

Reparation is a Fundamental Obligation of Christianity

by Raoul Plus, S.J. – written in 1921

Who Will Make Reparation?

IN his "Journal of a Convert," Van der Meer de Walcheren gives an account of a "Revival Meeting" in London. Two ministers came from America; they hired the Albert Hall, where they addressed more than 15,000 men. One of these preachers invited all who desired to give themselves to God to come forward. Clearly his voice rang out: "Who will come to the Lord?" For some time the immense audience remained in anxious, impressive silence. Then one voice was raised: "I will." At once, from all parts that cry "I will," "I will," reechoed. And while the people were slowly coming down the long flights of the stairs and making their way to the front benches, the two missionaries, stretching out their arms to them, continued their exhortation: "Who will come to the Lord?" Thousands responded and the cry "I will" resounded continually throughout the hall.

We do not need these emotional scenes, more or less artificial. It suffices for us to remember the words of Christ: *Si quis vult venire* -- "If any man will..." We need volunteers, souls that offer themselves willingly and that are faithful to their engagements.

Lord Jesus, raise up these volunteers, souls that rightly understand the Christian life, and likewise the nature and necessity of Reparation, volunteers whose nobility of soul leads them to give themselves wholly according to their state of life. Already there are many such, but the number must be doubled, trebled, nay increased tenfold. The world will be saved when we have a sufficient number of souls devoted to Reparation, and not before.

Will anyone offer himself? Many devote their energies to objects far less noble, but none offers such hidden glory, such imperative urgency, as Reparation.

Si quis vult venire -- "If any man will..." Who is willing?

Here I am, Lord, *I will*. Enlighten and strengthen me. Already, I am won over to Thy cause. Lord, I will.

In What Reparation Consists

TO *repair* means to put a thing in good condition again. When a house becomes dilapidated and uninhabitable, it has to be repaired or restored. Sometimes the damage utterly destroys an object. In this case, reparation means *compensation*, giving the equivalent.

In the moral sphere, the equivalent, the ransom for injury sustained, can only be given by the oblation of one's self. No material object can adequately compensate. How can order be re-established? By some penalty inflicted upon the wrong-doer or self-imposed. Having allowed himself an unlawful and unbridled pleasure, it is just that some pain, duly proportioned, should re-establish the moral equilibrium. This is self-evident, without our discussing theories arising from the problem of God's vindictive justice. In this case, the equivalent of the wrong done is called expiation and, as in the preceding examples, can be offered by the guilty party himself, or by one, guiltless of the crime, who offers himself as surety.

The verb "to repair" has a triple meaning: *restore*, *compensate*, *expiate*. Having stated these facts, we will now briefly explain:

1. *Why* Reparation should be made
2. *Who* ought to make it.
3. *How* it should be made.

Why Reparation Should be Made

Reparation is a Fundamental Obligation of Christianity

WHY did Christ come upon the earth? To make Reparation; for no other reason. He came to repair His divine work which sin had ruined, to restore to man his supernatural life; to compensate, by his merits, for the insult offered to the Father in the garden of Eden and for those insults which man's malice daily renews and multiplies. He came to expiate by his sufferings -- in the stable, during his hidden life and on the cross -- the human selfishness that began with man's creation and never ceases.

Our dear Lord could have performed this work of Reparation alone, but he did not so will it. He has chosen as associates each one of us, every Christian. We must grasp this truth well, for it is the foundation of the doctrine of Reparation.

St. Paul, when speaking to the early Christians of their pre-eminent dignity of sharing the very life of the Son of God, tells them that as Jesus lives by the Father, so they live by Jesus; He shares that life in virtue of His Divine nature, they in virtue of their adoption. He is their head; they are the living members, who, in virtue of his sacrifice, possess a divine life. Union is only perfect when the members are united to the head and the head to the members. The person of Christ is the head; they are his members, his mystical body.

Hence, according to the teaching of our Lord, "I am the vine, you are the branches." The Catholic church teaches that the *personal* Christ, consisting of the union of the divine and human nature, such as, of old, he lived in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem, such as he now lives in the Holy Eucharist, such as he lives and will live in Heaven until the end of time, does not constitute the *whole* Christ. He has willed it thus. The *whole* Christ consists of Himself --the head, *plus* ourselves, his mystical body. Our intimate union with his life explains why our Lord has associated us so closely with his work of Redemption.

Yet, as we have said, our Savior could have perfectly accomplished it alone. He does not need us to add to his merits, but he wills to make use of us, that he may increase ours. He is *the* Christ; we Christians are each of us *alter Christus* -- "another Christ." We must work together. The Redemption will only be brought about by the will of our Savior - the first Christ, and of all Christians, those *other* Christs. Undoubtedly, his participation and ours differ immeasurably. His has an intrinsic, infinite value and is, of itself, infinitely sufficient. God could have dispensed with our cooperation, but because he loves us, he asks for it.

