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How Catholic Teaching about War Has Changed: The Issues in View

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Abstract

A feature of the First World War, was the consistent condemnation of it by Pope Benedict XV and his unsuccessful efforts to bring about a negotiated peace. This paper argues that the Pope realised that the nature of modern warfare demanded a new evaluation of war and that his teaching began a real shift and development in this teaching that is clearly discernible in the teachings of his successors and the Second Vatican Council, and the work of Catholic theologians and movements. However, we can see how in many ways this shift has not been recognised in the wider church, shown by the reluctance of local church leaders to question or condemn particular conflicts. On the basis of this shift the paper argues that the Catholic Church, now committed to "virtual pacifism", should base its witness to peace on two paradigms: first, the unmasking of wickedness, seen above all in the culture engendered by the possession of nuclear weapons; and second, a marked distancing from the powers and claims of the modern nation state.

Keywords

Peace, War, Benedict XV, Nuclear weapons, State

Introduction

This paper[1] argues that the opposition of Pope Benedict XV to the First World War, expressed from the time of his first message as pope, *Ubi Primum,* on 8 September 1914,[2] began a real sea change in Catholic teaching about war and peace. This has led the Church to reject modern warfare. This process, culminating in *Gaudium et Spes*

[1] I am grateful to Dr Theodora Hawksley for comments on this paper.

[2] The Pope refers to the feast of Our Lady's Nativity and calls on the belligerent nations "to leave nothing undone to hasten the end of this calamity . . . the rulers of the peoples [should] be satisfied with the ruin already wrought."

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and the teachings of St John Paul II, has nevertheless been uneven and has not been accepted by many Catholics.

In the first part of my paper I will look at the *theology* of Pope Benedict's witness against the war. Then I will look at some of the ways in which Catholic theology about war and peace developed as a result, both at the level of Magisterial teaching and within the wider Church. In the third section I will put forward two connected models for how we can witness to the shift in teaching.

I The Theology of Benedict XV

From the end of the last century new studies have appeared of Pope Benedict's diplomacy, some prompted by the ninetieth anniversary of the Pope's Peace note in 2007 and the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.[3] First, I will examine his impassioned statements about the war, *looked at theologically*.

Of course, Benedict, while clear in his mind that he was *the* Teacher of the Faith, probably did not see himself as a theologian: indeed no modern pope until St John Paul II would be seen in that light.[4] Moreover, his condemnations are not couched in conventional theological language. They are appeals to the emotions in florid Italian rhetorical language of the kind that we find in other papal pronouncements of this period (such as St Pius X's condemnations of Modernism). A good example of Benedict's is *Allorchè Fummo,* the appeal to the leaders of the belligerents (now including Italy) a year into the war:

> It is the blood of brothers that is being poured out over land and sea. The most beautiful regions of Europe, the garden of the world, are strewn with corpses and with ruin. Where but a short time ago there flourished the industry of manufactures and the fruitful labours of the fields, the guns now thunder fearfully . . . .You bear the dread responsibility of peace and war in the sight of God and man; listen to the voice of a father, who is the vicar of the supreme and eternal Judge . . . .

[3] The most important is what is now the authoritative work in English, John F. Pollard, *Benedict XV The Pope of Peace* (London: Continuum 1999). Ashley Beck, *Benedict XV and World War I: Courageous Prophet of Peace* (London: CTS 2014) was originally written to mark the Peace note anniversary and was reissued for the centenary.

[4] Della Chiesa's initial training was in law and he gained a law doctorate from Genoa in 1875 as a layman. He carried on in this vein in Rome, although he did gain a theology doctorate *cum laude* before his ordination. In 1880 he got another law doctorate, with the highest honours, from the *Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici* (H. E. G. Rope, *Benedict XV, The Pope of Peace* [London 1941], 23ff.).

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Moral theologians could criticize the Pope for being rather subjective. He is not using dry theological language, but addressing politicians and monarchs who were not theologians and for the most part not Catholics. He lays a lot of emphasis on what will happen as a result of the carnage, the ends of it all. There is no discussion, as one might find in *Veritatis Splendor,* of the objective quality of acts.

Furthermore, there is comparatively little of the Just War doctrine; it is largely implicit and in the background. But we can identify two of its criteria in particular.

The first is the category of "last resort". The Pope thought that national leaders had given up negotiating far too soon. His constant plea, largely ignored or rejected, is that they get back to the negotiating table. In *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum,* his first full encyclical, he writes: "Surely there are other ways and means whereby violated rights can be rectified. Let them be tried honestly and with goodwill, and let arms meanwhile be laid aside."[5] This criticism is surely justified: many recently published studies of July 1914 show that for the most part people were wary of serious negotiations, or simply on holiday.[6] Britain, to its credit, rather late in the day, tried to get the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia referred to international negotiations and arbitration, but on the whole opposing sides seem to have had very little direct contact with each other.

