

ON PEACE

IRENE MARINOFF

SINCE the Fall man has been haunted by the vision of peace, of a state in which the fulfilment of desire would be complete and undisturbed. The longing for peace is as universal as desire itself; for the very idea of desire includes the wish for peace, inasmuch as the full enjoyment of any coveted good can only be ensured by peace. Even wars, as St Thomas points out, are only fought for the sake of peace, in order to bring about conditions more satisfactory than the prevailing ones; while the very restlessness and sensationalism of an age merely indicates that the pursuit of genuine peace has been given up as impossible of fulfilment.

In any treatment of the subject of peace, the Augustinian definition immediately comes to mind. 'Peace is the tranquillity of order.' This definition applies equally to what is more correctly named concord, the agreement of individuals among themselves, and the harmony within the soul of one person. Peace is not identical with order. If this were so, the uniformity of an army on the march or the enforced silence of a class of unruly boys could be termed peace. What is found there is merely an external unification which leaves the powers of the soul out of account. Yet these must be called into play before there can be any suggestion of real peace.

St Augustine's 'tranquillity' points to a unity of a very different nature and degree than the superficial one imposed from without. *Concord* is defined by St Thomas as 'the union of appetites among various persons' (II-II, 29, 1), and this is realised by an act of the will. Thus the cohesive power of a state or community is determined by the will of the individuals which constitute it. This connection is often overlooked in normal times, but becomes immediately evident when, in periods of great danger, the individual citizens rally together, overcoming their natural cowardice by a supreme act of the will.

In the individual the union, whose flower is peace, affects all the appetites, bringing them into harmony and setting

them at rest together. Now it is perfectly clear that as long as desire is directed towards temporal goods, or any object other than the *summum bonum*, God himself, there cannot be peace. Not only does the transitory nature of the things of this world preclude their calm and secure possession, their very nature, being purely material, is incommensurable with ours. Even the loving pursuit of another soul cannot bring complete satisfaction, for such is the law of our being: *inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*.

The restlessness of souls, engaged in any other quest than that of God, is due to a fundamental disorder. A soul can only be at peace with itself when the emotions are controlled by the will, which is, in its turn, enlightened by right reason; or, in other words, when all its faculties are submitted to God as its final end, and the integration thus achieved radiates into its daily life. Even so, this will not be the perfect peace of the beatific vision. As St Thomas says, 'The chief movement of the soul finds rest in God, yet there are certain things within and without, which disturb that peace'. (ibid. 2.) What man can taste of peace during his earthly pilgrimage can only be imperfect peace, in itself a highly desirable and precious possession.

Peace is not a virtue; but it is closely related to two virtues. Peace is the effect of justice, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to true union. Yet, being the result of union, it is still more the effect of the greatest of all virtues, of charity itself. For charity is the main unitive force. Therefore, when we are exhorted to have peace with one another, we are in reality asked to make certain acts of charity.

Peace is a fruit of the Holy Ghost, an immediate effect of the presence of God in our souls. Among these fruits it ranks as the third, being preceded only by charity, which is prior to it, and by joy whose perfection it is. St Thomas shows the twofold way, in which peace may be said to perfect joy. A soul at peace will not be affected by those outward disturbances which prevent the complete enjoyment of a desired object. Moreover, it can no longer be troubled by restless desires, seeing that it is wholly fixed on God. The soul is therefore guarded against its chief enemies, and free to enjoy God in comparative tranquillity.

Christ himself is the cause of peace. His very coming into the world was accompanied by the angelic promise to men of good will. During his ministry he not only proved himself master of external disturbances of tranquillity such as the storm and the waves, but equally of those evil spirits which harass the soul. The casting out of devils is invariably accompanied by the restoration of peace to their victims. The Syrophœnician, whose daughter had been healed, returns to find her lying on her bed (Mark 7, 30). The young man who was possessed by a dumb spirit, after being torn and buffeted, was left as dead (Mark 9, 26).

Our Lord, however, showed himself Prince of Peace in a far more positive sense than this. He not only removed the obstacles in the way of true peace, he also satisfied the fundamental needs of our nature, thereby ensuring tranquillity. To the weary and heavily burdened he brought refreshment, and knowledge to the earnest seeker. 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal Life?' (John 6, 68.) From the days when the doctors were astonished at his answers in the temple, he was ready to let others partake of his wisdom, not even withholding it from Pilate, who enquired into the nature of his kingship. There is no longing in man which Christ did not come to satisfy, from the simple craving for food to the complex appetites of the soul, even to the most fundamental need of all, the desire for love. Thus the feeding of the five thousand only foreshadowed a far greater gift, the fulfilment of all man's desires in the Bread of Life.

