

SACRAMENTALS OF WARTIME

Now that events have settled the issue between peace and war a new situation arises which demands the attention of the theologian in respect of the readjustment of life in accord with Christian principles. Many new elements have been brought into our lives, and we not unnaturally pause to reflect how, if at all, they can find place in the Christian life as such.

We are not without reasons, and compelling reasons, in support of our cause. Much as we may abhor jingoism, we must learn to distinguish it from authentic patriotism, a Christian virtue authorised by God and the Church. Yet even patriotism, taken in its fullest sense as a Christian virtue and duty, does not make the whole issue crystal clear; it does not diminish the realities of the horror and attendant evils of war, but on the contrary makes those realities more actual and those evils more apparent, urging thought as to the reorganisation of individual life to meet them. Patriotism emphasises the need of accepting readily the restraint and sacrifices inevitably imposed on all. Can this acceptance be a truly Christian thing, and can the new conditions of civil life be integrated into the Christian life?

There is much that will chiefly affect only one's private life; and this at least can be accepted in a Christlike way, sanctified and made sacramental. Much has been spoken and written of the life of the Christian in the Body of Christ and of his share in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and it has rightly been pointed out how this participation dignifies human nature and how the quality of '*alter Christus*' places a man, in some sense, higher than the angels, invited to embark, as an Apostle and Coadjutor of Christ, upon the conversion of the world. It has been emphasised that the Mass is a common act of worship, sharing in which

is a specifically Christian act; that the layman is also, in his sphere and degree, a sacrificing priest, and that he must carry this power into his daily life where he must continue to behave as 'another Christ' exercising his apostolic functions amongst his fellow men. But it is all too easy to forget that this oneness with Christ in the Mass is not only a oneness with Christ the Priest, but equally a oneness with Christ the Victim. Thus, if the Christian ideal is to be realised in the world of everyday life, it must be the ideal of Christ persecuted by the Pharisees as well as of Christ preaching to the Pharisees. There might be little or no discomfort in following Christ the High Priest of the New Law, or that discomfort might be outweighed by a sense of exaltation, or even of glamour. But when the following of Christ the Victim is interpreted in terms of a ready acceptance of a shortage of food or a deprivation of the simplest luxuries of life, the reaction may be less enthusiastic. Yet such an acceptance is the logical outcome of a complete understanding of the implication of the Mass; for union with Christ must be total, both in respect of His dual quality of Priest and Victim, and in respect of a man's whole life. It is possible that the less humanly attractive element has been glossed over to some extent, but it is there especially that the liturgy can help to the formation of a right attitude in face of the sufferings that war must bring in its train.

A true sharing in the life of Christ means that the ordinary routine of every day acquires a sacramental value not only as a function of the priestly quality but also of that of the victim of sacrifice, not only in respect of the creative activities of everyday life, which can be made into corporative prayer, but also in respect of daily privations and hardships which can likewise be 'sacramentalised' in union with Christ the Victim. We are familiar with the notion that we should offer up our lives in the Mass; it is equally true that we must *be offered up*. This is more than a difference of emphasis; it implies a new mentality. In offer-

ing, the dignity of the priest is assumed; in being offered, the indignity of the victim is accepted. Both are equally real and important in the liturgical life, but it is the second that is going to become more and more actual in the present circumstances.

Already we find ourselves put to some inconvenience under wartime conditions, even if only in the form of A.R.P. restrictions and some food shortage. Much more may well be asked. 'Offering it up' often suggests no more than a kind of rueful facetiousness; but to offer it up for the right reason, because we have offered up the Sacrifice of the Mass and because this is but a part of that Sacrifice, is to understand the possibilities of the situation in which we find ourselves; it is to implement the obligations which participation in the Mass implies and makes the 'offering up' of present distress a sacramental action and not a mere stoic endurance.

Such a 'sacramentalisation' is something for which human nature wittingly or unwittingly craves. 'Man is a spirit in flesh, a "sacrament" among creatures,' writes Dom T. Wesseling in *Liturgy and Life*. 'Man does not live two separate lives, but in spite of the perfect distinction between his material and his spiritual life he lives one sole life, one single complete human life. . . . In man body does not exist merely for the soul. Indeed, what *exists* as such is neither soul nor body, nor mind nor senses nor digestive and reproductive systems, but the whole man. . . . The unity of a sacramental reality consists precisely of the essential collaboration of the outward visible sign, matter, and the invisible vivifying spirit as two *complementary* though diverse forces. In this way we call mankind *sacramental*.' Because man is so made he needs to live an integral life and he is made profoundly unhappy when circumstances arise which appear to conflict with the principles of his living. We find ourselves in such circumstances now; but there is no need to manufacture excuses for accepting them; there is the best possible reason in the

offering of the daily Mass. A perfect understanding of submission as victims with Christ on the altar means an acceptance of all the suffering accompanying war, an acceptance not only human but also, by participation, divine, and in that sense sacramental. To accept the hardship willingly because it is part of the work resulting from consecration as co-victims in the Mass is to transform a merely civilian duty or material deprivation into a sacramental action, a miniature, so to say, of Calvary, performed in union with the whole of Christendom in Christ and thereby acquiring a divine-human character.

There is, however, a second aspect of the question, a more social one. The social world of the liturgy is the whole world; the Redemption was not for Englishmen alone, nor for the allies alone. Because the Redemption is universal in power, the liturgy does not recognise racial and social barriers, but rather that Russians and Germans have equal rights with French, Poles and English to the adopted Sonship of God in Christ. Fortunately, many have foreseen the danger of racial hatred and made some effort to forestall it by pointing out that the struggle is not against the German people, still less dictated by hatred of them. We must go further yet and point out that the German people as well as ourselves are co-victims with Christ on the altars of the Church, and that many of them, too, will be realising their Christian character in the grim details of everyday life during war. This reason should far outweigh any other reasons we may have for exercising restraint in our attitude to our enemies.

Moreover, based as it is on the liturgy, it has greater actuality here and now than moral suasions or intellectual convictions. This is the peculiar value of the liturgy: whereas moral exhortations rouse us to action and dogma convinces us of the truth, these are but preliminaries to actual acts of Christian virtue; the liturgy, on the other hand, is actual and gives occasion for professing these truths of dogma and experiencing specifically Christian

realities. In the Mass we do actually unite ourselves daily with our 'enemies,' we do actually offer ourselves as victims with them in Christ. Unless we repudiate the Mass we must put these truths into effect outside church, because the liturgy is more than a mere rousing of the affections, more than just an intellectual conviction; it is the actualisation of Christ on earth, actualisation in which we participate. When we have attended Mass and said with the priest: 'We therefore beseech Thee, O Lord, mercifully to accept this oblation of our servitude, as also of *Thy whole family*,' we can scarcely follow this up with a campaign of hatred against the German people, members too of Christ's 'whole family'; nor when we have made this offering of our service can we complain about whatever suffering comes our way. Only when we have removed all traces of rancour and uncharity can we claim to be following out our duty as Brothers of Christ; only when we have made sacrifice of our human comfort and convenience in real practical ways can we claim to be perfect co-victims with Christ in the Mass. It is this mentality which should form a background to all activity in wartime, and it is only such an outlook which can hope to construct a just and lasting peace, for true peace must be based on that true Christian unity which is actualised here and now in the liturgy.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.