BLACKFRIARS

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BREAD FOR THE STARVING

DURING his ministry Christ was several times moved to pity at the possibility of people going hungry. He would not dismiss the multitude fasting lest they faint on their journey home. He spoke to them in desert places but was ready to accept the consequences. It is a sign of hope that there are many Christian men and women today who, taking compassion on the multitude, are deeply moved by the knowledge that multitudes, even millions, are starving in Europe, India and the Far East. The war has undoubtedly burdened many hearts, but the policy of 'Let them starve, it will teach them a lesson,' has fewer supporters than their power and propaganda would lead us to expect. The normal Christian, and in particular the British or American soldier, dealing on the spot with the starving masses, has not smothered his human feelings of compassion. Spokesmen as varied as Victor Gollancz[1] and Pope Pius XII have urged the pressing and vital need of so many fellow human beings, and many people have responded generously as with the splendid contribution by Catholics in their Lenten Alms.

Christ said to his apostles: 'It is for you to give them food to eat.' And that command lies heavily upon all his followers today. It is the apostles, both cleric and lay, who have the greatest responsibility in the matter of the starving peoples. For those who are not Christ's

(1) Victor Gollancz has written and published a challenging pamphlet, *Leaving them to their Fate—The Ethics of Starvation* (6d.), in which he sets out the facts and the existing Allied policy, opposing them with the possibilities of relieving this threatened disaster without unduly harming our own food supply.

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does not remain 'other' to be looked up to and adored at a distance when he is received on the tongue under the form of bread. People may bow down after the Holy Communion and remain adoring him as though he were still in the monstrance or as though they were in fact a human tabernacle enclosing the sacred host. They may sometimes forget that this bread is food, spiritual food which makes them *one* with what they are eating. Their hunger will never be satisfied so long as our Lord remains over against them to be gazed upon with awe. The nourishment is so powerful that its effect is that 'it is now no longer I but Christ liveth in me.' This is the bread of life, the bread of Christ's life. This is food.

If we examine the nature of the effects of this sacrament the importance of the Holy Eucharist may be seen as of the highest at this time of famine. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ is the immediate and permanent effect of the words of consecration uttered over the bread and wine. But this most holy thing of all creation is itself a sign of something further, for a sacrament is an effective sign of grace in men's souls. The ultimate effect, therefore, the *res* of the sacrament, is within the souls of those who offer the Mass and receive the sacrament. And this *res* is the unity of the Mystical Body. This body is not fully compacted into one until its completion in heaven at the end of time, but as he struggles towards that final resurrection of Christ the individual Christian can grow more like to the One whose life he shares. Every Christian grows in this way by the food which he eats at the Common Table, and as each shares more fully in the one life, so in fact that single principle of vitality spreads through the whole mass of Christians. Gathered round the same table feeding on the same spiritual food, they all begin to live the same common life of Christ, common because they are all in communion, they all communicate. For this did Christ give us his body to eat, that we might become one mystical body.

To approach the question from another angle we may insist that the special grace which this sacrament brings to the soul is that of charity, the love of God. All sacraments produce an increase of charity because they all convey grace to the soul and consequently love to the will. But the Eucharist soars above all other sacraments in that it directly produces actual charity, or acts of the love of God and of the neighbour. There is no space here to elaborate the profundities of this doctrine, but we must insist that as a result of receiving Holy Communion the soul falls more in love with God not merely habitually but by conscious acts; he actually loves the men whom God has made. 'Through this sacrament,' says S. Thomas, 'not only

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is the habit of grace and virtue increased but it is furthermore roused to act, according to 2 Corinthians v. 14: "The charity of Christ presseth us." So the soul is spiritually nourished through the power of this sacrament, by being spiritually gladdened, and as it were inebriated with the sweetness of the divine goodness, according to Canticles v. 1: "Eat, friends, and drink and be inebriated, my dearly beloved" ' (IIIa 79, 1 ad 2). And this is the same as becoming one with Christ in the mystical body, becoming more enveloped in the unity of the Church.

To one who is convinced of the truth and efficacy of the Holy Eucharist, therefore, it is evident that present physical starvation is a direct result of a previous, far more serious starvation of spiritual food. Had Europe as a whole been feeding on the Body of Christ at the beginning of this century, to take any date at random, then she would have been spared two disastrous wars, the land would be prospering and all would be well fed. To the extent to which people are receiving this sacrament in the right habit of mind and so allowing it to have its effect, to that extent does peace, the fruit of charity, reign. The Bread of Life could have saved this people from death.

Again, to anyone convinced of the efficacy of this sacrament it is evident that at this moment more than ever do men require to be fed at the table of the Lord. Since the fall men can never save themselves; their nature is too weak to pull them out of the mire into which they are always sinking. It is only occasionally that this is made clear; but it is clear today that we have no chance of survival except through the divine power of grace. We have little life in us and what there is ebbs quickly as by some curious inevitability men produce atom bombs, bigger and faster bombers and the like. Men are separated thus by fear and hatred. Only One can join them again in love, and he has given us a sure means to this union. 'Take ye and eat,' at the common table.

In face of starvation all Catholics then should intensify their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; more frequently and with better dispositions approach the sacred meal. But they should not be content with their own communion. On fire with love of God, they should leave the altar ready to set the world ablaze, determined to bring all others from far and wide to feed on Christ's Body, so to be nourished that famine may be driven to the hideous memories of a dim past.

Is not the bread we break a participation in Christ's body?
The one bread makes us one body, though we are many in number;
The same bread is shared by all. (1 Cor. 1).
Jesus said: It is for you to give them food to eat. (Mt. 14).

THE EDITOR.

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