

Catholic Peacemaking

The World Day of Peace Messages, 1968-2009

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I. INTRODUCTION

When I enlisted into the Army at age twenty, I embarked upon a journey that would change my life forever. I joined after a disheartening college experience that shamed my parents – both of whom were officers in the Air Force. And so I tried to follow in their footsteps, thinking that I could do some good in the Army while making my parents proud, and perhaps improve my lot in life. I became a Forward Observer, graduating as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of my class. Then I became an Airborne Ranger – one of the most elite infantry units in the world. Finally I went to West Point, where I would finish my first year ranked fourth among more than a thousand cadets. I wanted to be the best, and I wanted to be good. I wanted to join the Special Forces – the Green Berets, whose motto was “To Free the Oppressed”. In an evil world, where might made right, being good also meant being strong, being powerful, being deadly. Because evil would kill you and destroy everything you loved, given the chance. I fit perfectly into the military, and if ordered, would destroy anyone who sought to destroy what I loved.

But then everything changed. The dark forces that ruined my college experience had never left, but had only grown larger, more powerful, and depraved – forces that made me do things I hated, and that made me hate myself. Then 9-11 happened. And I turned inward. What was wrong with us? Why was the world so horrible? Was there even a God?

In sorrow and hatred and spiritual darkness, I started to pray. Almost immediately, a fellow cadet invited me to mass. I found an old bible, and began reading the Gospels. God’s presence intruded into my soul. Something was happening to me, or rather, *someone*. I discovered that Jesus Christ was real, and that he has a message for me. And in three words, he changed my life forever: “love your enemies”.

Whatever the Church might teach, whatever the Church might have done in the past, whatever the philosophers and the theologians might write, Jesus put his hand on my heart and his mouth to my ear, and whispered, “love your enemies”. Later, after making my first confession since childhood (having been raised in a nominally Catholic family), after listening to Pope John Paul II speak out against the impending war with Iraq, and after reading Tolstoy’s brilliant book, “The Kingdom of God is Within You,” I applied for discharge from the military as a conscientious objector. My parents warned me that I would not receive it, that I would be dishonorably discharged, that I would even go to prison. And I could see that they were ashamed of me, again. But I was faced with the truth – that I could not kill those that Christ commanded me to love. And I had to follow that truth.

The military designated an officer to investigate my claim, and I was called into his office for a hearing, where I would be interrogated, where they would test my beliefs and my faith. Yet when I entered the low-lit office, I recognized the face of the officer who would decide the fate of my life: he was a fellow Catholic, a man who I had seen every morning at daily mass but had never talked to. He nodded his head and smiled in recognition, and then proceeded to tell me something startling: “I read what you’ve

written,” (over fifty pages of journals and reflections), “and I’ve been listening to the Pope too . . . and you know what . . . I think you’re right. But I have four children. What do you think I should do?”

Looking back, I wish I had given him a better answer. I only told him to follow his conscience. I should have added – *but form your conscience first*.

I eventually received an honorable discharge from the Army as a conscientious objector, and have spent the last six years forming my conscience not only upon the words and example of Christ, but upon the Church’s doctrines and teachings. Today, we face a corpus of doctrine that seems to support war-making and violence, yet upon closer examination does not. While the words ‘just-war’ and ‘legitimate defense’ are invoked by countless Catholics to support state policies of warfare, the Popes and Bishops speak out relentlessly against war. How is it that one fourth of those soldiers who invaded Iraq were Catholic, even as their Popes, Cardinals, and Bishops remained opposed to the war? This disconnect is not simply based on disagreements of a ‘prudential nature’, but are rooted in something deeper. *The Church’s understanding of war and peace is undergoing a transition, one that began with the World Wars, and was explicitly proposed at the Second Vatican council.*

The clearest formulations of this transition are found within the Papal *World Day of Peace* messages, and if our consciences are to be formed correctly, we should begin our study with these messages. Historically, priests and religious were canonically forbidden from killing or shedding blood. But today, in light of the Universal Call to Holiness, the Church now understands that *all* are called to renounce violence. Nonviolence is not a special vocation *within* the Church, but the special vocation *of* the Church. For the Church has discerned that “love of enemy” is not simply an admonition for monks and nuns, but is the call of everyone baptized into Christ, and in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, forms the “nucleus of the Christian revolution”.

While violence is a duty for a fallen world untouched by salvation, nonviolence is a duty for a redeemed Church set ablaze by the Holy Spirit. While a fallen world has the duty to destroy evildoers, a redeemed Church has the duty to save evildoers. While a fallen world must wage just-wars, a redeemed Church must love its enemies, and like Christ, be prepared to die for them. We must turn away from the legitimate duties of a fallen world, and embrace the supernatural graces of Christ’s kingdom – a kingdom that grows not through war, but through sacrificial love for those who hate us. We may always kill as sinners in a fallen world. But as men and women on the journey to sainthood, as bearers of the Kingdom of God, we are called to something better – not to kill, but to love. And it is precisely this love that saves the world. May God bless us all with the courage and passion to embrace this call.

Nathaniel C. Wildermuth

II. PEACE

Where does peace come from? What is peace? Why should we want peace? “[Peace] is a Messianic phase.” (1969) Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the opposite of conflict. Peace is not people leaving each other alone, but people living with and for other people. Peace is not the lonely hermit alone in his cabin, but a joyful family celebrating life with the feast of creation. Peace is the perfect life of complete harmony, where nothing is wrong and everything is right. Peace is salvation. And if peace is salvation, peace requires a savior. Peace requires a Messiah, someone who can save us from not only one another, but from ourselves.

He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin. As an innocent lamb he merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed. In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another, freeing us from the bondage of the devil and of sin, so that each one of us could say with the apostle: the Son of God “loved me and gave himself for me” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 22).

Jesus the Messiah is our salvation and our peace. The world tries to convince us otherwise. Salvation, the world says, is impossible. Men will always kill men and snakes will always bite children and Jesus of Nazareth can only make us wait patiently for death by fooling us with dreams of ‘pie in the sky’. The world teaches us that Jesus might save us after we die, but certainly not before we die. Until then, we must accept the world as it is, we must accept ourselves as we are – broken, damaged and hopeless. We must accept that the poor will starve, that families will break, that wars will rage, and that nothing can ever heal human nature.

Yet Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Saved in Hope*, rejects this despair. He rejects any perversion of the Gospel that makes faith ‘private’, that disarms faith by turning the Gospel into a “narrowly individualist” and “selfish search for salvation” (Spe Salvi, 16). Real faith in Jesus Christ doesn’t simply draw us into heaven. Faith in Jesus Christ draws heaven into us, and into the world: “Faith draws the future into the present” (Spe Salvi, 7).

the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life. (Spe Salvi , 2)

Jesus the savior, and the Church as his faithful witness, teach that healing is possible. The poor can eat, families can flourish, human beings can be reborn, and war itself can be conquered. *Peace is possible. His Peace. The Peace of the Kingdom of God.*

III. SUPERIOR FIREPOWER

The man or woman reborn in Jesus Christ is the greatest weapon for peace. Rebirth, repentance, metanoia, conversion, transformation – all these words describe a person’s complete devotion to the King of God’s Kingdom. This transformation isn’t saying one prayer, it isn’t being baptized once (or twice) it isn’t going to Church or wearing a cross. This transformation is the total purification of heart, body, soul, and mind. It is the transformation into the very image of Jesus. The salvation of the messiah is to change us into himself, by which we can call ourselves the very ‘body of Christ’ by which we can say with St. Paul, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). The world says that human nature cannot change, that humanity will always hate and kill. But this is a lie. Conversion and transformation are real, and necessary.

Jesus calls to conversion . . . a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart . . . a new heart. (CCC 1427, 1431, 1432)

Conversion is not easy and it is not quick. It begins in sacraments, grows in prayer, and manifests in action. It is the full transformation of the full person - both the spirit and the body, both the interior life and the exterior life, both our relationship with God and our relationship with Man. For either the whole person is saved, or not at all. And saving a whole person takes an entire lifetime. Salvation and peace will not come overnight to the person or overnight to the world. It will take the whole of history to establish a permanent peace. It will take the conversion of the world, one person at a time, culminating in the return of Jesus Christ.

On the journey of transformation, of conformation to Jesus, we discover how Christ brings peace and how Christ defeats evil. We learn from the inside – from the heart, and become like Jesus. We become partners of salvation with him, as “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20). For Jesus is the source of our thoughts, words, and actions. His Holy Spirit is *our spirit*. Faced with a choice, not only do we ask, “What would Jesus do?” but also, “What would Jesus think? What would Jesus feel? What would Jesus desire?” And within those questions, within the Spirit of Christ living within us, giving us a new heart and a new life, we discover an answer. We discover the way of peace and salvation. We discover love.

The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends.

Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope, or for action, the Love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love (CCC 25).

The practical and daily love of Jesus Christ is what lives inside the reborn Christian. It is this love that transforms us by flowing from his heart to our heart, to our mind to our mouth to our words to our deeds and to the whole world. The peace of the world hinges upon the love that flows not from politics, economics, or social institutions, but from the hearts of those transformed by God. Indeed, “the ‘heart’ of man must be renewed, in order to renew systems, institutions and methods. Christian faith has a word for this fundamental change of heart: it is ‘conversion’” (1984). The real weapon of peace, the real

source of our salvation, is the love of Christ that first changes us, and then through us, changes the world.

But let us admit that ‘love’ can mean anything or nothing, if we do not remember that this is not any particular kind of love, but the very love *of Christ*. We must not simply ‘love’, but *love as Christ loves, as Christ is*. And what kind of love is this? Christ’s love “is not fleeting emotion, but an intense and enduring moral force which seeks the good of others, even at the cost of self-sacrifice” (1994). This sacrificial love “is the only force capable of bringing fulfillment to persons and societies” (2005).

Christ’s love “overcomes evil with good” (2005). This sacrificial love of all others, which is not an idealistic intention, but an effective action for another person’s good, holds the key to peace and salvation. Doing good, even when it hurts, is the new love of Jesus Christ, and is the one hope for peace.

