



The Global Quest for *Tranquillitas Ordinis*

Pacem in Terris, Fifty Years Later



Pacem in Terris reflected a profound sense of its own historical moment, both sacred and secular. In less than five weeks' time (11 October – 16 November 1962), Pope John XXIII had convened the Second Vatican Council, negotiated behind the scenes during the Cuban crisis, and had learned from his physicians that he only had a short time to live. Officially published on Maundy Thursday (11 April 1963), *Pacem in Terris* is often called his “last will and testament”. The encyclical’s approach to “reading the signs of the times” would be incorporated only a few years later by the Council’s Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS §44). In his [World Day of Peace Address](#) (2003), marking the fortieth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, Pope [John Paul II](#) said: “Looking at the present and into the future with the eyes of faith and reason, Blessed John XXIII discerned deeper historical currents at work. Things were not always what they seemed on the surface. Despite wars and rumours of wars, something more was at work in human affairs, something that to the Pope looked like the promising beginning of a spiritual revolution” (WDP, §3). Commenting on the sub-title of the encyclical – “On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty” – Pope John Paul insisted that these are the “essential requirements of the human spirit”, and therefore of a global community bound together not by coercion or by the mere absence of war, but rather the most deeply human actions of discovering and acknowledging the truth, respecting and protecting the rights of others, sharing our goods of mind and spirit with others, and freely assuming responsibility for our own choices. These principles, he explained, constitute the foundations for peace, properly and fully understood: “Boldly, but with all humility, I would like to suggest that the Church’s fifteen-hundred-year-old teaching on peace as “*tranquillitas ordinis* – the tranquillity of order” as Saint Augustine called it (*De Civitate Dei*, 19, 13), which was

brought to a new level of development forty years ago by *Pacem in Terris*, has a deep relevance for the world today, for the leaders of nations as well as for individuals" (WDP, §6). The Eighteenth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences brings us to the very eve of the fiftieth anniversary of Pope John's great encyclical. Given PASS Council's decision (5 May 2010) to prepare materials that may be helpful to the Church's observance of this anniversary, the Academy will consider where we stand a generation later with regard to the encyclical's main themes and proposals. We will do so in the spirit of interpretation recommended by Pope [Benedict](#) in [Caritas in Veritate](#) (2009): "Coherence does not mean a closed system: on the contrary, it means dynamic faithfulness to a light received. The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging" (CV §12). In order to discern the signs of the times today, the Academy has two important tasks. First, to discern the new truths, especially scientific ones such as micro- and macrophysics, the genetic code, the beginning and end of human life, climate change, etc., which, although not directly salvific, explain nature and the human body and brain. Moreover, to interpret other issues, problems, and still unrealized opportunities which affect the tranquillity of order in the global commons. Second, to identify the agents, the new social and political ideas and authorities that influence our global commons, and the potential they represent. In addition, to examine the new possibilities that might lead to a global governance. These two tasks are necessarily related, for it is not enough to identify certain truths, issues and problems; it is also necessary to recognize the agents, ideas, and authorities who might provide solutions. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, the quest for a "greater degree of international ordering" must be "inspired and governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore capable of responding to demands of the human family through binding international rules and through structures capable of harmonizing the day-to-day unfolding of the lives of peoples" ([Address to the U.N. General Assembly](#), 18 April 2008). None of this can happen without human action and creativity. "Peace", Benedict says, "is a gift that God entrusts to human responsibility so that it might be cultivated through dialogue and respect for the rights of all, reconciliation and forgiveness" ([Angelus](#), 28 March 2010).

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