Nor did our Lord, on departing from this world, withdraw his gift of peace. After the Last Supper he expressly left his peace with the disciples. 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid.' (John 14, 27.) The Saviour does not give according to the manner of the world, none of whose gifts are permanent. The gifts of Christ are imperishable and lasting, even unto eternal life. As though he would emphasise this fact, the risen Lord chooses as his first greeting to the assembled Apostles the words: 'Peace be unto you' (John 20, 19). Since Christ is the creative Word, his salutation immediately

bestowed upon the disciples the gift of peace.

Since the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, the Church has not ceased to intercede for peace. In the Canon of the Mass alone, her plea is reiterated six times, beginning in the *Te igitur* with her own need for unity, then imploring the divine gift for the faithful in the *Hanc igitur*. After the consecration she intercedes for the souls in Purgatory that they may be granted 'a place of refreshment, light and peace'. Then she turns again to the faithful, repeating her prayer for peace in the *Libera nos Domine*, which gains added weight and urgency in the short last part of the *Agnus Dei*. In conclusion, she gathers all these separate petitions together in the great prayer for her own pacification, the *Domine, Jesu Christe, qui dixisti*. Here she reminds our Lord of his promise of peace, and, using almost the same words as in the *Te igitur*, calls down upon earth this choicest of blessings, the first fruits, as it were, of the Mass, both herald and companion of the Supreme Gift. The Divine Office, too, abounds in petitions for peace.

Peace is a gift of the Holy Ghost, and petition is therefore the right means to obtain it in larger measure. But this does not preclude all active pursuit of peace, nor lessen the obligation we have of realising the conditions in which it is possible. In one of the official prayers of the Church we implore God to grant us 'a perpetual peace with God, a perpetual peace with our neighbour, and a perpetual peace within ourselves'. This threefold petition gives an indication of the ways in which peace can be pursued.

Perpetual peace with God. From one point of view, our entire spiritual life can be described as the removing of obstacles to the divine action upon our souls. If these are very serious, as in the case of mortal sin, absolution has to be obtained before the sinner can be re-established in grace. Once the sin has been forgiven, and the severed relationship of Father to son fully restored, the soul is no longer ill at ease; she can face her Creator again with confidence. Characteristically this step is often called 'making one's peace with God'.

If the soul is in the state of grace, she already possesses a certain measure of peace, due to the divine presence in her

depths. It is possible to increase this not only by direct petition, but also by definite acts of the will. If, as we have seen above, the peace of the soul depends on the ordering of all her faculties towards God, a closer union with him will inevitably be accompanied by an increase of inner peace.

The contemplation of the divine law, the practice of the presence of God, frequent acts of submission to his will, the manifold ejaculations of the day, by which the soul endeavours to unite herself with the Author of all Being—all these actions serve to increase our awareness of the supernatural. They have a regulating effect on the appetites of the soul by directing them towards the Supreme End, and in doing so they provide the conditions of true peace.

Peace within ourselves follows once the soul 'has made her peace with God', though there may be still a very long way to go. It is true that a growing preoccupation with God and the things of God will cause this inner peace to permeate the whole being. Yet there are certain practices which, by ensuring outer peace, will facilitate the inward movement of the soul towards her Creator.

First and foremost among these is the practice of silence, so essential in this age of noise and restless loquacity. As Romano Guardini remarks in one of his letters addressed to the young, 'Silence is more than not speaking. It is an inner fullness. In speaking we spend ourselves. We give of our knowledge, our experience. The very strength of our hearts goes out into our words. . . . When we are silent, we collect ourselves. The springs of our inner strength are renewed. Knowledge becomes clearer, our vision more defined.'¹ We might add that in keeping silence, we open the gates wide to that peace which cannot be tasted unless the unruly voices of the world are hushed. For it was in the silent depth of midnight that the Prince of Peace came to dwell among the sons of men.

The masters of the spiritual life have much to teach us concerning those movements of the body, the emotions, the intellect, and the will by which, as it were in concentric circles, all powers of the soul are bent on the divine object

¹ *Gottes Werkleute*, p. 125. Verlag Deutsches Quickbornhaus. 1925.

of contemplation and thereby pacified. In our frenzied age, much has been already gained when the individual can not only sit still for a length of time, but do so without unnecessary contraction of the muscles. Complete physical relaxation, while maintaining a position such as kneeling, standing or sitting upright, has a beneficial effect on the action of the soul, which finds such a pliable *corporis materia* at its disposal. Vocal prayer and the early stages of meditation will be pursued with a certain ease, not clutched at with the frantic gestures of forced desire. The inner freedom and simplicity of a child is the model in this as in other respects. Gradually the repose sought from without will penetrate more and more deeply, until it is joined by the peaceful motion from within, and the whole soul is stilled in the calm of wonder and adoration.