One may be tempted to ask, “But who is my neighbor? Who am I to do good to? Everyone? Fellow citizens? Even strangers? Even my enemies? “But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk 6:27-35). Jesus not only taught this kind of love, but lived it, and died for it upon the cross. And Christ’s “most faithful disciples . . . have been builders of peace, to the point of forgiving their enemies, sometimes even to the point of giving their lives for them” (1979). This kind of sacrifice is not a secondary or marginal aspect of Christ’s love, an aspect better left to saints, priests, and religious, but is rather the very epitome of Christ’s love. It is the love of the cross, the force for good that redeems sinners from evil. Pope Benedict XVI, speaking of Christian nonviolence, teaches us that “love of one’s enemies constitutes the nucleus of the Christian revolution” (<http://www.zenit.org/article-18951?l=english>). The love that changes the world is enemy-love, the love that knows no limits and no fear – Christ’s love. The real weapon of peace is the love of Christ – the love that loves the unlovable, even at the cost of one’s own life.

In our transformation and conversion to enemy-love, we not only discover peace in our own hearts, but share this peace with those who need it the most. The centurion who helped to murder Jesus was defeated, was touched and pierced to the heart, and upon Christ’s death proclaimed, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mk 15:39). In loving those who hate us *by doing good to them*, we allow God’s love to touch, break, and heal their enslaved hearts. Love begets love, and “love never fails” (1 Cor 13:8).

Is sacrificing ourselves for the good of those who hate us a naïve dream, an unrealistic illusion? The world says so. But for those of us who trust in Christ, for those who believe in his victory over death, we embrace the hope to “face even the most difficult situations with the weapons of peace and reconciliation,” (1997) for we “know that, in spite of everything, peace is possible, because it is part of the original divine plan” (1994).

No matter how bleak the situation, no matter how great the evils one faces, Christians are called to trust in the love of Christ, for “if the Church dares to proclaim what, from a human standpoint, might appear to be sheer folly, it is precisely because of her unshakeable confidence in the infinite love of God” (1997). With the unconditional goodness of Christ living inside us and flowing from us, “everyone can

defeat evil with good” (2005). Evil can never defeat love. Jesus is truly the Messiah, the savior, the one who brings peace by transforming the world one person at a time. In him, “Christians nourish an invincible hope,” the hope of the world (2005).

A. Truth and Freedom

What stands in the way of Christ, in the way of his reborn peacemakers, is not what first led all of mankind into rebellion against God – lies. Jesus calls Satan the “father of lies” and a “murderer from the beginning” (Jn 8:44). Satan’s lies kill and destroy, using and perverting men and women, setting us against God and then against each other. Lies turn brothers and sisters into enemies, destroying them from the inside. “The first lie, the basic falsehood, is to refuse to believe in man, with all his capacity for greatness but at the same time with his need to be redeemed from the evil and sin within him” (1980). The basic falsehood says that conversion is either impossible or unneeded. The basic falsehood either makes man into a beast or makes man into a god. When we are seduced into blind despair or absurd optimism, we lose our primary weapon of peace – conversion. We begin to think that love is either powerless or irrelevant. We let the lie de-convert us, and are soon drawn into conflict with one another. We become slaves to war and violence.

In turning to God, in emulating and integrating the love of Christ, we are freed from the lies of the world. We are armed with truth, “the serene and powerful driving force of peace” (1980). Only in the truth can evil be recognized and confronted. Only in the truth can a world of gray be perceived as a battleground of black lies and white truth. For “the man of peace is able to detect the portion of truth existing in every undertaking” as well as identifying “the real causes of evil and injustice” (1980). Only a man of truth can see that no human being is ever completely corrupted, that some good always remains possible even within the darkest souls.

While the man of truth looks at evils “squarely [and] calls them by their proper name,” the truth about man’s capacity for redemption never “allow[s] us to despair of our opponents” (1980). Like Jesus, we realize that “forgiveness and reconciliation are constitutive elements of the truth” and that to “refuse forgiveness and reconciliation is for us to lie” (1980). Only a man of truth is capable of crying out, “Father, forgive them,” as he is nailed to a cross (Lk 23:34). Only a man of truth is capable of crying out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” as he is stoned to death (Acts 7:60).

But the world teaches us differently. We are taught to despair of our enemies, that reconciliation is impossible, that what counts is force and violence. But “let us not accept violence as the way to peace” (1981), let us not “shut human beings into categories in opposition to each other” (1984), let us instead “free history from the false paths it is pursuing [by being] people with a deep trust in man” (1985), a trust founded upon the truth about man – that we *all need* and are *all capable* of redemption and conversion.

The Church prays that no one should be lost . . . The Church prays for “all men to be saved” . . . it is also true that God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him “all things are possible” (Mt 19:26) . . . (CCC 1821, 1058).

The world must be taught this truth. This truth brings peace wherever it is heard and accepted. Yet no one can be forced to see the truth, for “truth imposes itself solely by the force of its own truth” (1991).

Human freedom resists any imposition of truth, and God cannot heal any human heart against a person's own free choice. Truth must always be accompanied by freedom, and freedom always follows from truth.

The world often seeks to impose truth or conceal truth, rather than respecting the freedom of human hearts. Governments, peoples, and cultures can conspire to hide the truth, to oppress the truth, or to even deny the freedom to seek the truth. While some ideological systems attack truth and freedom outright, Western ideologies often attack truth by presenting false materialistic and individualistic notions of freedom. Freedom, in such a context, comes to mean following 'one's own truth' which is relative to all other 'truths', thereby destroying the possibility of grasping truth itself. In such subtle deceptions the very reality of God is questioned, or worse, abandoned. And when "God dies in the conscience of the human person, there inevitably follows the death of man, the image of God" (1985).

While the world claims to be free, many remain trapped and enslaved by deceptions they cannot even see. They are enslaved by the Father of Lies who was a murderer from the beginning, and have been drafted into rebellion against God and one another. They have been "seduced by systems that present a global vision of humanity that is exclusive and almost Manichean" – making "struggle against others" (1984), whether socially, economically, or politically, the basis of their lives.

The truth does not lead men and women to enter into endless conflicts with one another. The truth does not make man the enemy, or any man an enemy. The truth makes evil itself, with all its lies, the enemy.

The man of peace, compelled by the love of Christ and guided by the truth about man, battles not flesh and blood, but the world rulers of wickedness – the lies that enslave man in a war against man. The greatest good we can do for one another is to be agents of redemption by being instruments of truth, forgiveness, and freedom, just as Christ did for us.

B. Dialogue and Prayer

The discovery of truth is achieved through the dialogue of persons, cultures, and religions. Dialogue isn't negotiation, and doesn't necessarily involve committees, debates, or even words. Rather, "true dialogue is the search for what is good" and "presupposes the search for what is true, good, and just for every person, for every group and society" (1983). Dialogue rests upon the truth that all human beings are always capable of reason, and that "reason, and not might, must decide the destinies of peoples" (1969). Thus dialogue, as a "central and essential element of ethical thinking" (1983) is not only "necessary for true peace", but is "always possible" (1984) – even in the darkest situations. Just as every person is capable of embarking upon the way of redemption, every person and society is capable of dialogue.

Dialogue occurs whenever a person truly communicates with another person. The exemplary form of dialogue is prayer. For prayer comes from "the heart . . . the place of decision . . . the place of truth, where we choose life or death . . . the place of encounter" (CCC 2562-3). In that encounter with God, true prayer brings us into union with God. Such is the goal of dialogue – true communication, community, and communion.

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy (St. Therese of Lisieux).

Dialogue is not a simple exchange of words, but an exchange of heart – an exchange of soul that leads to unity and oneness. Accordingly, "dialogue is blocked by an a priori decision to concede nothing, to refuse to listen, by a claim to be – oneself and only oneself – the measure of justice" (1983). Dialogue only occurs when both sides open their hearts to one another. Only a person redeemed by truth can find the courage to open themselves up to their enemies, to make themselves vulnerable in the face of attack. But the truth convinces us that every heart is capable of redemption, love, freedom, and hence, dialogue. Moreover, we know that conversion is a process and a journey – that just as we must continue to pray for healing of heart – no matter how far we have come – that we must also continue to enter into dialogue with all of man. Just as prayer removes obstacles to communion with God, dialogue removes obstacles to communion with humanity. Dialogue is not for the self-righteous, but for the sinner who seeks sainthood, knowing that "life is a pilgrimage of discovery: the discovery of who you are . . . a voyage that never ends" (1985). Dialogue is precisely this "path of discoveries" and "the more we discover one another, the more we can replace the tensions of the past with bonds of peace" (1986).

The invitation to dialogue is not always accepted, as Jesus found in the people of Israel. God invited his people to come to him over and over again, even as they rejected him over and over again. Christ's parables help to reveal something of the essence of dialogue. When asked by his disciples why he spoke to the crowds in parables, Jesus replied that "knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you, but to the rest, they are made known through parables so that 'they may look but not see, and hear but not understand'" (Lk 8:10). Far from implying Christ's rejection of the crowds, the parables' mysterious nature invites the crowds to enter into Christ's community of disciples. Only by

saying ‘yes’ to Christ, only by accepting the invitation to dialogue, only by moving from the edges of the crowd to the foot of the Savior, can one begin to truly understand Christ.

One does not enter into dialogue because both sides are perfect, but because both sides are imperfect and need one another to find true healing. In opening ourselves up to the truth, we discover that no person or culture is perfect, and that peoples can and must work together to purify one another of all elements contrary to love, life, and truth. The ‘culture of death’ is not bound by a continent or a hemisphere. The culture of death, a culture premised upon lies about God and Man, influences every nation and every people. For precisely this reason, “*dialogue between cultures and traditions . . . is the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world*” (2001). The good that exists within the variety of the earth’s people must be drawn forth and shared.

Such goods can be particularly seen in the achievements of science and art. The sharing of cultural gifts helps to foster the openness and trust that is required for real dialogue. Indeed, the beautiful works of culture are “an anticipation of the emergence of a universal peaceful society” (1982). All too often, men and women only see the worst in one another, instead of seeing the divine image and the face of Christ. Moreover, we often fail to see our own failings. Prayer again serves as a useful measure of true dialogue. The man who enters into a self-righteous dialogue with God speaks only to himself, and does not receive God’s mercy – for the man never even asks for mercy.

