

## **Pacem in Terris (1963)**

### **Historical Context**

*Pacem in Terris*, (On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty) was promulgated by Pope John XXIII on 11th April, 1963, two months before his death. The encyclical is best appreciated against the background of the development of the United Nations, the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. After the atrocities of the Second World War (1939-1945) delegates from 50 nations met to establish an international peace-keeping organization, which was to become the United Nations. Its first resolution focused on the peaceful use of atomic energy and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This development took place at the beginning of the Cold War, a term used for the hostile relationship between the United States of America (USA) and communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) that lasted for most of the second half of the twentieth century. While neither “superpower” ever actually fought the other, their hostilities were played out through lesser states, and the Korean war and the conflict in Hungary were early examples of this. After World War II the Korean peninsula was under the sphere of influence of Russia, and in the south by America, with each claiming its right to a united Korea. The United Nations sent troops to the south, after the invasion by the North and China, provoked by the UN advance towards its borders, attacked the UN and South Korean troops. After the death of Stalin, the General Secretary of the USSR, and the election of Eisenhower as American president, an armistice was signed in 1953.

Hungary was ruled by the USSR from 1945. It was in the Soviet sphere of influence from 1945 and the USSR seized total power in 1949. When Stalin died the Hungarians hoped for freedom. In 1956 a protest of students and workers was brutally suppressed by Soviet troops, with tens of thousands being killed, and another 200,000 escaping to the west. In the face of nuclear threat, Eisenhower offered only moral support to the Hungarian people. Other hostilities erupted over control of the strategic Suez Canal, with a nationalist regime under Gamal Nasser nationalizing the canal and ultimately turning to the USSR for both military and developmental support.

The Berlin wall was also a powerful symbol of the Cold War. After World War II what remained of Nazi Germany was divided into four zones each controlled by one of the victorious powers America, Britain, France and the USSR, with Berlin similarly subdivided. In 1949 the French, British and American sectors formed the Federal Republic of Germany which included West Berlin, while the Soviet zone formed the German Democratic Republic (including East Berlin). In May 1952 the borders between east and west Germany and between east Germany and west Berlin were closed, and restrictions imposed on east Berliners traveling to west Berlin. In 1961 the Communist government erected a concrete and barbed wire barrier between the two halves of the city. East Germans were not allowed free travel to the west of their city until the collapse of communism in 1989.

The world came closest to war between the two superpowers with the Cuban missile crisis. In the 1950s, Cuba was ruled by the dictator Batista, who had the support of the USA. Spurred by the socialist thought of Mao Tse Tung, young Cubans led by Fidel Castro overthrew Batista, and among other reforms Castro nationalized American firms in Cuba thus keeping their profits in Cuba. The USA imposed a trade embargo on Cuba, with the result that Russia

stepped in to buy Cuban exports. With a new friend of Russia only 50 miles from America, President Kennedy supported an abortive attempt by some exiled Cubans to overthrow Castro, who looked to Russian protection and by 1962 Russia had a nuclear missile base in Cuba, and Cuba had the guarantee of unlimited weapons. With the USA under threat, Kennedy undertook not to invade Cuba if Russia withdrew the nuclear missiles and revoked its weapons. There was a tense stand-off for some time, until one year later the two nations signed the Nuclear Test Ban treaty. The final Cold War conflict was played out in Vietnam with the spread of communism at its height there in 1963. The ensuing war claimed millions of civilians and soldiers on both sides before America withdrew in 1973, Saigon fell in 1975 and Vietnam was united under one government.

## Overview of the document

Addressed not just to the Catholic community but to “all men (sic) of good will” *Pacem in Terris* is one of the great Catholic social justice encyclicals, in the range of documents (1891-1991) that make up the body of Catholic social teaching. This teaching can be reviewed in four historical periods:

1. The first period was a response to the Industrial Revolution (documents from 1891 to 1957);
2. The second, to which *Pacem in Terris* belongs, was a response to the Second World War (1939-1945), the nuclear age and global interdependence (documents from 1961 to 1967);
3. The third period was a response to post-industrial societies (documents from 1971 to 1975)
4. The fourth spanned the social justice teaching of Pope John Paul II (documents from 1981 to 1991).

