OUR NEW MOMENT:

RENEWING CATHOLIC TEACHING ON WAR AND PEACE

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I have been asked to speak today about Catholic teaching on war and peace as it has evolved since the end of the Second World War, and the renewal of that teaching which is taking place at the present moment. There is no more sacred place on this planet to speak of these themes than here in Hiroshima, where the fullest horrors of war have been unleashed upon humanity, and where the strength of the human spirit has been manifested with unsurpassed depth in the heroism and hope of the Hibakusha.

The overwhelming violence of the Second World War, culminating in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, demanded that the world confront the very reality of war at its core, and come to grips with the

spiritual and moral failures that had killed tens of millions of men and women and devastated cultures, economies and communities across the globe. At the very center of this profound reflection was the searing recognition that atomic weapons were not merely a new type of warfare, but a human creation that would have the capacity to end humanity itself.

Within the Catholic community, the fruits of the introspection and moral questioning that followed the barbarism of World War II produced a new moment in Catholic teaching on war and peace, reflected in Pope John XXIII's monumental encyclical Pacem in Terris. Written in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, where humanity's worst nightmares about the dangers of nuclear weapons were almost realized, Pacem in Terris arose from the conviction that the Church must speak forcefully to the question of peace, drawing from its rich teaching on war and peace, but proceeding with profound attention to the signs of the times. Pope John set forth a comprehensive framework for building authentic peace in the world by outlining the fundamental human rights that along can generate lasting peace, as well as providing a profound reflection upon the implications of the international community that was emerging in the 1960's. Finally, Pope John placed the threat of nuclear weapons vividly in front of the world and proclaimed "in this age of ours, which prides itself on its atomic power, it is irrational to think that war is a proper way to obtain justice for violated rights." He fearlessly proclaimed that the

issue of nuclear weapons was at its heart a moral question, and that the world would have to forge a way toward nuclear disarmament if the future of humanity was to be assured.

A central element in forging that pathway lay in the building of international institutions of peace that would build justice, foster collaboration, and operate effectively during times when conflict among nations was rising. In speaking to this theme, Pope John was reflecting the tradition of papal teaching that had been the lynchpin of Catholic interventions in the international system throughout the twentieth century. But Pacem In Terris gave new specificity and prophetic strength in seizing the imagination of the world and harnessing it to the searing question of how to avoid war and erect peace as the new millennium was approaching. In doing so, Pope John created a new moment in Catholic thought to seize upon the new moment which the world was facing on the critical questions of war and peace.

As we gather here in Hiroshima on this profoundly sad anniversary marking eighty years since the unleashing of nuclear weapons as an act of war, Catholic teaching is once again undergoing a new moment in its teaching on war and peace. This new moment, like the encyclical of Pope John XXIII, is rooted in Catholic tradition and unswervingly attentive to the signs of the times in our own age, when nuclear proliferation is a growing danger that threatens to engulf us all.

In this new moment of Catholic theological renewal, three major shifts in Catholic thinking are taking place. First, the continuation of wars among nations and within societies, enlisting devastating weapons and resulting in countless deaths have pointed to the need to fundamentally renew and prioritize the claim of non-violent action as the primary framework for Catholic teaching on war and peace. Secondly, the continuous misuse of the just war tradition and its susceptibility to functioning as a justification for rather than a restraint upon warfare, challenges the Church to refine this ethical framework if it is to provide morally informed guidance in addressing those situations where non-violence fails. And finally, the failure of nuclear deterrence as a "step on the way to nuclear disarmament" has produced a situation where we are facing the breakdown of the arms control regime and the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons.

The Church must engage with the world in this new moment in order to contribute the deepest wisdom of Catholic faith and tradition in a perilous age. And Catholics in every land must grapple with these foundational questions if we are to be faithful to our lives as citizens and believers.

