

# Papal Thinking about Peace Since *Pacem in Terris*: The World Day of Peace Messages, 1967-2013

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In October of 1962 much of the world was focused on a tense confrontation between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The thirteen-day confrontation was among the tensest incidents in the more than four decades of the Cold War between the Americans and the Soviets. Six months later on April 11, 1963 John XXIII issued his final encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth). Although it was often said that the pope wanted to respond to what had come to be called the Cuban missile crisis, the papal letter was more accurately described by an Italian journalist as “the utopia of Pope John XXIII.”<sup>1</sup> The encyclical was less concerned with current events and more of an effort to explain the papal viewpoint on what peace might mean in the modern age.

In what follows, I will present an exposition and analysis of papal thinking about peace beginning with John’s letter. Following that I will discuss major themes regarding peace in two important social encyclicals of Paul VI and John Paul II. Then I will turn to a source of papal thinking about peace that has not received adequate attention, at least in the United States, the annual World Day of Peace (WDOP) messages issued by Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. These messages do not have the doctrinal weight of encyclicals, yet they are texts of Catholic social teaching that provide insight into the papal thinking about peace. These WDOP messages will be treated under two headings: the nature of peace, and paths to peace. I will conclude the essay with an assessment of what the WDOP messages contribute to Catholic teaching on peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Zizola, Giancarlo. *The Utopia of John XXIII*, trans. Helen Barolini. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985.

## Pope John XXIII and Teaching on Peace

There is both an epistemological and moral optimism in the Catholic tradition and nowhere are those qualities more evident than in *Pacem in terris*. For John the natural law found within the heart of the human person guides a moral order that includes the relations between individuals with one another, between individuals and the state, between states with other states, and relations within the global community. The norms governing these relations can be known, according to John, and the resulting social order can be attained if people demonstrate the requisite good will. It is rather remarkable that the pope could put forth such a positive vision and maintain such a hopeful stance towards the achievement of peace just a few months after the world had been at the doorstep of nuclear war. But good pope John was nothing if not optimistic.

Like any utopian vision, the encyclical was open to criticism from those who held a more skeptical view of the possibilities of a peaceful world order, or at least the relatively ordered and rational way in which John envisioned it coming about. Reinhold Niebuhr, the influential proponent of Christian realism in theological ethics, thought that John's hope in an institution like the United Nations as an instrument of world order was misguided.<sup>2</sup> And even the prominent Jesuit John Courtney Murray, commenting on John's vision of a peaceful order, thought it was unclear "how this hope is concretely to be realized."<sup>3</sup>

*Pacem in terris* was well received by many in the peace movement, however, and Pope John's letter encouraged a generation of Catholic activists who became involved in the anti-war movement during subsequent years. The impact of the encyclical also led to the willingness of the bishops at Vatican II to reconsider the church's teaching on nonviolence. Pope John XXIII did not explicitly deny the theory of just war but his silence about the right of national self-defense, coupled with his opposition to nuclear war, created a mood of questioning on the topic of warfare. Within that context the council acknowledged the need for "an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr, Reinhold. "Pacem in Terris: Two Views," *Christianity and Crisis* 28/8 (May 13, 1963) 81-83.

<sup>3</sup> Murray, John Courtney. "Things Old and New in *Pacem in Terris*," in *Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Leon Hooper. Washington, DC: Woodstock Theological Center / Georgetown University Press, 1994, 251-52.

<sup>4</sup> Vatican II. *Gaudium et spes*, (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965), n. 80.

Exactly what that new attitude entailed was left unstated, but it is plausible to understand it as the establishment of a moral presumption against war. Starting with John XXIII and continuing through the papacies of Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI a teaching has developed “that a presumption against war lies at the very center of Catholic thinking on war and peace.”<sup>5</sup> Earlier theories of just war gave the presumption to justice, and war was understood as being morally acceptable as a means to establish justice. The present formulation of the church’s teaching with its presumption against war as a means to justice, reflects the “new attitude” called for at Vatican II.

An important corollary of this new attitude was the approval given to pacifism as an alternative to just war theory. In 1956 Pope Pius XII had written that when legitimate political authority “in a moment of extreme danger” decides that a war of self-defense is necessary, “a Catholic citizen cannot invoke his own conscience in order to refuse to serve and fulfill those duties the law imposes.”<sup>6</sup> Just nine years later, however, the bishops at Vatican II declared, “We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights . . . And it seems right that laws make humane provisions for the case of those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms, provided that they accept some other form of service to the human community.”<sup>7</sup> That clear reversal of previous teaching developed in the span of less than a decade. Without question, the influence of *Pacem in terris*, as a final testament of John XXIII, had helped shift how Catholics thought about war.

## Vatican II, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II

Evident throughout Pope John’s encyclical was the belief that peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is not simply what remains after the shooting stops; rather it is something that requires positive action toward construction and maintenance of a certain type of social order. This insight was not always evident in some of the early drafts of *Gaudium et spes*. Marie-Dominique Chenu, a theological advisor to the bishops, wrote the original section on peace treating it largely as a state of non-war.<sup>8</sup> After this approach was rejected, Chenu and other

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<sup>5</sup> McElroy, Robert. “Why We Must Withdraw From Iraq,” *America* 196/15 (April 30, 2007) 10-12.

<sup>6</sup> Pius XII, “Christmas Radio Message” (December 23, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> Schujit, Willem. “History of *Gaudium et Spes*” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol V, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969, 330.

contributors to the drafting of the text came around to a positive approach to an understanding of peace.

