

Peace Here and Now:
Impulses for a New Peace Awareness

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IN the St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus' life history begins with a proclamation of peace: The angels sing: "Peace is now on Earth," during the birth of Christ. Upon his advent in Jerusalem, the enthusiastic assembly calls: "In heaven is peace, and glory in the heights." The peace, which descended to Earth on Christmas, withdrew back to the place of peaceful origin after the rejection of God's son; one could also say evaporated to a utopia.

Today's situation looks exactly the same. After the emergence of liberalization, which sealed the East-West conflict and, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, which released millions into freedom, world peace seemed to come into reach as never before. After the European peoples, who delivered bloody religious, annexation, and extermination wars also made the determination to establish a mutual House of Europe, a citadel of peace arose exactly in the center of a region that was the scene of the worst wars, from which it could be expected that it would illuminate the whole conflict-torn world. However, this hope of peace of this so unhappily receding century suffered a serious setback through the American reaction to the terror attack of Sept. 11, from which it will only recover through the steadfast stance of the entire power of heart and mind. Most importantly, the contemplation of the question of what peace really is belongs to that.

What is Peace?

Three motives work toward the answering of this question: a pressure to find meaning, a factual pressure, and a pressure of suffering. First of all, a pressure to find meaning; since, after the Second World War a new reflection of the topics of peace set in, even if hesitantly, which was even more urgently demanded since humanity was hardly ever before, with the exception of the time of the great epidemics, so directly confronted with the fact of massive death as in the century of the two World Wars and the subsequent regional conflicts. But, under the imprint of this time of horror, the meaning of death, as never before in consideration of the

proliferation of the wear of language on the entity of language, and, as it especially lay in the consequence of the events, the meaning of peace was contemplated. As contemporary theology largely neglected to deal with this burning concern, the church teachers took the initiative, as opposed to its habit to deal only reactively with current issues, when the unforgotten Council Pope Johannes XXIII published the encyclical based on the Darius Milhaudeiner choral symphony, the ‘*pacem in terris*’ on April 11th, 1963. In that respect he arose to the contemplations—then also assimilated by Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker—that, under the conditions of the destructive potential of the nuclear age, war can no longer be taken into consideration as a means of carrying out political or economic conflicts.

Peace was therewith only seemingly expelled to the realm of utopia. Because, basically all humanitarian progress was still achieved on the path in the sense of “scientific revolutions,” and therefore achieved in that the opposite was recognized as impossible, and was felt to be intolerable. That was the case with the ancient institution of slavery, with trial by ordeal and torture as a means of criminal justice, and with executions in the form of stoning, crucifixion, and burning. If Islam now reverts to such practices in individual radical forms, then it proves that due to its late emergence, the phase of enlightenment and humanism gone through by Christianity during the last centuries is still lacking. Meanwhile, to a large extent, Christianity must also finally come to the insight of the incompatibility of the death sentence and human dignity. Because only then is the prerequisite for the worldwide recognition of the basic idea of the peace encyclical given, whereupon the collective execution in the form of a modern war of destruction under the current conditions would become the same as a “negative utopia.”

A factual pressure amplifies a pressure to find meaning, about which no words are to be lost in this respect inasmuch as it is felt to be a distinct pressure by all who are contemplative. It consists of the often lamented excessive arming of the world powers, which have long since fulfilled the state of “overkill” and is now aggravated through the anonymous threat emanating from terrorism. That largely lead to the impression that the invisible protective armor, which had laid itself over large parts of the world as a result of the emergence of liberalization in 1989, the end of the East-West conflict, and the union of the European peoples was broken, while simultaneously an attitude toward life of uncertainty, susceptibility to angst and depression took hold of humanity. Add to that the observance that the threshold, which must be exceeded during the engineering of a war, has been significantly lowered as a result of the

terrorist attacks. Because that is now no longer lead to by threats by a world-political aggressor or the threatening danger of the national basic existence, but also by motivations such as collective fear, especially in connection with injured national pride and the loss of the supposed vulnerability to attack. From that point of view, the factual pressure poses the question whether the ensemble of these factors must not above all be met with a radical change of consciousness.