Because prayer is the ultimate form of dialogue, ecumenical prayer among the different religions is a powerful force for peace in the world. Religion itself points man to his transcendent identity and destiny. Although we must always be fully aware of the differences between religions, the seekers of transcendent truth can enter into an effective dialogue with one another – precisely through lifting their hearts up to God together. We must engage in “intense, humble, confident and persevering prayer, if the world is finally to become a dwelling-place of peace,” for “Prayer is *par excellence* the power needed to implore that peace and obtain it” (1998). This dialogue of joint prayer will help to “ensure that the many painful wounds inflicted over the course of centuries will not be repeated” (1992) and that all religions can unite in “speaking out against war and bravely facing the consequent risks” (1997). Once peoples and nations can pray together, once they commit themselves to resolutely facing the truth and lies that permeate the cultures of the world, once they accept the invitation to join one another in following the path of peace, nothing will be able to stop them. Through dialogue and prayer, people will be led “to a new understanding of their human condition,” that fosters the “sincere gift of themselves” – culminating in their “complete fellowship with other human beings” (1998). For in opening themselves to truth, wherever it may be found, humanity opens itself up to love, wherever it may be found:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, 2).

We must all seek out and find the rays of truth, no matter how slight, for the truth cannot help but further the salvation of Jesus Christ and the redemption of all mankind. We have nothing to fear, nothing to lose, much to learn, and everything to gain. We must have bold confidence in the power of God to unite enemies, precisely by uniting us with him – in the dialogue of Man and God, and the dialogue of men and women. Then, together, as brothers and sisters and children of the Most High, we can discover the path to salvation and peace.

C. One Human Family

In his fatherly care for all of us, God desires that all men should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood. All, in fact, are destined to the very same end, namely God himself, since they have been created in the likeness of God (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 24)

“Every man is my brother” (1971) and every woman is my sister, because God is the Father of all. And yet because lies lead my brothers and sisters to live without ever experiencing the love of the Father and without ever seeing the face of Christ. Lies make brothers and sisters into strangers, and even enemies. Though “we are one human family” (1987), we kill one another. We wage war. We destroy. We starve. We despair.

Though brother continues to kill brother, the Church continues to remind us that “Yes, every man is his ‘brother’s keeper’, because God entrusts us to one another” (Evangelium Vitae, 19). Yet we are brothers and family armed to the teeth against one another. We pursue peace through the firing of a gun or a launching of a missile – through bloodshed. And yet God tells us again: “Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil!” (Gen 4:10). We must remember our common humanity, our common heritage, and our common destiny. Even in death, our unity does not end.

Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse . . . It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. (Spe Salvi, 48)

In the grace of conversion, in the prayerful dialogue of truth, we receive a “new heart [that] seeks to banish the fear and psychosis of war [and] replaces the axiom which holds that peace results from the balance of arms with the principle that true peace can be built up only in mutual trust” (1984). For true peace “cannot be ensured until a security based on arms is gradually replaced with a security based on the solidarity of the human family” (1987). Indeed, the “goal which believers must put before themselves is that of establishing community relationships among people” (CSDC 392). This communion will not come through negotiation, but only through the sacrifice of enemy-love.

If the world opens itself to our common humanity, if the world puts trust in humanity’s capacity for goodness and reason, “if the consciousness of universal brotherhood truly penetrates into the hearts of men, will they still need to arm themselves to the point of becoming blind and fanatic killers of their brethren” (1976)? The answer is clear if the truth is acknowledged. We are all family. We need simply to accept it, and act upon it. What we do to one man, we do to all of man, and to the Son of Man himself, who teaches us that “what you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). Christ reveals to us the final destiny and goal of existence – to be united with one another and with God, forever.

D. Learning Peace

The path to peace is not easy, for it requires realizing that though “you may think that you already know everything about Peace in the world,” you and I and all of us still have much to learn (1976). In a secularized world, where peace means material abundance amidst historical pockets of cease-fire, the word ‘peace’ has been stained. The slogan ‘Peace and Justice’ has become the rally-cry of men and women who even deny God, or hate God outright. Peace must be redeemed from secular forces, and the “world must be educated to love peace” – true peace (1968).

The World Day of Peace messages, if received with prayerful and earnest hearts, provide a “true ‘science of peace’ [that] is easy to understand . . . but at the same time quite demanding” (2004). They are demanding because they are “a new ideological education, education for peace” (1970).

The World Days of Peace are particularly intense moments of prayer for peace and for the commitment to build a world of peace . . . these annual occasions represent a rich source for the renewal and development of the Church’s social doctrine (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 520).

We must “reflect together on the priceless treasure of peace” (1987). For “we Christians see the commitment to educate ourselves and other to peace as something at the very heart of our religion” (2004). The Church’s own reflection upon peace in the modern era began in earnest with the Second Vatican Council. Following the horrors of World War II and the terrors of the Cold War, the Fathers of the Council began a systematic reflection upon peace that has not ended, and whose fruits have yet to fully ripen.

The development of armaments by modern science has immeasurably magnified the horrors and wickedness of war. Warfare conducted with these weapons can inflict immense and indiscriminate havoc which goes far beyond the bounds of legitimate defense . . . All these factors force us to undertake a completely fresh appraisal of war. Men of this generation should realize that they will have to render an account of their warlike behavior (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 80).

The love of Christ compels us to join the Church on its ‘completely fresh appraisal of war’, a journey that takes us straight to the World Day of Peace messages. Moreover, we are ‘forced’ to look beyond the world’s ideologies and the world’s heroes, to the Church’s truth and the Church’s heroes. We are called to enter into a deeply prayerful study of peace, following in the footsteps of Christ and Christ’s greatest saints. All of us must “learn the history of peace and not simply the history of victory and defeat in war” (1996). Moreover, “Every community should undertake an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace” (2006). In doing so, we will discover the true face of the Prince of Peace, and his true image within us.

IV. WAR NO MORE

The reborn person who draws close to Christ and is transformed by Christ's love discovers that violence is a lie and that war – even defensive war – is in itself evil. We discover that “war in God's name is never acceptable!” (2007). We discover that “war is the failure of all true humanism” (1999), and that war is quite simply “absurd” (1969). The idea that war is anything but an evil consequence of sin, that war could ever be a force for freedom, happiness, truth, and love, is simply absurd.

The Magisterium condemns “the savagery of war” and asks that war be considered in a new way. In fact, “it is hardly possible to image that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice”. War is a “scourge” and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arise between nations, “it has never been and it will never be,” because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts. When it erupts, war becomes an “unnecessary massacre,” an “adventure without return” that compromises humanity's present and threatens its future. “Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war.” The damage caused by an armed conflict is not only material but also moral. In the end, war is the “failure of all true humanism,” “it is always a defeat for humanity”: “never again some peoples against others, never again! . . . no more war, no more war!” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 497).

Yet the world teaches us that war saves, and that peace comes through superior firepower. But this “abhorrent logic of war” (1993) is worthy of total condemnation. War is a “useless slaughter” (2006) of brother killing brother, of son killing father, of mother killing daughter. No one ever wins a war. Rather, everyone loses.

Jesus Christ and his Apostles teach us to reject “the senseless violence of arms” (1993) and to “unite to fight every kind of violence and to conquer war” (1996). War must be conquered because war is evil: “Providence urgently demands of us that we free ourselves from the age-old slavery of war” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 82). Killing another person is the ultimate act of despair, for “Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence, God cannot be present” (CSDC 488).

War is a curse of sin, and for ages man remained enslaved to both sin and war. The Old Testament bears witness to this fact, especially in the story of King David and his son Absalom, in the story of the Son who revolted against Father. King David, in defending his Kingdom, had nowhere to turn but violence and war. The ‘victory’ of David occurred through the death of the very son he loved: “The king was shaken, and went up to the room over the city gate to weep. He said as he wept, “My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!” (1 Sam 19:1)

King David's tears reveal the real nature of war. War is never victory. War is always the triumph of evil. Yet evil has been conquered in Jesus Christ – evil in our hearts, and evil in our world. War does not have the last word. What David could not do, the Son of David *would* do. What David could not

build, the Son of David would build – a house and a Kingdom that would storm the very gates of hell. Jesus Christ has freed us with his love, the love he pours into our hearts in the Holy Spirit, in the ever-loving presence of the Father.

In Jesus Christ, in the sacrifice of enemy-love, in dying for sinners, we discover freedom. We discover faith, hope, and love. We discover the victory of the martyrs – *the true warriors for peace*. Dying for another person, dying for sinners, as Christ taught and lived, is the ultimate profession of faith, hope, and love.

Yet in our world, martyrs are forgotten and warriors are etched into our currency and our monuments. What has led to this terrible distortion that makes war into peace and warriors into saints?

War, of course, has not ceased to be part of the human scene. As long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, 79).

Lawful self-defense can be a duty for those still enslaved by the evil of war. The Church sets strict limits to such self-defense, according to the just-war theory – originally a doctrine proposed by the pagan Cicero and adopted by Saints Augustine and Aquinas. Paradoxically, the Church condemns the evil of war, while maintaining that war is a necessary response under certain conditions. The slavery of war still reigns over much of the world, just as the slavery of sin still reigns so many human hearts. Though redemption is real, and conversion possible, much of the world remains in darkness. In such darkness, violence remains the only response to violence. In such darkness, horror rules.

In this darkness, many are tempted to despair of peace. Many are tempted to baptize violence as the salvation of the world. Many, blinded by man's fallen nature, are tempted to make war holy, and warriors saints. Some maintain that Jesus never condemns war or warriors, that the Gospel and the bible resolutely support war as a positive force for good in the world. They point to the story of the Centurion, whose faith Jesus praises as the greatest he had found in all of Israel. This same Centurion, a slave-owner, has also been the favorite story of those who once supported slavery. Have not Christians waged war and owned slaves throughout history? Have not even Popes and Saints killed and owned men? Yes, Popes have killed their brothers. Saints have owned their brothers. And it was a Centurion that nailed the Son of God to a piece of wood. Sin has been with us from the beginning, and no man or woman is immune from it – no matter how strong their faith, no matter how deep their love.

Today, the philosophies of just-slavery have been dismissed. Today, the philosophy of just-war is being questioned. For these doctrines are rooted in all too-fallible human reason, and have failed to integrate the enemy-love of Christ. The just-war theory is under considerable review in light of humanity's experience of total war in the 20th century. Man's experience of war had been local and limited up to that point, but with two World Wars, we have seen the real face of violence. In theory, the just war theory is rational. But in practice, war is always irrational. In practice, the just-war theory fails. We have discovered the hard way that "war destroys [and] does not build up," (1999) that war "weakens the

moral foundations of society and creates further divisions and long-lasting tensions” (1999). Killing, in short, solves nothing.

