

# The Teaching and Methodology of *Pacem in Terris*

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*Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XIII's 1963 encyclical, is one of a series of hierarchical Catholic Church documents, beginning with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which addresses the social problems facing society. Pope John Paul II and many others refer to these documents as Catholic social teaching,<sup>1</sup> although all recognize that, in the broad sense, Catholic social teaching involves much more than just these documents. The documents of Catholic social teaching will furnish the primary lens through which this essay will discuss three aspects of *Pacem in Terris*—its methodology, its social teaching, and its optimism.

## Methodology

*Pacem in Terris* emphasizes a natural law methodology appealing not primarily to the theological categories of redemption, Jesus Christ, and grace but to the ordering of natural law found in human nature that our conscience reveals to us. The theological basis for natural law is the work of the Creator, and by definition all humankind can discern this order and law in human nature and in conscience. The natural law was the characteristic approach of pre-Vatican II Catholic moral theology and was the basis for all Catholic social teaching. *Pacem in Terris*, in its seven-paragraph introduction, spells out more clearly than any other document of Catholic social teaching its natural law methodology.

Peace on earth which all people of every era have most eagerly yearned for can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed. . . . The

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* nn. 1-4; *Centesimus Annus* n. 2 in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* edited by David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992) 395-97; 440.

human person . . . can understand that order. . . . God . . . created the universe . . . and also created human beings in his own ‘image and likeness,’ endowing them with intelligence and freedom and made them Lord of creation. . . . [T]he Creator of the world has imprinted in the human heart an order which conscience reveals to us and enjoins us to obey. . . . [T]he laws governing them [human relationships] . . . are to be sought . . . where the Father of all things wrote them, that is in the nature of human beings.<sup>2</sup>

There can be no more explicit recognition of the natural law methodology that claims that human beings can use their God-given reason to discover the order that the Creator put into the world. “By these laws we are most admirably taught” the order and relationships that serve as the foundation for peace in our world as developed in the four main sections of the encyclical—order between human beings, the order or relationships between individuals and particular states, the relationship among states, and the relationship of individuals and states within the worldwide community. This short introduction contains six citations to Scripture, but they all support the natural law approach and refer only to creation. The only citation from the New Testament is Romans 2:15 which is the classical text used to ground the natural law theory.

At the end of the document John XXIII states, “The doctrinal principles outlined in this document derive from both nature itself and the natural law” (157). Throughout the document the pope often refers to the natural law basis for his teaching. For example, “The same natural law which governs relations between individual human beings, serves also to regulate the relations of nations with one another” (n. 80). In keeping with the early encyclical of Leo XIII, *Pacem in Terris* at the end does bring in Jesus, redemption, and grace so that people can put into practice the order outlined in the document itself. But these theological aspects only help us to live out the natural law (166-172).

One advantage of a natural law approach is that non-Christians and nonbelievers can understand and respond to the document because it is not based on specifically Christian theological sources. John XXIII, for the first time, addresses an encyclical not only to bishops and members of the church but to all people of good will. Such an approach makes explicit what was implicit in the earlier documents—all people on earth

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* nn. 1-6, in *Catholic Social Thought* edited by David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon 131-32. Subsequent references to *Pacem in Terris* will put the paragraph numbers in the text itself. I have changed the original text to employ inclusive language.

are called to work together for the common good. Catholics are not called to do something different from others. Many non-Catholics responded to *Pacem in Terris*. For example, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions sponsored convocations about *Pacem in Terris*.<sup>3</sup>

Vatican II called for a much different approach that related Jesus Christ, grace, redemption, faith, and Scripture to the moral life while still giving importance to reason and human nature. Subsequent documents in Catholic social teaching have tried to give these aspects a greater role and to overcome the division between the supernatural order and the natural order found in the natural law approach of pre-Vatican II Catholic theology and in *Pacem in Terris*.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent popes have continued the precedent of *Pacem in Terris* in also addressing all people of good will, even though these documents also appealed to specifically Christian and Catholic sources. Thus a tension arises in the subsequent documents between the two methodologies employed (a specifically Christian approach and a natural law approach appealing to all) and the two different audiences addressed (Catholics and all others).

