

John Dietrich's Sermon: "Nationalism and Internationalism"
As Presented & Amended
by
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[Preamble: John Dietrich first presented the following sermon at the Frist Unitarian Society of Minneapolis on January 19, 1919, just two months after the end of World War I, during an international Peace Conference meant, in his words, "to end in some kind of a league or fraternity of nations which will assure us that fighting on a universal scale will never again blast the earth." World War II began only twenty years later, ending with the invention and deployment of two nuclear weapons and the beginning of an arms race that has left us with enough bombs to blast the Earth many times over. Perhaps, if those "statesmen" who attended that Peace Conference had heard and heeded Dietrich's sermon then, the world would be a better place today. Perhaps if some of today's statemen hear it now, it will become a better place tomorrow. As usual, I have had to redact much of his original manuscript for brevity's sake, but not by sacrificing any of Dietrich's main points or diminishing the heart and spirit of his message, which may be even more timely for us today than it was a century ago. Let those have ears to hear, listen.]

The most important as well as the most difficult problem before the world today is that of the relationship which shall exist between the nations of the world and the future ... That we must work out some kind of internationalism as a condition of the continuance of civilization is a proposition to which everybody will agree ... But when we try to define what the international organization shall be like, when we consider the animosities and jealousies and conflicting nationalistic interests which must be reconciled, we readily understand that we are confronted by the most intricate and complicated task that [humanity] has ever faced.

To those of us who have no particular knowledge of the field, this problem presents itself most vividly in its psychological or spiritual rather than its political aspects. I mean that we are most interested in that struggle between our allegiance to humanity as a whole and our loyalty to the particular nation to which we happen to belong ... This conflict between the nation and humanity is real and especially at this moment when we are called upon to adjust the interest of our country, at some sacrifice, perhaps, to the interest of the world at large ... We are beginning to feel the pull of that beautiful ideal of devotion to humanity, and yet our feet are set firmly upon the foundation of national patriotism. Someone has described patriotism as "Our present resting place on the way to the love of all men," meaning that social evolution has carried us out and above the love of family and tribe to the love of country, but has not yet advanced to that universal love to which nothing that is human can be alien. Thus far we have gone, but not farther, and there are many who tell us that until we have moved beyond this present resting place of the nation with its borders and boundaries and barriers, we cannot hope to construct the fabric of that ideal internationalism of which the prophets have dreamed.

Cosmopolitanism or anti-nationalism. This is why I discuss this morning the question of nationalism and internationalism, with their respective claims upon our allegiance. First, we will have to understand what we mean by the terms. For instance, the word “internationalism” is frequently used instead of the word “cosmopolitanism.” That is, by “internationalism” is meant the wiping out of all boundaries, the erasing of all distinction between peoples, the freeing of all men from national affiliations and the making of each a citizen of the whole world. This, of course, is not internationalism, for the very word itself means “between nations,” and there can be no relations between nations if nations are not permitted to exist. This, rather, is cosmopolitanism or anti-nationalism, but since many people think of internationalism in this sense it will be necessary to treat it in order to clear the ground.

In spite of the fact that there are those who hope for the day when all international boundaries shall be removed, when there shall be no more divided humanity, I am inclined to agree with the very ancient saying: “boundaries are sacred” ... Boundaries are practically necessary in every form and phase of existence. We live on a planet that is bounded, and it is fortunate for us that the earth has its own sphere, its own orbit, and its own individual existence ... How indebted we are to the first man who selected a piece of soil and built a fence around it, and then, by means of cultivation, changed that part of the wilderness into a garden. The farm is a protest against the desert. Boundaries separate the cultivated from the uncultivated earth. In the same way home, which is the most important unit of social life, is only another word for boundary. Our homes are the boundaries which give us the most fundamental rights we possess. And the same thing is true of us as individuals ... By clearly drawn lines you are yourself and I am myself, and by virtue of this fact we have our rights ...

Boundaries win. Many attempts have been made in the past to destroy these boundaries, but ... the people refused to have them destroyed. Even before the time of Jesus we hear Epictetus saying: “Never, in reply to the question, ‘To what country do you belong?; say, ‘I am an Athenian, but say ‘I am a citizen of the Universe.’” “Love mankind,” is the command of Marcus Aurelius. Jesus was a true cosmopolitan, even to the point of asking men to love their enemies. But the first organized attempt to break down the barriers of nationality was made by the Roman Catholic Church. It has been anti-patriotic in all the countries of the world. It seeks to place itself above nations, to have men say, not “I am an Italian,” or “I am a German,” but “I am a Catholic.” The objective of the ... Crusades was to cripple the nationalistic movement by diverting attention to foreign wars. The real purpose of the Crusades was not to rescue an empty tomb, but to defeat the rise of nationalism in Europe. One of the rules of the Jesuits is not to recognize individual nations. But the Catholic Church did not succeed—in fact, it went to pieces on the rock of nationalism.

