



Mount Saviour Chronicle

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF MOUNT SAVIOUR
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Dear Friends of Mount Saviour:

Soon the Eve of Christmas will be with us, and we shall begin to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by singing the antiphon of first vespers: "The King of Peace, whose face all the earth longs to behold, has been made great." In the mind of the Church Christmas is the solemn proclamation of the presence here on earth of Christ's universal reign of peace. Since the recent peace mission of the Holy Father to the United Nations has brought the problem of peace so much into focus we would like to share some thoughts on this topic with you by way of the Chronicle.

Let us start with a reflection upon the nature of that peace which Christmas proclaims, the messianic peace of Christ. We shall then try to get an idea of the relevancy of this kind of peace in the past and in the present, and give you a picture of how it works in the monastic community as well as how it affects your lives, our Oblates and friends. We hope that by doing this our greetings and wishes for a blessed Christmas become a real sharing in the peace of Christ.

In the brief address which he gave at Kennedy Airport Pope Paul distinguished two kinds of peace, one which rises from the earth, the other which descends from heaven. The first took form and consciousness in the city of Rome, a "world-city" which for the first time in our Western civilization promoted and embodied the political union of peoples under the rule of law, and established the "imperium mundi", a world empire. The latter, the peace that descends from heaven, is represented in the Catholic Church, which is not founded on temporal power. The fact that the center of the Church is Rome seems to indicate a natural sympathy existing between the two universalities: Justice and peace have kissed one another. The Holy Father here touched upon the very nature of messianic peace. It does not rise from the earth, but descends from heaven. It is not a human achievement, but a divine blessing. The earthly city of Rome had succeeded under Caesar Augustus, through military power, under the rule of law, and all over the Mediterranean world, in establishing tranquility of order, the Pax Romana. But this tranquility of order was not yet the messianic peace. This appeared on earth when Christ was born, the Son of the Most High, and the Saviour of men. "No one had ever seen God; but God's only Son, He who was in the Father's bosom, he has made him known (John 1:28). The Spirit

of God was upon him, to preach to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives (Lk. 4:18-19 — Isaiah 61:1). "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his bruises we were healed" (Isaiah 53:5), when hanging on the cross he prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). He rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, greeting them: "Peace be unto you," and breathed on them, saying: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you remit they are remitted unto them; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained" (Jo. 20:22-23). This is the peace which the world cannot give, which has to descend from above, since it is neither a matter of human power kept in check by law, nor abundance used wisely, but basically an art of reconciliation, and as such its source can only be the heart of God and its only recipient the heart of man. While the messianic peace is rooted in the heart, it is not exclusively a matter of the inner man. Our heavenly Father's thoughts of peace are written in the whole work of creation as well as in the history of man; and in Christ they come to a Head. "Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross — to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through him alone" (Coloss. 1:20).

Here we are at the root of that "sympathy" with which, in the words of the Holy Father, the two universalities greet one another. "The whole earth longs to behold the face of the messianic King of Peace," sings the liturgy of Christmas. The question arises: Is such a statement realistic? Has the Birth of Christ really marked the beginning of a new era of peace and happiness for mankind? And if it has not, is Christmas really relevant? Is Christianity relevant? Has it ever been relevant?

The question of "relevancy" is very much alive in the minds of many people today. Since it is a very deceptive term, we have to reflect for a moment upon its meaning. To be "relevant" means to "matter". Importance matters, too. Still, relevance does not seem to be synonymous with importance, because the latter implies an inner "weight" in the thing itself as the reason why it matters. Relevancy is much more impatient, more demanding, more spectacular, and more short-lived than importance. It is never used, as importance is, of persons, but only of ideas, of institutions, of cultural forms. What makes these things relevant is not their importance in history, nor their importance for the individual person. It is their capacity to

arouse the attention of the masses, and both immediately and perceptibly to influence contemporary public life. Relevance needs large-scale success. It belongs to the sphere of the practical. If one could ask the question: "Is prayer relevant?" one would probably receive a negative answer. Christianity evidently does not fit into this kind of "relevancy", because the messianic peace is a meeting of two universalities, that of the heart and that of the cosmos. But precisely in this way the peace proclaimed at Christmas possesses its own kind of relevancy. Because it is primarily reconciliation between God and man, its realization does not depend on all kinds of preparatory educational organizational measures. It is there at the very moment at which God reveals to man the hidden purpose of his Love. What is required on the part of man is a listening heart, acceptance of God's Love for him, and readiness to change. "Change your heart, because the Kingdom of God is at hand," was the whole program of action on the part of the Messiah-King.

