

## IN TEMPORE BELLI

OUR first duty, now that war is upon us—and it will be increasingly our duty until the conflict is ended—must be to remind ourselves of what our attitude towards it should be as Christians. Morality is not Christian unless it is subsumed under religion; right action is determined primarily by our whole attitude to God; and in the context of war there is a Christian attitude of mind towards it in general as well as a detailed system of ethical principles. That attitude of mind should be our first concern now. In the litany of the saints we pray: *From pestilence, famine and war, O Lord deliver us.* War is set beside the other two scourges with which God chastises the sins of the world. In the recognition of that fact, that war for the Christian is chastisement, lies the root of our attitude. For needless to say, the sin of which we shall think is not the sin of somebody else. It is easy, all too easy, to project the moral guilt on to our neighbour—in this case, those with whom we are at war. It is so easy that it is the first thing to guard against. It is not a question here of assigning the political responsibility. The drama of war is played on two planes, the temporal and the spiritual; on the one level we may as a nation be guilty or we may not; on the other, it would be the negation of all that Christianity teaches to regard ourselves as innocent. It is a platitude to say that the perhaps unspectacular sins of the Christian are more grievous than the spectacular sins of the pagan because they are a deeper injury to God's love; but it is a platitude of which we do well to remind ourselves. The first thing, then, is penitence: to desire, and work for, and pray for, a change of heart within ourselves.

*Lord, be merciful to me a sinner:* if that is the spirit of our prayer we shall be saved the danger of self-righteousness. And we need all the help we can get to avoid that

danger. We are fighting Nazism; and Nazism is the negation of Christianity, and of that rational structure of international society which Christianity through the centuries has worked so hard to build. But because that is the case, there is every danger that we shall tend to think of ourselves, and be encouraged to think of ourselves, as pure and spotless paladins, having nothing with which to reproach ourselves. That is not the case. We should be less tempted to think it so were it plague or famine with which we were confronted; our attitude of mind must be the same when, as now, it is war. Again, at the moment it is easy to distinguish between Nazism and the German people; it is easy to hate the former and not the latter. But it may well become harder. Already in the *Times* newspaper a correspondent has attempted to prove from Tacitus and St. Augustine that the Germans of to-day as a whole are brutal and uncivilized ruffians. This is the type of evil stupidity which we should do everything in our power to stem. And with it goes all the atrocity-mongering, all the indiscriminate cartoons and slogans, which may, and presumably will, blur the distinction between Nazism and the German people. Here there is a distinction to be made. There are facts, established beyond all doubt, which equally beyond all doubt are a violation not only of international law, but of natural law as well. The sinking of the *Athenia* is a case in point. But there is likely to be a host of stories of particular atrocities lacking foundation; and here the only sensible practical rule is to refuse to believe them unless and until they are vouched for authoritatively, and, more important, to refuse to pass them on. But in both cases the essential thing is to remember that they prove nothing against the German people as such: that they are not indications of the German national character. It may be that we shall be encouraged, perhaps by sections of our own press, to regard ourselves as crusaders against 'anti-God forces'; the root objection to that line of thought has already been sug-

gested; but it has also to be remembered that nothing is more calculated to make us forget that we are in fact fighting masses of ordinary men who are either actually or potentially members of the Body of Christ. Juridically, they are in the wrong, and we have a perfect right to think and to say so. But it is not for us to pass moral judgments on them as individuals. And though unhappily it is impossible to resist a leader with force except by resisting those who follow him, a constant recollection of this distinction between juridical and moral guilt may help us to avoid that fire-eating apostolate of hate, and that tendency to treat God as a tribal deity who is definitely on our side and the enemy of our enemies, which will afterwards draw down upon the Church the contempt and the hatred of men. In whatever way we may regard the *ethics* of the present conflict, there is a lesson to be learnt from the terrible irony of the prayer of William Law—from the spirit at least, even if we disagree with the applicability of the letter: 'O Blessed Jesus, dear redeeming Lamb of God, who camest down from heaven to save men's lives and not destroy them, go along, we humbly pray thee, with our bomb-vessels and fireships: suffer not our thundering cannon to roar in vain, but let thy tender hand of love and mercy direct their balls to more heads and hearts of thine own redeemed creatures than the poor skill of man is able of itself to do. *Amen.*' What is of most importance, in the present context, in that ironic prayer, is its scathing indictment of an attitude of mind: the attitude of mind that would harness the God of love and mercy, and the Saviour of all men without exception, to the service of a tribal self-righteousness; the attitude of mind that found expression in the words set by our Lord in opposition to those words of the publican already quoted—*I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, . . .* This thing has come upon us because of our sin; we cannot say that we ourselves are wholly good, or that God is 'on our side,' as He is sometimes made out to be—in the sense of being

a sort of glorified mascot, whose presence can be put to good use in the way of propaganda. Is there not, indeed, a peculiar appositeness in the words of the Pharisee? Is it not perhaps precisely because we have been, among other things, extortioners and unjust that God has visited us with this scourge? Peace is the *opus iustitiae*—the fruit of justice and charity; and on the spiritual plane, beyond the purely temporal causalities of politics and economics, real though those are, we are reaping the logical conclusion of the lack of justice and of charity in our world. Once again, it is not for us to project the blame on to others: let us recall the history of the papal struggle for social justice, with its sad record of failure on the part of Catholics to implement the lead given by the Papacy. Let us recall the more recent history of the struggle of the Popes for international justice, and ask ourselves whether we did all in our power to follow up the lead they gave us there, to uphold the principles they expounded, to work for that international society which they for their part laboured so hard to build. We are, in fact, as the rest of men.

In this war as in every other, as has been said so often before, it is the poor who will suffer most. If we remember that, too, it will help us to fashion our prayers in a Christian and not a tribal form. God's love and care are extended equally over all souls, no matter on which side of the barricade they may chance to be. For us, then, to pray that the mercy of God may be shown to both sides alike: that to both sides alike may come swiftly a just and lasting peace. Swiftmess and justice are indeed likely to be related: it would be easy, were hostilities to be brought to an end, for Nazism to fall, now—it would be easier perhaps to negotiate a just peace from which rancour and the desire for revenge would be removed. The longer the war lasts, the harder it may prove to be.

There are, then, positive ends for which we must work and pray: and they are ends from which not only self-righteousness but selfishness also must be removed, *He*

*that hateth his life shall find it*—only through that self-loss in God which is the essence of religion shall we find life again in the midst of death; only in so far as we can school ourselves to approach our present problems in that attitude of self-loss, only in so far as we can make of our present plight a recall to religion, can we hope that God, who 'writes straight with crooked lines,' may bring good out of evil. That is why, in the prayer for peace, the removal of fear of enemies is coupled with, and preceded by the surrender of the heart to God's commands—*corda nostra mandatis tuis dedita et hostium sublata formidine*. Happiness is found only in giving, the giving which is the essence of love; and that giving is first and foremost the total self-giving of the spirit to God, and then, the loving service of a threefold community, the family, the nation, the world.

For us, then, to make sure that a spirit of nationalism shall not cause us to put our own good above that of the human family as a whole, shall not breed rancour, hatred, and revenge in our hearts. Our guide is the internationalism of the Church; our duty, to ensure that the love we bear our own contry shall play its proper part in the service of that greater common good which is the good of the world. So we return to the necessity for a change of heart, and therefore to the necessity of penitence, to the prayer of the publican. Only in those dispositions can we pray, without making of our prayers a mockery, *Spare, O Lord, thy people, and be not angry with us for ever*.

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