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1951 Christmas Message of Pope Pius XII

The Heart of World Peace Lies in Spiritual Order



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Following is the English translation from the Vatican of the 1951 Christmas Eve discourse by His Holiness Pope Pius XII. It was broadcast in Italian by the Holy Father and followed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day by broadcasts in 25 other languages.

ONCE again, and for the thirteenth time, the grace of the Eternal High Priest permits Us, on the anniversary of the Nativity, to address the Catholic world from this venerable See.

Each year this lovely feast offers Us the occasion of expressing to all the faithful of the world Our paternal greeting with a profound sense of the mysterious bond of faith, hope and love which unites, at the Crib of the new-born Saviour, those redeemed by Christ.

In contrast with the collapse of so many earthly institutions and the failure of so many ephemeral programs, the spirit of God sustains, with the vigor of perpetually self-renewing youth, His spouse the Church, the fountainhead of abundant life, whose ever more vivid manifestations reveal her supernatural character; inexpressible comfort for each believer; insoluble riddle for the enemies of the Faith.

Though great is Our joy in finding Ourselves once again in this Christmas gathering united with the faithful of all continents—and also with those who are one with Us in faith in God—nevertheless the harsh reality of the hour casts upon this joyful anni-

versary the saddening shadow of clouds which still hover menacingly over the world.

The contribution of the Church to the cause of Peace.

We realize full well the intimate satisfaction and the unconditional docility with which Our devoted children always listen to the voice of the common Father; yet We are not unaware of the anxiety with which they once again await his words on the great subject which stirs and agitates the human heart: the subject of peace, and, in particular, his precise and concrete statement on the contribution of the Church to the cause of peace itself; that is to say what the contribution of the Church cannot be, what it can and should be, what it really is. May the Heavenly Father, Who at the birth of His Divine Son sent choirs of angels to sing of peace upon earth, deign to inspire Our words.

What then the contribution of the Church to the cause of peace cannot be. Supposed neutrality of the Church.

The present state of affairs demands from Us a frank and sincere judgment upon events. But these events have reached such a critical stage that We are forced to recognize that the world is split into two opposing camps and that all men are divided into two clearly separated groups which consequently are very loath to concede to anyone any sort of liberty to maintain a position of political neutrality.

Now those who wrongly consider the Church as a kind of earthly power, or a sort of world empire, are easily induced to demand also from her, as from others, the renunciation of her neutrality and a definite election in favor of one or the other side. However, there can be no question of the Church renounc-

ing her political neutrality, for the simple reason she cannot serve purely political interests.

Let it not be thought that this is a mere play on words or concepts. It suffices to have an elementary notion of the foundation upon which the Church as a society is based, in order to understand Our meaning without need of further explanations. The Divine Redeemer founded the Church in order to communicate to all men through her mediation His truth and His grace unto the end of time. The Church is His "Mystical Body." She belongs entirely to Christ, as Christ belongs to God. (I Cor. 3, 23).

Statesmen, and at times even churchmen, who want to make the Spouse of Christ their ally or the instrument of their political alliances, either national or international, would do injury to the very essence of the Church and would inflict damage on the life which is proper to her; in a word, they would bring her down to the same level on which conflicting temporal interests are locked in struggle. And this is and remains true, even where there is question of ends and interests legitimate in themselves.

Whoever, then, would wish to detach the Church from her supposed neutrality, or bring pressure to bear on her in the question of peace, or diminish her right freely to determine whether, when, or how she may wish to come to a decision in the various conflicts, such a one would not make the Church's cooperation in the work of peace easier. For any decision on the Church's part, even in political questions, can never be purely political, but must always be *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the light of the divine law, of its order, its values, its standards.