The just-war theory has tempted many to claim that war is good, when the just-war theory makes no such claim. In the medieval ages, Saint Basil required soldiers who killed in war to undergo years of penance before receiving the Eucharist. War was limited on holy days and seasons – for how could brother kill brother on Christmas? In World War I, on Christmas night, the French and German soldiers spontaneously laid down their weapons to celebrate with one another, crossing lines, and embracing one another as brothers. Historically, the Church has always attempted to limit or even ban violence, and its greatest saints have renounced war. Saint Francis forbid his lay third order – the Secular Franciscans – from bearing arms. With tens of thousands of lay men and women joining Francis’ third order, war-making decreased simply from the lack of soldiers. Even entire classes of weapons were banned, with the crossbow being declared anathema at the Second Lateran council. Even as Popes have owned slaves and waged war and entire peoples were drawn into the Crusades, violence has never been decisively approved as a good by the Church.

In past times, cruel practices were commonly used by legitimate governments to maintain law and order, often without protest from the Pastors of the Church, who themselves adopted in their own tribunals the prescriptions of Roman law concerning torture. Regrettable as these facts are, the Church always taught the duty of clemency and mercy. She forbade clerics to shed blood (CCC 2298).

Along with torture and the death penalty, violence and war has increasingly been rejected in their entirety. Pope Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger in 2003, said, “today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a ‘just war’” (<http://www.zenit.org/article-7161?l=english>). Today, the disciples of Christ are uniting to finally and fully embrace the way of peace.

While wars of limited defense will always be philosophically legitimate, the Gospel compels us to conquer war itself, and to recall that even legitimate wars are the evil fruit of sin, and a failure of Christian love. The words of Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address are appropriate, both in their truth, and in their tragedy:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

War is a useless slaughter that must never be glorified, not even when made legitimate in limited self-defense. He who can kill another child of God without weeping is one who has not understood the love of Christ on the cross. He who can award medals and order war without tears has not seen the face of Christ in the enemy, has not trusted in the power of love, has even lost hope in the peace of Christ.

War is a tragedy that must not continue. War is the pinnacle of human sin. War is the collective groan of human despair. War is hell, and the hell of war must end.

A. Peace is Possible

Because war is good, the world teaches, war will never and should never end. A world of real peace, it is thought, is impossible. “Here on the contrary is our message, your message too, men of good will, the message of all mankind: peace is possible” (1973). For the first word of the risen Christ to his disciples was, “Peace”, the peace of the New Covenant.

What gives us hope that war can give way to peace? For without this hope, peace will never be attempted, never realized. The despair of peace is the destruction of peace. At root, “what compromises the stability of Peace” is the “skeptical conviction that, in practice, Peace is impossible” (1974). People think peace is a “wonderful idea,” but then dismiss peace as a “poetic dream and a utopian fallacy” that is like an “intoxicating drug” (1974). The world regards peace as impossible, mistakenly believing “that what matters is force,” that “organized society cannot do without force” (1974). But the ancient prophet Isaiah saw a different vision – a Kingdom of God, ruled by the Prince of Peace, the Messiah who is our Christ.

“Peace I leave with you , my peace I give to you’ (Jn 14:27) Christ has said to us. This divine promise fills us with the hope, indeed the certainty of divine hope, that peace is possible, because nothing is impossible with God.” (1992) He is the Prince of Peace who will defeat the powers that enslave us – sin, death, and yes, even violence and war – for every combat boot will be burned, and every armor plate broken.

The Old Testament’s greatest victories occurred not through the power of Israel, not even through the power of human weaponry, but through the might and power of God . For “The Lord crushes warfare” (Jud 9:8), and David reveals that “it is not by the sword or spear that the Lord saves” (1 Sm 17:47). The history of God’s people reveals how fallacious it is to trust in the bow or shield, spear or sword, horse or chariot, for the power of God defeats Pharaoh’s armies, tears down Jericho’s walls, and defends his people from ‘certain defeat’. Faith in God and faithfulness to God’s commands leads to certain victory over evil: “Fear not! Stand your ground . . . the Lord himself will fight for you; you only have to keep still” (Ex 14:13-14). No matter how powerful the enemy might seem, simple fidelity opens us to the immense and unstoppable power of God. The essence of this power, however, is not to be found in material combat, but rather in spiritual combat – in the battle for human hearts, where sin, evil, violence, and war originate.

Jesus contemporaries, and even his disciples, expected the victory of God to be accomplished through divine military power. They asked to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritan town. They refused to believe that their Christ would be crucified. They even carried swords, and used them. But Christ did not come to bring victory in a war. Christ came to bring victory *over war*, over evil, over the powers of hell and death: “upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

The failure to believe in peace is the failure to believe in Christ. Some deny that Christ really has brought peace. And yet since Christ rose from the dead, peace has been growing like a mustard seed – flourishing with each newly reborn human heart.

This communion exists; these "islands of peace" exist in the Body of Christ. They exist. And forces of peace exist in the world. If we look at history, we can see the great saints of charity who have created "oases" of this peace of God in the world, who have again lit their light, and have been able to reconcile and to create peace again. The martyrs exist who suffered with Christ; they have given this witness of peace, of love, which puts a limit to violence (Pope Benedict XVI, <http://www.zenit.org/article-16679?l=english>).

Peace is possible, because the Prince of Peace still lives – in, through, and with us, his body. Swords, spears, chariots, tanks, bombers, and bullets cannot build the peace of Christ. Violence and bloodshed cannot build the body of Christ. Only love, Christ's love, can do that.

Peace, let us repeat at once, is not a purely ideal dream, nor is it an attractive but fruitless and unattainable utopia. It is, and must be, a reality - a dynamic reality and one to be generated at every stage of civilization, like the bread on which we live, the fruit of the earth and of divine Providence but also the product of human work (1978).

B. Peace is a duty

“Peace is a duty” (1969), the Church teaches, not only for all men and women, but especially for those who follow the Prince of Peace, and the source of Peace, Jesus Christ:

Working for peace can never be separated from announcing the Gospel, which is in fact the “good news of peace” (Acts 10:36; cf. Eph 6:15) addressed to all men and women. At the centre of “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15) remains the mystery of the cross, because peace is born of Christ's sacrifice (cf. Is 53:5) — “Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we were healed”. The crucified Jesus has overcome divisions, re-establishing peace and reconciliation, precisely through the cross, “thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Eph 2:16) and bringing the salvation of the Resurrection to mankind (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 493).

Just as God saved humanity through a human – his Son – God’s gift of peace is accomplished through persons living in Christ. “Peace is both gift and task” (2007). God chose to bring Christ into the world through a human being, and through human beings Christ continues to save the world – through his living Body, the Church. “God's gift of peace is therefore also at all times a human conquest and achievement, since it is offered to us in order that we may accept it freely and put it progressively into operation by our creative will” (1982). Peace, then, must not only be embraced as our destiny, but “must be won” by those whom Peace has already conquered (1984). Peace conquers hearts and draws hearts into itself, transforming men and women into the peacemakers of Jesus Christ. Peace is not a duty of obligation stamped on to disciples against their own will, but peace flows from hearts reborn and set on fire for love of God and man.

Just as the battle for hearts on earth is never complete, just as conversion is a life-long process of temptation and perseverance, Peace requires the active and continual cooperation of men and women. Peace must be built by every generation: it is always in “a process of continuous and progressive realization” (1974), it is “is always coming to be, always incomplete, always fragile, always under attack” (1969). In a world of darkness, the peacemakers must fight with “intelligence and living courage” (1978).

Everyone is called to fight for peace, no matter their vocation, no matter their state in life. Peace is a duty for all, requiring the best of each. “No one can claim exemption” (1998), not least “Christians, who have as their guide and master the ‘Prince of Peace’” (1992). Indeed, for “the Catholic faithful, the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary, but essential” (2000).

The works of the faithful are clear: the end of war and the era of peace – not a perfect or permanent utopia, but a dynamic harmony that lives moment to moment in the love of men and women. The command to love is our duty of peace, and the reconciliation of friend and foe and man and God is the peace Christ promises to those who love him.

C. Violence is a lie

Many good men and women have been captivated and seduced by the lie of violence. Some believe that economic progress requires war. Some believe that social progress requires war. Some believe that the best solution to any problem is at the point of a blade. Some believe that war is the answer, the only answer to war. Yet the preacher of the Papal Household believes and teaches otherwise. Capuchin friar Raniero Cantalamessa has preached to the Popes and Cardinals for more than three decades – from 1980 until now, and his words on violence are revealing:

Nor is it possible to justify violence in the name of progress. "Violence," someone has said, "is the midwife of history" (Marx and Engels). To some extent that is true. It is true that new and more just social orders are sometimes the outcome of revolutions and wars, but the contrary is also true: What results from them is injustice and evils worse than before . . . Violence is only midwife of further violence (<http://www.zenit.org/article-9864?l=english>).

While war does seem to jump-start dead economies, while war does seem to draw forces of unity and energy and even nobility, while war can seem like a harsh but necessary cure, the Church resolutely says 'no'. War never makes the world a better place. The shedding of blood creates worse injustices, worse evils – even if such evils cannot immediately be seen. Indeed, "how false was the Peace imposed only by the superiority of power and force" (1972). The apparent success of war is one of violence's greatest lies. The peacemaker must resist "the deceptive solutions of rapid progress obtained by violence, convinced that such gains would bring with them the poisonous seeds of fresh conflicts" (1979).

Evil cannot drive out evil. Violence cannot solve violence. War is bloodshed and man killing man – the very destruction of the image of God – not only in victim, but even in victor. The heart made capable of killing is a heart estranged from the divine image of love within. In his book, "On Killing," Lt. Col. David Grossman reveals that killing violates a deep part of man's heart, and destroys even those who kill in self-defense:

"I was just absolutely gripped by the fear that this man would expect me and would shoot me. But as it turned out he was in a sniper harness and couldn't turn around fast enough. He was entangled in the harness so I shout him with a .45... I can remember whispering foolishly 'I'm sorry' and then just throwing up... I threw up all over myself. It was a betrayal of what I'd been taught since a child."

