice, until humanity has grown into the likeness of its God.⁷

The committee was so impressed with Ainslie's presentation that they urged him to deliver the same address before a gathering at the largest church in town. However, he declined and returned home as originally scheduled. Reflecting back on the episode much later, he remarked, "I needed just such an experience to awaken me on the whole war question."⁸ He confessed that he felt ashamed both of his participation in the national encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic and of the complimentary comments he made about war. While his opposition to war was just beginning to take shape at this time, he had begun to believe the "biblical" defense offered in behalf of war had no more credibility than the elaborate "biblical" justifications which had been presented on behalf of slavery. Ainslie decided he would never again speak on war except to denounce it. Shortly thereafter, he offered a resolution against war at the General Convention of the Christian Church. However, the committee on resolutions didn't present it. He was not dissuaded. When the Spanish-American War began, "I was prepared: I spoke against it on all occasions."⁹ Though there was wide-spread support to "avenge the Maine," when Ainslie was interviewed in a Baltimore newspaper, he declared, "No, I will not take up arms against Spain. I will be neither soldier nor chaplain... I am willing to suffer and, if need be, to die, but I will not kill my Spanish brothers. If this means a fine or imprisonment, I am willing to meet either or both."¹⁰ Still, at the time he made this bold statement Ainslie's thoughts on war had not yet come to maturity.

Theological foundations

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ *Some Experiments in Living*, 5.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Cited in *Working With God*, 338f.

For Ainslie, opposition to war grew directly from a commitment to the teachings, example and person of Jesus Christ as presented in scripture. While he offered many pragmatic reasons against war, none of them was attributed with the fundamental importance that he gave to biblical and theological considerations. While he willingly supported practical strategies that would reduce international tension and while he urged functional alternatives to solving disputes by means of deadly force, in the end he held that in regard to war "the only cure is Jesus Christ."¹¹

Ainslie held that Jesus was triumphant in a way that challenged victories that are dependent upon effectively employing aggressive and violent means. To the contrary, "he conquered Satan by yielding Himself an unresisting victim to his malaise." Rather than by defeating evil through the destruction of others, Jesus endured violence to the point of the cross and thereby overcame satanic power. His was a victory won by love. In view of the example of Jesus, Ainslie insisted, "the non-resistance of evil must be considered as one of the most fundamental principles, for his whole life was a constant propounding of this doctrine."¹² In his own life and sacrifice, Jesus defined the love that he proclaimed. It was not a love for one and against another, a love for friends over and against opponents. Rather in teaching his followers, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you," Jesus urged that good and not violence be done to enemies as well as to friends. Ainslie observed, "It is impossible to reconcile the principle of the villainy involved in war with the principle of love for one's enemies as taught by Jesus, which He exemplified by praying for His murderers..."¹³

Ainslie recognized that the only warfare compatible with the love found in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ is spiritual warfare. The love necessary to follow Christ "has in it a moral militancy and a spiritual chivalry that demands the highest heroism - demands far braver souls than those who, under the passion of battle,

¹¹ Peter Ainslie, letter in *The World Tomorrow*, May 26, 1920.

¹² Peter Ainslie, *Among the Gospels and the Acts* (Baltimore: Temple University Press, 1908), 60.

¹³ *Working With God*, 337

face the cannon's mouth." Christ, Ainslie believed, transformed the battlefield from the stage of physical conflict to one of spiritual conflict.¹⁴ On such a battlefield, deadly weapons have no place because they cannot advance the rightful aims of Christians. The only appropriate arms are those "whose results are beneficent to man[kind] here and hereafter."¹⁵

Appealing to the example of Jesus, Ainslie noted that even though Jesus was an object of violence, never was he an agent or advocate of violence. Though others sought to destroy him, his aim was to save them. Even while some were seeking to put him to death, he never sought to do harm to others but endeavored to stop them from shedding each other's blood. Ainslie taught that Christ calls Christians to continue his reconciling, peacemaking work "even at a cost like that which was paid for it at its first announcement."¹⁶ He contended that only when Christians are no longer willing to kill each other but readily die for each other will the love of God shown in the cross of Christ become a compelling reality to the nations.

According to Ainslie, the entire life of Christ was a protest against violence and militarism, from his infancy when his family fled the sword of Herod to his internment in a borrowed tomb before which Roman soldiers were stationed. Yet since the time of the Emperor Constantine "which marked the beginning of the period the church passed into captivity,"¹⁷ Christians have for the most part willingly fought and killed in war in behalf of the state. Ainslie saw this as a choice for Antichrist against Christ. He maintained that it was essential that the church relearn to think with the mind of Christ: "Only in thinking peace after the thought of Christ will we be able to find in Him the Prince of Peace."¹⁸

Not only must Christians think the peaceable thoughts of Christ after him but they must embrace the cross with him. The way

¹⁴ Ibid., 338.

