

For a Child is born to us.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

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1. *Revolution.*

"In the recognition of the royal prerogatives of Christ and in the return of individuals and of society to the law of His truth and of His love lies the only way to salvation."

(Encyclical of Pope Pius XII *Darkness Over The Earth*)



T WAS A LAZY SUMMER AFTERNOON. Paddy Rourke, an old friend, had popped in for a short visit. Rather than swelter indoors, we had braved the heat and headed for Murray's pond. You would have to know Paddy not to be surprised—once the long string of gossipy tid-bits had been exchanged, compared and digested—at his bold leap into the stormy subjects of world affairs in general and the rights of labor in particular. Paddy, you see, was a laborer and mighty proud of the fact. He delighted, too, in posing as an ordinary "plug." But such a pose was deceptive for it must be stated in his defense that he is one of the few of his class who are not afraid to think for themselves within their own limitations. Now how is Paddy and his pose and his thinking linked in any way with revolution? Perhaps Paddy's own passionate conclusion to our heated debate along the way and delivered so dramatically as we neared Murray's pond will be justification enough for introducing Paddy to the reader. "Brother," thundered Paddy, "call this whole mess what you want: call it the war against tyranny, or the war to save the brotherhood of men, or the march of the peace-loving United Nations against Hitlerism and Fascism (still the only bad isms you'll note), but I say the masses are on the move. It may be only the beginning—granted. But if I were to plan things I couldn't think of a better way to set off a rip-snorting revolution the like of which the world has never seen or which the world could ever forget. Take it or leave it; this is revolution. World War II is a world revolution."

Now we may not feel warranted in waving our finger at a warring world and crying out "World Revolution." Yet, there might be more truth than poetry to Paddy the "plug's" unromantic diatribe. We do know this much: revolution, physical or moral, thrives on force. And force, brute force is the arch enemy of order and harmony. And without order, peace becomes just another word to lisp. As we look out from the safety of the home front on the brutal scenes of modern war, we know, too, that tremendous forces have been unleashed, forces far greater, more terrifying than any Gestapo or Nazi torture chamber. We are beginning now to suspect that it is these forces which are more devastating than our guns or bombs or planes or tanks, because these forces are the causes of all the guns and bombs and planes and tanks. We are beginning to fear that perhaps this horrible world catastrophe is not the work of one man nor of one group of men, that Herr Hitler is not the sole cause of World War II. We have long ago abandoned the hope that with the Fuehrer's death—and only his death—the blessed, longed-for shades of world peace would cover us as gently as a summer shower. We have begun to face the hard, and often bitter, facts; we confess these truths to all who will give us ear.

But how many of us have made the problem of peace a personal problem, a problem as intimate and as momentous as the family budget? During the happy—and happy only because it is holy—Christmas season of 1944, will your neighbor next door, or the grocer down the block, stop to figure that he has helped to set-off a world revolution? Yet, each one of them has contributed his share: because the frightful forces of evil behind World War II had their beginnings in human hearts and their hearts, like ours, were among them. They will surely take time out to express their longing for peace. They may, like others, take time out to fall on their knees and pray for peace. But will all, or any of us, take time out to look back at our daily lives before the war? Will all or any of us try to find how and what has been our contribution to those frightful forces of evil that now harass our world? The merest backward glance will show us that we have shut out from our daily lives the peaceful bounties of a life of virtue. We have preferred instead the discordant licenses of the selfish life. We have revolted, in short, from the peaceful life of the spirit and subjected ourselves to the passionate life of a god called mammon. World War II may not warrant the epithet "revolution." But, at the very least, World War II bears all the signs of revolutionary effects, of a revolution already accomplished not by one or two individuals here or there but by the masses. Man has risen up

against the God Who created him and Who "made him after His own image," and Who "clothed him with strength according to Himself."

Long before the march of the German hordes, long before Pearl Harbor, most of us had unfurled our revolutionary ensign which read: "I will not serve!" There was no time for self-discipline. The exercise of the Christian "forces" of righteousness and justice under the dynamic leadership of charity in our life at the factory, at home, at the card table, or at the ball park was puerile. It got you no place. The gospel message of "take care of yourself first, last and always and in whatever way you can" brought us homes and the comforts of radios, refrigerators, automobiles, and cocktail bars. The other Gospel message—rather command—"to love God and love neighbor" could only make us feel the weight of our halo and the inconvenience of our wings.

