

## FATIMA AND THE PEOPLE'S THEOLOGY

'For I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid, a weak man and of short time, and falling short of the understanding of judgement and laws.' (Wisd. ix, 5).

What do we mean by the 'mind of the Church'? In the most obvious sense the Church is an autocracy: the life and the power and the wisdom are from above, from the Head which is Christ. But there is another sense in which the life of the Church has its democratic aspect: for the vitality and vigour of the Church, the degree in which the life and power and wisdom are used and expressed, this depends not least on the masses of the faithful, on their acceptance of and response to what is given. So the development of the Church's dogma is a process which can be found to begin from below: first the gradual fermentation of the idea in the devout life of the layfolk, then its discussion and analysis in the controversies of theologians, then finally the decisive voice, the consecration, by the wisdom from above, of the truth in these new discernments and elucidations of ancient fact. Can there be a similar process in the realm of morals? We do well to remember the power of the Spirit in giving to the hearts of the simple and unlearned a *sense* of the right and the good. In two ways this connatural knowledge, as St. Thomas calls it, differs from the work of the theologian and may complement it: it goes straight to the conclusion, while the theologian, working in another medium, must first sift and test the premisses; it concerns the particular fact or type of fact, where theology is concerned primarily with the general principle. True, it must submit to the judgement of the *Ecclesia docens*; we cannot plead the promptings of the Spirit where the conclusion goes against the data of revelation or the findings of traditionally established theology. Nor can we deny the damage that can be done if those who are unacquainted with theology try to justify their convictions by the light of a science with which they are not familiar. But on the other hand the *communis aestimatio* of the faithful, when it is really a *common*, a universal, conviction, is a thing of weight; and if it can be shown to be a particular application of the principles of theology and of the faith we are surely right in regarding it as being an expression of the mind of the Church.

The moral theology of the Church is always in need of new development and new applications as new facts arise to confront it. Sometimes the new facts can be stated and defined with scientific accuracy, and then the task of theology is relatively easy: in the light of its

principles it must say, 'This type of action is good or evil as the case may be,' and the decision is an immediate guide to behaviour. Sometimes, on the other hand, the facts are far more fugitive, and the theologian, as such, may be compelled to restrict himself to general statements which may be far from helpful to the individual searching his conscience here and now. Such is often the case with the theology of war. The Church can say, for example, that contraception, or artificial insemination, are wrong, and can define exactly what we are to understand by the terms, and thenceforth the Catholic is at least in no doubt as to where he stands. But the Church says also that the directly intended killing of the innocent, in warfare as elsewhere, is wrong; and this, so far from being the end of the matter, is only the beginning. What are the facts? Some will say of a particular case that the people being killed cannot be regarded as innocent, they are involved in the war themselves; some will say that the killing is not directly intended. . . . It is just here, on the judgement of the *facts*, that the common estimate of the faithful can be of particular value; for if you find the theologian's statement of the principle given practical application in the layman's judgement of the facts—a judgement which, no doubt very slowly and gradually, has become sufficiently convinced and sufficiently common to be regarded as a general conviction—then you can presumably say that in this case moral theology has advanced to a new elucidation.

That any such common estimate must as a rule take a long time to crystallize is obvious; and the process is presumably bound to be retarded where the environment is predominantly non-Christian, and still more if war psychosis has subordinated judgement to propaganda. That is why, whatever side we may take in the question, we cannot but be thankful for the recent discussion among Catholics of the problem of area-bombing, or obliteration-bombing as it is sometimes called. For this means first of all that Catholics are plainly not willing to take their judgements ready-made from the cheap Press; it means also that they are able to debate the question—as for the formation of a 'Catholic sense' they must among themselves.<sup>1</sup> We need to pray urgently that out of all the thought and the argument a common estimate may indeed be formed.