The Centrality of an Ethic of Non-Violence

Ever since Pacem in Terris was written, every successive Pope has pointed to the moral depravity of war. Pope John proclaimed that "it is hardly possible to imagine that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice." Pope Paul VI journeyed o the United Nations to plead with the world "No more war. War never again." Pope John Paul II taught that war is never an appropriate way to settle disputes among peoples, " it has never been and it will never be. Joseph Ratzinger chose the name Benedict to tie his entire pontificate to that of Pope Benedict XV, who had tried to end all war.

But it was Pope Francis who utilized the trajectory of all of these statements to construct a framework for Catholic teaching on war and peace that placed non-violence rather than the just war ethic as the primary prism through which to evaluate decisions in situations of deep conflict. In Fratelli Tutti, he wrote: "We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a just war. Never again war."

Francis was even clearer in his elaboration on the horrific nature of war as it has emerged in our times. "Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and 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 to those civilians whose killing was considered collateral damage. Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and the displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation of chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. In his way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be naïve for choosing peace,"

Is there any place on earth where the enormous cruelty of war is more palpable and haunting than in this place, on this terrible day of remembrance.

The charge of naivete traditionally leveled against advocates of non-violence has been gravely diminished in its legitimacy in recent years through a series of studies of real-world conflicts. Erich Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's book entitled Why Civil Resistance Works, used quantitative data from a wide variety of conflicts within and among nations. Some ended in armed conflict, others did not. But their demonstration that non-violent resistance can often be significantly more effective than armed defense in achieving the sustainable vindication of human right in the forms of conflict that have emerged as the dominant military confrontations of our day lends tremendous strength to the

proposition that the Church should place non-violent resistance at the center of its theology of war and peace.

Pope Leo has repeatedly taken up this emphasis on non-violence in the teaching that he has presented to the world during the three months of his pontificate. "From local and everyday situations to the international order, whenever those who have suffered injustice and violence resist the temptation to seek revenge, they become the most credible agents of non-violent peacebuilding processes. Non-violence, as a method and a style, must distinguish our decisions, our relationships and our actions."

Pope Leo sees this construction of a culture of non-violence as not only personal or communal witness, but as building structures and institutions of non-violence for our world. For only in this way can the beautiful vision of Fratelli Tutti be translated effectively into reality amidst the all too potent human recourse to violence and hatred.

The Just War Tradition

If the mandate to view active non-violence as the primary Catholic teaching on war and peace arises from its resonance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a second ethical tradition has long been prominent in the Church's thinking about the realities and moral demands of war. This just war framework, which is rooted in the insights of Saint Augustine, proceeds from the conviction that at times the call to non-violence does

not produce the justice or the peace which are the goals of non-violent action. At many times in the Church's history this ethic of just war has been viewed as the primary Christian teaching on war and peace. But it is essential to understand that when this was true, the church consistently accepted the just war framework only as an explicit constraint on the recourse to war, not as a pathway which made war easier.

Just war thinking consists of two sets of moral pre-requisites for engaging in warfare. The first, called the *ius ad bellum*, consists of the requirements for morally going to war. These include a just cause such as the defense against the initiation of war by another nation, the exhaustion of all efforts to avoid war, the consent of the national sovereign, the right intention, namely to repel the aggression and not more; a reasonable chance of success and the conviction that the harm caused by war will be outweighed by the good that will be achieved. The second set of moral prerequisites for legitimately going to war is called the *ius in bello* and consists of never directly attacking civilian populations and guaranteeing that every major action in war should yield a good that outweighs the harm it will bring.

Throughout much of history, the just war criteria did on many occasions block the recourse to war and limit its destructiveness. But many elements of modern warfare have conspired to limit its power as a constraint on war, which was the tradition's only reason for existence.

One problem lies in the reality that for so many recent uses of the tradition to evaluate a decision for military action, the just war framework has operated as a source of justification for those inclined to go to war rather than as a constraint on war. One of the accelerants for this trend is the unfortunate statement in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that the evaluation of the just war criteria belongs to those who have responsibility for the common good. It is objective moral reality which determines whether the *ius ad bellum* has been met, not the views of political leaders.