That applies also to the third reason, a pressure of suffering. Wars have always thrown the stricken into nameless horrors, deprivations, and suffering. Firstly, the soldiers permanently faced with the fear of death and thereby humanly perverted; thereupon the no less afflicted civilian population, and finally the maltreated and starving animals. The spiritual damages are no smaller: the reversal of information into propaganda, the truth into lies, the morals into ruthlessness, humanity into brutality and barbarism. Although it's true that war also lead to individual heroic performance, this was not seldom in the service of a reprehensible affair. Therefore, the goal of the pressure of suffering is the fastest possible ending of war and the immediate reconstruction of peaceful conditions. But, what exactly is peace?

The Inversion

A temporary answer to this still-open question is given through the famous words of Isaiah, "righteousness creates peace," which Pius XII, the pope of the most serious time of crisis so far, chose as the heraldic motto, and which has dominated peace discussions up till now. Accordingly, righteousness is the foundation and condition of peace. However, on this occasion it was overseen that the Epistle of St. James summarized the message of peace in the inverted sentence in that he explained peace as the «soil» of righteousness and this as the "fruit" of peace. However, that doesn't makes less sense than the Old Testament maxim. Because, in order not to lead to an amorphous condition, peace needs a structured principle: righteousness. In its communicative and distributive-creative power it leads to the necessary order of peace, the bringing about of *ordo pacis*. Through that, the danger of disorder is banned, and also in consideration of social and economic differences, a peacefully ordered cohabitation of humans is ensured.

Still, the inversion is of even much greater significance; it pushes peace into the group of those highest ideas that are distinguished by their lack of alternatives. That applies first of all to the idea—equated with godliness by Plato—of good, but also of truth, beauty, and freedom. That goodness must be assumed without any alternative was

already recognized by the medieval metaphysics, which accordingly decided that evil is a deficit and a lack of goodness. Likewise, error is not an opposite, but a straying from the truth, and ugliness, also not seldom a contrasting enhancement of beauty, but certainly never its opposite. The same applies to the relationship of freedom to slavery. Because, this indicates its loss but not the opposite of it. Against this background, it is already clear that war is not the opposite of peace, but the identification of the consequences following its loss. Therefore, whomever claims this in habitual well-coordinated thoughtlessness, even if in view of the Tolstoy title "Peace and War," has already given up and has encouraged his demise. Because, peace is settled too highly in the top bracket of the possible ways of thinking that it could be thought of as its opposite. Moreover, this top bracket is so close to the concept of God that speaking of this in a forthcoming sense that nothing larger and certainly nothing else is able to be thought of over and above it. Therefore, peace must be thought of without alternative, as purely positive. As little as God and the Devil are opposites, peace is the opposite of war.

Closeness to the concept of God, however, also entails that there is no definition of peace. When St. Augustine, after a long search, describes it as "peaceful order," he therewith designates its consequence rather than itself. Meanwhile, the biblical peace testimonials show that there, where peace comes into appearance, it shines. Thus, as in the seven-colored bow of the rainbow after the Flood, so, as on the alter touched by the staff of God's angel who conferred Gideon the title "Jahwe is peace," so as in the messianic kingdom of peace, in which the wolf and lamb live together and humanity forges their swords to ploughshares and their spears to vintner's knives, so as in the shape of the godly child, on whose shoulders rule rests and whose name is "Prince of Peace," so then the New Testament in the countenance of Him who gave peace like no other because it embodies peace in persona.