There are two essential conditions for success. First of all, no

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<sup>1</sup> We owe a debt of gratitude to the Editor of 'The Catholic Herald,' for instance, for making discussion of this problem possible in his correspondence columns. The problem will not cease to be a problem after the war is over: there will be the question of the Sanctions at the disposal of international or supranational authority. The use of international sanctions was explicitly advocated by Benedict XV, but of course taking it for granted that they should not be immoral in themselves.

good can be done, but only damage, by arguing in independence or defiance of the theological principles. Thus; a recent letter-writer to one of the Catholic newspapers urged the morality of area-bombing on the grounds that our duty is to win the war. . . . This puts any non-Catholic reader in the position of being able to repeat the old gibe about believing that the end justifies the means, for indeed this is precisely what the writer apparently does believe—in defiance of one of the basic principles of all moral theology. Moreover it rides roughshod over the traditionally established application of that principle to the particular question of war: it is the common teaching of the Catholic tradition that where war is concerned not only must the cause be a just one but the methods also must be *in themselves* justifiable: the cause cannot of itself justify the methods. If Catholics find themselves in the position of having to say, of war as of anything else, 'Our cause is just but the only way we can make it prevail is by adopting immoral methods,' they are in duty bound to conclude, 'Then we cannot make it prevail,' and to try to act accordingly.

The second condition is prayer. The 'people's theology' is a matter not of science, of discursive reasoning, but of faith illumined by the Holy Spirit: but the mind can be opened to that illumination only by prayer, by a prayerful life. 'I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid, a weak man and of short time, and falling short of the understanding of judgement and laws . . . and who shall know thy thought, except thou give wisdom and send thy Holy Spirit from above, and so the ways of them that are upon earth may be corrected, and men may learn the things that please thee?' But the Spirit is sent to those who call upon the Spirit.

The desired unanimity, on this subject at any rate, is at present far from being given. What is to be done meanwhile, apart from praying for it? Two things suggest themselves. First of all, on those of us who do feel that in this respect evil is being done, there lies a special duty. There are many things in the recent history of this country which must bring down upon it the blessing of God: its harbouring of the harbourless from so many lands, both before the war broke out and since; the self-sacrificing bravery of so many; the innumerable generousities which the distress of war victims has called forth. But if we feel that here, on the other hand, objectively speaking,<sup>2</sup> evil is being done, there lies on us the duty of attempting

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<sup>2</sup> Need it be said that to regard a course of action as *objectively* wrong is not to be guilty of the arrogance and impertinence of judging the *doer* of the action, or belittling a self-sacrifice or a heroism which may well be far beyond the capacity of the one who in his own conscience has to make the judgement?

so far as we may to heal the damage done: to heal hatred by a greater and deeper love of the brotherhood of men, to assert more strongly the fatherhood of God and the authority of his laws by a renewal of repentance in our own lives and a greater intensity of prayer, to do what we can to expiate.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, whatever our views on this or any other particular problem of the moment, we may all be sure that where there is in fact an accepted 'Catholic view' on any subject, it will often be opposed or derided in the name of modern science or rational enlightenment: and though it is indeed one of our duties to make plain the reasonableness of our faith, the thing goes deeper than that. In this second case as in the first, we may find help and guidance in the recent dedication of the world by the Pope to the heart of Mary, and in the too little known apparitions of our Lady at Fatima, by which the dedication was inspired.<sup>4</sup>

There are many who are, to say the least, chary of welcoming the idea of devotion to the heart of Mary because of the debased forms in which the parallel devotion to the sacred heart of our Lord has now for so long found expression. But we should not confuse the essential with the incidental. What in fact does the devotion mean? We use the word heart in our common speech often enough, and we do not accuse ourselves of debased sentimentality in so doing, for we know what we want to express: we mean love, and the wisdom and understanding that spring from love. *Le coeur a ses raisons. . .* If we speak of devotion to the Sacred Heart we mean simply devotion to our Lord, but a devotion which concentrates, in love and gratitude and supplication, on his loving understanding of, and sympathy for, the sorrow and suffering of the world—the eternal and

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<sup>3</sup> The discomforts or hardships or sufferings which war brings can be made an expiatory sacrifice if they are turned into love; prayer itself can be an expiation; and if instead of trying to escape the thought of the immensity of the world's sufferings we on the contrary try to make it our own, and bear some part of it in our own hearts, our sorrow can be, within the passion of Christ, a redeeming sorrow, sharing with His in expiating the evil and healing the pain.

