

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITAS LATERANENSIS

ACADEMIA ALFONSIANA

INSTITUTUM THEOLOGIAE MORALIS

STUDIA MORALIA

IV

1966

COMMENTARIA
IN CONSTITUTIONEM PASTORALEM
GAUDIUM ET SPES
CONCILII VATICANI II

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THE MORAL THEOLOGIAN AND THE PROBLEM OF PEACE

SUMMARIUM

In capite quinto Constitutionis Pastoralis principia belli iusti exponuntur; auctor vero huius studii, ulterius progrediens, autumat, maioris remedii in mala societatis hodiernae esse caritatem heroicam. Proponit solutiones magis rigorosas quod attinet abolitionem belli, servitium militare, incrementum demographicum.

The climax of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in Today's World is reached in chapter five devoted to the Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations¹. The doctrine expounded in this section presupposes both an intimate commitment to the world on the part of the Church, and an acceptance of the phenomenological conclusions concerning the nature of contemporary man and his place in the world, arrived at in the first part of the document. These factors create a new atmosphere and at least a new evaluation of the factual considerations that must enter into the moralist's judgments as he struggles to formulate the ethical obligation of the Christian in the contemporary world.

Of singular importance in this regard is a subtle change in the universalist suppositions concerning the validity and applicability of Catholic moral imperatives. While the older moralist was content to assert conclusions of the natural law as binding all of mankind, even though many of its prescriptions were not acknowledged as such by the vast majority of living men, the

¹ Cf. A. WENGER, *Vatican II, Chronique de la quatrième session* (Paris, 1966) 262-282; *L'Action Populaire, Gaudium et Spes* (Paris, 1966) 309-352; XAVIER RYNNE, *The Fourth Session* (New York, 1966) 225-230.

Conciliar Fathers have demonstrated a sensitivity to the ethical perceptions of all men of good will. Thus they acknowledge that in its striving toward maturity, the human family is inspired by principles that are in harmony with the Gospel message; and they agree in concentrating on the ideal of creating a stabilized peace that will render the world a fit habitation for a more truly human life.

This is not a reversal into the acceptance of a relativistic standard; nor is it a denial of the Church's eschatological perspective. But it is a literal acceptance of Christ's assertion that « the Son of Man came [into the world] not to be served, but to serve » (Mt 20. 28). While occasionally lost sight of, this consciousness of having an important part to play in man's terrestrial development has been a characteristic of Christianity from the start², despite an obvious temptation to withdrawal under the pressure of persecution in the first centuries of its existence, and the experience of rejection by a large proportion of the intellectuals of the Enlightenment, and of the modern political and scientific age. The insistence of the last four Popes — Benedict XV, Pius XI, Pius XII and John XXIII together with Pope Paul's United Nations visit — has made it clear that the Church is to cooperate with mankind in the creation of a better world; this teaching has now received conciliar status. Its implications for the moralist are substantial³.

It is obvious that after hesitating between a prophetic and a pastoral approach to the problematic of peace, the Council fathers decided to lay down specific norms dealing with the current world situation⁴. In so doing, they disappointed many observers who

² Cf. *Epist. Clementis Rom.* I, xxxv-xxxviii; *Epist. ad Diognetum*, v and vi, esp. 1: « What the soul is in the body, that the Christians are to the world. »

³ The opening paragraph of this document speaks of the human family facing « an hour of supreme crisis in its advance toward maturity (*in suae maturitatis processu*) » (par. 77), thus reminding the moralist of his obligation to keep up with the signs of the times. »

⁴ By concentrating more on practical efforts than on the restatement of principles, the Council Fathers hoped to commit the Christian conscience to co-operation in concrete programs within the secular as well as the religious spheres. Cf. R. BOSCH, *Sociologie de la Paix* (Paris, 1965); E. PENROSE, *The Revolution in International Relations* (London, 1965).

had hoped that following the lead of Pope John's Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and Pope Paul's *Discourse to the United Nations*, the Council prelates would simply have condemned war out-of-hand as an evil, and as a useless means for solving human disputes and political disagreements. However neither of the two Popes had been so absolute. John labelled modern war «unthinkable,» and Paul called for its abolishment; but neither Pontiff accepted the pacifistic challenge of absolute condemnation⁵.

The Council accepted the reality of man's sinful and frequently irresponsible obstinacy and blindness; and called attention to the danger to modern civilization posed by perverse ideologies that could engulf mankind, should the men committed to decency and justice forego the obligation of self-defense. In so doing, the Council demonstrated its consciousness of the moral perspective within the realistic framework to which it was committed by the anthropological and sociological considerations in the earlier part of the document. Instead of a wholesale condemnation of war as the final excrescence of injustice, however, it prescribed a fundamental study of the conditions that occasion armed conflict, and urged men and nations to concentrate attention on specific remedies for the economic and social ills of the world. Here again the document has proven disappointing to ideological minded individuals who desired an outright condemnation of false or perverse social doctrines as the cause of world upsets and war. But the Fathers viewed such doctrines as rather the occasion than the cause of national and world conflict; these perverse theories frequently being rather the result of fundamental injustices in man's social and economic relationships.