Another problem is the distinction between military and civilian targets in bombing campaigns, which is a moral demand of just war thinking. This city was targeted for atomic attack ostensibly as a military target, when it was fully recognized by those who authorized the military action that the civilian death toll and radiation effects would be the primary outcome of the bomb for the future of the war.

In addition, the just war framework is defective in two additional areas of moral choice. Ther first is the requirement of right intention, which demands that all sides in war seek peace consistently, even if it mean making significant concessions. Warfare inherently expands war aim rather than reducing them. The just war tradition does not include a realistic set of moral criteria for seeking war termination.

The second area of concern touches upon complex alliance, failed state and non-state actor realities. The current horrors in the Middle East illustrate this. Every side justifies its actions morally, and the just war tradition provides little concrete guidance.

Thus, while in limited circumstances, such as Ukraine, a recourse to war is morally legitimate within limits and in response to attack, the just war tradition must be revisited and refined it if is to provide compelling moral guidance in the contemporary world. This should be an important element of the renewal of the Catholic tradition on war and peace that is taking place within the Church.

The Spector of Nuclear Weapons

The final element of the renewal of Catholic teaching on war and peace arises from the very apex of barbarism whose anniversary we are remembering with profound sadness and regret today: the development and use of the atomic bomb.

The relationship of the imperative to eliminate nuclear weapons and the realities of deterrence have framed Catholic teaching for the past sixty years. Consistently, the Church has demanded that nuclear weapons be eradicated from the face of the earth. That element of Catholic teaching has never changed. But the treatment of deterrence – and how it conditions the moral imperative to eliminate nuclear weapons – has shifted dramatically since the issuance of Pacem in Terris.

Pope John was less troubled by the reality of deterrence itself than by the risks which nuclear testing would being "even though the monstrous power of modern weapons does indeed act as a deterrent, there is reason to fear that the very testing of nuclear devices for war purposes can, if continued, lead to serious danger for various forms of life on earth."

By 1982 Pope John Pul II was emphasizing the temporary nature of the moral legitimation of the possession of nuclear weapons for deterrent purposed: "…the logic of nuclear deterrence cannot be considered a final goal or an appropriate and secure means for safeguarding international peace."

Pope Francis viewed nuclear deterrence not as a source of peace, but a destabilizing element in the international system that creates a false sense of security, encourages the proliferation of nuclear weapons, threatens the environment and robs from the poor. As a consequence, at a conference at the Vatican following the passage of the international *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, Pope Francis categorically condemned the possession of nuclear weapons as morally illicit.

Discerning the implications of this dramatic shift in Catholic teaching constitutes one of the central tasks for theologians, bishops, policymakers and committed Catholics who work in the area of ethics

and nuclear weapons. On this issue, the successive moral positions of the Church regarding deterrence have all been framed as an interim ethic in anticipation of a better moment.

Now we have moved beyond an interim ethic to one which demands collective action to eliminate the nuclear arsenals of the world, even amidst a global culture in which the number of nuclear powers is expanding. The events of the past six months, which have witnessed an alarming confrontation between India and Pakistan and the bombing of the Iranian nuclear facilities in an attempt to prevent that nation from achieving the capacity to use nuclear weapons, make clear that our willingness to tolerate the nuclear status quo should end. In the world of international relations, the principle of unintended consequences is of tremendous importance. Contrary to the desire of the United States, the attack on Iran may have the effect of teaching nations that the only way to prevent a nuclear attack, or to continue to have a nuclear shield in a time of vacillating American commitments, is to own nuclear weapons.

If our gathering here today is to mean anything, it must mean that in fidelity to all those lives were destroyed or savagely damaged on August fourth eighty years ago, we refuse to live in such a world of nuclear proliferation and risk-taking. We will resist, we will organize, we will pray, we will not cease, until the world's nuclear arsenals have been destroyed.