

THE CHURCHES AND THE EPIDEMIC

To the Editor of *The Living Church*:

I AM moved from the bottom of my soul to protest against the absolutely unprecedented action of our boards of health in closing the churches during the epidemic on a well-nigh nationwide scale, as a measure faithless to Christian principles, to the very ideals for which we are fighting the war, and as a glaring example of Prussianism in principle and method.

It needs to be proclaimed in clarion tones to-day that *the regular, sustained, corporate worship of Almighty God is essential to the very life and structure of society*. We are supposed to be fighting for the principle of universal brotherhood, else the war for us has no meaning. We need to be sharply reminded that men can not live together as brothers unless they recognize, and consistently act out, their dependence upon a common Father. The fate of all our peace measures, leagues of nations, and the rest, lies just here. To any man with eyes half-open to-day it is becoming increasingly clear that the determining factor in the war is spiritual force, as it will be the determining factor in the days of reconstruction to come. And corporate Christian worship is the highest and most powerful expression of spiritual force that the world knows, if there be any truth in Christianity at all. On Saturday last our shops and public conveyances were allowed to draw their crowds, on Saturday evening thousands of persons were permitted to throng the streets of our cities in a dense mass for a Liberty Loan ovation, and on Sunday morning the churches were ordered closed! What does this mean? Business and financial interests must not suffer interruption because they are really vital to the community, but Christian worship, a spiritual activity, is not vital! That is our practical working belief. Further, the measure is a glaring example of Prussianism in principle and method. The sole reliance upon material forces and scientific measures as far as any corporate action is concerned; the corporate approach to God denied to every one, sanctuaries closed, in a time of unparalleled suffering, sorrow, and death; the tacit assumption that the civil authority is supreme over the spiritual in all things; there is the soul of Prussianism; the Intolerable Thing. Had this happened in Germany one could readily understand it. To behold it acquiesced in here in America is cause for amazement and arresting thought.

I am sure that our boards of health have striven to do their best. I know that they were compelled to act quickly to cope with an appalling condition in our communities, but their action in closing the churches is no less an appalling violation of the Christian conscience. It must not for one moment be permitted to stand as a precedent.

Yours truly,

CHARLES TOWNSEND.

Good Shepherd Rectory, Rosemont, Pa., October 23rd.