The primary disadvantage of the natural law approach is the failure to relate faith, grace, sin, redemption, eschatology, Scripture, and Jesus Christ to the issue of peace. In the post-Vatican II Catholic Church, no official document or teaching on peace would take such a natural law approach. Peace is a significant aspect of the word and work of Jesus and of the community of the disciples of Jesus.

The natural law has two related meanings. The theological aspect of the natural law question refers to where the Christian finds moral wisdom and knowledge. The philosophical aspect of the natural law question refers to the understanding of human reason and human nature. Here *Pacem in Terris* exhibits both discontinuity and continuity with the philosophical understanding of natural law found in the Catholic tradition at that time. *Pacem in Terris* moves beyond the preceding understanding by putting more stress on the human person and not as much on human nature as such. In keeping with the primacy of the person, *Pacem in Terris* emphasizes the importance of freedom and

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Reed, ed., *Peace on Earth: Pacem in Terris: The Proceedings of an International Convocation on the Requirements of Peace* (NY: Pocket, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> From my understanding of this subsequent development, see Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002) 32-49.

human rights which constitutes a significant development in the Catholic natural law understanding. The next section will discuss these aspects. This development has been called the turn to the subjective and subsequent documents such as the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* of Vatican II further develop this emphasis on the dignity, freedom, and rights of the human person.

In continuity with the traditional Catholic natural law approach, *Pacem in Terris* uses a deductive methodology rather than an inductive one. The emphasis is on the principles of natural law that are applied to the problems and issues addressed. *Pacem in Terris* describes its own approach as how “doctrinal principles and directives ought to be applied to reality” (154). As mentioned earlier, the four major parts of the document apply the principles found in the natural law to the four primary areas of concern.

However, *Pacem in Terris* indicates a glimmer of change with regard to a more inductive methodology that subsequent documents develop. Each of the four major sections of the encyclical ends with a section on significant contemporary characteristics. The section at the end of part three bears the title “Signs of the Times” (126-129). Among the present day developments *Pacem in Terris* mentions the role of women in public life and calls for women to have “rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life” (41). However, earlier the encyclical puts a limit on women’s rights to working conditions in accord with “their duties as wives and mothers” (19). There is no mention of limits for men based on their duties as husbands and fathers. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the 1965 document of Vatican Council II which deals with social teaching, begins each of its discussions of particular topics with the “signs of the times.” This indicates a much more inductive and historically conscious methodology. Paul VI later employed just such an inductive and historically conscious methodology in his 1971 letter *Octogesima Adveniens*. However, John Paul II reverted to a more deductive approach and downplayed historical consciousness and the role of local churches.<sup>5</sup>

### **Content of Its Social Teaching**

As one would expect, *Pacem in Terris*, as a part of the broad Catholic tradition in social ethics and the narrower tradition of Catholic social teaching, shows significant continuity with the tradition. Recall the

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<sup>5</sup> Curran 58-67.

continuity with the natural law methodology of the tradition. *Pacem in Terris* accepts the anthropological basis of the Catholic tradition—the dignity of the human person and the fact that the human person is social by nature. In the light of this anthropology, the Catholic approach has always opposed the opposite extremes of individualism and collectivism. Individualism so stresses the individual that it downplays society. Collectivism so stresses the collectivity that it forgets about the dignity of the individual person. In the Catholic understanding, the common good is the end or purpose of public society and the state. Individualism only recognizes individual goods; collectivism only collective goods. The common good by definition is a good for the whole society but also flows back to the good of the individual who belongs to the community. Think, for example, of clean air or equal rights for all (53-66).

The two principles of subsidiarity and socialization govern the proper role of the state. According to the principle of subsidiarity the state should do everything possible to help individuals, families, and intermediate bodies to do all they can and should only interfere and do things on its own when these lower bodies and individuals cannot accomplish it on their own. The principle of socialization recognizes that in the midst of growing complexity (the word globalization was not common in 1963) the state is going to have to intervene more than in the past because so many problems are so vast and complex that only the state can deal with them adequately. The problems are too great and too complex for individuals, families, and intermediate bodies to solve them (67-69).<sup>6</sup> Authority in the state ultimately comes from God and must be recognized in relationship to God's authority and God's law. Human laws that go against the eternal and natural law are unjust laws and do not oblige in conscience (46-52). This suffices to show that in its basic approach to the social order *Pacem in Terris* is in continuity with the Catholic tradition in general and the tradition of Catholic social teaching in particular. Next I will consider the contributions that *Pacem in Terris* has added to the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

