

“THE TEACHING OF PEACE IN THE `PACEM IN TERRIS` AND ITS RELEVANCE” relazione al Convegno “Pacem in terris, 40 jaar later” Gent Triest Institute ottobre 2003

The Encyclical *PACEM IN TERRIS* was promulgated 6 months after the Cuban Missile Crisis and 2 months before the death of John XXIII. It was the first Encyclical addressed to “all men of good will” and it was received with enthusiasm by wide and varied public. It was also published in the ‘New York Times’ and the Soviet press gave a positive evaluation. It became the object of discussion and meeting between diplomatic and Theologians. It is in fact, the only Encyclical to have been put in the Music of OLIVIER MESSAIEN.

1. The concept of peace among men.

The Encyclical is structured in five parts. The introduction shows that the peace that everyone needs must be based on that order which is “willed by God”(n.I).

The 5 sections proceed thus:

- (I) The order between persons with human rights relative to duties.
- (II) The relation between persons and the Public authority within the state.
- (III) The relation between the states.
- (IV) The relation of the persons and political communities with the world community.
- (V) And the Pastoral exhortation.

The Encyclical begins with this capitory phrase: “The Peace on earth, deep yearning of human beings of all age, comes to be established and consolidated only in the full respect of the order established by God.” In the order established by God the Pope counts among others human rights deriving from the same nature of the human being, orderly laws and of the state, an economy

oriented to the common good, equal relation among peoples, justice for developing countries and an international political authority with adequate executive powers.

There is an equivalence between peace and just relations among men. The peace depends immediately on the success of relations among men, in all levels and of group, and at the same time between men and God (n.2).

The peace as implying relations, rests then on a profoundly generous option of love and of faith in the other.

Its demands seem then well above the human possibility. The mysterious foundation that sustains this option and gives it the strength to be effective is found in God. The peace is a matter of faith and is a gift of God which is to be received and fortified (n.38).

So human relations that integrate and respect rights and duties merit the authentic human relations, impregnated by the demands of truth, of justice and of solidarity and able to generate a peace among nations. In this way there is presented a positive vision of peace. Besides, the negative definition as lack of war and of conflicts appears objectively insufficient.

In this case the stillness of a state run by terror or the kinds of cold war would be considered peace (n 39).

The peace is understood resulting from a process aimed at resolving conflicts with a method at least not destructive. The concept of conflict forms part of its definition. The peace in the positive sense underlines the conflict because only concentrating attention on conflict can strain us to find a method of solution in terrible situation too; and would therefore obtain a true peace. Understood in this way, the search for peace becomes essentially the preparation and attention to find method for solution of ordinary conflicts and also of those possible having always confidence there will be found a practical method for resolving them, even if it is extremely difficult (n.39).

Such an idea of peace contains all the conditions and possibilities of an existence able to create consensus and communication and is unfolded in diverse dimensions. In the dimension of the conflict interior to the person, whose constructive overcoming comes to be designated anthropologically as human identity; in the dimension of struggle among men whose conclusion and transformation into a just cohabitation is understood as reconciliation. In the dimension of the social antagonisms (for example: oppositions of classes and race) the struggle among men becomes fruitful collaboration of all without levelling the differences.

In the dimension of the international conflict the peace is concluded with the distinction in the sense of a practical and just equilibrium of interests that implies the cessation of the state of war, basing in the international Law.

With the positive elements it is necessary the dynamic elements of the concept of peace because the pacification of the human being never can -if not metaphorically- be formulated with timeless, but with dynamic figures of order. The peace is a category of the story of the human journey, which regardless of humanization – cannot be conceived in abstract or in utopic manner.

The PT calls us again to the historical base of peace as process, that today is the realization of rights of man and the idea of the international community.

As final figure the progressive solidarity and free communication of all men and groups appears!

2. The Theological-spiritual Dimension.

The insatiable nostalgia of an ideal world sends again the men to the transcendent dimension of their existence: The spiritual dimension of peace (the peace that is in Christ who reconciles men with God and between men)

determines and orients radically the ethical dimension of peace (justice and love).