However, Jesus understood peace as his life mission; because he came to protect his people from the threatening catastrophe caused by the agitation of the Zealots, who endeavored to lead a war for freedom against Rome at any price. And he did this through renouncing the use of any violence for the fight of these fanatics' religious pretext and by heralding the God of unconditional love. However, because the spiral of violence had already been set in gear he was rejected, and finally crucified. When the Popes of the last century, with John XIII in their lead, pleaded with increasing emphasis for unconditional peace, they stepped into the path of Jesus. But, wasn't it blurred beyond recognition through the vio-

lence of Christians against followers of different faiths and against Christians? Didn't Christianity fall fatally behind Jesus in the time of religious wars? But how did that happen?

The Invasion of Violence

The shrewdest explanation was offered by Nietzsche with the ascertainment that even in Christianity, the least evangelical feeling of revenge had surfaced to "the top." This was confirmed by the Apocalypse, when the bowls of Godly wrath were poured out over the persecutors of Christians. And that was confirmed by Tertullia, with his virtually sadistic depiction of the hellish punishments threatening the persecutors. Under this influence, Augustine forced himself to decide against his original conviction of endorsing violence against heretics. Nevertheless, with that he opened the door to the darkest chapter of the history of Christianity, distinguished by inquisition, banishments, and religious wars. Only under the last Popes did the church force itself to accept the admission that the relationship to Judaism was also excessively affected by this. However, on the other side, the encounters of Christianity with Islam also stood under the sign of bloody violence, as Islam originally took up its triumphant advance as a religion of the sword, and thus let Christianity, torn apart through various confessions, dreadfully atone for that which it had mutually done. That called the attack on 11 September, committed in the name of Islam, into traumatic memory. If, due to the confrontation with it, nothing even worse than the present war is to emerge, the relationship between the Abraham religions must be newly contemplated.

A Sign of Communication

However, Islam, from its origins, is not a religion of the sword, but of the book. In the Koran sent down from the heavens "in the night of power," it possesses the revelation of the document decreed to Mohammed. That connects him with Judaism and Christianity, which simultaneously understand themselves as religions of revelation, regardless of how far their interpretation of revelation diverges. Because, in accordance with the Jewish conviction, God's revelation was given to Moses as law. For Christianity, the mediator of the revelation is its content at the same time. That is why the sentence "in the beginning was the Word" received its most current interpretation in Marshall McLuhan's keyword: "the medium is the message." That, however, shows that regardless of the bloody history, far more connects than separates Abraham's religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Schiller nostalgically glorified the polytheism of the “Greek Gods” who saw a deity in every star and a nymph in every spring. Israel is indebted to this humanity, for it gave it is the realization of the God who is above the world and simultaneously comprises it. Islam intensified this concept in the uniqueness of God to whom his worshippers and were tied through omnipotence, and lent the faith in him an astounding penetration. Christianity overcame the prevailing ambivalence in both these images of God through this: it revealed the God oscillating between fascination and fear as one of unconditional love, who, as such, can only be unveiled through works of love and peace. If Lessing meant that the religions of Abrahams could not prove their truth better than in competitive acts of humanity and tolerance, an even more urgent goal is set before their eyes: peace. Dedication to that would be the best way they could “expiate” the mutually inflicted suffering and take action for the overcoming of the current crisis situation. Because, the damage caused by the terror attack and the thus resulting reaction affected not only the lamentable victims and those affected by the misery of refuge, but world peace, which had almost come within reach, to an even greater extent. What is now indicated as never before would thus be a mutually given sign of willingness from these religions, to seal the end of their prior history of conflict and to start a new history under the sign of growing understanding and tolerance.

The Question of the Ability to be Peaceful

But, don't the efforts for peace fail on that which history only too clearly shows; the question of the doubtful ability of humanity to be peaceful? And doesn't this need to be called even more into question, as the modern anthropologists such as Rene Girard and Walter Burkert, with their thesis of the primary aggression of homo necans revert to the thesis of Oswald Spenglers, which, to the appall of the great journalist Theodor Haecker, identifies humanity as predators? Considering the events of the recent months, mustn't one actually doubt the peace-ability of humanity and lose faith in his willingness to make peace? Isn't the War of Gierach growing exactly in times of peace?