### *Vision of and Program for Peace*

The major contribution of *Pacem in Terris* involves the introduction of the topic of peace into the documents of Catholic social teaching. The

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<sup>6</sup> John XXIII introduced the concept of socialization in *Mater et Magistra*, nn. 59-67, in O'Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought* 93-95.

earliest document, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), dealt with the social problems created by the Industrial Revolution. Subsequent documents including John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) dealt primarily with the issues of economic justice. As a result of *Pacem in Terris*' putting the focus on peace, subsequent documents of Catholic social teaching address the issue of peace together with the economic and political issues that were already a part of this tradition. Thus, for example, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* of Vatican II addressed five specific areas including "Chapter 5: The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations."<sup>7</sup>

The way in which *Pacem in Terris* develops the topic of peace is also most important. In this document, John XXIII proposes a vision of peace and the means or program that should be used to make peace present in all aspects of our world. All people of good will must work to bring about peace in all the relationships in our worldwide community.

Pre-Vatican II Catholic moral theology especially in the light of its relationship to the sacrament of penance was heavily casuistic. The concern was whether particular acts were right or wrong and why. The broader Catholic tradition over many centuries had developed the theory of the just war which tried to limit both the justification of going to war in the first place and the conduct of war even if there were a just cause. On this basis, casuistry dealt with the problems raised by particular wars. In this document, John XXIII does not develop the just war theory in any detail, although he does not deny it. There is little or no casuistry in this document. *Pacem in Terris* shifts the focus from casuistry to vision and a program for peace, from war to peace. All are called to be peace makers in our world (166-73). Subsequent documents in Catholic social teaching have continued this vision of peace and called for all to work for peace even though they also have employed more casuistry in relation to particular aspects of war and its threats. Paul VI, for example, insisted that development is the new name for peace,<sup>8</sup> whereas John Paul II sees peace as the fruit of solidarity.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent popes have followed the approach of John XXIII by recognizing the importance of peace and the need for all to work for peace and the structures that will bring about peace in our world.

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<sup>7</sup> O'Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought* 219-29.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* nn. 76-80, in O'Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought* 258-59.

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* n. 39, in O'Brien and Shannon *Catholic Social Thought* 423.

## Human Rights

*Pacem in Terris* was the first document in Catholic social teaching to develop at length and give a central role to human rights. Part one of *Pacem in Terris* discusses the order among human beings, and human rights and duties form the basis for this order (8-33). Every human being is a person endowed with intelligence and free will who consequently has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from one's very nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable. The rights developed in some detail include the right to life and a worthy standard of living, rights pertaining to moral and cultural values, the right to worship God according to one's conscience, the right to choose freely one's state of life, economic rights, the right to meeting and association, the right to emigrate and immigrate, and political rights. These natural rights are "inseparably connected, in the very person who is their subject, with just as many respective duties; and rights as well as duties find their source, their sustenance, and their inviolability in the natural law which grants or enjoins them" (n. 28). For example, the right of everyone to life is correlative with the duty to preserve life; the right to a decent standard of living is correlative with the duty of living it becomingly. All persons also have the duty of acknowledging and respecting the rights of others.

Leo XIII, in his 1888 encyclical, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, condemned the modern liberties and the rights attached to them. The liberty of worship goes against the "chiefest and holiest human duty." Liberty of speech and the press means that nothing will remain sacred for truth will be obscured by darkness and even error. One only has a right and a duty to speak what is true and honorable and no right to speak what is false. Leo XIII judges the liberty of teaching in the same way. Leo also condemns the right or liberty of conscience. The only true meaning of the freedom of conscience is the freedom to follow the will of God and to do one's duty in obeying God's commands.<sup>10</sup>

What explains the great change between Leo XIII and John XXIII, who not only accepted human rights and freedoms but made them the basis for justice in human society? The change involves a shift from the primacy of the objective to the primacy of the subjective but note that the emphasis on the subjective does not deny some role to the objective.

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, nn. 19-37 in *The Papal Encyclicals 1878-1903* edited by Claudia Carlin (Washington, DC: McGrath, 1981) 175-79; see also Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, nn. 31-42, in Carlin, *Papal Encyclicals 1879-1903* 113-16.