"And I froze, 'cos it was a boy, I would say between the ages of twelve and fourteen. When he turned at me and looked, all of a sudden he turned his whole body and pointed his automatic weapon at me, I just opened up, fired the whole twenty rounds right at the kid, and he just laid there. I dropped my weapon and cried"

Those who have killed understand the lie of violence. And yet so many continue to accept death as a solution to life. Yet the Church continues to teach that it is "not permissible to kill in order to impose a

solution” (1979). For Peace requires “a clear and conscious acknowledgement that violence is an unacceptable evil and that it never solves problems” (2005). No, “let us not accept violence as the way to peace” (1981), for “violence cannot obtain true justice for you or for anyone else” (1987). What reverberates in the heart also resounds in truth – the destruction of our brothers and sisters never solves any problem, never makes the world a better place, and never fosters true peace. The peace that violence creates is the false peace of might and power, not of brotherhood and love. Moreover, within the false peace of violence, hearts and bodies are subjected to powerful forces that will eventually unleash new and more terrible violence.

Jesus puts it simply: “all who take the sword will die by the sword”, for violence destroys those who believe in it. Thought it might appear that ‘just-wars’ lead to peace or justice, war and violence never have and never will be a source of love – the real foundation of peace and justice. Instead, “factors of life and progress that may have been found even in wars and revolutions were derived from aspirations of an order other than that of violence: aspirations of a spiritual nature” (1979). Wars are often fought out of noble motivations – love of family, love of country, love of life and truth. It is this love that prevents war from destroying everything, and that restores civilization. Yet these aspirations of a ‘spiritual nature’ must be liberated from the means of violence. Satan must not be used to drive out Satan, and war cannot be used to end war. Violence cannot save us. Only love – not only for our selves, but especially for our enemies, can bring peace.

Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity ... do not believe in violence; do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace and forgiveness and love; for they are of Christ (1980).

Jesus carried a cross, not a sword, and he taught us how to respond to violence: ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also (Mt 5:38-39).

This practical love of enemy forms what Pope Benedict XVI calls “the magna carta of Christian non-violence [that] does not consist in succumbing to evil, as a false interpretation of “turning the other cheek” claims, but in responding to evil with good (cf. Rom 12:17-21) and thereby breaking the chain of injustice” (<http://www.zenit.org/article-18951?l=english>). The false interpretation of “turning the other cheek” is based on a limited understanding and often narrow translation of “Do not resist an evildoer”. N.T. Wright, the Anglican Bishop and Biblical Scholar, reveals a better translation of this famous passage, one that corresponds with Pope Benedict’s insights:

‘Do not resist evil’ (5.39) is not to be taken simply to refer to personal hostilities or village-level animosity. The word ‘resist’ is *antistenai*, almost a technical term for revolutionary resistance of a specifically military variety (Jesus and the Victory of God, 291).

In the Old Testament, the Greek word ‘*antistenai*’ is primarily used in a militant or violent sense:

- “no one will be able to *stand against* you, until you have destroyed them” (Dt 7:24).

- “For we are powerless *against* this great multitude that is coming against us” (2 Chr 20:12).
- “We will overwhelm them; their mountains will be drunk with their blood, and their fields will be full of their dead. Not even their footprints *will survive* our attack; they will utterly perish” (Jd 6:4).
- “They all come for violence, with faces *pressing* forward”;
- “he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand” (Nm 22:31)

Walter Wink, a protestant biblical scholar, summarizes the issue with startling clarity:

"Do not resist one who is evil, or do not resist the evil person," is not accurately translated. It's not wrong - the word *antistenai* - *anti* means "against" and *stenai* means "stand" - means to stand against somebody or offer resistance. But what was overlooked by the translators is that *antistenai* is a technical term for "warfare." It refers to the marching up of two armies in solid ranks until they collide in this deafening cacophony of steel against steel, and they suddenly stand there and disembowel each other until one side has had all it can take and they break and run. *Antistenai* is the word that describes that bloody encounter. And so when Jesus says, "Do not *antistenai* the evil people," he's not just saying, "Don't resist them." Of course you resist those who are evil. Jesus always resisted evil. Can anyone name me a single time Jesus doesn't resist evil? But he's saying don't resist evil violently (Walter Wink, “Nonviolence for the Violent”, http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/walter_wink.htm).

Where does Jesus forbid the use of violence? Not only in his revelation about the futility of ‘the sword’, but more precisely in the best translation of “Do not resist evil”:

“Do not *violently* resist evil” (Mt 5:39).

Yes, resist evil, but not with military force, not with wars, not with revolutions of bloodshed. Instead, resist evil with the revolution of love.

Christ's proposal is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with more love, with more goodness . . . for Christians, non-violence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone (Pope Benedict XVI, On the Revolution of Love, <http://www.zenit.org/article-18951?l=english>).

Peace is possible, but not through violence. Peace is possible only through the love that rejects the lie of violence, through the very love of Jesus Christ.

D. The Sanctity of Life

The rejection of violence carries a paradox and a question: “*how else are we to defend the lives of the innocent?*” If Jesus forbids resisting evil with violence, how are we to defend life? In recognition of this paradox, and of the grave duty to defend life, the Church has traditionally made allowances for limited defense using violence – a ‘necessary evil’ that carries no guilt.

Unfortunately it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life. In this case, the fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about, even though he may not be morally responsible because of a lack of the use of reason (Evangelium Vitae, 55).

In a wicked and dark world that has succumbed to the lies of violence, Jesus’ rejection of bloodshed seems like a form of cowardice and defeatism. And yet Christ’s admonition reveals the truth: that if we truly value life, if we truly seek to defend life, we must not only defend the lives of the innocent, but also the lives of the guilty. While it is certainly just to defend the lives of the innocent, it is Christ-like to defend the lives of the guilty. Therein lies the contradiction – all life is sacred, yet to defend life we often resort to taking life. In this paradox, many have forgotten that violence, no matter how ‘necessary’, is still evil.

The Prince of Peace’s solution to this dilemma is in making “necessary evil” unnecessary. By the grace of Jesus Christ, we can free humanity from the slavery of necessary evil. Indeed we must, for the “violence which so many individuals and peoples continue to experience, the wars which still cause bloodshed in many areas of the world . . . can no longer be tolerated” (1995). The ‘necessary evil’ of legitimate war can no longer be tolerated. The mass acceptance of mass violence, far from making life a supreme value, has destroyed our love of life. The guilt of legitimate bloodshed does not simply vanish, but seeps into the very soul of civilization. Life has been made cheap by our toleration of war. And because life has been de-sacralized, we have come to believe the lie of violence – that war is a solution and that bloodshed is peace.

What does it mean to defend life, to choose life? To “choose life involves rejecting every form of violence” (1999). One cannot simultaneously defend life while using the means of death. If “we based the logic of our activity on the sacredness of life, war is virtually disqualified” (1977). Yet today, life is sought through death and peace is sought through war, as if peace could be secured through the destruction of life: “Peace is sought and won through conflict, like a sad doom necessary for self-defense” (1977). In the words of Tacitus – they make a desert, and call it peace. They destroy villages, towns, cities, and entire countries, and call it peace. They even rip babies from wombs, and call it peace. They light incense and kneel beside alters, and offer up sacrifices to God, even as they choose war or choose abortion, and they call it peace.

May our love for life – all life, even and especially the lives of sinners – help us to realize that “we are all called to do everything possible to banish from society not only the tragedy of war,” but every

“violation of the individual human being’s right to life” (1995). Jesus gives us a model to follow in this regard. It is upon that cross that Jesus reveals what it means to *do everything possible* to defend life.

The battle for Life can only be won by those who are guaranteed to live forever. If death and evil have the last word, then violence is necessary, the death is necessary. But if life and truth and peace have the last word – as they do in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his saints – then something new has come into our world. We have been given a chance to liberate mankind from the slavery of death, by sharing in the life and heart of Jesus Christ. Christ’s cross teaches us that the battle for life reaches beyond the simple defense of our bodily existence, and extends to the depths of the spirit – the soul. In fighting to save our bodies with violence, we unleash the powers of darkness that destroy our souls. In a dark and sinful world, we may often be forced to choose between saving individual lives and defending the value of Life itself. Moreover, there are even “cases where a good higher than Life itself comes into play . . . truth, justice . . . faith” (1977). The defeat of death requires the risk and sacrifice of Christ’s love, a love made possibly only by total faith in the triumph of his resurrection.

A force that the world does not know is active in defeat, in the humiliation of those who suffer for the Gospel: "for when I am weak", the Apostle Paul exclaims, "then I am strong" (II Cor 12: 10). It is the power of love, defenseless and victorious even in apparent defeat. It is the force that challenges and triumphs over death (Pope Benedict XVI, <http://www.zenit.org/article-22428?l=english>).

The Christian rejects all war, because war is the spiritual and material destruction of the children of God. Violence destroys both victims and victors. For Life to triumph, for Peace to reign, war must give way to something new: the love of Christ that transforms us from enemies into brothers.

E. Swords into Ploughshares

“Everyone knows, and particularly those who come from the countries that hostilities are bathing in blood, that violence always spawns violence. War throws open the doors to the abyss of evil. War even gives access to the most illogical possibilities. War, therefore, must always be considered a defeat: a defeat of reason and of humanity. Thus, may there soon be a spiritual and cultural impulse that will induce people to ban war. Yes, war never again!” (John Paul II, Letter on 18th International Meeting of ‘Peoples and Religions’)

Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Christ in clear terms:

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more
(Isaiah 2:3-4).

Christ’s teaching and example remain clear. He commanded us to love our enemies and to resist them with goodness and love, not bloodshed. Peter not only betrayed his Lord with words, but with deeds – when Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of his enemy. Christ’s admonition and rebuke was delivered not only to Peter, but to the entire Church: “put your sword away!” (Mt 26:52). And if we are too numb to understand such words, Christ takes decisive action. Instead of fighting his enemies with violence, he fights with goodness: “⁵⁰Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him” (Lk 22:50-51).

In our world, how many Christians have not only severed ears, but blown apart bodies, families, and nations? No matter how legitimate and guiltless such violence may be, Jesus still turns to us and declares: put away the sword that will destroy you in the end, and trade violence for the sacrifice of goodness. “Wars, even when they ‘solve’ the problems which cause them, do so only by leaving a wake of victims and destruction” (1997), they “are often the cause of further wars”, they “do not solve the problems for which they are fought,” and “they prove ultimately futile” (2000). “Nothing is resolved by war; on the contrary, everything is placed in jeopardy by war” (1993). Wars not only destroy bodies, but also “exercise a pernicious influence on people’s minds” (1994) leading to the very destruction of people’s souls.