Apart from that the fact that in the case assumed by these theoreticians humanity would have wiped itself out long ago, and regardless that humanity is only capable of survival in groups, based on the protection and defenselessness already observed by Thomas Aquinas, and is therefore dependent on solidarity and helpfulness, these questions can only be answered based on the prior question: Through what do people become evil? Again, Aquinas meddled into this question with the doubt-

ful reference to Paul with the well-known thesis of original sin. But, Paul says—and emphatically at that—exactly the opposite: “Where O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” And, to this, he added the decisive sentence: “The sting of death is sin.” After that, death goads to sin: the incentive to be evil is therewith humanity’s slavery to death. Nothing proves this more emphatically than the psychology of the murderer. According to the astute analysis of Sebastian Haffners, the mass murderer Hitler tried, after Stalingrad sealed his defeat, to drag along as many as possible into his unavoidable death. The apocalyptic, in ideals only, pursues the same goal, so far as he proclaims the end of time and the end of the world, and denies his believers further life-possibilities. But, the same applies also to hate. “Whoever hates his brother,” says the great epistle of St. John, “is a murderer of people”; since, with his hate, he tends to wipe the others out of his life. How can this be remedied?

The Fellowship of God

Apparently only through people being able to rise above their addiction to death. In their short-circuited relation to God, the terrorists leap over the fear of death and perform their murderous deed without any hesitation. However, the real religion of overcoming death is only that of Christianity. Therefore, belief in the resurrection of Jesus shapes the crystal middle of Christianity. But, the same applies to the resurrection, which Paul understood as the installment of Jesus in his attribute as the Son of God, as to his achievements in life. It is comprised of his word and the attempt through the works of wonders to transfer His attribute of being the Son of God to his chosen. That is why the resurrected assured: “I live, and you will also live.” He takes his chosen into his genealogical relationship to God, so that it fundamentally rises above the slavery to death. That is the sense of the fellowship of God, which is to be valid as the highest statement of the Christian anthropology and in remembrance of Nikolaus von Kues, who dedicated the best work to it up to now, but which needs to be newly discovered even more in regard to the current situation today.

The Overcoming of Fear

However, another obstacle stands opposed to the message of peace: in consideration of the threat of terror, the multiple conditions leading to angst. It has even crept into the peace motivation. An analysis shows that many peace activities succumb to a self-delusion, so that behind their implementation and their search for peace, the pure fear for sur-

vival is not seldom hidden. Still, the havoc of angst continues to increase as soon as the collective fear spills over from the individual to whole groups. On the one hand, it puts those seized by it into a condition of paralysis. And as the illustrious expression says, the loss of one's head, which, with its intelligence also weakens will power so that it literally becomes capable of doing anything. On the other hand, it generates a hectic, which allows neither a realistic estimation of the approaching danger, nor the possibility of escaping from it. Thus the fear psychosis arises, which abruptly changes into unscrupulous aggressiveness, and then drives all the more into a threatening ruination.

The biblical prehistory tells of a three-fold loss of paradise: in the account of the Fall, humanity loses the paradise of the original security of God's protection; in the account of the first fratricide, he loses the paradise of brotherly solidarity; and in the account of the Tower of Babylon, the paradise of linguistic understanding. Concerning that, Haecker quotes in his book "What is the human?"—derided by Heidegger—the verse: "the great Babylon is only a joke if it really wants to be as large and immoderate as our Babylonian heart." According to that, humanity loses the supporting relationship to God in the first case, in the second, the relationship to his fellow human beings, in the third to itself. That is, however, especially the work of fear.

It alienates people from their support in God, their relationship to fellow humans, and, as existential angst, from themselves. To the extent that people reach the fellowship of God however, this three-fold shadow falls away from them. The shadow of the fear of God, because he knows it is drawn to the heart of the loving Father, the shadow of social fear, because he catches sight of the image of himself and the partner assigned him by God, and finally the existential angst, because the love shown him by God heals the wounds of the strife with himself.

