

# The Pope's Own Words

(Following is a translation of the 1966 Christmas message of Pope Paul VI, issued Dec. 22, 1966.)

Brothers, sons, friends and all who are listening to our words.

We wish once again, this Christmas of the year 1966, to stir your hearts with all simplicity by recalling the angels' hymn which rang out in the heavens on that blessed night in which the Virgin Mary gave birth to the Savior of the world, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is not familiar with those well-known words: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will?" We repeat this exultant cry of the angels, proposing it to you as the inspiring motif of the thoughts and sentiments which on this festive occasion come naturally to the minds and hearts of those who are able to discern what things are really important and who are aware of the obligations and the greatest needs of mankind. The glory of God and peace among men are now and will never cease to be the two points of reference which inspire and give direction to our lives. They are the greatest gifts which the Christmas season promises and indeed brings to us.

To turn with the ardor of soul to the ineradicable thought of God can never be wearisome for the thoughtful or without profit for believers. For God is at once a mystery and a living reality; He is the light and source of all order and wisdom; from Him all existence springs and He is the ultimate basis of scientific law and moral precept; He is, of necessity, the center of our life; He is ineffable goodness; ever willing to converse with us in the experience of daily life.

We should like to repeat now what we have already said on another occasion: we must be on our guard against the danger of modern day idolatry. Today man is tempted to worship himself, to set himself up not only as the highest object of thought and as the goal of history but even of all reality. He is ready to believe that he can of himself, relying only on his own resources, make real progress and bring about his own salvation. In other words, man is tempted to seek only his own glory and not the glory of God.

This fatal and frightening departure from the true norm of human life is taking place before our eyes; from the realm of theory the denial of God is being reduced to practice. What used to be the preserve of a small number of speculative minds is infecting the thinking of the many. An atheism that was rationalist and academic is yielding place to one that is materialistic and social. Today a falsely humanistic mentality is becoming more and more widespread, a mentality deeply rooted in egotism because it is closed to the knowledge and love of God, and is basically restless and unsettling because it is closed to His light and to hope in Him.

Man is a being who, by his very nature, transcends and reaches out beyond himself, he is, by nature, ordained to God. If this fundamental orientation of man is frustrated, then the luminous mystery of God-become-man (the mystery of Christmas) will cease to be the feast of joy and peace in our lives; instead, the gloomy mystery of man-making-himself-God will become our tragic drama, an impending threat, capable of bringing us endless ruin.



*In this special tabloid section of your Courier are the complete texts of several recent talks given by Pope Paul at the Vatican. The Pope's own words will provide Catholics with an authentic guide on the road to renewal of the Church and for their own spiritual development. Other talks given by the Pope will be published in subsequent issues of the Courier.*

Let us go back, dear brethren, to the day, when, with the birth of Christ, God and man, relations, vital relations were re-established between divinity and humanity. Let us go back to those humble and noble religious efforts—the seeking of God, faith in God, confidence in God, prayer to God, love of God. We will then experience the first joy of Christmas, that is, we ourselves will be able to sing of the glory of God in an intimate and personal poem, in a solemn and cosmic hymn.

And then we will have the second joy of Christmas, the second gift, that of peace.

It seems almost superfluous to talk about peace since the word is on so many lips, and questions bearing on it are taken up and debated so widely. But it is not superfluous now, because today's feast repeats its gentle noble name to us, so uttering it as to give us not only its comforting sound but an insight into the richness of its meaning. In this way it obliges us every Christmas to clarify our ideas on the true meaning of peace, which is in St. Augustine's celebrated definition "the calm of order," a reflection, that is, of what accords with justice and with the thought of God's eternal law.

If we constrain ourselves to examine it—and this can be our act of reverence and devotion to the Christmas mystery—we shall easily see the variety of meanings that this lofty word bears, as many as are the ideas of order to which it refers.

We shall see how peace is not an independent good, but a resultant and a derivative that presupposes and calls for an antecedent good which is none other than order, justice and the harmony of things.

We shall see how peace is not stable or stationary if the order to which it gives its name is changing and moving, as is human order, particularly the social order; and how in consequence peace in this world cannot be enjoyed in a state of complacent serenity but must all the time be produced, won and defended.

Furthermore, we shall see that from one peace another takes its rise, in the same way that from one order already

established another is produced. From the first establishment of order between God and man, the basic order, the order of Christmas, it is possible for every other order in human affairs to follow; from peace with God its inward conflicts and peace likewise in men's hearts in their relations with one another.

As we pursue our reflections on peace at this moment of history we cannot but endorse the observation that anyone would make if sensitive to humanity's present condition: that today the world lacks security! As modern society advances in its conquests, a sense of universal fear is gradually pervading men's minds; the more progress men make in science and technology, the more they distrust one another; the more they possess, the less secure they feel; and this awareness they have of the instability of things and of this life, instead of moving us as it should to direct our minds to eternal things, finishes by creating in many hearts a sense of anguish which leads to the abandonment of hope about the meaning and value of human existence.

Why so? The reason is that lack of security arises chiefly from a constant ever-increasing danger, a real danger, a danger to the world; and circumstances if they passed out of control could make it imminent and unavoidable.

We all know what power for destruction modern man possesses; and how some make it a reason for competition, confidence and pride. So many liberties have been vindicated for the sake of man's dignity and for his full and personal development, but his freedom from fear, has not been effectively sought and still lies outside his grasp.

There are now so many ties between peoples, ties in technology and commerce, cultural and political ties, but the bond of brotherhood between men, between classes and their countries has not yet been drawn sufficiently tight; their mutual respect, esteem, cooperation

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