“After so many unnecessary massacres, it is in the final analysis of fundamental importance to recognize, once and for all, that war never helps the human community, that violence destroys and never builds up” (1993). War is evil, and if it is still to be labeled as ‘necessary’, let it only be considered

necessary in the same sense that rope is necessary for a noose. For the noose of ‘necessary war’ is tight around the world’s neck. And so, in the final analysis, “is it not necessary to give everything in order to avoid war?” (1983).

We must not cling to our lives, for if we do, we will end up serving death itself. We must take off the noose of legitimate bloodshed. But this can only be done in our transformative encounter with Jesus Christ. In him, we encounter peace. We encounter the peace “as a messianic phase” (1969), the Christian age.

The battle against war flows from the battle against evil, and both battles carry a heavy price – the sacrifice of those who imitate their Messiah. Although war can be legitimate, war cannot defeat war. Although the “the sword . . . [has] its own *raison d’être*, for justice and peace . . . has there not come into the world a transforming dynamism, a hope which is no longer unlikely,” (1976), a way to defend peace without destroying life, a way to free ourselves from the necessity of suicidal violence? Yes. The answer is not war. The answer is Jesus Christ. For Christ has given us a new weapon against evil, one that can set us free from our ancient bondage. He has given us his own divine love, and the promise of the resurrection – of eternal life. Only this love can conquer hearts and defend life and build peace.

This is God’s new way of conquering: He does not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposes violence precisely with the contrary: with love to the end, his cross. This is God’s humble way of overcoming: with his love – and only thus is it possible – he puts a limit to violence. This is a way of conquering that seems very slow to us, but it is the true way of overcoming evil, of overcoming violence, and we must trust this divine way of overcoming (Pope Benedict XVI, <http://www.zenit.org/article-16679?l=english>).

This is the vision “of the mankind still to be born” – reborn in Christ’s love and “stripped of its grievous weight of murderous military weaponry” (1976). We must immediately set “in place structures of peace and methods of nonviolence” (2000) while we also “reduce arms to the minimum necessary for legitimate defense” (1987). But we must not be content to simply loosen the noose of war with “judicious disarming” (1976) and “demilitarization” (2008). All instruments of death – starting with human persons – must be transformed into instruments of life, into instruments of Christ’s new peace – peace through love.

V. MERCIFUL JUSTICE

In response to the Church's message of peace, the Papal Preacher Raniero Cantalamessa notes that "Some may object." On Good Friday of 2004, Fr. Cantalamessa preached the message of peace, of the triumph of nonviolent love, of the total rejection of war and violence.

Some may object: But isn't the Bible itself full of stories of violence? Isn't God called "the Lord of hosts"? Doesn't it say that he gave the order to impose the ban, to exterminate entire cities? Isn't he the one who, in the Mosaic law, prescribes the death penalty in many cases?

Indeed, haven't even saints and Popes declared and waged war in the name of Christ? The Papal preacher's response is arresting:

If someone had put the same objection to Jesus during his life on earth, he would surely have answered in the same way as he answered the question about divorce: "It was because you were so hardhearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8).

On the question of violence too, "it was not like this from the beginning." The first chapter of Genesis shows us a world where the very idea of violence was unthinkable, not only in regard to relationships of human beings one with another, but even in regard to animals. It was not permissible to kill, not even to avenge the death of Abel (see Genesis 4:15) . . .

Paul speaks of a time when "sins went unpunished" because God "held his hand" (Romans 3:25). God put up with violence, as he put up with polygamy, divorce and other things, but all the while he was teaching the people, leading them toward the time when his original plan would again be put in place, restored to honor as by a new creation.

This time came when Jesus, on the mountain, proclaimed: "You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. ... If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other one as well. You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:38-39;43-44).

God in Christ pronounces a definitive, commanding "No" to violence, and substitutes in its place not non-violence merely, but more: forgiveness, meekness, gentleness,

(Good Friday 2004, <http://www.zenit.org/article-9864?l=english>)

God's original plan for man is a world without violence – a world of harmony, brotherhood, family, and peace. Christ our Messiah has come to save us from sin, death, and hatred – from the war raging both inside and outside us. Christ came to reunite us with God and with one another, and violence and war have no part in this unification. "If there is still violence," Fr. Cantalamessa teaches the Pope, and the

whole Church, “it cannot any longer, even in the remotest sense, claim to be of God or try to cloak itself with his authority . . . Better atheism than that.”

And yet the Church maintains that armed self-defense is sometimes a duty – that violence is sometimes a duty. “As long as man remains that weak, changeable and even wicked being that he often shows himself to be, defensive arms will, unfortunately, be necessary” (Paul VI’s UN Address, 1965). For unredeemed humanity, violence is the only response to violence – the Old Testament bears witness to this fact, with its proscriptions of death and war. In a fallen and wicked world ruled by the powers of darkness, violence is the only response. And yet this *response* is not a *solution*. Legitimate violence does not solve violence, but rather suspends violence. Such is the bleak fate of an unredeemed world – endless violence, ceaseless war, and no hope for peace. And for those trapped in such a world, for those untouched by Christ’s transformative grace, legitimate violence is a duty. The last century’s great spokesman for peaceful resistance – Mahatma Gandhi – understood the violence could be a duty for some, and said so in clear terms:

I have been repeating over and over again that he who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honour by non-violently facing death may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can do neither of the two is a burden. He has no business to be the head of a family. He must either hide himself, or must rest content to live forever in helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully (<http://www.mk Gandhi.org/>).

A fallen world is incapable of rejecting war and achieving peace, but a redeemed world is not only capable of rejecting war, but called to reject every form of violence. Those touched by Christ have been given a new path for humanity. This path begins, is sustained, and ends in the redemption of human hearts and human communities – through the progressive transformation of persons and societies in Jesus Christ. And so Christians are redeemed men and women living as foreigners amidst a world that is still tragically enslaved to darkness and war. War and violence still remains the only response for the great multitudes of the world. The world is not ready to give up violence, because the world has not said ‘yes’ to the love of Christ.

Insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ. But insofar as men vanquish sin by a union of love, they will vanquish violence as well and make these words come true: "They shall turn their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into sickles. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 78).

The abolition of war is just as much of a journey as the redemption and conversion of a sinner – it takes the confession of our wrongdoing and a perseverant battle to build a new life of grace. As persons and peoples say ‘yes’ to Christ, they will find that war is no longer the only response, that violence is no longer the only choice, that new paths to a real peace open up. We will discover that mercy is possible, that justice is possible, that peace is possible. We will embrace Pope John Paul II’s call to renounce war, precisely by learning how to fight for peace:

It seemed that the European order resulting from the Second World War and sanctioned by the *Yalta Agreements* could only be overturned by another war. Instead, it has been overcome by the non-violent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth. This disarmed the adversary, since violence always needs to justify itself through deceit, and to appear, however falsely, to be defending a right or responding to a threat posed by others. Once again I thank God for having sustained people's hearts amid difficult trials, and I pray that this example will prevail in other places and other circumstances. May people learn to fight for justice without violence (Centesimus Annus, 23).

The redemption of man flows from the heart into the world, into a concrete love of neighbor that sacrifices for a new world of justice and mercy. The peacemaker's alternative response to war and violence is the political, economic, and social pursuit of *merciful justice*. Whereas fallen man fights for peace only with the fallacious "fury of arms, Christ's peace infuses [an] unconquerable energy" (1969) that is capable of defeating war itself. While a blind world turns to violence and destruction as its only 'solution', the saved seek a new way to peace:

The enormous suffering of peoples and individuals, even among my own friends and acquaintances, caused by Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, has never been far from my thoughts and prayers. I have often paused to reflect on the persistent question: how do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence? (2002).

John Paul II's question is posed to a world split in two – divided between those untouched by God's mercy, and those led to a new life in the love of the Father and power of the Holy Spirit and sacrifice of the Son. The darkness of the world finds no response to violence but stronger violence, but the light of the world, of redeemed humanity, in the words of Pope John Paul II, reveal a new option, a new 'way' founded upon a new covenant:

. . . the shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness (2002).

War cannot be simply abandoned, but it can be replaced – replaced by the peaceful battle for merciful justice. Only when merciful justice is established will war cease, and war will only cease as long as merciful justice is maintained. In this great battle, "no one can claim exemption," and "no one is excused," for "all are called to live in justice and to work for peace" (1998), especially those who have been given the grace to accomplish what seems like the impossible – the reconciliation of the world.

A. Justice and Law

There is “no peace without justice” (2002). There can be no peace without order – and not just any kind of order, but the order willed by God.

Peace is the fruit of justice, (cf. *Is 32:17*) understood in the broad sense as the respect for the equilibrium of every dimension of the human person. Peace is threatened when man is not given all that is due him as a human person, when his dignity is not respected and when civil life is not directed to the common good. The defence and promotion of human rights is essential for the building up of a peaceful society and the integral development of individuals, peoples and nations (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 494).

By virtue of man’s nature, every human being has natural rights that must be protected and promoted. Given life by God, every person has the right to life and all those things required for life. Given freedom by God, every person has the right to the truth, to religion, and to conscience. It is precisely in the defense of all human rights and the promotion of their corresponding duties that justice lives and flourishes.

Injustice is the opposite: “the spirit of war . . . springs up and grows to maturity where the inalienable rights of man are violated” (1981) for the “seeds of destruction are already sown in institutionalized injustice” (1987). Quite often peace is threatened not simply by individuals, but more often by political, economic, and social systems that disregard justice. Unjust governments, unjust economies, and unjust societies cannot be at peace. The battle for peace must actively uproot every injustice wherever it may be found, for every injustice is a crime against humanity and a crime against God. And so any form of ‘pacifism’ or nonviolence that turns a blind eye to the violation of human rights is simply a self-righteous form of cowardice. The rejection of violence is only possible within the embrace of human rights.

. . . we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 78).

The peacemaker “clings to the conviction that nothing can justify [the] violation of the rights of man . . . he refuses to surrender in the face of injustice, to compromise with it” (1984). Yet the peacemaker also understands that rights cannot be protected through the violation of rights – peace cannot come through war, life cannot come through death, freedom cannot come through slavery. Human rights apply to every human, or to no human. Even the enemy has a right to life.

Death comes to those who embrace death for others, and life comes to those who embrace life for others. The defense of rights cannot be limited to our ‘own’ people. The defense of rights extends past borders

and conflicts. All rights of all men are inalienable, and if we wish to defend our own rights, we must defend the rights of all.

