



50th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*  
Lisbon, 23 November 2013

***Dialogue and Democracy: Instruments for Peace in Europe***

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President

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I greet you warmly to this conference that celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. May your reflections on the role of dialogue and democracy as instruments for peace in Europe bear fruit by helping participants and others to “contribute whole-heartedly to the creation of a civic order in which rights and duties are ever more diligently and more effectively observed.”<sup>1</sup>

*Pacem in Terris* is the legacy of Pope John XXIII to a humanity yearning for peace. Its title calls to mind the hymn of the angels at the birth of Jesus: “*Glory to God on high, and on earth peace to men of God’s pleasure*”<sup>2</sup>; and just as the angelic hymn qualifies the experience of peace on earth “*to men*” with the restrictive genitive, “*of God’s pleasure*”, so does Pope John connect “*peace on earth – which man throughout the ages has longed for*” with the condition of “*the diligent observance of the divinely established order.*”<sup>3</sup> And the exposition of this “*divinely established order*” is what occupies Pope John in the encyclical.

For, although the Cuban missile crisis and the threat of nuclear war were the immediate occasion for its promulgation, the encyclical does not directly counsel nuclear disarmament, the abolition of war or the opening of space for peace. *Pacem in Terris* does not argue from war to peace, but *from human dignity and relationships* to peace! Throughout the encyclical, the undeniable fact of human *relationships* and the irreducible value of human *dignity* are the foundation and fount or source.

Blessed Pope John begins and continues and finishes with the irreducible core of *dignity* within each and every man and woman – and with the dynamics of *relationship* among them all. He begins with the individual person and the dyad, and he does not stop until he reaches the whole human family and all its institutions and the universal common good they should serve – until, in other words, he reaches *peace on earth* for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, § 31.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:14.

<sup>3</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, § 1.

*Relations*, like *coexistence*, begin on interpersonal and community levels and expand to society, nations and the entire globe. On all these levels and in all these forms of relationships and coexistence, the dignity of the person needs to be safeguarded by cultivating the virtues of *truth*, *justice*, *love* and *freedom*. Indeed, *relationships* are not something we happen to be in, and *dignity* is not something that we may or may not have. *Relationships* and *dignity* are what we are and have as *human*. No other creature in heaven or on earth is so constituted. For this reason, the rights that flow from the human person's dignity "are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority,"<sup>4</sup> be it local, national or international. The *dignity* and *rights of persons* are prior to society and must be so recognized, respected, protected and promoted by society.

As creatures created with inalienable dignity, we exist in relationship with our brothers and sisters. Outside of such relationships, less than human is what one sadly finds oneself to be. By way of remedy, Pope John XXIII locates peace in the *dignity* of every human being and in persons in *relationship*. I am so glad that you will be reflecting this morning on the theme of interreligious dialogue as a way to build peace in Europe. I greet very warmly and with profound respect the representatives of the different religious communities that will offer their contribution. Interreligious dialogue goes hand in glove with the demands of the relationships in which we stand. With Good Pope John we can trust that where *justice* governs relationships and people embrace the dignity of every person, there peace begins to reign.

*Pacem in Terris* guides us to introduce God's plan of salvation into public life, so that all inhabitants of planet earth might flourish. This great encyclical is a high point of the Church's Social Teaching on social and political coexistence. May its lessons for political activity animate your reflections on the relationships between democracy and values for the betterment of Europe and your discussions on improving politics in Portugal.

Through the intercession of Blessed John XXIII, soon to be Saint, may Portuguese Catholics and all people of good will collaborate ever more fraternally "in the many enterprises which our present civilization makes possible, encourages or indeed demands."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1930.

<sup>5</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, § 33.