Historical circumstances help to explain how this dramatic change occurred. Notice how Leo XIII in the nineteenth century opposed rights and insisted on duties. The Catholic Church in the nineteenth century strongly opposed the individualistic liberalism that it saw as coming from the Enlightenment. Individualistic liberalism insisted on the freedom and rights of the individual but did not give enough importance to duties to God, neighbor, and the truth. In this perspective Martin Luther introduced individualistic liberalism into the religious realm by insisting on the conscience of the individual and denying any role to the church. Philosophical liberalism insisted on the reason of the individual person, but this reason was cut off from the reason and will of God. Political liberalism insisted on democracy, but democracy substitutes the will of the majority for the will of God. Just as Leo was no friend of the modern liberties, he was also no friend of democracy. He referred to the people not as citizens but as “the untutored multitude.”<sup>11</sup> In this light, capitalism is economic liberalism run wild with the capitalists claiming to be able to make as much money as possible and giving no consideration to the law of God and the needs of others. In opposition to individualistic liberalism, Leo XIII insisted on duties rather than rights and on truth rather than freedom.<sup>12</sup>

But as the twentieth century developed the enemy or, to use a more irenic term, the dialogue partner changed. Totalitarianism replaced individualistic liberalism as the major problem. In the 1930s, Pope Pius XI condemned Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, but it is safe to say that the Catholic Church was always more fearful of totalitarianism from the left than from the right.<sup>13</sup> The strong opposition of Catholicism to communism also brought about a closer relationship between the Catholic Church and the United States and reduced greatly the suspicions that many Americans had about Catholicism and Catholics even in the middle of the twentieth century. Gradually then the Catholic Church began to defend the freedom and rights of the person against the totalitarianism of communism. However, one should also remember that Leo XIII did talk about the rights of workers to organize in 1891. But John XXIII was the first pope to make human rights the basis of his understanding of the social and political orders.

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<sup>11</sup> Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, n. 23, in Carlin, *Papal Encyclicals 1878-1903* 176.

<sup>12</sup> For such a view of liberalism, see Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, nn. 23-34, in Carlin, *Papal Encyclicals 1879-1903* 112-14.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Pius XI, “*Non abbiamo bisogno*”; *Mit brennender Sorge; Divini Redemptoris*, in *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, edited by Claudia Carlin (Washington, DC: McGrath, 1981), 445-58; 526-36; 537-54.



There is no doubt that Catholic social teaching learned much from the theoretical and practical proponents of human rights. The Catholic Church arrived on the human rights scene a little breathless and a little late. However, while learning from liberalism, Catholic social teaching in its acceptance of human rights avoided the problem of individualism often associated with liberalism. First of all, *Pacem in Terris* insists on the need for rights and duties. The two must go hand in hand. Rights alone are not enough. Second, *Pacem in Terris* insists on both what are often called civil or political rights and social or economic rights. Political and civil rights are related to the concept of “freedom from.” I am free from any external force that tells me how to worship God, what to say or print, with whom I should associate. Social and economic rights according to *Pacem in terris* include the rights to food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and necessary social services. In a more general sense, *Pacem in Terris* recognizes the right to a worthy standard of living (11). Countries coming from the tradition of liberalism have emphasized political and civil rights. These are the rights found in the United States Bill of Rights for which we should all be very grateful. But the United States has been very weak on social and economic rights. Reflect on the fact that even today we are one of the few nations in the developed world that does not guarantee medical care to our citizens. On the other hand, socialist and communist countries have always stressed social and economic rights but have not accepted political and civil rights. *Pacem in Terris* insists on the need for both kinds of rights, once again illustrating that Catholic social teaching differs from both liberalistic individualism and Marxist communism. Third, Catholic social teaching distinguishes itself from individualistic liberalism’s emphasis on grounding rights in the freedom of the individual by grounding human rights also in the common good.<sup>14</sup>

In this movement to a greater stress on freedom and human rights, a significant development occurred even in the two years between the publication of John XXIII’s first social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, in 1961 and *Pacem in Terris* in 1963. Part four of *Mater et Magistra* bears the title: “Reconstruction of Social Relationships in Truth, Justice, and Love.”<sup>15</sup> Note this is not simply an isolated citation but refers to the whole part four of *Mater et Magistra*. *Pacem in Terris* maintains that a civil society is well-ordered, beneficial, and in keeping with human

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<sup>14</sup> David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 159-165.

