

PAX CHRISTI IN REGNO CHRISTI

“*PAX Christi in regno Christi.*” It is difficult to make people realize the significance of this ideal even within the Catholic Church. But if we would propose this watchword to the outside world and make it a plank in the programme of Catholic Action, we shall meet with little more encouraging than a shrug of the shoulders, if not with positive rebuff. To many Catholics it is inconceivable that the Pope had in mind *political* peace between the nations, as well as religious peace based on the foundation of the common faith, when he proposed this watchword. They will not agree that Catholic doctrine and moral teaching should impose Christ’s command of peace as a duty upon the States of the world or that it has any political reference. To refute this error it must suffice to quote two papal pronouncements. Benedict XV writes in his Encyclical *Pacem Dei* (1920): “The command of Love among individuals found in the Gospels differs in no respect from that which should reign among *States and peoples.*” And the present Pope Pius XI declared in his first Encyclical: “It is a holy duty for *peoples and governments* to follow and use as a guide the teachings of Christ in both the internal and external aspects of their *political life*” (*Ubi arcano*, 1922). Nobody will underestimate the difficulties which lie in the way of a policy which is based on the principles of the Gospel. But the teaching of the Gospel, because it is opposed to the spirit of the world, is hard to follow always. Yet it must be preached in all its aspects, unaccommodatingly—“*opportune, importune*” (II Tim. vii, 2).

Pessimism would be justified and the preaching of the Word of Jesus Christ would be a vain task if we had to rely merely on natural means to put it into practice. For this reason any pacifist creed which is devoid of a religious foundation is useless. Phrases like “Reason will triumph” or “Humanity will grow wise after so many misfortunes” are false. For not only is human reason weak and subject to error, but also its leadership is constantly usurped by the passions, which, if they are not directed and strengthened

by the supernatural, follow the flesh rather than the spirit.

“Natural man” is prone to error despite all scientific and technical progress. He is incapable of learning the lessons of a catastrophe for which he alone was responsible, and of avoiding one even more terrible. What better evidence of this could there be than the fact that the nations of Europe have been unable to profit by the disastrous experience of a World War and make its recurrence after a relatively short period impossible? For since then the unification of Europe, which should have been an inevitable lesson taught by the Great War, has been prevented rather than promoted, despite the certainty that the path which is now being trodden can only end in a second and even more terrible conflict.

For the thousandth time natural reason and natural will stand convicted in their impotence. They cannot ever overcome the hidden powers and forces which make for the tragedy of the world.

Can these ever be overcome? “This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith” (I John, v, 4); not of course the imperfect faith which merely assents and pays lip-service to the teachings of Christianity; but the Faith which is consumed with the fire of love and filled with the spirit of deeds and the will to sacrifice; the Faith which is superior to Reason, because it denies the specious reasonableness of worldly means and efforts, and sets up against it the “Folly of the Cross.” This Faith does not despise the healthy principle of Reason which has its place, its rights, and its functions even in the supernatural order. The true Faith contains the whole of true knowledge and makes use of it.

In this way Christian moral doctrine acknowledges and develops a theory of the relations between States which is as realistic and as contemporary, and relies on the same intellectual instruments, as those proposed by purely profane science. The only difference is that the full expression of the Christian doctrine is an organization of society which teaches the revelation of God; that is to say, it requires the peoples of the world to belong, as it were, to one family, to be united on spiritual matters and at peace with each other, in spite of all national differences and peculiarities.

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To tread this path two things are necessary. Firstly the steadfast adherence to Catholic teaching in these matters. However opposed the actual conditions, however great the power of their worldly authors may be, we must not be disturbed by this cleavage but must propagate by the spoken and the written word our teaching as the teaching of the Truth. It is not for the healthy to adapt itself to the sick and compromise with it, it is for the sick to keep before its eyes the ideal picture of the healthy. To assert that Catholics have always carried this out in the history of the Kingdom of God would be untrue. But what has been the result? Our concessions have always strengthened our opponents. The history of the decline of the Christian spirit in public and international life could perhaps be described as the *History of the Compromises* which we have made with the world, both in the sphere of practice and to a certain extent in the sphere of theory.

The first need is, then, the uncompromising promulgation of our teaching. The second, equally important, is the uncompromising living in Christ. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. His living members are the Christians who are living in a state of Grace, fellow saviours. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out and to be trodden on by men." When we Christians are pushed back, and even pushed out, when we are trodden under foot, we should first ask whether we ourselves are not responsible for this treatment, whether we have not become the salt which has lost its savour. It is not proposed to discuss here in general the influence which Christians can have in the world to preserve, to invigorate, and to redeem; but in particular their influence upon Peace. We have a contribution to make through our teaching and through our life. In such danger is the Peace of the world and so near is the threat of an all-destroying war that natural resources are no longer of any use. But with God "all things are possible." We need no extraordinary powers, but merely those supernatural powers which are open to us at all times. If we are in a state of sanctifying grace, which unites us with the living

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God, we can bring into our surroundings the strength, the light and the consolation of this higher life, and thereby become real centres of spiritual rebirth. Above all the Peace of God will be transmitted from ourselves to others. More particularly, we can *pray* for Peace.

