

THE BRIDGE OF PEACE

By POPE PIUS XII

“BEHOLD I will bring upon her, as it were, a river of peace” (Isaias 66, 12). This promise, announced in the messianic prophecy of Isaias, was fulfilled, with mystic significance, by the Incarnate Word of God in the New Jerusalem, the Church: and We desire, beloved sons and daughters of the Catholic world, that this same promise should resound again over the entire human family as the wish of Our heart this Christmas eve.

A river of peace upon the world: this is the desire which We have most constantly cherished in Our heart, for which We have most fervently prayed and worked, ever since the day when God in His goodness was pleased to entrust to Our humble person the exalted and awe-inspiring office of common father of all peoples which is proper to the vicar of Him to Whom all races are given for His inheritance (Psalms 2, 8)..

Casting a glance backwards over the years of Our pontificate with regard to that part of Our mandate which derives from the universal fatherhood conferred upon Us, We feel that it was the intention of Divine Providence to assign to Us the particular mission of helping, by means of patient and almost exhausting toil, to lead mankind back to the paths of peace.

At the approach of the feast of Christmas each year, We would have ardently wished to be able to go to the cradle of the Prince of Peace and offer Him, as the gift He would cherish most, a mankind at peace and all united together as in one family. On the contrary, We had to experience—during the first six years—the indescribable bitterness of seeing nothing all around Us but peoples in arms, carried away by the mad fury of mutual destruction.

We had hoped—and many others had hoped with Us—that once the rage of hatred and revenge had finally ceased, there would very soon have dawned a period of secure peace. Instead, there continued that agonizing state of uneasiness and danger, which public opinion described with the name “Cold War,” because, in reality, it had little or nothing in common with true peace and had much of the character of a truce that trembled at the slightest touch. Our annual return to the cradle of the Redeemer continued to be a sad oblation of sorrows and anxieties, with an intense desire to draw therefrom the courage that was necessary in order to persist in exhorting men to peace and pointing out to them the right road to attain it.

Cold War and Cold Peace

Can We, at least now in this sixteenth year of Our pontificate, fulfil that wish? According to many reports, the Cold War has slowly been replaced by a period of decreased tension between the opposing parties, as if they were giving each other a longer breathing space: and not without some irony, this decreased tension has been given the name “Cold Peace.” While We willingly recognize that this does represent some progress in the laborious ripening of peace properly so called, nevertheless it is not yet a gift worthy of the mystery of Bethlehem, where there appeared “the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour” towards men (*Tit. 3, 4*). For it is in too vivid contrast with the spirit of cordiality, of sincerity and of brightness that hovers around the cradle of the Redeemer.

In fact, in the political world, what is meant by “Cold Peace” if not the mere co-existence of various peoples based on fear of each other and on mutual disillusionment? Now, it is clear that simple co-existence does not deserve the name of peace; to which Christian tradition, formed in the school of the lofty intellects of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, has come to apply the definition “the tranquillity of order.” Cold peace is only a provisional calm, whose duration is conditional upon the changeable sensation of fear and upon the varying calculation of present strength; while it has about it nothing of true “order,” which presupposes a series of relationships converging towards a common purpose that is right and just. Besides, by excluding all bonds of a spiritual nature between peoples so fragmentarily co-existing, cold peace falls far short of that which was preached and desired by the Divine Master: for His peace is founded on a union of souls in the same truth and in charity. It is defined by St. Paul as the “peace of God” which binds in the first place men’s minds and hearts (*Cfr. Phil. 4, 7*), and it is put into practice by acts of harmonious collaboration in every field of life, not excluding the political, social and economic fields.

Such is the reason why We do not dare to offer Cold Peace to the Divine Infant. It is not the simple and solemn pax

(peace) which the angels sang to the shepherds on that holy night. Much less is it the Pax Dei (Peace of God) which surpasses all understanding and is a source of interior and complete joy (*Cfr. Ibid.*).