<sup>4</sup> Our Lady appeared to three children near Fatima, Portugal six times in the year 1917. She appeared as our Lady of the Rosary, and her message was that, for the salvation of the world in general and of Russia in particular, God wished mankind to pay homage to her heart. After long enquiry the authenticity of the apparitions was recognised by the Bishop of Leiria in 1930, and Fatima has become a place of pilgrimage on the scale of Lourdes. On October 31st, 1942, Pope Pius XII, broadcasting at the close of the Jubilee celebrating the apparitions at Fatima, consecrated Russia and the whole world to the heart of Mary, and renewed this consecration on December 8th of the same year. All the dioceses of France were in the same way consecrated to her in 1943, and in England the devotion was advocated by the Archbishop of Westminster in a pastoral letter in the same year. The literature concerning Fatima includes a C.T.S. pamphlet by Archbishop Godfrey, the Apostolic Delegate, and *Our Lady of Fatima*, by Archbishop Ryan, O.P., published by Brown and Nolan, Dublin.

infinite wisdom of the Word, but the warm and gentle and human wisdom of the Word made flesh who bore our infirmities and shared our sorrows. If we speak of the heart of Mary, we think similarly of her wise and gentle sympathy, her love, her care for mankind—the loving care of her mother's heart.

There are often times when you have to set the wisdom of the heart against the superficial science which neglects the deeper realities, when you have to try to combat the pride of intellect, which sets out to build an anthropocentric world, by praying, with the knowledge of those deeper realities in your heart, that the wisdom which is from above may be given to men, for 'by wisdom they were healed, whosoever have pleased thee, O Lord, from the beginning.' And perhaps in the dedication of the world to the heart of Mary the Mother it is this lesson that is being driven home to us with renewed emphasis: for we have seen the man-made world, the world of man-centred scientific humanism, come crashing down before our eyes, and yet it seems to be to the same self-sufficient science that built it that we are looking to build it again. The science of man is never sufficient and always dangerous unless it is complemented by the wisdom of the heart, and that wisdom is symbolized, and indeed especially enshrined, in the heart of woman. So often you find in the history of the world that it is through woman that the deeper realities and the deeper sanities have been preserved or restored, and that for these things women have been striving while men were too concerned with their politics and their plannings to be aware of them. Patriotism is not enough, justice is not enough, science is not enough, logic is not enough—it is for these truths that woman stands in the life of mankind: and when they are forgotten or ignored it is the life of mankind that suffers. It is an ill thing for a man, as the psychologists tell us, to be on bad terms with his *anima*. It is an ill thing for society to lack the wisdom which is proper to woman: not thus is the happy family built, or the happy world. Yet to-day, when as never before this wisdom is needed (for it is indeed a whole world that is to be re-built), the pressure of events has been such as to put this wisdom further and further out of sight, to push woman further and further not only into doing the work of men but into thinking like men, and so to put the hope of a better world more and more exclusively in terms of science alone.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, women who make excellent scientists, philosophers, economists, politicians, and so on, and who rightly therefore follow their vocation. That is not in question. What is in question is the very real danger that present conditions may succeed in stifling generally the wisdom which is most proper to women as such—a wisdom without which we cannot hope for a sane and happy world.

We need all the help that science can give us, indeed, but science is not enough. We need, if science is not merely to repeat old errors, we need to revive in our hearts the simple, deep things; we need mother-wisdom.

