

## THE CHURCH, PEACE AND WAR

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LOVE of mankind." It is upon the proper interpretation of this much abused term and upon the active application of its principles that the peace of the world depends. During these troubled times when the world is torn between the militarism of Germany and Japan and the extreme pacificism of the followers of George Fox, there can hardly be found words more expressive of the Church's attitude towards modern conditions and the universal hunger for peace than those of Pius XI. "Peace does not consist merely in a hard inflexible justice, it must be made acceptable and easy, by being compounded equally of charity and a sincere desire for reconciliation . . . Peace is an act and results only from love."<sup>1</sup>

Man is by nature a social being: he is so dominated by society that everything which can properly be called human has a relation to social life. Without society there would be no family, no community, state or nation. Without society there would be neither science, nor art, nor culture. Moreover, without the mutual aid of his fellows, man could not for the most part practice so easily and so well the virtues which help to lead him to his final end.

Love of one's neighbor is the binding force of society. It is the element which unifies the peoples of the world, and has for its fruit that union and peace of which Saint Augustine speaks when he answers the question: "What is society and what is its foundation?" "Man finds," he says, "three things he has to love, God, himself, and his neighbor. And as he finds that he who loves God thereby loves himself, it follows that he must get his neighbor to love God since he ought to love his neighbor as himself."<sup>2</sup> Consequently he will be at peace or concord as far as in him lies. Further he tells us that peace between men is well-ordered concord; civil peace is the well-ordered concord between the citizens of the state; and finally "the peace of the world is the tranquillity of order."<sup>3</sup> Any lack of

<sup>1</sup> Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei*.

<sup>2</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

love tends to sever this union and works as a destructive influence on society. This rupture of concord among social beings reaches its ultimate stage in war.

We need but hastily glance through the pages of history to discover that war seems to have been the status of the world frequently since the time of Cain. Yet side by side with this fact there has been deeply rooted in the hearts of men an everlasting longing for peace. As long as we have had war we have had protests against it. As wife or child or brother stood by the corpse of a soldier who had fallen, mingled with the grief and pain was the question: "What is the reason for this brutal death at the hands of his fellowman?" But the only answer given was that it was necessary because of the failure of some earthly ruler to judge justly and peacefully concerning the rights of his kingdom.

When man endowed with free will cannot overcome the continued resistance of another rational being he resorts to war. This is inevitable, for when all other methods which depend on the free will of the person to be influenced, such as appeals to reason, to conscience, to self-interest, to affection, fail, there remains only material compulsion. Thus we see that war is essentially a conflict between two or more groups of human wills carried on in the physical plane.<sup>4</sup> This process of mutual destruction will continue until one side or the other discovers that surrender would be wiser than prolonged slaughter of human beings and the wanton destruction of property.

This assertion of moral right by armed might according to the principles of war may be either offensive or defensive in its origin. Superficially it would seem that the state which first declared war is the aggressor, but such is not always the case. As war is an assertion of right it may concern rights already infringed upon or rights now being attacked. Therefore "as a vindication of past injustice, war is sometimes called offensive; as a means of repelling attack it is called defensive."<sup>5</sup>

In 1891 Bismarck said that "war is the law of nature, in a general form it is the struggle for existence, and until men become angels it will not cease." This statement is certainly not true, but as in all aphorisms there is enough truth contained in it to expose us to the danger of drawing a false conclusion. Such would be the case were we to gather that because a thing has happened a thou-

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Plater, S.J., *A Primer of Peace and War*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

sand times it becomes by law absolutely necessary. What will be necessary as long as man exists and wishes to exist is struggle. But struggle is not war. Adam's condemnation was: "In the sweat of thy face," not by the blood of thy neighbor, "shalt thou eat bread."<sup>6</sup>

In order the better to understand the Church's plea for peace, let us first consider her mind on war. With regard to its moral grounds, its justification, and its limitations the Church holds the middle course, neither condemning nor sanctioning war absolutely. She rejects alike the two extremes, that of militarism which glorifies war as an end in itself, and that of extreme pacifism which denies any character of lawfulness whatever to war. Catholic theologians look upon militarism as a defect of the virtue of meekness because it tolerates peace only as a time for the preparation of war, while they consider extreme pacifism as a moral weakness which seeks peace solely from motives of pusillanimity.