It is not even that peace which mankind today dreams of and longs for after so much affliction. However, We wish to examine in detail its shortcomings in order that from its hollow void and its uncertain duration there may be born in the rulers of nations and in those who can exercise any influence in this field, the imperative desire to transform it as soon as possible into true peace, which is, in reality, Christ Himself. For, since peace is order and order is unity, Christ alone is able and willing to unite men's minds in truth and love. It is in this sense that the Church points Him out to all peoples in the words of the prophet, as being Himself peace: "Et erit iste pax" (and this man shall be our peace) (*Micheas 5, 5; cfr. Liturgical Office for Feast of Christ the King, passim*).

Co-Existence In Fear

It is a common impression, derived from the simple observation of facts, that the principal foundation on which the present state of relative calm rests, is fear. Each of the groups, into which the human family is divided; tolerates the existence of the other; because it does not wish itself to perish. By thus avoiding a fatal risk, the two groups do not live together; they co-exist. It is not a state of war, but neither is it peace; it is a cold calm. Each of the two groups smarts under the fear of the other's military and economic power. In both of them there is a grave apprehension of the catastrophic effect of the latest weapons.

Each follows with anxious attention the technical development of the other's armaments and the productive capacity of its economy, while it entrusts to its own propaganda the task of turning the other's fear to its advantage by strengthening and extending its meaning. It seems that in the field of concrete politics reliance is no longer placed on other rational or moral principles, for these, after so many delusions, have been swept away by an extreme collapse into scepticism.

The most obvious absurdity of the situation resultant from such a wretched state of affairs is this: current political practice, while dreading war as the greatest of catastrophies, at the same time puts all its trust in war, as if it were the only expedient for subsistence and the only means of regulating international relations. This is, in a certain sense, placing trust in that which is loathed above all other things.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned political practice has led many, even of those responsible for government, to revise the entire problem of peace and war, and has induced them to ask themselves sincerely if deliverance from war and the ensuring of peace ought not to be sought on higher and more humane levels than on that dominated exclusively by terror. Thus it is that there has been an increase in the numbers of those who rebel against the idea of having to be satisfied with mere co-existence, of renouncing relationships of a more vital nature with the other group, and against being forced to live all the days of their lives in an atmosphere of enervating fear. Hence they have come back to consider the problem of peace and war as a fact involving a higher and Christian responsibility before God and the moral law.

Undoubtedly, in this changed manner of approach to the problem there is an element of "fear" as a restraint against war and a stimulus to peace; but here the fear is that salutary fear of God—Guarantor and Vindicator of the moral law—and, therefore, as the Psalmist teaches (Ps. 110, 10), it is the beginning of wisdom.

Once the problem is elevated to this higher plane, which alone is worthy of rational creatures, there again clearly appears the absurdity of that doctrine which held sway in the political schools of the last few decades: namely, that war is one of many admissible forms of political action; the necessary, and as it were, the natural outcome of irreconcilable disputes between two countries; and that war, therefore; is a fact bearing no relation to any kind of moral responsibility. It is likewise apparent how absurd and inadmissible is the principle—also so long accepted—according to which a ruler, who declares war, would only be guilty of having made a political error, should the war be lost. But he could in no case be accused of moral guilt and of crime for not having, when he was able to, preserved peace.

War and the Moral Order

It was precisely this absurd and immoral concept of war which rendered vain, in the fatal weeks of 1939, Our

efforts to uphold in both parties the will to continue negotiations. War was then thought of as a die, to be cast with greater or less caution and skill, and not as a moral fact involving obligation in conscience and higher responsibilities. It required tombs and ruins without number to reveal the true nature of war: namely, that it was not a luckier or less lucky gamble between conflicting interests but a tragedy, spiritual more than material, for millions of men; that it was not a risking of some possessions, but a loss of all: a fact of enormous gravity.

