

Editorial

This year the angelic Christmas greeting, "Peace on earth," may be received by many earnest people with a good deal of wistfulness and maybe even some mingling of cynicism. Our involvement in war in Vietnam, our continuing civil rights crisis at home, the threat of further conflict in India and Pakistan, and in Africa—these conditions hardly testify to our possession of peace on earth. Is our present state not more appropriately reflected, perhaps, in Jeremiah's lament: "They said, Peace, Peace, when there was no peace"? (Jer. 8:11)

We cannot begin to answer this challenge until we have faced a deeper question: what is the peace we are looking for? As Pope Paul reminded us during his historic peace mission last October, we must not only love peace; we must "meditate on the real meaning of peace." We Christians know, His Holiness continued, that true peace "must be based on moral and religious principles which will make it sincere and stable"; its ultimate source can only be "the true concept of life, that is, the Christian concept." Only the peace that Jesus gives "can regulate every human relationship, because in the very first place it regulates the relationship with God." Here we can see the Pope echoing St. Augustine's classic description of peace as "the tranquillity of order"—which means, first of all, that men must be rightly ordered to God.

These basic facts should inspire us to a continuing self-examination: is the divine peace of Jesus Christ always the central motive in our concern for peaceful conditions on earth? Earthly conditions of tranquillity — Augustine's *pax terrena* — must be carefully distinguished from the *pacem in terris* announced by the angel that first Christmas night and dramatically reiterated by Pope John in our own time. *Pax terrena* can be pursued even by evil men, for evil purposes; but, as we were reminded by the angel twenty centuries ago and by Pope John less than three years ago, only "men of good will"—men whose will is ordered to God—can know Christ's *pacem in terris*.

This is not to suggest that *pax terrena* itself is evil; in fact, as Augustine himself points out when using the disparaging term, it is

a good which Christians must help to promote. But it can be sought for the wrong reasons, and under no circumstances may Christians pursue it as the supreme goal. We must, then, do all we can to bring about tranquillity in the world—among nations, among Christian communities, between the Church and the world she lives in. Some truly admirable efforts in these directions should be evident in the articles that follow. But the dominating motive in all these undertakings must be that “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7), and which can only come through “the restoration of all things in Christ.” (Eph. 1:10)

So long as this supernatural Christian peace is our central concern, we need not be discouraged by the current absence of earthly tranquillity. We can with continuing confidence rejoice in the angel's Christmas message: “Peace on earth!”

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