



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

***Pacem in terris* as a living document**

Trastevere, 29 May 2012

Your Excellencies my Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Scholars and Practitioners of Peace, Brothers and Sisters in our Lord:

As a former student of Sacred Scripture, I am happy to fulfil the role of “a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:52) and so to contribute to this opening session, “‘New things’ in the theology, ethics, and practice of Catholic peace-building.” My assigned task is to read with you the 50-year-old *Pacem in terris* as a living document. This is how I will proceed: After a glance at the historical context, I would like to focus on the core idea of the Encyclical. On this basis, then, I will sprint through its six sections, highlighting in each a “living” idea which, I suggest, might still be especially relevant to Catholic peacebuilding. My conclusion will be some hints and questions about building peace today and tomorrow.

1. Historical preamble

The longing for peace is a wide river running through the pontifical texts of the troubled 20th century.

In his *Appeal to the Leaders of the Warring Nations* of 1917, Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) condemned war as unnecessary massacre or senseless slaughter. He systematically taught the same in his 1920 “Peace, the most beautiful task of God”¹ on the theme of peace and Christian reconciliation. This was the first encyclical entirely devoted to the theme of peace.

Pius XI dedicated his 1922 encyclical to “the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ,”² extensively developing the theme in the years after the tragedy of World War I.

The motto of Pius XII’s pontificate (1939-1958) was *Opus iustitiae pax*, peace is the fruit or work of justice. During World War II, he gave many addresses and broadcast many Christmas Radio Messages promoting civil rights, social peace, and unity among nations.³ On matters of war and peace, he issued ten encyclicals, mostly after 1945 – for example, *Optatissima pax* (18.12.47) on prescribing public prayers for social and world peace, and *Summi maeroris* (19.07.50) on public prayers for peace – and in 1956 three of

¹ Title: *Pacem, Dei munus pulcherrimum* (1920).

² Title: *Ubi arcano Dei consilio* (1922).

³ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, § 93.

them in the space of eight days protesting the Soviet invasion of Hungary and praying for freedom and peace.⁴

And then came Pope John XXIII (1958-1963). Some of us remember his pontificate personally, and we all know about the world broken into two Blocs after World War II – each with its colonies, and separated by an Iron Curtain which, in mid-1961, found concrete expression in the Berlin Wall. We know about the nuclear arms race which reached its historical brink in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, a crisis that Pope John did much – perhaps everything – to defuse.

But preventing war is not the same as building peace, and it is the latter which Pope John wanted to leave as his legacy to the Church and the world. So in the few months between the missile crisis in October 1962 and its promulgation on 11 April 1963, *Pacem in terris* was written in Italian and edited several times. Finally translated into its official Latin, the Holy Father signed it on Holy Thursday, and because he was leaving his last will and testament to all his sons and daughters of the Church and to all people of good will, he signed it on television.

Since the title given me would have us read the encyclical *as a living document*, I can do no better than let Pope John himself show us how to do so with faith and hope:

Some say – I have heard it said myself – that the pope is too optimistic, that he sees only the good, that he takes everything at its best. But by now, I don't know how to distance myself naturally, given my way, from Our Lord who did nothing but infuse goodness, happiness, peace and encouragement into his surroundings.⁵

Let us see, then, how this Encyclical encourages us to imbue our surrounding world with the same optimism and peace. The way to begin, it seems to me, is to seek the touchstone, the core or nucleus, the most basic principles that animate the Encyclical.

2. The core idea

The obvious priority for any Supreme Pontiff would be to uphold the ideal of peace and call for an end to war. But Pope John does not argue from war to peace; he does not urge everyone to banish war and leave space for peace.

Instead, the undeniable fact of human *relationships* and the irreducible value of human *dignity* are his starting blocks and, in a real sense, he never leaves them. From the word “go!” – as if not wanting to get sucked in by the destructive fear of war – he starts building peace and never stops. He begins and continues and finishes with the dynamics of relationship within every person and between people. He begins and continues and finishes with the irreducible core of dignity within each and every man and woman and within them all. He begins with the individual person and the dyad, and he does not stop

⁴ *Luctuosissimi eventus* (28.10.56) urging public prayers for peace and freedom for the people of Hungary; *Laetamur admodum* (1.11.56) renewing exhortation for prayers for peace for Poland, Hungary and the Middle East; and *Datis nuperrime* (5.11.56) lamenting the sorrowful events in Hungary and condemning the ruthless use of force.

