



The Holy See

MESSAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 2003

PACEM IN TERRIS:
A PERMANENT COMMITMENT

1. Almost forty years ago, on Holy Thursday, 11 April 1963, Pope John XXIII published his epic Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*. Addressing himself to “all men of good will”, my venerable predecessor, who would die just two months later, summed up his message of “peace on earth” in the first sentence of the Encyclical: “Peace on earth, which all men of every era have most eagerly yearned for, can be firmly established and sustained only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed” (*Introduction: AAS*, 55 [1963], 257).

Speaking peace to a divided world

2. The world to which John XXIII wrote was then in a profound state of disorder. The twentieth century had begun with great expectations for progress. Yet within sixty years, that same century had produced two World Wars, devastating totalitarian systems, untold human suffering, and the greatest persecution of the Church in history.

Only two years before *Pacem in Terris*, in 1961, the Berlin Wall had been erected in order to divide

and set against each other not only two parts of that City but two ways of understanding and building the earthly city. On one side and the other of the Wall, life was to follow different patterns, dictated by antithetical rules, in a climate of mutual suspicion and mistrust. Both as a world-view and in real life, that Wall traversed the whole of humanity and penetrated people's hearts and minds, creating divisions that seemed destined to last indefinitely.

Moreover, just six months before the Encyclical, and just as the Second Vatican Council was opening in Rome, the world had come to the brink of a nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The road to a world of peace, justice and freedom seemed blocked. Humanity, many believed, was condemned to live indefinitely in that precarious condition of “cold war”, hoping against hope that neither an act of aggression nor an accident would trigger the worst war in human history. Available atomic arsenals meant that such a war would have imperiled the very future of the human race.

The four pillars of peace

3. Pope John XXIII did not agree with those who claimed that peace was impossible. With his Encyclical, *peace* – in all its demanding truth – came knocking on both sides of the Wall and of all the other dividing walls. The Encyclical spoke to everyone of their belonging to the one human family, and shone a light on the shared aspiration of people everywhere to live in security, justice and hope for the future.

With the profound intuition that characterized him, John XXIII identified the essential conditions for peace in four precise requirements of the human spirit: *truth, justice, love and freedom* (cf. *ibid.*, I: *I.c.*, 265-266). *Truth* will build peace if every individual sincerely acknowledges not only his rights, but also his own duties towards others. *Justice* will build peace if in practice everyone respects the rights of others and actually fulfils his duties towards them. *Love* will build peace if people feel the needs of others as their own and share what they have with others, especially the values of mind and spirit which they possess. *Freedom* will build peace and make it thrive if, in the choice of the means to that end, people act according to reason and assume responsibility for their own actions.

Looking at the present and into the future with the eyes of faith and reason, Blessed John XXIII discerned deeper historical currents at work. Things were not always what they seemed on the surface. Despite wars and rumours of wars, something more was at work in human affairs, something that to the Pope looked like the promising beginning of a spiritual revolution.

A new awareness of human dignity and inalienable human rights

4. Humanity, John XXIII wrote, had entered a new stage of its journey (cf. *ibid.*, I: *I.c.*, 267-269). The end of colonialism and the rise of newly independent States, the protection of workers' rights, the new and welcome presence of women in public life, all testified to the fact that the human race was indeed entering a new phase of its history, one characterized by “*the conviction that all men are equal by reason of their natural dignity*” (*ibid.*, I: *I.c.*, 268). The Pope knew that that dignity was still being trampled upon in many parts of the world. Yet he was convinced that, despite the dramatic situation, the world was becoming increasingly *conscious of certain spiritual values*, and increasingly open to the meaning of those *pillars of peace* – truth, justice, love, and freedom (cf. *ibid.*, I: *I.c.*, 268-269). Seeking to bring these values into local, national and international life, men and women were becoming more aware that their relationship with God, the source of all good, must be the solid foundation and supreme criterion of their lives, as individuals and in society (cf. *ibid.*). This evolving spiritual intuition would, the Pope was convinced, have profound public and political consequences.