It is in the *Summa* of St. Thomas that the true doctrine of the Church on war is to be found.<sup>7</sup> Considering the morality of war, St. Thomas lays down three conditions for its justification. First, it belongs only to a lawful authority to wage war; second, there must be a just cause; third, those who wage war must have the right intention.

The first requirement is directed against the "right of the fist," so common during the middle ages, by which every petty prince thought he had the right to wage war. This condition maintains that private individuals who are subject to an earthly ruler should seek justice at his hands. Hence it is lawful for the state to wage war when there is no power above it from which it can obtain justice. A world court with authority over all states, whose proper object would be to preserve peace, would raise the world above the necessity of war as a means of national self-defence. Until we have such a court, the ruler of the state must protect and defend it from its enemies even with force when other means are ineffective.

The second requirement, a "just cause" is had when those against whom war is waged merit attack because of some fault. There are two features to this just cause, moral guilt and certain knowledge of the guilt. Material fault, that is, unconscious guilt, is not sufficient; it is not an evil deed and those who commit it are not evil-doers. This second requirement St. Thomas states as something

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<sup>6</sup> *Gen.* III, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 40, a. 1.

self-evident and without need of discussion or illustration. Following St. Augustine he maintains that "just wars are those which avenge injuries; when for instance a people on whom war is to be declared have either failed to make reparation for some wrong committed by their subjects or to return what has been unjustly taken."<sup>8</sup>

The third condition for a just war is a right intention, that is, the intention of advancing good and avoiding evil. "True religion looks upon those wars as lawful that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and uplifting the good."<sup>9</sup> It may happen, however, that a war declared by a legitimate authority for a just cause is rendered unlawful through a wicked intention, such as the lust for political power and the extension of boundaries.

Although he does not mention it expressly, yet from his consideration of the use of strategy and again when speaking of the ownership of spoils taken in war,<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas seems to add a fourth requirement, namely the right use of means in waging war. As the main object of war is to force the enemy to yield to terms by inflicting physical suffering and loss of goods, it would appear that the greater the loss and the more speedily it is inflicted the more speedy and more certain will be the result. But civilized beings upheld by their knowledge of moral obligations and imbued with the virtue of charity should not look upon war simply as a means of legalized murder and robbery. They should realize that the commandments of God retain their full force even on the field of battle, despite the fact that the lives and property of their opponents for the present are rightly open to attack. Francis De Vitoria commenting on this question declares: "When for a just cause war has broken out it must not be waged so as to ruin the people against whom it is directed, but only as to obtain one's rights, for the defence of one's country, and in order that peace and security may result."<sup>11</sup> It must be certain that war does not bring with it greater evils than those it is to cure.

Thus it is plain that the Church does not entirely condemn war; but as a last resort, because of the ineffectiveness of other means of restoration and self-defence, she permits it. From history it may be seen that she even sanctions war when it is the only means of restoring an order that is based on charity and justice, for the end that is

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<sup>8</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, I, 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 40, a. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 40, a. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Francis De Vitoria, O.P., *De Jure Belli*.

sought when men are engaged in war is a more perfect peace in place of one that is defective.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Church does not utterly condemn war, there is no one who does not consider war the world's most horrible spectacle. No slaughter house for animals can be compared to man's battlefield. It is unfortunate, however, that only sentimental descriptions of warfare are given, and these in pacifist and socialist literature in whose circles there is less appreciation than among Christians of the real purpose of life. It is for the Church, then, to fulfill her mission of peace. This she does by her ethical principles governing peace and war.

