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## Commentary

# Hasn't the Time Finally Come for the Establishment of a World Government?

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On Holy Thursday, April 11, 1963, Pope John XXIII signed live on the world's television stations his last and long-awaited encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. Its writing prompted several world events in this period only 18 years after the end of World War II, the period also called the Cold War. Half a year earlier, on October 11, 1962, the Second Vatican Council began, and we still have before our eyes the ceremony with which Pope Francis commemorated the 60th anniversary of its opening in the Basilica of St. Peter with the exposed remains of St. John XXIII with his famous homily critically reacting to various ideological movements in the Church. However, the events of the so-called The Cuban crisis brought John XXIII to the idea of writing a radical anti-war Encyclical letter. Despite the fact that the very name of the Encyclical letter was misused by the communists to create the so-called the peace movement of priests in several countries of the Soviet bloc and therefore reminds us of the significant events of the given time, the Encyclical remains surprisingly relevant even 60 years after it was written.

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*To the 60th Anniversary of the publication of the encyclical Pacem in Terris by Pope John XXIII.*

After a long struggle for power following the death of Iosif Stalin (1953) and a brief period of leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union by Comrade Grigory Malenkov, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894-1971) becomes the leader of the Soviet Union. He was the first Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU: in office from 1953 to 1964), who publicly denounced Stalin's crimes, initiated the so-called 'destalinization', and was also the first Soviet leader to visit the United States of America (15 September 1959), a country with which he intended to establish a relationship of peaceful coexistence. Khrushchev, for his part, found himself in great difficulty after the mishandling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, after which the Russian fleet carrying

missiles for Castro's pro-Soviet government had to make a quick U-turn because of a naval blockade by the United States. His downfall was apparently the result of a conspiracy of party leaders, angered by his foreign policy, which embarrassed the party and the USSR itself on the international stage. The CPSU accused Khrushchev of major policy mistakes precisely during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 15-28, 1962.<sup>1</sup> In addition, an episode that could not go unnoticed was the visit of Khrushchev's daughter and son-in-law to Pope John XXIII at the Vatican. This visit may have taken place without consultation with the Party and threatened to be seen as a breakdown of the then Communist doctrine. Likewise, after a long period of McCarthyism and several post-colonial wars, the policy of the United States was also prepared for an atomic confrontation with its greatest ideological opponent, the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

During this dramatic period, Pope John XXIII sent a message to the Soviet Embassy in Rome on October 24,

1962, to be delivered to the Kremlin, and also to the American President (Catholic) J.F. Kennedy, expressing his concern for peace. In this message he declared, "We ask all governments not to remain deaf to this cry of humanity and to do all in their power to save the peace."<sup>3</sup>

*Pacem in Terris* (abr. PiT) is the last encyclical issued by Pope John XXIII on 11 April 1963, when he was already seriously affected by the disease - stomach cancer - from which he died in less than two months. It is one of his most famous, celebrated and debated encyclicals. It represents a clear means of renewal and political change, which the Pope wanted to initiate by convening the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962.<sup>4</sup> It is the first encyclical addressed to "all people of good will" besides the clergy and the Catholic faithful. *Pacem in Terris* represents a particularly powerful turning point in a world dominated by the Cold War and divided between capitalism and socialism. Pope John XXIII therefore raises his voice to recall the fundamental value of peace. The text of the encyclical was written by Pietro Pavan, professor and then rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, a former collaborator in the drafting of the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* of 15 May 1961. Pavan's work was also supported by the so-called contribution of the Secretary General of Pope Loris Capovilla.<sup>5</sup>

The argument develops at three interrelated levels: relations between citizens and political authorities, relations between political communities, and relations between citizens and national communities with the world community. At the heart of the encyclical is the affirmation of a just order willed by God, centred on the dignity of the human person and gradually reflected in history through the development of human institutions. After defining basic human rights, from the most basic (food, clothing, housing, rest, medical care) to "rights with political content" and corresponding duties, the document outlines a system of relations between political communities based on their equality "because of their inherent dignity," on their right to independent existence, on the protection of minorities, on the reception of political refugees, on solidarity and mutual trust as the only possible alternative to the arms race, conventional and nuclear. The encyclical pursues the profile of a world legal and political order corresponding to the "universal common good" and requiring appropriate "public powers", established by consensus and aimed at recognizing, respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of the person, without prejudice to the principle of subsidiarity. In the pastoral part, the encyclical stresses

the obligation of active participation in public life and the possible cooperation between Catholics and non-Catholics at the economic, social and political levels.

