

## "PEACE; FEAR NOT"—II

SEBASTIAN CARLSON, O.P.

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IOGENES, the legend says, sought long and far for an honest man. We are told that he laid aside this mortal clay before his storied lantern. Ponce de Leon capped twenty years of adventure in the West Indies by a fruitless search for the fountain of youth in the Land of Bimini. In our own day—to take a more serious example from a serious quest—John L. Stoddard walked in Darkness for a lifetime to find Light. Perhaps Diogenes might have rested his weary limbs on the couch of Death more easily if someone had propped a French mirror in his path before the Last Lover beckoned. Destiny would not have withheld the will of his lips from the adventurer of the Spanish Main if he had sought Him Who could renew his youth like the eagle's. Nor would the ex-Agnostic and Rationalist have wandered so far from the Faith of his Fathers if, in the words of the song, he had known that his castles in Spain were out in his own back yard.

Man has a tendency to seek afield what he has at home. Stupid and unfortunate? Yes, but pitifully human. When Adam trudged from Paradise in the light of a flaming sword, the Common and the Found and the Plain remained behind with God's Angel in the Garden, but the Unique and the Occult and the Complex took up their lodging in his heart. Along with the Creator's curse to eat bread in the sweat of his brow was Ignorance's curse forever to seek afar what is near, to puzzle out dazedly what is of crystalline simplicity.

So today, the Children of God seek Peace through the forests of the night, though they have it in the chambers of their heart. Their heavenly spouse is Charity, of whom is born to them Peace. If they will but recognize the child as their own, they need no more wander the world with Diogenes' lantern, nor plough the main of Life for the Fountain of Youth, nor search endlessly and vainly the tranquillity of Light. The de-

sire of their lips they possess and have long possessed, hidden in the secret of their hearts.

For—as was shown at the conclusion of the previous paper—peace is inevitably an effect of charity. Every man has peace who is free from mortal sin.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it will be well to show the truth of this once more, inasmuch as it is the crucial point of the question.

Charity, we know, is more than kind talk and almsgiving; first and foremost it is love of God. It involves intimate association with Him really present in the soul by grace. It is a friendship unspeakably more intimate than the love-union of any two creatures on this earth. Far more than any human friendship then, it results in joy and happiness. Creator and creature are gladsome in each other's company.<sup>2</sup> Truly indeed, the creature may not *feel* the bliss of this lofty friendship, nor experience any sensible sweetness in it. It is something he has, but does not have to feel. If he does sense a joy in God's abiding presence within, that sensation is purely accidental, a mere overflow of the internal and spiritual happiness in his will.

A friendship of such a sublime nature is all-absorbing, influencing the human party to esteem all else in its light. It gives a man that which he was principally created to have,—God. It makes the creature value God above all other friends and all other goods, and regard his union with the Divine as a yardstick to measure his other desires and cravings.<sup>3</sup> His whole being tends toward God, and his every action is referred to Him; his will is united with God's Will.

Moreover, he recognizes that his fellow creatures are as dear to God as he himself is, and like himself capable of sharing the Divine Friendship. He sees that they crave and desire true happiness just as he does, and he finds himself hoping that they attain it. He helps them when he can, or at the very least when he must, so uniting his will to their wills.

Everything within this friend of God is as one! There is calm order among the forces of his own nature, between himself and his neighbor, between Himself and God. He is at peace with the whole universe and its Maker; the pearl of great price is in his hands.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 29, a. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 23, a. 1; and q. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 25, a. 1; q. 26, a. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 29, a. 3.

That he should not possess this pearl is impossible. Desire is love's arrow, winging its swift way through the air, knowing no rest until it rests in the heart of the beloved. But when it has buried itself deep in its targe, it is still at last. Then love's desire is satisfied; joy's turn is at hand; and joy implies rest in the possession of good, which is peace.<sup>5</sup>

If all the good people in the world could read this, they would smile, then sigh, and shake their head wearily. "No," they would say, "this is not true. It sounds beautiful and pleasant, and for a moment it warms the heart; but it will not stand against the strong gale of experience. Life is rough." Indeed, despite their falls and venial sins and imperfections, such people love God and love Him dearly. Yet they claim that they know no peace and do not really expect to have it till they have purged their souls snow white in the icy waters of tribulation,—till they are old and their blood is sluggish, and grace finally becomes stronger than nature. Peace is to be the golden treasure at long last unearthed by the spade of time—just before it begins to turn up the sod in God's acre.

In a sense, this is true; man in this life cannot swim in the river of peace promised by God to the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding this, he can quaff large cool draughts of its flood, and lave with it his burning brow and temples. But he pleads that he cannot *feel* the water caress his skin, that he cannot sense this peace of charity, so that it is worthless to him. Alas! Such a man has unwittingly pulled down from the wall of his heart the precious heirloom of his fathers, rolled it up carelessly, and borne it aloft to the attic of forgetfulness, there to collect dust and cobwebs beside the broken relics and faded letters of a day that is dead. He has thrown his best suit into a corner, and wonders why he must be clad in a rag. Though his pantry is full of choice, nourishing viands, he seeks avidly the crumbs that fall from the table of the world. His hearth is bright and warm and quiet, yet he is out in the night and in the storm, buffeted by the wind and chilled to the bone by the rain. Who will call him home? Who will dry his quivering limbs, clothe him in the soft warmth of his own garments, place his own meat before him, help him bring down the old masterpiece from the garret, and hang it high before his eyes? Who

<sup>5</sup> Gredt, Joseph, O.S.B., *Elementa Philosophiae* (6th ed., Fribourg, 1932), 508, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Isaias*, lxvi, 12.

will make him understand that because he has God in his heart, he has peace? If he could but see that it is something to have and possess, though not, perhaps, to feel! If he could but *realize that he is at peace*; that in his quest for a tranquil life he has been overlooking what is primary and essential, and craving for what is secondary and accidental! If he could not only know but be convinced that his castles in Spain are towering in his own back yard!