¹⁵ Ibid., 339.

¹⁶ Peter Ainslie, "For my Part I Will Not Go To War," *Pennsbury Leaflet*, No. 34, (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, N.D.), 4.

¹⁷ *Working With God*, 336f.

¹⁸ Peter Ainslie, *Christ or Napoleon – Which?* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1915), 23.

of peace is not a way without pain and sacrifice. It is a way that can be in some ways as hazardous as war. To follow Christ requires a willingness to be vulnerable for the sake of the good he calls his disciples to do. Ainslie insisted that "we are to suffer... we are to take up our cross if we would be disciples of Jesus; we are to renounce worldly advantages; we are to go to death rather than [violently] resist evil..." According to Ainslie, Christians are to be "heroic," not on the battlefield, but on the field of self-giving love, shaped by the cross of Christ. "The redemption of the world lies in the *via crucis*."¹⁹

Ainslie recognized the cross and the sword as polar opposites and he declared that binding them together has been a disaster to both the world and the church. He firmly held that "to wrench the cross from the sword" was an unavoidable and urgent task if the church ever hoped to serve the world as Christ intended.²⁰ For those who follow Christ there can be no room for taking life but only for "giving human life away. Christ did that for us and He said that our experience in coming after Him would be something like His. It means all this to be a Christian."²¹

Ainslie was not naively optimistic in his opposition to war and advocacy of peace. He had a vital doctrine of sin. Over against any notion that the world and humankind are "basically good," Ainslie contended that "the world is wrong."²² The entire point of Jesus coming into the world was that God might set the world right, to heal its spiritual brokenness and repair its self-inflicted wounds. Evil is not an illusion but a powerful reality that must be confronted. Yet the confrontation is not to be by means of force but love and persuasion, as seen in the life of Jesus. However, the difficulties of accomplishing this are not insignificant.

Ainslie identifies two particular problems. First of all, "the human heart is stubbornly wicked." It fails to recognize goodness and clings to evil while calling it good. It justifies hostility by every

¹⁹ *Among the Gospels and the Acts*, 61.

²⁰ *Christ or Napoleon – Which?*, 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 25.

means possible. Second and closely related, "the human heart deceives itself." Among Christians this self-deception leads to resistance to the practical application of the way of Christ and sanctions behaviors that are the antithesis of the teachings and example of Christ, all the while "being done under the name of Christianity" and thereby easing the conscience.²³ The form but not the substance of Christianity has too often been affirmed so that Christ is reduced to a mere symbol as the methods of the world are adopted by Christians.

Ainslie did not hesitate to declare that there is an enormous struggle between good and evil, and he asserted that evil must be conquered. But rather than using this claim to undergird war efforts – as many through the centuries have done – he turned the focus of the battle inward: "There can be no cessation of hostilities until evil has been absolutely beaten – the evil that is in us."²⁴ He called upon Christians to examine themselves in the light of Christ and accept no standard of measurement which would justify actions unlike those found in Christ. Church leaders who would promote any rationale that allows for violence and support for military might Ainslie forthrightly renounces as "false prophets."

In sharpest contrast with advocates of the "just war" tradition, Ainslie refused to see that war could ever have any role in a quest for justice. Indeed, he held that however just a cause might be, as soon as it enlisted the force of arms that cause relinquished the claim to be just. He regarded war as incorrigibly corrupt and corrupting. Killing, maiming and destroying does not become good because it is done in the name of a good cause, and good is not attained by doing evil. It is evil's power to deceive that convinces Christians otherwise. Ainslie held that only good can overcome evil, precisely the sort of good displayed in the nonviolent Christ. "It is by the power of abounding grace that we will beat sin into a captive."²⁵

Ainslie's pacifism contained an eschatological dimension. The hope that he affirmed was one rooted in the ultimate action of

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

God. He confessed that the battle against war and other forms of evil can be disheartening. Yet he regarded this as a result of shortsightedness. He expressed skepticism toward the belief in inevitable progress and questioned the view that education would lead humankind to overcome brutality and barbarism. Instead, he called Christians to look to the resurrection for assurance, declaring that "the tomb of Christ in the garden of Arimathea is empty. He is risen, and He has shown us that when the world's warfare is over, the conquerors will be Himself and the redeemed out of every nation, standing on the captured ramparts of evil."²⁶