The second criterion is proportionality. Benedict is saying, "Whatever your cause, the slaughter is not worth it." We associate enormous casualties in the war with terrible, long battles such as the Somme or Verdun, but the loss of life in the first weeks was vast at the battles of the Marne, Mons, Tannenberg and Lemberg, certainly by the time of the Pope's first message on 8 September, and even more so by the time of his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi* (on All Saints Day[7]) and his heartfelt Christmas Eve message.[8] Benedict's reaction begins clearly a reappraisal of Catholic teaching about war, not the result of theological reflection in itself on the Just War tradition, but a response to the nature of modern warfare. Humanity has found new, industrial and efficient ways of killing more people more quickly than in the past. For Benedict the scales have now been pulled down hard on one side by the weight of thousands of bodies; this

[5] Section 5. The complete text of all Benedict's messages and letters is available from www.vatican.va.

[6] This is made clear in many books about the weeks leading to war, including recent excellent additions such as Seán McMeekin, *July 1914* (London: Icon 2013) and Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace* (London: Profile 2014)

[7] Over a million lives had been lost by the end of 1914.

[8] "Cry out, cease not! Ah! May the fratricidal weapons fall to the ground, may they fall at last, stained as they already are by too much blood . . . that an end may come to the terrible scourge which now grips and throttles such a great part of the world."

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fundamentally affects the proportionality criterion, both in general terms and in relation to specific battles.[9]

This shift can do one of two things: for some it makes the whole Just War doctrine simply out of date. What worked for Augustine and Aquinas, as a way of calculating the proportionate response to an evil or an injustice, cannot work in the age of the machine gun, let alone the Trident submarine. For others the shift proves the validity of the tradition, in that we can still carry out the calculation; for many, including Pope Benedict who was certainly not what we would now call a pacifist, this will lead in more and more cases to denying that particular conflicts fulfill the Just War criteria.[10] Therefore most Christian commentators, including recent popes, have reached a negative verdict about most contemporary conflicts because the numbers of deaths involved in such conflicts (including those of civilians) are out of proportion to the ends sought. In America particularly there has been a great debate about whether the Just War tradition is valid at all any more, but surely what is important is that in most situations pacifists and most adherents of the Just War tradition actually end up in the same place, opposing most wars or conflicts that are being fought or have been fought in recent years. This shift in Catholic teaching rules out relativizing the proportionality criterion or making it subordinate to, for example, the criterion of reasonable prospect of success.[11]

Beyond these elements from the Just War tradition we can detect two further theological strands. The first is in *Ad Beatissimi* and in the encyclical Benedict wrote after the Versailles conference in 1919, *Pacem Dei Munus,* where he wrote: "This joy of our paternal heart is disturbed by many bitter anxieties, for if in most places peace is in some sort established and treaties signed, the germs of former enmities remain . . . there can be no stable peace . . . unless there be a return to mutual charity to appease hate and banish enmity."

In *Ad Beatissimi* Benedict's analysis of the war's causes is indebted to St Augustine. In section 5 he makes it clear that "foundations of states began to be shaken" because "the precepts and practices of Christian wisdom ceased to be observed the ruling of states". The war is a symptom of "evil raging in the very inmost heart of human society" and it has happened because of lack of charity, because

[9] Much has been written on the changed quality of war evident in the conflict and the effects on wider society of advances in military technology in the previous century. One of the best studies is Daniel Pick, *War Machine The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press 1993).

[10] An example of this applied to the 2003 Iraq is D. L. O'Huallachain and J. Forrest Sharpe (eds.), *Neo-Conned! Just War Perspectives: A Condemnation of War in Iraq* and the companion volume *Neo-Conned! Again* (Vienna, VA: IHS Press 20005).

[11] In my view this is what is done in Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2013), chapter 4. Professor Biggar commends the 'callous general' who is prepared to tolerate a high number of casualties in the interests of likely success.

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of hatred and suspicion in men's hearts. Later on (section 18) this pessimism seems almost to cause the Pope to be removed from what is happening: "Let us, then, bid those who are undergoing distress of whatever kind, not to case their eyes down to the earth in which are as pilgrims, but to raise them to Heaven to which we are going: 'For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come' (Hebrews 13:14)".

