

The Pope and Peace

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, February 1954, 1, 7.

Summary: Explains what anarchism and pacifism mean against the backdrop of the modern state. Reaffirms the principles of subsidiarity, freedom and personal responsibility, and the membership of all in the body of Christ. (DDLW #237).

On New Year's day I began to read the Pope's Christmas message which was printed partly in the New York Times, and noticed that directly under his message, on page one, column one, the Soviet wishes the world a merry Christmas. Christmas, the broadcast said, always conveys the finest cherished hopes of plain people and their deep rooted faith in the possibility of a peaceful happy life, but no time in the past few years has the conversion of that possibility into reality been so close and so real as at the present time. The broadcast added that certain "governments of the west have been forced to pay heed to the popular demand that the spirit of negotiation prevails over decisions based on force."

More than half the Pope's message of 5,000 words was discussion of the materialism that results from technological progress and particularly from the "spirit which finds what is to be most highly prized in human life with the advantages that can be derived from the forces and elements of nature."

The Times went on to say that the Pope's message was one of the gloomiest of modern times. He is not satisfied with the progress towards peace and regards what peace we have as a very fragile affair. "Many people were astonished that the Pope did not speak of Catholics who suffer persecution behind the iron curtain except for a brief reference to them in the blessing which concluded the message." Perhaps the Holy Father thought the persecuted ones were in a better spiritual way than those who were living under the materialism of the west.

There were two columns of excerpts of the message and they were most provocative of thought. They were about work and leisure, the nature of man, the need for and the blessings of technological advance but also the futility in placing our hopes in these, and the dangers of men becoming spiritual pygmies, the need to do away with the inequalities in living standards and the fallacy of hoping to gain peace by raising the standard of living and increasing productivity.

Pope Pius said many of the things we have been saying over and over again in *The Catholic Worker* but the concluding paragraphs of the Times two columns,

dealing as it does with Utopias, authority and State, might seem to be especially for our meditation. As we are told by St. Peter to be ready to give reason for the faith that is in us, I must in all humility, as publisher of the Catholic Worker, try to comment on it and explain again what anarchism and pacifism means to me, and what I think it meant to Peter Maurin. Bob Ludlow and Ammon Hennacy can speak for themselves.

We have often enough been accused of taking quotes out of context, or taking what words appeal to us, or agree with us. Here are the Pope's words which seem not to agree with us.

"The Christian statesman does not serve the cause of national or international peace when he abandons the solid basis of objective experience and clear cut principles and transforms himself as it were, into a divinely inspired herald of a new social world, helping to confuse even more minds already uncertain. He is guilty of this fault who thinks he can experiment with the social order, and especially he who is not resolved to make the authority of the state and the observance of its laws prevail among all classes of society. It is perhaps necessary to demonstrate that weakness in authority more than any other weakness undermines the strength of a nation, and that the weakness of one nation brings with it the weakness of Europe and imperils the general peace."

Observation is made in the New York Times that is thought attention is being called to the unrest of France and her opposition to a united Europe. But my comment will be in reference to our own attitudes to the State and its laws.

Our Lord said, "He who will be the leader among you, let him be the servant," and on washing the feet of his disciples, "As I have done, so do ye also." "Christ became obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross." Be ye subject to every living thing, St. Paul says.

To be a follower of Jesus, one would certainly not seek after authority, or look for political office. It is thrust upon one by ability and recognition of that ability by others, as it was in the case of St. Peter, St. Ambrose, Pius XII and so on.

In Christian statesmen, where there are such, then it would seem necessary to cultivate humility, courage, holy indifference, holy poverty, in order to fulfill one's high office. And perhaps one would not stay in that office long. To lead by example rather than by law seems to have always been the Christian way. St. Francis, humblest, poorest of men, was pushed into a position of authority. In the present day, Don Luigi Sturzo, in the past and the present mayor of Florence, in the present from all account of him, was pushed into office.

The problem of authority and freedom is one of the greatest problems of the day. Russia certainly cannot be accused of lack of authoritarianism. Though they may be said to be "experimenting with the social order," they are certainly resolved to make the authority of the State and observance of the laws prevail among all classes of society. The Soviet union is no longer a classless society when they admit to a middle class. There is a good society, however, where classes are functional rather than acquisitive, as Tawney said.

How obey the laws of a state when they run counter to man's conscience? "Thou shalt not kill," Divine law states. "A new precept I give unto you that you love your brother as I have loved you." St. Peter disobeyed the law of men and stated that he had to obey God rather than man. Wars today involve total destruction, obliteration bombing, killing of the innocent, the stockpiling of atom and hydrogen bombs. When one is drafted for such war, when one registers for the draft for such a war, when one pays income tax, eighty per cent of which goes to support such war, or works where armaments are made, one is participating in this war. We are all involved in war these days. War means hatred and fear. Love casts out fear.