For Ainslie the resurrection provided assurance of a victorious future of peace over war. God will not allow the violent power of nations to have the last word. Further, he pointed to the eschatological promise of Christ's return as a source of hope for those who work nonviolently against evil and see few results. "He promised to come back in order to lead His forces into the fulfillment of the Divine programme," wrote Ainslie.²⁷ He urged an "attitude of expectancy" which could lift the soul even in the midst of darkness and tribulation. Confidence that the future is in the trustworthy hands of God offers power to resist the temptation to insure the future through well-armed human hands. Calling attention to the witness of the prophets, Ainslie lifted up the promise of the coming time when "swords shall be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks" and nations will no longer turn weapons against each other, rather they "shall learn war no more." Christians can act faithfully and confidently, trusting in God's promised fulfillment of history because "through His second advent, our advance will be marked beyond what we have dreamed."²⁸

The challenge of unity

Because there is one God all humanity is one, taught Ainslie. It was the will of God that peace should prevail. But sin disrupted that peace. The oneness of humanity is now to be demonstrated and

²⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁷ Ibid., 62.

²⁸ Ibid., 67.

fostered by one church living under the loving rule of one Lord. At present kinship among humankind is "but a passing fancy unless Christ be the tie." Through fellowship with Christ the desire for oneness is reawakened and strength to maintain it is provided, but above all "Divine girdles mysteriously bind us to each other, for the blood of Christ is stronger... than the blood of father or mother."²⁹ Ainslie was convinced the church was the divine institution in which this kinship was to be put on display.

He held that the work of Christ for the world cannot be furthered by a church at odds with itself, shattered into competing denominations. The inability of the church to do its rightful work is not simply because fragmentation hinders practical effectiveness. Rather both the nature and purpose of the church requires that it be one. In its life the church "is to remove the barriers of discord and unfriendliness, making it easy, permanent and spiritual for [people] to come into a fellowship for which they were created and out of which they are to develop into the highest of earth's products."³⁰ Denominationalism inevitably hinders the church in its work and witness before the watching world since it bespeaks of fragmentation and alienation even as the message of the church is one of reconciliation. A divided church will always lack the credibility that the gospel of Jesus Christ requires.

Division not only led to ineffectiveness in pursuing the mission of the church; Ainslie considered it pagan and immoral. By its very existence division in the church proclaims a lie, that lie being that all Christians are not equal, not accepted and redeemed by one Lord and, therefore, not acceptable to one another. Ainslie tirelessly declared the opposite to be the truth. In such organizations as the Association for the Promotion of Christians Unity, the American Commission on Christian Unity, the Christian Unity League for Equality and Brotherhood and others he challenged all to set aside those denominational peculiarities that create barriers, separating

²⁹ Peter Ainslie, *My Brother and I* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1911), 13.

³⁰ Peter Ainslie, *If Not a United Church, What?* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920), 14.

Christian from Christian and church body from church body. Unity must not wait for the resolution of doctrinal disputes. The practice of fellowship must have precedence over doctrinal agreement.

After the 1927 Faith and Order gathering in Lausanne, Switzerland, Ainslie's views became even clearer. Charles Clayton Morrison reflected on these shortly after Ainslie's death:

We can never reach Christian unity by discussing doctrinal differences, he was now convinced. We can resolve doctrinal differences, if it is necessary to resolve them, only by affirming and practicing Christian unity. Unity is not a goal to be attained; it is a point from which we set out if we would attain the great goals of Christian endeavor... And there is no possibility of church unity until our disunity is seen to be not merely an ecclesiastical misfortune, but downright sin.³¹

Faithfulness to God is not found in clinging to denominational distinctiveness nor is exclusivism a sign of loyalty to Christ. By being bound to Jesus Christ, Christians are bound to one another. Fellowship with Jesus Christ entails fellowship of Christians one with another. Division in the church is an offence before God and before the watching world whose own self-destructive division is in desperate need of healing.

Ainslie believed denominationalism and nationalism to be closely related, so much so that with the changing of a phrase or two "the description of the one may be equally as descriptive of the other."³² He saw that for the sake of church unity it is imperative that the relevance of both denomination and nation be erased from the Christian mind. At no time was this more clear to him than with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. He saw the war as a judgment upon the impotence of the witness of a divided church. He

³¹ Charles Clayton Morrison, "Peter Ainslie – A Catholic Protestant," *Christendom* 1/1 (Autumn 1935), 50f.

³² *If Not a United Church, What?*, 93.

wondered if the war would have even been possible had the church been united. But as things stood, it was as though Christ had never even come into the world.

