

REPARATION: MAN'S DEBT TO GOD FOR THE OFFENSE OF SIN

In 1928 Pope Pius XI issued an all too little known encyclical, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*; on the nature and need of offering to God reparation for offenses committed against Him. In it Pope Pius teaches that reparation is an act made to God in compensation for an injury against His divine love. Such offenses may arise from negligence, forgetfulness or deliberate malice. Everyone is bound to make acts of reparation since all have sinned. Thus all have offended God Who created all men out of gratuitous love towards them. Through the exercise of the virtue of religion, itself part of the virtue of justice, love must be returned to God by every person. Those who have been granted who have been granted a further participation in the divine nature by grace are called all the more to return love to the Creator and Redeemer. Not everyone worships God as he ought - many do not recognize God even minimally as their origin and • maker. Even those possessing true Christian faith can (and do) sin against God, even to the extent of apostasy, the complete abandonment of Catholic faith and practice. Christians, as well as those completely devoid of any religious disposition at all, can offend God by violating the Natural Law, a reflection of the mind of God inscribed in the very nature of the created order. Christians can also sin against charity and the revealed truths given to this world by Jesus Christ.

All offenses against God, whatever their nature, cause or origin, require reparation or the rendering of that debt which is due to God for the offense given. Each person has a debt which he owes God for his own offenses. But there are also debts owed to God by those ignorant of them. More tragic still is the reparation due from those who have rejected God and Christ completely, together with any concept of owing anything at all for the offenses which they have committed. As members of the one Body of Christ, Christians are able to make reparation for themselves as well as for others. This is rooted in the infinite power and merit of the all sufficient reparation Christ made on our behalf as God and man in His Passion. This perfect and infinite reparation is shared through the communion of spiritual goods possessed by the members of His Mystical Body, the Catholic Church. In *Miserentissimus Redemptor* Pope Pius says, "We must always remember that the whole strength of [our] expiation depends on the one bloody sacrifice of Christ." But he goes on to say. "The more perfectly our oblation and sacrifice corresponds to the sacrifice of Our Lord, and the more perfectly we immolate our love and desires while mortifying our flesh by that mystic crucifixion of which Saint Paul speaks, the more abundantly will we receive the fruit of the propitiation and expiation [we make] for ourselves and for others."

Christians, therefore, are called by faith to make reparation as an act of justice even though no one can fully repay any debt owed the infinite God since He is, in a manner of speaking, infinitely offended by any sin at all. Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, can fully offer reparation for offenses against God's divine majesty. But Christians also make acts of reparation from the motive of love for they desire to offer consolation to the Savior, to make loving amend for the lack of love so many exhibit in His regard. It may be objected that it is not possible to console the ascended Redeemer since He now reigns gloriously, never to suffer again. This is true: Christ cannot be consoled now since He lives without the least suffering or sorrow. But it is possible to console Him through reparation which He foresaw when He lived in time. Pope Pius gives the theological basis for this teaching: "If the soul of Christ became sorrowful unto death because of our sins which were still in the future but foreseen by Him, it cannot be doubted that at the same time He also derived solace from our reparation which was, likewise, also foreseen." Just as Jesus foresaw all sins - the apostasy of entire nations, the staggering ingratitude and unbelief of so many - so too He foresaw all the acts of reparation and consoling expressions of love

made to Him by faithful hearts throughout the ages. Pope Pius goes on to mention entire religious congregations "whose purpose is by an earnest service, day and night, in some manner to fulfill the office of the Angel consoling Jesus in the garden."

From this scriptural and theological basis has arisen, particularly in modern times, devotion focused on offering loving reparation to the Lord Who has been wounded by the sins of mankind. This is the origin of countless religious movements and communities whose purpose, like the CRNJ, is to offer the God of love the lives of their members in a devoted reparation to Him from Whom they, and all the world, have drawn their origin and hope of redemption.