Seeing the growth of awareness of human rights that was then emerging within nations and at the international level, Pope John XXIII caught the potential of this phenomenon and understood its singular power to change history. What was later to happen in central and eastern Europe would confirm his insight. The road to peace, he taught in the Encyclical, lay in the defence and promotion of basic human rights, which every human being enjoys, not as a benefit given by a different social class or conceded by the State but simply because of our humanity: “Any human society, if it is to be well-ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations, flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature. And as these rights and obligations are universal and inviolable so they cannot in any way be surrendered” (*ibid.*, 259).

As history would soon show, this was not simply an abstract idea; it was an idea with profound consequences. Inspired by the conviction that every human being is equal in dignity, and that society therefore had to adapt its form to that conviction, *human rights movements* soon arose and gave concrete political expression to one of the great dynamics of contemporary history: the quest for freedom as an indispensable component of work for peace. Emerging in virtually every part of the world, these movements were instrumental in replacing dictatorial forms of government with more democratic and participatory ones. They demonstrated in practice that peace and progress could only be achieved by respecting *the universal moral law written on the human heart* (cf. John Paul II, [*Address to the United Nations General Assembly*](#), 5 October 1995, No. 3).

The universal common good

5. On another point too [*Pacem in Terris*](#) showed itself prophetic, as it looked to the next phase of

the evolution of world politics. Because the world was becoming increasingly interdependent and global, the common good of humanity had to be worked out on the international plane. It was proper, Pope John XXIII taught, to speak of a “*universal common good*” (*Pacem in Terris*, IV: *I.c.*, 292). One of the consequences of this evolution was the obvious need for a *public authority, on the international level*, with effective capacity to advance the universal common good; an authority which could not, the Pope immediately continued, be established by coercion but only by the consent of nations. Such a body would have to have as its fundamental objective the “recognition, respect, safeguarding, and promotion of the rights of the human person” (*ibid.*, IV: *I.c.*, 294).

Not surprisingly therefore John XXIII looked with hope and expectation to the United Nations Organization, which had come into being on June 26, 1945. He saw that Organization as a credible instrument for maintaining and strengthening world peace, and he expressed particular appreciation of its 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which he considered “an approximation towards the establishment of a juridical and political organization of the world community” (*ibid.*, IV: *I.c.*, 295). What he was saying in fact was that the *Declaration* set out the moral foundations on which the evolution of a world characterized by order rather than disorder, and by dialogue rather than force, could proceed. He was suggesting that the vigorous defence of human rights by the United Nations Organization is the indispensable foundation for the development of that Organization's capacity to promote and defend international security.

Not only is it clear that Pope John XXIII's vision of an effective international public authority at the service of human rights, freedom and peace has not yet been entirely achieved, but there is still in fact much hesitation in the international community about the obligation to respect and implement human rights. This duty touches *all* fundamental rights, excluding that arbitrary picking and choosing which can lead to rationalizing forms of discrimination and injustice. Likewise, we are witnessing the emergence of an alarming gap between a series of new “rights” being promoted in advanced societies – the result of new prosperity and new technologies – and other more basic human rights still not being met, especially in situations of underdevelopment. I am thinking here for example about the right to food and drinkable water, to housing and security, to self-determination and independence – which are still far from being guaranteed and realized. *Peace demands that this tension be speedily reduced and in time eliminated.*

Another observation needs to be made: the international community, which since 1948 has possessed a charter of the inalienable rights of the human person, has generally failed to *insist sufficiently on corresponding duties*. It is *duty* that establishes the limits within which *rights* must be contained in order not to become an exercise in arbitrariness. A greater awareness of *universal human duties* would greatly benefit the cause of peace, setting it on the moral basis of a shared recognition of *an order in things* which is not dependent on the will of any individual or group.