When the bishops at Vatican II proclaimed that peace “is rightly and appropriately called ‘an enterprise of justice,’”<sup>9</sup> it was with a particular view of justice in mind. It was biblical justice. The biblical idea is rooted, as is so much of Hebrew thought, in the experience of covenant. The fundamental reality for the pious Jew was that Yahweh had freely entered into a relationship with the Jewish people marked by God’s faithful and devoted love (*Hesed*). In those times when that fidelity and devotion were reciprocated by the Israelites, the experience of covenant was that the Jewish people lived in a set of right relationships – with God, with one another, and with creation. Justice was the term used to characterize this state of being in right relationship.

Biblical justice is of a different nature than the way most Americans think of justice. Unlike the American idea of justice as impartial or “blind,” the biblical concept of justice portrays Yahweh as being partial, with a clear bias in favor of the Jewish people in general, and with the poor and marginal being a particular object of divine favor. This explains why the prophets regularly look to the treatment of the widow, orphan, and alien as a test of the Israelite community. This biblical triad represents those people most at risk in a patriarchal and tribal society. In such a society, women and children without a spouse or father, and aliens without kinship relations, are understood as people on the margins of the community. So the test for justice in a society was whether those who might be easily neglected are instead brought into right relationship with others.

In modern Catholic teaching this biblical perspective informs the way that the church understands social justice. Community is at the heart of the Catholic vision of justice; establishing communities where people are able to live in right relationship with one another as well as with God and the rest of creation is the goal. Creating institutions and policies that reach out to protect the marginal in modern societies is key in this regard. Talk of a preferential option for the poor in Catholic social teaching is simply a retrieval of the biblical idea of a special love and concern for those people who are the contemporary version of widows, orphans and aliens.

According to the bishops at the Council, “Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized

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<sup>9</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, n.78, quoting Isa. 32,7.

by persons as they thirst after ever greater justice.”<sup>10</sup> Such a statement about peace presumes an appreciation of the wider Christian tradition, not only the communitarian perspective of justice found in the Bible, but also the Augustinian theme of peace as an order of tranquility that eventuates from harmonious relationships.

It is with the above background that one can properly interpret Paul VI’s famous statement in *Progressio populorum* that “Development is the New Name for Peace.”<sup>11</sup> Use of this phrase undoubtedly owes much to Bishop Manuel Larrain of Talca, Chile, who talked of development in connection with peace on several occasions at the Council.<sup>12</sup> In 1965 Larrain, who was a student of Catholic social teaching and a supporter of Cardinal Cardijn’s method, issued a pastoral letter on the relationship of peace and development.

When Paul surveyed the state of the globe in the late sixties, he concluded that the great social question of the time was the growing gap between rich and poor, both within states and between them. The gap was economic but also political as many experienced a degree of powerlessness that prevented them from bringing about beneficial change. For Paul, the needed remedy was to assist the poor to undergo integral development, an approach that was not limited to the economic realm but would include all dimensions of human well-being. An important aspect of such a holistic view of development is that the poor and marginal must be active agents of their own advancement. Needed is not paternalistic charity that maintains the poor as passive objects of concern, but empowerment that enables the poor to participate in their development.

The idea of justice as participation has become an important emphasis of Catholic social teaching. It suggests both the goal of justice as full engagement in the life of a community, and the means to that goal, the empowerment of people, especially the poor, as active agents. So development as the new name for peace must be understood to mean a particular kind of development, one that is integral and just, as well as a certain kind of process, one that is inclusive and participatory. In Paul’s mind, overcoming severe inequalities is central to development; and working toward integral, just, participatory development is peace-making. Respecting human dignity, promoting development, and

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<sup>10</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Paul VI. *Populorum progressio* (On the Development of Peoples, 1967), n. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Schuijt, “History,” 331.

establishing peace are all facets of the same project, forging a “civilization of love.”<sup>13</sup>

An additional item that can be added to this evolving understanding of peace as integral, just, and participatory development came nearly twenty-five years after John wrote his encyclical. In 1987 John Paul II, reflecting on the teaching of his predecessors issued a follow-up encyclical on development. In this new letter he repeated the message that working for “social justice means to ensure that all persons have the opportunity to experience authentic human development. . . Engagement in this enterprise *is* the call for and life project of every Christian. . . The *name* for this engagement is solidarity. . . Solidarity is simultaneously the path to development and to peace.”<sup>14</sup> This added a further nuance to the Catholic teaching on peace. Solidarity provides an energy that fosters the desire to work for a truly just and participatory development. From the commitment to solidarity in the pursuit of integral development will emerge genuine peace. “The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of virtues which favor togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity.”<sup>15</sup>

To summarize these comments on the evolution of Catholic thinking, peace is the outcome of a committed engagement (solidarity) to the project of social progress for individuals and societies (just and participatory development). The modern papacy has promoted this understanding by linking development as the new term for peace and solidarity as the crucial step in working for a proper development. Solidarity is the path to development, and peace is the end result of working for a development that is integral, just and participatory. This linkage of peace, development, and solidarity is the overarching framework for Catholic thought on peace in the contemporary period. In the next section we will examine further papal teaching about peace as found in a different body of literature than the social encyclicals.