<sup>15</sup> John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, n. 212, in O’Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought* 118.

dignity if it is founded on truth, justice, charity, and freedom (35). Part three, “Relations between States,” develops its entire discussion in the light of these four values. Thus, in 1963 John XXIII recognized the importance of freedom for civil society that he had not recognized as a fundamental societal value in 1961!

Among the rights mentioned in *Pacem in Terris* is the “right to practice one’s religion privately and publicly” (14). Recall that Vatican II was discussing religious freedom at the time and that the Catholic Church had adamantly denied religious freedom for all until that time. Ironically, *Pacem in Terris* gives a long citation from Leo XIII’s *Libertas Praestantissimum* to justify the right to religious freedom (14). But Leo was a strong opponent of religious freedom for all. Perhaps the citation from Leo XIII tried to cover up the great differences between Leo XIII and proponents of religious freedom. Later in the document, *Pacem in Terris* rejects one of the primary arguments that justified the older denial of religious liberty—the obligation to follow the truth with the subsequent affirmation that error has no rights. *Pacem in Terris* insists, “(O)ne must never confuse error and the person who errs, not even when there is a question of error or inadequate knowledge of truth in the moral or religious field” (158). There can be no doubt that *Pacem in Terris* helped pave the way for the 1965 *Declaration on Religious Freedom* of Vatican II.

Another significant connection exists between *Pacem in Terris* and the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*. The primary drafter of *Pacem in Terris* was Pietro Pavan, an Italian priest and professor who published much in social ethics and strongly supported the need for democracy.<sup>16</sup> But Pavan also had an important role in drafting the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*—a role second only to that of John Courtney Murray.<sup>17</sup> The hand of Pavan might also help to explain the natural law methodology behind both documents as distinguished from the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* which tried to integrate faith, redemption, grace, and Jesus into its approach. Of course, Murray himself was a strong advocate of a natural law approach to religious freedom, but the role of Pavan as a major influence in both

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<sup>16</sup> Giancarlo Zizola, *The Utopia of Pope John XXIII* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978) 12 ff.; Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000) 243-44.

<sup>17</sup> George G. Higgins, “Introduction,” in *Religious Freedom: 1965 and 1975: A Symposium on a Historic Document*, edited by Walter J. Burghardt (New York: Paulist, 1976) 3; see also Pavan’s brief biography on p. 73.

documents is at the very least consistent with the natural law approach followed in both.

*Pacem in Terris* paved the way, not only for Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, but also for the continued emphasis on religious freedom in subsequent papal documents and actions. Likewise, later documents developed even more the role of human rights. John Paul II has made human rights the centerpiece of his approach to social teaching.<sup>18</sup>

### *Interdependence and Global Dimensions*

John XXIII was the first pope to put Catholic social teaching into a global context. *Mater et Magistra* in 1961 recognized the global context and pointed out that perhaps the most pressing question of our day concerns the relationship between the developed countries and the underdeveloped countries (157). *Pacem in Terris* addressed the worldwide dimension by devoting part four to the "Relationship of Men and of Political Communities with the World Community" (130-45).

*Pacem in Terris* first points out the growing interdependence of our world. Technology and science have brought people together across national boundaries fostering the exchange of ideas at international conferences and meetings. The interdependence of national economies is evident as is the fact that the security and peace of all countries are necessarily connected. Thus today we are conscious of the entire human family and the need for the universal common good. The present situation of nation states is inadequate to promote the universal common good. Note that *Pacem in Terris* here insists on the need for adequate structures to serve the universal common good. The moral order demands a public authority that is in a position to operate in an effective manner on a worldwide basis (130-35).

*Pacem in Terris* then goes on to talk about the international authority. The authority must come into existence through common accord and not force. This authority must recognize the dignity and rights of all individuals. The principle of subsidiarity should guide the universal authority just as it does nation states. The worldwide authority will not replace individual states but will be better able to address the many worldwide issues that individual states cannot adequately address.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Bryan Hehir, "Catholicism and Democracy: Conflict, Change, Collaboration," in *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings: Readings in Moral Theology No. 13*, edited by Charles E. Curran (New York: Paulist, 2003) 34-37.