Perhaps that is one reason why we are to dedicate ourselves to the heart of Mary. At Lourdes it was to a simple child that Mary appeared, that the pride of rationalism should be humbled; at Fatima it was again to simple children that she appeared, and it was simple advice that she gave—Tell the people that they must repent, must change their lives, and must say the rosary—and are we not to see in this a challenge to the different but also dangerous rationalism of our own times? There is another thing. Archbishop Ryan, O.P., in his book on the apparitions at Fatima, points out the similarity between the sign in the skies which there bore witness to the identity of Mary, and the sign which was given to St. Dominic when he was near to despairing of his efforts to convert sinners, not by the 'rich means' which had been adopted, but by his own methods of prayer and preaching: in each case the sign in the skies, in each case the rosary. And what is the connection between the rosary and the motherly wisdom of Mary, apart from the fact that it is particularly *her* prayer? 'Mary kept all these words, these events, in her heart,' we are told; it was thus that she learned her deep wisdom. And the rosary, the prayer that can be used by the most simple and the most brilliant and learned alike, the rosary is one of the best and simplest methods of keeping the words, the events, of life in our hearts as well: the presence of the Infinite on earth, the value of the deep human realities, the pattern of family life, the fact of sin, of redemption, of our constant need of redemption, the glory of the new life, the power and the love of the Spirit, the power and the patronage of Mary the Mother herself. 'By wisdom they were healed, whosoever have pleased thee, O Lord, from the beginning.'

We have been concerned here primarily with one particular problem because it is at the moment the subject of discussion and because it is our particular responsibility as Englishmen: those of us who are forced to conclude that evil is being done must want to repair the evil, and how better than by saying the rosary? But whatever we think about this particular problem, whatever indeed we think about the record of our own country in general, none of us can be in any doubt whatsoever about the appalling weight of evil—the unimaginable cruelties and injustices wrought now for so many years past by other hands—with which the whole world is burdened. Of none of this can we ever say that now it is past, it is over, we need think no more of it now. Nothing is ever lost. Nothing is ever

simply past and done with. The evil that we do lives on with us and after us, and in pain and suffering must work itself out in the future that is hidden from us, strengthening the hand of that mystery of iniquity from which all the evil and all the sorrow take their rise. And the evil that others do, the evil that other nations do, in our own time, this too lives on with us and after us, this too weighs us down and brings sorrow on our world: and we cannot wash our hands of it, we cannot refuse all responsibility, for the world is a family in the eyes of God, and those whose crimes and cruelties make us shudder to think of, they too are in the eyes of God our brothers, and we cannot be indifferent to the deeds and the destiny of our brothers. The evil the world does cannot be lost, cannot be obliterated: but it can be repaired. It can be repaired in the love and the power of Christ: and for this work too the Head 'has need of his members.' We are called to share in our small way in the infinite expiation of Christ: and again how better shall we do it, or begin to do it, than by the rosary?

The rosary is not, of course, a substitute for the liturgy and above all the Mass. It presupposes that there we are already doing what we can. But on the contrary it will precisely enrich our understanding of the Mass and make more real to us what is there done: and it will keep us nearer to that reality throughout the day. 'Mary kept these words in her heart.' Many people are so busy that they would find it difficult to fit in even the few minutes necessary for saying a rosary, but why should it be said all at once? There is no one who does not find himself waiting for a few seconds for a train, a bus, an appointment; and so the rosary can be said in fragments and by that very fact can be a way of keeping these words in the heart.

There is the need of expiation, there is the need of learning the wisdom that is from above: for both alike we must turn to Christ and his Mother in their loving wisdom and their sympathy for the world's sorrow, dedicate our lives and our work to the love of their hearts, and so we may hope in the end to learn wisdom, the wisdom that is from above, the deep wisdom of the simple and the pure of heart, and then we shall have power to work for the world, for of that wisdom we are told that there is no evil by which it can be overcome.

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