The social institution that best reflects this truth is the family. For it is in the family that we discover the true meaning and the true path to rights. In the family, it is not power or force that fosters justice. Rather, justice flows from good rules based on reason – rules that find authority not in the force of violence, but the force of law. Even among families, “power must always be disciplined by law” (2008). Among the family of nations, too, we must “replace ‘the material force of arms with the moral force of law’” (2004). For law, when rooted in the moral law of God, has a moral force that is vastly more powerful than violence. Violence may physically force people to do its bidding, but only for a time, and only in a spirit of discontent. But law, when it is just and rational, when it is accompanied by sanctions that respect even the rights of those who break the law, has a moral force that is capable of not only ordering society rightly, but even of shaping the hearts of its followers – forming them as a virtuous people. True peace is impossible without good law, a law that “would foster true freedom rather than blind caprice, and protect the weak from oppression by the strong” (2008).

With such an understanding of law, we begin to see the route toward the abolition of war – not by a simple, naïve, and unilateral demilitarization, but through the installation and implementation of an international law capable of regulating the relationships between states and peoples. Just as civil wars only truly end in the establishment of law and order, so too will international war end with the establishment of international law and order.

It is our clear duty, therefore, to strain every muscle in working for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent. This goal undoubtedly requires the establishment of some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all and endowed with the power to safeguard on the behalf of all, security, regard for justice, and respect for rights (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 81).

For this reason, and in this way, “the building of peace is a task that falls directly and principally to political leaders” (1982), all of whom “must be convinced that war is in itself irrational” (1984). War must be replaced by law, an internationally binding law that understands that “human rights have no borders” (2000). Indeed, “is this not the time for all to work together for a new constitutional organization of the human family” (2003)? International cooperation does not mean the creation “of a global super-State,” but rather “continuing and deepening processes already in place” (2003).

Political leaders – from elected officials to community leaders, from the international to the state to the city, must resolutely face injustice with law, not war, for violence can never truly secure justice. Only in law can the truth be established and followed according to human reason and with respect to human rights. All too often the ‘national security’ of a state is made an absolute good, defended only by force of arms. These ideas must be abandoned and replaced by a firm commitment to the rights of all persons and all peoples, not through the force of violence, but through the force of law.

B. Mercy and Reconciliation

Justice requires more than law, more than the simple application of force. For there is “no justice without forgiveness” and “true peace is made possible only through forgiveness” (2002). The world presents us with a very narrow vision of justice, one defined by a system of legislation, courts, police, and prisons. But arrests, convictions, and imprisonments do not produce justice. True justice is the kind that “makes whole” and “does not destroy”, and most importantly “leads to reconciliation” (1998). Justice restores relationships and heals persons and peoples. The parable of the prodigal son is a story about the justice that comes precisely through mercy, for the son is restored to the Father only through the Father’s compassionate forgiveness.

Justice, at “its deepest level, it is rooted in love” (1998). “Therefore, justice, if separated from merciful love, because cold and cutting” (1998). The elder son who refuses to join in the Father’s celebration is the man fixated on a false form of justice – a justice that would rather follow rules and legislation than pursue forgiveness and healing. But the Father understands that “by itself justice is not enough . . . it can even betray itself, unless it is open to that deeper power which is love” (2004). Sending his prodigal son into the field as a servant would be to give into the “logic of simple justice” instead of allowing the evils of the past to be transcended by the “logic of forgiveness” (2004).

The world’s mistaken understanding of justice must be “completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundation . . . at the personal level or on a wider, even international scale” (2002). Justice, in short, needs love – real love, tangible love, made concrete in mercy. John Paul II’s interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates the power of mercy:

The parable of the prodigal son expresses in a simple but profound way the reality of conversion. Conversion is the most concrete expression of the working of love and of the presence of mercy in the human world. The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil: mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man. (Dives in Misericordia, 6).

Forgiveness makes reconciliation possible, and this reconciliation is the *true face of justice*. Any form of ‘justice’ that precludes, opposes, or obstructs forgiveness is a perversion of justice. Moreover, any form of forgiveness that does not extend past intention, any type of forgiveness that does not change the way we act, the way we live, the way we confront evil, is not forgiveness at all, but only sentiment. Neither love nor forgiveness are mere emotions. Forgiveness is the spurned Father who rushes to meet his prodigal son, embracing the smallest chance of reconciliation and even sacrificing his prized possessions in a gratuitous act of mercy.

In a world of evil and war, love must manifest precisely as mercy: “Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil” (2002). Just as love is prepared to sacrifice itself, “forgiveness always involves an apparent short-term loss” that

“may seem like weakness” (2002), that “might appear to be sheer folly” (1997). Yet without forgiveness, we “remain a prisoner of the past” (1997), incapable of ensuring “that past evils will not come back again” (1997).

It might seem that mercy is possible only for individuals, and even then, that mercy is limited to simple intention and feeling. But mercy is the true power of the Gospel that concretely transforms not only individual human relationships, but social life itself. The law of love conquers not only human hearts, but human communities, and must govern not only persons, but societies.

Yes, “forgiveness seems absurd to human politics” (1970) and “forgiveness can seem contrary to human logic” (1997), but forgiveness transcends our human understanding. Love is a divine force capable of changing everything and everyone. No person and no society are so lost or so dark as to be incapable of forgiveness. The Church proclaims forgiveness as the path to justice “because of her unshakable confidence in the infinite love of God” (1997).

This commitment to forgive forces us to “response to violence with works of peace” and to “face even the most difficult situations with the weapons of peace and reconciliation” (1997). Yet our twin commitment to justice gives orientation to this fight – “Forgiveness neither eliminates nor lessens the need for the reparation which justice requires” (1997). Instead of blind tolerance, forgiveness requires “the search for truth . . . [for] the evil which has been done must be acknowledged and as far as possible corrected” (1997). Forgiveness does not preclude punishment, but give punishment a purpose, a direction, and a meaning: “re-establishing authentic relationships with God, with oneself, and with others” (1997). In punishments guided and formed by forgiveness, “the door to repentance and rehabilitation must always remain open” (1997).

Properly understood, justice constitutes, so to speak, the goal of forgiveness. In no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence towards evil, towards scandals, towards injury or insult. In any case, reparation for evil and scandal, compensation for injury, and satisfaction for insult are conditions for forgiveness (Dives in Misericordia, 14).

We must trust in the power of forgiveness to forge justice, for the “intense joy of forgiveness, offered and received, heals seemingly incurable wounds, restores relationships and firmly roots them in God’s inexhaustible love” (1997). Is it not true that “all human beings cherish the hope of being able to start all over again, and not remain forever shut up in their own mistakes and guilt” (1997)? We must not lose hope. We must forgive, not simply in words, but in deeds.

³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven (Lk 6:35-37).

C. Wealth and Poverty

Among the many violations of justice, of love, of human dignity and rights, “the one issue which most challenges our human and Christian consciences is the poverty of countless millions of men and women” (2000). Over one billion people live in “Situations of extreme poverty,” situations that “constitute a prime injustice” (1998). Amidst such violence against the image of God, war inevitably rises up. “At the origin of many tensions that threaten peace are surely the many unjust inequalities still tragically present in our world . . . inequalities in access to essential goods like food, water, shelter, health” (2007).

While the poor die in trash heaps, the rich nations hoard and spend money for instruments of warfare and death. But “rather than waste resources or devote them to deadly weapons of destruction, it is necessary to use them above all to satisfy the primary and basic needs of humanity” (1986). Quite simply, “money ought not to be used for war, nor for destroying and killing, but for defending the dignity of man” (1993). Poverty is an absolute “affront to the dignity of the human person” (1998), and those who are incapable of seeing this truth are like the rich man in Christ’s parable of Lazarus. The rich man does not even see the poor man outside his gate – not until it is too late.

“It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence” (1990). Today, “we can no longer tolerate a world in which there live side by side the immensely rich and the miserably poor, the have-nots deprived even of essentials and people who thoughtlessly waste what others so desperately need” (1998). The poor “can wait no longer: they need help now and so have a right to receive immediately what they need” (1998). God made the world not merely for the rich, not merely even for the ‘middle class’ of wealthy nations, but rather for all men and women. God made the earth for all, not for the few.

Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute and untouchable: “On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone”.
(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 177).

What gifts we have, and what goods we receive, are not meant simply for us, but are to be shared in love with all. “The Church’s admonition is clear . . . earthly goods are meant for the whole human family and cannot be reserved for the exclusive benefit of the few” (1993). And so the “distinctive mark of the Christian, today more than ever, must be love for the poor, the weak, the suffering” (1998). And Christ said all this and more in the plainest and most direct way possible: “none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Lk 14:33).

We must take care, however, not to perceive the poor “as a problem, but as a people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future” (2000). We fill our hearts with hope,

renouncing paternalistic practices, and embraces programs that “enable the poor to take responsibility for their own livelihood” (1999). We must “ensure that the poor have access to credit”, so that they may be leaders of their own destiny rather than slaves to another’s agenda. Further, the “aim of true development is people” (1987) rather than economies. People must come before markets or even money. “People must be active agents, not passive recipients” of aid (1987). In essence, we “must help them to discover the values which enable them to build a new life” (1987). The poor, then, need friends rather than managers, they need brotherhood more than they need dollars, for even the greatest amount of financial aid means nothing without love – love in us, and love in them, love for one another, and love for God.

We are stewards of all we have, and all we have is meant for the good of not only ourselves, but all. And all of us – rich or poor – must be ready to sacrifice all we have for the good of another. In concrete actions, we must “stem the unrestrained consumption of earth goods”, we must make “Moderation and simplicity . . . the criteria of our daily lives” and we must cultivate “a spirit of sharing” that is “not just from our surplus” (1993). For as long as poverty persists, war will threaten, and as wars erupt, poverty deepens. The folly of violence and greed must end. Those who love Christ “cannot remain indifferent when faced with the suffering of the poor” and they must even be “ready to sacrifice their resources and their own selves so that others may live” (1993).

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church held this opinion, teaching that men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods . . . Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him,"(12) and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, 69).

D. Creation

I don't think it is enough appreciated how much an outdoor book the Bible is. It is a hypaethral book, such as Thoreau talked about--a book open to the sky. It is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better. Or that has been my experience of it. Passages that within walls seem improbable or incredible, outdoors seem merely natural. That is because outdoors we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary, but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread. Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air, and pondered the improbability of their existence in this warm world within the cold and empty stellar distances, will hardly balk at the fuming of water into wine--which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is fumed into grapes. (Wendell Berry, *Christianity and the Survival of Creation*).