## Papal Teaching for the World Day of Peace

On December 8, 1967 Paul VI issued the first World Day of Peace (WDOP) message. It was essentially an announcement of the papal

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<sup>13</sup> Paul VI, “*Regina Coeli* Address Pentecost Sunday,” (May 17, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (On Social Concern, 1987), n. 39, emphasis in original.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

desire to “launch an idea,” that there would be a new practice of celebrating a “World Day of Peace” each January 1 as the civil year begins.<sup>16</sup> The message was addressed to all people of good will and the papal proposal “is not intended, therefore, as exclusively ours, religious, that is, Catholic.” Rather, the hope was that the celebration of a day dedicated to peace would “have the adherence of all the true friends of Peace.”<sup>17</sup>

With this initiative Paul began a series of messages that as of January 1, 2013 numbers forty-six. The practice has been to release the message in advance of the actual date, but the first day of the new year is the formal date used for reference. Intended for all people, the messages are largely accessible to a wider audience although they usually have closing remarks that relate the year’s theme specifically to the Christian community. The first message was limited to the invitation to join in the initiative. Subsequent messages have taken up a range of topics aimed at helping readers “to discover the rich harmonies of the single theme of peace.”<sup>18</sup>

Admittedly, it is not always easy to see the unity in the vision of peace presented in the WDOP messages. Some of the themes seem less than central to the project of fashioning a unified understanding of peace. In the decade of the nineties, during the pontificate of John Paul II, a number of the messages took as their theme whatever was the topic of a U.N. annual declaration, for example a year of dialogue, or a year of the homeless, or the family, or women, or children. In his 2004 message, John Paul II reflected on his twenty-five years of issuing such messages and described his purpose as presenting “a synthesis of teaching about peace which is *a kind of primer*.”<sup>19</sup>

However, the organization of this “primer” is not immediately evident to a reader. Rather than simply provide a chronological survey of the messages I shall focus on themes that receive repeated attention or that are given particular prominence in the texts. In what follows I shall treat the papal messages under these headings: the nature of peace and the paths to peace.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul VI, “For the Observance of a ‘World Day of Peace,’” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Etchegaray, Roger. “Presentation,” in *Ways of Peace*. Vatican City: Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*, 1986, v.

<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, “An Ever Timely Commitment: Teaching Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2004).



### *The Nature of Peace*

In the very first message that followed the initial invitation to establish a WDOP, Paul VI linked peace to human rights.<sup>20</sup> This approach of Paul is very much in accord with the thinking of John XXIII. As one commentator has observed, while the topic of *Pacem in terris* is peace, “the backbone of the document is its teaching on human rights.”<sup>21</sup> That is, the encyclical offers a “distinctively Catholic approach to peacemaking,” one that focuses on “the realization of human rights as the substance of peaceful world order.”<sup>22</sup> In paragraphs 8-27 of the encyclical John provided a comprehensive list of those human rights that the church endorses, including social and economic goods as well as civil and political liberties. The reason John, and Catholic social teaching in general, accepted an inclusive approach to human rights is that such rights are understood to be expressions of those freedoms, goods, and relationships necessary for human beings to experience their dignity.

In his message Paul states “peace is today intrinsically linked to the ideal recognition and effective realization of the Rights of Man.”<sup>23</sup> The linkage is not just one way. “Peace and Rights are reciprocally cause and effect, the one of the other: Peace favors Rights, and Rights in their turn favor Peace”<sup>24</sup> The theme is picked up again in the 1974 message as Paul recalled the recent 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights and affirmed, “true Peace must be based on a sense of the untouchable dignity of the human person, from which arise inviolable rights and corresponding duties.”<sup>25</sup>

The bond between peace and human rights in Catholic social teaching was further promoted in several messages of John Paul II. In 1998 the pope reflected upon the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Declaration and commented that safeguarding peace rests upon a correct understanding of the anthropological foundation of human rights. That foundation

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<sup>20</sup> Paul VI, “The Promotion of Human Rights, the Road to Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> Christiansen, Drew. “Commentary on *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth),” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth Himes. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Paul VI, “Promoting Human Rights,” 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Paul VI, “Peace Depends on You Too,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1974).



involves “Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”<sup>26</sup>

Two lessons drawn from that foundation are that human rights are universal and indivisible. For John Paul, the “criticisms of those who would use the argument of cultural specificity to mask violations of human rights, and the criticisms of those who weaken the concept of human dignity by denying juridical weight to social, economic and cultural rights” must be rejected.<sup>27</sup>

The next year John Paul returned to the topic with the theme “Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace.” At the beginning of his message the pope stated that he had a conviction “which I very much want to share” with others. “When the promotion of the dignity of the person is the guiding principle, and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment, then solid and lasting foundations for building peace are laid.” Conversely, “when human rights are ignored or scorned” then the seeds of “violence are inevitably sown.”<sup>28</sup>

The discourse of human rights in Catholic social teaching about peace concerns the substance of peace as well as the means to attain peace. Regarding the first, if human rights are the building blocks of a just society and peace is the attainment of an integral, just, and participatory development of each person and society, then establishing and securing human rights constitutes much of what is meant by peace.<sup>29</sup> Concerning the means to peace, the pope asked, “how could there be war if every human right were respected?” He concluded, “Complete observance of human rights is the surest road to establishing solid relations between States. The culture of human rights cannot fail to be a culture of peace.”<sup>30</sup>

It should not be a surprise that a particular human right of great interest to the papacy is the right of religious freedom. In his 2011 WDOP message, Benedict XVI claimed, “*that among the fundamental rights and freedoms rooted in the dignity of the person, religious freedom enjoys a*

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<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, “From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1998), n. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, “Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1999), n. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., n. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., n. 12.

