

Merrill's Peace Hymns Sermon

These excerpts are drawn from William Pierson Merrill's June 20, 1935, sermon, "Peace Hymns."

The holy love of peace and the holy hatred of war should sing themselves into the hearts of Christians of our day. It is highly significant that at the very beginning of Christianity a choir of angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of goodwill"; as if to bring to men the heavenly message that in no way could God's glory be more highly exalted than by the outworking of peace on earth; and that the way to that lay through the spirit of goodwill in the hearts, homes, races, governments, and relations of mankind; and the best way to bring that heavenly message to earth was to sing it.

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It is a sign of growing appreciation of the spirit of Jesus Christ that we find a steady advance in the number and quality of hymns of peace and goodwill that are sung by Christians in their worship.

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What we need is [*sic*] hymns that present peace as virile, commanding, appealing; as stirring a figure as that of war, in common presentation. We need to bring out the majesty of peace, the naturalness and homeliness of it.

For that reason, and perhaps for others, the best peace hymn may be one in which peace is joined with other great ends and ideals, rather than one which sets her alone. For what we need to realize is the extent to which peace is really bound in with the best elements in all good and high human living. The best hymns for peace may well be those which deal with social justice, and, if they mention peace at all, set it as one of the sure and beneficent fruits of a right social order. The Bible frequently reminds us that peace is not a "thing in itself," but a by-product rather, the natural fruit of social justice and goodwill.

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Our hymns, no less than other parts of our religious life, should reflect the attitude and purpose of building a world, a social and international order, of which peace shall be a natural element.

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Our most urgent need is that of real and strong hymns of the new order, of the Kingdom of God, of human brotherhood, of social justice, of love at work among the affairs of men, of broad and resolute goodwill. These, whether they use the word or not, will be the true peace hymns. May God send us singers who can so awaken in our souls the passion for a world in which justice shall be enthroned, and goodwill have free course, for only in

such a world can peace come and abide.