It is not rare to see purely temporal powers and institutions abandon their neutrality, and align them-

selves today in one camp, tomorrow perhaps in another. It is a game of alliances which can be explained by the constant shifting of temporal interests. But the Church keeps herself aloof from such unstable alliances. If she passes judgment, that does not mean that she is thereby abandoning a neutrality hitherto observed; for God is never neutral toward human events in the course of history, and so neither can His Church be. If she speaks and judges on the problems of the day, it is with the clear consciousness of anticipating, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the sentence which at the end of time Her Lord and Head, judge of the universe, will confirm and sanction.

Such is the proper and superhuman function of the Church regarding political questions. What, then, is the meaning of that empty phrase about a neutrality which the church should abandon?

The Church does not judge according to purely political norms.

Others, on the contrary, in the interests of peace, demand the neutrality of the Church. But neither have these a correct idea of the place of the Church in the midst of the world's great events.

She cannot come down from the lofty supernatural sphere where political neutrality has no meaning, in the sense in which this concept is applied to earthly powers. This does not exclude, but rather increases, her share in the toils and sufferings of her divided members in either camp, and intensifies her grief at the clash of opinions and desires in her own ranks.

The Church cannot consent to judge according to exclusively political norms; she cannot tie the interests of religion to particular policies of a purely earthly scope; she cannot run the risk of giving any reason for doubting about her religious character; she can-

not forget for an instant that her role of representative of God on earth does not permit her to remain indifferent, even for a single moment, between "good" and "evil" in human affairs. If that were asked of her, she would have to refuse, and the faithful on both sides would, in virtue of their supernatural faith and hope, have to understand and respect her stand.

And now, what contribution can and should the Church make to the cause of peace?

Since this contribution cannot be purely political, and since the normal place and essential mission of the Church is not in the area where nations—friendly, antagonistic, or neutral—continually meet, bringing with them their ideas and concrete political tendencies, what, then, should be her contribution to the peace? What is the legal right, what the peculiar nature of this contribution?

The legal right and the peacemaking mission of the Church.

The legal right? Behold: nowhere will you find it as clear and almost palpable as at the crib of Bethlehem. The Infant lying there is the Eternal Son of God made man, and his name is *princeps pacis*, Prince of Peace. Prince and founder of peace—such is the character of the Saviour and Redeemer of the whole human race. His sublime divine mission is to establish peace between each man and God, between men themselves and between peoples.

This mission, however, and this desire for peace are not born of timidity and weakness, which can meet evil and the wicked only with resignation and patience. Everything in the frailty of the Babe of Bethlehem is hidden majesty and contained force, which only love restrains, in order to make the hearts

of men capable of begetting and nurturing peace, and give them the strength to overcome and scatter all the forces that might compromise its life.

But the Divine Saviour is also the invisible head of the Church; and for that reason His mission of peace lives on and is active in the Church. Every year, with the renewed memory of Christ's birth, is renewed, in her deep consciousness of her title to contribute to the work of peace, a unique title which transcends every earthly thing and stems immediately from God, an essential element of her nature and of her religious power.

This year, once more, the Church kneels before the crib and receives her mission from the Divine Infant, the Prince of Peace. At His side she sees revealed true human nature, true in the fullest sense of the word, for it is the very human nature of God, her Creator, her Redeemer, her Restorer. With eyes tenderly fixed on the face of the infinitely lovable Prince of Peace, she listens to the heart beats which tell of a love embracing all mankind, and is inflamed with ardent zeal for this mission of her Lord and Chief, which is also her own, the mission of a peacemaker.

Consciousness of this mission has always been keen and effectively active in the Church, especially in her supreme leaders, the Roman Pontiffs. Justly then, Our great predecessor, Leo XIII, recalled to the world the peacemaking activity of the Popes when he said in 1899, on the eve of the first conference for peace: "And what inspired them (the Bishops of Rome) was the consciousness of a very lofty mission, the prompting of a spiritual fatherhood which makes men brothers and saves them." (Allocution to the College of Cardinals, April 11, 1899. Acta of Leo

XIII, Vol. XIX, Rome, 1900, p. 271). And today, as We have said, the same is true.