I.

While world peace is essentially an enterprise of justice (Is. 32. 7) that must involve nations and all mankind in a continual cooperative effort, the precarious nature of human justice, or the

⁵ JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963: AAS 55 (1963) 291: «In this age of ours that glories in its atomic power, it is *irrational* to think that war is any longer a means for obtaining justice when rights have been violated»; PAUL VI, *Discours a l'Assemblée des Nations Unies*, 4 October 1965. Cf. P. RAMSEY, *The Vatican Council on Modern war* in Theol. Stud. 27 (1966) 179-203.

attempt to render to every man his due, has been well demonstrated by the war laden history of the world during the last five thousand years⁶. Social theories and ideologies that have their foundation in a terrestrial view of man and his destiny have proven themselves inadequate in the struggle to bring even a semblance of peace and mutual respect in human relationships. It must be admitted likewise that the Christian ordering of life over the past 2000 years has not been any more successful in bringing about a peaceful co-existence even between nations that confessedly were committed to the Christian creed. But it is also obvious that the Christian experiment has never received a fair trial⁷.

Basic to the Christian creed is the fact that as sons of God, all men are brothers; and that their relationship to one another is to be founded upon charity or love. The Johannine observation is absolute: «If a man does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he say he loves God whom he cannot see?»⁸. Thus the fundamental ordering of the Christian ethic immediately supercedes the realm of justice and finds its basis in a respect for one another that proceeds from the charity of Christ, the Son of God. This means in concrete terms that every man is his brother's keeper in that his attitudes and actions have a bearing not merely on his immediate associates in his family, or among friends and acquaintances, but among all men, including those who make themselves his enemy⁹.

It is with this concept that the Christian moralist must begin

⁶ St. Augustine, in *De civitate Dei* (IV. 4) had summed up the history of the world up to his times in the scornful phrase, «*Remota justitia, quid sunt regna nisi latrocinia*» indicating that there was little evidence of justice in any secular state, and much less in international relations. The Council however chose to take a more optimistic, even though equally realistic, view of the possibility of working toward international peace, relying on the commitment of so many apparently enlightened «men of good will» in the present epoch.

⁷ In the expression of G. K. Chesterton: «Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.»

⁸ 1 Jn 4: 20; cf. *L'Action populaire, Gaudium et Spes*, 311, n. 167; R. COSTE, *Dynamique de la paix* (Paris, 1965).

⁹ Chapter 78 of the document discusses the relationship between justice and charity with the reminder that for the Christian, conscious of redemption by the suffering of Christ on the Cross, the obligation to cooperate with all mankind in working for peace is an absolute, certified by St. Paul (Eph. 4. 15-16).

his considerations of justice; otherwise he quickly loses himself in the discussion of a series of relationships that have a realistic bearing on everyday life in the family, in social, economic, and political commerce, but that fall far short of the requirements of Christian-orientated human relationships that can bring about peace and harmony in the various stages of human life and achievement¹⁰.

The fundamental reason why an ethic based on natural law is not sufficient is the simple fact that man by nature is self-centered and selfish. He thus finds it difficult if not impossible to discover the true limits of what is his due; and is constantly tempted to exaggerate and demand satisfactions in accordance with ill-conceived desires that impinge upon the rights of his neighbor. It is in this perspective that the Christian concept of justice must immediately insist upon the obligations of charity; and extend this charity to the universality of mankind. Thus the deordination of modern international society has a cure in the obligation of each individual not merely to respect his neighbor's rights, but to love his fellow man in such a realistic fashion that he must be conscious of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, supporting the downtrodden, educating the illiterate, promoting justice for the exploited, and actively seeking to love even his enemy. In the structured order of modern society, this means working for social and international justice, at home first, and then abroad. It means beginning by the adoption of benevolent attitudes on the concrete level of race, color, creed, and political and cultural beliefs, as well as in the toleration of personal idiosyncracies in the family and on the neighborhood scale.

II.

With this as background, it is legitimate to ask what might have been the result of a conciliar condemnation outlawing any resort to arms other than those needed for local police measures; and this, on the assumption that modern warfare by its very

¹⁰ The moral manuals discuss the so-called «order of charity» beginning with relations between husband and wife, children, etc. in almost Stoic fashion.

complication and destructiveness is neither truly limitable, nor can it be encompassed within the classical rules for defining a just, defensive action. Actually, basing their final decision on a familiarity with the perverse tendencies of even redeemed human nature within the Christian sacramental complex, the Fathers of Vatican Council II settled for a realistic evaluation of the Catholic moral teaching concerning the waging of purely defensive war, while they called for the building of peace in justice and charity. Movements and efforts were made to go a good distance beyond this realism: to call for the outlawing of all war without exception; to give total support to the notion of conscientious objection; to recognize pacifism as a truly Christian attitude; to denounce the production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons as immoral; and to declare their possible use, even as deterrants, as *semper et pro semper* evil. But all such attempts were headed off in favor of the traditionally prudential approach.