⁵ “Qualcuno dice, ho sentito dire anch'io, che il papa è troppo ottimista, che non vede che il bene, che prende tutte le cose da quella parte lì del bene, ma già, io non so distaccarmi naturalmente, a mio modo, dal nostro Signore, il quale pure non ha fatto che infondere intorno a sé il bene, la letizia, la pace, l'incoraggiamento.” La RAI - Radiotelevisione Italiana, 31.03.62.

until he reaches the whole human family and all its institutions and the universal common good they should serve.

Monsignor (later Cardinal) Pietro Pavan, the material writer of the same Encyclical of which Pope John XXIII is the real author, explains this very well: “Human beings – men and women – have already acquired ... their *personal* dignity: a dignity understood *not* in the moral but in the *existential* sense. And it is this dignity which becomes recognized and attributed to every human being in virtue of his very nature only for the fact that he is a person.”⁶

My dear brothers and sisters, if you were reading the text with your own eyes, at the words “acquired ... their *personal* dignity” you would see points of suspension. The phrase I left out, from 1963, was true then, for Monsignor Pavan was referring to a still incomplete process. So his statement included: “Some human beings are *in the process of acquiring* their personal dignity.” Now I have re-inserted the words into my remarks

- out of emotion as a Ghanaian: in 1963 my country – the first colony in sub-Saharan Africa to attain independence – had been independent for only 6 years.
- out of emotion as an African: in 1963, African Americans were still *in the process of acquiring* their personal dignity.
- out of emotion as a Catholic: how many believers in 1963 and since then have been persecuted and martyred for their faith ... and still are?
- out of emotion as a human being: I cannot not think of the slavery, trafficking, abortion, rape, suicide, euthanasia and pillage that go on even as we speak, not to mention less obvious but still pernicious acts and situations of imperialism and colonialism and war: war overt and covert, war conventional and ‘informal’, war never clean and usually very very dirty....

However, it is not only out of emotion that I have paused. I also have a pedagogic motive: to emphasize that for Pope John, human *relationship* and human *dignity* are the indispensable core, building-block and touch-stone of peace. It is not difficult to grasp *relationship* and *dignity* as clear ideas and even as essential to an enlightened humanism that centres on the person in society. But, with his inexorable insistence and careful elaboration, Pope John offers us *relationship* and *dignity* as constitutive of the densest, thickest, richest human reality. Can we not conceive of these as *the* gift of God our Creator when He made Man? Must we not confess that these are *the* gift which man’s inhumanity so blindly denies and tramples and steals in so many monstrous ways?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites *Pacem in terris* in its crucial statement on the human dignity and human rights that transcend any other consideration:

Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them,

⁶ “E’ indubbio che un segno dei tempi che maggiormente contraddistingue e caratterizza questa nostra epoca è la maggiore consapevolezza che gli esseri umani – uomini e donne – hanno già acquistato o stanno per acquistare *della loro dignità di persona*: una dignità intesa *non* in senso morale, ma in senso *esistenziale*. E’ cioè la dignità che viene riconosciuta e attribuita ad ogni essere umano in virtù della sua stessa natura solo per il fatto che è persona.” Pietro Pavan, *Pace in terra: Commento all’enciclica Pacem in terris*, Treviso: San Liberale, 2003, pp. 121-22.

or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.⁷

So, *relationships* are not something we happen to be in, and *dignity* is not something that we may or may not have. *Relationships* and *dignity* are what we are as *human*, and no one else and nothing else in heaven or on earth are so constituted. As creatures created with inalienable dignity, we exist in relationship with our brothers and sisters and, outside of such relationship, less than human is what one sadly finds oneself to be. And just so, and so justly, Pope John XXIII locates peace in the *dignity* of every human person and in persons in *relationship* – where justice governs relationships and people embrace the dignity of every person, there peace begins to reign.

3. Elaboration

Let us now survey the encyclical and, in each of its six parts, highlight a key idea especially relevant to peacebuilding.

Introduction (PT 1-7)⁸

“In the beginning God created man; in His image and likeness He created him; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). God endowed his human creation with freedom and intelligence.

