

DOMINICANA

Vol. XXXV

DECEMBER, 1950

No. 4

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

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PAX ROMANA! PAX ROMANA! The peace of Rome had descended upon the Empire. The temple of Janus had been closed by Augustus, an event which had happened only twice before in the entire history of the Roman Empire.¹ Yet in reading the titles of the Emperor, one is somewhat startled to discover that Augustus was never called "Prince of Peace." Wonder at this neglect increases as the reader recalls that every noble deed of every Emperor was remembered by some title. Perhaps Augustus was denied the title because his was a strange peace, really not a peace at all. Throughout the territory of the Empire, the legions of Rome were garrisoned, ready to quell any revolt, prepared to meet any emergency that might arise from the subjected peoples. Spies of the Emperor were everywhere, and every popular gathering was watched and reported to the Master in Rome.

Perhaps there were other reasons, aside from the foreign policy of Rome, for the failure of the people to proclaim Augustus the "Prince of Peace." The cultural background of the Empire and her philosophical tendencies could not bring peace into the lives of the Roman citizens. The cults of the Romano-Hellenic civilization flourished in every section of the Empire. As the Roman conquest expanded over North Africa, engulfing Carthage, subjugating Egypt, and spreading its tentacles throughout Asia Minor, not only was the law of Augustus imposed upon the vanquished, but the worship of the Roman gods was decreed as well. In the temples of Greece, Syria, and wher-

¹ Cf. Ricciotti. *Life of Christ*. Bruce, Milwaukee, 1950. p. 219.

ever Rome ruled, worship was paid both to the gods of the conquered and to those of the conquerors. In Rome, too, the gods which were worshipped in the provinces found honor in the temple on the Capitoline. That cult paid to a god or gods which struck the fancy of the adorer was adopted. If many cults and gods could attract the attention and appeal to the emotions of a man, devotion was given to all. Thus it was common for a man to worship a variety of gods, offering sacrifices to them for contradictory reasons. Saint Paul has described the pagan worship in his Epistle to the Romans: "For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of fourfooted things, and of creeping things."² So far had syncretism advanced and religious knowledge declined, that the philosophers of paganism could give no better reason for religion than that the State commanded it.

If such was the bewilderment of the leaders, what must have been the confusion of the masses? Superstition was rampant, even to the extent of worshipping unknown gods, through fear of offending them. The rituals performed were but barren gestures, powerless to influence thought and moral conduct. For the pagans, the gods were no better than men. The very faults which were despised in human beings were honored in the gods, and violence and injustice were proclaimed as their daily office. Saint Paul could write of the heathens as: "being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness, full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity, whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy."³ They had little to help them to avoid these things. Certainly no assistance came from the philosophers and poets. Inspiration was not to be found in the example of the gods. Such a religion was weak and hesitant to answer questions of the existence and nature of God, and man's immortality; and thus there was no peace in the hearts of its adherents. The philosophers and the poets have been praised by men of every age, but, like Augustus, not one of them has ever been called, "Prince of Peace."

² *Rom.* 1:22, 23.

³ *Rom.* 1:29-31.

Such was the condition of the world into which Christ, the true Prince of Peace, was born. His birth had been foretold by the prophet Isaias, who had given Him that sacred title.⁴ Prince of Peace, for Christ alone could bring charity and justice into the affairs of the Roman Empire. Prince of Peace, for only He could establish the harmony of right order in the lives of the pagans. Prince of Peace, for Christ could answer the questions troubling a despairing mankind. Prince of Peace, for Christ could abolish superstition by means of the truth. Prince of Peace, for Christ could cleanse the temple of false gods and ridiculous cults, and establish therein the worship of the One, True God.

Almost two thousand years have elapsed since the birth of that Prince, and there is very little prospect of His peace as we again celebrate the anniversary of His birth. The fault lies, not with the Prince of Peace, but with His rebellious subjects. Christ has not been asked to present His solution, the *only* solution of world problems.

As soon as peace was declared after World War II, fear entered the heart of every person. The Great Powers left their troops in the conquered lands, naval units were put in moth-balls, not destroyed; and reserve sections of the armed forces were organized. All this was done in a spirit of preparedness for a Third World War. The emergency has come. The Korean incident may have been the reveille for every army in the world. The relations among all the nations are in a state of suspicion, and those who talk of peace and security with us, may soon declare a total war. What is this but an echo of the peace of Augustus?

The international front, especially Russian foreign policy, is not however, the only source of concern for us. Confusion concerning the basic questions of human living is universal in the secular colleges and universities. The intellectual life of the world is feeding on the slow poison of agnosticism, skepticism, and atheism in religion; materialism in philosophy; laxity in morals. The blind professors and instructors in these institutions cannot lead their students to truth or goodness, and the doubts, denials, and immorality of the pagans are revived.

Among too many people, the very existence of God is questioned, when it is not openly denied. Knowledge of a personal God and Divine Providence are considered fables by modern non-

⁴ *Isaias*, 9:6.

Catholic philosophers. The spiritual nature and immortality of man's soul are discussed in liberal circles as one would speak about a curious antique. Modern man is even more confused and restless than the ancient pagan.

Immoral leagues have been founded and boast of worldwide organization. Societies fostering birth control and euthanasia proudly publish the lists of their growing membership. Individuals are happy to join licentious associations which would destroy the law of God. Their reward can be only that of the pagans, "who changed the truth of God into a lie; and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. . . . Who having known the mercy of God, did not understand that they who do such things are worthy of death; and not only they that do them, but they also that consent to them that do them."⁵ Family life is being ruined; juvenile delinquency grows more widespread each year; divorce is rampant; peace has disappeared from the lives of men. This is the world into which Christ comes in 1950. Just as the pagans of earlier times had no Prince of Peace, so among the modern pagans, none of the present statesmen, poets, dramatists, novelists, or philosophers is given that title. History indeed repeats itself.

Saint Thomas says that if Christ had been born immediately after Adam's sin, mankind would not have realized its need for a Savior.⁶ Centuries had to pass also for man to realize that without Christ world peace was but a dream. Thousands of years had to elapse to impress upon the minds of men that peace in their personal lives, without Christ, is an impossibility. This truth is established by our brief consideration of pagan society as it existed before the birth of Christ.

Nineteen centuries have passed since Christ, the Prince of Peace, first came among men; yet little attention has been given to His advent. We in this century, more than the men of any other age, should realize the need of a Savior. In less than fifty years we have been the participants in two World Wars, and we face the prospects of a third. Certainly all nations, on this Christmas, need Christ, their Savior, their Prince of Peace. Fear of an atomic war, fear of Russia, fear of responsibilities, and fear of death have gripped the human heart. Modern man has carved

⁵ *Rom.* 1:25, 32.

⁶ *Summa Theol.* IIIa, q. 1, a. 5.

a graven image, the world and the flesh, and he is now afraid that his worship will ascend in the smoke of an atomic or hydrogen bomb.

When the Prince of Peace, Christ, was born, an angel said to the shepherds: "Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for today is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."⁷ Again these words are heard in every brilliantly lighted cathedral and in every mission hut; in the large city, and on the small atoll; in our own country, and in those foreign lands which we consider enemy territory; for the Church rightly proclaims Christ as the Prince of Peace for all men. In the Gospel for the first Mass on Christmas Day, the glad tidings of the Savior's birth are "for all the people."

When the angels left, the shepherds said: "Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass."⁸ We of the twentieth century would do well to go over to Bethlehem with them, to see the Word of God, the Savior, the Prince of Peace, Who alone can save mankind.

⁷ *St. Luke*, 2:10.

⁸ *St. Luke*, 2:15.