But when the Church and her Supreme Pastor pass from this sweet intimacy of the Babe of Bethlehem, so peaceful and heartwarming, into a world that is far from Christ, it is like stepping out into a gust of freezing air. That world talks nothing but peace; but it has no peace. It claims for itself all possible and impossible legal titles to establish peace, yet does not know or does not recognize the mission of peacemaker that comes directly from God, the mission of peace deriving from the religious authority of the Church.

Poor short-sighted men, whose little field of vision does not go beyond the possibilities of the present hour, beyond statistics of military and economic potential. How can they form the slightest idea of the worth and importance of religious authority for the solution of the peace problem? Superficial minds, unable to see in all their reality and fullness the value and the creative power of Christianity, how can they help being skeptical and disdainful of the power of the Church for peace? But others, and please God they are the majority, will see with more or less awareness that denying to the religious authority of the Church her competence in effective action for the peace has but made more desperate the tragic condition of the troubled modern world.

The defection of many from Christian belief had hastened this extreme and almost intolerable state of affairs. And one would say that God has answered this rejection of Christ by the plague of a permanent menace to peace and the frightening specter of war.

Just as the Church's right to work for peace is

unique, so is the worth of her contribution to the same cause.

Relations of the Church with states.

The Church is not a political, but a religious society. That, however, does not prevent her from assuming not merely external but internal and vital relations with states.

The Church has in fact been founded by Christ as a society that is visible, and, as such, meets states in the same territory, embraces in her solicitude the same people, and in many ways and under different aspects makes use of the same means and the same institutions.

And since the Church and the states live together, beside these external and what might be called natural relations, there are others, too, interior and vital relations, which have their principle and origin in the person of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church. For the Son of God by becoming man, and truly man, has by that very fact entered into a new relationship, a truly vital relationship, with human society, with human nature. And this is true whether we consider human nature a single unit implying equal personal dignity in all men, or human nature as found in multiple particular societies, especially those societies which, within the fundamental unity of human nature, are necessary to effect, or at least perfect, external order and sound organization.

Society of states

And here we have in mind primarily the family and the state, as well as the society of states, since the common good, the essential purpose of every state, cannot be attained or even imagined without this

intrinsic relation of the states to the human race as a whole. Under this aspect the indissoluble union of states is demanded by nature. It is a fact which is imposed upon them. And in consent to it, although sometimes hesitantly, they answer the voice of nature. This natural union they strive to embody in an external stable framework, an organization.

As human experience teaches them, the state and the society of states with its external organization, in spite of all their defects, are naturally, given the social nature of man, forms of union and order among men; they are necessary for human life; they contribute to its perfection. Their very concept involves the tranquility of order, that *tranquillitas ordinis* which St. Augustine gives as a definition of peace. These societies of their very essence exist for peace.

With them, as societies which exist for maintaining peace, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace—and with Him the Church in whom He continues to live—has entered into a new and intimate relationship which elevates and strengthens society. This is the basis for the singular contribution which the Church by her very nature makes to the cause of peace—that is, when her life and her action among men occupy the place that is their due.

And how will all this come about, except through the continuous, enlightening and strengthening action of the Grace of Christ on the minds and hearts of citizens and statesmen, so that in all human relationships they recognize and pursue the purposes of the Creator, that they strive to enlist the collaboration of individuals and nations for effecting these purposes, that within as well as among nations they practice social justice and charity?

If men, obeying the Divine Will, will use that sure

way of salvation, a perfect Christian order in the world, they will soon see the possibility of even a just war practically disappear. For there will be no reason for such a war, once the activity of the society of states, as a genuine organization for peace, is made secure.