And yet, Pope John regrets, “there is a disunity among individuals and among nations which is in striking contrast to this perfect order in the universe. One would think that the relationships that bind men together could only be governed by force” (PT 4). So in the relationship of force, he sees a *deviation* from the order established by God. When we make use of force, we abandon ourselves to inhuman and irrational and destructive forces, rather than entrusting ourselves to reason according to the divine order. The building of peace on earth, the introduction insists, is certainly a task to be taken up with reason; and also, and better, with faith in God as well.

I. Order between men (PT 8-45)

The first chapter, called “Order between men,” is so easy to sum up that one is in danger of missing its revolutionary meaning as the indispensable point of departure for all peace-making:

Each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable (PT 9).

Therefore *all* human beings are equal in dignity; without discrimination. All humans are equal, not only before the law, but in the eyes and hearts and, especially, behaviour of *all* their brothers and sisters. No one is too young a foetus or a youth; or too comatose or old;

⁷ *Catechism* § 1930 with reference to *Pacem in terris*, 65.

⁸ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html

or too poor or handicapped or foreign; or too black or female, or too religious or of the wrong religion or tribe or party ... to be acknowledged as indivisibly, irreducibly human.

Every human being is a person, the subject of both rights and duties, and not just conventional rights but first of all rights lovingly infused by our Creator. To call a stone or a tomato or a dog an “individual” is accurate enough – any single entity can be so denoted. But as a category, “individual” says far too little about any one of us; for to be man, woman or child is to be brother or sister, created in relationship, created with equal human dignity, created as a member of one human family.

Towards the end of the first chapter, Pope John can already draw out an extraordinary consequence of the fundamental starting point which, I trust, we too are ready to adopt: “[H]uman society thrives on freedom, namely, on the use of means which are consistent with the dignity of its individual members, who, being endowed with reason, assume responsibility for their own actions” (PT 35).

My dear friends, with what we have so far – freedom, dignity, reason and responsibility – do we not already have enough to build peace?

II. Relations between individuals and the public authorities (PT 46-79)

The second chapter builds directly on the first. What is true between persons also holds true for those many human groupings which we call institutions or authorities. The truth here could hardly be simpler: “All men are equal in natural dignity; no man has the capacity to force internal compliance on another.” Note how this is articulated within a paragraph on the legitimacy of public authority:

[A] regime which governs solely or mainly by means of threats and intimidation or promises of reward, provides men with no effective incentive to work for the common good. And even if it did, it would certainly be offensive to the dignity of free and rational human beings. Authority is before all else a moral force. For this reason the appeal of rulers should be to the individual conscience, to the duty which every man has of voluntarily contributing to the common good. But since all men are equal in natural dignity, no man has the capacity to force internal compliance on another. Only God can do that, for He alone scrutinizes and judges the secret counsels of the heart (PT 48).

It is worth reading the paragraph twice, once as it would have sounded in Moscow and then again in Washington. In brief, no authority, no power has the right to coerce, to infringe upon freedom; on the contrary, every authority should pursue the common good.

III. Relations between States (PT 80-129)

Following Pope John’s basic logic, the third chapter treats how states should deal with one another. In his own words: “[N]o one can be by nature superior to his fellows, since all men are equally noble in natural dignity. And consequently there are no differences at all between political communities from the point of view of natural dignity” (PT 89).

With dignity grounding the relationships between and among political communities, *Pacem in terris* rejects all oppression between State and State.

Therefore (again it seems too simple, but so it is), laws must be respected and, when violated, the lawbreaker fairly tried and really punished. Treaties must be

implemented. Corruption, all kinds of cheating at every level, must be snuffed out. If all this were done, would we not be much closer to justice and therefore to peace?

But there is more. For peace really to take hold, *trust* has to be at the centre,⁹ and Blessed John means real trust, not just diplomatic confidence-building measures. So what he calls for between states is not an eviscerated or diluted form of what he began with between persons!

In his own words: “[R]elations between States, as between individuals, must be regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation” (PT 114) or effective solidarity. Logically, therefore, “lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust” (PT 113). Imagine, in October 1962, with countless nuclear-tipped missiles aimed at Moscow and Washington, someone calling upon world leaders to set aside their mutual suspicion in favour of mutual trust – that someone can only have been a Prophet of God and indeed a Saint!