*special status.*<sup>31</sup> This is so because religious freedom is a right intimately connected to human dignity for it touches upon the inner life of each person. “Religious freedom expresses what is unique about the human person, for it allows us to direct our personal and social life to God, in whose light the identity, meaning and purpose of the person are fully understood.”<sup>32</sup> John Paul II also agreed with the intrinsic link between religious freedom and the right of conscience that is fundamental to human dignity. “It belongs to the dignity of the person to be able to respond to the moral imperative of one’s own conscience in the search for truth.”<sup>33</sup>

Any political or cultural system that denies religious freedom is a system that is premised on a “reductive view of the human person.”<sup>34</sup> Further, religious freedom is foundational to moral freedom for it permits a person’s openness to truth and goodness as best a person may grasp these. “Religious freedom should be understood, then, not merely as immunity from coercion, but even more fundamentally as an ability to order one’s own choices in accordance with truth.”<sup>35</sup>

It would appear then, that Christiansen’s conclusion about *Pacem in terris*, noted earlier, is largely applicable to the subsequent papal teaching. The attainment of a global culture of human rights is the substance of a peaceful world order.

Yet human rights are not the only theme needed for understanding peace. As the discussion of religious freedom suggests, peace is connected to fundamental human goods. As John XXIII stated, and as subsequent papal writing develops, peace is founded upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love, and freedom. These four pillars are necessary in a well-ordered society and constitute the values that must be present in any society that is properly peaceful.

Paul VI warned of the danger of “false concepts which too often surround and thus deform and distort” the idea of peace. There is the constant temptation for political leaders “to impose by the use of force such normal relations as bear the appearance of Peace.”<sup>36</sup> In the following

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<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, “Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2011), n. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 1.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, “Religious Freedom: Conditions for Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, “Religious Freedom,” 2011, n. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Paul VI, “If You Want Peace, Work for Justice,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1972).

year Paul asked, “shall we give the name of peace to a truce, to a mere laying down of arms, to an arrogant exercise of power beyond revoke, to an external order based on violence and fear, or to a temporary balance of opposed forces, to a trial of strength consisting in the immobile tension of rival powers?” To his own question the pope answered, “This would be a necessary hypocrisy, with which history is filled.”<sup>37</sup>

Another false version of peace entails the assertion of rights without the corresponding acknowledgement of duties toward others.<sup>38</sup> Whereas, in truth, it is “the harmonious coexistence of individual citizens within a society” that is the source of peace.<sup>39</sup> To speak only of one’s rights while minimizing one’s duties ignores true peace, which “calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word.”<sup>40</sup>

The papal perspective on truth as a foundation for peace emanates from the Catholic conviction that there is a moral order within creation, an order established by God. Human wellbeing, individually and collectively, is necessarily tied to recognition of, and a life in accord with, that moral order. This order is the “grammar” of the dialogue between the conscience of the person and the divine call to live an authentic human existence.<sup>41</sup> Opposition to peace founded on the truth about the human situation can be found in two camps: “the nihilist denies the very existence of such truth, while the fundamentalist claims to be able to impose it by force.”<sup>42</sup>

The connection of peace with justice has already been discussed earlier in this essay. Here I will simply note that justice in Catholic social teaching is the virtue that “defends and promotes the inestimable dignity of every human person and is concerned for the common good insofar as it is the guardian of relations between individuals and peoples.”<sup>43</sup> Justice is to govern the establishment and organization of the social order,

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<sup>37</sup> Paul VI, “Peace is Possible,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, “Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2003), n. 3

<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, “In Truth, Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2006), n. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., n. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., n. 10.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, “From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All,” 1998, n. 1.

domestic and international. When the social order is proper there emerges peace, the outcome of a situation in which the dignity of each person is safeguarded and the basic rights and duties of everyone are harmoniously interrelated. The idea that peace develops out of the establishment of justice is affirmed regularly in the WDOP messages.

“Love will build peace if people feel the needs of others as their own and share what they have with others.”<sup>44</sup> For John Paul the role of love in the social order is very much akin to solidarity, a willingness to move beyond “vague compassion or shallow distress” in our response to the other and to adopt a “*firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself . . . to the good of all and of each individual.”<sup>45</sup> Further, love as solidarity means those who “have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel *responsible* for the weaker and be ready to share with them.”<sup>46</sup> Note that love as solidarity is not a cold calculation of duty but a movement of the will to commit oneself to the other because of a sense of responsibility toward the other. This is a common way that Catholic social teaching speaks of love, as going “beyond what justice can provide.”<sup>47</sup> It is to transcend the legitimate rights and duties that order human communities and embrace a sense of brother- and sisterhood in the way we relate to one another.

The fourth and final pillar of a peaceful social order is freedom. An interesting side note to this point is that John had originally listed three pillars – truth, justice, and love – of social order in *Mater et magistra* but *Pacem in terris* included the addition of freedom as a fourth pillar. In the space of just two years, 1961 to 1963, the pope came to accept a fourth fundamental value for a good society. It is a notable example of substantive change in Catholic social teaching.

“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.”<sup>48</sup> Here one sees the idea that freedom is first of all an essential good for persons, it is the quality that allows people to be self-determining and thereby responsible for the actions they choose. In Catholic teaching people are accountable to the norms of right reason; norms they must follow if they wish to live in accord with

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<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, “Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment,” 2003, n. 3.

<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987, n. 38, emphasis in original.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 39, emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 1965, n. 78.

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, “Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment,” 2003, n. 3.

their being as rational creatures. Freedom is essential to human development for it permits the exercise of conscience when determining life choices.

