

# Just Peace?

## On social peace and the causes of division

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I would like to start on a personal note. I sat down to write this talk the day after I heard that Loughlin Hickey had died. Many of you may also have had the pleasure of knowing him. I want to give this talk in his honour. I was enabled to do much of the kind of thinking that I'll use here through conversation with him – he was one of the most interesting thinkers I have ever had the good fortune, or the providential guidance, to meet. So I'd like this talk to start with him in mind.

Jenny asked me to talk under the title "Just Peace? On Social Peace and the Causes of Division". In some ways, this is a new problem. Would Jenny have asked me to talk about social peace 25 years ago? I'm not sure we would have thought this was an important topic at that point. So in that sense, it's an emerging issue for us in our stage of history. We have new influences which are causing division in our society. We know from personal experience, from newspaper stories and from academic research that social media is an important source of division in our society today. That is something new. We have a new combination of ideas, theories, and philosophies which are creating new problems for us.

I think we should put on the table too the question of faith or belief, which connects us with "trust". In many languages, it's the same word for faith and for trust. The changes on that level are, in some ways, unprecedented. There are a lot of new issues – new causes of division – that mean that the solutions we found for building social peace in the past can no longer be applied in the same way as they were in the past. At the same time, living in peace with each other is a perennial problem.

The second sin recorded in the book of Genesis, after the primordial one of breaking our relationship with God, is a sin against peace, the killing of a brother. I have no doubt that those of other religious traditions could also recount similar stories from the foundational texts of their religious traditions. We know that Greek, Roman, Viking and other mythical systems are full of stories of violence and destruction. In Joseph Campbell's idea of the "hero's journey", he would argue that confronting the destructiveness in many of these mythical stories is a source of heroism, and part of arriving at the good - such as the peace of the Shire at the end of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. These foundational myths, part of our perennial experience, represent a resource for us in dealing with our search for social peace.

I think the storytelling issue is very important for our problems today; also the arts in general, whether they are visual, or auditory, relating to music, or the culinary arts, relating to food, and the way in which that's a crucial element of peace building, or any other kind of poesis. The Greek word, poesis, is the making of something good and beautiful in itself, which is very closely connected to praxis – the Greek idea of making ourselves and our society good, and virtuous and beautiful and, yes, peaceful.

In the face of new problems and perennial issues, I want to be like the householder that Christ talks about in the Gospel of Matthew, who brings out of his house a treasure that is new and old. Put these together and try to find interesting, innovative solutions by drawing on ancient texts or classic texts, in dialogue with new problems. To do this, I want to use what is probably the most classic source on peace in the Catholic social tradition "*Pacem in Terris*", which is 60 years old this year. This is a significant year to look back at it, and look at it in relation to two key problems that I think are causing division. Maybe this text could help us in constructing social peace in the face of these two key causes of division.

The first one is our relation with the environment. What does building peace with the natural world mean? How can we do it when there's so much tension between ourselves about it? There's another set of problems relating to respect for rights, and the question of peace. The whole rights area is such a contested domain now with all kinds of things being called rights; the whole discourse about them seeming to be a source of social aggression - terms like culture wars - rather than with peace. I think we can look in *Pacem in Terris* for some kind of word about these two kinds of problems. Then I would like to connect what *Pacem in Terris* is saying with another text, which comes from the same historical period. I think you might find that connection surprising. And then, finally, we'll conclude.

Starting with *Pacem in Terris*. The key term that Pope John uses in his encyclical about peace is the term “order”. If *Pacem in Terris* was a piece of Blackpool rock, the word order would be going all the way through it from one end to the other.

Before continuing, I would like to invite the audience in this room to share their interpretation of the word order, the semantic field around order. *[This is what the audience shared: tidiness, structure, systematic law and order, control, natural, chaos, safety]*

There are different terms associated with order. Some of you might want to suspend your normal semantic field around this word, to open yourself to what the Pope is going to be saying to you in this document.

The main thing that Pope John is calling us to do in using the word order is to recognise the basic structure of reality, or the key characteristics of the world we live in. You might question what the word order has to do with the basic structure of reality. To understand why the Pope used that term, it will be helpful to know something about his background and his formation.