At the Offertory of the Holy Mass, the priest first puts wine in the chalice. Then, under pain of mortal sin, he has to add a few drops of water. Thus, our Lord's role and ours are symbolized, together with the proportional value of his action and ours. The wine alone would suffice for the validity of the consecration. Nevertheless, the drops of water must be added, and by the effect of the divine words of consecration, they are changed, as well as the wine, into the Precious Blood.

Granted, our part in the Redemption of the world is infinitesimally

small; what are a few drops of water? But God requires it and he transubstantiates this tiny addition by uniting it with his own offering. This mere nothing becomes all-powerful, in virtue of the power communicated to it by God. Thanks to this "nothing" which has become "something," souls will be ransomed. Without the offering of this "nothing" -- so intrinsically insignificant and yet so really precious, on account of our union with Christ -- many souls would probably be lost. The world needs all its potential saviors: it needs Jesus, its chief Savior *par excellence*; it needs each one of us, who are called to co-operate with him in the redemption of the world. As Lacordaire says: "The human race had perished as a whole, by men's solidarity, that is to say by its corporeal and moral union with Adam its origin. Hence, it was fitting that humanity should be saved in the measure and manner of its loss, that is by the means of solidarity. Where the solidarity of evil had lost all, by the solidarity of good, all has been re-established." (Conférence LXVI., *De la Réparation*.)

We are almost ignorant of our greatness as Christians, if we do not know our obligation of sharing in the work of the Redemption. If we try to shirk our part, we are omitting a most noble, as well as a most peremptory, duty.

But we must examine this matter closely. *How* did Christ make Reparation?

By suffering.

Here a problem confronts us. The Son of God, desiring to renew his work, to restore all to its primitive condition, *instaurare omnia*, was not obliged to choose for himself a life of suffering, pain and humiliation. Yet it was precisely this plan that he chose, rejecting all others, because he willed to repair all by suffering.

Whence it follows that, as we are necessarily united with Christ in his mission, since we form his mystical Body, so we must necessarily co-operate with him in his suffering or "Passion." Therefore, St. Paul when explaining the necessity of our co-operating with Jesus in his work of Redemption, goes straight to the point and tells us that we must "fill us those things that are wanting," not in the mission of Christ, but in his *Passion* (*Adimpleo ea quae desunt passionum Christi*. - Col. 1:24). The two unite, neither can exist alone. We must make Reparation with Christ, and we can only do this by uniting our sacrifice with his.

Bossuet writes: "In order to become the Savior of men, Jesus Christ willed to be a Victim. But since he has a mystical body, it follows that if the head is immolated, all the members likewise must become

living victims." (*Serm. pour la Purif. de la Ste. Vierge*).

Here is the progression -- we might more correctly say the equation -- be a Christian, a savior, a victim.

Nor is the term "victim" something strange or new. This doctrine is as old as the Gospel. It is the very foundation of the preaching of St. Paul, of the early Fathers and of the Church in all ages. The Apostle, in his Epistle to the Romans, sets forth this doctrine very clearly. He writes: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, *that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God* (12:1).

Van der Meer de Walcheren, in the Introduction to his *Journal d'un Converti*, says: "I am well aware that there are many so-called rational animals, who seem to live sixty or eighty years and are someday buried without ever once merging from their nothingness... Appearances were enough for them, all else had no existence." "Happily," he adds, "there are some real men, some who are really alive, and who have not received their souls in vain."

Shortly before his conversion, he says, referring to the same subject: "I am more and more stupefied at seeing the majority of men living on so calmly, not troubling themselves in the least about anything whatever. They wear a fat, self-satisfied smile, never giving a thought to the *yawning depths about us*."

Yes, deep abysses surround us: that of man's sin, that of God's love. God has placed the latter close to the former, and we stand between the two with our role clearly and imperatively defined. It is characteristic of the true disciple of Jesus Christ that he has found out these abysses and, in consequence, lives in an irrepressible anxiety for the salvation of the world, both on account of the sterility of the Precious Blood and of his share of the responsibility in the story of the Divine life upon earth.

All Christians are under two obligations: First, they *must make Reparation* in union with Jesus Christ, who came upon earth solely for this purpose and, with whom, they form one unit. Secondly, they must make this Reparation *as He wills* --namely, *by suffering*.

Too few of the faithful have the faintest conception of the Christian life; they seem to imagine that practically there are two doctrines taught by our Lord, or at least two ways of interpreting His one law -- one consisting in trying to suffer, the other in striving not to suffer at all; one of deliberate mortification, the other of deliberate avoidance of whatever is irksome. Briefly stated, they believe in an easy-going, comfortable kind of Christianity destined for the majority of

Christians, whereas the other kind of Christianity, austere and crucifying, is reserved for those stern characters or fantastical people who feel drawn to it.

