

# THE SUPERNATURAL VALUE OF A SOLDIER'S DEATH

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THE question whether soldiers can be martyrs has been appearing periodically from the time of the infant Church down to our own day. Tertullian is supposed to have denied the possibility with the words: "Nemo oves appellat eos qui in bello armati, et ipsi et eadem feritate certantes cadunt; sed qui in sua proprietate atque patientia, dedentes potius semetipsos, quam vindicantes trucidantur."<sup>1</sup> And yet John Capistran, at the time of the Crusades, could go to the other extreme by repeatedly giving the title of martyr to those who were to sacrifice their lives in such a worthy cause.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps even stronger are the words of a certain bishop to the soldiers:

Ego vobis testis sum, et in die Judicii fidejussor existo, quia quicumque in isto glorioso occubuerit bello, absque ulla Purgatorii poena praemia aeterna . . . consequetur, dummodo confessus sit, et contritus, vel saltem firmum habeat propositum, quod statim, peracto bello, super peccatis, de quibus nondum fecit Confessionem, ostendet se Sacerdoti.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is treated in St. Thomas and in post-Thomistic theologians; it arose again during the last war; and during the present conflict it has been given occasional consideration.<sup>4</sup> The reason for interest in the question is obvious. Anyone with the slightest shade of sentiment would like to hope that there is some special reward for those who sacrifice their lives on the field of battle; and when that hope is brightened by the thought of martyrdom and all the wonderful things that such a word implies, then it is only natural that men should try to find some justification for such a claim.

As a technical theological problem, the question first arose, I think, from two rather difficult passages in St. Thomas. For that reason I

<sup>1</sup> *Adv. Marcionem*, IV, 39 (PL, II, 486-87).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Benedict XIV, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, III, 18, 7, (*Opera Omnia* [Prati 1840], III, 175).

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> J. Sherman, *The Nature of Martyrdom* (Paterson, N. J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1942), pp. 83 ff.; 118 ff.; J. Bluett, S.J., "Our Soldier Dead: Are They Martyrs?" *America*, LXIX (1943), 208-209; A. Kleber, O.S.B., "A Soldier's Death, A Martyrdom?" *Ecclesiastical Review*, CXI (1944), 281-90.

would like to review briefly the doctrine of St. Thomas and then, more at length, the subsequent discussion as it is found in some of the theologians down to our own day.

#### ST. THOMAS

Martyrdom may be defined, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, as an act of fortitude<sup>5</sup> by which a person, motivated by charity,<sup>6</sup> patiently<sup>7</sup> accepts death<sup>8</sup> in protestation of the faith.<sup>9</sup> Were we to analyze it according to its causes, we might formulate the analysis as follows: the *causa eliciens* is fortitude;<sup>10</sup> the *causa imperans* is charity;<sup>11</sup> and the *causa finalis* is faith.<sup>12</sup>

For our particular purpose it is important to pay close attention to the word "patiently" in that definition. St. Thomas insists on it when he develops the notion of fortitude as requisite for the martyr.

Principalior actus fortitudinis est sustinere, ad quem pertinet martyrium, non autem ad secundarium actum eius, qui est aggredi. Et quia patientia deservit fortitudini ex parte actus principalis, qui est sustinere, inde est quod concomitanter in martyribus patientia commendatur.<sup>13</sup>

With that notion clearly before us, let us approach the doctrine of St. Thomas in reference to soldiers who die in battle. He brings up the point in treating the question, "whether faith alone is the cause of martyrdom." Under the third difficulty he says that faith must be the sole cause of martyrdom; otherwise soldiers who die in a just war for the common good would be martyrs.

<sup>5</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, II-II, q. 124, a. 2 c: "Ad fortitudinem pertinet ut confirmet hominem in bono virtutis, et maxime contra pericula, et praecipue contra pericula mortis, et maxime eius quae est in bello. Manifestum est autem quod in martyrio homo firmiter confirmatur in bono virtutis, dum fidem et iustitiam non deserit propter imminetia pericula mortis, quae etiam in quodam certamine particulari a persecutoribus imminet."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 2m: "Ad actum martyrii inclinatur quidem charitas, sicut primum et principale motivum, per modum virtutis imperantis."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3m: "Quia patientia deservit fortitudini ex parte actus principalis, qui est sustinere, inde est quod concomitanter in martyribus patientia commendatur."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4 c: "Ad perfectam rationem martyrii requiritur quod aliquis mortem sustineat propter Christum."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 5 c: "Et ideo cuiuslibet martyrii causa est fidei veritas."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2 ad 2m.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 1m.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3m.