How is it possible—many at that time asked with the simplicity and truth of common sense—that, while every individual feels within himself an urgent sense of moral responsibility for his own most ordinary acts, the dreadful fact of war, which is also the fruit of the free act of somebody's will, can evade the dominion of conscience, and that there be no judge to whom its innocent victims may have recourse? In the atmosphere of that time, when people were beginning to return to common sense, widespread approval was given Our cry, "War Against War," with which in 1944, We declared Our opposition to the pure formalism of political action and to doctrines of war which take no account of God or of His commandments. That salutary return to common sense, instead of being weakened, became more profound and more widespread in the years of the Cold War, perhaps because prolonged experience made more clearly evident the absurdity of a life lived under the incubus of fear. Thus, the Cold Peace, with all its incoherences and uneasiness, shows signs of taking the first steps towards an authentic moral order and towards a recognition of the elevated doctrine of the Church regarding just and unjust war, and the licitness and illicitness of recourse to arms.

This goal will assuredly be attained if, on one side and the other, men will once again sincerely, almost religiously, come to consider war as an object of the moral order, whose violation constitutes in fact a culpability which will not go unpunished.

In the concrete, this goal will be attained if statesmen, before weighing the advantages and risks of their decisions, will recognize that they are personally subject to eternal moral laws, and will treat the problem of war as a question of conscience before God.

In the conditions of our times, there is no other way to liberate the world from its agonizing incubus except by a return to the fear of God, which in no way debases the man who willingly submits to it; rather, it saves him from the infamy of that awful crime—unnecessary war. And who can express astonishment if peace and war thus prove to be closely connected with religious truth? Everything that is, is of God: the root of all evil consists precisely in separating things from their beginning and their end.

Hence, also, it becomes clear that pacifist efforts or propaganda originating from those who deny all belief in God—if indeed not undertaken as an artful expedient to obtain the tactical effect of creating excitement and confusion—is always very dubious and incapable of lessening or of eliminating the anguished sense of fear.

The present co-existence in fear has thus only two possible prospects before it: either it will raise itself to a co-existence in fear of God, and thence to a truly peaceful living-together, inspired and protected by the Divine moral order: or else it will shrivel more and more into a frozen paralysis of international life, the grave dangers of which are even now foreseeable.

In fact, prolonged restraint of the natural expansion of the life of peoples can ultimately lead them to that same desperate outlet that it is desired to avoid: war. No people, furthermore, could support indefinitely a race of armaments without disastrous repercussions being felt in its normal economic development. The very agreements directed to imposing a limitation on armaments would be in vain. Without the moral foundation of fear of God, they would become, if ever reached, a source of renewed mutual distrust.

There remains, therefore, the auspicious and lightsome other way which, based upon the fear of God and aided by Him, leads to true peace, which is sincerity, warmth and life, and is thus worthy of Him Who has been given to us that men might have life in Him and have it more abundantly (*Cfr. John 10, 10*).

Co-Existence in Error

Although the "Cold War"—and the same is true of the "Cold Peace"—keeps the world in a harmful state of division, yet it does not, up to the present, prevent an intense rhythm of life from pulsing therein. It is true that this is a life developing almost exclusively in the economic field. It is, however, undeniable that economics, taking advantage of the pressing progress of modern techniques, has by feverish activity attained surprising results, of such a nature as

to foreshadow a profound transformation in the lives of all peoples, even those heretofore considered rather backward. Admiration unquestionably cannot be withheld for what it has done and what it promises to do.

Nevertheless, economics, with its apparently unlimited ability to produce goods without number, and with the multiplicity of its relationships, exercises over many of our contemporaries a fascination superior to its potentiality, and extends to fields extraneous to economics. The error of placing such trust in modern economics is again shared in common by the two camps into which the world is today divided. In one of these, it is taught that, since man has given proof of such great power as to create the marvellous technico-economical composite of which he boasts today, he will also be able to organize the liberation of human life from all the privations and evils from which it suffers, and in this way effect a kind of self-redemption. On the other hand, the conception gains ground in the opposing camp that the solution of the problem of peace must be sought in economics, and particularly in a specific form thereof, that of free exchange.