The encyclical was not directed towards state proposals that could become socialist in nature, and focused on the role of the centrality of man, free thought and understanding, reason, and the motor of ideal decisions and the goal of sociality. On the contrary, this encyclical is consistently focused on the theme of active peace and the building of paths to that peace - a deep desire of the people - seeing the light in a time of tension and cold war. The Pope speaks to a world divided between two blocs and at war in Vietnam, Africa and Latin America with the looming threat of nuclear rearmament. The message is strong: "Yet peace is but an empty word, if it does not rest upon that order which Our hope prevailed upon Us to set forth in outline in this encyclical. It is 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."<sup>6</sup> The document outlines four key points to guide humanity on the path of peace: the centrality of man, inviolable in his rights but also bearer of duties; the common good to be pursued and realized everywhere; the moral basis of the political community; the power of reason and the illuminating beacon of faith, to the final "pastoral challenges", the personal imprint of St. John XXIII, with references to active participation in public life and the realization of the common good.<sup>7</sup>

Peace, the fundamental and declared object of the encyclical, can only come about through a reassessment of the value of the individual in a *certain* (humanistic) sense, which cannot be destroyed in the presence of systems, whether capitalist or socialist. It is the so-called "third way", also known as the "way of common sense", rediscovered today by more and more people and groups, but already defined then. The universe is ruled by an amazing order, and this also testifies to the greatness of man, who discovers that order and creates the appropriate tools to seize these forces and turn them to his service.<sup>8</sup>

## Examples of important ideas of the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*

- The unique order of the universe is starkly contrasted by the disorder between people and nations, as if their relations with each other cannot be resolved except by violence (PiT 2).
- Human beings are by nature social creatures, and therefore they are to live together and seek each

other's good (PiT 14).

- Every well-ordered and properly ordered human society must have as its foundation the principle that every human being is a person, i.e., that he is endowed by nature with reason and free will, and as such has rights and duties which flow directly from his nature and are therefore universal, inalienable, and inalienable (PiT 3).
- However, we are not free to think that authority is not subject to any standards. On the contrary: it is the ability to give orders according to sound rational principles. For authority is a power mainly of a spiritual nature; hence public authorities should appeal to the conscience of individual citizens, i.e., to the duty which each of them has to contribute willingly his share for the good of all. (PiT 20).
- However, a distinction must always be made between error and the errant, even when it is a mistake or incomplete knowledge of moral-religious content. For a man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man and does not lose his human dignity, which must always be taken into account. Finally, man never loses his natural ability to abandon error and seek the way to truth (PiT 57).

As we have already pointed out, in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII made a detailed statement **on the issue of human rights**. Here we find the most important rights, which were also formulated in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. They are justified by the dignity of the human person. In 1965, the *Second Vatican Council* referred to this encyclical. Here man is considered as being created "by God the Creator with reason and freedom as the essence of communion" and must act according to his conscience. The most important aspects are: the *protection of individual human dignity*, the *recognition of the fundamental equality of all human beings*, and the *possibility of taking an active part in the life and governance of the state*. The state must ensure the protection and enforcement of human rights. At the same time, the Catholic Church claims the right "to subject political questions to moral judgement when the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls so require".<sup>9</sup>

Günthör notes that the 1948 UN Declaration, as well as the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and the Second Vatican Council's document *Gaudium et Spes* Article 26, speak only of the rights granted to the individual with respect to others and the state, not of the rights of the state with respect to individuals, or of a nation with respect to another nation. "Rights of man" thus designates the individual man. Thus, we see the decisive turn in the

Church that took place under Pope John XXIII.<sup>10</sup> This Pope emphasizes that the dignity of man has been increased by the supernatural elevation of his rights through revelation and redemption by the blood of Christ, and in this way, men have become children of God by grace and also friends of God and heirs of God's power.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Pope, human rights include:

- the right to exist and preserve one's own life;
- the right to truth, honour and the formation of spiritual faculties;
- the right to a free conscience;
- the right to freely choose one's state of life;
- the right to free initiative in the economic sphere
- the right to work (the right to a fair wage);
- the right to form associations;
- the right to choose your place of residence;
- at the political level: the right to active participation in public life.<sup>12</sup>

