
JUSTICE IS A PILLAR OF PEACE IN THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Abstract

The search for answers to the question of how to achieve peace in the modern world is an important scientific and research challenge. The vision of peace in society has been expressed for centuries by the teaching of the Catholic Church. One of the forms that define the framework for building peace are the specific pillars of peace, which are truth, justice, freedom and love. Pope John XXIII was the first to announce the pillars of peace, then successive popes in various aspects referred to this approach to building peace. The publication shows one of the basic pillars of building peace, which is justice. Many times, the definition of justice and peace became the foundation of the teaching of the popes at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. This article is an interdisciplinary one. It is embedded in theological teachings, because it refers to the teaching of Catholic Church and Apostolic See's statements about concrete an approach to education for peace based on justice. However, due to the matter of these statements, the article can also be classified as security studies - it contains a reference of the Church to contemporary social threats, such as, for example, armed conflicts.

Keywords: Popes, justice, World Day of Peace, security, society

1. Introduction

Over the centuries, man has created rules, made declarations and normative acts in order to find peace and justice. One of the most important declarations in the last century is the one signed after the end of World War II. The United Nations General Assembly announced in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where in the second point we read „Recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” [1].

The road to peace is a complex process that is written and understood by all those who strive for or take part in arduous peace processes. It is worth noting that this type of activity is a non-military aspect of security [2-4]. The teaching of the Catholic Church also testifies to a significant interest in this issue. This is evidenced by numerous documents of the Holy See, or even the

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annual Messages for the World Day of Peace, which respond to the current threats destabilizing the social order [5, 6].

The article aims to show the concern of the Holy See in building peace in the contemporary world. An example of recipes for building the foundations of peace are the pillars of peace defined by Pope John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in terris*. Among the pillars of peace are values such as truth, justice, freedom and love. Due to the wide scope of research covering the teaching of the Catholic Church on the four pillars of peace, in the paper I will discuss one of the pillars of peace which is justice. The research area will primarily cover the teaching of the Popes, from John XXIII the forerunner defining the pillars of peace, all the way to the teaching of Pope Francis.

The article deals with Theology and security sciences. This is due to the fact that the statements of the Holy See on building peace also refer to contemporary security threats, such as armed conflicts and other forms of aggression against other people.

2. Research

2.1. Peace is the work of justice

As we read in the book of Isaiah, true peace is actually “a work of justice” (Is. 32.17). The fathers of the Second Vatican Council likewise recognized peace as „the fruit of the order given to human society by its divine founder, the realization of which is to be worked on by people who want more and more perfect justice” (*Gaudium et spes*, 78).

Pope John XXIII, formulating the principle of the pillars of peace in his encyclical *Pacem in terris*, explained the importance of human life in society. Already in the first part of the papal document referred to as ‘Order between people’ in the part on human rights and duties in society, the Pope conditions the principle of the pillars of peace on the definition of the principles of coexistence of citizens within the limits of law and duty. Only then, together with the understanding of spiritual and material values, is it possible to understand what the individual pillars of peace are „what is truth, what is justice, what is love, what is freedom” (*Pacem in terris*, 45).

Also in the last fifth of his encyclical, Pope John XXIII, in his pastoral guidelines at the point of great tasks, cites that the most important tasks of humanity are to introduce „a new system of social relations between individual citizens” based on the principles of truth, justice, love and freedom (*Pacem in terris*, 163). Therefore, in order to introduce such principles, the Pope encourages common prayer for peace „Let us pray fervently to the Divine Redeemer for the peace he has brought us. May he himself remove from the hearts of men all that can disturb this peace, and make all witnesses of truth, justice and fraternal love.” (*Pacem in terris*, 171)

2.2. Justice as a condition of social order

The next Pope Paul VI maintained the concept of his predecessor's teaching on peace. In the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* of May 14, 1971, writing about society, emphasizes that the preservation of the principles of peace with respect for human boundaries and freedom results from the understanding of concrete values within the framework of principles and duties „the importance of educating in social life, an education in which, in addition to the instruction on the rights due to everyone, there will be a reminder of mutual duties, which are the necessary equivalent of rights. The awareness of duties and the exercise of them depend most on self-control, as well as on taking responsibility and recognizing the limits of the freedom of an individual or group” (*Octogesima adveniens*, 24.). Pope Paul VI confirms his opinion in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, where it unequivocally opposes the violence and death that accompanies aggressors in subsequent armed conflicts „Renounce the path of armed struggle and go out to meet others with dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust and hope around you!” (*Populorum Progresio encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the development of peoples* 26.3.1967, 7, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). In the above statement of the Pope, we see the important role of justice as one of the factors determining the restoration of relations in societies.

