

CHRISTIAN CRISIS

THE greatest crisis of the century has come with the cessation of hostilities and the defeat of the German nation. There is a danger that we do not recognise the situation as a crisis. In 1939 everyone was most uncomfortably conscious of the crisis as we entered into the war. And then within a year, when the Nazi domination of Europe came within a pace of success, people understood that a critical point in the history of our civilisation had arrived. Christians of this country began to drop their quarrels and sink their differences. The spirit of anti-Christ was evidently on the threshold, and as he seemed likely to pour out his enmity on all Christians alike the threat of persecution brought a very strong desire for unity in order to resist the evil. Fear, the usual forerunner of a change of heart, began to turn Christian men to God and to one another. Christian Councils sprang up all over the country, the Sword of the Spirit and Religion and Life movements were organised on a nationwide scale and there were other local movements full of promise, such as the Towards a Christian Social Order at Norwich. It is interesting to note that the same spirit of fraternity was taking root at that time among Christians on the Continent. The German domination provided an excellent ground for collaboration among the different Christian bodies for four years and more, so that there was time to consolidate and prepare lasting results. But north of the Channel the immediate danger began to recede, and the growing success of our arms would make an accurate gauge of the cooling of the ardour for Christian co-operation.

Now that anti-Christ has been conveniently slain or at least buried for the present, Christians seem to be disposed to fall back, withdrawing the hand of fellowship and taking up their pre-war antagonisms. Christian Councils are either closing down or remaining merely as relics of a past enthusiasm forcing smiles and protracting non-committal conversations. It is several years now since the Catholic Sword of the Spirit was clearly separated from the Anglican Religion and Life movement, and since that day their co-operation seems to have diminished progressively. Indeed there is no group at the present moment which seems to be animated with a Pentecostal spirit. Nowhere is there evidence of a united 'Christian front' on the policies that demand a strong and influential backing. Apparent prosperity and success, supremely symbolised in the recent victory in arms, have brought satisfaction and expelled the hunger for union and co-operation.

The position is ironical, for with the crisis of the 'Cease Fire' comes the judgment on the whole future of Christendom. Are the Christians of Europe to continue in their old way of disintegration, offering themselves as blind victims to the increasing power of Caesar which has brought the world to the present pass? Or are they to take advantage of what could be a creative moment almost unparalleled in history? The cessation of hostilities marks the end of only the first and simplest stage of the modern struggle; the negative destruction of the foe provides an easy formula for life while the battle lasts. The crisis arises when destruction has ceased and a change-over to positive rebuilding and reorganisation takes place. General Franco found it far easier to fight and win the civil war in Spain than to carry that State with all its conflicting elements with him in his reconstruction. The responsibility which the present weeks have brought to the Christians of Europe and America can therefore be scarcely exaggerated. In 1940-1941 the people who were enthusiastic for Christian co-operation understood the need for rebuilding the Christian character in time and preparing for this critical period. But to have been successful the movement should have increased in intensity, in clarity and in practicability as the present moment approached, so that there might be a sufficiently powerful and well-formed Christian public opinion to make itself felt in the actual rebuilding which must now begin.

Far more subtle powers are now ranged against the Christian way of life than while Hitler lived and fought. It is no longer a matter of physical force, but of an insinuating spirit which cloaks itself under such happy formulae as 'righteous indignation.' Thus the brutalities of the concentration camps in Germany have been used purposely to kindle hatred. Those atrocious horrors of some of the German Nazis were shown to the people on the threshold of victory rather than to the defeated Germans themselves, the majority of whom were almost unaware of this bestial side of the Nazi campaign, except when they were themselves thus tortured. The facts that very many of those who suffered in those frightful charnal houses were Germans and that other nations have been subject to similar cruelty at the hands of those at least nominally on our side, have been suppressed in order to encourage the British public to condemn in anger the whole German race for these crimes. Again, the final treatment of Mussolini and some of his followers, including a woman, has been condoned in most responsible quarters as understandable and even laudable; the newspapers have published the horror-photos of these bestialities with a certain air of gloating.