The most recent and final WDOP message by Benedict came in the fiftieth anniversary year of *Pacem in terris* and provides his gloss on John's claim that peace is founded upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love, and freedom. The human family is structured

by interpersonal relations and institutions supported and animated by a communitarian 'we,' which entails an internal and external moral order in which, in accordance with truth and justice, reciprocal rights and mutual duties are sincerely recognized. Peace is an order enlivened and integrated by love, in such a way that we feel the needs of others as our own, share our goods with others and work throughout the world for greater communion in spiritual values. It is an order achieved in freedom, that is, in a way consistent with the dignity of persons who, by their very nature as rational beings, take responsibility for their own actions.<sup>49</sup>

One other aspect concerning the nature of peace in the WDOP messages is the support given to John XXIII's conviction that genuine peace was not beyond the grasp of humanity. A claim repeated by all the authors of the WDOP messages is that peace is, indeed, possible. This was the actual title of the 1973 WDOP message even as the statement acknowledged that people are "menaced by a doubt, a doubt that could be fatal: is peace ever possible?" And too often, it was said, the doubt is transformed "into a disastrous certainty: peace is impossible!" In reply, Paul VI insisted that the message to be proclaimed by people of good will must be that peace is possible. Certainly it has to be built with new institutions, and with a renewed commitment based on reason and not emotion. Peace will require a new form of justice along with courage based in love, but these things are all possible. And if peace is possible then "it is a duty."<sup>50</sup> The pope was aware the hope of peace had perished in the hearts of many people and saw his role as renewing the human aspiration to attain genuine peace.

In the next year, Pope Paul added to the message about the possibility of peace by proclaiming the duty that falls to each individual to bring about peace.<sup>51</sup> His aim was, once again, to counter "the unspoken and skeptical conviction that, in practice, peace is impossible." He admitted

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<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, "Blessed are the Peacemakers," (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2013), n. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Paul VI, "Peace is Possible," (1973).

<sup>51</sup> Paul VI, "Peace Depends on You Too," (1974).

that many see peace as “a poetic dream and a utopian fallacy.” Yet, Paul maintained, “Peace is based not only on being but also becoming.” That is, peace is dynamic, it must be created and “must always be in a process of continuous and progressive realization.” He summed up his view by stating, “Peace is possible only if it is considered a duty.” This is because “Peace must take hold of the consciences of men as a supreme ethical objective, as a moral necessity,”<sup>52</sup> what he called an inner compulsion, that arises as a demand of human existence.

Behind the papal insistence on the possibility of peace and therefore the duty to build peace there is a confidence in the power of ideas. Paul observed that if the cause of peace truly became the idea that won the hearts of people then national leaders would be greatly influenced by public opinion. And if public opinion is so significant then individual responsibility for peace is heightened “for each of us forms part of the civic body operating with a democratic system, which, in varying forms and degrees, today characterizes the life of the Nations organized in a modern manner.” As the pope maintained, “Peace lives by the support, though individual and anonymous, that people give it.”<sup>53</sup> He returned to this theme a few years later, observing that “progress is being made by the idea of Peace;” it is growing in the minds of people and through that idea there would eventuate action to develop structures for peace.<sup>54</sup>

The fundamentally hopeful outlook that Paul held was his “conviction that Peace is a duty, Peace is possible.” He repeated this papal axiom because of his belief that peace was truly the great aspiration of all people and that what was needed was to mobilize and organize the idea that lived in people’s hearts and consciences. The axiom was justified because “Peace is no dream, no utopia, no illusion. Nor is it a labor of Sisyphus.”<sup>55</sup> The commitment to peace as a duty does not signal a belief that establishing peace will be easy; it entails a task that is “very long and very difficult.” Nor does the pope think that it is for the church to determine the strategy; that is to be left to experts in a variety of fields.<sup>56</sup> It is the role of the papacy, according to Pope Paul, to encourage people to commit themselves to the cause of peace and to keep the cause alive in the minds and hearts of all members of the human family.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Paul VI, “Peace is Possible,” 1973.

<sup>54</sup> Paul VI, “The Real Weapons of Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1976).

<sup>55</sup> Paul VI, “If You Want Peace, Defend Life,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1977).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

The axiom, “peace is a duty, peace is possible” was reiterated by Paul’s successors. In 2004, John Paul II began the WDOP message by calling out to his listeners to hear his “humble appeal” that “*peace remains possible*. And if peace is possible, *it is also a duty*.”<sup>57</sup> Similar to Paul VI, John Paul asks of people that, despite the setbacks and tragedies afflicting the human family, they not “yield to fatalism, as if peace were an unattainable ideal.”<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI also was concerned to encourage peacemakers by his statement, “Peace is not a dream or something utopian; it is possible.”<sup>59</sup>

It is evident from the WDOP messages that John XXIII’s optimism about the possibility of moral progress toward peace was not his alone. A clear conviction of the modern papacy is that it is within the reach of human beings to establish peace. There is a guarded optimism in Catholic social teaching about the possibilities for peace. It will not come about, however, unless individuals and communities take seriously the duty to build peace.

### *Paths to Peace*

In the 2005 message, John Paul II wrote, “Peace is a good to be promoted with good.”<sup>60</sup> This statement may be contrasted with the classical Roman axiom, “If you want peace, prepare for war.” The papal maxim stands the older view on its head. For John Paul, the task is to prepare for peace and this has led to an emphasis on actions that pave the path to peace. As we have seen, the main way to build peace is through solidarity in fashioning a process of just development, which entails the promotion of the full slate of human rights needed to protect human dignity. However, the WDOP messages offer three additional themes for forging the path to peace.

Within a tradition that has identified development as the new name for peace there should be no surprise that poverty is viewed as a major obstacle to peace. For the modern papacy, “peace and development are interrelated and must be addressed together.”<sup>61</sup> One reason for this is

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<sup>57</sup> John Paul II, “An Ever Timely Commitment”, 2004, emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI, “Blessed are the Peacemakers,” 2013, n. 3.