2.3. Justice as a source of peace

The Pope who unequivocally and repeatedly referred to the principles of the pillars of peace was Pope John Paul II. In John Paul II's message for the XXXI World Day of Peace on January 1, 1998, entitled 'The justice of every human being, a source of peace for all'. Already in his first sentences, the Pope defines the connection between justice and peace as a fundamental and dynamic tool in creating order and truth: „Justice and peace go hand in hand, there is a constant and dynamic bond between them. Justice and peace serve the good of every man and all men, and therefore require order and truth. They are exposed to the same dangers: the offense against justice is also a threat to peace.” (*XXXI World Day For Peace 1998, From the justice of each comes peace for all*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_j-p-ii_mes_08121997_xxxi-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). Thanks to the direct relationship between justice and peace, it was possible for the Pope to appeal to the rulers of the states to cease all disputes, conflicts and violence in the name of ensuring peace through social justice. To emphasize the importance of one of the pillars of peace - justice, the Pope clearly emphasized „Justice and peace are not abstract concepts and unattainable ideals; they are values inscribed - as a common heritage - in the heart of every human being. Individuals, families, communities, nations - all are called to live in justice and work for peace. No one can evade this obligation.” (*XXXI WDP*, 1.01.1998, p. 7) According to John Paul II, the above duty is a great challenge and social task,

especially towards those involved in conflicts, victims of exploitation or people who have experienced injustice.

The Pope also understands justice as a shield through a dynamic and living virtue that protects human dignity and cares for the common good. Justice is also „guardian of the bond between people and nations” (XXXI WDP, 1.01.1998, p. 1). John Paul II does not discuss the question of justice and peace only superficially, but enters into the depths of man, into his nature. He affirms that justice as a virtue, with its roots reaches the potential of love, which is an expression of mercy, because „When justice, then, is detached from merciful love, it becomes cold and merciless” (XXXI WDP, 1.01.1998, p. 1). Summing up his message, John Paul II recalled and emphasized that „The justice of every human being is a source of peace for all. No one can shirk this duty, which is so decisive for the human race. It is for each person a call to action tailored to individual competences and tasks.” (XXXI WDP, 1.01.1998, p. 7)

Pope in his Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2002 entitled ‘There is no peace without justice, there is no justice without forgiveness’ four months after the September 11 attacks in the United States, it gives the world new hope. Referring to his experiences during the Second World War, he writes that the only way to achieve peace is to combine justice and forgiveness „The pillars of true peace are justice and that special kind of love that is forgiveness” (XXXV *World Day For Peace 2002, No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness*, p. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20011211_xxxv-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). Aware of the fresh wounds suffered during this tragedy, the Pope calls for the cultivation of values such as justice and forgiveness in the context of achieving peace. Considering the issue raised in the subject of the work, John Paul II is of the opinion that it is precisely a well-understood justice that ensures moral and legal principles on the basis of respect for rights and duties that is able to achieve true peace. „True peace is therefore the fruit of justice, moral virtue and juridical guarantee, which ensures full respect for rights and duties and the equal distribution of benefits and burdens.” (XXXV WDP, 1.01.2002, p. 3) The Pope sees here the weakness of human nature, which in the face of tensions tends to conflict. However, this does not lead to an agreement, but to an escalation to the international stage. The answer is forgiveness as a just reparation of the damage done, in the spirit of bringing order and calming the soul. „Rather, forgiveness seeks full justice leading to a peaceful order, which is not so much an impermanent and temporary cessation of hostilities as a thorough healing of the bleeding wounds of the soul.” (XXXV WDP, 1.01.2002, p. 3)

According to the Pope, peace based on justice and forgiveness is attacked by terrorist organizations that develop their arsenal not only in the arms aspect, but also in the political and economic aspect. More and more states are being dragged into pointless strategies to attack the innocent. People are used to attack defenceless and random victims, which accumulates hatred, distrust and isolation. Therefore, the Pope unequivocally states that „Terrorism is based on

contempt for human life (...) and constitutes a real crime against humanity” (XXXV WDP, 1.1.2002, p. 4). John Paul II calls for a statement „there is a right to defend oneself against terrorism” (XXXV WDP, 1.01.2002, p. 5) on the basis of appropriate moral and legal principles, in the choice of ends and means, the guilty parties must be identified and subjected individually to legal liability. In his message, the Pope also draws attention to a just approach to the use of aspects such as nationality, origin or religion during conflicts. An example is the excuses of terrorists to fight on behalf of the poor, or to use words that they fight in the name of God. Both examples are an excuse, and a desecration of religion.