Pope John, like all Catholic priests before the Vatican Council, was formed within the manual traditions and all these manuals were full of quotes from St. Thomas Aquinas’ thinking. Many concepts and ideas emerge from St. Thomas's thought and order is one of them. Order was a very important term for St. Thomas. We find more specific background from the diaries of Pope John himself. In the Second World War in 1942, he was the apostolic delegate, the representative of the Pope, to Turkey and Greece. He was in Istanbul and started a retreat on the feast of Christ the King in 1942. The retreat-giver was talking to him about the image of the perfect Bishop using texts from Isidore of Seville. On the night of the first day of the retreat, he wrote in his diary:

*“The Bishop must be distinguished by his own understanding, and his adequate explanation to others, of the philosophy of history, even the history that is now, before our eyes, adding pages of blood to pages of political and social disorders. I want to re-read St. Augustine’s City of God, and draw from his doctrine the necessary material to form my own Judgment.”*

He reads St. Augustine’s City of God in which the key idea that he has connected with peace is the idea, in Latin, *tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquillity of order. When Pope John writes his encyclical on peace 20 years later, he has in mind the work of St. Augustine, which he wanted to make his own. He wanted to have his own idea about the philosophy of history.

I would like to mention one example of the kind of critique that this idea received. In commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Pacem in Terris*, Cardinal Roy, the

President of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, wrote a public letter to Pope Paul VI. In relation to the opening line of *Pacem in Terris*, he observed:

*“this word “order” jars the modern mentality, as does, even more, the idea that it summons up: a sort of complicated organic scheme or gigantic genealogical tree, in which each being and group has its predetermined place.”*

He suggests it would be better to use other words and provides a series of terms, finishing with the concept of “values”.

That was in 1973, but here in 2023 we are in very different circumstances. Our recovery of the idea of order, as presented in *Pacem in Terris*, could be very useful in dealing especially with those two problems I mentioned at the beginning.

The idea of order runs through *Pacem in Terris* from beginning to end. The very first phrase reads:

*“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.”*

If we really want peace, we have to go back to this order. There are six levels of order in the encyclical:

1. Order in the universe
2. Order (with)in human beings
3. Order between human persons
4. Order between members of a political community and its authorities
5. Order between political communities
6. Order that ought to obtain between individuals, social groups, and states to a worldwide community.

Before looking at how order is used at some of these levels, it is worth noting that the Pope says that the order in the world can be described partly in scientific terms, but it also refers to the overall goals of human beings and their relationships. That means we need to use philosophy and theology as well as science to talk about order, in its complete sense. We can note that some things that we could only describe on a philosophical level in the past are now being demonstrated on a scientific level. An impressive research source for this is the happiness research, because it is done all around the world.

Researchers found that increased income for those on low level incomes resulted in increased levels of happiness across different cultures. These two go together; but at a fairly low level, they start diverging. Income can continue to be increased but happiness does not increase at the same rate. Instead, it is much more correlated with the quality of relationships. This is a really interesting scientific result, which converges with the philosophical result.

Similar results are coming out of genetics, or out of game theory. There are many different sources that show we are very socially oriented beings. If we are talking about the basic structure of reality, and there's an honest search for this on the part of scientists, philosophers and theologians, then we should expect that they could converge. If science can develop more, and enter more into the domain that we thought was only philosophical and theological before and give insight into that, it will be no surprise that we see some convergence, because all of these thinkers and all of these scientists are engaged in an honest search for truth. They're trying to understand the basic structure of reality.

Let us now look at the first stage in Pope John's use of the idea of order. He starts with order in the universe. My guess is that this idea would have been less striking to an audience in the 1960s than it is to us now, which may explain why this part of the text is very short. It's only a couple of paragraphs. Nevertheless, what he has written here is quite striking. Although his way of writing is different from Pope Francis's, the content, I think, could have been written by Pope Francis, but he would do it in a different way. I quote from the second paragraph of the text:

*“That a marvellous order predominates in the world of living beings and in the forces of nature, is the plain lesson which the progress of modern research and the discoveries of technology teach us. And it is part of the greatness of man that he can appreciate that order, and devise the means for harnessing those forces.”*

Pope John moves to the second level, which is order within human beings, arguing that humans participate in the order of the universe and also have a special role in maintaining it. He says: *“God created man ‘in His own image and likeness’, endowed him with intelligence and freedom and made him Lord of Creation.”*

You might think that in the 1960s, scientists would say that it's just religion, just religious namby pamby stuff. But when we think now about this idea of the Anthropocene, the huge impact that we're having on our planet, and the capacity we have to change its structure, often in a negative way, maybe this idea of being the *'Lord of Creation'*, is not so far away from a possible mindset to think like that.