We have seen how throughout the ages side by side with the lust for war there has been growing the equally strong desire for peace. The first appeals were made more to sentiment than to reason as the first protests against war as an abomination came from hearts moved by feelings for "humanity." As a result, there sprang up, among other theories of peace, what might be called "religious pacifism," a doctrine which found its staunchest supporters among the followers of George Fox, a weaver born in Leicestershire, England, in 1624. This religious sect, under the name of Quakers, believing that every man has an inner light which is his only guide, reject almost everything external in religion. Condemning oaths, art, music, the drama, and the bearing of arms, they cling to one religious truth ardently and abandon all the other equally important truths to the background. They are so impressed by Christ's commandment of love and are so devoted to their works of mercy that for the Quaker who practices this simple ethics as taught by Our Lord there can be no such thing as war. The state and nation may say what it likes but Christ forbids all hatred, envy, and revenge, and has commanded all men to love their enemies, to do good to them and overcome evil not with evil but with good. No one imbued with this spirit, they claim, can kill his brother or even wound him.

As a matter of fact the Quakers and all other sects infected with the errors of extreme pacifism are preaching a doctrine which would eventually produce anarchy. If pursued to its final stages it would destroy the very state of human society. For if a state may not resist a foreign aggressor it may not resist a domestic assailant. It would be unlawful then, to defend oneself as well as others; criminals, therefore, would have free rein; peace and order would be overthrown, until at last civilization itself would be undermined.

The Church rejects the form of pacifism which prefers peace to the sword at any price, as well as that form of militarism which

glorifies war as an inexorable law and an unavoidable necessity in the march of progress. What then is the Church's stand on peace? We have seen that man in a social being; his common human needs demand that he be so. Some of these are supplied by the family, others by the community, still others by the state. Moreover each group trains man to fulfill his duty to a higher group: thus family life prepares him for community life; community life for national life; finally national life prepares man to become a citizen of the world. Therefore man's social instincts extend far beyond national boundaries. Nor is this "world citizenship" prejudicial to love of one's country any more than national citizenship is prejudicial to a man's living a family life.

Furthermore in His plan of creation God gave to each individual a personality and a place of his own in the world; likewise to each nation, however great or small, He gave its proper rank among the kingdoms of the earth. As each individual finds his proper place in the family; each family its harmony with the other families of the state; each state its well-ordered concord with the nation; and each nation its proper place in the world and its harmony with other nations—then throughout the world there will be not merely absence of war but that "tranquillity of order"<sup>12</sup> which is true peace. This will be brought about only by love among men and nations, by a love that not merely wishes well but does good. It is such a peace that the Church seeks and continually beseeches the peoples of the world to pray for. Its ultimate realization may not be reached but its ideals cannot be questioned.

Ever since its birth the Church has been reproached either because she concerns herself too much with the things of this world or because she does not concern herself enough. If she interferes in social affairs she has forgotten her spiritual mission; if she does not interfere she has lost her status as the spiritual and moral leader of civilization. However, it must be plain even to her objectors that her doctrine of peace is the only one that can stand the test of reason, experience and revelation.

The Church, whose gospels contain the doctrine of the God of Mercy and Justice and maintain the existence of heaven and hell, rejects the pacifist theories of the Quakers who so emphasize Christ's example of love that they forget His doctrine of justice. Justice and the punishment of evil must and shall remain.

Nor does the Church nullify the gospel command of love any

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<sup>12</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 13.

more than she does that of justice. Holy justice is the application of force, but it is free from the sins of passion, hate, and greed, vengeance and strife; its methods, save on rare occasions, are spiritual instead of material. The Church does not believe that bitterness of men towards each other is more effective than spiritual means, for she realizes that man has that power denied to brutes of living by reason and law. Should he choose to live by passion and instinct he should not wonder that he fall into brute conditions. But as a punishment for man's sins God permits this terrible scourge of war to befall him to remind him of the folly of disobeying His law.

God the creator of all things, the God of Justice and Love does not desire war, but in His Divine Providence He has left to man the means of perpetuating among the ever-changing generations of the world the principles of Christianity by which he will be able to rectify the reverses and disputes among nations; to continue to hope for and plan a new international community, "a true City of God which while in its stages of pilgrimage avails itself of the peace of the earth, and so far as it can, without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessaries of life and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, IX, 17.

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