



Peace, Politics, and Theology

A Continuing Discussion on Pacem in Terris

The article on the Pacem in Terris Convocation featured in the preceding number of Dominicana has occasioned considerable discussion, in accord with the editors' hopes. From among the original Convocation participants whose comments were invited, two letters were received which seem to focus in a special way on the central problem of the interpretation of Pacem in Terris. With the authors' kind permission we are printing the pertinent sections of these letters below, followed by an additional contribution from a Dominican who has written previously in Dominicana and elsewhere on theological and historical subjects.

from R. Paul Ramsey

Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion, Princeton University

Thank you for sending me a copy of your Journal. I have read . . . with interest and admiration especially the article on the Pacem in Terris Convocation.

The latter was certainly a spirited and accurate estimation of the

Convocation in New York. If you want a critical comment, this would take us beyond the legitimate purposes of your article. It is simply that I do not quite understand why you Roman Catholics should appear quite so content with an entirely secular interpretation of the Encyclical, or should agree to the possibility of accepting its teachings on any such basis. See the comments you printed by Senator Pell and Professor Stuart Hughes on pages 304 and 308. I tried unsuccessfully at the Convocation to enforce what I regard to be a sounder interpretation. This is reported . . . in the Pocket-book on the Convocation edited by Edward Reed, in the "Round Table" section, pages 176-197.

from Jerome D. Frank, M.D.

Department of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Thank you for the copy of the Winter, 1965 issue of *Dominicana*. I found the follow-up on the Convocation very worthwhile. . . .

I am a little concerned by the editorial, which seems to imply that *pax terrena* should not be pursued as the supreme goal. This is like the switch from "Peace on Earth. Good will to men" to "Peace on earth to men of good will." Does this not leave a loophole justifying war against those who, by our definition, are not of good will? Of course, by their definition we are not. (All people think the war they fight is justified.)

I am not sure the church itself realizes that with the advent of nuclear weapons, weaponry for the first time in human history has become a far greater menace to humanity than famine or disease. Terrible as wars were, they were trivial causes of death compared to natural causes. The influenza epidemic of 1918 killed ten million persons in six months. Until then, no war had even come close to causing this much destruction.

Even in war a very small proportion of the deaths was caused by weaponry. Most were caused by the dislocation of society, leading to famine and plague. World War II is the first in which more combat troops died of wounds than disease. Suddenly mankind has developed weapons that can kill hundreds of millions in minutes and contaminate the earth's surface for generations by radioactivity. For the first time war can wipe out civilization, if not mankind.

To me the inescapable implication is that war has become the

supreme evil. The requirement is to find other ways of fighting for one's beliefs that are compatible with human survival and are effective against enemies who are willing to use violence. Perhaps the task is impossible, but the successful campaigns of Ghandi and Martin Luther King raise hopes that such methods of fighting may develop into truly effective ones. . . .

Thank you for your willingness to print my comments even though they differ from your own. This whole field certainly deserves the maximum amount of discussion, and I am glad to participate in it. . . .

In all honesty I should add that I may not understand the concept of *pax terrena*, so that to this extent my comments may be irrelevant. Hopefully, the published discussion will clarify this question.

from Aquinas Bruce Williams, O.P., Ph.D.

Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C.

The comments of Professor Ramsey and Dr. Frank are welcome because they force our attention to the crucial question which, I believe, was not squarely faced in the winter *Dominicana's* presentation. Professor Ramsey regrets that the feature article discussed Pope John's theological peace encyclical in purely secular terms, whereas Dr. Frank is disturbed at the editorial's discussion of the world peace effort in theological terms. Surely theology and secular politics are distinct, although, as *Pacem in Terris* assumes, the two are somehow connected. The danger is that when we can distinguish clearly between two things whose real connection is obscure, we can prefer one at the expense of the other. This is the danger which both contributors, from opposite viewpoints, have discerned. Professor Ramsey fears that a secular bias will undermine Pope John's basic religious message; Dr. Frank is fearful that a theological bias can undermine the possibilities for world peace.

Theological or Political

Let us begin with Professor Ramsey's viewpoint, and it will be helpful first to amplify the comments in his letter by quoting from his remarks at the Convocation to which he there refers us:

. . . I want to try to rescue the encyclical from some grave misinterpretations that have been made about it. It does not seem to me that the good Pope John talked at all about what it seems to me I have been hearing . . .