However, the initial paralysis falls off to the same degree, and he comprehends that the lifestyle of Jesus passes onto him and qualifies him to perform acts of service and helpful self-impartation. But, according to the blessing of the peacemaker, which can also be read the other way around, it exists primarily in his testimony to peace. Therefore, the new peace consciousness is tied back to the own-concept of him who has attained the fellowship of God. He must understand that never was anything larger expected of people, that nothing larger was ever intended for them, but also that nothing greater was ever demanded of them. As God's child, he belongs to himself as never before; as God's child, he is also, however, obliged to everything as never before. "Behold", calls

out the New Testament to his highest level of reflection, “what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should not only be called the sons of God, but actually are.” “Humanity overcomes his own nature there,” Gregor von Nyssa adds to that, “as it changes from an immortal into a mortal, from a person becomes a God.” But, by breaking down the partition in his own heart, he becomes, as Gregor says in his determination of peace, the originator of “loving understanding among the people.” Nothing would be more modern than the Abrahams religions attempt to provide their believers with this maxim and to thus let them become active witnesses of peace. Because, that would be the surest way to actually save the endangered world peace for the millennium begun. That is why the new peace awareness is tied-back to the own-concept of reaching the fellowship of God.

Only Peace Can Save the World

Considering the pictures of horror and destruction arriving almost daily from Israel, it seems like a dream, when the prophet Isaiah promises: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks”; because, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” And when that therewith promised in the Gospel of St. John assures: “Peace I leave with you, My Peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you.” From that, The Epistle to the Ephesians concludes the sum of that which is the basis of the Christian understanding of peace with the sentence: “He is our peace.” With that, the prophet was no less an illusionist than Jesus Himself. Rather, both know what the horror scenarios illustrated: that hate, violence, and terror plunge the opponents deeper and deeper into ruin. Therefore, the unforgotten Council Pope John XXIII wrote the sentence into the conscience of humanity in his peace encyclical ‘Pacem in terris’ that considering the modern potential of weapons, war can never again be used as a means for settling political, economic or social conflicts: a word that was never as current as it is today. Because, in the wake of the liberal awakening of 1989, the European House came into being on the blood-soaked soil of Europe, and with it, an island of peace from which it was to be hoped that its impulse of peace would shine throughout the whole world. But, the terror attacks on the center of the world economy, together with the American reaction to it dealt that hope a setback, from which cannot be seen how it is to be overcome.

The Pressure of Suffering

With the urgency of a time signal, these events demand a renewed contemplation on the meaning of peace, to which there is no alternative and which therefore must be emphasized and attempted in its absoluteness. As everybody knows, television has the fatal effect that it transforms even the most horrible facts into dressed-up pictorial sequences, which effects a gentle fear in observer at best, but does not result in a suitable shock. Repressed therefore was the fighters' fear of death, the agonies of the injured and dying, the despair of the survivors and the deserted, and the degradation and brutalization of humanity executed in all that. Thus, a powerful pressure of suffering bears upon the search for peace, to which the pressure to find a meaning that is just as large is added. Apparently, it was not enough that, especially in post war eras, voices were raised, which complained of the lost peace, the horror of the battles, and the extinction of the dignity of man in the fire-storm of wars were raised, often in shocking words. Because the peace-thinkers, who built upon their appeals with Nikolaus von Kues and Immanuel Kant at their lead, on the one hand articulated passionately and astutely for the desirability of peace. But, they bowed under the experience theorem that every peace is followed by a new war, and therefore shoved the matter of peace into the realm of hopes and ideals. Therefore, in consideration of the modern situation, it must be even more emphatically asked how one should objectively think about peace.