We busied ourselves too with the erection of a new super-society. We gave that society the impressive name of "materialistic"—just another name for pagan or godless. But our way of living in that society we twisted into a paradox. On the one hand, we adopted the moral code of Browser the pup and his friends. Yet, on the other, we have noisily demanded the rights and respect reserved solely for those who live according to His image. We have shouted for "liberty" and "freedom," "free rights for free men." We have cried out for "tolerance" and "understanding." We have pleaded tearfully for "peace," peace for all men. We are human beings; these are our "rights." Somehow or other we continue, even now, to ignore the basis of these rights. We forget, or pretend never to have heard, what One, called the Prince of Peace, had said when He was in our midst: "These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have distress. But have confidence. I have overcome the world."

If peace is to be found in Him, then it seems permissible to conclude that without Him there can be no peace. Further, by revolting against Him we not only betray our name but lose all claim to that rich inheritance of human rights. We have no right then to be provoked to wrath when vicious brutes—more evil only in degree than we—rise up in other lands abroad to torture, murder, treat as dung their victims, fellow mortals like themselves. The tyrants of the world are at least consistent; the story of their lives contains no paradoxes. They give no mercy, justice, love; they ask for none. They admit their godlessness; they live godlessly. And yet they thrive on the very forces of evil they find in the souls of their sub-

jects. They depend for their existence on those forces which all of us have cultivated so carefully in our hearts, those forces that are the causes of guns and bombs and planes and tanks. Those same forces, too, are the cause of our revolt from Him without Whom there can be no peace. And as long as these same forces of evil remain secure within our souls our rights to worldly peace must be denied.

Yet if we would live we must have peace. Without it, why live; why live to fight and die for words and unworthy fellow men? In our puny human way, we have sought to secure world peace. Even now we talk, we plan on paper and even in our hearts, for the machinery of international organizations and international police forces that will help to assure peace for all men. Constantly, we have been reminded that this is the people's war; it should, therefore, be the people's peace. But no one seems to do anything about the people—not even the people themselves. At first glance, there seems to be very little that can be done. In the end, it will be—it must be—the skilled and learned in politics who will draft the written peace and supervise the enforced peace. What can the people, the masses do when there are so many experts?

The people—all of us—can do one thing without harm to anyone: we can listen sharply to the voice of history which tells us that a paper peace is no peace. With a little effort, we might re-read the words of our Holy Father: "In the recognition of the royal prerogatives of Christ and in the return of individuals and of society to the law of His truth and of His love lies the only way to salvation." With prayerful thoughtfulness, we might possibly conclude that: "Man and Christ face one another as question and answer, as desire and fulfilment." With our customary frankness, we might even confess to ourselves the wondrous truth that: "Only he who sees in Christ the answer to his question and the fulfilment of his desires is redeemed." Finally, with Christian zeal we will have the courage to proclaim to all the world that: "There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved, save the name of Jesus." Having obtained peace for ourselves and therefore, for others, by appealing directly to the Prince of Peace, we, the people, will then be prepared to preserve the peace. And this we can do by uniting "all our forces in one solid, compact line against the battalions of evil, enemies of God no less than of the human race." But to carry out this Christian program for peace demands a Counter-Revolution, a return to God from our revolt which has carried us away from Him.

2. Counter-Revolution.

"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad before the face of the Lord, because he cometh." Psalm 95

(Offertory Prayer—First Mass of Christmas)

Fellow revolutionists, Christmas Day 1944 is P-Day—Peace Day! It must be a revolutionary day: the Christian Counter-Revolution must then begin. It must be a rising not of a few scattered or pious individuals but of the masses—of everybody's neighbor and everybody's grocer everywhere—of all who sincerely long for lasting peace. The place of assembly is a dilapidated stable, an ancient hill-cave outside "the city of David which is called Bethlehem." The only armament necessary is the same that effected our successful first revolt—our hearts. But the password this time is a joyful message; it is "the good tidings of great joy" announced long ago by a heavenly angel to men, fearful like ourselves, poor shepherds of the hills. Mark well the words: "This day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." All you who have shouted for "liberty" and "freedom," "free rights for free men"; all you who have cried out for "tolerance" and "understanding"; all you who have pleaded so tearfully for "peace," peace for all men, behold an "infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger" invites you to His presence. Behold, too, that He is the same One Who has told us to have confidence for in Him we shall have peace.

