



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the children of God”. Ending the wars in Ukraine and beyond

Science and Ethics of Happiness and Wellbeing



Europe is once again wracked by war, and the peacemakers so blessed of Jesus are pushed aside by those urging for more war. Each day brings news of more terrible destruction and dislocation, and more vociferous calls for escalation of the war. Ukraine pleads for more heavy weaponry to repel the Russian invasion; Russia promises to achieve its war aims in Ukraine; the US declares that it aims to defend Ukraine and “weaken Russia”; and few leaders – apart from Pope Francis – speak about peace negotiations.

We are caught in an upward spiral of escalation and destruction, with many more wars being waged all around the world. Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has warned us that we are already involved in a piecemeal World War III, and this grim and foreboding prophecy is becoming ever more real with the war against Ukraine, while this reality is being overlooked by most world leaders. The total wars of the 20th century killed tens of millions of people and stained humanity for generations to come. In his Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy powerfully expressed our modern existential condition: “The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life.” A total war in the 21st century, in a world filled with nuclear weapons, would end civilization, and possibly humanity itself, irreversibly damaging our habitat and planet Earth.

Over two and a half millennia ago, the prophet Isaiah expressed the yearning for a world where war is ended, declaring, “He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many

peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war” (Isaiah 2:4). These words are inscribed on the wall facing the United Nations building in New York, and express humanity’s shared hopes for a world in peace.

This workshop, part of the Science and Ethics for Happiness and Well-being program hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, will discuss the world’s current conflicts with a view to promoting peacemaking and transforming swords into plowshares. The meeting will explore the deep roots of the current conflict, their geopolitical as well as local dimensions, the risks of escalation, and the “off ramps” to peace through diplomacy. Conflicts such as the war against Ukraine are propelled by many deadly currents, miscalculations, hatreds, and mistaken ideas. There exist ample opportunities to identify and collaborate on common interests that can lead to peace. The workshop will search for those common interests that can bring the fighting to a quick end through peacemaking rather than war-making.

In 1962, exactly 60 years ago, the world arrived at the nuclear precipice in a dynamic similar to that of today. The great powers of that day, the United States and Soviet Union, were engaged in a tit-for-tat escalation of hostilities that nearly led to global destruction. President Kennedy and Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev ended the Cuban Missile Crisis not through war but through diplomacy and compromise. The following spring, Pope John XXIII issued *Pacem in Terris*, which inspired both Kennedy and Khrushchev to negotiate more deeply for a more thorough peace. Inspired by Pope John XXIII, they agreed on the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in the summer of 1963.

In reaching that agreement, Kennedy spoke of peaceful diplomacy in words that are as important and true today as they were six decades ago:

So, let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.

Guided by the ancient and ongoing yearnings for peace, the workshop on June 6-7 is dedicated to the search for common interests and a world that is safe for diversity.