He says, *"God created man 'in His own image and likeness', endowed him with intelligence and freedom."* That's very important, the endowment. He *"endowed him with intelligence and freedom and made him Lord of Creation."* We'll come back to that later.

Without dwelling on this point, however, he immediately notes that between ourselves, there is *"disunity"*, which is in *"striking contrast to this perfect order in the universe"* such that relations between us only seem to be governable *"by force"*. And yet, there is a kind of order within us: *"the world's Creator has stamped man's inmost being with an order . . . And how could it be otherwise? All created being reflects the infinite wisdom of God. It reflects it all the more clearly, the higher it stands in the scale of perfection."*

As a classic thinker, he believes that human beings are higher up the scale than non-living or other living beings because of the intelligence and freedom that we have - because we can use our knowledge to do things for the good. We still have the problem of disunity and order coexisting side by side – what to make of it? In the next paragraph, the Pope argues that we have mistaken ideas of this order: *"Many people think that the laws which govern man's relations . . . are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemental forces of the universe. But it is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different."*

When the early economists were developing their models, Newton was seen as an enlightenment figure. He had brought light into the world with his ideas about physics. Then all the economists wanted to set up systems which were like the physical systems. It is these kinds of blind elemental forces that get transferred into our thinking about economics. However, the Pope said: *"the Father of the universe has inscribed these laws into man's nature, and that is where we must look for them."*

This brings me to another crucial point, which is that order in relation to human beings is expressed in classic Catholic thought in relation to *"natural law"*. This is a topic that cannot be properly addressed now. However, the basic idea of natural law is fairly simple – we are oriented to do what is good for us through our nature. At the level of other animals, they are oriented to do what is good for them, and for their species, through instinct whereas human beings are able to think and reason about this and choose between possible different goods. If I have two hours a week to spend on doing something interesting, I could learn Polish, or acrobatics, or visit a housebound person or so on.

As mentioned, the first practical principle of natural law thinking is to do good and avoid evil. There are two levels: the first, primary level regards human beings as they were made to be - before the Fall - as they truly could be. It is interesting that our understanding of good on this level really is accessible to all. It is inscribed in our nature. It is world peace – we all know we would be better off

if we had world peace. It is being kind to each other. This is our participation in the natural law that the Pope is talking about. Since we know we're not actually without sin, or we're not fully developed, these ideas of good often seem utopian, but they remain crucial as goals that we are trying to achieve if society could gradually move in this direction.

The secondary level of natural law relates to the historical experience of being human which is full of disunity, full of sin, full of weakness, full of all the problems we know. It depends on historical circumstances, cultural traditions and so on. At this level, it is much more difficult to work out what is the good thing to do; more detailed theoretical and technical knowledge is required to grasp what is good for us.

Turning to economics, the natural law tradition would indicate that, at the first level, we should have an economy that includes everybody and it should have a sustainable relationship with our environment. If people on the street were asked what a perfect economy would be like, the most common replies would include these two themes. That's the thinking on the first level of natural law but that is not where we are. A communist system, having everything for everybody, doesn't work because we're weak, we're sinful. So the Church would say that we need private property. This is important. We know from historical reasons that if we don't have private property, we won't achieve the goods and make the effort to produce things in the way we do when we have ownership. So there is the idea of distribution and involvement that stays there. Or people sometimes see private property as a social mortgage; the way the Church thinks about private property.

So natural law has these two levels, it's about achieving the good at these two levels.

The second point to make is that natural law thinking also involves taking seriously what are usually called "inclinations" – a sense of hunger, for instance, will drive us to eat, and that is basically a good thing, though it can become disordered for a variety of reasons. We also have intellectual curiosity which drives us to learn and that is usually a good thing too although, again, it can be misused. This leads us towards a corollary body of thought about virtues. There is more to be said, but this brief synthesis of some of the key points in natural law should give the sense that, in this way of thinking, the kind of beings we are shows us how we should behave. That is how we can participate in the order of the universe that the Pope is talking about. This seems to be important in a world that has learnt that it needs to deal with the nature around it according to the way it is, the laws that govern it, and not just the way we would like to deal with it. The Pope, in *Pacem in Terris*, connects that realization with the idea that, in a similar way, we can only have peace among ourselves if we respect the law inscribed in our hearts - the kinds of beings we are too.

This brings us to our second point: the relation between rights and order. At the third level of order in the encyclical when he is talking about the relation between human beings, Pope John focuses on the recognition of what he calls “one key 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”*.