Fellow Counter-revolutionists, it is that same Child Who can and will restore to us the rich inheritance of our human rights. There is only one condition which all of us can fulfill: we can place in His loving hands the same armament that we have used so long against Him. We can bring Him our hearts, humbled and chastened by the distresses of the world and, contritely, we can beg Him to heal these bruised hearts with His mercy. Is that too much to ask? Is the sacrifice too great even for us who, for so long, have been sacrificing time and industry, money and life itself for an elusive ideal called world peace? A humble and contrite heart may require too great a sacrifice if we intend merely to stand at the stable door and wave a friendly hand or maybe utter a few prayerful words—and then turn away. That would be asking too much. But those who enter the stable and remain in the presence of the Christ Child will find an answer to all their questions, the fulfilment of all their desires. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: to them that

dwelt in the region of the shadow of death light is risen." For those counter-revolutionists who refuse to walk any longer in the darkness of their own selfishness, the Divine Infant will become a light, a light that will intensify the closer the approach becomes. Without that Light, the shadow of death must become large and threatening. With that Light, every day must become a Peace day. To have that Light, we must give our hearts and remain with Him. Remaining with Him, we will enjoy all the rights of "free men" because we will be free to lay claim to those rights befitting sons of God.

If, through the Infinite Mercy of the Divine Child, we are able to remain with Him, we will find that our vision will become sharpened. And if we look closely, we must see through the chinks of the stable walls the gleaming figure of a Cross suspended overhead. For those of us who wage successfully the counter-revolution, this should come as no surprise. It is so easy to embrace Jesus Christ, the Infant; it is so very difficult to embrace the Crucified Christ. We can wax enthusiastic over the Divine Babe, helpless in His manger; our words of pity and compassion make us feel so courageous and strong. But we become timid and grow faint at the foot of Calvary; words fail us and so often we turn away in fear. Yet, that same Cross is the means of our salvation just as the helpless Infant is the Way. To embrace the Child in the stable is to embrace the God-Man on the Cross. To give our hearts to the Child is to give our all.

Fellow counter-revolutionists, we must be ready for that Cross. We must never permit ourselves to forget that the Child of Bethlehem is He Who was later to endure every human suffering. We must rather remember the words of St. John: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Gentiles and Jews, men and women, rulers, servants, even the masses refused to recognize Him. And, continues St. John, "He came unto his own and his own received him not." Not only did they refuse to receive Him but they heaped upon Him all the torment which their evil souls could devise. They blasphemed His Holy Name; they mocked and insulted Him; they wearied and saddened His soul and scourged and wounded His body. That same Infant Head we carress on Christmas morning is the same Head that will one day bear a Crown—a Crown of Thorns. The Infant hands and feet are the same which on Good Friday will be pierced with cruel nails. Spittle and blows of cruel men will one day fall upon the beautiful Face of the Innocent. And, finally, the forces of evil in human hearts will lash and tear at that Body, now so fragile and helpless.

Fellow counter-revolutionists, these are the prayerful sentiments

which careful musing over our new password will bring. "The good tidings of great joy" should lead us safely on the way to salvation. They will give us the courage to "unite all our forces in one solid, compact line against the battalions of evil" which seek to destroy both our hearts and the hearts of our fellows. The "good tidings" must lead us to our meeting place before the stable. And if our thirst for salvation and peace is sincere and truly Christ-like, we will not only enter to adore the Child but we will remain there with Him. For the forces of evil within our hearts we will substitute the Christ-like force of love. The Cross and Christ, the Child and the Crucified, these are the new means to lasting peace. They are the people's means to world peace. They are the means of the new Counter-Revolution which begins Christmas 1944.

"For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the PRINCE OF PEACE."