*Pacem in Terris* recognizes and praises the work of the United Nations and especially points out the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. The United Nations at this time is an important step forward, but the pope desires and hopes that in its structures and means it may become ever more equal to the magnitude and nobility of the task to be an effective safeguard for universal, inviolable, and inalienable human rights (136-45). Reality and hindsight remind us how difficult, even impossible, it is to establish such an adequate international political structure. Human finitude and sinfulness apparently constitute insurmountable obstacles.

One political consequence of the international perspective grounded in the universal fatherhood of God, human solidarity, and charity concerns the plight of refugees. The pope also recognizes a right of persons to enter a new political community and a contemporary duty of the state “as far as the common good rightly understood permits . . . to accept such immigrants and to help to integrate them into itself as new members” (106). Note here the limitation on state sovereignty in the light of the universal common good and the human rights of individuals.

The emphasis of *Pacem in Terris* on the worldwide dimension of the social problem has strongly influenced subsequent documents of Catholic social teaching. The Catholic Church self-consciously has become more a worldwide church since the pontificate of John XXIII, and Catholic social teaching shows that worldwide dimension.

### *Dialogue and the Cold War*

Three small paragraphs in part five “Pastoral Exhortations” have had a great effect both on the church and the world (158-60). We must “never confuse error and the person who errs.” The person always retains one’s personal dignity. God is always working to bring such persons to the truth. “For Catholics, if for the sake of promoting the temporal welfare they cooperate with people who either do not believe in Christ or whose belief is faulty because they are involved in error,” such action might be the occasion to turn these people to the truth (158). *Pacem in Terris* then distinguishes between “false philosophical teachings regarding the nature, origin, and destiny of the universe and of people” and “movements” relating to economic, social, cultural, and political issues “even if these movements owe their origin and inspiration to these false tenets.” Teachings do not change but movements can and do change in the course of history. In addition, these movements “contain elements that are positive and deserving of approval” (159). “For these reasons it can at times happen that meetings for the attainment of some practical results which previously seemed completely

useless now are either actually useful or may be looked upon as profitable for the future.” Involvement in such negotiations requires great prudence (160).

The language is diplomatic, general, and tactful, but the meaning is crystal clear. John XXIII here called for a thaw in the Cold War. The Catholic Church, the implacable foe of communism, now envisions and supports the possibility of meetings to discuss issues of paramount importance for life in this world. This opening to the left involves a movement away from intractable opposition to dialogue with Russia and the communist countries of the East.

An event a few months before *Pacem in Terris* was written obviously influenced the call for dialogue and negotiations in the document itself. John XXIII had played a significant role in the peaceful settlement of the Cuban missile crisis between the United States (John F. Kennedy) and the USSR (Nikita Krushchev). Norman Cousins, the non-Catholic editor of the well-respected *Saturday Review*, has told the story. On October 23, 1962, President Kennedy called Cousins who was at a dialogue meeting with Russian scientists saying that the deadlock over the Cuban Missile Crisis could readily lead to nuclear war. The Russian fleet was already heading toward Cuba and the United States fleet was going out to stop them. Kennedy urged Cousins to contact the pope who was the only viable third force who might be able to appeal to both the West and the East. Through a Catholic priest at the meeting (Felix Morlion) the pope was reached. Meanwhile the Russian members at the meeting contacted the Kremlin. The idea was for the pope to give public recognition to all who contribute to peace in the world and thus provide Krushchev help in persuading hard-liners to back down. The pope's statement begged the heads of state to avoid the appalling horror of war, to listen to the cry of all humanity, and to negotiate to preserve peace. Wisdom calls for such negotiations and history will vindicate such leaders. The next day *Pravda* carried the papal message on the front page under the banner headline “We Beg All Rulers Not to Be Deaf to the Cry of Humanity.” Ultimately Krushchev scrapped work on the missile base, returned the Russian fleet to its base, and called for negotiations. Obviously, other factors were also present in settling this dispute, but the pope played a significant role even though the United States press never mentioned it.<sup>19</sup>

John XXIII thus ushered in a new era of dialogue and negotiation with communism and countries behind the Iron Curtain. Paul VI both

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<sup>19</sup> Zizola, *Utopia of Pope John XXIII*, 3-10; Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, 230-31.

in theory and in practice further developed this dialogue and negotiation. John Paul II was more wary of communism especially because his church in Poland was the primary opposition to the communist government there. Looking back, however, one can see how these three popes played a significant role in ending the Cold War.

