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## Christianity and Peace.<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE history of our times has shown us that there is no easy way to peace; and the world today with all its political upheavals and international problems challenges us to reconsider the true nature of the peace which all people desire. It is now clear that peace which can last and survive the ever-changing scenes of the world drama and the fortunes of history can only be built upon the firm foundations of justice, righteousness and a genuine respect for human personality. In the kind of world we live in lasting peace cannot be brought about by better economics and better politics, unless these are the manifestation of moral and spiritual values, and proceed from a transformed human nature. When we probe beneath the immediate and overwhelming economic and political problems we are confronted in the last analysis with a moral and spiritual problem.

Therefore in this discussion we are concerned fundamentally with the Christian conception of peace, and our task as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace. We are not concerned with an idealised picture of a world where cessation of hostilities and international rivalry for power and world domination has given place to Utopian prosperity and grandeur. On the contrary, we wish to take up the thesis that peace is a permanent quality of life and experience which can not only survive the onslaught of its enemies but also grow richer and more profound in the midst of the conflict. In the heart of the Christian Gospel is this message of peace and reconciliation. It is a message addressed to the world of all time with its greed and selfishness, pride and lust for power. It is a message to people of all time. Yet it is more than a message because it comes with tremendous power striking at the root problems of sin and evil. It challenges men and women to see the causes of disorder, confusion and war within and without. "Peace on earth" was the song of the angelic host who heralded the birth of the Prince of Peace, but the Cross stands in history as the supreme illustration of the costly undertaking of the author of peace. In the experience of those who accept the Lordship of Christ and the way of the Cross, peace is a present reality.

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the Baptist Youth World Congress in Stockholm.

We Christians have only to look around the world to realise that to many people the attainment of peace is a religious ideal. It is both fascinating and inspiring to reflect on the picture of the peaceful man some other religions have set forth. For our purpose the significant fact is that it is commonly held that the peaceful man is the good man or that peace is the fruit of goodness. The common characteristic of most religions is their quest after goodness. In the teachings of Confucius as illustrated in the Analects the good man or the perfect man is the peaceful man. Virtue, he taught, should be the ideal both of the ruler and his people, for virtue alone promotes and guarantees peace. In Buddhism, the religion of Ceylon and most of the East, the religious man is the peaceful man, and the final goal of the religious life is the attainment of peace. Peace as a religious quest is most clearly illustrated in Indian thought. The man who through self-discipline and ascetic renunciation has given himself to the contemplation of Absolute Brahma (ultimate Reality) is on the path to peace. In the bliss of communion with God, the world with all its pain and suffering is forgotten. In his experience of the Real, the problem of this illusory empirical order has ceased to be. The Hindu Saint who can rise to such spiritual heights is portrayed as the embodiment of serenity. We have a similar echo in the ancient Greek thought as illustrated in Aristotle's ethics, where the "great-souled" man is set forth as the ideal good man who has found peace. Peace is recognised by such systems of thought as a quality of life, a religious ideal with its moral and spiritual implications. In the non-Christian conception of peace, therefore, we observe that (a) peace is the reward of man's efforts after goodness; (b) This peace is non-communicative; (c) Peace is not within the reach of all people, because the ethical discipline and the intellectual or philosophical speculation pre-supposed can only be a specialist's task.

We then agree with those who maintain that peace is essentially religious in character, meaning thereby that its basis should be moral and spiritual. But our chief criticism of such ideologies is that they are too negative in conceiving peace more as an escape from evil and sin rather than as victory over them. Further, as we have already remarked, such a doctrine of peace makes too heavy a demand on the intellectual and moral qualities of man in making peace entirely the result of human effort.

It is the Christian view that peace is essentially a quality of life, and is supremely the gift of God in Christ. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "My peace give I unto you." When St. Paul describes salvation on the negative side as a three-fold liberation; from the spiritual forces in the

world, from the law, and from sin he is thinking in terms of victory. On the positive side the Christian is brought into fellowship with Christ and he lives in a friendly universe. He has peace not because he has escaped from the world of stark realities, but because Christ has overcome the power and the tyranny of evil and sin. "Let the peace of God garrison your hearts" wrote the Apostle. This is the peace which is described as one of the fruits of the Spirit; one of the characteristics of the new life.

Peace, from the Christian standpoint, is a permanent quality of the Christian life. It is not conditioned by the changing circumstances of the world, i.e., no international upheaval can destroy the royalty of inward peace. How abundantly has this been illustrated by the testimony of Christians who went through the fiery trial of persecution and indescribable pain and suffering during the world wars. Nevertheless it is conditioned by those essential requirements of justice, righteousness, duty and service we have seen in Christ. To be in a condition of peace and permeate the world with peace we must walk in the way of peace, upholding those moral and spiritual values which alone can provide the environment in which peace could thrive and flourish.