We have already had occasion at other times to expose the baselessness of such teachings. About a hundred years ago, followers of the free commerce system expected wonderful things from it, attributing to it an almost magical power. One of its most ardent converts did not hesitate to compare the principle of free exchange, insofar as its effects in the moral world are concerned, with the principle of gravity which rules the physical world, and he attributed to it, as its proper effect, the drawing of men closer together, the elimination of antagonism based on race, faith, or language, and the unity of all human beings in unalterable peace (*Cfr. Richard Cobden, Speeches on Questions of Public Policy. London, Macmillan and Co., 1870: Vol. I, pp. 362-366*).

The course of events has shown how deceitful is the illusion of entrusting peace to free exchange alone. Nor would the result be otherwise in the future if there were to persist that blind faith which confers on economics an imaginary mystic force. At present, moreover, there are lacking those foundations of fact which could in any way warrant the over-rosy hopes nourished today, as in the past, by followers of this teaching. As a matter of fact, while, in one of the camps which co-exist in Cold Peace, this highly vaunted economic freedom does not in reality exist, it is, in the other, completely rejected as an absurd principle. There is, between the two, a diametrical opposition which cannot be reconciled by purely economic forces. Nay, more, if there are—as there actually are—relations of cause and effect between the moral world and the economic world, they must be so ordered that primacy be assigned to the former; that is, the moral world which must authoritatively permeate with its spirit the social economy. Once this scale of values has been established and its actual exercise permitted, economics will, insofar as it is able, consolidate the moral world and confirm the spiritual postulates and forces of peace.

On the other hand, the economic factor might place serious obstacles in the way of peace—particularly of a Cold Peace, in the sense of an equilibrium between groups if, employing erroneous systems, it were to weaken one of the groups. This could occur if, among other eventualities, individual people of one group were to engage, without consideration or regard for others, in a ceaseless increase of production, and a constant raising of their own living standard. In such a case, an upsurge of resentment and rivalry on the part of neighbouring peoples would be inevitable, and consequently also the weakening of the entire group.

One must be convinced that economic relationships between nations will be factors of peace insofar as they will obey the norms of natural law, will be inspired by love, will have due regard for other peoples and will be sources of help. Let it be held for certain that in relations between men, even merely economic relations, nothing is produced spontaneously—as does occur in nature which is subject to necessary laws—but everything depends substantially on the spirit. Only the spirit, the image of God, and the executor of His designs, can establish order and harmony on earth, and it will succeed in doing so to the same extent that it becomes the faithful interpreter and docile instrument of the only Saviour Jesus Christ, Who is Himself Peace.

Moreover, in another matter even more delicate than that of economics, error is shared by the two camps co-existing in the Cold Peace; an error, namely, regarding the principles which animate their respective unity. One of the camps bases its strong internal cohesion on a false idea, as idea, moreover, violating primary, human and Divine rights, yet at the same time efficacious; while the other, forgetful that it already possesses an idea that is true and has been successfully tested in the past, seems instead to be tending towards political principles which are evidently destructive of unity.

During this last decade since the war, a great yearning for spiritual renovation urged souls to unite Europe strongly, the impetus coming from the natural living conditions of her peoples, with the purpose of putting an end to the traditional rivalries between one and another, and of assuring a united protection for their independence and their peaceful development. This noble idea did not present motives for complaints or diffidence to the world outside of Europe, in the measure that this outside world was favourably disposed to Europe. It was also believed that Europe would have easily found within herself the animating idea for her unity. But the succeeding events and recent accords which, as is believed, have opened the way to a Cold Peace, no longer have for a basis the idea of a more extensive European unification. Many, in fact, believe that the governing policy is for a return to a kind of nationalistic state, closed within itself, centralizing therein its forces, unsettled in its choice of alliances and, consequently, no less perilous than that which had its time of highest development during the last century.

