

THE COMMONWEAL

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Pacem in Terris

IF THE PAST is any guide in these matters, the Catholic response to Pope John's magnificent encyclical *Pacem in Terris* will be slow and tentative. This is not to say that there will not be initial praise and publicity; that much at least is traditional. Already that praise has been heard. But the difference between initial praise and a full-blown change in Catholic thought at all levels is another matter; too frequently it has taken years or decades for the full force of an encyclical to be felt. In part, the reason for such lags bear on the slowness of Catholics to change their customary ways of thinking on fundamental issues; then, too, the very language of encyclicals and their deference to the past often obscures those elements with a radical import.

We fervently hope this will not be the fate of *Pacem in Terris*. The problems it raises, the issues it touches, bear immediately on our present human situation—one of crisis and danger for the whole human race. The world today, and those Catholics living in it, cannot afford to wait ten or twenty or fifty years to take the encyclical seriously. It challenges everyone now.

What are those challenges? One way to answer this question is by observing how little aid and comfort the encyclical gives to some widely held views on the modern world and especially on the nature of the Cold War. It provides no support for those who would argue that a holy war against Communism is called for; for those who believe that any aid given one nation by another should be determined solely by political and military considerations; for those who believe that a nuclear balance of terror is the best way to preserve peace; for those who would cheerfully resort to nuclear war in the name of "justice"; for those who would misuse the traditional doctrine of subsidiarity to keep the government out of the areas of social and economic welfare.

In the past, what one theologian has called the "studied ambiguity" of papal encyclicals has often served to allow any number of incompatible interpretations. There is certainly some of this ambiguity in *Pacem in Terris*; but its thrust is very clear—and, in many ways, revolutionary. It draws on the best of traditional Catholic thought while at the same time displaying an acute sensitivity to the empirical realities of contemporary life.

THUS THE encyclical challenges Catholics—and all "men of good will"—to take seriously the rights of the human person; that is the foundation for its message. In spelling out these rights, the Pope lays an emphasis on the right of security "in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment. . . ." Again, he stresses man's "right to freedom in searching for truth and in expressing and communicating his opinions . . . the right to honor God according to the dictates of an upright conscience. . . ." Nor is the Pope content simply to list human rights: at times he expressly points out the necessity of implementing and extending these rights. "It is not enough, for example, to acknowledge and respect every man's right to the means of subsistence: One must also strive to obtain that he actually has enough in the way of food and nourishment."

The touchstone, then, of the encyclical is the person—"endowed with intelligence and free will." Even "the person who errs is always and above all a human being, and he retains in every case his dignity as a human person." From this central point the Pope derives his conception of a "genuinely human" order in society: "an order whose foundation is truth, whose measure and objective is justice, whose driving force is love, and whose method of attainment is freedom."

Yet it is evident that few, if any, societies in the world today can claim to have achieved this ideal. In this respect, the Pope displays a healthy realism:

he presents the task of creating such societies as a ceaseless and difficult one. More than that, he is particularly persuasive in pointing out those complexities of the modern world which make the realization of the ideal difficult of attainment. On two points he is especially eloquent.

First, he explicitly points out the danger of the arms race. Not only does it sap the "intellectual and economic resources" of nations, but it also creates an atmosphere of terror among the peoples of the world: "Justice, then, right reason and humanity urgently demand that the arms race should cease." For those who have doubts that it should, the Pope drives his point home in the sharpest fashion: "It is hardly possible to imagine that in the atomic era war could be used as an instrument of justice."

If there is in this last sentence an implicit rejection of the applicability of the "just war" theory in a nuclear age (and we are not certain on this point), there is also a rejection of another time-honored way of thinking: that a nation should pursue its own ends independently of other nations. With one blow, the Pope disposes of this antiquated theory: "Today the universal common good poses problems of world-wide dimensions, which cannot be adequately tackled or solved except by the efforts . . . of public authorities which are in a position to operate in an effective manner on a worldwide basis. The moral order itself . . . demands that such a form of public authority be established."

The Pope very wisely does not attempt to spell out how such an authority could be established; this he leaves to the ingenuity of the statesmen of the world. At most he contents himself with commending the ideals of the United Nations while hoping at the same time that it "may become ever more equal to the magnitude and nobility of its tasks. . . ." More generally, the Pope in very few instances attempts to present detailed plans for the establishment of a more viable human world order: "The problem of bringing social reality into line with the objective requirements of justice is a problem which will never admit of a definitive solution."

Flexibility, vision, justice, the human person—all of these values are fully served by *Pacem in Terris*. They are not, sadly, always served in the real world. But that is our task; Pope John has done his part with eminence, charity and wisdom.

Boost for NATO

ONLY A FEW short months ago President de Gaulle's resolute "No" to the United States-British plan for a NATO nuclear force put the future of the Western Alliance in serious doubt. France seemed

determined to have and control her own nuclear force at the expense, if necessary, of the Atlantic Community. Now it seems, for whatever inscrutable reasons, France is reconsidering her disengagement from NATO, if not her design for a nuclear force of her own. The cordial atmosphere recently among the NATO representatives in Paris, as well as France's willingness to cooperate in contributing two fighter-bomber squadrons to the NATO Force in West Germany mark the stirrings of new life in at least the military part of the Alliance. For the French to back out now would be isolationist in the extreme.

A sure sign of revival within NATO was the protest note which the Soviet Union delivered to the Western nations during the Paris meetings, expressing the old fears of a West Germany armed with nuclear weapons and pressing for renewed negotiations over Berlin and European security. So far, however, the Russians have shown no real attempt to arrive at a peaceful settlement of those issues. But that is not to say there is no problem concerning West Germany's participation in a NATO nuclear force, from the Soviets' point of view.

It is good that hope of new life has been infused into NATO, but there is still a long way to go before a truly effective inter-allied nuclear defense can be realized. For one thing, West Germany, France and Italy seem to be increasingly disenchanted with the United States plan for Polaris missile-firing surface ships with mixed crews as the basis for the force. These countries claim that a submarine-based force is cheaper, more efficient and more "sophisticated," and their arguments must at least be considered.

The second major problem concerns the actual control of the multi-national force, as opposed to the old United States-sponsored multilateral force, which now seems to be emerging. According to the plan behind that force, the several participating countries would have a veto power over the firing of nuclear missiles. There are such obvious imperfections in that plan that it alone would demand arduous negotiations to establish.

Paradoxically, the recent French concessions may not represent so much of a gain for NATO, mili-

ADDITION TO THE STAFF

This week we are pleased to announce the addition to the staff of John Leo as an Associate Editor. Mr. Leo, a graduate of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, has since 1960 been one of the editors of the *Catholic Messenger* of Davenport, Iowa.