Ainslie insisted that Europe was so vulnerable to war and the church so inept in resisting war precisely because in its divided state it had been preoccupied with secondary matters, denominational distinctiveness and competition rather than giving "attention to the great things of God."³³ Because the church had failed to be one, regardless of denomination, nation or race, the nations had little respect for the church. The political leaders among the opposing nations trusted that they could proceed with devastating conflict without being concerned over the possibility of facing significant opposition by Christian leaders. Rather, the support of the church within the respective national order was taken for granted. Because the church was fragmented, national loyalty easily triumphed over Christian unity. Instead of the Christians in various lands speaking with one voice against the belligerence and violence of the nations, Christians added their voices to the acrimony spewing from their respective nations and added their efforts to the warring madness.

The church's support of military ventures shows the world how very far the church has departed from Christ, Ainslie contended. By its support of deadly force of nation against nation and even Christian against Christian, the church loses its ability to convince the world that it loves either God or humankind. In fact, the church's willingness to support war throws into question both the church's understanding of God and its definition of love. Ainslie conceded that the church "loves some kind of conception of God and that it loves some [humans] are not denied, but that it loves the God whom Jesus revealed and that it loves all" can be justly denied by the vast majority of the world.³⁴

If it had been unclear during earlier time, certainly World War I offered "the most spectacular display" of the divided church's "false interpretation of religion." The war was declared and

³³ Peter Ainslie, "The Continental War and the Divided Church," *The Christian Union Quarterly* IV / XIV (October 1914), 169f.

³⁴ *The Scandal of Christianity*, 154.

conducted by Christian heads of state who were guided by Christian parliaments, congresses and cabinets, led by Christian generals, fought by Christian soldiers who were nurtured by Christian chaplains and supported by Christian churches in nations viciously antagonistic toward one another. The example and teachings of Christ were left lying in the dust and "Christianity stalked forth as a skeleton of form, deaf to the moral and social crimes of the world, but holding in its grip the denominational peculiarities..."³⁵

Yet even the limited unity found within denominations proved to be powerless in times of war. The loyalty to nation overwhelmed any sense of denominational unity among those in antagonistic nations. Spiritual bonds within those denominations that have international memberships were not given priority over national allegiance. Protestants killed those of their own denomination as readily as they killed those who were of no religion. Roman Catholics killed Roman Catholics without regard to their common faith. Loyalty to France or Germany or England provided more durable and commanding of devotion than whatever allegiance might have been created by fragmented Christianity. Shared spiritual commitments faltered in the face of international animosity.

Ainslie held that while many people will ask which nation is the most to blame, the greatest blame lies with the divided church. The church in its fragmented and weakened state inexcusably failed to assert its kinship in Christ and its God-given spiritual bond of Christian to Christian in every land. Instead it allowed itself to be enlisted by competing belligerent powers, thereby contributing to evil rather than standing together to resist it. While not denying that there were immediate economic and geopolitical causes of the war, "the remote cause must be laid at the door of the church."³⁶

Ainslie would certainly have been in full agreement with sentiment behind the "Modest Proposal for Peace" poster put out by the Mennonite Central Committee in the 1980s: "Let the Christians of the World Agree Not to Kill Each Other." Though perfect unity may be elusive, at a bare minimum Christians throughout the world must

³⁵ *If Not a United Church, What?*, 5f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

sufficiently recognize their spiritual bond to refuse to destroy each other for any nation, cause or competing loyalty. If the church would but manifest its true nature it would inevitably be an agent of peace. Hence, the barriers in the church must be overcome so that the barriers in the world can be credibly challenged. Ainslie insisted that for the sake of its integrity and mission, as well as for the well being of the world, the separated churches must work to overcome prejudices, ignorance, competition and isolation in order to grow toward the oneness Christ intended. If Christians would refuse to harm each other, the nations would be seriously hampered in their warring intentions.

An important facet of both the unity of the church and the repudiation of war for Ainslie was the abolition of military chaplaincy. In a sermon entitled "*Has Christianity Accepted Christ?*" preached at the Federation of Churches in Washington, DC, he declared, "The churches ought to recall their chaplains, for with the outlawry of war there is no more place for a chaplain in an army than in a speakeasy."³⁷ Those words spread across the country and were quoted in numerous major newspapers and responded to in editorials. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, said, "The author of such a statement is unfit for the pulpit," lacking "either mental or moral discrimination." The *New York Herald-Tribune* judged Ainslie's statement as "blatantly outrageous" and "a preposterous and insulting belief."³⁸ A number of other papers, however, offered Ainslie words of concurrence.