Si . . . aliquid aliud bonum esset causa martyrii, maxime videretur quod illi essent martyres qui pro defensione reipublicae moriuntur: quod Ecclesiae observatio non habet: non enim militum qui in bello justo moriuntur, martyria celebrantur. Ergo sola fides videtur esse martyrii causa.<sup>14</sup>

I quote his answer:

Ad tertium dicendum, quod bonum reipublicae est praecipuum inter bona humana. Sed bonum divinum, quod est propria causa martyrii, est potius quam humanum. Tamen quia bonum humanum potest effici divinum, ut si referatur in Deum, ideo potest esse quodcumque bonum humanum martyrii causa, secundum quod in Deum refertur.<sup>15</sup>

About this question and its answer there are two peculiarities. First, after proposing the difficulty that the Church does not give the crown of martyrdom to soldiers, St. Thomas does not even attempt to give an answer. Secondly, in his response to the question about the common good, he is very generic: any good that is referred to God can be the cause of martyrdom. Under that aspect, then, a soldier can be a martyr: not that he is a martyr, or has been a martyr, but simply that he can be a martyr.

If we try to discover how this possibility can be changed into a fact, we find a solution in the *Commentary on the Sentences*.

Cum quis propter bonum commune non relatum ad Christum mortem sustinet, Aureolam non meretur: sed si hoc referatur ad Christum, Aureolam merebitur, et Martyr erit; utpote, si Rempublicam defendat ab hostium impugnatione qui fidem Christi corrumpere moliuntur, et in tali defensione mortem sustineat.<sup>16</sup>

It is this passage that has created the difficulty for the post-Thomistic theologians. They were very conscious of the virtue of patience which the Angelic Doctor had stressed in his treatment of the fortitude requisite in the martyr. How was that to be reconciled with the doctrine here proposed, namely, that the soldier could be a martyr since he defended his country from attack? How can a soldier with a gun in his hand be a passive victim?

One simple solution would be to say that St. Thomas had changed his doctrine when he wrote the *Summa*; that he no longer viewed the problem in the same light as he did when writing on the *Sentences*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3m.

<sup>16</sup> *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 5, a. 3, quaestiuncula 2 ad 11m.

Fr. Kleber seems to give this as a partial solution.<sup>17</sup> Yet I know of no other theologian who uses it. Usually theologians accept the double statement of St. Thomas and then look for an explanation, presupposing that the doctrine of the *Summa* is in some way consistent with what is found in the *Commentary on the Sentences*.

#### POST-THOMISTIC THEOLOGIANS

Sylvius is quoted in certain editions of St. Thomas (e.g., the Marietti edition) as agreeing with his doctrine. On examination, however, we find that although the agreement is there, Sylvius does not throw any great light on the problem. He says that those who are killed while defending their country in a just war can be martyrs if they defend it "propter Deum, amore justitiae ac legis divinae, non vero si stipendii militaris aut praedarum intuitu, aut alia aliqua intentione, vel prava vel bonum dumtaxat humanum spectante."<sup>18</sup>

In treating of the passage in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, he merely repeats the doctrine as it is given by St. Thomas, and then proceeds to give a rather logical explanation of the reason why the Church does not inscribe soldiers who die in the defense of their country in the number of the martyrs: the Church does not act in such cases except after making diligent inquiries; such inquiries, however, are quite difficult in the case of soldiers, "cum aliquando haeretici, schismatici, aliique facinorosi homines in bello contra infideles decertant, non habito respectu fidei sed proprii commodi."<sup>19</sup>

Sylvius does not touch the difficulty: How can a soldier be a passive victim and still sell his life as dearly as possible in the defense of his country? This difficulty becomes even greater when we find some theologians pointing to Christ the exemplar of martyrs, and wondering how the soldier on the battlefield is said to be imitating Him in death. "Et Christus quidem testimonium perhibuit veritati patiendo, non armis pugnando, aut Tyranno obsistendo. . ."<sup>20</sup> "Christus autem non vicit corporaliter pugnando, sed patienter sustinendo. . . Nec ait beati qui resistunt, sed qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justi-

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>18</sup> *Commentarii in Totam Secundam Secundae S. Thomae Aquinatis* (Antverpiae, 1693), q. 124, a. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, In Addit., q. 96, a. 6 ad 11m.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict XIV, *op. cit.*, III, 18, 5 (*Opera Omnia*, III, 173).

