

BLACKFRIARS

VOL. XX

OCTOBER 1939

No. 285

EDITORIAL

The Fuehrer's act of robbery with violence is now, thanks to Stalin's intervention, speedily to be consummated. Yet, though the country of Poland be dismembered, that principle for which she has deemed it worth while to die remains only the more firmly established—the right of men to liberty in the cult of God and of domestic peace. Other nations, too, have thought this fight worth while, and have entered it with open eyes. France and England, not merely their governments but their peoples, did all that seemed lawful to them to do in order to avert the terrible horror of war. In the material order they had nothing to gain, much inevitably to lose; but in the moral order there was something to be preserved or, it may be, gained, which outweighed those material considerations. The calm spirit of readiness to accept the tremendous self-sacrifice that must be required of all, the absence of war-fever and hate-propaganda, the general sympathy for the mass of the German people, these are indications of what might well be called a Christian attitude in the face of overwhelming provocation.

The practical issue is clear-cut; please God it remain so. Whatever our individual or even national shortcomings may be, we are involved in a struggle for something wholly and objectively good. That is why the Bishops have given to us Catholics so definite and inspiring a lead. 'We, the Catholic Hierarchy of England and Wales, wish to urge upon all the Faithful, at this time of national trial and endeavour, the duty of loyal obedience to His Majesty the King, and of willing co-operation in every form of national service. We have a profound conviction of the justice of our cause. Our Nation in this conflict stands for freedom

and for the liberty of the individual and the State. . . . We call upon our people to pray for the success of our cause and that of our French and Polish Allies, remembering also our enemies so many of whom are engaged against us with good conscience.'

This matter of personal conscience in the face of war is not always a simple one; but here, at any rate, all our consciences should be clear—though far from complacent. 'You are fortunate in this,' writes Bishop Dey to the three Services, 'that the cause which summons you to arms is right and just in the eyes of God and of all good men.' If there were nothing else involved than this matter of justice, it would be enough; for we are not immediately or primarily concerned about justice towards ourselves as individuals; we are concerned with the injustice done so undeservedly to others. We may not stand by and see our fellows robbed of the possibility of holding or gaining what is their precious right, while we still have the power to restrain the robber.

But there is a wider issue involved than that of the despoiling of Poland. This particular aggression was another and most definite step in the destruction of that principle of law amongst peoples which is inseparably allied to fundamental natural rights and without which a religious life or any truly human life is rendered practically impossible. It is not a question merely as to whether Germany shall be allowed to rule Europe; it is a question as to whether Nazism (or, as it now clearly appears, its blood-brother Communism) shall be allowed to deprive mankind of its inalienable and vital rights.

We maintain, then, that the peoples of England and France have come to the aid of Poland not only with a 'good' conscience, which might, nevertheless, be misguided, but with a clear and well-informed conscience as to the objective rightness of their cause. It is such a conscience alone that can give that inward peace of soul in the face of imminent perils and grievous privations, of fright-

fulness, it may be, such as the world has not hitherto known; yet, even so, it is to be recognised that that conscience and that peace, to be real and lasting, needs a continued influx of divine grace and an unshaken belief in divine providence. Modern war, above all, is an unspeakable horror; but it is a scourge of frightfulness of man's own weaving. Let there be none of this foolishness of blaming God for it, as there was in the last war. Nevertheless this, too, comes under the merciful direction of His infinite providence. If man will make war, or make war inevitable, God will bring good even out of this—not out of the evil that lies behind it, but out of the tragic suffering it brings in its train.

There can be no doubt that those suffer most in war who least deserve to suffer; but there is something essentially Christian in this. It was by His suffering and death that Christ our Saviour won for men the freedom their souls required; but men themselves must suffer like Him to earn their share in this freedom. The suffering that has now come upon us and so many of our fellow men may well be a God-given way of paying the price not merely for political freedom, but for the liberty of the adoption of the sons of God. There is room for no selfishness here; those who suffer most, and especially those who die, stand to gain least from a materially selfish point of view. It may be said with truth that they suffer and die that others may profit, and there is no greater charity than this. They may lose their whole world; but they will have gained eternal possession of their souls. That is the divine providence and that the opportunity of this present war.

Whether that opportunity will be seized and used to its fullest extent must necessarily depend upon the good will of all the individuals concerned, but especially of those who are clear-sighted enough to see the real issue at stake and heroic enough to follow Our Lord not only in His sufferings, but also in His unshaken pity for those who knew not what they did. The mass of those who have

fought against the freedom of Poland do not know, have not been allowed to know, what they do. Happily in these early days of the war the people of France and England have, for the most part, admirably restrained the passions of hatred and revenge so liable to vitiate even a cause as good as theirs. It is the duty of every individual to be on his guard against these deadly enemies of truth, justice, charity and ultimate peace. It has been said with truth that war is the result of irreligion and lack of faith. Our primary concern in that regard is not to apportion blame; for who is there that is entirely without sin? Our concern must be to face objective facts, and of paramount importance is the fact that we must provide, first of all in our own souls, an antidote to the machinations of the Evil One evidenced in that growing spirit of irreligion wherever it is to be found.

A deep and unwavering trust in God must substantiate our charity, our loyalty and our courage, if we are to live as Christians through the tribulations and temptations of a war that has come to the very doors of us all. Taken not merely in a negative spirit of reparation for infidelity, but also in a positive spirit of striving for what is right in ourselves and others, these days of dire calamity will bear a precious and divine fruit of their own, spiritual values will be regained, splendid virtues will be nourished, and a Christian spirit of self-sacrifice will prevail. Terrible scourge as war is, let these divine things be allowed a place to weigh in the balance against it. We would not choose war, even for the possibility of these good things, perhaps; but war has been thrust upon us, and these things are not only now possible, but to be sought strenuously. *Thy Kingdom come.*

THE EDITOR.