JUSTICE, LOVE AND PEACE

By DONALD NUGENT

A PREFACE to 'Justice, Love and Peace', it seems to me, ought to acknowledge certain things. Goods so inclusive can be treated here only personally, though I hope not too idiosyncratically. Though these three goods would seem to constitute something like the substance of the 'externalities' of the faith, they are inseparable from a spirituality, and the author would approach the subject somewhat dialectically, weaving back and forth between the frontiers of spirituality and ethics, in a kind of synthesis of the two. Ultimately, they are one, spiritually — or they at least ought to be. They are certainly one in Christ, and the grand formula, 'Justice, Love and Peace', might be recognizable as a quotation from the preface of the Mass of Christ the King. It expresses the ancient ideals of the messianic kingdom of God.

Wherever we may be, in 1979, we would seem to be a long way from the realization of that kingdom. Vatican II would seem to be a stride in that direction; and very early on, *Gaudium et Spes* directed us towards 'scrutinizing the signs of the times'. To that end the author, who can advance no particular claims to *charismata*, would like to offer a few reflections and projections.

First, some of the better news. It would seem that the world wants to be more catholic. Values like holism, adumbrated largely from the secular sphere, are on the side of an enlarging catholicity, and they would seem to express a search for a depth-spirituality with a social or communal sense. Negatively, the 'revolution' of a particular counter-culture has been tried and found rather wanting and, along with its gains, has left its share of spiritual and psychic debris. 'Fad' spiritualities, built upon a cult of dubious personalities, would seem to be increasingly desperate: the Jonestown tragedy would seem to be a case in point. The sexual revolution of the 'sixties is increasingly transparently a 'conservative' revolution, or a counter-revolution. Its values are the values of the market-place. With the communist world moving from *mystique* to *politique*, and with groups

like Baader-Meinhoff moving from radicality to criminality, we are not so sure what the word revolution means any more. A spiritual and moral vacuum exists. Against this setting, someone like Thomas Merton, a monk with his rather compelling credentials in both areas, is emerging as one of the foremost influences upon western spirituality: some would say *the* foremost influence upon western spirituality.[1] Mother Teresa, who only *lives* a revolution, is everywhere acknowledged a saint in her own time. Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, lectures a group of some ten thousand, including ranking members of the hierarchy, on the lessons of Hiroshima. Meanwhile, there is great ferment in some evangelical circles, perhaps the best expression of which in the United States is *Sojourners*, a fine monthly dedicated to the compatibility of a 'conservative' theology and a radical social philosophy. I am not entirely satisfied that one can get a radical social witness out of any *other* theology. It may be that we need a new political, and perhaps theological, vocabulary. Guenther Lewy advances the theory that western religion was apt to be on the side of revolution until, loosely, the age of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, when it inclined to succumb to the slogans of 'crown and altar'.[2] My sense is that, in principle, there is a direct, not inverse, relationship between religion and revolution.

There is also bad news in 'the signs of the times'. In 1979, we are obviously inching closer to 1984, maybe the mythical *Nineteen eighty-four*. For this, there is no fixed scenario. It could be scientific (technically, 'scientistic'): Bernard Häring writes of the Skinnerian psychology as the new secular version of the Grand Inquisitor.[3] *Nineteen eighty-four* need be no more than that time and place where scientific reductionism has replaced the absolute value of life. We should by no means judge the fascism of the future by that of the past. Its partisans, apparently decent people all, may be marked less by black shirts than by white jackets. *Nineteen eighty-four* could be a single catastrophe, like nuclear catastrophe; while Christians have largely acquiesced in the irrationality of the arms race. It need not necessarily mean, therefore, the reign of the commissars: that is, of an externally imposed authority. 'Big Brother' may be within: in the technological society, the affluent society, the permissive

[1] E.g., Walter H. Capps, *Hope against Hope: Moltmann to Merton in One Theological Decade* (Philadelphia, 1976).

[2] Cf *Religion and Revolution* (Oxford, 1974).

[3] Cf *Ethics of Manipulation* (New York, 1974).

society. He may be the invisible but ubiquitous manipulator of the depressionless, painless and guiltless utopia that threatens to envelop us. This is to suggest a certain *caveat*: perhaps understandably, after so long a cloistering, some may be naïvely and indiscriminately embracing the modern world at a time when the most conscientious forces are rejecting much of it in favour of older traditions, organicism and mysticism. To be sure, an unreflective and uncritical bohemianism is no corrective to an unreflective and uncritical bourgeois mentality and, for those who have known it, the magisterial authority of the gentle groves of academe is not really gentler than that of the hierarchical Church. There is a need for a more measured synthesis of 'the monastery' and 'the world'; for my sense is that the world is going to be either a monastery — that is, a community — or a cemetery. We have lost too much of our tension with 'the world'. There may be such a thing as a spiritual application of the old maxim, *si vis pacem, pare bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for making war) — but spiritual war.