*tiam. . .*"<sup>21</sup> "Conformari debet Christo Domino qui testimonium perhibuit veritati, non contradicendo, sed patiendo."<sup>22</sup>

Faced with these difficulties, some of the theologians have excogitated examples to indicate how a soldier can show the patient, passive attitude requisite for martyrdom. Benedict XIV quotes the example given by Capisucchius. It is that of a soldier who, in the interval between the time that he received his wound and the hour of death, voluntarily and passively accepts death; by that patient attitude he is, according to Capisucchius, a victim as our Lord was a victim.<sup>23</sup>

The Salmanticenses give us an example in which they seem to be motivated purely by loyalty to St. Thomas. For, although they hold strongly for the opinion that soldiers are not martyrs, they still wish to allow for the possibility given by the Angelic Doctor. For that reason, apparently, they tell us of a soldier who is captured in battle by the infidels. Brought to the infidel king, he is given the alternative of denying the faith or being put to death. In that case, say the Salmanticenses, the soldier becomes a martyr.<sup>24</sup> That is perfectly true, but the *status quaestionis* has been changed. It takes the man out of the ranks of the soldiers and places him in the same category as those who in any other circumstances are told to deny their faith or die.<sup>25</sup>

Another explanation distinguishes a double *finis* in the actions of a soldier: his primary aim in fighting is to defend the faith against the attacks of the infidels; self-defense is secondary: "ut propria vita defendatur tamquam necessaria ad praeliandum pro Ecclesia, et fide Christi."<sup>26</sup> The same doctrine is proposed by Billuart. He says

<sup>21</sup> *Collegii Salmanticensis . . . Cursus Theologicus* (Paris, 1878), V, 309.

<sup>22</sup> C. Frassen, O.F.M., *Scotus Academicus* (Romae, 1901), X, 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, III, 18, 3 (*Opera Omnia*, III, 173).

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>25</sup> This is by no means a fantastic case. "At the siege of Safed (1624) at which ninety Templars met death, eighty others were taken prisoners, and, refusing to deny Christ, died martyrs of the faith" (C. Moeller, "Templars," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIV, 493). Fr. Kleber says that a similar incident occurred shortly before St. Thomas wrote on the *Sentences*, and that he may have had just such a case in mind. He also quotes from the Salmanticenses on this point, placing in italics their solution that "it is along this line that the Angelic Doctor speaks" (*art. cit.*, pp. 286-87). This conclusion I find hard to accept. Does the Angelic Doctor speak precisely along that line when he says: "si rempublicam defendat . . . et in tali defensione mortem sustineat"?

<sup>26</sup> Benedict XIV, *op. cit.*, III, 18, 3 (*Opera Omnia*, III, 172).

that these soldiers could, if they wished, yield to the enemy and deny their faith, and by so doing escape death; hence their action stems from a positive will to die for the faith.<sup>27</sup>

Billuart also faces the apparent contradiction in the doctrine of St. Thomas. How reconcile such an action with the patient, passive attitude of Christ, the victim who was led as a lamb to the execution? Billuart answers by denying the need for such a reconciliation: it is not necessary for the soldier to imitate Christ in every feature of Calvary; it suffices if he voluntarily accepts death for truth and virtue.<sup>28</sup> To substantiate this statement, he adduces as an analogy the death of those martyrs who at first fled from their persecutors—an action fully in accord with the words of Christ<sup>29</sup>—and afterwards voluntarily offered themselves as victims when apprehended. If these men are considered martyrs, why not the soldiers who voluntarily offer their lives in the field of battle?