This manner of entering into the peace by way of increased hatred

is quite obviously contrary to the spirit of Christ, and it is disastrous for any Christian peace, which must be the fruit of justice and love. In neither of the incidents cited (and there are many other such) did justice or love play a part. In asking prayers for peace during May Pope Pius XII has said: 'It is unhappily not easy in such an upheaval to achieve, by the minds of many who are still moved by vindictive feelings, a peace which will be tempered equally by equity and justice. . . .' Yet apart from the frequent appeals from the Holy Father few protests of any weight have been made by those who profess to follow Christ.

This insidious attack from anti-Christian powers is covered by more successful camouflage at home in the plans for the new post-war society now being set on foot, as well as in the general attitude to society itself. The Christian family, which lies at the foundation of any peaceful society, is being steadily undermined both by the State and by the individuals who comprise the State. The State attacks the family, for instance, in its legislation for education, which gradually ceases to be the concern of the parent, and which is now aimed at making happy slaves in a formless, classless society, to be called—like many other forms of dictatorship—'democracy.' The totalitarianism introduced as a war measure when that was the only way to win total war, promises to remain to 'direct' individual slaves to their work, to house them in such a way as to make a family impossible, to feed them from food monopolies, and now even to rear them artificially when more 'hands' are required. There is little sign of a general Christian protest against these infringements of the rights and liberties of the Christian man. A reason for this silence is that individuals themselves are attacking the family and rapidly and cheerfully casting aside the last vestiges of responsibility. The intense desire for pleasure without responsibility is poisoning the true conception of the family. The *Christian Newsletter* recently published a supplement (*The Outlook for Marriage*, by David R. Mace, April 5th) giving an alarming but authoritative account of the increased promiscuity of sexual relationships ('the number of unmarried women in the country who have abandoned their chastity is at least one in six'), in the rapid advance in the number of divorce and separation suits, indicating that at least one in ten marriages has broken down. The figures given in this account are increasing in geometric progression. The picture deepens in gloom when one realises that these figures must include many so-called Christians who regard their own private morals (forgetting their inescapable social effects) as beyond the reach of Christian religion and society. Little wonder that such people allow

the attack on Christian life to continue unchallenged. It is with this enemy in our midst that we as a nation pass the crisis from negative hostilities to positive peacemaking. All those who follow Christ should be horrified at this attack on the Christ in themselves; but it is too subtle for many to understand it as an attack, or to realise that anti-Christ has not yet been buried.

Now, evidently, is the time when Christians should co-operate on these vital issues of future peace. The principles are based on natural law, as we have often been reminded; but that is not sufficient to bring them to concrete practice. Some spiritual revival is needed to bring a widespread enthusiasm for these truths, otherwise no firm resistance can be presented to the attack. This of course implies the need for Christ's direct leadership, for the spirit of the gospels, for grace. 'Where are the signs of the change of heart so often called for by individual Christians and recently emphasised by his Holiness? 'It is not enough to gather in great numbers around the altars of the Blessed Virgin, there to lay offerings, flowers and petitions. There is need even more to renew our moral conduct in public and private life, for thereby we lay that solid foundation on which alone rests the structure of domestic and civil life, a structure not fragile and tottering, but homogeneous and enduring.'

His Holiness in fact stands almost alone in his realisation of the supreme importance of this moment of crisis and of its danger unless it be redeemed by supernatural justice and charity in those who have the power to form the future. In this country we seem ready to admit that the relaxing of the physical war strain, and the removal of danger, has drained our enthusiasm for any vital Christian action, that we require persecution and evil days to keep us prepared for the emergencies through which we now pass. There may be little hope remaining for establishing a Christian social order, but it is surprising that there should be such apathy on the part of Christians and that they should be ready to leave the positive side of peacemaking to the secular powers bent on paganising Europe. If Christians could unite on the fundamental questions of the moment like the love of enemies, the love of the Christian family, of chastity and of justice, some good things might yet be rescued from the debris of our civilisation. Now is the time for fervent and practical Christian co-operation. If the crisis is left in the hands of the politicians alone the Christians will have lead the Church one stage nearer to the catacombs.

THE EDITOR.