In 1932 at the Maryland state convention of the Disciples of Christ, he offered a resolution which called upon the denomination to withdraw support for military chaplains. He lost but garnered a large minority vote. Prior to submitting the resolution Ainslie met with gatherings of army and navy chaplains, to make his case against their office.³⁹ With displeasure he cited the words of the chief of chaplains, Colonel J.E. Yates, in *The Army and Navy Journal* (1933): "The chaplain is an indispensable factor in the military service from every

³⁷ Peter Ainslie, *Some Experiments in Living*, 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹ Personal letter to Dr. Frederick J. Libby, February 16, 1928.

standpoint. Strategists like to appraise him in terms of military advantage. Some commanders go so far as to say of him, 'We count our chaplain as good as a hundred men in a fight, because the men fight so much better when he's with them.'"⁴⁰

Ainslie believed that the loss of chaplains in the military would damage war efforts and move the world toward the abandonment of war. For chaplains to bolster the morale of soldiers, particularly Christian soldiers as they seek to kill other Christian soldiers, he found spiritually and morally repugnant. The chaplain in the military serves a role the church should never support: assuring soldiers that what they do on the battlefield is honorable and in the service of God. He did not at all object to ministering to soldiers. He did so himself. Rather what he opposed was ministers being used to serve to strengthen goals of the military in war. The chaplain supposedly is present as a representative of the churches, but he first and foremost serves the aims of the military. Ainslie wrote of the chaplain,

He is there to uphold, in the name of religion, the lying of war propaganda and the beastly murder of the battlefield; to maintain the alliance of religion with the purposes of the war, irrespective of what those purposes may be; to assume the justice of his country's side in the war, whether it is just or not; and, above all, by prayer and exhortation, to strengthen the morale of the soldiers so that they may murder as many of the enemy as possible, and to give God thanks for the onslaught whether he be on the side of the victors or the vanquished. It is a dreadful tie-up of religion with iniquity and it ought to be abolished.⁴¹

"Every church ought itself to be a peace society" endeavoring to express the spirit of Christ in terms of

⁴⁰ Peter Ainslie, *Some Experiments in Living*, 22f

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

international spiritual community, declared Ainslie.⁴² If Christians throughout the world simply refused to support any action that would harm other Christians, peace in the world would be strongly reinforced. Ainslie was convinced that the number of Christians throughout the world is more than adequate to undermine war efforts. If Christians would refuse to participate in bloody conflicts the church could compel the national authorities to seek alternate means to resolve international disputes. A church that is true to Jesus Christ and true to its own barrier-transcending, ecumenical nature can offer neither sanction nor support to nations at war. Rather the church, simply by being faithful to its Christ-derived identity, will by its very existence bear witness against war.

Conclusion

Jesus said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against itself will fall" (Luke 11:17). Ainslie was mindful of these words and saw that unity is imperative for the church and the responsibility of every Christian. The natural result of being reconciled to God in Christ is for Christians to come together in a reconciled community that obliterates the walls of hostility that separate people and that reinforce alienating distinctions. Division in the church is a perversion of both the nature and the witness of the church. Fragmentation leads to a weakened, ineffectual church rendering it more likely to contribute to the brokenness of the world rather than facilitating its wholeness. Hence, Ainslie argued that denominational Christianity must clean its own house by working for better relations among all the members of its household. Christians can credibly and powerfully work for the abolition of war only by being so committed to oneness with others in Christ that no other commitment will ever take precedence.

⁴² Peter Ainslie, "For My Part I Will Not Go To War" Pennsbury Leaflet, No. 34 (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, N.D.), 3.

The widely distributed "Pact of Reconciliation" which became a part of the charter of the Christian Unity League, was prefaced by Ainslie's assertion that "the life and spirit which Jesus Christ reveals for the redemption of the world cannot function through a divided church."⁴³ The church was instituted by Christ to be the alternative to the hate-filled and warring divisions of the world. It cannot ably be such an alternative without unity. Neither can the unity of the church be pursued and practiced so long as Christians remain willing to put themselves in the service of nations or other aggressive forces and allow themselves to kill each other. Ainslie saw clearly - as many Christians still do not - that a commitment to church unity and a refusal to support war are inseparable. The repudiation of war is essential for the unity of the church and the unity of the church is essential for Christian efforts to undermine the practice of war. Ainslie recognized that the issue of war must not be treated as simply another item over which Christians disagree. Rather the practice of peace requires immediate implementation as an expression of and starting point for Christian unity and then Christian unity can be the starting point for the abolition of war.

⁴³ Idleman, 85.