... A more determined effort to amalgamate all people and all races into one humanity and establish a universal workingmen's empire was made a number of years ago by what is

known as "The International." The international was to be a new world government. It offered to people the whole earth for our fatherland. Those who entered this fellowship were no longer to say: "I am a Frenchman," or "I am the Englishman," but "I am an internationalist." No one was ever again to salute the national flag, but the red flag of internationalism. The world was going to be a sort of big family. But the scheme broke down from sheer weight. It was too big to be portable and too visionary to be practical. It failed to recognize the natural boundaries between a Zulu and a Frenchman, between a Hottentot and an Englishman, and in the end boundaries won.

From the idealistic point of view patriotism looks small alongside cosmopolitanism. To love the whole world seems so much nobler than to serve one little country ... Of course, to love one's country should not mean to hate all others, any more than to love one's home means to despise all others. In fact, a real love of one's country implies respect for the loves of other peoples, but the man who can love Africa as much as he can love America is spiritually blind. He sees in countries only soil and stones, and in men only flesh and bones—gifts, achievements, institutions, civilization mean nothing to him, else how could he love Africa as well as America, or put Asia on the same plane with Europe? We must beware of a false humanitarianism which finds its expression only in words such as: "the world is my country," and "Love your enemies" when in reality we have no intention of making the world our country or of loving our enemies.

You will note, therefore, that if one must choose between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, I am a nationalist. Not a nationalist in the sense that I believe in maintaining our boundaries and developing America regardless of the interests of other countries, but in the sense that I believe in maintaining our boundaries and developing America in the interest of other peoples ... Many would dispute this point of course. They say patriotism is love for one's country and [one] either loves his country or he does not. But this is not so. True patriotism is, indeed, a love of one's country, but it may be of a high or of a low order ...

The patriotism of one man, for example, concerns itself with the territory of his native land—its area, character, and national resources. It lays emphasis upon the greatness or variety of the country's population. It is proud of its wealth, its trade, its bank clearings. It dreams of empire and dominion, of exports and imports, of power and glory. It expresses itself in flag-waving's and applause, in army reviews and naval pageants, and [proudly boasts] with slogans, such as: "Deutschland Uber allies (Germany above all)" "Britannia Rule the Waves," "America First."

Very different, however, is another type of patriotism—that of the man who expresses his love of country in terms of literature and art, social progress, and ethical idealism. To him his land is the realm of beauty and goodness, it is the place where happy, prosperous, and noble people live. Territory does not interest him, but justice does. Military power leaves him cold, but social improvement exalts him to the stars. If he thinks of empire, it is the

empire of ideas: and if he dreams of power, it is the power of righteousness. [This is the] type of patriotism and love of country I believe in.

Country as a nation. To make clear the relationship between nationalism and internationalism ... I should make another distinction ... the distinction between a country as a nation or people and a country as a government or state. When we speak of a country as a nation, we mean a group of persons living within a certain territory, who feel at home with one another, who understand one another, who work with one another, who love one another, who feel themselves bound together by a kinship which is felt for no other group of persons in the world. In its lower form this is merely the gregarious instinct which holds together a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle. In a higher form it becomes a conscious feeling of similarity and likeness in which the country takes on the appearance of a home and the people of members of the family. The very physical features of the country become as familiar and friendly as the furniture in our homes, and a [person] feels at home only in his own country.

But there are still higher forms than this, for a nation becomes distinctive only in those great achievements of literature, art and social life which constitute the real glory of a people. In the last analysis a nation is a group of persons moved by a common tradition and lead by a common ideal. This tradition embodies itself in a literature which no other people could have written, an art which no other people could have conceived, a music which no other people could have composed ... A nation is simply a social group bound together by spiritual and emotional ties so strong that no cruelty, no tyranny, no persecution can split it asunder, and it is this nationality in which I believe ...

Country as a state. But there is another thing which people have in mind when they speak of nationalism which I now refer to as the governments or states of the world. By this I mean not the people whose lives and traditions and aspirations make up what I have called the nation, but rather the system of government by which the people are organized and by which their destiny is directed. It is a political institution ... and it is these governments and not the nations which have caused all the trouble in the past. While the state should be nothing more or less than the physical machinery through which the nation can express itself and do its work in the world, it is more often a gigantic instrument controlled by selfish interest for this stunting of the nation's will and the perversion of its life.

... It is this distinction between a nation and a state ... that we must find our solution of all international affairs hereafter, and it is this simple fact which leads us straight to the conclusion which I wish to point out, and which I believe is the heart of the whole matter. I refer to the fact that while nations have no cause for quarrels or misunderstandings with one another, states are almost certain to be involved in disputes with one another most of the time and an open warfare with one another part of the time.