I do not believe that this analogy in itself is sufficient proof to warrant placing soldiers in the category of martyrs. But I do believe that joined to Billuart's general principle it constitutes an argument that has not been satisfactorily answered by any of the theologians. Moreover, it is an argument that becomes more impressive under consideration. We do not, for instance, say that the martyr has to carry a cross, or be scourged or crowned with thorns. Why then do we have to be so insistent that he be perfectly passive in undergoing death for the faith? One answer may be that historically all the martyrs crowned by the Church have acted that way. But did not the circumstances have much to do with that particular way of dying for the faith? For example, the Christian burned at the stake did not attempt to escape from the flames; but he had no obligation to escape. The soldier fighting for his country has an obligation, as a soldier, that the Christian at the stake does not have at the moment of death. Should that obligation in itself make him unworthy of the martyr's crown? It is perfectly true that the soldier is not imitating Christ in all the circumstances of the passion. But, with Billuart, we can answer that he is imitating Him in the all-important circumstance, the voluntary self-sacrifice unto death for truth and virtue.

<sup>27</sup> *Summa Sancti Thomae*, VIII, d. 1, a. 2, De Martyrio (Paris, 1847), p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> "When they persecute you in one town, flee to another" (Matt. 10:23).

But what of the virtue of patience that should be manifest in his death? We answer with St. Thomas:

Nec est contra rationem patientiae quod aliquis, quando opus fuerit, insiliat in eum qui mala facit; quia ut Chrysostomus dicit super illud Matth. IV: *Vade, Satana*, 'in injuriis propriis patientem esse, laudabile est; injurias autem Dei patienter sustinere nimis est impium'; et Augustinus dicit in quadam epistola ad Marcellinum, quod 'praecepta patientiae non contrariantur bono reipublicae, pro quo conservando contra inimicos pugnatur.'<sup>80</sup>

The answer to this argument consists in the accumulation of texts to show that the martyrs were to conquer the world, not by the force of arms, but by the spiritual weapons of patience, humility, and meekness:<sup>81</sup> "Behold, I send you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents, and guileless as doves" (Matt. 10:16); "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (II Cor. 10:4); "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake" (Matt. 5:10); etc. The supposition seems to be that the virtues implicitly or explicitly contained in these texts are not evident in the Christian soldier, at least not at his death.

Again the question is: Why must it be that way? Are these quotations, as a matter of fact, pertinent to the question at issue? Is there any indication that when they used these words our Lord and St. Paul were talking precisely about martyrdom? Actually, those who hold that these qualities must be manifest in the martyr also hold that some men have an obligation to flee in time of persecution, especially if the safety of their lives is necessary for the spiritual good of their flock. Does such an action find its justification in the texts cited above? And, if not, why should there be any difference between the death of a martyr who is captured in flight, and the death of a soldier who is defending his people? Why should his act of defense deprive him of the crown in circumstances where patience would be, as St. John Chrysostom says, "impium"?

It is also objected that the idea prevalent in the mind of the soldier is that he will escape death if he can. But is that not the thought prevalent also in the mind of the martyr who is apprehended in flight? It is true that the martyr who flees, feels that his life is neces-

<sup>80</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, II-II, q. 136, a. 4 ad 3m.

<sup>81</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

sary for his people; but cannot the same thing be said for the soldier who is trying to defend his life?

Finally, some theologians point to the fact that the soldier does not think that he is victorious unless he prevails over the enemy, whereas, in the death of the martyr, we see the wonderful paradox of a glorious victory in apparent defeat. In martyrdom, they say, the Christian proclaims to all men that he despises everything in the world, even life itself, for the love of Christ. But even here we can find a parallel in the death of a soldier; for the wonderful thing about martyrdom is not the paradox, but rather the charity which motivates the self-sacrifice.<sup>32</sup> And that same charity can certainly be present in the soldier who offers his life on the field of battle.

It seems that the difficulties against the soldier are based, to a certain extent, on a slight confusion between the words *passio*, which means suffering, and *passiva*, which means that<sup>1</sup> one does not object. Let us take, for example, one of the Scripture texts used by those who say that the soldiers cannot be martyrs: "Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur." In this sentence *patiuntur* evidently means "suffer." Only by approaching it with preconceived notions can we say that the suffering here mentioned by our Lord is necessarily passive suffering. Would it not be a more normal interpretation to take the words for what they actually mean, i.e., voluntary acceptance of suffering, and then allow the circumstances to determine whether the suffering should be passive or, in the case of the soldier, accompanied by resistance?