### *Disarmament and War*

As mentioned, *Pacem in Terris* concentrates on the vision and way to peace and does not engage in specific casuistic analyses of particular issues. However, the encyclical devotes one section of eleven paragraphs to disarmament (109-19). The encyclical notes that the arms race has devastating effects on the economy of the developed countries themselves and also on the economies of the underdeveloped nations. Proponents justify the arms race by claiming that only an equal balance of power can preserve peace in our world. But we all live in fear of the threat of nuclear weapons that might even be set off by some unexpected and unpremeditated act. True and solid peace, however, “consists not in equality of arms but in mutual trust alone” (113). Our common human nature, human reason, the desires of all, and the beneficial consequences for all call for such a peace. The pope believes this peace can be achieved and urges statespersons to spare no pain or effort in working toward such a peace. *Pacem in Terris* calls for the cessation of the arms race, a reduction of stockpiles, and agreement on the banning of nuclear weapons. But the pope does not call for unilateral disarmament. Stockpiles should be “reduced equally and simultaneously by the parties concerned. . . .” A fitting program of disarmament requires “mutual and effective controls” (112, cf. 128-29).

Only one statement of *Pacem in Terris* addresses in a specific way the issue of unjust wars. “Therefore, in an age such as ours, which prides itself on its atomic energy it is contrary to reason to hold that war is now a suitable way to restore rights which have been violated” (127).

In the first available English translation authorized by the Vatican, an erroneous translation from the Latin gave the impression that the pope was embracing pacifism—“It is hardly possible to imagine that in the atomic era wars could be used as an instrument of justice.” But this erroneous translation was then changed to what was cited above.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968) 192-94.

The teaching of *Pacem in Terris* is in line with the previous teaching of Pius XII on just war. In his Christmas addresses of 1944 and 1948, Pius XII condemned aggressive wars. John Courtney Murray interprets Pius XII as denying two of the three justifications for going to war in the modern just war theory—war for avenging past offenses or for recovering what has been lost. Pius XII allows only defensive wars for repelling present injustices.<sup>21</sup> Thus, *Pacem in Terris* does not accept pacifism but rejects war as a means to restore violated rights. Defensive wars might still be legitimate.

Subsequent documents of Catholic social teaching and their papal authors have continued to deplore the arms race and call for disarmament, but they have never demanded unilateral disarmament. Subsequent popes, in keeping with the vision and program for peace developed in *Pacem in Terris*, have insisted on the importance of working for peace but have never embraced pacifism and still allowed defensive wars. However, in the light of the evils brought about by war and the fact that war itself can never achieve true peace, John Paul II opposed the war in the Falkland Islands, the First Gulf War, and the Second Gulf War. John Paul II is not a pacifist, but he has significantly restricted in practice the resort to war.<sup>22</sup>

### **Optimism of *Pacem in Terris***

*Pacem in Terris* suffers from a natural law optimism. Natural law bases its approach on human reason and human nature and neglects both grace and human sinfulness. Some in the classical Lutheran tradition denied natural law precisely because of the existence and all pervasiveness of sin. A sinful human reason reflecting on a sinful humanity cannot arrive at true moral wisdom and knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Such an approach overemphasizes the role of sin. At its best the Catholic tradition recognizes that sin does not destroy the human but wounds it. However, the natural law methodology tends to ignore sin and thus fails to account for its presence and influence in wounded human na-

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<sup>21</sup> John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1960) 254-65.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Joblin, "Le Saint-Siege face à la guerre: Continuité et renouvellement de son action pour la paix à l'époque contemporaine," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 299-352; William L. Portier, "Are We Really Serious when We Ask God to Deliver Us from War? *The Catechism* and the Challenge of Pope John Paul II," *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996): 47-63.

<sup>23</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics, vol. 1: Foundations*, edited by William H. Lazareth, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 147-451.

ture. *Pacem in Terris* never mentions sin or its effects. There is no recognition of the tragic or the conflictual nature of human existence. In addition to neglecting the role of sin, the natural law approach neglects eschatology—the relationship between the fullness of the reign of God at the end of time and the present. The fullness of eschatology reminds us of the imperfections, limitations, and sinfulness of the present. The fullness of justice and peace will never exist in this world. On the other hand, God’s grace is working in the world and we must strive to make justice and peace more present. *Pacem in Terris* thus suffers from a natural law optimism that fails to recognize the existence of sin and the fullness of the eschaton’s influence on the present.