<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, “Do Not Be Overcome with Evil, But Overcome Evil with Good,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2005), n. 1.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, “Peace and Youth Go Forward Together,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1985), n. 8.



that war takes away resources that might otherwise be put to the cause of development. This is a constant refrain of the modern papacy; the money spent on arms and war is money that is misdirected and taken from the proper goal of development. John XXIII made the point when he lamented the “vast outlay of intellectual and economic resources” that powerful nations devote to the arms race while “other countries as a result are deprived of the collaboration they need in order to make economic and social progress.”<sup>62</sup>

Opposition to the arms race has become a common papal theme. Paul VI challenged those nations caught up in the arms race and he did not limit his criticism to the superpower rivalry. In one WDOP message Paul singled out those developing nations, “which are imposing upon themselves enormous sacrifices in the resources essential for basic needs, cutting down on food, medicine, education, road-building, housing and even sacrificing true economic and political independence, so that they can be armed and can inflict fear and slavery on their own neighbors.”<sup>63</sup>

Without denying a nation’s right of legitimate self-defense, John Paul II still spoke of, “the scandal of the arms race seen against the background of the needs of the Third World.”<sup>64</sup> The distortions in spending priorities, brought on by the tensions of East-West relations, was a subject of regular criticism from the pope. “Numerous countries are engaged in the painful struggle to overcome hunger, disease and underdevelopment, while . . . the arms race continues to absorb unjustifiably resources that could be better used.”<sup>65</sup>

Years after the end of the Soviet Union, Benedict XVI recognized that the “peace dividend” or economic benefit of halting the superpower arms race had not yet produced the desired shift in resources to poor countries, “which rightly demand, after having heard so many promises, the concrete implementation of their right to development.”<sup>66</sup> He returned to the theme three years later to speak about the relationship between disarmament and development. “The current level of world

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<sup>62</sup> John XXIII. *Pacem in terris*, n. 109.

<sup>63</sup> Paul VI, “Peace is Possible,” 1973.

<sup>64</sup> John Paul II. “Peace: A Gift of God Entrusted to Us,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1982), n. 12.

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, “From a New Heart, Peace is Born,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1984), n. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, “In Truth, Peace,” 2006, n. 15.

military expenditure gives cause for concern . . . it can happen that immense military expenditure, involving material and human resources and arms, is in fact diverted from development projects for peoples, especially the poorest who are most in need of aid.”<sup>67</sup>

Expenditures on arms – whether due to superpower tensions, nationalistic fervor, military elites or dictators seeking control – are regularly and strongly challenged by the modern papacy. Of course, one reason for this is the risk of increased devastation from powerful weapons if war breaks out. However, a more commonly cited reason is the way that military expenditures skew the use of resources and prevent greater assistance to the poor within a country and to those entire nations that are poor. Fighting poverty, not fellow human beings, is the way to true peace according to the modern papacy. “Poverty is often a contributory factor or a compounding element in conflicts, including armed ones. In turn, these conflicts fuel further tragic situations of poverty.”<sup>68</sup> Curtailment of the arms race in order to overcome poverty is one of the paths to peace.

Another element in the path to peace has to do with support for international institutions and building a more adequate architecture for global order. The political theorist Richard Falk has written about a “Grotian moment,” in which the political, legal, and diplomatic status quo is being transformed.<sup>69</sup> It was Grotius who provided a new language of international law to address the European order that emerged after the Peace of Westphalia and the end of the Thirty Years War. A sense of the present age as moving toward a new globalized order has led recent popes to call for the creation of institutions and practices for managing a different emerging world order.

Each of the three papacies under discussion – Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI – visited the United Nations to deliver major addresses to the General Assembly of that institution. The papacy has been a strong supporter of the UN and other global institutions that seek to establish a more just and peaceful world order.

Paul called the UN “the first among these institutions” and suggested that “peace finds its own home and its own workshop” within

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<sup>67</sup> Benedict XVI, “Fighting Poverty to Build Peace,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2009), n. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., n. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Falk, Richard. *Law in an Emerging Global Village*. Ardsley, NY: Transnational Press, 1999.

institutions that serve as instruments of world order and global solidarity.<sup>70</sup> Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional bodies (e.g. European Union, African Union), policy regimes (e.g. Food and Agricultural Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization) are institutions that have some potential to promote global bonds of solidarity as well as fashion an international order that enables peace.

John Paul had his own “Grotian moment” in 2003 when he wrote, “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.” Instead, what the pope had in mind was “continuing and deepening processes already in place” to meet the need for exercising “international political authority.”<sup>71</sup>

Pope Benedict has stated that peace involves “the attainment of the common good of society at its different levels, primary and intermediary, national, international and global.” Therefore, “it can be said that the paths which lead to the attainment of the common good are also the paths that must be followed in the pursuit of peace.”<sup>72</sup>

One must remember that the common good in Catholic social teaching requires the existence of political authority that can promote and guide activities that bring about the well being of each and every person. At the level of international and global common good there must be an analogous authority to that of the state acting on behalf of the national common good. This is made clear by Benedict in his final encyclical where he listed some of the challenges facing the global common good, including “timely disarmament, food security and peace.” To adequately address these and other issues of global order “there is urgent need of a true world political authority, as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago.”<sup>73</sup> In sum, the path to peace requires attention to maintaining and building the institutional framework that secures the global common good. The necessary institutions are not all in place but those institutions that do exist to serve the common good at the international level are supported by the papacy.