For these reasons, then, there seems to be at least as good an argument for the possibility of soldiers being martyrs as there is against it. As we saw, St. Thomas admits the fact that the Church has not given the crown to soldiers, and yet he holds the possibility of soldier martyrs. Subsequent theologians who disagree base their disagreement on the ground that the martyr must be perfectly passive. In circumstances

<sup>32</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, II-II, q. 124, a. 3 c: "De aliquo actu virtutis loqui possumus dupliciter: uno modo secundum speciem actus ipsius, prout comparatur ad virtutem proxime elicientem ipsum: et sic non potest esse quod martyrrium, quod consistit in debita tolerantia mortis, sit perfectissimus inter virtutis actus; quia tolerare mortem non est laudabile secundum se, sed solum secundum quod ordinatur ad aliquod bonum, quod consistit in actu virtutis, puta ad fidem et ad dilectionem Dei: unde ille actus virtutis, cum sit finis, melior est. Alio modo potest considerari actus virtutis, secundum quod comparatur ad primum motivum, quod est amor charitatis; et ex hac parte praecipue aliquis actus habet quod ad perfectionem vitae pertineat."



where patience would be, according to St. John Chrysostom, "impium," they say that the soldier cannot be a martyr because he has a gun in his hand. To substantiate that claim, they appeal to Scripture texts which hardly seem pertinent. Finally, they point to the observance of the Church, a fact which St. Thomas had already admitted before giving his conclusion.

#### STATUS QUAESTIONIS

If we ask, however, whether all this can be applied immediately to the present war, the answer, to my mind, must be in the negative. The reason for this is precisely the very restricted *status quaestionis* of the theologians whom we have quoted above. They make it absolutely clear in what they write that they are not considering any and every type of war. In fact, they restrict themselves very definitely to what is tantamount to a crusade by Christians against infidels. St. Thomas writes that the soldiers are martyrs if they defend their country from the attacks of those who endeavor to destroy the faith.<sup>33</sup> Sylvius follows him almost verbatim.<sup>34</sup> The Salmanticenses insist that the war must not only be just, but that it must be between Christians and infidels. And, even in a war with infidels, if the enemy is not motivated directly by hatred of the faith but by the desire of some temporal advantage, then the Christian soldiers who give their lives are not martyrs. "Nec de his est qui dubitet."<sup>35</sup>

Benedict XIV, who makes a thorough investigation of the question, tells us explicitly that the *status quaestionis* centers around a war between Christians and infidels on a religious issue, *non autem ex aliquo fine politico*. If the latter is the reason for the war, "unusquisque admittit Fideles in eo morientes Martyres non esse."<sup>36</sup>

I stress this *status quaestionis* because it is absolutely essential to keep it in mind if we are to make use of the conclusions of these theologians. Otherwise we are quoting them out of context and do violence to their thought. We can, for example, quote St. Thomas, as Vermeersch does, to prove that soldiers can be martyrs. But if we want to quote him or any of the subsequent theologians to prove that

<sup>33</sup> *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 5, a. 3, quaestiuncula 2 ad 11m.

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, In Addit., q. 96, a. 6 ad 11m.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.*, III, 18, 3 (*Opera Omnia*, III, 172).

- \* soldiers in any given war actually are martyrs, then we must be sure that such a war fits into the very restricted *status quaestionis* of those from whom we derive our principles.

While freely confessing a most incomplete knowledge of all the elements involved in the present world-wide conflict, I, for one, would not venture to say that it fits the picture of war as envisioned by the theologians who professed that soldiers are martyrs. I say that, not because I believe that there are no religious issues at stake in the war today; perhaps they are greater than anyone dreams. I say it because I believe that the war is altogether too complicated, involves too many ideologies, too much confusion of Catholics on both sides, too many political issues, and too much power politics, to fit into the comparatively simple, straightforward, faith-versus-heresy struggles considered by the theologians of a few centuries ago.

If for those theologians there was only probability for the proposition that soldiers are martyrs, that probability is lessened, if anything, in the present war.