In the Message for the XXXVI World Day of Peace on 1 January 2003, entitled ‘Encyclical *Pacem in terris* constantly obliges’ John Paul II developed the meaning of the pillars of peace with the attribution of specific meanings to individual words of truth, justice, love and freedom. In pointing out the importance of justice through peace-building, the Pope renewed the teaching of his predecessors based on the fact that justice is conditional on respect for the preservation of the rights and duties of others. „Justice will build peace when each one concretely seeks to respect the rights of others and to fulfil his or her own duties to them.” (XXXVI World Day For Peace 2003, *Pacem in terris: a permanent commitment*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20021217_xxxvi-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed on 10.05.2022) Traditionally, the Pope at the end of his message refers to prayer for peace in the world, which should be based on the foundations of justice. Thanks to prayer, which makes the heart open to God, who will bring the peace of Christ into the spaces of division and struggle. The Pope extends the idea of prayer for peace to justice, thanks to which order and order between nations is possible. „To pray for peace means to ask for justice, for the establishment of an order within states and in relations between them.” (XXXVI WDP, 1.1.2003, p. 14)

2.4. The righteous who promote peace

Benedict XVI in the Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, writing on the subject of justice and peace, emphasized the role of those who, following the example of Christ, promoted peace. Among the many saints, the Pope also added his predecessors, who by the nature of their task were at the forefront of the proclamation of peace and justice. „It is testified to by the saints and all those who gave their lives for Christ the Saviour in the field of justice and peace. It expresses the prophetic mission of the Popes to lead the Church of Christ in apostolic terms and to discern the new demands of evangelization.” (*Caritas in veritate*, p. 12)

In his teaching, Benedict XVI sees further aspects of peace-building through the perspective of justice, which results from the inner spiritual sphere of every human being. Subsequently, such a state of a person affects the public and social sphere. As Benedict XVI said: „there is a close relationship between worship of God and peace among people on Earth” (...) for „without openness to transcendence, man easily falls prey to relativism, and then finds it difficult to

act in accordance with justice and to commit himself to peace” (Benedetto XVI, *To the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year greetings*, 7.01.2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130107_corpo-diplomatico.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). For this reason, in the space of every person’s life, it is necessary to be aware of the presence of God, which cannot be denied, because only God can inspire man not to recognize any norm above himself and to choose only himself as the norm. Such a vision of man without God leads to cruelty and violence. (Benedetto XVI, *Meeting for peace in Assisi: Day of reflection, dialogue, and prayer for peace and justice in the world. ‘Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace’*, Assisi, 27.10.2011, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111027_assisi.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). In order to prevent a state of human life without God, the Pope argues, it should be remembered that in a state governed by the rule of law, democracy can be a significant paradigm of this process if it is based on justice and the desire to protect the rights of everyone, especially the weak or the marginalized, in the constant search for truth (Benedetto XVI, *Discorso ai dirigenti delle Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani*, 27.01.2006, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2006/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060127_acli.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). Such a social construction is correct, where everyone responsibly contributes at all levels of life of the local, national and global community.

2.5. Love of peace based on justice

The incumbent Pope Francis also sees the need to remind the world of the role of justice in building peace. Already in his first message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2014 entitled ‘Fraternity as the basis and the way to peace’, the Pope criticizes all injustice, including hostilities, which are a violation of fundamental human rights (*XLVII Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2014 - Fraternità, fondamento e via per la pace*, p. 7-8, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20131208_messaggio-xxvii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014.html, accessed on 10.05.2022). In turn, in the second message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2015, entitled ‘No longer slaves, but brothers’, the Pope reminds us that man is a relational being who creates interpersonal relationships around justice and love (*XLVIII Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2015 - Non più schiavi, ma fratelli*, p. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xxviii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html, accessed on 10.05.2022).