The theological foundation of *Pacem in Terris* is the “marvelous order” (n.2) in the universe, which was created by God and of which the human being and human dignity are the highest expression. Indeed, *Pacem in Terris* was the last encyclical to be based in the classical, philosophical natural law paradigm, as against the more scriptural-personalist paradigm beginning with *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965. Contingent upon this principles of natural law is the importance of respect for human rights as an essential consequence of the Christian theology of the person. John XXIII established in the encyclical that every person has the right to life, “the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life” (n.11). Human dignity is the basis of human rights, which are to be protected by society along with their corresponding duties, to make a “whole-hearted contribution to the creation of a civic order in which rights and duties are ever more diligently and more effectively observed” (n.31). Public authority is necessary to preserve human dignity, rights and duties, and this legitimate authority is at the service of the *common good* (n.46 and n.54), a term which refers to the total of the conditions that lead to optimal individual and community development (n.52-59) in the social, psychological, physical, intellectual, and spiritual spheres.

Within this theological framework, John XXIII responded to the international political situation. It was 1963, at the height of the Cold War, just two years since the erection of the Berlin Wall and only months after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Thus the encyclical is notable for its application of Catholic social theory to relationships between states and nations, where previously the emphasis has been on relationships within states. “In their deliberations together, let men (sic) of outstanding wisdom and influence give serious thought to the problem of achieving a more human adjustment of relations between states throughout the world”.(n.118) It also addressed the problems of war and conditions for peace, where previous documents had mainly stressed the economic sphere. John XXIII explained that “any disputes which may arise between nations must be resolved by negotiation and agreement, and not by recourse to arms.” (n.126). A section of the encyclical (n.109-116) directly addressed the arms race, condemning it as a waste of intellectual and material resources which contributed to and continued the oppression of people. The stockpiling of weapons was described as leading not only to great fear, but also to explicit danger for various forms of life on earth as a result of nuclear testing. It called for a thorough and complete disarmament to be led by reason, the desire for peace, and by commitment to the common good, since, in the words of Pope Pius XII: "Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war." (Pius XII's broadcast message, August 24, 1939).

The encyclical may be read in five sections.

1. The first section, in parallel with the *UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, establishes the relationship between people as individuals, and discusses human rights and moral duties (n.1-45).
2. The second section addresses the relationship between people and the state, dwelling on the collective authority of governments (n.46-79)
3. The third section establishes the need for equality among nations, and the need for the state to be subject to the same rights and duties as individuals (n.80-129).
4. The fourth section argues for the need for better relationships and co-operation between nations, (n.130-145) and the encyclical ends by exhorting Catholics to work with others for political and social improvement (n.146-172).

## Key Points in the Encyclical

- There is a “marvelous order” in the universe which reflects the glory of God, and of which the dignity of the human person is the highest expression. Yet this order is often not reflected in relationships between people and nations.
- Relationships between individuals should be characterized by a conviction of the human dignity of all, a dignity which leads to inalienable rights and duties. There are physical rights, moral and cultural rights, religious rights, the right to choose one’s station in life, economic rights, the rights of meeting and association, the right to emigrate, and political rights. Corresponding duties include the protection of life and acceptable living standards, mutual collaboration and responsibility, and the protection of charity, freedom and the moral order.
- Present society is characterized by improvements in social and economic conditions, developments in the role of women in society, and the worldwide movement toward the political independence of all nations, led by convictions about the equality of all people.
- The role of governments is critical in protecting human rights and duties, and giving direction to the community’s work for the common good. Authority, however, is before all else a moral force, and since it is derived from God, any laws that contravene God’s moral order are not binding on conscience.
- Governments are obliged to govern in keeping with the moral order and for the common good of all. This requires that all are enabled to participate in society, although this may mean, at times, a preferential treatment of the weaker and more vulnerable. In addition, governments must always be protective of the spiritual needs of their citizens.
- The constitution of each state or nation should contain a charter of human rights, must regulate the authority of public office, and must designate relationships within the state in terms of rights and duties. It must be clearly stated that the principal function of public authorities is to recognize, respect, co-ordinate, safeguard and promote citizens' rights and duties.
- Relationships between states should be harmonized according to the dictates of truth, justice, co-operation and freedom. More developed nations are not entitled to exercise arbitrary power over other nations.
- Truthful and just relationships between nations require the protection of the rights, living conditions and social participation of ethnic minorities.
- Truthful and just relationships between states require mutual assistance and the pooling of material and spiritual resources. The protection of the common good of individual states is therefore parallel with the common good of the entire human family. The development of reciprocal relationships and mutual support and assistance between states and nations is a primary duty of this age.
- Political refugees deserve compassion and the protection of their human rights, including the right to enter a country where a better life may be possible. The work of international agencies engaged in protecting the rights of refugees is particularly commended.
- The arms race is caused by a belief that the stockpiling of weapons is a deterrent to war, but it is a waste of material and intellectual gifts and continues the oppression of the poor. It leads to increased fear and potential destruction of the world environment. An agreement must be reached to stop the arms race and to abolish nuclear weapons.