Peace has its roots in the message of Christ. In fact it is necessary the help from the heaven asked to whom who won sin by his suffering passion and death. The sin is destructive and deadly element. Christ has reconciled men with the heavenly Father by his blood”(n.60). This truth is also the motive of the universal address of the encyclical. The peace is a “good” that interests not only some but also all because every man is searching for peace and has the capacity to recognize Christ our peace.

The peace that Christ announces to men, moreover is not first of all the peace built by men; is that immediately granted by the same initiative of God.

The christological perspective qualifies the intention of the pontiff against the problem of peace. This is considered not more as one of many problems to which the church must give an answer, but as an event immediately linked to the mystery of Christ. The presence of Christ is effectively a builder for peace and criterion for every act of peace.

If the name of peace is Christ, it follows from this that every discussion for peace finds its food and strength in the mystery of love and of service to Christ to his death on the cross. To avoid the understandings or visions purely utopic, John XXIII reminds us that the project of peace cannot base itself only on human strengths, even if they are animated by every laudable good will.

We would not value exactly this teaching of John XXIII if we had underlined the Pontiff has addressed the *Pacem in Terris* to all because he was driven by a spirit of humanistic universalism.

In reality valuing attentively his interventions, especially in the light of Christmas radio messages, universal openness is rooted in the evangelical message of the birth of Christ, where he announces the gift of peace to all men of good will.

The encyclical reassumes the Christian revelation on the peace as gift of God which is humbly invoked in the prayer. It is a gift that discloses an arduous exercise and exigency towards the conversion of the heart.

The same “structures of sin”, that is the economic and political mechanisms generators of distortions and injustices, put their roots in the personal sin of man. To this radicalism the Christian peace associates particular diversity and universality.

Suffice to reflect on the sense of the Hebrew biblical word which designates peace, “Shalom”, meaning which refers to the harmony and to the fullness of an integrated life of joy, justice, love, safeguard of rights. Conceived this way, the peace postulates the cultivation of and the exercise of those virtues, traditionally associated with war: boldness, courage, discipline, strength, initiative. The opposite are those of the timidity, of the indolence, of the wild as dull-living.

3. “The quadrilateral of John”

From the Encyclical emerges clearly that war is not inevitable, and peace is not only a gift: war and peace are products of human works and art of which men are responsible.

War is not fateful or inevitable: as if it were an event instigated by the blind forces of nature.

War can be avoided; provided that we seriously engage ourselves to avoid. Authentic peace can be realized: provided that we involve ourselves seriously to realize it.

The *Pacem in Terris* teaches that the individual is not the passive subject of the peace, but the author of the peace. Besides the encyclical (and also the *Gaudium et spes*) has recognized positive value in the act which reunite faith and moral action for obtaining peace without armies.

The fundamental cultural passage has been that of a peace only joined to existence of juridical and political institutions to a peace obtained with a dynamic process which achieves and maintains the peace.

Either for the problems of rights of man or for those of relations between the states, the Encyclical gives priority to the ethical perspectives and to the primary of moral over law, priority subdued to the supreme norms of the truth of justice, of solidarity and of liberty. It is a profound change, with 4 values put in act to the benefit of the person, the Moral takes on again its position and capacity of human and spiritual creativity. In this view it is understood the foundation of the peace on that which in good terms can be called “quadrilateral of John”: justice, truth, liberty and solidarity.

If the respect of human law is the primary base of justice, the search for a greater knowledge of human rights is made to spring from a truth on which they are found, or from the truth of man.

Therefore the truth is a necessary condition of justice and peace. But the truth in its turn cannot be looked for than in the liberty, Therefore these two elements are directly correlated:

So we are free only when the truth reigns.

Only in this way peace can exist authentically human and “the order in the political communities can exist.

In the first part the encyclical presents relations these values entertain among them.