The nation has no enemies; it only has friends. National interests never divide; they tend only to unite. When a nation produces a literature, it adds to the wealth not only of itself but of all mankind; When its musicians compose operas and symphonies, their music glorifies the lives of all men everywhere; When its reformers achieve liberty for its people their triumph confer emancipation upon the world. A nation's heroes are lifted up into the pantheon of the race and are worshipped in every part of the world. In everything that makes for the real greatness of the people, nations are united. [Despite having been at war with Germany], German music is still being played at our concerts. German pictures are still hanging on the walls of our art galleries. German books are standing upon the shelves of our libraries. Luther stands in the pulpit of every Protestant church, Schubert sings his songs in every heart, and Goethe whispers his thoughts to every mind. In spite of the efforts of the states, the nations are so interwoven as to make them inseparable.

Only states quarrel. If there were only nations in the world, therefore, or if the nations and states were identical, there would be no problem of war. It is only the states that are divided by innumerable jealousies and hostilities ... They are built up into certain institutions, known as balances of power and embodied in certain practices known as diplomacy, and written into certain statutes, known as international law ... which make up the life of a state. It is questions of territories and boundaries and open markets and secret treaties and spheres of influence and national interests, and so-called honor, which divides state from state, cause disputes and hard feelings between otherwise friendly peoples and [occasionally] result in war. And yet these things are wholly artificial. Every one of them is a pure illusion in the minds of diplomats. From the standpoint of the basic human interests which make up our life, they have no more reality than a Unicorn or a dragon. It is the states which are disputing and not the nations. It is the governments which are fighting and not the peoples.

Real internationalism. What we have in the world today is inter-state relations which produce suspicions, jealousies, hatreds, and wars. What we need in the world is international relations ... in the truest sense of that great word, *internationalism*, which will produce a friendship, trust, confidence, and peace. And in order to bring about this change we need to do everything we can to diminish the power of states and dispel the illusion of hostile interests; and at the same time magnify the power of nations and emphasize the reality of friendly relations. This means, of course, a revolution of international affairs ... And in order that this revolution may be brought about and a true internationalism may be established, I believe certain things are necessary.

In the first place ... the nation and the state must be made identical in territory, that is, there must be no nation which is not also a state and no state which is not also a nation ... It would mean, of course, the breaking up of all the empires of the world into national units in order that each group of people with similar feelings and aspirations might determine its own policy ...

[Secondly] ... each separate country must be democratized within itself from top to bottom so that the government of each country may in the truest sense represent the ideals and aspirations of the people ... Kaisers and kings, chancellors and premiers must go. The control of the state must be passed over completely into the hands of the people ...

[Thirdly] There must be formed a League of Nations which will leave each state free to determine its own internal policy but in which each state will accept dictation from the league in its external affairs ... Each state in the world union must surrender to the new international state its independent political sovereignty in foreign relations, which, of course, does not touch in any way the sovereignty of each state in its own internal affairs.

Love for humanity. All these changes are essential, but they will be as nothing unless there comes a fourth and greater change ... that which shall take place in the hearts of men when they are lifted up above the superstition of the state to the pure love and reverence for the nation, and the greater love and reverence for humanity at large. It will be necessary to develop what I might call the international mind ... which is dedicated fundamentally to humanity, and to the service of humanity... We must learn that the interests of the whole are greater than the interest of any one part ... This does not mean that we should not love the nation to which we belong. It means, rather, that when there is a clash between the interests of our nation and the world at large, we must recognize the supremacy of the interests of humanity to those of our nation ... And this is what I mean by the international mind ... love and loyalty to the nation, but still greater love and loyalty to mankind ...

We are [now] in the nationalistic stage of evolution, where no higher capacity of human relations is generally acknowledged than that of love of a country ... and to many a devout soul this marks the end of progress. But beyond the nation is the world and beyond the people of one country the great circle of humanity, and I believe the day will come when we shall recognize that our first and highest duty is to mankind as a whole and not to any single section of mankind ...

A Republic of nations. And each nation will grant the right of interchangeable citizenship so that no dweller in a new land will need to go through the process called naturalization. An Englishman will not be a foreigner in America any more than a Pennsylvanian is a foreigner in Minnesota ... And in some internationalized spot you will find a world-capital or world center which will provide a meeting place for all, a place for the interchange of ideas and interests, and a clearing house for all the arts and sciences and religions as well as business and political affairs. Here will be a world Court of Justice, the World University, a world library, a World Bank and a world temple of religions and everything that will help develop the world's conscience. And in the heart of every [person], you will find a love for [one's] family, for [one's] city, for [one's] nation, but greater than all these will be [one's] love for the world ...