#### CHANGE IN APPROACH TO THE QUESTION

During the last war there was a change in the approach of the theologians to this question. Strangely enough, it is not altogether clear that the reason for this change was the type of war that was being fought. Actually, very little mention is made of the fact that the war was not a crusade against the infidels, but a good deal of the emphasis was placed on the impossibility of classifying the soldier as a martyr simply because he died with a gun in his hand.

Regardless of what we may think of the reasons given, we can certainly approve of two points that are clarified in the writing of these theologians. First, they are speaking explicitly of the war then being fought in France. Secondly, they do not consider the soldiers in those battles as potential martyrs.

On the assumption that the soldiers are not martyrs, they face the following question: "Is there anything positive that can be said for the tremendous sacrifices that these men are making in the war?" The answer among the French is phrased in the "hopes" that we should have for the eternal salvation of these soldiers.

The now famous "Patriotism and Endurance" of Cardinal Mercier

adopts this attitude. He writes that the soldier is "not a martyr in the rigorous theological meaning of the word, inasmuch as he dies in arms, whereas the martyr delivers himself, undefended and unarmed, into the hands of the executioner." He then goes on to say that he would not hesitate to assert that for the soldier "death, accepted in this Christian spirit, assures the safety of that man's soul. 'Greater love than this no man hath', said Our Savior, 'that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"<sup>37</sup> Such a death is an act of the highest charity.

Another explanation comes from the pen of Fr. Michel. He makes a penetrating study of fortitude and martyrdom in St. Thomas, and then tells us that the prudence of the Angelic Doctor, based on the prudence of the Church, ought to dictate our attitude on the question. By prudence he means the tacit attitude taken by St. Thomas in the *Summa*, first, in admitting that the Church has not given the crown of martyrdom to soldiers, and secondly, in merely mentioning the possibility of martyrdom without trying to found it in fact. According to Michel, the possibility of the death of soldiers becoming real martyrdom in a war like the present seems restricted to such special cases, and appears so conditioned, that one ought to avoid all generalization on the question.<sup>38</sup>

He tells us that if we wish to speak of the hopes we may have for the eternal salvation of the soldier, we should not base them on a similarity with the death of a martyr, which is "peu probable," but on the certain doctrine of extra-sacramental justification of a soul by a perfect act of charity. He advocates, then, the doctrine of a generous sacrifice, or at least one deliberately accepted, as an indication of a perfect love of God and neighbor.<sup>39</sup>

Fr. Y. de la Brière makes the application of this principle in two rather ingenious articles of exegesis on the Second Book of Machabees.<sup>40</sup> In brief, his argument is as follows. In the Book of Machabees it is related that in one of the battles against the infidels it was

<sup>37</sup> *Pastorals, Letters, Allocutions: 1914-1917* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1917), p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> "La guerre et le martyre," *Revue apologétique*, XXV (1917), 82-83. Unfortunately, in this study he did not consider the passage from *In IV Sent.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> "La récompense des soldats tombés au champ d'honneur," *Luttes présentes de l'Église* (Paris, 1914-15), pp. 165-75; and "La mort des martyrs et les espérances spéciales de salut pour l'âme des soldats tombés au champ d'honneur," *ibid.*, pp. 357-76.

found that some of the slain soldiers had taken donaries from the idols of Jamnia. "And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause were they slain" (II Mach. 12:40). Now De la Brière argues that since the soldiers died with the donaries on their persons, it would appear that they had died in sin—a serious sin because of the seriousness of the law (Deut. 7:25). Yet, despite this fact, Judas sends money to Jerusalem to have sacrifice offered for them, "thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection" (II Mach. 12:43).

Why should he think that sacrifice would be of any avail if these souls were in hell because of their sin? Evidently he did not think that they were in hell. Why? "Because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness (*εὐσέβεια*) had great grace laid up for them" (12:45).

Now if we study this word *εὐσέβεια*, we find that among the people of antiquity it meant a sentiment of respect and filial love for parents, for the State, and for God.<sup>41</sup> Hence the reason why Judas did not doubt that God had given the soldiers the supreme grace of repentance and pardon at the hour of death was the sacrifice they had made for their family, their country, and their God.