“The proper order of the human community is of moral essence. In actual fact, it is the order that has for its base the truths, which is realized in the justice which need to be vivified by love which finds in freedom a perpetual equilibrium and always more human” (PT n.37). John XXIII gives more importance to those values of which its source go back to the inspiration of Pius XII.

A better formulation is found in n. 52, bosom of the pastoral considerations.

The more humanly character of relations of everyday life “reclaims an order whose foundation is the truth, whose measure and objectives are the truth, whose strength dynamic is love, method of realizing liberty”.

If peace then is found on these 4 values, the wars, those of the history and of the present are really born and feed by the lack of these values.

The lack of solidarity makes richer and more powerful people to organize the economy and politics of the world in a manner considering their our supremacy, to the expenses of the poverty and of the growing dependence of the majority of humanity (n.41).

The hypocrisy of give to everyone “his” justice, permits in stronger countries to extend constantly “their power” initiate wishfully with violence and abuse of power, but maintain with easy expedient of who has at hand the lever of the finance and of the world market. And they do not consider the “ destination of universal goods”. In reality many wars and revolutions are born as a reaction to injustices which suffocate the same possibility of life or of a minimum human dignity (n. 39).

So also the lack of liberty is at the root of many revolutions or rebellions: and here we really find the hypocrisy of groups or nations that display our ideal Liberty. But in reality they proclaim and defend “their” liberty, limiting, if not suffocating the liberty of many poor and in more or greater difficulty (n. 40).

Applying to the state the dialectic of rights and duties, enumerated in the first part, the Pope evokes in two resumptions the rights of the political communities, which ever be their dimensions and their importance at international level. Their recognition makes part of the content of the truth (n. 33) and their respect make part of duties of justice (PT.n. 34). When they compare problems relative to the order between states, the third pillar is not love anymore but solidarity. The love or the human fraternity or the dynamism of charity are not means between

parenthesis, but rather they find new forms passing through the mediation offered by all the institutional forms of solidarity.

4. The inner peace and the international peace

In the Christmas Radio messages of 1959 John XXIII indicates with clarity that the peace of heart, the social peace, the international peace are “essential elements that constitute the unmistakable face of peace”. Therefore men of good will are those who succeed to work out peace in the unity of three aspects. Everyone can experience peace granted by God, even when peoples of the earth are at war, can know by means of the faith in the same Gospel. Peace is then, also certain obligation of liberty of the faithful. In fact Jesus says: “Blessed are those who work for peace, theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. But the work of peace to which Jesus refers does not look immediately at international relations; looks instead at interpersonal relations and consists in the disposition to search always in the other, a brother without instead getting disheartened by the slap received.

The social group is in an existential dimension different from that of the individual, and the moral laws valid for the individual can be applied to the group only indirectly and with essential distinctions. A direct application of rights and duties of the individual to rights and duties of the group is impossible. This fact shows clearly the limits of any realistic hope of a peace on earth”.

As to the application of the “peace gift of God to relations between peoples it is not possible to make direct deductions.

The appeal to the word of the Gospel naively as ingenuously and irresponsibly used by some Catholics as if the legitimization of the exclusion of armed conflict was however the best political choice.

This ingenuous Pacifistic declination of the Christian Gospel is an easy temptation for the Catholic: In fact to comply with pacifistic deduction relieves of assuming responsibility against such situations, in reference to which it can be necessary a choice of war 5.

The political action has certain need of an ethical inspiration, as underlines the encyclical; but the most general principles of the ethic do not yet constitute a political program.

The political action needs practicable historical projects; and therefore requires historical analysis and interpretation of the complex dynamic of social facts at the level of the single country and the level of international community.

The extreme possibility of objection of conscience and thus of uncompromising choice that refuses aberrant behaviours with respect to the fundamental moral principles. This is the choice of one who does not accept to confront himself to the practically possible or impossible. He put however an act that has value of “witness” or “Martyr”, also at the loss of life.

But it must remain an extreme possibility and must not contradict the overall acceptance of Christian living, even though as “stranger” and “pilgrim”, to the internal of the compromised society of sons of Adam, assuming in its duty and responsibility.