The social order which depends on profits, which does not consider the nature of man's needs, as to living space, food and work, is a bad social order, and we must work to make that kind of an order in which "it is easier for man to be good."

The modern States which built up a Hitler, which did not depopulate concentration camps and gas chambers by providing living space, giving asylum or by imposing economic sanctions, are monstrosities. When they are driven to force finally, they fail to accomplish that peace which they set out for. It is a greater blood bath than ever, with threat of more to come.

We need to look back to the city states of Italy (all of their good aspects, as Kropotkin did) and to the guilds; to our own early American principles, "he governs best who governs least;" we need to study such a teacher as Don Luigi Sturzo who held political office and founded a party which worked towards credit unions, cooperatives, labor unions, land for the people, as the beginning of an order in which men could be conscious of their dignity and responsibility; we need to consider the principle of subsidiarity when we talk of authority and freedom.

Everything needs to be broken down into smaller units to be workable and according to man's nature, whether it is States, cities, factories. A union, a cooperative, is no better than the men in it, than the locals or cells which make it up.

Man must be responsible, in other words, to exercise his freedom which is God's greatest gift to him. The greatest message which Peter Maurin had for us was this reminder of man's freedom. **That is why he never used the word pacifist or anarchist.** Privately he admitted to both positions and letters from his brother in France tell us that he always considered himself a pacifist.

Tom Sullivan and Jack English went to see Peter once in the hospital during the last years of his life when he was not able to think as he used to put it, and could not elaborate on what he said.

They asked him then, "Was he a pacifist?" He said, "No."

A year or so later, I asked him what he would do about conscription, and he answered then, "I would resist."

How to square these two answers, which we both are sure that we heard correctly. I have thought about it a good deal these last few years, and now again since reading Brendan O'Grady's thesis on Peter Maurin, where the text of Peter's brother's letters occur.

Going over Peter's essays again I have thought that greater even than Peter's message of poverty, manual labor and the works of mercy, was his message of man's freedom and personal responsibility. It was a timeless problem he was dealing with. It was a problem which a better social order would make easier to solve, and it is a problem which will always remain with us "until the day dawn and the shadows flee and the Desire of the everlasting hills shall come."

Peter did not want to be fragmented, if we can use that word, by being called a pacifist or an anarchist, both of which words would serve to set him apart from men, by their very extreme position.

First of all we are Catholics, children of our holy Father Pope Pius XII. And first of all we are Catholics, before we are Americans, Russians, Germans, Italians, French or Chinese. We are members of the body of Christ, or potential members. We are sons of God.

A great and terrible thought, setting us free, and also making us realize our responsibility.

Ammon Hennacy is an individual anarchist and a well ordered and peaceful man, subjecting himself in all things to others around him, whether it is his army, Captain boss, or his daughter's needs, or the duties of his Church which he has voluntarily chosen in a true metanoia.

In thinking of Peter and Ammon I am thinking of men meek and humble of heart, desiring no power over others, no position of authority, yet forced to speak out by the exigencies of the times, with authority. They are lovers of poverty, content with little, stripping themselves.

I remember Peter when we picketed the German consulate back in 1935 down at the Battery, picking up the leaflets we were handing out and which had been strewn around by bystanders who had not yet been taught by the radio and press that Hitler was an enemy to man. They thought we were communists.

Peter was obeying authority in the shape of a policeman who told us we were littering the street. Peter thought of authority and law in relation to the Thomistic doctrine of the common good which he was always talking about. He had a book on the subject which he was always trying to get us to read. Have we read half the books on his list?

I think of Ammon removing boulders and fallen trees from the roads as he walks along, not because he uses a car but to give evidence to his conviction of man's responsibility which goes with his freedom.

In the Soviet's Christmas message they speak of the plain people. On the other hand, the Pope, surveying the materialism of the faithful, is sorrowful and

warns us—"Above all, man needs a religious formation...a Christian concept of work...Sunday and its unique dignity as the day devoted to the worship of God...a mutual agreement to oppose the cause of division reigning among nations in the discrepancy of the standard of living and of productivity." He urges too "a continental union of peoples, different indeed, but geographically and historically bound together." Away with doubts, suspicions, fears.

"If anyone asks in advance for an absolute guarantee of success, the answer is that there is a risk, but a necessary one; a risk, but in keeping with present possibilities, a reasonable risk. The supreme incitement to action is the gravity of the moment."

So in 1954 we continue to work towards the brotherhood of man and the Fatherland of God.