It is the laborious yet necessary task of our busy lives to preserve the tranquillity gained in prayer throughout the day. This is perhaps most easily achieved by continuous acts of submission to the divine will. For herein lies an invincible weapon against all that might jeopardise this peace of soul. Whenever the soul reaches out for God, she is within reach of peace. Now by the very fact of Divine Providence, we are assured that God can be found in every detail of the day. Any reminder of this will serve as a powerful safeguard to tranquillity. Nothing can happen to the Christian except by divine permission. There is a way to God and to peace from every situation, however complex and disturbing. Hence, what has been begun in prayer can be pursued throughout the day, the Godward motion of the soul being without let or hindrance. In submission to the divine will, we can find God as surely as in the prayer which expressly seeks him; and this is the profound meaning of those words, 'In his will lies our peace'.

God has willed it that we should seek salvation, not as isolated individuals, but as one body, as members of one another. Nor will our pursuit of peace be really fruitful, unless we have learnt, as far as is in our power, to keep the peace with our neighbour. This will involve numerous acts of charity, all that is comprised in the exhortation of the Apostle, 'bearing one another's burden'. It will mean setting

our own convenience aside, suspending our judgment, working at a reasonable compromise to prevent a clash of opposing forces. Above all it will demand that we look upon others as of equal value and dignity as ourselves—in short, that we consider them as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here again, in the manifold difficulties besetting the path of the genuine peacemaker, the consideration of divine Providence will be of immediate assistance. For the main cause of disunity among men is that they fail to regard one another as 'before God'. Our relation to God is so often a one-dimensional thing, symbolised by a straight line, leading from our soul, at one end, to God at the other. Even when we have realised our obligation to our neighbour, our charity is often enough limited to definite groups of people, our relatives and friends, the members of our nation, or even all Catholics throughout the world. However sorely we may fail in practice, we are at least theoretically prepared to receive these into our God-relationship. We pray for them, we endeavour to assist them, we do our best to preserve the bond of peace.

Yet the numbers of those who remain outside, on a different plane from that established by God, the soul, and our neighbour, remain a dishearteningly vast majority. They constitute a real cause of friction, and a constant menace to our peace. For by refusing to draw some of our fellow creatures into the unifying fellowship of charity, we give an opening to those mortal enemies of the soul, such as envy, greed, the spirit of competition, pride and hatred, which undermine the tranquillity so hardly won in prayer.

It is only when we begin to see existence as a sphere with God at its centre, its surface and the whole expanse enveloped by the same paternal love, watched over by the same divine Providence, it is only then that the greatest danger to our peace can be met. For recognising the divine will in every situation, we will take fresh courage to meet our fellow men with fraternal charity. Even if we fail in our attempts to keep the peace, such is the mystery of the brotherhood of man that our efforts are not lost, but that somewhere, maybe at the ends of the earth, a sinner will repent, and the bond of peace be forged anew.

Seeing the will of God in all those events, which may disturb our composure, is indeed an efficacious safeguard to tranquillity. Once we learn to give our *fiat* in answer to the 'Fear not, it is I' of every trial, we shall most surely possess that peace which surpasseth all understanding.



'IN ME YOU HAVE PEACE'¹

ST THOMAS AQUINAS

These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence, I have overcome the world.—John 16, 33.

OUR LORD unfolds to his disciples the hidden depths of his teaching, and by these words shows how important and helpful it will be to them.

The value of his teaching lies in the peace that it brings to man. In this context, it is as if our Lord were saying: I know well that very soon you will all leave me; but I know that if you really understand my doctrine you will not harden your hearts in desertion. The reason for every thing I have spoken about in my sermon, all that I have taught you throughout the Gospel, is this: that if you do return to me, *In me you may have peace*. For the whole purpose of the Gospel is that we should find peace in Christ alone. 'Much peace have they that love thy law' (Ps. 118, 165). Now true peace of heart is wholly opposed to the disturbance of mind caused by all the threatening evils around us. If sometimes we experience a grief or joy greater even than those evils, our restlessness naturally disappears. Thus men of the world, who are not united to God by charity, endure these trials, but without peace of soul. The saints on the other hand, who possess God in their hearts by charity, are immersed in the peace of Christ even though the world may cause them great suffering. 'Who hath placed peace in thy borders' (Ps. 147, 14).

¹ Translated from St Thomas's commentary on St John by T.