This can occasion a broad excursus on pertinent spiritual fundamentals, including the second and third terms of our title, 'Love and Peace'. After the sexual revolution of the 'sixties, it is not clear if we know what the word love means any more: and, after some of the pop psychologies of the 'seventies, the same might be said of peace. Peace is not necessarily what it appears to be. If sometimes less, it can also be more than what meets the eye: that is, it can be considered co-extensive with the Good News; Paul went so far as to speak of the 'gospel of peace'.[4] This kind of peace is inclusive, breaking down our artificial categories and unveiling the hidden connectedness of things. When it speaks of peace, for example, it is also speaking of love; for it speaks from a centre where all the supernal goods flow into one — or, more elementally, that primordial place where they have not yet been differentiated. It sees accordingly that it is dualistic as well as delusory to separate morality into the 'public' or 'life' issues on the one hand, and the merely 'private', that is, sexual issues on the other. Abortion, for example, is an issue where the two are inseparable. One cannot have permissive sexuality without permissive abortion: the one will catch up with the other eventually. James notes: 'It was the same person who said, you must not commit adultery, and you must not kill';[5] and, happily, *Gaudium*

[4] Eph 6, 15; cf Isai 52, 7.
[5] Jas 2, 11.

et Spes (27), which many of us have not yet caught up with, condemns 'murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia . . . whatever insults human dignity, such as sub-human living conditions', in the same sentence. Moreover, there is such a thing as violence in slow motion, like the violence of a malignancy, invisibly consuming from within. It can be argued, for example, that the violent climax to a film like *Looking for Mr Goodbar* was really anti-climactic. The kind of peace we are describing has broken with surface value, then, and it takes us into the mystical 'dark night' and re-trains us to see with the divine vision. Its apparent 'ignorance', as in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, is really wisdom; and if it no longer sees any difference between spirituality and morals, it is ideally suited as a perspective for a critique of a social order that does, either cynically or simplistically.

The unifying embrace of the mystical is best revealed in the peace of Christ. A reconciliation of apparently divergent texts such as that of 'taking the sword' and 'not peace, but a sword' is ultimately quite literally mystical. The second sword is, I believe it safe to say, the *gladius spiritualis*. This is the spiritual sword that Simeon, in the conclusion of his great *Nunc dimittis*, foresees as piercing the soul of the mother of Christ.[6] And this is essentially the same sword that Bernini, in what may be his most famous sculpture, represented as penetrating the heart of St Teresa. St Teresa, whose theology is so extraordinary, that is, mystical or experiential, has expressed better than almost anyone how pure or mystical love is likely to be a mysterious blend of pleasure and pain. Peace is compatible with pain, just as, conversely, war is compatible with pleasure. Indeed, how could we account for so much war were the latter not true?

The peace of Christians, not Christ, is the problem, and we do not have a history of peace. This is a privilege we can increasingly ill afford. Georges Bernanos, among the most caustic of contemporary saints, has written of how, centuries ago, those who killed people looked like killers. Mercenaries, expert at rapine or rape, were recruited from the underside of society, and they looked their cut-throat parts. Now, men who are essentially engineers, indistinguishable from anyone else, can press a button from thirty thousand feet and wipe out a city: their only fear that of 'being late for dinner'. This is recognizable as more than a random thought from a fiction about a country priest. It has recently been brought out how the

[6] Cf Lk 2, 35.

crew that dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima deliberated as to whether or not they should delay their return from target in order to watch the mushroom cloud go up. They finally determined against it, lest they miss the pinochle game back at the barracks. These were not evil men; but this, too, may be a species of the banality of evil. What is happening to us?

We do not have a history of peace because we do not have a theology of peace. Christ may have said 'My peace I leave you', but most of us have been left with pietism. Theology has become socialized. Theology is always subject to the process of socialization, but in an age of mass society it is socialized massively. Evangelization can become showmanship; the sacraments, syrupy consolation; the *charismata*, 'signs and wonders'; zeal, enthusiasm. People live more with effects than causes, pastoral theology undermines prophetic witness, security of self replaces the Kingdom of God, and an insidious spiritual hedonism displaces the heroic. The more popular and marketable mysticisms become techniques for handling stress (and trafficked in ways that would make a Tetzel blush), love an obsession with orgasm, the peace of Christ a sometimes awkward or officious ritual (at least it is a ritual). Peace is not really a very popular subject — unless it is *my* peace, of course. Socialization and individualism are complementary rather than contradictory. Society is simply reducing religion to its own egotistical terms. Religion is conformed to the world. Against this setting, the harsher ethical imperatives are apt to be labelled 'humanist' or 'socialist', and christian morals held suspect. People will chant 'God wills it' for a crusade, but not for peace. Are we evangelizing society or socializing the Evangel? *Historically* observed, religion is apt to be either pure or popular, and the author's part is not that of aristocratic disdain but evangelical imperative. Moreover, this general disposition, we might add, is not just a popular one. Everyone who has read the great climactic chapter of Georges Bernanos, *Under the Sun of Satan*, will never forget the figure of the *Philosophe* and what proved to be his superficial, delusory peace.

