

# FORMING CONSCIENCES FOR FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

## Article #4: War and Peace

### THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Jesus proclaimed a peaceable kingdom. The Gospel of Mathew depicts Jesus as the New Moses who possesses divine authority to promulgate a New Law. The Beatitudes proclaim blessed the peacemakers, the merciful, and the meek. Our Lord forbids retaliation and commands love for one's enemies. Listen to these words: "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love you enemies and pray for those who persecute you," says the Lord. Jesus taught us to practice nonviolence in our daily interactions.

Our Lord preaches peace to Israel and warns them that they are courting disaster by insisting upon violent resistance against Imperial Rome. He even weeps over the city of Jerusalem, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" They didn't know.

Barabbas is portrayed by St. Mathew as a Messiah figure and an alter ego of Jesus. The way of Barabbas, as a revolutionary, is one of violence and vengeance. The way of Jesus, as the true Messiah, is one of peace and nonviolence. The people choose Barabbas instead of Jesus.

Jesus also behaves very differently than the Jewish martyrs in the Old Testament who cursed their persecutors while being tortured. Instead, the Lord prays for them, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Jesus implored His Father to show Divine Mercy to His torturers and killers.

### NO TO VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF GOD

How do we make sense of the divine violence present in the Old Testament after having considered the explicitly non-violent and downright peaceful teachings and example of Jesus? There are many different approaches to the subject of divine violence in the Hebrew Scriptures. Tremper Longman III offers a compelling hypothesis in his book *Confronting Old Testament Controversies: Pressing Questions about Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence*. He seeks to answer the question: Does God kill? Longman argues that the Old Testament portrays a series of phases that ultimately culminate with the victory of Jesus at the final judgment. They are:

Phase one: God fights the flesh and blood enemies of Israel.

Phase two: God fights Israel.

Phase three: God will come and fight Israel's oppressors.

Phase four: Jesus fights spiritual powers and authorities.

Phase five: Jesus wins the final battle.

Violence and war in the name of God is not taught or encouraged in the New Testament because of the phase of salvation ushered by the advent of the Messiah. "We need to remember that we live in the period between the first and second comings of Christ (phase four), the period of spiritual warfare. Christians should never use violence to further the gospel or in name of Christ," says Longman. If his exegesis of the Bible is correct, and I believe it is, we can give a definitive NO to war and violence in the name of God. Violence can never be used to further the ends of the kingdom of God.

In Mark's Gospel (Mk 6:7-32), Jesus sends the Twelve on mission. They are allowed to wear sandals and bring a staff, but they are disallowed by Jesus from carrying bread, bags, money, and an extra tunic. They disciples are to trust in Divine Providence and not have another "agenda". This is a very different approach to evangelization than the methods employed by some believers

through the centuries. “Across the centuries, powerful Muslim and Christian communities have often happily followed in the wake of conquering armies,” writes Kenneth Bailey in *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey From Psalm 23 To The New Testament*. Sad but true.

## WORKING FOR PEACE

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us how to bring about a more peaceful world.

“Respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is “the tranquility of order.” Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity (CCC, 2304).”

Poland was ruled by a Communist Regime that reported to the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1989. The influential leadership of Pope John Paul II led to the downfall of the Leninist/Marxist system of government. The Holy Father traveled to his native country in 1979 and led a nine-day pilgrimage. The Solidarity movement began after his visit to Poland.

Filip Mazurczak wrote an article for Catholic World Report in which he said,

“Solidarity was the largest nonviolent protest movement in history. Even though non-believers and religious minorities were prominent in Solidarity’s leadership, the Catholic nature of the labor union was unmistakable. The striking workers didn’t simply want material or political gains. They wanted the government to

respect their God-given dignity. During Solidarity protests, the workers prayed and priests celebrated Mass. Images of John Paul II and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa were ubiquitous. Outspoken priests like Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, who was brutally murdered by the regime, attracted tens of thousands of workers and (often secular) intellectual dissidents to their Masses.”

Sacrifices were made for human rights and human dignity. “Yes, we love peace, but we are not willing to take wounds for it, as we are for war,” said John Andrew Holmes. The people of Poland were willing to take wounds for peace.

## SELF DEFENSE

When efforts for peace fail, then what?

Let’s ask this question. How ought a sovereign nation respond when their borders are invaded by a terrorist group or another country? Church teaching does affirm a right to self-defense. “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is front of him, but because he loves what is behind him,” writes G.K. Chesterton. It is a morally right, when motivated by love, to take up arms to defend one’s home, family, and country.

One’s life is a gift from God and there is a responsibility to care for it. That is why the decision to defend one’s life is an act of love towards self. However, one must use moderate self-defense and avoid using more force than is necessary in the hostile situation.

Those with legitimate authority have the duty to protect others. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says,

“Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the

common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the civic community entrusted to their responsibility (CCC, 2265).”

John the Baptist was preaching repentance when he was approached by soldiers who asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation; and be content with your wages (Lk 3: 14).” Jesus was approached by a Roman centurion and the Lord expressed astonishment over his faith (see Mt 8:5-13). It is notable that neither John the Baptist nor Jesus Christ told the soldiers to quit their jobs. Perhaps they recognized the legitimate role they played in society.

## JUST WAR

The Catholic Church does offer principles from Sacred Tradition about the commencement and prosecution of war in the modern world. Here is what the catechism says,

“The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;

- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine (CCC, 2243).”

Do you believe that the current wars in the Middle East and Ukraine meet these criteria?

Pope Francis has been critical of just war theory. He has been outspoken in advocating for peace. In *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father writes,

“Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil. Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims. Let us look once more at all those civilians whose killing was considered ‘collateral damage’. Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation or chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence, look at reality through their eyes, and listen with an open heart to the stories they tell. In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naive for choosing peace” (FT 261).

## **PACIFISM**

Cardinal Francis George once said that the world needs pacifists just like it needs celibates. Celibacy is eschatologically advanced in the sense that it anticipates the way things will be when the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in at the end of time. There is no marriage in heaven and there will be no marriage in the new heavens and the new earth. However, if everyone was celibate now there would be no human beings!!

In a similar way, pacifism points forward to the day when peace will reign and the “lion will lie down with the lamb”. The way of nonviolent resistance offers a powerful prophetic witness to our violent world. However, in our fallen, conflictual world the police need to be able to stop a mass shooter quickly and decisively when he or she is attempting to kill kids at a school.