The words of the Pontiff challenge the political initiative but do not replace it. They don't dictate a political recipe univocal and obliging, configuring the papacy like a supreme regulator of international relations.

To all is demanded a responsible comparison with the most authoritative and urgent pontifical warning according to which war is a defeat for rights, the policy and lastly humanity; and is required to intensify the dialogue and the sense of reciprocity with the good reasons of brothers politically lined up on the opposite front (PT n. 42).

A realistic vision of man and of history must not lead to cynicism, but opposes an authentic hope for a utopia, and certainly urges the courage to risk also when failure is more probable than success.

The social ethic is in that sense an ethic of responsibility: and thus political behaviour cannot be satisfied by the witness offered to ideal values (maximal, as every ideal value), without considering the consequences; but must assume the responsibility of the proper consequences: must foresee, “work out or calculate” and pursue the possible.

The judgment on many injustices that afflict social life don't by themselves orient or direct the concrete choices.

To this aim the discernment of what is possible is indispensable: of what consents to diminish injustices of objective human relations, becoming lawful for the political responsibility of individuals. The ideal of peace must become concrete historical ideal, strategy of the possible that as such knows and wishes to confront assiduously and objectively with the works of governments, obviously with the work of all governments.

It is obvious that the changed socio-cultural and technological contexts of today calls for a rewriting of the `Pacem in Terris` that appears yet too closely linked with a conception rather static of the order and of the authority.

Among the rights, there is not the right of dissent, it doesn't mention the objection of conscience and the dynamics of the liberation and of voluntary service (n. 57). But for its methodology and the evangelical spirit that pervades it, the encyclical appears even today are current and stimulating.

5. The political organization of the global community

In the perspective of peace understood in the sense of global respect of the order of human living based on the truth, realized in the justice and in the liberty

vivified by the working solidarity (n. 16-17), the encyclical highlights as having the right of priority in the socio-economic-political field, the pursuit of the universal common good (n.44-49).

This category constitutes a conceptual novelty of remarkable support. While in the current teaching, object and end of common good was only national political community, in the *Pacem in Terris* the common good promoted is that of the integral human family and can never be separated (n.36).

It is not only a broadening of the tradition of the common good, but a true reversing of perspective: the common good of an individual political community is not an end in itself to themselves, but must be considered in more broad way of universal common good. This last category permits us to grasp the theme of peace according to a horizon more wide respect to the past one.

The *Pacem in Terris* predicts a political organization of the world community (nn.44-48). Also if there are not yet present the dynamics of the globalization and ethnic nationalism, John XXIII warns the growing interdependence or “socialization” and the relative emergency of social problems on a worldly scale, therefore of a common good to manage at this level.

Today worldly problems to which the *Pacem in Terris* already indicated are considerably broad. Migration, communications, pollution, armaments; and the end of two blocks render possible and necessary, for the first time after 1945, the organisation of a more just world political order.

In the exhortations to create a new order of the world built on dialogue, on consensus, on participation and interdependence, the Pope indicates the perspective of the definitive suppression of the war and calls upon changing to the respect of the order, to the optimism concerning the modern world and to the confidence in the constitutional forms of government. (n.43)

“Quare aetate hac nostra quae vi atomica gloriatur, alienum est a ratione, bellum iam aptum esse ad violata iura sarcienda” (n. 42)

But really because the war is contrary to reason, the Pope does not hesitate to put his trust in the reasonable man. In fact it is right to hope that men, meeting each other and negotiating, have to discover better the ties that link them, originating from their common humanity” (PT n. 43. The war instrument is absolutely irrational. Reason leads toward peace, war is the fruit of a lack of rationality. In the *Evangelium vitae*, John Paul II speaks well of a “new sensibility always more contrary to the war as instrument to solution of conflicts between peoples and always oriented more to the search for more efficient instruments but not violence to block the armed aggressor”(n.27). The war enters in scene every time that reason is unable to manage a conflict; in this sense war is always “alienda a ratione”

The Pontiff interprets the anxieties and the worries of all humanity today.