The antidote to socialization is a return to the source. Whatever peace is, it is God's will, and the will of God is best revealed in the Son of God. It is the degree of abandonment to the will of God that distinguishes the great mystics; and for the great christian mystics 'the way' has been Christ's way, and that has generally been the way of the Cross. St John of the Cross can provide an appropriate premise: we are to measure ourselves by God, not God by ourselves.

Whether root or not, we might begin, as intimated, by suggesting that the rule of religion is not *our* salvation but God's will. God's will *includes* our salvation, but our salvation does not exhaust that will. In other words, salvationism is too narrow a base for a theology of peace, since we are predisposed to understand it as my salvation, and issue in an acquisitive, bourgeois christianity. The peace *of Christ* is not necessarily *our* peace.

Secondly, mystical theology is more concerned with perfection than it is with peace. Its perfection includes peace, and it should take but a moment's reflection to recognize that *my* 'peace' may not be very compatible with my perfection. As much the opposite. Perfectionism has been inordinately cloistered, but in principle it would proceed from the purification of the microcosm to that of the macrocosm, or a continuum. The problem is in the market-place's equation of 'peace' and 'tranquillity'. And this relates to a psychologizing of religion attendant to its socialization, to a superficially-conceived and short-sighted psychological or emotional well-being as the *summum bonum*. Tranquillity, as distinguished from peace, is external. It can be produced by a pill or, for at least ten minutes, by the gratification of some particular appetite. But this is the way 'the world gives peace'. Real peace runs deeper. It is not so much the absence of tension as the ability to live with tension.

Peace is the fruit of love, and mystical love is 'pure love'. Pure love is not self-seeking. Ironically, this kind of love can be incompatible with a conventional peace. Christianity is a religion of universal love and, as one universalizes one's loves, one is apt to feel more pain than peace. If the Mystical Body means anything, it means that peace is inseparable and indivisible, that in some sense none of us can enjoy peace unless all of us do. As over against the love of a child, which seems to be what Paul means,[7] peace is the fruit of a mature love, which can reduce to a love that is something done more than a love that is something felt. The profane love of the market-place is apt to equiparate love and feeling. But feeling, it would seem, is only naturally egocentric: its concern is *my* feeling. Mature love is active: one is 'loving' as he is indeed loving, not as he is being loved. Mystical literature, from the Shulamite woman's being 'sick with love',[8] speaks of 'the wound of love', and pure love is unlikely to be without pain. By its pain will you know a pure love, and by its passion for justice. Against this setting, we can finally

[7] Cf 1 Cor 13, 11. [8] Cant 2, 5.

focus upon justice, the first of our three virtues. Justice is not just a greek abstraction, but a biblical imperative. As Bernanos's priest puts it, justice is 'a flowering of charity'. But charity has had its way of *ending* at home, even if, with the Mystical Body, salvation is social as well as individual. Whether properly or not, there could hardly be a greater condemnation of modern Christianity than that such a very large proportion of the world views marxism as the last refuge of morality, of justice. For marxism, of course, economics is the integrative and decisive element of at least public morality. James comes close to saying this himself,[9] and it would be difficult to find a better candidate for patron of the *apertura a sinistra* that dawned in the earlier 'sixties. The most important creative theological statements in this area and, according to some, any area, since Vatican II, have been in the genre of the theology of liberation. While primarily a latin-american and third world school of theology (school is not the word, since it would substantially 'unschool' theology), its impact, especially since the Medellin conference, has been enormous: ecumenical and universal. With Pope John Paul at Puebla, it saturated the media, even if the media often expressed a poor understanding of it. A radically-open prophetic synthesis, it goes beyond orthodoxy to orthopraxis, intellectualization to conscientization, theology to life.

The objections to the theology of liberation are themselves serious, for it represents not just a superficial peace but a sword. The major objections can probably be reduced to three: first, that the theology of liberation is a 'political' theology; secondly, that it would reconcile the irreconcilable, the christian gospel and communist atheism; and, thirdly, that it accepts the marxist idea of the class struggle.