The final consideration in all these judgments seemed to stem from a fear that a perverse type of atheistic government might gain control of the world, or a large part thereof, and reduce Christianity to an insignificant sect. This is an extreme supposition, of course, but not far from the mind of many Christian leaders. The destruction of the personal property concept, and of current governmental and financial structures at which atheistic marxism is aimed, seemed as much a part of their fearful attitude as was their worry about the spiritual perversion of souls¹¹. Many of these ecclesiastics seemed to feel that the only true protection for the Church is the preservation of the present, accidentally-based, political and economic system. Yet it is within this very system that the Council recognized the roots and the cause of the present continuing exploitation of the vast majority of mankind¹².

It seems most difficult to adjust such thinking to the extremism of Christ's cry: «The foxes have holes, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has not whereon to lay his head»¹³.

¹¹ Cf. WENGER, *Vatican II, Quatrième session*, 256-261.

¹² Chap. 83; cf. WENGER IV, 265-67; *L'Action populaire* 331-333.

¹³ *Lc* 9: 58; cf. C.H. DODD, *Gospel and Law*, ch. IV: The Law of christ (London, 1943).

It is likewise notable that the early Christians, despite a precarious position in the economic and political system in which they lived, managed not merely to survive, but to convert a large portion of their contemporaries, particularly during the decades when they were outlawed and persecuted.

Beyond reflecting the attempt made by Pope John to separate the doctrine of atheism from the communist movement in its historical expression and development¹⁴, and Pope Paul's analysis of the relations of the Church with men of various degrees of belief and unbelief in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, this chapter of the constitution shows no serious attention given to the analysis of what might have happened had the Council come out with a clear call for the abolition of armed forces of all kinds. Such a call would not have been heeded on any proportionate scale of course; and a number of bishops pointed out not merely its ineffectiveness, but the danger it presented of having the Council considered a purely idealistic congress out of touch with modern man.

But there is no certainty that such a declaration might not have been heeded by millions of people all over the world. Had it been heralded as a great Christian crusade, who knows but that it might have echoed across Europe, and the Asian continent, up and down Africa and the Americas, and have bounded from island to island in the Pacific ocean down to Australia, New Zealand, and the ends of the earth, in somewhat similar fashion to the cry «God Wills It!» of Pope Urban II that started the original Crusade, and that made its way all through their Mediterranean bounded world.

This is of course merely a hypothesis. But it has a bearing on the moral evaluation of the Council's teaching. Might not a moment for evangelical boldness have been called for? Had it been

¹⁴ *Pacem in Terris*, AAS 55 (1963) 300: «a false philosophy of the nature, origin, and purpose of men and the world,» should not be identified with an economic, social, cultural or political program, «even when such a program draws its origin and inspiration from that philosophy». While par. 85 does not refer directly to this caution of Pope John, it confines its admonition to stating that a «limit must be placed on ... machinations for the purpose of spreading and imposing false ideologies» while calling for international cooperation among all nations and peoples.

tried, the immediate effect would have been most difficult for intelligent and conscientious Catholics and Christians in government and in the military. But it is these very men who might have been the first to hail the emancipation it would offer them from the horrible burden of making earth-shaking decisions involving both the lives of other men, and the possible future of present day civilization. There would not have been a wholesale abdication of responsibilities on the part of these people, for the Council's action would have been a call, not an immediate denunciation. But its impact could have been great, even in the councils of the mighty on all sides of the bamboo and iron curtains.

A similar consideration might be turned to the problem of patriotism and conscientious objection. Should every bishop and cleric have been called to disassociate himself from every form of military service, and Christians generally given the impression that a pacifistic attitude was much more in keeping with the Christian message, the world wide effect would certainly have been startling. This proposal, though quickly squashed, seemed to have been on the minds of many Europeans in particular, still gravely conscience-stricken over the scandal given in two world wars by Catholics and Christians murdering each other on both sides of the battlefields¹⁵.