Peace as an Imperative

According to Kant, a peace-willing people makes the determination: "There shall be no more wars among us." With that, the possibility of a new war remains open. However, whoever speaks using the renowned Tolstoy title "War and Peace," has, in principle, already betrayed peace to war. Because, peace is not only the greatest of all human utopias that presses itself with all force step by step towards its realization in this era; it also belongs to the top bracket of human ideas, to which there are no alternatives just as with the ideas of truth, freedom, and goodness, and which therefore must be thought of without any alternatives and conditions. Therefore, the New Testament turned the words of Isaiah, "righteousness creates peace," which Pious XII chose as his heraldic motto, into its opposite and righteousness was declared to be "fruit" and the consequence of peace. That, however, means that peace must be thought of and attempted without conditions and reservations in accordance with the other major concepts.

The Ability for Peace

Still, is humanity, who so readily leans toward hate, revenge, and violence, capable of peace at all? If the destroyed buildings and devastated cities, as is so often declared, are a mirror of its soul, then this is to be doubted very much. Many reasons speak for its inability for peace. But the deepest of all is angst as can now be seen from the fears rampant exactly in this era. Because, fear paralyzes and creates isolation, so that those attacked by it lose the contact to their contemporaries and become speechless and helpless. However, when pushed into the corner and threatened in their existence, the fearsome become unpredictable and aggressive. Therefore, the angst must be overcome, if humanity is to be moved to and become capable of peace. However, it is precisely this that Christianity wants to make understood from its midst. No matter how much the churches try to achieve its goals using the pedagogies of fear, and try to move humanity to accept its directives through the suggestion of conscience, sin, and the fear of hell, Christianity, from its origins, still remains the religion of overcoming fear. Therefore, the first word of the Resurrected, which reflects back into the Christmas message is: "Have no fear!" What is meant by that is explained in the sentence of John: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear."

Even if faith does not remove every form of the increasingly multiplying fears, still it overcomes the three root fears: the fear of God, the fear of fellow man, and humanity's fear of itself. The apprehension to lose the supporting stability of existence with God, through the message of the unconditionally loving God; the fear of fellow man through the commandment of charity, and the existential fear through the vocation of humanity to the fellowship of God. The last blessings of the Sermon on the Mount continue from there: "Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children!" Whomever feels raised up to the rank of the fellowship of God knows he is capable of and obliged to peace. The person crowned with the "crown of grace of the fellowship of God" is, as the Cappadocia Gregor von Nyssa assured, he who is truly capable of peace's work.

The Mutual Peace-Work

There are tasks of a dimension that cannot be overcome from any one institution or religion alone, but only on the path of the synergy of all. Since Christianity is obliged to the "Gospel of Peace," it must therefore try to close ranks with cooperation-willing partners. Buddhism offers itself in the first line because Buddha, according to the words of Guardi-

ni, made the astonishing attempt to raise existence out of the hinges of violence and a suffering condition, and to lead humanity on a path of impassive peacefulness. Simultaneously, however, Christianity stands in a special affinity to Judaism and Islam due to its belief in God and faith in revelation. The relationship to these “Abraham religions” however has stood under the sign of bloody persecutions and conflicts for centuries, up into the horrific scenes of the Second World War. In the meantime, however, they mutually stand before the challenge of an oceanically proliferating atheism, which they can only meet with a mutual effort and bundling of their energies. In order to remain plausible through that, they must, however, first prove to the world that they are willing to settle their old conflicts and to prove themselves worthy in the gift of their mutual belief in God through acts of tolerance and understanding. Because, only under this prerequisite will they prove themselves to the aesthetic surroundings that their message is capable of leading the world out of its crisis-bound and ever more threatening condition. But, if they are to be able to bundle their energies, they will need a mutual goal. This could certainly not be more topical than the goal of peace actually demanded by current events. For this, they would have to motivate their followers to show everyone that they, regardless of the burden of their history, are messengers of peace, based on their innermost determination and conviction.