The specific "relevancy" of Christmas and of the messianic peace derives from the fact that God, through the Incarnation of his Son, shows to us that man is relevant to him, not because of his virtues and accomplishments, but because of the Father's absolute love for him. Looking at himself in the light of God's love for him, man first becomes relevant to himself, as a person, as God's child. In this love he is born again; he is a new man; joy and courage fill him with new life. He experiences in the depth of his heart that God is his Father — "relevant" indeed! — that all of God's children are his brothers — relevant to him in God. All this has really happened since the King of Peace was born, certainly in the hidden depths of millions of human hearts. But it has also become manifest by affecting and changing the public life of man. The idea of "ministry", of service, took on a completely new dignity and glory and effectiveness. The poor, the sick, the strangers, the children, the widows, the virgins, up to that time irrelevant factors in a society ruled by power and wealth, suddenly found themselves cared for in the arms of charity. Saint Paul himself started the first collection for the needy in Jerusalem, to implement his teaching that through the gospel of God's love the Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews, part of the same body, sharers together in the promise made in Christ Jesus (cf. Eph. 3:6). In the writings of the Apostles hospitality appears again and again as a typically Christian virtue. Widowhood and virginity became "relevant" in the service of that charity that seeks not her own, and as soon as the Church emerged from the catacombs pious foundations of all kinds provided the material means for hospitals, for schools, and not only for these, but also for churches and monasteries.

At this point the question of relevancy rises again and really becomes critical. Are churches and monasteries relevant? Is worship relevant? When Christ, at the beginning of his peace mission, was led by the Spirit for forty days into the wilderness to be tested by the devil, the latter offered him a marvelous short-cut to peace, showing him all the kingdoms of the world and telling him that all this would be his at the moment in which he would worship him. The devil offered him to establish happiness for all through power alone, not through God's Love. Christ decided in favor of God's love. He chose the way of the Suffering Servant. He wanted to carry the world's sin as the Lamb of God, offered on the cross. He did so by making his own the words of God's command: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." His words are like an echo of the angelic

hymn which in the Christmas night proclaims the messianic peace: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will" (Lk 2:14). The very source of the messianic peace, Christ's love for men, his death on the cross, is an act of worship offered to the Father: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you, since you have given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do: and now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made" (John 17:1-5). The source of Christ's peace is the Father's love, the crown of his peace is worship.

"If we truly wish to be Christians, we must love peace, we must meditate on the real meaning of peace, we must conform our minds to the thoughts of peace. In the past it was not always so in the education of minds and the training of citizens; but today it must be so; we must love peace, because its dwelling is first in men's hearts, and only afterwards in the external condition of society. Peace must live and reign in men's consciences, as Holy Scripture teaches us: "May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts!" (Colossians 3:15) These words of the Holy Father in the homily which he delivered during the Mass at Yankee Stadium show the way to us to make Christmas relevant in our lives and in the world. It is the program which our Lord himself pointed out when he said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Christ's peace is more than mere "tranquility of order." It is a living, creative power in us. We are able, as sons of God, to make peace, not in the ways of power politics, but in the ways of the heart. The fact that all through the letters of the Apostles and in other early Christian documents Christians are admonished to obey the political authorities is neither due to a "conservative" attitude nor is it an evasion dictated by fear. It springs out of the very essence of Christian peace as a fruit in man's heart of God's Love. It was a real danger to Christianity of the first centuries to be used as a tool, either by the Jewish zealots or by seditionists conspiring against the imperial power. (Cf. *The Anchor Bible, The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*; ed. Bo Riecke, Garden City, N. Y., 1964, Introduction, p. xxxvii). This would have drawn the Church into the passions of politics, and would have destroyed those virtues which are essential to the citizens of the kingdom of the Son of God's Love: faith, peace and love, patience and obedience. "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Romans 19:17-19). "Strive for peace with all men and for holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). "Shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22). "Finally, all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing. For he that would love life and see good days . . . let him seek peace and pursue it" (I Peter 3:8-11).

To these we could add innumerable other quotations to make it clear what the true and immediate concern of

the Apostles was, when they announced the glad tidings of peace. Their true enemies were not the political powers but those of the mind: wrath, hatred, envy, dissension, all the various manifestations of what they called "bitter zeal". Because the true source of peace is God's love for every individual man, its real obstacle is the store of hostilities that have accumulated in man. Whatever form they may take, be it the pride of ancestry, of wealth, of culture, of nationality, of race, or class; or be it wrath, anger, hatred, contempt, or impatience, stubbornness, rash judgment, the spirit of revenge, they are the true thorns and thistles that have to be uprooted by our constantly repeated inner surrender to Christ, who loves us with a healing love. Our trust in him makes him arise in the little boat of our heart to rebuke the wind and the sea; and there is a great calm (cf. Matthew 8:26).