The Pope in the Jubilee 50. Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2017 entitled ‘Non-violence: a style of politics for peace’, like its predecessors, it points out that violence is the main cause of modern threats. Francis encourages the words of Pope John XXIII to see „a sense and love of

peace based on truth, on justice, freedom and love”, which values are a message to „non-violent action as a style of peace policy” (*L Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2017 - La nonviolenza: stile di una politica per la pace*, p. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html, accessed on 12.05.2022). In his message, he recalled the determined attitude of John Paul II, which, according to Francis, was proof that the fight for truth and justice in the name of peace achieved concrete results (*L WDP*, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, the appeals made to the modern world should be equally important. Examples are the words of Francis ‘No religion is terrorist’ (*To participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161105_movimenti-popolari.html, accessed on 10.05.2022), and that „Violence is an insult to the name of God” [7], as well as that „We will never stop repeating: The name of God can never justify violence. Only peace is holy, not war!” (*Visit to Assisi for the World Day of Prayer for Peace ‘Thirst for peace: faiths and cultures in dialogue’*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/papa-francesco_20160920_assisi-preghiera-pace.html, accessed on 20.05.2022).

Pope Francis sees the vision of improving human relations in building peace and fraternity, which he repeatedly repeats in his teaching. The foundation of proper relationships in the family can also be the beginning of building peace and justice. Pope Francis on January 1, 2014 said during the Angelus in the Vatican: „the path to justice and peace begins at home, and then goes on, to all humanity. But we have to start at home! May the Holy Spirit work in hearts, free them from self-absorption and hardness, and make us able to be moved in the face of the weakness of the Child Jesus. Peace, in fact, requires the power of meekness, the non-violent force of truth and love.” (*Angelus, 1° gennaio 2014, Solennità di Maria SS.ma Madre di Dio*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140101.html, accessed on 20.05.2022).

The Pope also recalled the Jubilee of Mercy, which ended in November 2017, and stated that „The Jubilee Year has made us aware of how many and different people and social groups are, who are treated with indifference, victims of injustice and violence. They are part of our ‘family’, they are our brothers and sisters. Therefore, the policy of non-violence must begin within the walls of the home and then spread to the entire human family.” (*L WDP*, 2017, p. 7) That is why the values that should be found in the public space, also in politics, are very important. From such human virtues „on which good political action depends, he mentions: justice, equality, mutual respect, sincerity, honesty, fidelity” (*LII Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2019 - La buona politica è al servizio della pace*, p. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20181208_messaggio-52giornatamondiale-pace2019.html, accessed on 20.05.2022).

In order for these values to be put into practice, an atmosphere of listening is needed, which the Pope recalls in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. He exhorts man to listen to the voice of those in need, as well as to the voice of Creation's cry. Here he speaks of concern for the earth, which is our common home, but also of the poor who are our brothers „the condition for the authenticity of the sense of inner union with other beings of Nature is simultaneous tenderness, compassion and care for man” (*Laudato si'*, 91). Speaking about the care for man, Francis during the Episcopal Conference of the Dominican Republic reminded that „Peace, justice and the protection of creation are three closely related issues that cannot be separated from each other in such a way that they are treated individually, as this could risk falling back into reductionism” (*LIV Giornata Mondiale della Pace 2021 - La cultura della cura come percorso di pace*, p. 6). Pope Francis' teaching on building peace and justice can be summed up by the following words „Jesus Christ has his purpose: the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of peace, justice and freedom in love; and she has the power that directs her towards this goal: that power is the Holy Spirit” (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140101.html, accessed on 20.05.2022).

3. Conclusions

Peace and justice have for many centuries been unifying in building good in the world. Already in the book of the prophet Isaiah, where we read about peace as a source of justice, we learn that the condition for relations between people is to base human and moral law on the value of justice. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recognized justice as the fruit of the social order, and Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* he placed justice as one of the pillars of achieving peace. Successive popes have also referred to the four pillars of peace, which are truth, justice, love and freedom. This was unequivocally and directly done by popes such as Pope Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI or the current Pope Francis.

Pope Paul VI recalls the rights and duties of every human being, which in the name of justice will lead to the common good. The call of Pope John Paul II is in the words „Justice as a Source of Peace”. The world is shown the need to build interpersonal relations, including international ones, for the need for justice, if states and nations want to achieve order and peace. The Pope recognizes peace and justice as a duty that is a great challenge and social task, especially towards the victims of numerous conflicts.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the role of every human being in promoting peace, he calls them righteous, because such an attitude motivates others to create proper relationships in society. Pope Francis, on the other hand, sees the path to peace in improving human relationships based on fraternity and justice, starting from the family home.

The culmination of the teaching of every pope on the issue of achieving peace through justice is the request for prayer, which makes man, thinking of God, build justice in society. Justice understood in this way, based on moral and juridical principles, while respecting rights and duties, is able to achieve true peace.

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