The peace of which the good Pope speaks is by no means just a matter of the mere obsolescence of the nation-state system due to the nuclear era. If I may, quite briefly: "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."¹

. . . When there is not agreement as to justice and freedom and truth, it seems to me most unfair to the Pontiff's words to suppose that we can proceed as if he had given us authority for believing that there could be a consolidation of world peace in a world in which agreement on those things is lacking. . . .²

Our notions of peace and justice and freedom and truth are precisely the things over which the world is divided. I do not see that the encyclical invites us to soar high over these crucial issues, but rather directs us to them.³

As Professor Ramsey notes in his letter, his effort to impress the Convocation with the importance of theological issues as distinct from political considerations was unsuccessful. This seems to have been inevitable, since the Convocation had been expressly organized to discuss Pope John's political proposals in abstraction from his theological presuppositions—a fact noted with dismay in some segments of the Catholic press. Moreover, since many participants did not share most of the Pope's religious principles and could not be aware of the full significance of his theological statements, it was likewise inevitable that in their political preoccupations they would reduce even the theology of the encyclical to political concepts. This illegitimate transposition was also observed by Professor Ramsey during the discussion:

. . . All the things . . . said [by another panelist] are profound, and profoundly true. The only trouble is that they are too profound to be discriminating political categories. They cannot be applied when one is undertaking political analysis. . . .⁴

It is hard to reply to a religious statement in political terms. I agree with you in ultimate dimensions. All men are one. But politically we act as Americans, as Frenchmen, as Congolese and South Vietnamese, etc. The categories one applies in politics simply are not dissolved by references to the ultimate unity of mankind. You are speaking, it seems to me, of the Kingdom of Heaven, in which I devoutly believe.⁵

I warmly appreciate Professor Ramsey's efforts at the Convocation, and in large measure I share his regrets at their outcome. Still, let us beware of minimizing what value there is in considering *Pacem in Terris* from a secular viewpoint. While a Christian cannot be

ultimately satisfied with an interpretation of the encyclical which remains at the secular level, he must often be willing to begin at this level for the sake of that communication with men of all persuasions which is indispensable for building world peace. Certainly, as Professor Ramsey insists, the "consolidation of world peace" must await general agreement on theological ultimates. But consolidation is the final goal, not the beginning step.

The special difficulty in dialogue at the secular level, which it is Professor Ramsey's great merit to have pointed out, is that those whose view is confined to the secular sphere will tend to reduce even strictly theological matters to secular categories. There are some issues—the basic ones at that—which are susceptible to discussion only on a theological plane, and it is especially the business of theologians to point this out. If Dr. Frank's letter is any indication, there are not lacking those who will give the theologians their due hearing.

Loophole for War?

Let us now address ourselves to Dr. Frank's challenge, which is not irrelevant but quite legitimate. Theologians as well as statesmen can be imperialistic about their sphere of concern. By ignoring the distinct sphere in which strictly political considerations must be applied, the theologian can use his own principles to draw disastrous political conclusions. The editorial in last winter's *Dominicana* does not appear to me to have done this, since it was largely confined to general Christian themes; its real purpose, I suspect, was to supply a theological dimension whose very absence from the feature article prompted Professor Ramsey's comments. But I do concede that its general character could well leave loopholes for careless or politically partisan theologians to read in the sort of inferences which worry Dr. Frank. Its choice of Augustinian terminology could quite understandably cause Dr. Frank some discomfort, but at least this seems to have succeeded in making the point which Professor Ramsey had failed to impress upon the Convocation: there are ultimate issues involved which can only be met at the theological level.

Dr. Frank has raised two questions, one concerning *pax terrena* and the other concerning "Peace on earth to men of good will." The second can be cleared up more easily and quickly, and its solution offers a good avenue of approach to the more complicated first ques-

tion. Actually, the translation of the scriptural verse (Luke 2:14) just given is more literally faithful to the genitive construction in the original Greek; but the real meaning of the phrase, according to currently respected exegesis, seems to approximate more closely what is suggested by the other rendering which Dr. Frank prefers. The "men of good will" are those whom God has made the objects of his own good will. The angelic greeting, in other words, is a promise of God's benevolence to his chosen ones. Certainly these men also bear "good will" toward God and toward one another, but this is a consequence of their having received the divine good will or favor. In one modern translation the verse actually reads: "Peace to the men he [God] favors." The peace is *on earth*, assuredly, but it does not originate there; it is sent as a gift from God.⁶