This simple, immediate, and constant return into the peace of Christ should be the fruit of the solemn proclamation at Christmas of the presence here on earth of the universal reign of the Messiah King. "The hour has struck for our 'conversion', for personal transformation, for internal renewal," the Holy Father said in his message to the United Nations, and he continued: "We must get used to thinking of man in a new way, and in a new way also of men's life in common, in a new way, too, of the paths of history and the destiny of the world." What a tremendous challenge this is for us as monks of Saint Benedict, who have chosen the word "Peace" as our watchword. Let us not forget that the peace mission of the Holy Father to New York was preceded and prepared by his visit, on October 24, 1964, to Monte Cassino, the cradle of Western monasticism. In the beautiful homily he delivered on this occasion the theme later to be developed in his New York discourses already appears. "We are celebrating peace," he said at Monte Cassino. "We wish to mark here, as it were symbolically, the end of war; the end of all wars, God willing." But here he relates the general idea of peace to Saint Benedict, whom on this occasion he declared Patron

of Europe; and to the form of monastic life established by Saint Benedict at Monte Cassino. "Excitement, noise, restlessness, externalism and multiplicity threaten man's inwardness. He lacks silence, with its genuine interior word; he lacks order; he lacks prayer; he lacks peace; he lacks himself. To regain dominion and spiritual possession of himself he needs to join the Benedictine choir once more." The withdrawal of the monk has the purpose of finding his own deepest personal life, as Saint Gregory, St. Benedict's biographer, says of him: "He lived with himself in the sight of the heavenly Overseer." The monk who has recovered himself in the monastic way of life is recovered for the Church. He is able to serve the Church in a new way. "The Church again raises you aloft on her candlestick," the Holy Father continues, "for you know how to illuminate the whole House of God with the light of the new religious pedagogy which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is intended to establish among the Christian people." The monk who withdraws from the world is not lost to the world: "He remains linked to it by new relationships brought about by his very remoteness: a function of contrast, but also of complementary brotherhood, for the values preserved in the monastery are not stolen from the world, but rather are kept safe for it, presented and offered to it."

I am sure that you, our Oblates and friends, will rejoice with us in these deep insights, by which the Holy Father, as father of all Christians and of all men, binds together heaven and earth, the heart of the individual person, the People of God, all mankind, by that Peace which we greet when at Christmas we sing: "The King of Peace, whose face all the earth longs to behold, is truly great."

F. Adamus Wignam, O.S.B.

Good News of Peace

"In the Messiah Jesus you who were once distant have been made close, in the blood of the Messiah. For he is our peace, having destroyed in his blood the dividing wall in the way, to make them both into one new man in him, making peace, in himself killing the enmity. And coming, he gave the good news of peace to you who were distant, and peace to those close by."
—Ephesians

Saint Paul is talking about the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of the Messiah, of Christ, but because of the versatility of the Word of God, and because of the manifold capacity of man to alienate himself, we can extend the power of these words to include more than the shadows that fall across Jewish-Christian relations, and bring them to bear on a number of associations. Probably chief among these in our minds at this moment is a very small colloquium which marked the beginning of the new Church year for us. From the afternoon of 29 November to the afternoon of the 30th we lived a day of rare beauty with a group of thirteen Presbyterian ministers of the Geneva Presbytery. Presbyterianism is venerable in

this part of the country; the First Presbyterian Church in Elmira dates its foundation from 1795. The Presbyterians of the Geneva, New York Presbytery are proud of the association they have in name as well as in fact with John Calvin of Geneva, Switzerland. The monastic tradition needs little defense of its venerableness. One could, then, have had some misgivings about the consequences of prolonged meeting and talk between two such groups. Thanks be to God that during the two long discussions, one on the Catholic Notion of Sacrament, the other on the Calvinist notion of Community, it became more and more perceptible that the Word of God was being spoken, that is, a healing and encouraging word. It is a blessing to have the space and facilities of the new monastery buildings, to enable us to make a contribution to the ecumenical spirit of the Church in this part of the state. When gatherings such as this are "successful", supernaturally speaking, it is a truly contemplative experience; Christ is encountered and looked upon in men, Christ is present in such gatherings, in a way as real as any other in our lives as monks. Such experiences need the conditioning of repetition; we are fortunately looking forward to a return visit from the Presbyterian clergy early in the new year.