Again the practical problem of all but deserting the millions of men and women involved in the great military establishments presents itself. But on a battlefield, despite the possibly heroic ubiquity of the chaplain, few men are conscious of spiritual values; and the vast majority are so occupied with logistics, strategy, tactics, and merely keeping alive, that they have precious little

¹⁵ The document « praises those who renounce the use of violence in vindictation of their rights... »; it also recognizes that those who devote themselves to the military service of their country should regard themselves as the agents of security and freedom of peoples. Finally, despite vigorous objection and the attempt to hedge the idea with legal considerations, the Council justified the right of the conscientious objector: « It seems right that laws make humane provisions for the case of those who, for reasons of conscience, refuse to bear arms, provided that they agree to serve the human community in some other way. » Cf. R. BOSCH, *La Société Internationale et L'Église* (Paris, 1961) 70-71, who discusses the ideas of the sixteenth century theologian F. de Victoria on conscientious objection, a moral position lost sight of by later moralists, and now restored by the council.

time to think of their religious commitments in a formal fashion. Even where there are highly spiritual minded combatants, the sacramental system is only a secondary consideration under emergency conditions. Again the risk of a possible, tremendous moral reawakening might have been worth considering.

III.

In the midst of this chapter's discussion of the limitation and possible abolition of the evils of war, and of the upbuilding of a stabilized peace, there are realistic observations regarding a respect for the dignity of the individual that begins with his provisioning, education, and vocational development. But here again, the document could be considered somewhat less than heroic. The demographic problem is touched upon but lightly. It is a complicated matter, for there are countries suffering from under-population problems created by their economic situation *vis-a-vis* world trade, as well as by tremendous local disproportions between the wealthy and the poverty stricken. But above all other considerations, there are right now simply too many mouths to feed in several great complexes of lands and nations, where over half the population are literally starving. There are simply too many people for the resources immediately available; and the local and foreign governmental, as well as private, aid programs have not succeeded in alleviating this situation. This close-to-starvation condition means likewise that such people do not receive the basic education needed to exercise the minimum of human dignity required to accept the message of the Gospel, or to exercise its tenets, should they have been traditionally possessed of them.

What then is the moral evaluation to be put on the Council's brave, positive, but in the end inadequate proposal for a startling solution to this problem? Do the complicated political, economic, social, and religious factors that are involved in preventing two or three well-to-do nations from aligning all the technical know-how needed to feed the whole world, excuse the Council from having proposed a possibly revolutionary solution of just that proportion? This is a realistic consideration that did enter the mind of many prelates and experts; and it was discussed privately,

and attempts were made to give consideration to the possibility that the Church might prescribe at least a temporary limitation of births — on the part of parents, using of course legitimate means — as a moral obligation. But fear that such a solution might be interpreted in a general sense, rather than as a particular measure in a definite set of circumstances, prevented its conciliar consideration.

Such a suggestion need not have prejudiced the outcome of the Papal Commission's Study concerning Demographic and Family Problems since the Council has already certified the right of parents to regulate the size of their families¹⁶. It would merely have permitted the application of this principle on a large scale in keeping with the dire needs of a particular nation or group of people.

These are some of the lines upon which the current moralist should possibly be thinking as he attempts to put the teaching of the Pastoral Constitution into effect. The document itself is much wider in its teaching and perspectives than is indicated here. But its purpose will not be served if it is merely used as a text to be exegeted according to standard procedures; or if it is accepted primarily as a summation of the Church's least-common-denominator in moral directives. For meanwhile the Church is involved in the mystery of «filling out the sufferings of Christ's body until He comes»¹⁷. This mystery-laden directive should lie heavily on the conscience of every Christian, and more particularly on that of the moralist.

Part of that suffering is surely the obligation of thinking through the moral obligations of the Christian, and of all men living in a world whose very contingency offers both a fascinating

¹⁶ Moral theologians generally were in agreement that the Church, in particular circumstances, might have to counsel people regarding the necessity of limiting the number of their offspring for the good of society. The document (par. 87) does make an advance on the question of means, stating: «Men should be informed judiciously of scientific advances in exploring methods whereby spouses can be helped in regulating the number of their children, and whose safeness has been well proven, and whose harmony with the moral order has been ascertained.» Cf. *L'Action Populaire*, 343-344.

¹⁷ Col. 1. 24-25; Eph. 3. 1, 13; Ph 2. 17; cf. R. VÖLKL, *Christ und Welt Nach dem N.T.* (Wurzburg, 1961) 304 and 315f.

distraction to the fairly well-off, and an excruciating agony to the deprived and underprivileged. What is certain now is that it is within the perspective of man's moral endeavors that the Body of Christ is to achieve its consummation in this world. It is within man's capability now to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and educate the ignorant, and thus remove one of the greatest obstacles to world peace and stability. By the same token, it will be possible in the very near future to «preach the gospel to every creature». But the message will not be received unless it is accompanied by a heroic attempt to imitate Christ in his «compassion for the multitude.» In the Council's teaching on the Fostering of Peace, there are elements of such an endeavor. Tomorrow's moral theologian must be prepared to demonstrate the need and the possibility of that heroicity.

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