Too soon have been forgotten the enormous mass of lives sacrificed and of goods extorted by this type of state, and the crushing economic and spiritual burdens imposed by it. But the real error consists in confusing national life in its proper sense with nationalistic politics: the first, the right and prized possession of a people, may and should be promoted: the second, as a germ infinitely harmful, will never be sufficiently repelled. National life is, in itself, that operative composite of all the values of civilization, which are proper and characteristic of a particular group, for whose spiritual unity they constitute, as it were, its bond. At the same time, it enriches, as its own contribution, the culture of all humanity.

National Life Not Political

In essence, therefore, national life is something not political; and this is confirmed by the fact that, as history and practice demonstrate, it can develop alongside of others, within the same state, just as it can also extend itself beyond the political frontiers of the same state. National life became a principle of dissolution within the community of peoples only when it began to be exploited as a means for political purposes; when, that is to say, the controlling and centralizing state made of nationality the basis of its force of expansion. Behold then the nationalistic state, the seed of rivalries and the fomenter of discord.

It is clear that, if the European community were to move forward on this road, its cohesion would become, as a result, quite weakened in comparison with that of the opposing group. Its weakness would certainly be revealed on that day of future peace destined to regulate with foresight and justice the questions still in abeyance. Nor should it be said that, in new circumstances, the dynamism of the nationalistic state no longer represents a danger for other peoples, being deprived, in the majority of cases, of effective economic and military power, for even when the dynamism of an imaginary nationalistic power is expressed in sentiment rather than exercised with actions, it is equally offensive to the mind; it feeds on distrust and breeds suspicion within alliances, impedes reciprocal understanding and thereby loyal collaboration and mutual help, to the same extent as it would if it had at its command effective force.

What would become, then, in such circumstances, of the common bond which is supposed to bind individual states in unity? What kind of a grand and efficacious idea would that be which would render them strong in defence and effective in a common programme for civilization?

Some would like to see it as agreement in the rejection of that way of life destructive of liberty, proper to the other group. Without a doubt, aversion to slavery is worthy of note, but it is of negative value, and does not possess the force to stimulate the human spirit to action with the same efficacy as does a positive and absolute idea.

Such an idea, instead, could be love of the liberty willed by God and in accord with the needs of the common good, or else the ideal of natural law, as the foundation of an organization of the state and of states.

Only these, and like spiritual ideas, acquired now for many long centuries as part of the tradition of a Christian Europe, can sustain comparison—and moreover emerge victorious in it, to the extent that these ideas are really lived—with the false idea, though concrete and effective, which apparently holds together in cohesion, not without the aid of violence, the other group; the idea, namely, of an earthly paradise to be attained as soon as a determined form of social organization would be realized. Though illusory, this idea has succeeded in creating, at least outwardly, a compact and hardy unity, and is being accepted by the uninformed masses; it knows how to inspire its members to action and voluntarily to make sacrifices. The same idea, within the political framework which expresses it, gives to its directors

a strong capacity for seduction, and to the adept the audacity to penetrate as a vanguard even into the ranks of the other side.

Europe, on the other hand, still awaits the reawakening of her own consciousness. Meanwhile, in what she stands for—such as the wisdom and organization of associated living and as an influence of culture—she seems to be losing ground in not a few regions of the earth.

Has Europe Lost Her Way?

Truly, such a retreat concerns the promoters of nationalistic policy, who are forced to fall back before adversaries who have taken over the same methods and made them their own. Especially among some peoples until now considered colonial, the process of organic maturation towards an autonomous policy, which Europe should have guided with perception and care, was rapidly turned into nationalistic outbreaks, greedy for power. It must be confessed that even these unforeseen eruptions, damaging to the prestige and interests of Europe, are, at least in part, the fruit of her own bad example.

Does this mean only that Europe has momentarily lost her way? In any case, that which must remain, and without doubt will remain, is the genuine Europe; that is, that composite of all the spiritual and civil values which the West has accumulated, drawing from the riches of individual nations to dispense them to the whole world. Europe, conforming to the dispositions of Divine Providence, will again be able to be the nursery and dispenser of those values, if she will know how to resume wisely her proper spiritual character and to repudiate the divinization of power.