A new international moral order

6. Nevertheless it remains true that, despite many difficulties and setbacks, *significant progress has been made* over the past forty years towards the implementation of Pope John's noble vision. The fact that States throughout the world feel obliged to honour the idea of human rights shows how powerful are the tools of moral conviction and spiritual integrity, which proved so decisive in the revolution of conscience that made possible the 1989 non-violent revolution that displaced European communism. And although distorted notions of freedom as licence continue to threaten democracy and free societies, it is surely significant that, in the forty years since *Pacem in Terris*, much of the world has become more free, structures of dialogue and cooperation between nations have been strengthened, and the threat of a global nuclear war, which weighed so heavily on Pope John XXIII, has been effectively contained.

Boldly, but with all humility, I would like to suggest that the Church's fifteen-hundred-year-old teaching on peace as "*tranquillitas ordinis* – the tranquillity of order" as Saint Augustine called it (*De Civitate Dei*, 19, 13), which was brought to a new level of development forty years ago by *Pacem in Terris*, has a deep relevance for the world today, for the leaders of nations as well as for individuals. That there is serious disorder in world affairs is obvious. Thus the question to be faced remains: *What kind of order can replace this disorder*, so that men and women can live in freedom, justice, and security? And since the world, amid its disorder, continues nevertheless to be "ordered" and organized in various ways – economic, cultural, even political – there arises another equally urgent question: On what principles are these new forms of world order unfolding?

These far-reaching questions suggest that the problem of order in world affairs, which is the problem of peace rightly understood, cannot be separated from issues of moral principle. This is another way of saying that the question of peace cannot be separated from the question of human dignity and human rights. That is one of the enduring truths taught by *Pacem in Terris*, which we would do well to remember and reflect upon on this fortieth anniversary.

Is this not the time for all to *work together for a new constitutional organization of the human family*, truly capable of ensuring peace and harmony between peoples, as well as their integral development? But let there be no misunderstanding. This does not mean writing the constitution of a global super-State. Rather, it means continuing and deepening processes already in place to meet the almost universal *demand for participatory ways of exercising political authority, even international political authority, and for transparency and accountability at every level of public life*. With his confidence in the goodness he believed could be found in every human person, Pope John XXIII called the entire world to a nobler vision of public life and public authority, even as he boldly challenged the world to think beyond its present state of disorder to new forms of international order commensurate with human dignity.

The bond between peace and truth

7. Against those who think of politics as a realm of necessity detached from morality and subject only to partisan interests, Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, outlined a truer picture of human reality and indicated the path to a better future for all. Precisely because human beings are created with the capacity for moral choice, *no human activity takes place outside the sphere of moral judgment*. Politics is a human activity; therefore, it too is subject to a distinctive form of moral scrutiny. This is also true of international politics. As the Pope wrote: “The same natural law that governs the life and conduct of individuals must also regulate the relations of political communities with one another” (*Pacem in Terris*, III: *I.c.*, 279). Those who imagine that international public life takes place somewhere outside the realm of moral judgment need only reflect on the impact of *human rights movements* on the national and international politics of the twentieth century just concluded. These developments, anticipated by the teaching of the Encyclical, decisively refute the claim that international politics must of necessity be a “free zone” in which the moral law holds no sway.

Perhaps nowhere today is there a more obvious need for the correct use of political authority than in *the dramatic situation of the Middle East and the Holy Land*. Day after day, year after year, the cumulative effect of bitter mutual rejection and an unending chain of violence and retaliation have shattered every effort so far to engage in serious dialogue on the real issues involved. The volatility of the situation is compounded by the clash of interests among the members of the international community. Until those in positions of responsibility undergo a veritable revolution in the way they use their power and go about securing their peoples' welfare, it is difficult to imagine how progress towards peace can be made. The fratricidal struggle that daily convulses the Holy Land and brings into conflict the forces shaping the immediate future of the Middle East shows clearly the need for men and women who, out of conviction, will implement policies firmly based on the principle of respect for human dignity and human rights. Such policies are incomparably more advantageous to everyone than the continuation of conflict. A start can be made on the basis of this truth, which is certainly more liberating than propaganda, especially when that propaganda serves to conceal inadmissible intentions.