As distinct from this heaven-sent peace on earth, *pax terrena* refers to the natural peace among men which is the work of the political community—of the "earthly city" (*civitas terrena*) in Augustine's terms. Admittedly the Augustinian concepts carry overtones of pessimism concerning the ultimate fate of the earthly city. Augustine was concerned to vindicate the permanent endurance of Christianity as contrasted with the inevitable demise of all world civilization. Christ's kingdom, being "not of this world" (cf. John 18:36), will survive the end of the world—specifically, in Augustine's time, the Roman world then crumbling under the barbarians. To the pagan Romans who challenge Christians to "tell us what good Christ has brought, wherein they think human affairs happier because he came,"⁷ the saint replies: "What wonder that the kingdoms of the earth are perishing? . . . The kingdoms of the earth have their changes; he will come of whom it is said, 'and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:33)."⁸

Dr. Frank may be inclined to suspect that this doctrine itself furnishes a loophole for war in today's world: must not the Church be indifferent to the threat of nuclear annihilation if she insists that the world must end all the same? But surely this is not an attitude that Christians will want to entertain seriously. First of all, Christian tradition does not accept the view that the end of the world is equivalent to utter annihilation; just what the "end" will involve is the subject of various interpretations. In any case the world's end must come at the time and in the manner decreed by God. It is not something to be precipitated by man's own initiative.

In one sense, certainly, the Church has moved away from the Augustinian way of speaking. Pope John has preferred to comfort the world rather than rebuke it with reminders of the inescapable end. Yet, as the author of what has remained the classic treatise on the relation of Christianity and world history (*The City of God*), Augustine may still claim our attention even as we follow Pope John. Although, objectively speaking, Augustine's world faced nothing akin to the horror of nuclear annihilation, we need not suppose that his Roman contemporaries viewed their own grim prospect—the end of the world as they knew it—with any less dread than ours. Moreover, as we have only barely indicated, the Augustinian themes (as much as those stressed by Pope John) are quite biblical in their inspiration. While some Christians may be prepared to dismiss Augustine as out of date, they will necessarily bear a more cautious attitude in respect to Holy Scripture.

'Pax Terrena' Supreme?

In a yet more positive vein, let us recall (as the editorial noted) that Augustine himself recognized the necessity for earthly peace even while he preached its transience. "Yet one cannot say that the things this earthly city desires are not good, since it itself is, of its kind, better than all other human things. For it desires earthly peace for the sake of enjoying earthly goods, and it makes war in order to attain this peace . . ." ⁹ Augustine here seems to support Dr. Frank's conviction that peace must be man's supreme political objective. The reason he mentions war at all is to insist that war makes no sense at all except as a means, reluctantly taken, to secure an ulterior peace. Dr. Frank seems prepared at least to admit the possibility that war could have served such a function in Augustine's time; he does not admit that this could be true of any war nowadays, and I submit that an increasingly influential body of Christian thinking is in accord with him. Certainly, if the premise be accepted that any major war will carry the inevitability of a world holocaust—and this is a premise for statesmen and scientists, not theologians, to substantiate—then the total unacceptability of war would follow quite consistently with Augustinian teaching.

Augustine, then, might encourage today's Christians to work for *pax terrena* as not only the supremely desirable goal but the absolutely indispensable one *in the political sphere*, which I take it is the

sphere of Dr. Frank's concern. Yet he would still insist on distinguishing *pax terrena* from the *pacem in terris* which is from God, to remind us that ultimate religious values are involved as well as political ones. On this point Augustine and Pope John—and Professor Ramsey, let us remember—are at one. Indeed, Pope John's encyclical issues its last reminder about the primacy of religious considerations by referring expressly to Augustine himself:

In fact, there can be no peace between men unless there is peace within each one of them, unless, that is, each one builds up within himself the order wished by God. Hence St. Augustine asks: *Does your soul desire to overcome your lower inclinations? Let it be subject to Him Who is on high and it will conquer the lower self: there will be peace in you; true, secure and well-ordered peace. In what does that order consist? God commands the soul; the soul commands the body; and there is nothing more orderly than this.*¹⁰

NOTES

1. Reported in the Convocation proceedings, *Pacem in Terris: Peace on Earth*, ed. by Edward Reed (New York, Pocket Books, 1965), pp. 187-188.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
6. See the remarkably penetrating discussion of this point, and of the whole peace problem in its theological and political dimensions, in the *Washington Post* editorial for Christmas Day, 1965, "On the Will to Peace."
7. S. Aug., *Enarr. in Ps. CXXXVI*, 9.
8. *Sermons*, LV, 9.
9. *City of God*, XV, 4.
10. *Pacem in Terris* (NCWC Edition), n. 165, citing *Miscellanea Augustiniana . . . Sermones post Maurinos reperti*.