This is the special reason for which this article has been written. It is intended to be an invitation to readers to remember the power of prayer, and to enlist themselves in the army of those who, in growing numbers, are imploring the Sacred Heart to dispel the present dangers, of which a world war, though not the most fundamental, is the most manifest. This year has witnessed the foundation of a new pious work, "the work of praying to Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament for the intentions of the Pope." The Holy Father received this work from ladies of Roman Society as a gift to commemorate his eightieth year. They were able to tell His Holiness that many religious communities had by their participation made it possible at the time of his birthday for over eight million hours of prayer a month to be devoted to his intentions. It is well known that his first intention is "*Pax Christi in regno Christi.*"

Let us remember one of the most consoling of stories in the Holy Bible. The wrath of God was collecting over Sodom and Gomorrah. He was intending to destroy these two cities for their wickedness, when Abraham came before him and said, "Wilt thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish withal and wilt thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein?" And God agreed, but Abraham worried whether there were fifty such souls, and asked whether forty-five would suffice. Again God agreed. And so the dialogue proceeds, each time conceding a smaller number of righteous men, till Abraham dares to make it a matter of not more than ten, and God answers magnanimously, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." The mercy of God in response to appeals from his friends will not be smaller in the New Testament than in the Old. It may be that the prayers for Peace of good men have already held back the often threatened outbreak of a new catastrophe.

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Now, even more than ever, should the Faith which triumphs over the world stand up against destiny in the form of a further decay of the Christian peoples. Like a supernatural fortification in the midst of all dangers, and all natural efforts to dispel them, a special Convent for the *Pax Christi in regno Christi* should be established, a convent in which the two elements of the Faith, the Teaching and the Life, should be specially conducted in view of their relations to the Peace which the world cannot give. Of the first importance would be prayer, the continual devotion to Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament and the supplication for His Peace. A congregation of Dominican nuns which is known for its strict rule and its exceptional intellectual work has declared its readiness to train women candidates who are willing to devote themselves to the work of Peace, and to help them to found a convent which lives absolutely for *Pax Christi in regno Christi*. The Sisters use the big Breviary in their liturgical offices, take it in turns to carry out an unceasing worship before the Holy Sacrament and devote themselves to the study and propagation of the Catholic idea of Peace. There are many religious works which are devoted to this idea (for example the Eucharistic League for *Pax Christi in regno Christi* in Rome; and the international Secretariat for Peace Masses in Paris), but they are known to few Catholics. The proposed Peace Convent should be a central gathering point for all these. The emphasis would then not be on any great organization or propaganda machine, but on the effort to intensify and to deepen with supernatural aid all those qualities which can prepare a way for the Gospel of Peace in the world. According to the Dominican tradition it would be at the same time a contemplative and active life; the active life, again corresponding to the spirit of the Order, would consist mainly in spreading the traditional Christian doctrine of Peace. There is a Catholic teaching about just and unjust war, there is a Catholic social and political philosophy, there are Catholic efforts towards reunion of Christendom. The watchword of the Holy Father mentions with great forethought not merely "*Pax Christi*" but "*Pax Christi in regno Christi*." The foundation of Peace is His Kingdom, in

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its unity, steadfastness, and inner richness, and in its all-embracing character. For this reason the revival and the spreading of the faith belong to the mission of the Peace convent. The Dominican nuns of the convent which is willing to become the parent of the Peace convent, are showing the fruits of their seven years' study of philosophy and theology by giving lectures and courses for educated women. Specialization in this teaching would be introduced in the new convent according to its purpose. To this purpose, however, would certainly correspond a general instruction for would-be converts who could also take temporary part in the convent life. Finally a community of lay tertiaries could be attached, whose function it would be to carry on throughout the world works and prayers in the spirit of the convent.

A bold but fine plan! Its execution lies in the hands of God. Till now the only assets are a few candidates who are prepared to do this work, and the goodwill of the Mother Convent which is prepared to instruct them in the way. Will these lines move the hearts of a few young girls to join this community as the brides of the King of Peace? It should be composed of as many nationalities as possible. Will others open their purses to help provide the material basis of this lofty spiritual work? Confident that this appeal will find the hoped-for echo in the hearts of some readers, both men and women, the writer adds his address: Piazza S. Maria Maggiore 8, Rome.

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(Translated by Bernard Alexander)