They argue thus: Monks and nuns remain in prayer all night, prostrate before the altar, or rise for prayer at two in the morning in order that we may sleep on comfortably in a good bed. They pass their time in prayer in order to dispense us from this exceedingly disagreeable task. They deprive themselves of food, therefore we can allow ourselves every luxury. They live in white-washed cells, furnished only, like those of Carmelites, with a crucifix, a holy water stoup, a death's head, and a discipline, so that we may adorn our houses with numerous ornaments and every modern comfort. If these religious go without fires, it is to allow us to have an excellent system of heating and a pleasant temperature in our rooms and passages. They sleep on a plank or a straw mattress, that we may have silken eiderdown coverlets and embroidered counterpanes. Their only jewelry is the cross, therefore we can wear trinkets and pearl necklaces that cost a fortune.

Undoubtedly, the perfect life exacts an amount of suffering, for which an ordinary Christian life does not call, but can we imagine any truly enlightened Christian life --even an ordinary one -- that in any way harmonizes with the feverish and pagan pursuit of the comforts of life, which modern materialism tries -- and, unhappily, too often with success -- to impose upon so many of Christ's disciples?

What then! Is Christ, perchance, divided? -- *Nonne divisus est Christus?* Are there two Christs? Is there a crucified Christ, whom we can only serve by our crucifixion, and a restful Christ, whom we can manage to follow quite well while partaking of all life's joys and pleasures? St. Paul did not preach two Christs. He knew of One only, "Christ crucified" - *Christum et hunc crucifixum* (1 Cor. 2:2).

Men have changed this since St. Paul's time. Now they know of two. The first, the true Christ, did not suffice, so they invented another, one without a cross, or a crucifying doctrine, a Christ without those two beams which cast such a disquieting shadow, a Christ whose demands amount to this: Live as you please; I promise you a happy eternity, provided that "you turn to me in your last moments with your darkening mind, that you repent with your failing will and give me the alms of your last breath."

There is no such Christ as this for Christians who will not suffer. The disciple is not greater than his Master. Our Savior has suffered, and every Christian must suffer in some form or other -- as we shall

explain -- if he would not prove false to his name, or fail to accomplish his mission; he must always be the friend of suffering.

A great Belgian statesman took for his motto: "Rest elsewhere." The day of perfect happiness, perhaps not far off, will surely dawn, perhaps soon, and will have no sunset. Meanwhile time is given us that we may merit "the joy of the Lord." *Intra in gaudium Domini tui*. But we can only enter into the joy of the Lord (Mt. 25:21) on condition that upon earth we have shared the sufferings of our Lord. Christ was the first to choose suffering as the way into glory. "Golgotha is not a rhetorical flourish." For us too the same rule holds -- *oportuit pati Christum et ita intrare in gloriam suam*. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and thus enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26)

We wish to triumph with him, therefore we must fight with him. In the Exercises of St. Ignatius, in the Contemplation on the Kingdom, the Saint places these words on our Lord's lips: *Laborare mecum*. Pizarro, a conqueror of South America, disembarked and threw his sword upon the ground to mark off the bravest, and called out: "Let all who are afraid remain where they are, let the others cross over and follow me."

This is stern language, and in spite of the convincing force of the doctrine, many draw back rather than face the suffering which is the inevitable consecration of all Christian life.

"How those arms of the Cross frighten me, as they stand out on the hill of Calvary! I feel more inclined to hide behind them rather than to be nailed upon them!"

"Yes, the wood is hard; but there is something more than the wood. There is One nailed to those arms. The wood is dead, but a living One is fastened to it. Looking at the Cross, as we ought to look at it, we no longer see the two arms, they disappear or at least become indistinct; the Body hanging there, alone rivets our attention and, in the midst of this Body, shining through an open wound -- the Heart. We say 'the Crucifix.' We are wrong: for we appear to name a *thing*. We ought to say: 'The Crucified,' for that shows a person."

"A person? Yes, in truth, a Person who is both human and Divine. What! Is it Thou, my God, who hang there?"

"Yes, it is I."

"Now I seem to understand better, I almost grasp the truth: I will suffer with Thee, Lord, but Thou will suffer with me. With Thee, I shall be brave and march resolutely forward."

"That you may have still more courage stand at the foot of My

cross and look round upon the world. Look at My executioners as they go down the slope of Calvary; look at Jerusalem, wrapped in slumber, where the multitudes know nothing. You must suffer in order that my Redemption may avail them. I have willed that you should help me. I can do all with you and nothing without your aid. Will you that we save the world together? Or do you prefer to go away along with the crowd?"

"Are you really speaking to me, Lord? Surely, you know not who I am!"

"You are one of mine own. Is that not enough for me to ask you to work, suffer and endure with me? The task is immense as you see. But I assure thee that it is worth the price, though it involves the oblation of yourself as a living victim, in union with Me, even in thy present state of life."

"Do you think I can? A living victim along with you, O Lord? Ah, yes, with all my heart -- take me!"