

CONTEMPLATION AND PEACE

CONTEMPLATION is the way to peace. But there are some who hold the contrary, not without good reason: for

1. Those who are entrusted with the drawing up of peace-treaties are generally men of action. And if we find much to criticise in their achievements, we can rarely doubt their goodwill and we must admit their success in establishing what all men are agreed to call peace.

2. Contemplatives withdraw from the world to seek peace as the first condition for the fulfilment of their vocation.

Against this we have the testimony of the Church's liturgy: *Beata pacis visio*. That is to say, peace is achieved through a vision or contemplation.

Peace is something more than concord. There is concord when one party to an agreement accepts his obligations reluctantly, but there is no peace: one desire conflicts with another, there is no tranquillity or order in his soul.⁽¹⁾ Yet desire is never completely at rest until the soul is in the presence of God. A relative tranquillity can, however, be attained in this world, more or less perfect according to the degree to which we perceive that only He who created our soul can maintain its harmony.⁽²⁾ When the perception of this truth contents us we are at peace. And this is attained through contemplation.

The order in the world and its tranquillity are fashioned according to a divine plan. Those who seek peace cannot therefore afford to neglect examination of the design which it is their task to realise: "They must be made to climb the ascent to the vision of Goodness, which we called the highest object of knowledge; and, allowed to remain on the heights, refusing to come down again to the prisoners."⁽³⁾ From temporal things they must rise to the knowledge of eternal truths; but once these are discovered, temporal affairs—the peace even that this world can give—must be arranged in the light of them.⁽⁴⁾ This is a real contemplation, but grace is not absolutely necessary for it. Reason alone can perceive both design and the law by which it is realised; and if God can direct irrational nature as an instrument to fulfil His plan,⁽⁵⁾ still

1. II-II q. 29 a. 1.

2. Cf. II-II q. 29 a. 2 ad 4 um.

3. Plato, *Republic* vii, 520 (Cornford's translation).

4. "Nam secundum viam inventionis, per res temporales in cognitionem devenimus aeternorum; in via vero iudicii, per aeterna iam cognita de temporalibus iudicamus, et secundum rationes aeternorum temporalia disponimus." I q. 79 a. 9.

5. "Tota irrationalis natura comparatur ad Deum sicut instrumentum ad agens principale." I-II q. 1 a. 2.

more can He secure the same end through the rational obedience of men who know Him as First Cause—even if they are untouched by grace.

But grace is a part of the plan. God the Creator is God the Author of Glory. by His antecedent will—at once the power and act of infinite love—calling every man to supernatural peace. The plenipotentiaries at the peace conference, whether agnostics, free-thinkers or Plymouth Brethren, cannot escape from that overpowering charity except by deliberate repudiation of it.⁽⁶⁾ A single step towards such light as they know will be rewarded with a richer illumination, bestowed sometimes directly but more often through the instrumentality of more advanced contemplatives. For they are the preachers of peace to the world, giving it out of the abundant fruits of their joyous contemplation.

Not for the sake of peace only in heaven, or even in his own soul, but for the peace that is attainable here, the life of the contemplative nourished by all the graces that God puts at the disposal of His Church is supremely necessary. For he is a most perfect instrument for the execution of the design which he perceives in prayer. God, who needs none of us, can make use of Churchill, Stalin, and the Emperor of Japan, but he prefers to crown his gifts by exalting humbler folk who only want to know and enjoy his peace. Perceiving this vision through faith, possessing it tenuously through charity, longing for the certain day of its final attainment through hope, they become under the influence of the gifts ever more ready to receive his inspirations and to be used entirely as he wills in the present pursuit of it.⁽⁷⁾ It is by God's power that anything is achieved in this world or the next, and that peace which reflects the tranquillity of the eternal kingdom can only be established by his wisdom and his love. It is the fruit of the Holy Ghost, the perfection of the joy which he also gives,⁽⁸⁾ and it is most securely attained by those in whom the seven gifts are most fully developed. And these are precisely the contemplatives; for while the gifts are in every soul in a state of grace, they are most marked in their effects on those who are far advanced in the mystical life. The

6. "A gratia gratum faciente nullus deficit, nisi propter peccatum; . . . et sine gratia gratum faciente non potest esse vera pax, sed solum apparens." II-II q. 29 a. 3 ad 1 um.

7. "Quanto movens est altior, tanto necesse est quod mobile perfectiori dispositione ei proportionetur . . . Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones, secundum quas dispositus sit ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur. Et istae perfectiones vocantur dona; non solum quia infunduntur a Deo; sed quia secundum ea homo disponitur ut efficiatur prompte mobilis ab inspiratione divina." I-II q. 68 a. 1.

8. "Perfectio gaudii est pax." I-II q. 70 a. 3.

mystics are the delicately formed, favourite tools of the Holy Ghost with which he constructs his kingdom on earth.⁽⁹⁾

Contemplation thus comes before true peace and causes it, and the reasons urged to the contrary can now be seen to be inadequate:

1. In answer to this difficulty, it might be asserted that what the peace-treaties secure is not peace but merely concord. But if something nearer to true peace is established, it is the fruit of contemplation: the defective but real appreciation of the divine scheme on the part of the peace-makers or the deeper understanding of the contemplatives who shed something of the light by which they are illumined on the politicians.⁽¹⁰⁾

2. A certain absence of strife is a necessary condition for contemplation, but this can never be perfect and at best is remote from peace as the principle—in the widest sense of the word—from the end. Moreover the contemplative life itself is neither the end nor the noblest way of reaching the end. It is better to pass on the light than simply to look at the sun: saints and sages from Gospel times until today are agreed that higher than the contemplative life is that form of the active life which springs from the superabundance of contemplation.⁽¹¹⁾ The vocation to it may cut across all the existing ways of the religious life and it is one which can least of all be rejected in our bewildered age.

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9. Without their instrumentality He prepares for them a kingdom in heaven, but while *in via* they have closer knowledge of it than others and like wise architects can direct the operations of the humbler builders whose vision is more limited.

10. Such a symposium as *People Matter* (S.C.M. Press, 6s.) suggests that outside the Catholic tradition there is a greater understanding of the fundamental conditions for peace than we sometimes realise. The general trend of these broadcasts is to suggest that people only matter because respect for their personalities means fulfilling divine justice; justice itself being understood as something far higher than any system of *natural* rights and duties.

11. "Opus vitae activae est duplex: unum quidem, quod ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur, sicut doctrina, et predicatio . . . et hoc praefertur simplici contemplationi: sicut enim majus est illuminare, quam lucem solum videre, ita majus est contemplata aliis tradere, quam solum contemplari." II-II q. 188 a. 6.