According to De la Brière, there are two conclusions to be drawn from this passage of Holy Scripture: first, that it would be inexact to attribute to the death of a soldier the same efficacy and recompense that one would give to that of a martyr; secondly, that it is certainly legitimate to consider the death of a soldier in the faithful fulfillment of duty as authorizing a very special hope for his eternal salvation.<sup>42</sup>

An examination of the scriptural foundation of De la Brière's thesis is rather revealing. Although it is, without doubt, the *locus classicus* for the proof of purgatory, it does not follow that all the theologians hold with certitude that the souls mentioned here are actually in purgatory. There are, in fact, two explanations given of the text: the first, that the souls are in purgatory; the second, that there are solid reasons for hoping that they are there despite what they had done.

The first explanation is based on the fact that, although the sin was

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

*in genere suo* mortal, nevertheless it could be venial because of the levity of the matter, the absence of the danger of idolatry in these particular circumstances, ignorance of the law, etc.<sup>43</sup>

The second explanation states explicitly that Judas, in sending the money to Jerusalem for the sacrifice, could have been motivated in the same way as Catholics today, who have Mass said for the dead who have been sinners in life. They do this in the hope that God may have given them the grace of repentance before death. In the case of the Jewish soldiers, however, there was a very special hope that they had made an act of perfect contrition because they "had fallen asleep with godliness." Suarez writes: "*Verisimile* namque erat eos saltem in mortis articulo de tali peccato doluisse, veniamque consecutos fuisse; praesertim cum pro fide et religione pugnarent, vitas suas prodigerent."<sup>44</sup> Corluy has practically the same: "Hos dicit *cum pietate dormitionem* mortis *accepisse*, quia obierant certantes pro Deo et patriis legibus. . . . Etiamsi gravis [sc. praevaricatio eorum] fuisset, potuit Judas merito sperare Deum morientibus pro sua causa concessisse in extremis debitam de illo peccato contritionem ut damnationem evaderent. Quae spes erat sufficiens fundamentum orandi pro iis defunctis."<sup>45</sup> Billot writes that it makes no difference whether the sin was mortal or venial, "quia pro mortali quoque peccato locus est contritioni et poenitentiae in extremis quae etiam tanto meliore iure erat in casu praesumenda quod pro patriis legibus sanctissimaque religione in bello sacro decertantes isti occubuerant."<sup>46</sup> Beraza has much the same thing.<sup>47</sup>

This second solution seems to fit the facts of the case much better than the first. For the text explicitly mentions the law that was violated, the implication being that it was a serious offence. Secondly, we are told that "for this cause they were slain" (12:40). This is much more readily explained by the assumption that it was a serious transgression rather than merely a venial sin.

Such an explanation, of course, leaves us with a difficulty concerning

<sup>43</sup> Bellarmine, III, 1. 1, c. 3 ad 6 m.

<sup>44</sup> *De Sacramentis: De Poenit. et Purgat.*, disp. XLV, sect. 1, n. 4 (*Opera Omnia* [Paris: Vivès, 1878], XXII, 881).

<sup>45</sup> *Spicilegium* (Gandavi: Poelman, 1884), I, 267.

<sup>46</sup> *De Novissimis* (Rome, 1938), p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> *De Deo Elevante* (Bilbao, 1924), p. 553.

the precise reason for the death of these men. However, Billot quotes from Bossuet to show that those whom God punishes as an example for others are not for that reason condemned without mercy. Hence, although their death may be attributed to their having taken the donaries, the very fact that the incident occurred while they were fighting in defence of their country was a sufficient warrant for Judas to think that they had died "with godliness."

As we saw, De la Brière draws from this the general conclusion that even in a war like the present one we should have special hopes for the eternal salvation of soldiers who die in the defense of their country.

Before we can come to that conclusion, we must be certain that we can apply what is said in the Book of Machabees about those who died in a holy war<sup>48</sup> to the soldiers who die in a political conflict like the present one. De la Brière seems to think that we can. He has no hesitation in transferring to the battlefields of France all that he has found in Scripture. This is explained by the similarity in the spirit of self-sacrifice for home, for country, and for God, which is found in both cases. Hence, those soldiers who make no reference at all to God in their sacrifice are *eo ipso* eliminated from consideration.

We have to narrow down the *status quaestionis* even more. Since there is no special *aureola* for the soldier as there is for the martyr, we must confine our discussion to the man who is in the state of sin. For the soldier in the state of grace, the sacrifice of life constitutes but a new and glorious act of virtue to be added to his eternal reward; it has no particular efficacy, however, for the essentials of salvation.<sup>49</sup> Even had he not gone to war, our hopes for his eternal salvation would have been particularly strong. Hence, the case is reducible to the man in the state of sin.