He then goes on to discuss some of the rights human beings have. There are 25 listed, backed up with quotations from St Paul, early Church thinkers, Aquinas and more recent papal encyclicals. You can see that he is trying to say this rights language is absolutely solidly in the Christian tradition. He is using absolutely standard sources to back up this thinking. He then moves to the corresponding duties. On this point, it is interesting to note that the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also wanted to include duties in their document, but since they could not get agreement on the duties, they ended up publishing the Declaration only with the rights. Duties, of course, place rights within an order, since we obviously cannot have rights without the duty to respect them.

However, in the *Pacem in Terris* text, the first duties listed refer to our actions that should be in accord with our own rights. It reads: *“The right to life involves the duty to preserve one’s life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it.”*

This reinforces the sense that we are endowed with rights, as the text above says – we are given them as a gift through our nature - and that we therefore need to respect our own natural rights, even before we respect those of others. He uses natural rights and human rights more or less interchangeably, I don't see any difference in the way he uses those two terms.

The idea of rights here, through its discussion of duties, is set into a vision of order, although this is no simple “law and order” discourse. *Pacem in Terris* also says that if laws are enacted that break the natural order, the just thing to do is not to keep them. I quote: *“Laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience. Indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse. As St. Thomas teaches . . . ‘we maintain that human law has the rationale of law in so far as it is in accordance with right reason, and as such it obviously derives from eternal law. A law which is at variance with reason is to that extent unjust and has no longer the rationale of law. It is rather an act of violence’.”*



All of these points – natural law as written in our hearts, the connection between order and rights, and the possibility of resisting against unjust laws - come together in another text published five days after *Pacem in Terris*. On April 16 1963, Dr Martin Luther King published a letter from Birmingham jail, which quotes exactly the same text from St. Thomas. He was responding to the hypothetical question: *“How can you advocate breaking some laws and keeping others?”*

It is not known whether Martin Luther King saw *Pacem in Terris* before he wrote that letter. He was already in jail when it came out so, although it is not very likely, it is not impossible. It would be even more impressive if he had not seen it, because he ends up in a very similar position. I quote from his letter: *“The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of law: just and unjust. A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.”*

Both Pope John and Martin Luther King think that authentic rights claims and right order are mutually implied, rather than being opposites. Keeping order should be about maintaining authentic rights and that the ground of both is the nature with which we are endowed.

Given how important Martin Luther King is in debates about rights today, pointing out his use of the same ideas of order and natural law that we find in the classic Catholic theology of *Pacem in Terris* may again be helpful to us in building social peace.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question of faith in the crisis of today’s society. In another part of his letter, Martin Luther King argues that crisis is an important moment for people to realise what is unjust in their society and to have to face that. However, an important French philosopher theologian, Jean Luc Marion, has suggested in his 2017 book *“The Catholic Moment”* that the problem for us in the West is not that it is in crisis, but that it is not in enough of a crisis. He says it is in *“stagnant decadence”* or a *“crisis of crisis”*. He continues: *“It is precisely by the infinite deferral of the moment of crisis that the modern world defeats the gospel, since the gospel is a call to crisis that demands a decision.”*

In so far as we are no longer able to defer our crisis, we may be more open to face the wrongs of our age and more open to the need for the kind of thinking about order and natural law that Pope John proposes as the basis for peace. This is what we found in the economic sphere after the financial crisis, as the experience of Blueprint (in which many people here and Loughlin, who I mentioned earlier, was pivotal) showed clearly. After the financial crisis, things changed. People started asking different questions, they started looking for new answers. The crisis was very difficult but it did break something open, start something new.

The recent announcement by Ayaan Hirsi Ali of her adoption of Christianity is also instructive. In her Unherd article, she talks not so much about the promise of personal salvation, but more that Christianity has demonstrated its capacity to build a culture that: *“consists of an elaborate set of ideas and institutions designed to safeguard human life, freedom and dignity — from the nation state and the rule of law to the institutions of science, health and learning”*. She had decided to become a Christian; how exactly the realization that Christianity can offer us help will affect the crisis of belief in the West more generally is still to be seen. At the very least, I think it should affect our catechetical programmes and the way the Gospel is shared with non-believers.

The goal of this talk was to suggest that the old idea of order, in connection with that of natural law, as presented by *Pacem in Terris*, and alongside Martin Luther King’s letter from Birmingham jail, could help us in dealing with two of our new sources of division and in building social peace in our day.

Thank you very much.

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