The approach between war and justice always provokes comprehensive hesitation and very much so today. In every war in fact, there is always injustices; many innocents always die, they produce destructions that are an insult to the labour of man.

To resort to arms constitutes undoubtedly a barbaric means for solving conflicts. All the same there can be situations in which it is the only mean possible to embarking a barbaric yet more great.

If in every war there are always injustices, so also in every peace there's much injustice. We cannot exclude that they give situations in which peace is again more unjust than war. It may happen that the choice of renouncing war against an unjust aggressor allows the acceptance of an abuse of power, that certainly is unjust.

It is today affirmed in the theological awareness the distinction between personal morality and social ethic; the distinction therefore between the “justice” of the person, the unique about which directly the Gospel of Jesus and respectively the Christian preaching speak, and “justice” in social meaning.

Such distinctions lead to a radical change of perspective of the Christian approach to the theme of war. They do not justify instead the liquidation of the theme by means of the simplistic theorem: the war is always bad, no matter what.

6. Pacifism and no violence

The strong condemnation of war in PT had repercussions throughout the catholic world. Some interpret it as the watershed document in the modern Catholic pacifistic movement. Some others point out that this option for pacifism is available for individual Catholics, but that the teachings subsequent to PT preclude that option for the Catholic church as an institution.

A close reading of the relevant passages reveals that John XXIII never explicitly affirms the pacifistic position instead of *Gaudium et Spes* that expresses admiration for those who have adopted non-violence as a way of life (n.78), and the Synod on justice asks for legal protections for conscientious objectors (*Justitia in mundo* n. 65). PT never explicitly addresses this issue. The failure to mention the option of non-violence is either a sign of extreme caution or a serious oversight in the document.

As interesting theoretical question arises: can a single institution advocate two contrasting moral approaches to the same issue? The Catholic church allows a pluralism of moral methodologies, since it permits its members to hold either the pacifist position or the just war theory, which are exclusive of each other.

At the base of the two decisions, to join to army or refuse it, there are ethical respect worthy reasons. The Christian morality recognizes the two positions as ethically justified. Vatican Council II says about the military service: "Who, in order to serve their country, have a job in army, would consider themselves as servant of security and of freedom for their people and, if they rightly do their

duties, collaborate truly to the stability of peace”(GS n.79). The Council thinks that it is right to protect the rights of people who refuse the military service because of conscience, on condition that they accept another kind of service towards the civil community (ibid).

The insertion of the proposition about non-violence in n.78 of GS shows the non violent action in its true depth, ethical and spiritual. What is specific in it it's this: the non violent action makes transparent and coherent the message of peace until to the social and physical level. It's a precious testimony to the actual presence of the Kingdom of God among us. Each must let themselves be interpellated by the moral and spiritual appeal: to refuse hate and to engage into the love to weak people and to enemies. The non violent person shows and incarnates this appeal in direct way in other dimensions: social and physical.

The non-violent action is not presented as a kind of resignation or escape in the face of conflicts. The Council speaks about it as a practice of defence of the rights and points out that this way is “available to the weakest”(n.78). From the ethical and spiritual roots emerge the collective and socio-political dimension too. These movements tend to transform the social relationships and engage a collective struggle against the violence and for the recognition of human rights.

The Christian ethics, in the light of the message of reconciliation, has to be understood as ethics of peace. However the Christian ethics of peace distinguishes itself from pacifism because of its dynamic and realistic perspective which doesn't permit hope in overcoming the destructive instinct by the absolute non-violence. On the other hand the renunciation of violence is considered as indispensable anticipation of the future reconciliation. Then the new kind of non-violent resistance are preferred to the violent solutions to conflict. If we maintain a dynamic and realistic perspective, we can move out reflection only inside these priorities or judgements of preference which orient

towards different forms of development of peace. The “already” and the “not yet” of the eschatological ethics of peace can’t be harmonized completely.

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