Just as in the past the well-springs of her strength and of her culture were eminently Christian, so now too will she have to impose on herself a return to God and to Christian ideals, if she is to find again the basis and bond of her unity and true greatness. And if these well-springs seem to be in part dried up, if this bond is threatened with rupture and the foundation of her unity crumbling, the historical and present responsibility falls back upon each of the two groups who find themselves now facing each other in anguish and mutual fear.

The motives ought to be enough for men of good will, in one and the other camp, to desire, to pray, and to act, in order that humanity may be liberated from the intoxication of power and of pre-eminence, and in order that the Spirit of God may be the Sovereign Ruler of the world, where once Almighty God chose no other means for saving those whom He loved than that of becoming a weak Babe in a poor manger. “A child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder” (*Isaias, 9, 6; cf. Introit, Third Mass of Christmas Day*).

Co-Existence in Truth.

Although it is a sad thing to note that the present rupture of the human race took place, in the beginning, between men who knew and adored the same Saviour, Jesus Christ, still there appears to Us to be a well-founded hope that, in His name too, a bridge of peace may yet be built between opposing shores, and the common bond, so sadly broken, be re-established.

There is, in fact, some hope that today's co-existence may bring mankind closer to peace. In order, however, that this expectation be justified, such co-existence must in some way be co-existence in truth. Now a bridge cannot be built in truth between these two separate worlds unless it be founded on the human beings living in one and the other of these worlds, and not on their governmental or social systems. This is so because, while one of the two parties still strives in large measure, whether consciously or unconsciously, to preserve the natural law, the system prevailing in the other has completely abandoned this basis.

A one-sided supernaturalism might refuse entirely to take such an attitude into consideration, alleging the reason that we live in a redeemed world and are therefore withdrawn from the natural order; or some might say that the collectivist character of that system ought to be recognized as a “historical truth,” in the sense that it too corresponds to the will of God—but these are errors to which a Catholic can by no means submit. The right road is quite different.

In both camps, there are millions in whom the imprint of Christ is preserved in a more or less active degree: they, too, no less than faithful and fervent believers, should be called upon to collaborate towards a renewed basis of unity for the human race. It is true that, in one of the two camps, the voice of those who stand resolutely for truth, for love and for the spirit, is forcibly suffocated by the public authorities, while in the other people suffer from excessive

timidity in proclaiming aloud their worthy desires. It is, however, the duty of a policy of unification to encourage the former and to make heard the sentiments of the latter.

Particularly in that camp where it is not a crime to oppose error, statesmen should have greater confidence in themselves: they should give proof to others of a more firm courage in foiling the manoeuvres of the obscure forces which are still trying to establish power hegemonies, and they should also show more active wisdom: in preserving and swelling the ranks of men of good will, especially of believers in God, who everywhere adhere in great numbers to the cause of peace.

It would certainly be an erroneous unification policy—if not actually treachery—to sacrifice in favour of nationalistic interests the racial minorities who are without strength to defend their supreme possessions; their faith and their Christian culture. Whoever were to do this would not be worthy of confidence, nor would they be acting honourably if later, in cases where their own interests demanded it, they were to invoke religious values and respect for law.

There are many who volunteer to lay the bases of human unity. Since, however, these bases, this bridge, must be of a spiritual nature, those sceptics and cynics are certainly not qualified for the task who, in accordance with doctrines of a more or less disguised materialism, reduce even the loftiest truths and the highest spiritual values to the level of physical reactions or consider them mere ideologies.

Nor are those apt for the task who do not recognize absolute truths nor admit moral obligations in the sphere of social life. These latter have already in the past—often unknowingly; by their abuse of freedom and by their destructive and unreasonable criticism—prepared an atmosphere favourable to dictatorship and oppression; and now they push forward again to obstruct the work of social and political pacification indicated under Christian inspiration. In some places it happens not rarely that they raise their voices against those who, conscientiously, as Christians, take a rightful active interest in political problems and in public life in general.

