

THE CAUSE OF PEACE

by Pope Pius XII


*An address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII
to the World Union of Catholic Women's
Organizations
April 24, 1952*



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

• Washington 5, D.C.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/causeofpeaceaddrpius>

THE CAUSE OF PEACE

Assured, as We are, of the great contribution that women are able to make to the cause of peace, We address this paternal message to you, mothers, wives and daughters of every nation, and particularly to you, Catholic women, whom We know to be filially devoted to the Vicar of Christ and through Him, to Jesus Himself, Who, during the course of His mortal life, had so many exquisite proofs of womanly devotion.

Ever anxious to promote the cause of peace with all possible means, until the rainbow of stable tranquillity shall shine forth in the skies of the world, We desire to give also into your trust, beloved daughters, the arduous but sublime task of laboring for peace; since you, perhaps better than others, appreciate the importance of the tranquillity of order as the essential condition of a sound feminine life.

It is in this very Rome, which the Peaceful King of the human family made His own, as if to consecrate and elevate that universal peace which the empire of Augustus had proposed for its goal and, to a certain extent, brought to realization, that there has assembled a Congress, representing the Catholic Women of the entire world, to solemnly express their desire for peace, to affirm their will to demand it from those who have the power to effect it here below, to study the concrete means and offer their cooperation to attain it, in the name of God and on the basis of Christian principles.

In truth, yours is not a new voice nor the latest among the so many that are being raised up on all sides on behalf of peace; but it is certainly among the most sincere and, We have reason to hope, fruitful. Who, in fact, could doubt the sincerity of a woman when she invokes peace, to which she primarily is devoted, or when she detests war, of which she would become the most pitiable victim? Such she has ever been. The ancient fable of the sorrowing Andromache, condemned by destructive war to widow's tears, to become the mother of a fatherless child and subsequently an exile and a slave, continues to be, even though it is a legendary epic, the personification of the cruel tragedies into which

the wars of every period have drawn woman and of those even more atrocious tragedies reserved for her by modern total war.

Millions of men and women, who can be considered as the survivors of the recent conflagration, still retain vivid memories of its horrors: mothers with babies at their breasts, struck down with the ruins of their homes, others torn by wounds; others turned, as it were, to stone by the sorrow and unexpectedness of their losses, as if something of their life were suddenly dashed to pieces. And in other places, in unnumbered multitudes there are women, to whom home means everything, compelled to go about wandering from place to place, driven on by the armies, with the dread shadow of terror hanging over them, with babies clinging to their necks and wailing with hunger or from disease. Mothers and wives for long years without word of the fate of their dear ones; and some, by reason of the unbelievable insensibility of rulers of state whose actions are so contrary to their words, even today are still suffering the awful anguish of the question: is my son alive? Virgins shamefully defiled and families deprived of their support and maidens from whom has been snatched away forever the great dream of their life. This then is the lot of woman in time of war!

Have the rulers of peoples ever thought with the hearts of sons of such tragedies, they who, We shall not say, are cherishing thoughts and desires of war but who are responsible for and maintain a state of affairs such as to create the danger of war and, perhaps, on the part of peoples unjustly oppressed (it is horrible to say so) even the desire for war, as the extreme hope for just liberation? But upon whom falls the responsibility for such a desperate desire?

Even though man, who boasts of being able to inure himself to difficulties, may somehow become adapted to those conditions of life which are imposed by wars, such as discomforts, hardships, sudden terrors and general irregularities, yet, such conditions are, too frequently, both physically and morally disastrous for woman.

Now the fear that (God forbid!) such an evil may recur moves the women of every part of the world to ardently

invoke peace. This invocation, We, as the Common Father, have often heard on their lips, and today We make it Our own to say to those in whose hands is the fatal choice between the sword and the olive branch: look with the eyes of sons to the anxieties of so many mothers and wives, among whom are also yours, and let them have greater weight on the scales of your deliberations than reasons of prestige, immediate advantage, or indeed, as may be the case, Utopian dreams inspired by theories which have little foundation in the real nature of men and of things. Do not ask for acts of useless heroism of women; they already have so many of them to accomplish in their ordinary life for their country and for the human family!

However, the sentiment which induces women to abhor war, would avail nothing, nor would it ever become a valid contribution to the cause of peace, if it were not transformed into a positive desire to restore everywhere the sense of fraternity, sustained by the consciousness of a higher obligation of charity, strengthened by the readiness to put into practice, in their environment, justice, of which peace is the work; in a word, if sentiment does not lead to action conducted according to the essential principles of Christianity. What these principles are in particular, and how they determine the action of the Church and of Catholics, We have recently expounded in Our Christmas Message of December 24 last, on the mission of the Church on behalf of peace (*Acta Ap. Sedis*, vol. 46, 1952, pp.11-15).

In it your cry of peace, beloved daughters, is distinguished clearly from that of other women, whose sincerity We are far from questioning but whose cry, unfortunately, We often see desecrated and turned to other ends, even if it is not brought to the extreme of becoming a cry of bitterness and of hatred. In any case, it is certain that any invocation of peace, which is deprived of the Christian concept of the world as a foundation, is doomed to resound in the desert of the heart, as the cry of the shipwrecked in the empty wastes of the ocean.

