

THE EUCHARIST AND PEACE

THE EDITOR

THE theme of this month's international Eucharistic Congress at Barcelona, 'The Eucharist and Peace', might seem at first to be far removed from the needs of our time, simply the latest example of the Church's escape from the intolerable dilemma of the world as it is into the security of the world to come. For peace is so largely thought of in terms of a pragmatic avoidance of war that the roots of peace are ignored, or, if they be exposed, they soon become a scandal, a cause of stumbling.

Not the least of our contemporary maladies is the confident invocation of such concepts as 'peace', 'freedom', 'justice', but with a wilful refusal to pay the hard cost their meaning demands. For peace is a work and not a policy: its accomplishment lies beyond the area of covenants or even of atomic bombs. It is particularly dangerous for Christians to take comfort in the name of a peace that is only rooted in the formidable growth of the material 'safeguards of peace': dangerous, because when all that political and economic power can achieve is in readiness, the radical work of peace is still to be begun.

Opus justitiae pax. Pope Pius XII's device is a sufficient reminder of what must be the constant preoccupation of the Church. Christ is our peace, and the establishment of the kingdom of his justice is the vocation of all who are made one in him who 'has made the two nations one, breaking down the wall that was a barrier between us, the enmity there was between us, in his own mortal nature'. (Eph. ii, 14.) And this work of man's reconciliation to God, in which is grounded the work of man's reconciliation with his fellow-men, is not a gesture of the past merely: to be recalled with longing as though it were no more effective, an inspiration but not a present reality. In Catholic belief the Eucharist is precisely the re-presentation throughout all ages of the very cause of peace, the work itself and not merely the memory of it. 'It is the Lord's death you are heralding, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, until he comes' (I Cor. xi, 26).

It is so at every level: the individual's reconciliation within

himself, the unity of family life, the harmony of social order, the peace of nations. The concentric circles have a single centre, the redemptive work of Christ and that work as renewed in all times and places in the eucharistic sacrifice. This is not to say that there is no Christian contribution to the debate as to how in a broken world men may achieve a temporal peace. The Christian fact is not a way of retreat from the fact of present strife: rather is it the unique type of reconciliation from which all men's efforts to establish peace must take their meaning and their dimension. Thus the Barcelona Congress does not confine itself to the splendours of eucharistic worship, though that indeed lies at the centre of the gathering as it must. The Congress will have much to say—in this faithful to the unceasing teaching of recent Popes—of the deep causes of our present discontents. And such factors as racial discrimination, social injustice and the abuse of national power are maladies in the moral order. They are discussed indeed in the assemblies of the United Nations, and they will be discussed no less in this assembly of the true international, the Catholic Church, which exists simply to perpetuate the reconciling work of Christ. But the discussions in Barcelona pre-suppose that all a secular order can achieve must be fruitless unless it be related to that constant centre which is Christ and his charity.

Does this mean that the politicians can hope for no lasting peace until all nations are on their knees in a common acknowledgment of Christ and the Church? And is an Eucharistic Congress only the affair of the faithful, without meaning for the millions who do not believe? In the end—and the end may be tomorrow or a million years hence—the answer lies hidden in the mystery of God's providential will for all mankind. But there is an immediate task and a present responsibility. For Christians that means, as it always has meant, the acceptance of the fact that for them is wholly certain: *congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*. The unity of Christians is the fruit of the love of Christ, made present and available every day in the offering of the sacrifice which is his and in which they share. And the knowledge of that unity serves more than the discernible body of all believers, for 'the Lord will claim for his own a generation still to come; heaven itself will make known his faithfulness to a people yet to be born, a people of the Lord's own founding' (Ps. cxxi, 32).