What is the practical contribution the Church makes to peace? The Christian order, foundation and guarantee of peace

What We have just said shows clearly Our thought in this regard. At the crib of the Divine Prince of Peace, We have to say again today what We have said before: The world is indeed far removed from that order willed by God in Christ, the order which guarantees a genuine and lasting peace. Perhaps it will be said that in that case it was no use to trace out the bold outlines of this order, and to set in relief the fundamental contribution of the Church to the cause of peace. It will be objected that if We say that peace cannot be defended but by a return to the eternal values of the individual person and of mankind, We thus only encourage the cynicism of skeptics and deepen the discouragement of the friends of peace. Finally We will be reproached with admitting that these are right who see in an "armed peace" the definitive and last word on the subject, a solution that would deplete the economic forces and exhaust the nerves of the nations of the world.

Nevertheless, for a practical as well as a theoretical estimate of the contribution each one can make to the cause of peace, especially the Church, even in unfavorable circumstances and in spite of the skeptics and pessimists, We think it absolutely necessary to fix Our view on the Christian order, today lost sight of by so

many, in order to see the crux of the problem now before us.

In the first place, such a survey will convince any impartial observer that the heart of the problem of peace is now the spiritual order: the problem is a spiritual lack, a spiritual deficiency. Too rare in the world today is the deeply Christian sense of values; too few are the true and perfect Christians. In this way, men themselves set obstacles in the way of actualizing the order willed by God.

Everyone must be convinced of this spiritual element inherent in the danger of war. To awaken that conviction is in the first place the duty of the Church, and her primary contribution to the peace today.

Modern Arms

We too—and more than anyone else—deplore the monstrous cruelty of modern weapons. We deplore them and do not cease to pray that they may never be employed. But, on the other hand, is it not, perhaps, a kind of practical materialism and superficial sentimentality to make the existence and threat of these weapons the sole and principal consideration in the question of peace, while no attention is paid to the absence of that Christian order which is the true guarantee of peace?

Hence, among other reasons, the differences of opinion and also the inexactitudes concerning the licitness and illicitness of modern warfare; hence likewise the illusion of statesmen who count too much on the existence or disappearance of those weapons. The terror they inspire in the long run begins to lose its effect, just like any other cause of terror; or at least it would not suffice, if the occasion should arise, to prevent the outbreak of a war, especially in those

countries where the voice of the citizens has not sufficient influence in the decisions of their governments.

Disarmament

On the other hand, disarmament, or rather the simultaneous and reciprocal reduction of armaments, which we have always desired and begged for, is an unstable guarantee of lasting peace if it is not accompanied by the abolition of the weapons of hate, cupidity, and of overweening lust for prestige. In other words, whoever connects too closely the question of material weapons with that of peace, is guilty of neglecting the primary and spiritual element in every danger of war. He does not look beyond figures, and, besides, his calculations are necessarily limited to the moment in which the conflict threatens to break out. A friend of peace, he will always arrive too late to save it.

If the desire to prevent war is to be truly efficacious, above all a remedy must be sought for the spiritual anemia of nations, for the ignorance of individual responsibility before God and man, and for the want of a Christian order which alone is able to guarantee peace. To this goal the resources of the Church are now directed.

The Christian order is an order of liberty

But here the Church meets with a particular difficulty which is due to the state of present social conditions: her exhortation in favor of the Christian order, as the principal factor in securing peace, is at the same time an incentive to form a correct idea of true liberty. The ultimate reason is that the Christian order, since its purpose is peace, is essentially an order of liberty. It is the cooperative effort of free men and

peoples toward the progressive realization in all spheres of life of the ends which God has assigned to humanity. It is, however, a pathetic fact that today true liberty is not esteemed, or it is no longer possessed. In these circumstances, harmonious cooperation, as the proper condition of peace, is internally enervated and anemic, while externally it is exposed to perils of every moment.

How, for example, can those who in the economic or social life want to make everything depend upon society—even the direction and security of their own existence—or those who today look for their sole daily spiritual nourishment less and less from themselves—that is to say, from their personal convictions and knowledge—and more and more from the diet prepared in advance by the press, radio, movies and television; how can they conceive true liberty, how can they esteem and desire it, if it no longer has a place in their lives?

Why, they are no more than mere cogs in the various social organizations: they are no longer free men capable of assuming and accepting a responsible role in public affairs.