In this way you, Catholic Women, are messengers and promoters of peace in virtue of the very title which you bear, because Catholic is in a way synonymous with peaceful. And even though your duty as citizens of your country

may require of you the ready resolution to die for your fatherland if it were really attacked unjustly or threatened in its vital rights, you are, on the other hand, more naturally and with greater fervor disposed to make your contribution toward creating those internal and external conditions which ensure order and peace.

This action the Church and humanity expect of you; action aimed at wiping out hatred, at forging bonds of brotherhood between peoples, at eliminating the material causes of conflict, such as want, unemployment, obstacles to emigration and such like.

This is a twofold action. On the one hand a psychological and moralizing action which your delicate tact enables you better than others to undertake: to bring men to an appreciation of heavenly things; to induce them gently to austerity, or at least to a seriousness and moral uprightness of life; to irradiate everywhere the spirit of gentleness, the sense of fraternity among all children of God; the consciousness of the obligation of renouncing unlawful riches, you yourselves being the first to renounce a luxurious standard of living; above all, as a synthesis and crown of spiritual action, to educate your children in a Christian manner, in accordance with the Christian vision of the world revealed to us by the Saviour.

To whom, in fact, if not to mothers, is the first transmission of the Gospel message entrusted? The wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence! It has ordained that every generation, at its birth, should pass through the kindly school of woman—who has at her side the Common Mother, the Church—in order that each in its own time may draw upon that goodness, that sweetness, that piety which are inborn in her.

Without this periodical return to that fount of goodness, humanity would soon give way under the hardships and bitter struggles of life and degenerate toward the most miserable savagery. Let you, therefore, who in virtue of your natural duty and of your divine mission form the souls of the young, let you direct the new generations to a sense of universal fraternity and of abhorrence of violence.

An action too remote, somebody may say. No; it is an action which builds on deep foundations and which is therefore fundamental and urgent. Just as wars, at least in modern times, do not come about unexpectedly, but germinate over long years in hearts, so also true, just and stable peace does not blossom forth at the first bright ray of sentiment or of a clarion call.

There is also an external activity because if in other ages the influence of women was restricted to their home and the surroundings of the home, in our days it extends (whether we like it or not) to even wider fields: to public and social life, to parliaments, to tribunals, to journalism, to the professions and to the trades. May women carry their work of peace into each of these spheres. If indeed all women were to pass from that innate feeling which makes them abhor war, to concrete action to impede war, it would be impossible that the total of such imposing efforts, which bring into play those forces best calculated to move the will, that is piety and love, it would be impossible, We say, that it should fail to attain its end.

May the Divine aid invoked in prayer which women, who are by nature pious, are accustomed to offer with greater perseverance to God, render still more fruitful these efforts. Just as, at the marriage of Cana, the prayer of your merciful Queen and Mother, full of solicitude and concern at the embarrassment and upset of the newly married spouses, was able to move the will of Jesus to change water into wine, "the wine which those of refined taste call the soul of banquets" (Bossuet, Sermon for the second Sunday after Epiphany); so also may your supplication, modeled on the fervor of faith of the Most Blessed Virgin, turn the will of men from hate to love, from greed to justice.

Beloved daughters! You know the great benefits which women owe to Christianity. When Christianity appeared on earth, pagan culture very often exalted women only for an ensemble of external and ephemeral endowments or for their fineness of sensibility. This esthetic vision and this exquisite feeling reached, in fact, the highest and most delicate forms. The finely turned phrases in the immortal works of the poets of the Augustan age throb with feeling; the statues of the gods, divine creations of art, embellished

the streets and forums, the temples and the courtyards of the sumptuous palaces. And yet all this was empty and superficial. Neither Athens nor Rome, beacons of civilization though they were, which spread so much natural light on family ties, succeeded by their lofty philosophical speculations or by the wisdom of their legislation in raising woman to the level which becomes her nature.

Christianity alone, on the other hand, while not failing to recognize those external and intimate qualities, was the first to discover and foster in woman those duties and callings which are the true foundation of her dignity and the motive for a more genuine exaltation. So that new types of womanhood come to light and make their influence felt under Christian civilization, such as those who were martyrs for religion, saints, apostles, virgins, promoters of widescale reforms, assuagers of all human sufferings, savers of lost souls and educators. According as new social needs arose, their beneficent mission extended and the Christian woman became, as she is today, with every good reason, a no less necessary factor in civilization and progress than man.

Precisely in this setting We see your present-day work of pacification, the most extensive, perhaps, assigned to you by Providence up to the present, and more social and salutary than any you have had in the past. Embrace it as a mission from God and humanity; dedicate your most assiduous attention to it, seconding those suggestions which a chosen section of you undertook to study and promote in the International Congress of Catholic Women, convinced of the fact that you could do nothing more conducive to the salvation of your nations and of your children, or more in accordance with the desires of the Vicar of Christ.

On all of you then, beloved daughters, spread throughout the earth, and in a special manner on you, Catholic Women, as on each of those taking part in the Roman Congress, We invoke light and grace from the Almighty, in token of which We impart to you with fullness of soul Our paternal Apostolic Blessing.