One could write a parody of the opening introduction of *Pacem in Terris*. The encyclical insists that the Creator of the world has printed on the human heart an order which conscience reveals and enjoins us to obey. This order teaches us how we should live in peace and harmony with one another, within individual states, and in the world community of all peoples. But there also exists in the human heart a disorder because of which human beings do not get along with one another, constant tensions, inequalities, and enmities exist between citizens and the individual state, and different states find it hard to live together in peace and justice within the world community. Human experience bears out this reality. There have been hundreds of wars both within and between countries in the decades since *Pacem in Terris*.<sup>24</sup> Thus an encyclical entitled *Bellum in Terris* (War on Earth) might have been almost as appropriate as *Pacem in Terris*.

On the tenth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* in 1973, Cardinal Maurice Roy, President of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, pointed out in a commentary on *Pacem in Terris* that the many forces of violence in our world today suggest the need that a new chapter with the title *Bellum in Terris* be added to *Pacem in Terris*. Cardinal Roy explains this violence in the light of the radical social changes that occurred in the decade since 1963.<sup>25</sup> But the real source of the violence in that decade and in every other decade of human existence comes from human sinfulness and the lack of eschatological fullness in our

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<sup>24</sup> James Ciment, ed., *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II*, 4 vols. (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe Reference, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> “Reflections by Cardinal Maurice Roy on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII (April 11, 1973),” in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John*, edited by Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976) 548.



world. However, Christians and others should strive to make peace and justice more present in our world.

This optimism shows itself in some of the considerations found in the encyclical especially concerning the world community of nations. John XXIII believes that a “true and solid peace of nations” based on “mutual trust alone . . . can be brought to pass” (113). First, I do not think that a true and solid peace among nations will ever be present in our world, but of course we have to strive toward it. Second, the reason why there will be no solid peace and justice in this world is because, in addition to trust, there is too much distrust, selfishness, pride, and self-deception in this world. In other words, the seven capital sins will always be with us.

Also, John XXIII ardently desires that the time will come as quickly as possible when we will have a world juridical-political organization where every human being will find therein an effective safeguard for the rights which derive directly from one’s dignity as a person (145). Such a day will never come on this earth. Look how difficult it is for different ethnic groups to live in peace in the same country today. How will it ever be possible for all ethnic groups, all religions, all cultures, all races, to live together in a worldwide political order? In addition, the powerful nations of the world will never be willing to give up any sovereignty. Look at how the United Nations and its Security Council are structured to ensure the sovereignty of the powerful nations. We need to try to move toward better worldwide structures, but John XXIII is too optimistic in expecting such a structure to come into existence. The natural law optimism of *Pacem in Terris* which forgets both human sinfulness and the future aspect of the eschaton thus has an effect on some of the content proposed in the encyclical.

However, John XXIII is neither a total optimist nor a total idealist. The elements of a more realistic approach come through in the encyclical even though there is no theoretical basis for such approaches. Consider the following four points. First, *Pacem in Terris* insists that justice and peace in this world require not just a change of heart but also a change of structures. Without adequate and proper structures, despite all the good will in the world, true justice and peace will never exist. Second, as pointed out earlier, *Pacem in Terris* does not embrace pacifism and does not call for unilateral nuclear disarmament. These practical positions show that trust alone is not sufficient to ensure justice and peace. Third, at the end of *Pacem in Terris* the pope cautions “to proceed gradually is the law of life in all its expressions; therefore in human institutions, too, it is not possible to renovate for the better

except by working from within them gradually” (162). Fourth, in fact *Pacem in Terris* explicitly recognizes that “the problem of bringing social reality into line with the objective requirements of justice is a problem that will never admit of a definitive solution” (155). Thus it seems the pope is proposing a vision toward which we must all strive with the realization that the road to it is very long and difficult and we will never be totally successful.

The natural law methodology of *Pacem in Terris* fails to recognize the dark, fragile, sinful, imperfect, and conflictual side of human existence in this world. Likewise this more optimistic methodology comes through in some of the content of the encyclical. But there is also a realism in John XXIII that tempers to some degree that optimism. At the very minimum, all of us can agree that we need a vision or a utopia of justice and peace to enable us to continue striving and working for a greater justice and peace in our imperfect and sinful world.