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<sup>70</sup> Paul VI, “Peace is Possible,” 1973.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, “Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment,” 2003, n. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Benedict XVI, “Blessed and the Peacemakers,” 2013, n. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (Charity in Truth, 2009), n. 67.

A final item mentioned in several messages as a path to peace is that of forgiveness. Early on in the celebration of the WDOP, Paul VI confessed, "To preach the Gospel of forgiveness seems absurd to human politics."<sup>74</sup> Yet he asked, "What kind of peace do they [conflicts] attain?" He then answers his question, "the peace which puts an end to any conflict is usually an imposition, a suppression, a yoke." And as a result, "A peace like this, too often feigned and unstable, misses the complete resolution of the conflict, which is in pardon" (Ibid.). Without the element of forgiveness, outlandish as it may seem to so called "realists," the likelihood is that the peace brought about will prove false.

The theme of forgiveness is an integral element in many of the WDOP messages during John Paul II's papacy. For him, "Offering and accepting forgiveness is the essential condition for making the journey towards authentic and lasting peace." And so for this reason the pope wishes "to appeal to everyone to *seek peace along the paths of forgiveness*."<sup>75</sup>

As is well known, John Paul II came from a nation that had a history laced with episodes of invasion, oppression, and subordination. He was a student of Slavic culture and history, aware of the many tensions and conflicts in central Europe. "History carries with it a heavy burden of violence and conflict which cannot be easily shed." The pope was well aware of the way that the wake of history tested the good will of those seeking peace. And yet, "the truth is that *one cannot remain a prisoner of the past*, for individuals and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories'." John Paul II is not advocating mere forgetfulness of the past, but examining the past in order to learn that "only love can build up, whereas hatred produces devastation and ruin." The lesson to be learned from history is that "the deadly cycle of revenge must be replaced by the new-found liberty of forgiveness"<sup>76</sup>

The message for the year 2002 was written "in the shadow of the dramatic events of 11 September last."<sup>77</sup> John Paul wished to "restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence," and was convinced that "the shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness." Returning to the

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<sup>74</sup> Paul VI, "Education for Peace through Reconciliation," (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1970).

<sup>75</sup> John Paul II, "Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace," (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1997), n. 1, emphasis in original.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., n. 3, emphasis in original.

<sup>77</sup> John Paul II, "No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness," (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2002), n. 1.

theme of the pillars or foundations of a peaceful social order, the pope proposed, “*the pillars of true peace are justice and that form of love which is forgiveness.*”<sup>78</sup>

As John Paul II developed the theme, he made clear that forgiveness is not opposed to justice, for they are both necessary for healing the social order. Nor did the pope deny that a people has a right to defend itself against terrorist attack.<sup>79</sup> Forgiveness, however, is necessary if the future is to be different than the present cycle of history in which revenge drives ever more violence. Being necessary is not the same as being obvious or easy; nonetheless forgiveness is the right strategy for peace. “Forgiveness in fact always involves an *apparent* short-term loss for a *real* long-term gain. Violence is the exact opposite; opting as it does for an apparent short-term gain, it involves a real and permanent loss.”<sup>80</sup>

Two years later, John Paul II returned to the theme stating, “*By itself, justice is not enough.* Indeed, it can even betray itself, unless it is open to that deeper power which is love.” Consequently the pope reminded all people of good will “that *forgiveness is needed* for solving the problems of individuals and peoples. *There is no peace without forgiveness.*” He urged listeners to “transcend the logic of simple *justice* and be open to the logic of *forgiveness.*”<sup>81</sup>

Ending the arms race for the sake of investing in development that eradicates poverty, building global institutions for a new world order, and bringing the transformative power of forgiveness into social life are three recurring themes that the papacy presents as pathways to peace.

## A Concluding Assessment

Despite notable exceptions, the Catholic community has long been identified as a religious body closely tied to the just war tradition. More recently, the voice of pacifism has returned to the conversation within the Catholic tradition on warfare. In a sense these languages of ethical reflection focus attention on war avoidance and war conduct (just war)

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., n. 2, emphasis in original.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., n. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., n.10, emphasis in original

<sup>81</sup> John Paul II, “An Ever Timely Commitment”, 2004, n. 10, emphasis in original.

or opposition to war (pacifism). While peace is certainly a concern for adherents to both approaches, it is not always the central focus. One aspect of the World Day of Peace initiative is its reminder that peace is at the heart of the Christian message, and that peace involves more than just not being at war.

There is growing interest within the Catholic church in the broad topic of peacebuilding, an array of practices that seek to establish a sustained and just peace. The practices will range from conflict resolution to economic development, from reforming political institutions to enhancing cultural exchanges, from transforming ethnic stereotypes to creating open and free public space for civic associations. And the aforementioned simply illustrate the breadth of activity that comes under the heading of peacebuilding. "In dozens of countries and regions the Catholic presence as peacebuilder has increased in frequency and intensity over the past several decades, and it is proving crucial to the prospects for social stability, conflict resolution, and economic development."<sup>82</sup>

The work of peace must be informed by an idea of peace. As John Macquarrie put it, "We need a concept of peace of sufficient depth and persuasiveness to exert a purchase on human aspirations and to provide direction and motivation for our techniques. We need an ethical vision of a truly personal and truly fulfilling human community."<sup>83</sup> If one looks at the recent Catholic social teaching, I think it can be fairly argued that there is a concept of peace that is coherent and capable of motivating as well as guiding peacebuilders. The key elements of that concept are the interrelatedness of peace as positive, justice as development, and love as solidarity. Those elements are all explicated in major papal encyclicals beginning with John XXIII's *Pacem in terris*.