IV. Relationship of men and of political communities with the world community (PT 130-145)

In our globalized world it is customary to lament the fragmentation and isolation into which we seem to be falling, despite vastly enhanced means of communication – never so instantly connectible, yet never so alone and out of touch with each other. And so the title of the fourth chapter delights me with its audacious hope, for it claims that not only states belong to the world community but also “men” – that is, individual persons. Yes, we *all* belong to the global community ... and that is what the Encyclical has been saying from the beginning. And the precious expression for that, in Catholic Social teaching, is the *common good*.

“The common good of individual States is something that cannot be determined without reference to the human person,” says Pope John, “and the same is true of the common good of all States taken together” (PT 139). In this chapter, he also writes that “Today the universal common good presents us with problems which are world-wide in their dimensions” (PT 137). This leads to his far-sighted remarks on a political authority on a world scale which, if oriented towards the universal common good, cannot fail to be founded on the dignity of human persons as free beings endowed with rights and duties.

Accordingly, may the United Nations Organization “be able progressively to adapt its structure and methods of operation to the magnitude and nobility of its tasks” (PT 145). *Pacem in terris* calls for a public authority of the world community “to evaluate and find a solution to economic, social, political and cultural problems which affect the universal common good” (PT 140). Global public authority is a challenge which, although very urgent, must surely take many patient years to be met in an effective and responsible manner.

⁹ For example, in Europe today, is there solidarity between the countries? E.g., between Germany and Greece?

V. Pastoral exhortations (PT 146-172)

Arriving finally at the fifth chapter and seeing it entitled “pastoral exhortations,” the hasty reader can be forgiven for thinking that the effective substance of the Encyclical has been given and now come a few pious suggestions for peace vigils and the like. Whereas in fact for everyone, but especially for peacemakers, this is where all the rubber hits all the roads! Let me choose one very favourite paragraph that bespeaks not an optional piety but a very serious obligation that follows from all the foregoing, namely,

the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom – relations between individual citizens, between citizens and their respective States, between States, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and States on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order (PT 163).

I believe that § 163 sums up the powerful efficacy of the Encyclical. It hearkens back to the opening passages, the creation of man as intelligent and free; insofar as relationships are conceived only in terms of force, this is deviation and failure. John XXIII extends a most powerful invitation to action, to political participation, so that people might make reason prevail over barbarity, law over violence and, in imitation of God at the very beginning, order, generosity, light and life over chaos.

This paragraph makes another crucial contribution by identifying the four pillars or virtues of truth, justice, love and freedom on which peace must be founded. These are the basis for harmonious development and for solidarity among peoples. These pillars are also the virtues of *communion*, which is what every man and woman was created for: *to be in communion with God and with one another*.

When in early January 1963 Pope John finished going through the draft Encyclical as we have done, he wrote in his journal:

I then dedicated the whole evening, about three hours, to the reading of the Easter encyclical in preparation, done for me by Msgr Pavan: “Peace among men in the order established by God and so: in truth, in justice, in love, in freedom.” A typed manuscript of 111 pages. I read it all, alone, calmly, attending to the tiniest detail, and I find the work really well constructed and well done. The last part, then: the “Pastoral exhortations” are in the fullest resonance with my spirit. I begin to pray for the impact of this document, which I hope will come out at Easter and will be reason for great edification.¹⁰

The four pillars are for building an edifice of peace – peacebuilding, construction of that shalom which is the true home of the human race, the real possibility of realizing peace in

¹⁰ “Ho poi consacrato tutto il Vespero, circa tre ore nella lettura della enciclica di Pasqua in preparazione, fattami da Mgr Pavan: «La pace fra gli uomini nell’ordine stabilito da Dio e cioè: nella verità, nella giustizia, nell’amore, nella libertà». Manoscritto di 111 pagine dattilografate. Ho letto tutto, solo, con calma e minutissimamente e lo trovo lavoro assai bene congegnato e ben fatto. L’ultima parte poi: «Richiami Pastoral» in pienissima risonanza con il mio spirito. Comincio a pregare per la efficacia di questo documento, che spero uscirà a Pasqua e sarà motivo di grande edificazione.” Alberto Melloni, *Pacem in terris: Storia dell’ultima enciclica di Papa Giovanni*, Bologna: Laterza, 2010, pp. 51-52, quoting *Pater amabilis: Agende del pontefice* (1958-1963), p. 482.

history. We do not find in John XXIII an academic or diplomatic abstraction of peace, nor vague and confused wishful thinking about it. He proposes instead a spiritual revolution with a solid rational foundation accompanied by a purified faith.