The premises of a lasting peace

8. There is an unbreakable bond between *the work of peace* and *respect for truth*. Honesty in the supply of information, equity in legal systems, openness in democratic procedures give citizens a sense of security, a readiness to settle controversies by peaceful means, and a desire for genuine and constructive dialogue, all of which constitute *the true premises of a lasting peace*. Political summits on the regional and international levels serve the cause of peace only if joint commitments are then honoured by each party. Otherwise these meetings risk becoming

irrelevant and useless, with the result that people believe less and less in dialogue and trust more in the use of force as a way of resolving issues. The negative repercussions on peace resulting from commitments made and then not honoured must be carefully assessed by State and government leaders.

Pacta sunt servanda, says the ancient maxim. If at all times commitments ought to be kept, *promises made to the poor* should be considered particularly binding. Especially frustrating for them is any breach of faith regarding promises which they see as vital to their well-being. In this respect, the failure to keep commitments in the sphere of aid to developing nations is a serious moral question and further highlights the injustice of the imbalances existing in the world. *The suffering caused by poverty is compounded by the loss of trust*. The end result is hopelessness. The existence of trust in international relations is *a social capital of fundamental value*.

A culture of peace

9. In the end, peace is not essentially about *structures* but about *people*. Certain structures and mechanisms of peace – juridical, political, economic – are of course necessary and do exist, but they have been derived from nothing other than the accumulated wisdom and experience of *innumerable gestures of peace* made by men and women throughout history who have kept hope and have not given in to discouragement. *Gestures of peace* spring from the lives of people who *foster peace first of all in their own hearts*. They are the work of the heart and of reason in those who are peacemakers (cf. Mt 5:9). *Gestures of peace* are possible when people *appreciate fully the community dimension of their lives*, so that they grasp the meaning and consequences of events in their own communities and in the world. *Gestures of peace* create a tradition and a culture of peace.

Religion has a vital role in fostering gestures of peace and in consolidating conditions for peace. It exercises this role all the more effectively if it concentrates on what is proper to it: attention to God, the fostering of universal brotherhood and the spreading of a culture of human solidarity. The *Day of Prayer for Peace* which I promoted in Assisi on 24 January 2002,

involving representatives of many religions, had this purpose. It expressed a desire to nurture peace by spreading a spirituality and a culture of peace.

The legacy of Pacem in Terris

10. Blessed Pope John XXIII was a man unafraid of the future. He was sustained in his optimism

by his deep trust in God and in man, both of which grew out of the sturdy climate of faith in which he had grown up. Moved by his trust in Providence, even in what seemed like a permanent situation of conflict, he did not hesitate to summon the leaders of his time to a new vision of the world. This is the legacy that he left us. On this World Day of Peace 2003, let us all resolve to have his same outlook: trust in the merciful and compassionate God who calls us to brotherhood, and confidence in the men and women of our time because, like those of every other time, they bear the image of God in their souls. It is on this basis that we can hope to build a world of peace on earth.

At the beginning of a new year in our human history, this is the hope that rises spontaneously from the depths of my heart: that in the spirit of every individual there may be a renewed dedication to the noble mission which *Pacem in Terris* proposed forty years ago to all men and women of good will. The task, which the Encyclical called “immense”, is that “of establishing new relationships in human society, under the sway and guidance of truth, justice, love, and freedom”. Pope John indicated that he was referring to “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”. He concluded by saying that “to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order” was a “most noble task” (*Pacem in Terris*, V: *I.c.*, 301-302).

The fortieth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* is an apt occasion to return to Pope John XXIII's prophetic teaching. Catholic communities will know how to celebrate this anniversary during the year with initiatives which, I hope, will have an ecumenical and interreligious character and be open to all those who have a heartfelt desire “to break through the barriers which divide them, to strengthen the bonds of mutual love, to learn to understand one another and to pardon those who have done them wrong” (*I.c.*, 304).

I accompany this hope with a prayer to Almighty God, the source of all our good. May he who calls us from oppression and conflict to freedom and cooperation for the good of all help people everywhere to build a world of peace ever more solidly established on the four pillars indicated by Blessed Pope John XXIII in his historic Encyclical: *truth, justice, love, freedom*.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2002

JOHN PAUL II