

Editorial

'Christmas Peace' and 'Easter Joy', much like 'March Winds' and 'April Showers', have become phrases known and used by ordinary conversationalists and gifted song writers, yet much more than the weather cliches words like 'Peace of Christmas' take on a certain magical meaning. In fact, the season is here when carols proclaim peace on earth, when decorations symbolize a need to dress up a bare existence, when specially wrapped gifts declare a denial of indifference, when wishes for peace on greeting cards indicate a desire for the cessation of hostilities.

Peace may accompany the Christmas season, but only because it accompanies the Christian life. Christmas time joyfully proclaims the gift of the peace of God only because it liturgically commemorates and effects the gift of the God of peace made flesh. Even if the universal and eternal peace means little to us because of our parochial prejudices and temporal fixations, still peace is not a matter of evergreens and bells.

It seems to me that peace has never built a lasting city but has had to be content to pitch her tent for a short stay because she has never been embraced for what she totally is.

Peace has been called: *Tranquility of Order*. Yet from, and even before, the moment when the little child led the calf and lion who learned to dwell together, mankind has been content to consider peace as tranquility alone or as order alone.

Peace cannot be mere tranquility or concord or, for that matter, pacifism itself. Blissful states are anemic; they surrender their life with its inherent struggle for dynamic wholeness to the indolent forces of universal unconcern. Peace with the mask of tranquility, if not tempted to accept the mere absence of war as desirable, is content with a state of tolerant co-existence. Mere tranquility yawns upon dishonor, untruth, injustice and sleeps on.

On the other hand, peace cannot be pure order. Order alone brings about a maddening mechanical existence. The eager enthusiasm for adventure and discovery is replaced by a stagnant acceptance of a perpetual machine-life. Peace with the mask of order refuses to search; it is content with the daily quota of regulated

production. Mere order never listens to new ideas and clamoring demands, for the machines never cease their eternal noise.

The chariots driven out of Ephraim and the swords turned into ploughshares were not enough for the peace of Israel. Only through the coming of the Messiah were the good tidings of peace announced to the Jews, who were near, and the gentiles, who were afar off; only through his cross was the intervening wall of enclosure broken down. In his blood, man was reconciled to man, man was reconciled to God.

Yet, here we are, Christmas 1964, with walls smeared with blood and with hatred's heat heavy in the air. It's no surprise. Peace is no instant cure, just as Baptism is no quick relief. The paradox is: to achieve peace a person must go to war! He must declare war on opulent society, on the segregated cities, on the apathetic world and strain every nerve to build up peace upon justice and charity. The Christian is not a pacifist; he is a peacemaker. He is the warrior of Jesus who doesn't assume an attitude of silence, for his sword is the word of God. He *does* rock the boat to disrupt a lifeless system and work for a living harmony.

Hillel's exhortation, 'Love peace; pursue peace' harmonizing with Pius XII's prayer, 'May God arouse you from your lethargy, keep you free from all complicity with tyrants and warmongers, enlighten your consciences and strengthen your wills in the work of reconstruction' can still rally us today.

Let the war on poverty continue; let the Peace Corps expand its work; let the conciliar debates shake foundations; let every hunger-pang for justice be shaped by prayer so that the Prince of Peace may transform persons of pulsating hearts into witnesses of truth.

Do we have time to listen to the words of John the Great: 'Peace will be but an empty sounding word unless it is founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice in freedom.' John's successor Paul VI must also be heard: 'Regarding the great and universal question of world peace, we say at once that we shall feel it specially incumbent upon us not merely to devote a watchful and understanding interest, but also to entertain a more assiduous and efficacious concern.' It was a glorious and great day when Rome went to Jerusalem in 1964, when the eternal city embraced the city of peace, and Paul raised the cry, 'Shalom! Shalom!'