The wind blows as it likes; the Spirit breathes where he will. The winds that come to Elmira from India have carried with them two other messengers of peace, of dividing-walls crumbling. One of these friends, Father Raymond Panikkar, warmed an unseasonably cool summer

with lectures and discussions on the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduism and Christianity have been juxtaposed in India by the plantation of islets of European Christianity in the Subcontinent, but a true meeting of minds and creeds has never yet happened, since the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity is a meeting of two self-contained orthodoxies, each relatively closed to meeting of Hinduism and Christianity is a meeting of two self-contained orthodoxies, then, each relatively closed to the other, neither much interested in values essential to its counterpart. We of European Christianity are guests, or worse, outsiders, in India, meaning that since we evangelize without invitation we must make every effort to present the Christian things that best complement the Hindu way. Raymond Panikkar's great interest, as the only Catholic professor in the Hindu University of Banares, is to take steps towards the assimilation of the flower of Western Christianity, with which he familiarized himself during long years of study in theology faculties in Europe, to the heart of Hinduism which he, as the son of a Hindu, is anxious to relate in a living way to the Word of Christ. Raymond Panikkar was directed to Mount Saviour by Professor Krishna Sivaraman of Elmira College and the University of Banares. Professor Sivaraman is now in the second year of a teaching engagement at Elmira, and came for a visit last year. Of all the places he had seen outside India, Mt. Saviour came closest to being like home. No one could have been more surprised than we, who do not cultivate Indian ways; but the monastic way of life, centering around the holy city of Banares, is a great force in Indian religion, particularly Hindu religion, and the ways of monks are not dissimilar in whatever religion they appear. This came out very clearly in a few talks and discussions on the ascetical life in the Hindu tradition, and will probably continue to make itself felt in a series of lectures which Professor Sivaraman is about to begin for us, as part of our current school year.

In all these instances, the Presbyterians, Father Panikkar, Professor Sivaraman, the heart of the matter has been heart. It is not a matter of making clever use of the old adage: "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar". We are not out to make converts; we simply try to practice the second commandment: love of neighbor, Christian or not, as we love Christ in ourselves. To prove that it is all very much a family affair, all these graces have been brought to the monastery through the friendship of Alfred Lee Klaer, as education minister in the First Presbyterian Church in Elmira, and later as teacher in Elmira College. It was he who first brought us into contact with the Geneva Presbytery, and he who brought Krishna Sivaraman for his first visit. For us as Benedictines all these associations have deep and lasting meaning in our community life as manifestations, each in

its own way, of the Advent of the Redeemer. "And coming, he gave the good news of peace to you who were distant, and peace to those close by."

A more usual way for us to help in breaking down dividing walls in the world is through our Oblates, who number about three hundred and fifty. We are aware that in their lives we supplement the life they find at the parish level, without supplanting that life; but we and they find this relationship, of monastery to Oblate, of Oblate to monastery, a congenial one. The ingredients of our friendship: the simple constituents of any staple Christian diet, the two great commandments of love of God and of brother, in a mysterious monastic blend for which even monks are not sure they have the exact recipe. If we were to be asked for the "type" of the Oblate, we would have to point to all the various "types" who have found us, from the widest circle including Sister Bede (Margaret Peil), Professor of Sociology in the University of Ghana; and Brother Paul (Lt. John Duemmel) serving with the armed forces in Viet-Nam, to the Oblates closer to home, some of whom follow somewhat less spectacular callings than Sister Bede and Brother Paul.

Of all the Oblates closer to home, none is more deserving of a word of public thanks than the one who is Patriarch of all Oblates, Mr. J. Sanford Shanley of the venerable New York group. As some of you know, there is a pre-historic chapter in the history of Mt. Saviour Oblates. That is to say, there was a group of Oblates affiliated to Monte Cassino by Reverend Father Damasus in the days before the foundation of Mount Saviour in 1951. Among these Oblates was "Joe" Shanley, distinguished New York architect, who has been Abbot of the New York City or Manhattan group ever since the death of Brother Bartholomew (Ambrose) Leonard, of blessed memory. With due reverence, we must salute him as the one who guided the Manhattan Oblates through the years as a most considerate and generous friend of the monastery, and who, through gentle service and cordial hospitality has seen them grow to the number of seventy. Now, with new duties as a result of having been named chief architect of extensive renovations in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and in poorer health than in goneby years, Joe has had to relinquish his duties as "Abbot of Manhattan". Thanking him for all he has done for us, and for continuing as an active member, to the satisfaction of his successor, F. Rogers Reinicke, we congratulate ourselves that we have been able to attract such men as these as friends and brothers, as signs of Benedictine Pax in the life of the Church in the world.

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We are reorganizing our mailing department to meet the recent postal regulations regarding the use of the Zip-Code.

We want to continue to share our monastic life with you through our Chronicles and Newsletters. To insure your receiving these publications we are sending requests to many of you to supply us with your Zip-Code number.

Please fill out and return the card attached to each notice. This is important. We need this card as a master card in setting up a new filing system.

Because we were able to do a certain amount of preparatory work at the monastery not everyone will receive a notice. However, if you do receive a request, we need your answer if you wish to remain on our mailing list. This response is needed even though the mail we send may occasionally bear the Zip-Code number.

We are most grateful for your help in setting up this new system.