

## THE GERMAN BISHOPS AND THE WAR

### A JOINT PASTORAL.

The Archbishops and Bishops of the German Empire to all their faithful, greeting, benediction, and consolation in the Lord.

BELOVED DIOCESANS,—

We have celebrated Christmas as never in life before, Christmas in the world-war, serious and sorrowful but also rich in grace, blessing, and supernatural joy. The war was a stern Advent school; it has brought us and our people nearer the Saviour. The more fearfully the war-clouds gathered over our country the more clearly, to use a beautiful word of the Apostle, did that God Who once said 'out of darkness let the light shine forth' light up within us the radiant knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Like a hurricane the war burst on the cold clouds and the evil vapors of infidelity and scepticism and on the unwholesome atmosphere of an unchristian over-culture. The German people recovered their senses; faith returned to its right; the soul lifted up its eyes and recognised the Lord. We saw His glory as it were of the Only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.

Following the attractions of grace, following the voice of their Pastors and the exhortation of their God-fearing Kaiser, the people entered the churches and found there the Saviour; many found Him again who had wandered far from Him. In the hour of misfortune the truth was realised that He alone was holy, He alone Lord, He alone most-high. We heard Him saying to us the earnest and consoling words—when you hear of wars and rumors of wars fear not for such must come to pass.

Our soldiers before their march renewed with Him in Holy Communion their covenant for life and death. If their spirits began to sink in the superhuman exertions, privations, and deadly dangers they raised themselves up to Him Who said of Himself 'I have come not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.' They invoked Him before the battle and during the battle, and implored Him in the trenches 'Lord remain with us for the evening is nigh.' And He remained with them and gave them to strengthen them His Flesh and Blood in the Most Holy Sacrament.

Like a compassionate Samaritan He made His way over the blood-soaked field of battle and through the hospitals, consoled the wounded, blessed the dying, and said to those who tended them 'Whatever you do to the least of My brethren ye do to Me.' He visited the parents bowed down with sorrow and the heart-broken widows and orphans and said to them 'Weep not' and consoled them as only He can console.

He has raised us all up when our own spirits began to sink. 'Have confidence, it is I, fear not.' He has above all opened the fountains of His mercy which united into one mighty stream of love and beneficence beside the blood-stream of the war.

In Him was and remained established the bond between us and ours in the field, between the fighting hosts abroad and the praying hosts at home, an unconquerable victory pledging union of all in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thus have these hard times brought us nearer to the Saviour. We could rejoice in the special mercies of His divine Heart and hear throughout all the noises of war the beating of that quiet loving soul-seeking Heart. It we thank for these salutary fruits of the war. It we thank for the glorious successes and victories with which heaven has blessed our arms. Truly in us has been accomplished the word of the great Pope Leo XIII. in his Encyclical of May 25, 1899, with which he announced the dedication of the whole world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: 'When the Church in the early ages groaned under the yoke of the Caesars the Cross appeared in heaven to the young Emperor Constantine as the sign of a speedy and glorious victory. Before our eyes stands another propitious sign, the most holy Heart of Jesus surmounted by the Cross shining brightly in the midst of flames.'

This sign which has remained to us till now the sign of salvation would we also give, Beloved, for the

entry into the year 1915, which must take over from its predecessor the bloody inheritance of the war. We do it in the conviction that nothing can bring more to our minds, can make more easy for us our first and weightiest duty in this world-war than an affectionate strong-willed adhesion to the most holy Heart of Jesus.

What is this principal duty? We answer without hesitation: Penance and Expiation. The war is a judgment for all nations afflicted by it, and therefore a loud call to penance and expiation. Time of war is time of penance. Woe to the nation which even this terrible chastiser can no longer bring to penance; it is ripe for destruction and even victory would be for it a defeat.

War opens the account-book of nations before all the world, and registers the result of its reckoning in human blood. We do not want to occupy ourselves with the account-books of other nations but with our own; we do not want to examine the consciences of our enemies but our own. We are innocent of the outbreak of the war; it has been forced upon us; that can we testify before God and the world. Still we do not want to boast of our innocence.

In us, too, has the war laid bare heavy guilt. Our people themselves have very clearly pronounced judgment thereon; things could not go on as they were. How often have we Bishops in the distress of our hearts loudly bewailed the decay of the religious and moral life (of religion and morality!). Now has the war restored religion to its rights and again inculcated on mankind the commandments of God with fire and sword.

What shameful degrading treatment, depreciation, contempt, had religion been obliged to endure openly, or rather, have we not allowed ourselves to endure in our own weakness and cowardice! That is our fault, our most grievous fault.

In God's war tribunal it has been made apparent how certain vices gnaw at the vitals of a nation so that its strength dries up in the time of need and it falls to pieces. But with the deepest confusion we must admit, we have let it come to pass, that even these vices have also crept in amongst our people to a considerable degree, that also amongst us marriage has been desecrated and deprived of its blessing of children. Our fault, our grievous fault.

It has been shown in this war that a nation cannot be more terribly injured than when its religious life blood has been drained. But, alas! endeavors to the same effect have not remained quite unknown to us either. Among us also secret forces have been working for a separation of Church and State, for the greatest possible exclusion of Christian spirit and Christian principles from the education of youth, from public and social life; their ideal is a maximum of freedom even for the most dangerous tendencies of the time, but the closest restriction and tutelage for the Church and religious movements.

The war has cited the modern anti-Christian irreligious (mind) culture before its tribunal and has exposed its worthlessness, its hollowness and emptiness, its guilt. But into our country, too, had this culture already considerably penetrated, an over-culture un-Christian, un-German and unsound in its whole being, with its external varnish and its internal rottenness, with its coarse pursuit of wealth and pleasure, with its no less arrogant than ridiculous supermen, with its dishonorable imitation of a foreign infected literature and art, and even of the most shameful extravagances in the fashions of women.

This is our people's and, therefore, our own grievous and most grievous fault. It demands penance and expiation. Our soldiers have heard at once in the call to war a call to penance; and, therefore, their first march was to the confessional. Their good example has been imitated in all classes of the people, public opinion has changed about; there breathes in German districts a different spirit from that of a few months ago.

But it would be a fatal mistake to think that now all guilt has been blotted out and the German people have been born again together to a new and better life. Long guilt is not atoned for by short repentance. True repentance blots out the guilt but not all the punishment as well. And the guilt of an entire