In the *Pacem in Terris* first chapter "Order between men" is the full definition of human rights from the Radio Message of Pius XII: "Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, 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."<sup>13</sup>

John XXIII knew that the protection of fundamental rights by the state also required international recognition, and for this reason he included in the "sign of the times" the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which granted these rights participation in the moral natural law. The importance of the United Nations has been confirmed by the visits of Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and finally, the current Pope Francis. It was Benedict XVI who, on April 18, 2008, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Charter of Human Rights, reiterated human rights in an authentic moral natural law without entering into the danger of relativism.<sup>14</sup>

The encyclical *Pacem in Terris* thus clearly analyses the "signs of the times" and distinguishes in a memorable text between ideologies and historical movements (PiT 159), thus freeing the Gospel from the ideologies that covered its proclamation. The Second Vatican Council follows the same line, especially with the constitution *Gaudium et spes*. Discerning the "signs of the times" by resorting to the necessary inductive method in concrete

situations and in actual action: this is the way Christians should carry out their decisions, and not by the obedient application of abstract principles of a predetermined doctrine.<sup>15</sup>

On the question of war and military conflict, John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* no longer speaks of the right of defence, but in the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (abr. GS) in Article 79 (*De bello vitando*), the Second Vatican Council recalls: "Certainly, war has not been rooted out of human affairs. As long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defence once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted."<sup>16</sup>

So, peace on earth does not lie:

- in the only state of peace in which there is no war.
- is not just a tactic to maintain a balance between opposing forces. Fear does not ensure lasting peace.
- is not simply imposed by state power ("does not result from repressive government").<sup>17</sup>

We see that the council document GS 79 espouses the idea of supranational authority, and some theologians even speak of a world government. However, it will hardly be possible to speak of world peace unless the community of nations is integrated into a world community over which the governing authority has sufficient authority to resolve any disputes. But trust between nations must be built by the full exercise of human rights. In their interpretation, both parties to an armed conflict or another (higher) authority recognised by the parties should agree. Tödt adds that GS 79 passes a conservative form of "*presumptio juris*", which is the fundamental proposition that if we have doubts about the fairness of a war, we must simply obey the state authority.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, this is how *Pacem in Terris* proposes (the only instance in the papal magisterium of modern times) to read the "signs of the times" not as figures of a pessimistic and catastrophic philosophy of history on the moral premises of eternal peace, but as the ways in which history itself speaks the Gospel to the Church. Thus, these signs will appear for many decades to come in response to the thirst of men and women for hope, to which Vatican politics, the authority of the Church, the consciousness of the faithful will re-join on more than one occasion.<sup>19</sup>

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, prophetically approached precisely the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of St.

John XXIII. Borghesi points out that popes do not write encyclicals on fraternity for a planet that would be in permanent peace. *Pacem in Terris* came out after the missile crisis in Cuba had brought World War III closer. It is undeniable how such crises of globalization, increasingly urgent clashes between blocs (US, China, Russia), continuous wars fought through proxy channels, religious terrorism, etc. configure a highly unstable world that is always ready to flare up. Add to this the great economic disparities, the tragedy of the Covid pandemic with its consequences for the poorest countries, the constant immigration. The change of epoch after 1989 has meant the gradual collapse of the barriers and counterweights that humanity undertook after the terrible tragedy of the Second World War: from the great international organisations to the Charter of Universal Rights to the European unification process. In the current moment, on the contrary, everything seems to be disintegrating: the UN, the EU, the link between the US and Europe, while cultural relativism tends to emphasise particularism and isolationism. The spirit of the times is bringing Manichaeism back into vogue in both forms: political, economic, religious. Barriers, old mistrust, old nationalisms are everywhere emerging. In this context, Francis launches the dream of a renewed fraternity between peoples and individuals: religious, political, economic and social fraternity. A dream similar to that of Martin Luther King, whose name is listed at the end alongside St. Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, Desmond Tutu, Charles de Foucauld.<sup>20</sup>