Now since a soldier's death does not produce justification *quasi ex opere operato*, as a martyr's does, we are led ultimately to the consideration of the efficacy of a soldier's death in reference to the grace of an act of perfect contrition. Is there a necessary nexus between the sacrifice implied in the death and the grace of contrition? Neither De la Brière nor any other theologian would hold that. Although Cardinal Mercier tells us that we should not demand the niceties of

<sup>48</sup> Cf. authors quoted: "in bello sacro," "pro fide et religione," etc.

<sup>49</sup> De la Brière, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

theological distinctions in the minds of the soldiers,<sup>50</sup> nevertheless everyone would demand some kind of reference to God in the act.

Granted this reference to God (which we cannot expect in every case), can we then conclude that the grace of perfect contrition will be present? Cardinal Mercier tells us of his own personal certitude on the question.<sup>51</sup> De la Brière does not go that far. He speaks rather of a "confidence" prompted by the incident recorded in the Book of Machabees. He looks on that incident as an indication that God in His mercy will most readily accord the graces of repentance and pardon to those who fight and die in the faithful fulfillment of duty. De la Brière has no hesitation in applying this, because he feels that the tragic obligation imposed on soldiers by legitimate authority is something that moves the mercy of God to send the interior graces of repentance with abundance and exceptional intensity to the soul of the dying soldier.<sup>52</sup> He tells us that in the soldier there is a wonderful natural foundation on which the supernatural can operate: from a sense of duty and sacrifice already present in the order of things human, divine grace can elevate the soul of the soldier to the notion and desire of sacrifice in the order of the things of God.<sup>53</sup>

Michel adds that, in his opinion, there are very few of the indifferent who do not turn to God in the hour of danger. If that is true, then, would not God, who is Goodness itself, make use of this movement of the soul to achieve a supernatural transformation of the sacrifice that these men are about to make?<sup>54</sup>

If we subject this emotional writing to the tribunal of sober analysis, we can arrive I believe, at the conclusion that it is *probable* that the soldier dying for his country receives the grace to make an act of perfect contrition. To carry our investigation further is to involve ourselves in that difficult problem regarding the sinner's power to merit actual graces and justification. There are certain things that we know of that state; there are other things that we simply do not know.

Relying on the things that we know, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the supernatural actions of a sinner, wonderful though they may be in themselves, are still those, not of a friend of God, but of a

<sup>50</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 373-74.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

rebel.<sup>55</sup> Nor can we forget what is found in the Council of Trent relative to the sinner's absolute inability to merit justification *de condigno*.<sup>56</sup> It is necessary to keep those facts before our eyes if we wish to base our hopes for the dying soldier, not on sentiment, but on a solid theological foundation.

These things presupposed, we can only consider the soldier's sacrifice in terms of a disposition or form of impetration that calls to the mercy of God for the necessary grace of repentance. Treating it as such, we can then begin to build our hopes in the value of this disposition by appealing to the arguments already cited. Certainly we can derive confidence from our knowledge of what God thinks of the act in itself, because our Lord has told us that "greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We can add to our confidence by appealing, as does De la Brière, to the incident in the Book of Machabees. We can perhaps say, with Michel, that there are very few Christians who do not turn to God in the hour of danger, and then we can hope that God, who is Goodness itself, will make use of this conversion to supernaturalize the sacrifice that these men are about to make. Yet, after we have advanced all these reasons, our conclusion remains only probable. In order to be certain of an infallible nexus between the sacrifice and the grace for repentance, we still need to have some evidence of a promise on the part of God. Such a promise is not evident.

Precisely because that promise is not evident, and because the wonderful power of impetration that flows from the Masses and prayers of the faithful throughout the world is evident, we who admire the sacrifice of the soldier so much should perhaps feel a commensurate obligation to add vitally to our "hopes" by a constant stream of prayers to God for the eternal salvation of those who are dying to save us.

<sup>55</sup> H. Lange, S.J., *De Gratia* (Freiburg: Herder, 1929), p. 576.

<sup>56</sup> *DB*, 801.