- Christians are called to work with other citizens for the protection of human rights and duties, for truth and just government in their own nations and for co-operation and mutual assistance as well as a commitment to peace among all nations of the world.

### Quotations from *Pacem in Terris*

Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order (n.1).

Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable (n.9).

Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services. In consequence, he has the right to be looked after in the event of illhealth; disability stemming from his work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood. (n.11).

As a further consequence of man's nature, he has the right to the private ownership of property, including that of productive goods....Finally, it is opportune to point out that the right to own private property entails a social obligation as well (n.21 and 22).

Once this is admitted, it follows that in human society one man's natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right. Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other (n.30).

Human society, as We here picture it, demands that men be guided by justice, respect the rights of others and do their duty. It demands, too, that they be animated by such love as will make them feel the needs of others as their own, and induce them to share their goods with others, and to strive in the world to make all men alike heirs to the noblest of intellectual and spiritual values (n.36).

God has created men social by nature, and a society cannot hold together unless someone is in command to give effective direction and unity of purpose. Hence every civilized community must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and consequently has God for its author. (n.46).

Hence, representatives of the State have no power to bind men in conscience, unless their own authority is tied to God's authority, and is a participation in it. (n.49).

The attainment of the common good is the sole reason for the existence of civil authorities (n.54).

A natural consequence of men's dignity is unquestionably their right to take an active part in government, though their degree of participation will necessarily depend on the stage of development reached by the political community of which they are members (n.73).

The first point to be settled is that mutual ties between States must be governed by truth. Truth calls for the elimination of every trace of racial discrimination, and the consequent recognition of the inviolable principle that all States are by nature equal in dignity (n.86).

Truth further demands an attitude of unruffled impartiality in the use of the many aids to the promotion and spread of mutual understanding between nations which modern scientific progress has made available. This does not mean that people should be prevented from drawing particular attention to the virtues of their own way of life, but it does mean the utter rejection of ways of disseminating information which violate the principles of truth and justice, and injure the reputation of another nation. (n.90).

Just as individual men may not pursue their own private interests in a way that is unfair and detrimental to others, so too it would be criminal in a State to aim at improving itself by the use of methods which involve other nations in injury and unjust oppression (n.92).

There may be, and sometimes is, a clash of interests among States, each striving for its own development. When differences of this sort arise, they must be settled in a truly human way, not by armed force nor by deceit or trickery (n.93).

We are deeply distressed to see the enormous stocks of armaments that have been, and continue to be, manufactured in the economically more developed countries. This policy is involving a vast outlay of intellectual and material resources, with the result that the people of these countries are saddled with a great burden, while other countries lack the help they need for their economic and social development (n.109).



