



The Holy See

BENEDICT XV

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

TO THE PEOPLES NOW AT WAR AND TO THEIR RULERS*

When We, though all unworthy, were called to succeed on the Apostolic Throne the meek Pius X, whose life of holiness and well-doing was cut short by grief at the fratricidal struggle that had just burst forth in Europe, We, too, on turning a fearful glance on the blood-stained battlefields, felt the anguish of a father, who sees his homestead devastated and in ruins before the fury of the hurricane. And thinking with unspeakable regret of our young sons, who were being mown down by death in thousands, We opened Our heart, enlarged by the charity of Christ, to all the crushing sorrow of the mothers, and of the wives made widows before their time, and to all the inconsolable laments of the little ones, too early bereft of a father's care. Sharing in the anxious fears of innumerable families, and fully conscious of the imperative duties imposed upon Us by the sublime mission of peace and of love, entrusted to Our care in days of so much sadness, We conceived at once the firm purpose of consecrating all Our energy and all Our power to the reconciling of the peoples at war : indeed, We made it a solemn promise to Our Divine Saviour, Who willed to make all men brothers at the cost of His Blood.

And Our first words, as the Chief Shepherd of souls, addressed to the Nations and their Rulers, were words of peace and of love. But Our advice, affectionate and insistent as that of a father and a friend, remained unheard. Our grief was aggravated, but Our purpose was unshaken ; We turned, therefore, in all confidence to the Almighty, Who holds in His Hands the minds and hearts of subjects, as of Kings, begging of Him the cessation of the unprecedented scourge. We wished to associate all the faithful in Our fervent and humble prayer, and to make it the more efficacious, We arranged that it should be accompanied by works of christian penance. But to-day, on the anniversary of the outbreak of the tremendous conflict, more intense is the desire of Our heart for the speedy conclusion of the war, still louder; is Our fatherly cry for peace. May this cry, prevailing over the dreadful clash of arms, reach unto the peoples who are now at war, and unto their Rulers,

inclining both to milder and more serene views.

In the holy name of God, in the name of our heavenly Father and Lord, by the Blessed Blood of Jesus, price of man's redemption, We conjure You, whom Divine Providence has placed over the Nations at war, to put an end at last to this horrible slaughter, which for a whole year has dishonoured Europe. It is the blood of brothers that is being poured out on land and sea. The most beautiful regions of Europe, this garden of the world, are sown with corpses and with ruin: there, where but a short time ago flourished the industry of manufactures and the fruitful labour of the fields, now thunders fearfully the cannon, and in its destructive fury it spares neither village nor city, but spreads everywhere havoc and death. You bear before God and man the tremendous responsibility of peace and war ; give ear to Our prayer, to the fatherly voice of the Vicar of the Eternal and Supreme Judge, to Whom you must render an account as well of your public undertakings, as of your own individual deeds.

The abounding wealth, with which God the Creator has enriched the lands that are subject to You, allow You to go on with the struggle; but at what cost? Let the thousands of young lives quenched every day on the fields of battle make answer : answer, the ruins of so many towns and villages, of so many monuments raised by the piety and genius of your ancestors. And the bitter tears shed in the secrecy of home, or at the foot of altars where suppliants beseech, do not these also repeat that the price of the long drawn-out struggle is great, too great?

Nor let it be said that the immense conflict cannot be settled without the violence of war. Lay aside your mutual purpose of destruction; remember that Nations do not die ; humbled and oppressed, they chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the combat, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hatred and revenge.

Why not from this moment weigh with serene mind the rights and lawful aspirations of the peoples? Why not initiate with a good will an exchange of views, directly or indirectly, with the object of holding in due account, within the limits of possibility, those rights and aspirations, and thus succeed in putting an end to the monstrous struggle, as has been done under other similar circumstances? Blessed be he who will first raise the olive-branch, and hold out his right hand to the enemy with an offer of reasonable terms of peace. The equilibrium of the world, and the prosperity and assured tranquillity of Nations rest upon mutual benevolence and respect for the rights and the dignity of others, much more than upon hosts of armed men and the ring of formidable fortresses.

This is the cry of peace which breaks forth from Our heart with added vehemence on this mournful day; and We invite all, whosoever are the friends of peace the world over, to give Us a helping hand in order to hasten the termination of the war, which for a long year has changed Europe into one vast battlefield. May the merciful Jesus, through the intercession of His Sorrowful Mother, grant that at last, after so horrible a storm, the dawn of peace may break, placid and radiant, an

image of His own Divine Countenance. May hymns of thanksgiving soon rise to the Most High, the Giver of all good things, for the accomplished reconciliation of the States; may the peoples, bound in bonds of brotherly love, return to the peaceful rivalry of studies, of arts, of industries, and, with the empire of right reestablished, may they resolve from now henceforth to entrust the settlement of their differences, not to the sword's edge, but to reasons of equity and justice, pondered with due care and deliberation. This will be their most splendid and glorious conquest!

In loving trust that the tree of peace may soon return to rejoice the world with such desirable fruits, We impart the Apostolic Benediction to all who make up the mystical flock confided to Us, and also for those, who do not yet belong to the Church of Rome, We pray the Lord to draw them close to Us in the bonds of perfect charity.

Given at Rome, from the Vatican, 28 July 1915.

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*AAS 7 (1915) p.375-377.