4. Conclusion

Laudable as it is to look back and celebrate a great encyclical of a great Pope, our urgent task is Catholic peace-building for tomorrow. So let me speak now as the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace who is most anxious to learn from you over the next two days and to collect suggestions for the future direction of our work.

Early in my talk, I cited Pope John's response to the charge that he was overly optimistic. Not 'too optimistic', I would say, but solidly hopeful because, following the Social Teaching of the Church, have we not come a long way?

I began with historical references to a half-century of papal preoccupations with peace against a background of war. Then Blessed John XXIII gave the world his final encyclical with the surprising title "Peace on earth" – a surprise because everyone would naturally anticipate another exhortation to avoid war. Instead, it contained something truly new: a radical re-imagining of harmony in the world founded on human relationship and dignity – so radical, indeed, that human relationships on every scale, from world-wide and among regions and major States down to the dyad of two people, are founded on the same principles of *relationship* and *dignity* and animated by the same virtues of truth, justice, love and freedom. And most fundamentally, this is all given a transcendental starting point in God's creation of man.

This new way of thinking is *transcendental* in at least four senses.

1. It belongs to *all* scales from relationships between two persons to relations between the great regional groupings and institutions and with the whole.
2. It fits *all* instances because it respectfully invokes human dignity and solidarity no matter what the level.
3. It is *universal* because it derives from the irreducible human essence, whether seen in terms
 - a. of the fundamentals of human nature (a consensus that suits secular thinkers), or
 - b. of the divine origin and eternal destiny of human existence (a spiritual or religious conviction). And finally,
4. Within the Catholic tradition, this social teaching is thoroughly rooted in the words and deeds of the *eternal* God-made-man, our Lord Jesus Christ who is God's love and peace made incarnate and manifest in the world.

And yet, despite the hopeful sign of *Pacem in terris* and the personal warrant of its beloved author who had defused the Cuban missile crisis the previous year, there have been far too many wars since 1963, along with horrid genocides and new tools of warfare unknown, unimaginable, fifty years ago.

But in this same conflictual half-century, we have also seen signs of the new mentality that Blessed Pope John called for. In the coming sessions, I am anxious to hear about the innovations in conflict resolution and inter-group mediation that have grown abundantly in recent decades. I wonder how you regard the recently developed

Responsibility to Protect and the challenging avenues for making good on this assertion of our common humanity.

You will speak about many fruits from seeds that fell on good soil, and some of them seeds surely from *Pacem in terris*. I limit myself to a single example, the truly astonishing experience of South Africa in the 1990s. Contrary to dire warnings and legitimate fears of unparalleled bloodshed, the transition to majority rule and the end of apartheid were achieved without large-scale violence. And what ensued was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which required and applied the virtues of truth, justice, love and freedom. That Commission has more or less reproduced itself about two dozen times around the world, and some of you have made distinguished contributions to such *post-bellum* efforts and processes.

Not wishing to divert you into debating any particular examples, I simply invite you to recognize a good spirit at large and at work, the same spirit that Pope John XXIII released when he threw open the windows of the Catholic Church to let a realistically positive appreciation of the world *in* and let saving ideas and assuaging rays of hope *out*.

Over half a century, then, society has learned to open doors for peace. What are the sources of such solidarity based on recognition of human dignity? I have briefly presented *Pacem in terris* of 50 years ago as a privileged source. Now it is up to each speaker and participant to contribute further ideas and especially concrete instances, recognizing how much we need, with God's help, to humanize globalization by striving, together, for the common good.

Confident that this conference will confirm how far we have come and that we are ready to go further, I wish to conclude with these words of Pope John: “[P]eace is but an empty word, if it does not rest upon ... an order that is founded on truth, built up on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom” (PT 167). May our deliberations be blessed by the intercession of Blessed John XXIII!

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