## **The Impact of *Pacem in Terris***

*Pacem in Terris* was read and embraced by readers outside the Catholic Church in a way that no other encyclical had been. One reason for this was undoubtedly the charisma of John XXIII himself, who addressed his encyclical not only to bishops, clergy and the faithful, but also to men (sic) of good will. Another was weariness with the constant threat of the Cold War, and uncertainty about where it would next lead. However, perhaps the most important reason why it was so readily embraced was the power of the document itself. In 1965, Robert Hutchens, head of the Centre for Democratic Institutions in the United States described *Pacem in Terris* as "one of the most profound and significant documents of our age ... which consigns nuclear arms, nationalism, colonialism, racism, and non-constitutional regimes to the wastebasket of history".

In just over forty years since the promulgation of *Pacem in Terris*, it is possible to identify developments that were the subject of John XXIII's hope and prayer as expressed in the encyclical. Much of the world has emerged from oppression, the structures that facilitate cooperation and dialogue between nations have been strengthened, and the threat of a global nuclear war has been contained. Significant is the development of the role of the United Nations as a world peace keeping force. In 1963 the United Nations was not twenty years old, and John XXIII saw it as a potential, although embryonic, world authority. While there is much evidence that this is what it is becoming, there is also evidence that the role of "public authority with power, organization and means co-extensive with these problems, and with a world-wide sphere of activity."(n.137) is also claimed, although less publicly acknowledged, by the United States. In *Pacem in Terris* Pope John XXIII warned that this world authority must be the result of common accord, and must act with impartiality. In the early twenty-first century the question as to whether the world can develop a global public authority, that has the common good of the world at heart, has yet to be settled.

Nevertheless, human rights are clearly on the international agenda, and since the promulgation of *Pacem in Terris* the world has seen the 1989 non-violent revolution that ended communism in Europe, the emergence of independent nations from European empires including the Soviet empire, and the end of the Cold War. Within the Church, the Catholic community has witnessed and participated in the rise of Catholic social justice activism on behalf of human rights, evidenced in the work of Catholic lay movements on behalf of victims and their rights in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, and East Timor. Catholic activism in support of refugees is world wide.

Pope John Paul II dedicated his message for World Peace Day 1998 and 1999, to commemorating the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The dignity of the human person as eloquently proposed in *Pacem in Terris* is now the cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, and a powerful, consistent message to the international community. Human rights are now part of the ordinary agenda of the universal Church.

## Questions

1. What signs of disorder do you see in relationships between individuals, within our Australian community and in the world community?
2. What forms or actions of governments contravene the moral order?
3. What does it mean to say that governments above all else are to be concerned with the common good?
4. What is the responsibility of wealthy, democratic nations to those nations that are poor and oppressed?
5. What world policy should be adopted in regard to nuclear weapons?
6. What duties does the international community have in regard to refugees?
7. How do you assess Australia's record on the protection of human rights?

## **Bibliography**

Hales, E.E.Y. *Pope John and His Revolution*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965.

Hebblethwaite, Peter. *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985.

Kammer, Fred, S.J. *Doing Faithjustice*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

McCarthy, George E., and Royal W. Rhodes. *Eclipse of Justice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Newman, Jeremiah. *Principles of Peace: A Commentary on John XXIII's Pacem in Terris*. Oxford: Catholic Social Guild, 1964.

Reed, Edward, ed. *Pacem in Terris: An International Convocation on the Requirements of Peace*. New York: Pocket Books, 1965.

Riga, Peter J. *Peace on Earth: A Commentary on Pope John's Encyclical*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1964.

## **Web links**

[Faith Doing Justice](#) - Making Catholic Social Teaching Accessible. This web site offers a plain English introduction to Catholic teaching on issues of justice in society.

[Catholic Social Teaching](#) (Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis). Through this site all the major Catholic Social Teaching documents can be accessed. It also has a very comprehensive reading list on Catholic Social Teaching and very good resources for Catholic educators.

[Australian Catholic Social Justice Council - Catholic Social Teaching](#). The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council was created in 1987 by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference to be the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia.

[The Social Teaching of the Church](#) (Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection). This site has a whole section dedicated to the Social Teaching of the Church.

[The Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching](#). Excellent introduction and good for secondary students.