In this essay I have examined another less well known source for understanding papal teaching on peace, the annual messages for the World Day of Peace. This papal initiative has produced mixed results. Perhaps chief among the negatives is the very fact of the annual World Day of Peace. Within the life of the church the "celebration" is overshadowed, even ignored, due to the Solemnity of Mary that falls on January 1 in the liturgical calendar.

A wise pastoral axiom has been called the "90-90 rule." Simply put it means that 90% of Catholics experience the Catholic tradition as what

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<sup>82</sup> Appleby, R. Scott. "Peacebuilding and Catholicism," in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, eds. Robert Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, Gerard Powers, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Macquarrie, John. *The Concept of Peace*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.



happens at their parish. Despite the many schools, hospitals, retreat houses, social welfare agencies, and other worthy institutions sponsored by the church, it is the local parish that remains the center of Catholic life for the vast majority of people. What happens at the parish level is the touchstone for the religious experience of Catholics. And 90% of parishoners find their experience of faith closely tied to the weekend Eucharistic liturgy. What the 90-90 axiom suggests is that if something is not linked to the parish celebration of the Eucharist it is overlooked by most Catholics.

The point is that despite the initiative of Paul VI to introduce the World Day of Peace into Catholic experience it is largely ignored. It is unlikely that most Catholics have ever read a single message for the World Day of Peace. I would hazard a guess that few Catholics have ever heard a homily on New Year's day that is focused on peace. Nor is it likely that an adult education program or prayer service has been devoted to the World Day of Peace in the majority of Catholic parishes. So as a pastoral initiative aimed at arousing an intensified commitment to peace, the World Day of Peace must regrettably be judged a failure.

A second negative involves a risk to the clarity and coherence of the concept of peace. The problem can be explained by an example. When the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Wangari Maathai, an African Catholic woman cited for her work opposing deforestation and supporting women's rights, there was a fair amount of criticism directed at the Nobel Committee. The critics did not dismiss the work of Ms. Maathai or her admirable dedication to worthy causes. The opposition was not aimed at her. Rather the criticism was lodged against the Committee because the vocabulary of peace had become so enlarged that, in the words of a former deputy foreign minister of Norway, "you end up saying everything that is good is peace."<sup>84</sup>

This risk of expanding the meaning of peace to embrace whatever is good is a danger for the WDOP messages. Some of the annual messages seem to equate peace with intercultural dialogue, education, brotherhood, reconciliation, a consistent ethic of life, religious freedom, minority rights, freedom of conscience, among other themes. While there may be connections between these themes and peace, and although there can be value in giving attention to such connections, there is certainly a risk that the word 'peace' becomes so elastic it is stretched to an extent that it loses conceptual clarity.

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<sup>84</sup> Tyler, Patrick. "In Wartime, Critics Question Peace Prize for Environmentalism." *New York Times* (October 10, 2004).



It can appear as if popes have used the WDOP messages to draw attention to various signs of the times that are noteworthy and yet have not been discussed adequately in their social encyclicals. One example of this is the topic of the environment. John Paul II and Benedict XVI each devoted a WDOP message to the environment (1990; 2010).<sup>85</sup>

In his statement, John Paul focused on an important theme that had not been a major focus of papal social teaching, although there had been brief mentions of the issue in writing of Paul VI and John Paul II. So the WDOP message was a welcome and overdue discussion of the environment in Catholic social teaching. Yet the discussion of the linkage between peace and the environment was modest and not particularly central to the overall treatment of the environment.

Benedict had already broached the issue of the environment in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*<sup>86</sup> and it appears that the WDOP message functioned as an opportunity for him to further develop his thoughts, perhaps touching upon material that he did not include in what had been a long and somewhat rambling encyclical. The connection with peace was that a proper model of development must address issues of sustainability and fair use of natural resources. One might say that Benedict was making a case for ‘sustainable’ being added to the list of modifiers that Catholic social teaching applies to development that is integral, just, and participatory. As with John Paul, however, Benedict’s treatment of the environment, thoughtful as it is, is not especially well integrated with the theme of peace for a WDOP message.

Despite these criticisms, the annual WDOP messages have provided an opportunity for ongoing reflection by recent popes on the topic of peace. When one reads them as a body of material there are recurring themes and there is a regular echoing of John XXIII on the foundational pillars of a peaceful social order as well as Paul VI’s proposal that just development is the new name for peace, and John Paul’s insistence on solidarity as the path to development and peace. These ideas are expanded upon and deepened in the WDOP messages. The messages also amplify themes that Vatican II had noted as building blocks or paths to peace.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990); Pope Benedict XVI, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation,” (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*.

<sup>87</sup> Vatican II. *Gaudium et spes*.

For a tradition to be a living tradition it must have a “growing end.” Rooted in the past it must engage the circumstances of the present. A living tradition permits the wisdom of the past to inform our response to the present; it also allows the present to elicit future development in the tradition itself. Clearly, Catholic teaching on peace is an instance of a living tradition.

Today, Catholicism has articulated a positive theology of peace, recognizing its multiple dimensions. The idea of political peace is both possible to attain and, thereby, a duty to implement. The WDOP messages have emphasized these points to an audience that may despair of peace. The papal statements have also added insights to Pope John’s vision of peace on earth and the means to bring it about. Although the pastoral impact of the annual World Day of Peace has not been as fruitful as Paul VI had hoped for, it has made a modest contribution to a theology of peace and to encouraging Catholics to become peacemakers.