Let me offer an objection to these objections. First, it seems to me that none of them, or at least the first two, are in the tradition of the catholic genius. To dismiss the theology of liberation as political smacks of the denotative linguistic habits of a one-dimensional man that is foreign to the catholic genius, which is inclusive and connotative. In a few words, Christianity is many things, but it is a moral revolution, and it would seem unlikely that one can have a genuine moral revolution without having a political and social revolution. Put another way, the Church has always accorded the right of the spiritual extra-territorial to the cloister, but it has never been afraid of politics. Particular mis-applications do not void

[9] Cf Jas 4, 1-2.

a sound principle. If, as 'the Philosopher' said, 'Man is a political animal' — then a politicism *is* politics. A politicism assents, by silence (and sometimes by more than silence, by personal enrichment) to what is politically ascendant or politically descendant. An appropriate antidote to this objection might be a wider acquaintance with one of the greatest imaginative syntheses of mysticism and revolution of our age.[10]

The second objection to the theology of liberation is the incompatibility of reconciling Christianity and communism. Of course, the same has been said of Protestant and Catholic, not to mention the classics and Christianity. If I read them correctly, the theologians of liberation are less directly concerned with 'reconciliation' with marxism than they are with the appropriation of the marxist genius. *Gaudium et Spes* (21) not only repudiated atheism, but also called upon us 'to detect in the atheistic mind the hidden causes for the denial of God'. In this respect, my sense is that schism between the Church and socialism, that works its way out on the terrain of history, is an expression of the larger schism between faith and life. It might itself be an example of false consciousness. I refer to the anomaly whereby, for whatever reasons, historic Christianity (again, excepting the religious communities) forfeited a part of the original deposit of morals if not faith, which in turn was eventually appropriated by atheistic communism as a kind of refracted mirror's image of biblical moral urgency. The vacuum would be filled, even if by communism, as a kind of modern 'scourge of God'. What we do not freely accept from our own, we may be compelled to accept from others. Socialism probably expresses more tension with the world than contemporary religion. Of course, the danger is in the tendency of socialism to degenerate into a wanton machiavellianism, wherein the end justifies the means; but then, historic Christianity has been accused of that too, and not without reason. This can intimate that Christianity and communism may be seen as complementary, not just contradictory. Without an inviolable spiritual centre, the anchor of a true humanism, communism easily lapses into the Gulag; without the challenge of communism, Christianity easily lapses into an insensitive, other-wordly pietism, There should be a more interior dialectic between the two. The one should oppose the other for being a *bad* communism or a *bad* Christianity. The goodness in both, as in all things, would tend to unity of itself.

[10] Cf Thomas S. Klise, *The Last Western* (New York, 1974).

This explanation might well be rejected as premature, especially in the light of the third objection: the idea of the class struggle. My understanding is that this was the core of the objection of Pope John Paul II at Puebla earlier this year, and not without some cause. Class struggle would seem to violate the Mystical Body, now from the other end, even if our purism here may be a rather tardy and smack of some special pleading. It is little more than a truism to say that the institutional Church, through such things as perennial Constantinianism as well as its mysterious stock holdings, has been beholden to if not allied with the capitalist system. It, too, has been socialized — against socialism — in what may be the 'Babylonian Captivity' of our times. In this light, the freedom of the Church to exercise its prophetic function is problematic. If I am not mistaken, the theology of liberation is moving us from false consciousness to troubled consciousness, a healthy progression. In this transition it might be helpful to note that *Gaudium et Spes* (71) was itself able to endorse expropriation of property, and that Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (15), speaks of 'alienation', a key marxist category, in a way that Marx himself might have envied. And, had Marx lived to see liberation theology, one might suspect that he would himself be moving from his own false consciousness to his own more troubled consciousness.

Meanwhile, a function of socialism may be to drive Christianity back upon its own sources. That, it seems to me, is the import of liberation theology. Gustavo Gutierrez, in his essential work, seems at one point to worry out loud about the fear of 'a kind of Constantinianism of the Left'.[11] 'The world' may have more to fear from the monk than it does from the commissar.

The times are also compelling us to enlarge upon our idea of priesthood. For all that, the Eucharistic mystery is still our great centrality. It would tell us, I think, that there is a distinction between grace and nature, that the laws of grace are not the laws of physics, that we are to love the world — sacrifice for it — but not surrender to it, that we are called not just to proclaim Christ but to re-present him, broken as he was. 'Do this', he said, 'in memory of me.' I know no finer statement on 'Justice, Love and Peace'.

[11] *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, 1973).