Human existence flows from the whole of created existence. The miracle of existence itself underscores the miracle of human existence. And yet in a fallen world, many are tempted to doubt the good and miraculous nature of creation. Many look at a world of death, disease, and suffering, and reject it. And in rejecting creation, they reject the Creator. With the advent of modern technological power, Man has begun to reform existence according to his own imagination, according to his own plans for salvation – from the tower of Babel to the golden calves.

Yet what once seemed impossible now seems destined – the total transformation of the world to suit the dreams of mankind – as if the original order of creation was radically hostile to human existence and needs, as if the original order of creation was, in fact, disordered, meaningless, and empty. While man dreams of ‘terra-forming’ other planets, making them suitable for human life, the modern project has enacted a program of reforming all of creation, remaking it not according to the divine order, but according to the human order.

A vision of man and things that is sundered from any reference to the transcendent has led to the rejection of the concept of creation and to the attribution of a completely independent existence to man and nature. The bonds that unite the world to God have thus been broken. This rupture has also resulted in separating man from the world and, more radically, has impoverished man's very identity. Human beings find themselves thinking that they are foreign to the environmental context in which they live. The consequences resulting from this are all too clear: “it is the relationship man has with God that determines his relationship with his fellow men and with his environment” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 464).

Having rejected both Creator and Creation, Man also rejects Man. And so the ongoing defilement of creation signifies and magnifies the conflict and wars of humanity. For “world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among people and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources” (1990). The destruction of the environment is not a economic or social issue, but is rooted in morality and the soul: “the ecological

crisis is a moral issue” that “lays bare the depth of man’s moral crisis” (1990). The problem, then, is not to be found in the “technical-economic aspect,” but within “the moral-religious dimension” (2007).

Creation is a gift of God to all of humanity, for the good of all humans, and for the good of the whole human – material and spiritual. The abuse of nature is rooted in a distorted understanding of God, man, and creation. Creation, as an divine gift, cannot be used by man for any purpose he conceives. God has placed man within an “order of creation, an order characterized by mutual interdependence” (1990) – not only between persons, but among all creatures and all creation. Within this good order, not only do we receive the gift of material existence, but the gift of spiritual nourishment: “Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power: contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity” (1990). The breakdown of the ecological order not only poses a threat to man’s material needs, but worse, endangers man’s spiritual needs. Nature shouts to us that God exists and that God loves us. The rejection and manipulation of nature reflects the rejection and manipulation of God’s love for us.

We face man’s moral failure to receive creation as divine gifts – a moral failure to be guardians and cultivators of these gifts. Instead, we see the “violent hoarding of the earth’s resources,” a blasphemous hoarding that “cause grievances, conflicts, and wars” (2007). If we desire peace, we must come “to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past” (1990). We must open our hearts to the great gift of our existence – not only for ourselves, but for the whole world.

Healing is possible. A new life is possible – a new life of peace among men, of peace among all creation. “The poem-prayer of Saint Francis, known as ‘The Canticle of Brother Sun’ is a wonderful and ever timely example of this multifaceted ecology of peace” (2007).

E. Family

If love is to save the world, love must begin in the family, as it did over 2,000 years ago in the manger of a poor Jewish family – the Holy Family of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. Not only does love start in the family, but so too does life itself.

The importance and centrality of the family with regard to the person and society is repeatedly underlined by Sacred Scripture. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). From the texts that narrate the creation of man (cf. Gen 1:26-28, 2:7-24) there emerges how — in God's plan — the couple constitutes “the first form of communion between persons”. Eve is created like Adam as the one who, in her otherness, completes him (cf. Gen 2:18) in order to form with him “one flesh” (Gen 2:24; cf. Mt 19:5-6). At the same time, both are involved in the work of procreation, which makes them co-workers with the Creator: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). The family is presented, in the Creator's plan, as “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society” and the “cradle of life and love” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 209).

Yet in today's world, love, life, and the family are under direct attack – not only by war, violence, and poverty, but especially in the horror of abortion, and in the insidiousness of divorce and contraception. “Every crime against life is a blow to Peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of the people, as often happens today, with horrible and often legal ease, as in the case of the suppression of incipient life, by abortion” (1977). Any nation or “community which rejects children, or marginalizes them, or reduces them to hopeless situations, can never know peace” (1994). Abortion destroys peace. No world that destroys its own young can ever be considered a world at peace. Indeed, “the deliberate killing of a child is one of the most disturbing signs of the breakdown of all respect for human life” (1996). Just as some ideologies once promoted *racial genocide* as the solution for world peace, today some ideologies promote *generational genocide* (‘population control’) as the solution for world peace. Yet without the recognition that all human beings – from conception to natural death – have the inalienable right to life, peace is impossible. Peace is aborted before it ever arrives.

Today, the joyful cries of the unborn are silenced by ideologies of death. And yet the assault on children does not end at birth. Tragically, “a growing number of boys and girls and even small children are playing a direct part in armed conflicts . . . they become involved in a real culture of violence in which life counts for very little and killing does not seem wrong” (1994). Children are the prime victims of war: the “memory of the millions of children who have been killed, and the sad faces of so many others who are suffering compel us to take every possible measure to safeguard or re-establish peace, and to bring conflicts and wars to an end” (1996).

Children suffer not only from material warfare, but also from spiritual warfare – especially in the different forms of attack upon marriage itself. Divorce destroys children just as surely as it destroys marriages, and is “a true ‘plague’ of present day society” (1994). If the family is to survive, if peace is

to flourish, it must begin with our children, for “Children are the future already present among us; they need to experience what peace means, so that they will be able to create a future of peace” (1994).

. . . the family must be for children the first school of peace . . . [by] the witness of their mutual love. It is by loving each other that they enable the child, from the very first moment of its existence, to grow up in peaceful surroundings, imbued with the positive values which make up the family's true heritage: mutual respect and acceptance, listening, sharing, generosity, forgiveness (1996).

In contrast, anything “that serves to weaken the family” – whether material or ideological – “constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace” (2008). Moreover, as “the fundamental nucleus of society, the family has a right to the full support of the State” (1994). The “family needs to have a home, employment . . . schooling for children, and basic health care” (2008). The family has a right to life, and all the things that make life possible and fruitful.

Thus the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society. All those, therefore, who exercise influence over communities and social groups should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family. Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect and promote their authentic nature, to shield public morality and to favor the prosperity of home life. The right of parents to beget and educate their children in the bosom of the family must be safeguarded. Children too who unhappily lack the blessing of a family should be protected by prudent legislation and various undertakings and assisted by the help they need (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 52).

The peace of God flows from the life-giving communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the family, a man and woman give themselves to one another in love and sacrifice, and the fruit of this divine imaging is the pro-creation of another beautiful and miraculous human being – a being destined for eternal happiness in the communion of God. All life, all love, and all peace, begin in the family of God and flow into our world through family of Man. Peace truly begins in the womb, where human and divine love meet, bringing into our world the very hope of salvation.

*For a child is born to us, a son is given us;
upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor,
God-Hero,
Father-Forever,
Prince of Peace.
His dominion is vast and forever peaceful
(Is 9:1-6).*

VI. Conclusion

It is fitting to conclude by engaging the thought of Catholic theologians and philosophers who maintain that war is a force for good in the world, and that people have a duty to kill in legitimate defense. Among the most influential and prominent of these voices is George Weigel, who writes that “Classic Catholic thinking about world politics understands that armed force can be used for good or evil, depending on who’s using it, why, to what purposes, and how” (http://www.eppc.org/news/newsID.1557/news_detail.asp). Accordingly, for Catholics there “are circumstances in which the use of proportionate and discriminate armed force is a moral obligation in pursuit of peace”. And yet the peace that is possible is not “a world without conflict, a utopian fantasy that ill fits biblical religion”, but rather “a humble sort of peace,” “a peace in which swords remain—sheathed or used to defend order—but are not yet beaten into plowshares” (<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/just-war-an-exchange-45>).

As such, Weigel believes that violence will always be necessary: “Imagine a world in which there really were effective legal and political institutions and instruments for resolving conflicts between nations – the world sketched by Blessed John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*. Even in that world, the option of armed force would have to remain open”. Why? Because “Human nature being what it is, somebody is going to break the rules, and sometimes do so in ways that cannot be handled through diplomacy.” Therefore, “armed force must be available, precisely to vindicate the rule of law” (http://www.eppc.org/news/newsID.1557/news_detail.asp).

For Weigel, there is no peace without justice, and no justice without armed force. Is justice – the “tranquility of order” – possible without violence? Weigel’s answer is an emphatic ‘no’. Weigel is certain that limited violence is necessary to establish justice in a world marked by the mystery of evil. In a fallen world, the just-war is necessary for justice, and hence, war is necessary for peace. Yet Weigel notes that such peace is not ‘without conflict’, and is ‘humble’, and is maintained by the ‘sword’.

Weigel, on his own terms, is absolutely correct and firmly in line with traditional Catholic teaching. The peace that Weigel describes – the peace of a fallen world, the peace of the City of Man – is only possible through the discriminating use of limited violence. This is an ancient doctrine reaching back to Saint Augustine, to a world where holiness is to be found (and even expected) only in priests and religious. It is a world of realism, but also a world of limited hope. The ‘peace’ that Weigel describes is a partial peace where tranquility is founded not upon love, but upon bloodshed.

The Universal Call to Holiness and the New Pentecost discerned by Pope John Paul II dare us to live according to a different hope, according to a fuller peace – one not ensured by bloodshed, but by brotherhood. Whereas Weigel lives in a world where there is no justice without violence, the grace of Jesus Christ unveils a deeper truth: “there is no justice without forgiveness” – without love, without mercy. The modern Church demands that we “learn to fight for justice without violence” (*Centesimus Annus*, 23). Many reject this call, thinking it absurd, impossible, naïve, or even heretical. Nonetheless,

and notwithstanding the critiques of sincere philosophers and theologians, the Church has seen the possibility of a true peace based upon love, mercy, and forgiveness, a peace where swords really can be beaten into ploughshares, a peace without war. This peace, a different peace than a fallen world is capable of, comes through the sacrificial love of enemy that fills the hearts of the redeemed. It is a hard peace won in martyrdom. The Church has heard this call. May God grant us the grace to accept it.