The whole encyclical *Pacem in Terris* is, after all, extremely topical. Today, 60 years later, the entire world community is equally confronted with military conflict and its imminent dangers, which Pope Francis has relentlessly drawn attention to. International organisations are still not functioning reliably and migration is taking on unprecedented proportions. And Pope Francis, in the same way as St. John XXIII, is trying to contribute to the restoration of social order and the pursuit of the common good. I hope that today's times will also move new generations of Christians to actively advocate for peace on our planet and not to allow the forces that are only concerned with division and containment to succeed in destroying this planet.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Novák, Dan Poláček, Na prahu jaderné války. Sovětské rakety na Kubě zažehly dramatickou bitvu nervů (On the Threshold of Nuclear War. Soviet missiles in Cuba spark dramatic battle of nerves), Server

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Marie-France TOINET, *Hon na čarodějnice 1947-1957: Mccarthismus (Witch Hunt 1947-1957: McCarthyism)*. Translation by Hana Hurtová. 1st ed. Prague: Themis, 1998. 176 p. ISBN 80-85821-75-3.

<sup>3</sup> A. Melloni, A. Giovagnoli (eds), *Pacem in Terris*, appunti sull'origine in *Pacem in Terris*, tra azione diplomatica e guerra globale, Guerrini e associati, Milano, 2003, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Daniele Menozzi, *Chiesa, pace e guerra nel Novecento: verso una delegittimazione religiosa dei conflitti*, Il Mulino, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> A. Melloni, *Pacem in Terris*. Storia dell'ultima enciclica di Papa Giovanni, Bari, Editori Laterza & figli, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. PiT 167.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriella Ceraso, *Pacem in Terris: 55 anni fa l'Enciclica di Giovanni XXIII sulla pace*, Vatican News, 04/2018, Città del Vaticano,  
<https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2018-04/pacem-terris-enciclica-giovanni-xxiii-pace-genti.html>

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Bizzarri, *Giovanni XXIII. Il Papa Buono*, Edizioni RAI-ERI, Roma, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gbiorczyk: *Christentum und Menschenrechte in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, In: *Die nahe Not, die fremde Nähe*, Diakonische Flüchtlingshilfe im Main-Kinzig-Kreis 1990-2010, Erlensee 2011, S. 118-127.

<sup>10</sup> GÜNTHÖR, A.: *Moral Theology III/a Trnava*, SSV 1996, p. 93-95.

<sup>11</sup> GÜNTHÖR, A.: *Moral Theology III/a Trnava*, SSV 1996, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of completeness, we add the inner content of the fundamental rights, taken up by the Spanish Jesuit moralists in the 16th century, which influenced later constitutional declarations of human rights: the right to life, the inviolability of the human body, the right to marriage and the family, the right to social and political freedom, certain forms of equality before the law and the protection of the law, the right to private property and to associate, as well as the right to emigrate and the right to settle and acquire land, cf. Schambeck H., *Menschenrechte, katholisch gesehen I*, [www.zenit.org/article-19543?!=german](http://www.zenit.org/article-19543?!=german) of 14.1.2010, p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. PiT 9.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre De Charentenay, *Pacem in Terris*, Aggiornamenti sociali, febbraio 2013,  
<https://www.aggiornamentisociali.it/articoli/pacem-in-terris/>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Tödt H. E., *Menschenrechte-Grundrechte*. In: Franz Böckle, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, Karl Rahner, Bernhard Welte (eds.), *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, Diel 27, Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 1982, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. G. Gundlach, *Die Lehre Pius XII. vom modernen Krieg*. In: Forster (ed.), *Kann der atomare Verteidigungskrieg ein gerechter Krieg sein?* Munich, 1960, pp. 107-133, after Helmut Weber, *Spezielle Moraltheologie*, Graz: Styria Premium 1999, p. 253.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. GS 78.

<sup>18</sup> Tödt H. E., *Frieden*, In: Franz Böckle, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, Karl Rahner, Bernhard Welte (eds.), *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, Vol. 13, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder 1981, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> A. Melloni, *Pacem in Terris*. Storia dell'ultima enciclica di Papa Giovanni, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2010, pp. V-VIII.

<sup>20</sup> Massimo Borghesi, *Una nuova "Pacem in Terris", "Fratelli tutti" - Per una lettura dell'enciclica di Papa Francesco*, L'Osservatore romano, Città di Vaticano, 13 ottobre 2020,  
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