Christian peace is communicative. Christ sent His disciples with the Gospel of the redemptive love of God. It was a message of judgment, hope and peace. The task of the Church today is to be the Ambassador of Peace, to champion the cause of peace by standing firm and loyal to the Christian principles that make for peace. The task of the Church in international affairs is not always clear. And even when the issues are fairly clear the line of action becomes a matter of controversy. We are not surprised that Amsterdam could not speak with unanimity on the great issues of our day, e.g., the problems of war. But the tremendous truth that the spirit and message that could eventually promote peace is in the Gospel of Christ was recognised with fresh conviction. The application of Christian principles and standards to particular world issues is bound to be difficult. But the Christian Church stands to bear witness to the truth that all things are possible with God and that it is His sovereign, gracious will that people of every race and country should be reconciled to God and their fellowmen.

We are making a tremendous claim when we face this disillusioned world with its people seeking for peace in the stormy tempest, and looking for security in the midst of uncertainty and fear. What then are the fundamental assumptions of the claim we make—that in Christ is peace, and in Him we have seen the values and standards that make for concord? The first assumption of the Christian doctrine of peace is the sovereignty

of God. The historical process is not the effect of the blind play of circumstances. The world is not at the mercy of forces over which none has control. Christian theology has no place for the law of Karma—an inexorable law at the heart of the universe which rules out God from His creation. Nor has it a place for a materialistic interpretation of history. This is God's world. Secondly, God's purpose for the world is redemptive. In the O.T. revelation and in the Incarnation we see God reaching out to man. The Cross is the supreme moment in history when God's redemptive purpose is so marvellously revealed. It was this faith in God's purpose that inspired missionaries like William Carey to dedicate their lives to the conversion of India and other lands. Wherever the Gospel was preached and men and women responded they made the amazing discovery that Christ alone could give real and lasting peace. To be redeemed from ourselves, sin, pride, selfishness is to find ourselves in harmony with God's creation. The third assumption is that in the work of redemption and reconciliation God takes the initiative and calls for our co-operation.

We have already noted the erroneous idea that peace is some impersonal entity which could be brought about by legislation or by a little more of good will amongst nations. On the other hand we have drawn the conclusion that it is a quality of life and outlook we should bring into the world. The question may rightly be uppermost in the minds of most of us as to the relation between such a peace and the peace we all desire for the world today: in other words the controversial problem of how to relate our Christian experience and values to the particular economic and political situation that seem to be the immediate cause of unrest, anxiety and discord. We agree that lasting peace should spring from transformed human nature as illumined by the Spirit of God, because to seek for peace in the world while our whole personality is thrown into a state of internal confusion and conflict is to indulge in self deception. The forces that make for war within and make us hostile to the world outside must be overcome. This victory Christ has won for us. This peace implies that we love and follow the ways of justice and righteousness in all our dealings. In our programmes of social reconstruction, economic reforms and politics, we must be sure that we stand by Christian principles. Our particular problems vary with the different countries we represent and their social and political structures. Happy are we when there is no conflict between our Christian convictions and our duty as citizens of our countries. Whatever the situation may be, our task is to bring into the complex of social relationships the peaceful outlook and spirit radiating something of the peace we have found in Christ.

The world has advanced with amazing speed in the realm of technical and scientific achievements. Some have begun to feel that man is unable to keep pace with this progress. The tragedy of scientific progress arises when it results in a devaluation of human life. Lasting peace necessarily demands that human life should be recognised as the greatest thing in the world—the crown of God's creation. The world today needs the Christian message that man is made in God's image, endowed with moral and spiritual capacities which alone give him his true status as a person. We must learn to respect all people even those we dislike. There is a divine spark in every human heart which can be quickened by the spirit of God.

Christianity does not provide an easy way. It has no easy solution to the problem of world peace. Those who champion the cause of lasting peace, and make no compromise about its demands, but remain loyal to Christ, are bound to come into conflict with those who attempt to build a world for themselves in utter disregard of God and His loving purpose for the world. Peace is a costly undertaking, but let us remember that the way of redemption was the way of the Cross. The challenging of the world situation comes to us as Christian young people. We can be faithful ambassadors of peace only by taking Christianity seriously. Let us make sure that we have enthroned Christ as Lord in our lives, and that we know the source and the secret of Lasting Peace.

Let us go into all parts of the earth taking with us this peace into every sphere of life. Let us sow in every land seeds of friendship and love.

W. G. WICKRAMASINGHE.