False Principles

Now and then, likewise, they disparage the assuredness and strength Christians draw from the possession of absolute truth, and on the contrary, they spread abroad the conviction that it is to modern man's honour, and redounds to the credit of his education, that he should have no determined ideas or tendencies, nor be bound to any spiritual world. Meanwhile, they forget that it was precisely from these principles that the present confusion and disorder originated, nor will they remember that it was those very Christian forces they now oppose that succeeded in restoring, in many countries, the freedom which they themselves had dissipated.

Certainly, it is not upon such men that the common spiritual foundation can be laid and the bridge of truth built. Indeed, it may well be expected that, as occasion demands, they will not find it at all unseemly to be partial to the false system of the other shore, adapting themselves even to be overcome by it in case it were momentarily to triumph.

In awaiting, therefore, with confidence in the Divine mercy, that spiritual and Christian bridge, already in some way existing between the two shores, to take on a greater and more effective consistency, We would exhort primarily the Christians of the nations where the Divine gift of peace is still enjoyed to do everything possible to hasten the hour of its universal reestablishment.

Conduct of Christians

Let these convince themselves, above all, that the possession of truth, if it were to remain closed within themselves, almost as if it were an object of their contemplation for deriving therefrom spiritual pleasure, would not be of service to the cause of peace; the truth must be lived, communicated and applied to all phases of life. Also truth, and particularly Christian truth, is a talent that God placed in the hands of His servants in order that, with all that they undertake, it may bear fruit in works for the common good.

To all possessors of this truth, We would wish to propose a question, before the Eternal Judge asks it, whether they have used this talent fruitfully, in any way to be worthy of the invitation of the Master to enter into the joy of peace. How many, perhaps even priests and lay Catholics, ought to feel remorse for having instead buried in their own hearts this and other spiritual riches, because of their own indolence and insensibility to human misery.

In particular, they would become culpable if they should tolerate that the people be left as though shepherdless, while the enemy of God, taking advantage of his powerful organization, is producing destruction in the souls not solidly enough formed in the truth. Equally responsible would the priest and laity be, if the people were not to receive and find from Christian charity in practise that active help which the divine will prescribes. Nor would those priests and laity fulfil their obligations, were they voluntarily to close their eyes and keep silence concerning the social injustices of which they are witnesses, thus furnishing an occasion for unjust attacks against the capacity of the social action of Christianity and against the social efficacy of the social doctrine of the Church, which, with the help of Divine grace, has given so many and such unquestionable public demonstrations in this regard and also in these recent decades.

In case the failure to which We have referred were to occur, it would likewise be those priests and laity who would bear the responsibility that groups of the young, and even pastors of souls, let themselves, in some cases, be won over to radicalism and erroneous progressivism.

The conduct of Christians—be they of high or humble state, or be they more or less prosperous—who would not be resolute in the recognition and observance of their own social obligations in the management of their economic affairs, would cause more grave consequences to the social order, and also to the political order. Whosoever is not ready to limit justly in relation to the common weal the use of his private goods, be it done freely according to the dictates of his own conscience, or even done by means of organized provisions of a public character, he is helping, insofar as it depends on him, to impede the indispensable primacy of personal impulse and responsibility in social life.

In democratic systems one can fall easily into such an error, when individual interest is placed under the protection of these collective organizations or of a party, where one seeks protection for the sum total of individual interests, rather than the promotion of the good of all; under such a guise the economy becomes easily subject to the power of anonymous forces which dominate it politically.

Beloved children, We are thankful to the Divine goodness for having given Us yet another opportunity to indicate to you, with paternal solicitude, the path of goodness. May the earth, abundantly watered by the Giver of true peace, be able to proclaim glory to God in the highest! “Let us go to Bethlehem” (Luke 2, 15) . Let us go back there close to the crib of sincerity, of truth, and of love, where the only-begotten Son of God gives Himself Man to men, in order that humanity may know again in Him its bond and its peace: “Today true peace comes down to us from Heaven” (*Office of Christmas, response, second lesson*). In order that the earth be worthy to receive it, We invoke upon all abounding Divine blessings.