Therefore, if today they cry, "no more war" what trust can be put in them? It is not their voice, but the anonymous voice of the social group to which they happen to belong.

This is the sad state of affairs which also impedes the Church in her efforts to obtain peace and in her plans for the realization of true human liberty which, from the Christian viewpoint, is the indispensable element of the social order, considered as the organism of peace. In vain would she multiply her invitations to men devoid of that realization, and still more use-

lessly would she direct her pleas to a society which has been reduced to sheer automatism.

Such, however, is the widespread weakness of a world which loves emphatically to call itself "the free world." It deceives itself, or else it does not understand itself: its strength is not based upon true freedom. This is a new danger which threatens the peace, and which in the light of Christian social order We must deprecate. Whence originates among not a few highly placed persons in what is called "the free world" an aversion to the Church, that importunate preacher of something which others pretend to have, but have not, and which, by a strange inversion of ideas, they unjustly say that the Church has not: We mean respect and esteem for genuine freedom.

But the invitation of the Church meets even colder welcome from the opposite camp. Here, indeed, it is claimed, true freedom reigns because social life does not depend on that uncertain figment of the imagination, the autonomous individual, nor does it make public order as indifferent as possible to values that are absolute, but everything is strictly bound up with and directed toward the existence and development of a defined collectivity.

The results, however, of the system We are now speaking of have not been happy, nor has the activity of the Church become easier, for here the true concept of freedom and personal responsibility is defended still less. How could it be otherwise when God is not Sovereign, when social life and activity do not gravitate around Him, nor have their center in Him? Society is nothing but a gigantic machine whose order is only apparent, because there no longer exists the order of life, of the spirit, of freedom, of peace. Like

a machine, its activity is material, destructive of human dignity and freedom.

In such a society, the contribution of the Church to peace, and her counsels of genuine order in real freedom are given under very difficult circumstances. However, the alleged absolute social values are capable of inspiring enthusiasm in youth at a critical age, while not rarely the youth of the opposing side, prematurely disillusioned by bitter experience, have become weary, skeptical, incapable of taking any interest in public and social life.

The good offices of the Holy See for the peaceful solution of conflicts

Peace, as We have said, cannot be assured unless God reigns in the ordered universe He has established, in the duly organized society of nations, in which each nation effects peace internally among free men and their families, and externally with other nations, an order guaranteed by the Church according to her office and in her own field of action. Such has always been the aim of great and wise men even outside the Church, as also in modern times on the occasion of the Vatican Council. (Conc. Vat. *postulata patrum, de re militari el bello*. Coll. Lac. T.7, N.9, N.861-866).

Meanwhile, the Church works for peace by awakening and stimulating a practical understanding of the spiritual heart of the problem. Faithful to the spirit of her Divine Founder and to her mission of love, she endeavors to the best of her power to offer her good offices wherever she sees the threat of a conflict between nations. Above all else, this Apostolic See has never shirked such a duty, and never shall.

“The Church of Silence”

As We well know and deplore with a heart deeply grieved, throughout vast regions of the world, this invitation of Ours to peace does not reach, except in mutilated form, the “Church of Silence.” Millions cannot profess openly their responsibility before God for peace. In their very homes and churches even the ancient tradition of the manger, so dear and familiar, has been abolished by the despotic will of those in power. Millions are in no position to exercise their Christian influence for moral freedom and for peace, because these words, freedom and peace, have become the stolen monopoly of professional trouble-makers and worshippers of force.

Nevertheless, even with bound arms and closed lips, the “Church of Silence” nobly responds to Our invitation. With a look she points to the still fresh graves of her martyrs, to the chains of her confessors, confident that her silent holocaust and her sufferings are a most potent contribution to the cause of peace, because they are a most noble invocation and a most compelling title to win from the Divine Prince of Peace grace and mercy for the fulfillment of her mission. “Grant peace, O Lord, in our days.”