To enjoy this knowledge and realization and conviction, all that he wants is good will and an understanding of his own nature. In Christians, the former is presupposed. The latter is a knowledge that man's nature is complex, partly sensitive and partly rational. Man feels; he thinks and wills. His more important part is rational, his less important part sensitive. Therefore it is with his will and his reason that man is to be most concerned. Now neither of these powers can be felt; both of them are spiritual, both are independent for the most part of sense, which is their servant.

An active knowledge of such truths helps one to understand that there is nothing on this earth save mortal sin that need disturb peace of soul. If one wills to be at rest, neither insensible creation nor the opposition of one's fellows nor the lower appetites' fierce champing at the bit of reason can rouse the heart from its divine slumber. Conceive if you will a world thrice as noisy in its civilization as our own; triple and quadruple its bustle and speed and man-made thunder. Then admit with every sound philosopher that all this necessarily jars through the nerves and senses, reels drunkenly into the imagination, upturns the memory, and falls upstreperously against the intellect. Admit it, I say; what then? Is your peace gone, because your nerves are bad? It need not be; for peace is a thing of the will, and the will is free to allow or to forbid the senses to upset it.<sup>7</sup> She is queen on her throne, and alone can throw herself off. No subject of hers can prevail against her unless she gives him leave. Serenely she sits and reigns, though Rome tumble in flame and ruin at her feet.

Perhaps it is an enemy who is so successful in destroying inner serenity. Association with him is unavoidable; porcupine fashion, he bristles minutely and hourly with opposition. You are a Catholic, and try to live up to the principles of your religion; he is an atheist, and succeeds admirably in living down

<sup>7</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 10, esp. a. 3.

to the basest and most unprincipled practices of paganism. You do your utmost to get along with him; he hates you enthusiastically, taking every opportunity to let you know that the war is not over. Such a case would seem absolutely to rule out concord, since according to its very definition concord implies a union of wills and desires. He is seeking the pleasures and satisfactions of the world and the flesh while you are seeking the fulfilment of God's commands. But even here, peace is quite possible,—though it be peace not at all as the world gives. Though you cannot unite your will to his by wishing him success in obtaining sinful pleasures, still you can do so by wishing and praying that he obtain what is truly his happiness in this life and the next: God and grace, the life of God. This is truly to unite your will to his, and that is all that is essential to real concord.<sup>8</sup>

Or is it a close friend or near relative who is causing so much unpleased turmoil of heart? Two persons intimately bound together can be of extremely opposite characters or of extremely opposite viewpoints. They can clash like misfitting gears over a question of paring apples or striking the breast at the Agnus Dei. They can come to verbal swords' points over such indifferent and trivial matters as when to water the budding roses, and the monk is not unfrequently heard complaining against his fellow religious,

"When he finishes refection,  
 Knife and fork he never lays  
 Cross-wise, to my recollection,  
 As I do, in Jesus' praise.  
 I, the Trinity illustrate,  
 Drinking watered orange-pulp—  
 In three sips the Arian frustrate;  
 While he drains his at one gulp!"<sup>9</sup>

How needless all this disturbance over things as natural as the clashing of personalities and difference of opinion! A man's opinions spring from the reasoning of his intellect; peace demands not union of intellects, but union of wills.<sup>10</sup> If I can realize that you wear tin shoes and drink warm milk and refuse to kiss your children because you opine that this is the only way to live long in the land that God has given you, your logical

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 29, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>9</sup> Browning, Robert, *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 29, a. 3, ad 2.

idiosyncracies will in no way impede the calm of our friendship. It is up to myself to choose concord or conflict.

Finally, it may be from one's own self that the greatest impediments to peace seem to come. Temptations shake the soul from foundation to topmost peak, doubts and anxieties trouble and harass it, failure or ennui overwhelm it. Loneliness and pain in their mute but terrible way apparently corrode the very rock on which the soul stands. Yet, if peace is gone after any onslaught that proceeded from the inner self, it is not that the siege has been successful, but that the soul has shown ignorance and impotence by yielding impregnable towers to powerless pygmies.<sup>11</sup>

Christian men and women then who are puzzled because they enjoy no peace in this vale of tears, will do well to meditate profoundly on the supposed reply of Marie Antoinette to her minister when he told her of the starvation of her people. "They have no bread? Then let them eat cake." The lovers of God must fast forever from the false bread of quiet and content munched so greedily by the sinners of this world; yet if they will, they can banquet perennially in the plenteous pantries of the Prince of Peace.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II., q. 10.

## CONTEMPLATION

CAMILLUS LILLIE, O.P.

Intent upon the blue and vaulted wall  
That hems the wooded hill and verdant dale,  
The friar contemplates that star-pierced veil  
In silent wonderment. Thoughts rise and fall.  
Beyond, he sees the rugged mountain tall  
Push through, dividing clouds that trail  
The jagged, silvered spears that still prevail,  
And all but pierce the floor of Heaven's Hall.

But farther still his thoughts are wont to rise  
To things sublime; they, stripped of ragged dress,  
Transcend defining clouds of time and space.  
At last, he dwells with Saints in mystic guise;  
The world forgot, he finds it sweet to press  
His lips to Wisdom's Fount, and drink of grace.