There is a tension here that perhaps would not be present if Benedict was a systematic theologian. If we simply have "no abiding city" and if the war has happened because of sin in men's hearts and the abandonment of Christianity, then what is the point of trying to stop it? Many would use his pessimistic analysis as a pretext for standing clear of the conflict.[12] The answer to the tension in terms of the Pope's own thinking is to be found in the phrase he uses, "a father's heart". It is his responsibility, however dire things are, to try and stop the carnage. In his 1917 Peace note Benedict had ruled out reparations and indemnities precisely because they would preserve the hatred and enmity – Versailles had them in spades and that was exactly what happened. We could call this a "theology of forgiveness". Woodrow Wilson and the Allies wanted guilt for the war established and punishment exacted; the Vicar of Christ wanted forgiveness.

Secondly, I think there is also a 'theology of diplomacy'. A distinguished chronicler of Catholic peace theology, Ronald Musto, claims that the papacy under Gregory the Great effectively started diplomacy and international law.[13] Successful diplomacy will need an element of forgiveness, a willingness to compromise, and a determination to carry on talking. The outbreak of the war was a massive failure in diplomacy. Arguably the diplomats in July 1914 were of varying abilities, or did not have sufficient responsibility, at the mercy of politicians and generals. The whole point of supra-national bodies like the League of Nations and the United Nations is that they attempt to keep diplomats in the saddle. A strict application of the Just War doctrine, indeed, demands a strong ideology or theology of diplomacy so that military force really is only a last resort: a big part of the moral case against both Iraq wars was that there was still space for more negotiation. This way of looking at the world also cuts through the claims of national leaders about not negotiating with "terrorists". The rhetoric is dishonest as negotiations almost always have to go on, often in secret. A success story for diplomacy (where the churches played an important part) is the Northern Ireland peace process: compromise and endless negotiation, over and against the language of "no

[12] In this paragraph I am particularly grateful to Dr Hawksley for her observations.

[13] *Catholic Peacemakers: A Documentary History,* volume 1 (New York: Garland 1993), p. 664.

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surrender".[14] What all this really means is that international structures, if properly used, make the "last resort" criterion impossible to fulfill.[15]

Benedict's critique of the war and his diplomatic efforts are integrated with his liturgical spirituality. He added the invocation "Queen of Peace, Pray for us" to the Litany of Loreto, and he was responsible for the *Incruentum Altaris,* the universal permission given to priests to offer three Masses on All Souls' Day (partly to help those who had been killed in the war).[16]

II The Theological Fall-Out from the War on Pope Benedict's Successors

I have looked in some detail at Papa della Chiesa because historically he is a neglected figure and connections with his successors are often not recognized. Pope Pius XI, the bookish Achille Ratti, whom Benedict plucked out of the Vatican library to send him to newly-independent Poland as Apostolic Visitor, should be seen as continuing Benedict's priorities. Pius took the motto "The Peace of Christ in the reign of Christ" and his first encyclical at the end of 1922, *Ubi Arcano Dei,* repeats Benedict's critique of Versailles, lambasting "the spirit of bitterness and vengeance' which had been "increased and almost given official status" by "an artificial peace established on paper."

In 1922 quite a lot had happened in Italy between Benedict's death and *Ubi Arcano Dei* – the so-called "March on Rome" and the coming to power of Mussolini. The context for Pius's message of peace and his call on people to turn back to Christ is the growing power of the State in so many parts of the world in the years after the war. The

[14] What is particularly shameful, as I have pointed out elsewhere, was the lack of support the pope got from bishops, particularly in Britain and France (*Benedict XV and World War I,* pp. 36ff). The only place where he got much support was in Ireland: see Jérôme aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914–1918* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press 2003). While the hierarchy was divided, at least until the botched introduction of conscription, some members of the episcopate, such as the Bishop of Limerick, were clearly loyal to the Holy See. In Britain the attitude of the bishops has to be seen in the context of how the whole country culturally rallied round the war effort: see on this Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Pimlico 1990).

[15] Of course the popes have pointed out that these structures have often been ineffective and need to be strengthened; it is only really with St John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* that really warm support is given to the United Nations, and St John Paul II's teaching that international bodies still do not have enough authority.

[16] See *Benedict XV and World War I,* pp.54ff., which also gives the text of his prayer for peace and describes the First Communion initiative in 1915. At the end of the war he gave a statue of Our Lady *Regina Pacis* to the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore where Mary has her left hand raised, as if to say 'Stop!'

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war itself, of course, had greatly increased the powers of the state over people's lives in western democracies, powers not really given up after 1918. Fascism, Soviet Communism and Nazism all represent, in differing ways, a growth in State power which the pope saw as a challenge to the freedom of the human person and the place of the Catholic Church in society. The institution in 1925 in the encyclical *Quas Primas* of the feast of Christ the King (originally at the end of October each year, and since 1969 on the last Sunday before Advent) is a response to this challenge. The world has lost its way because it has turned away from Christ, and war and violence are the fruits of this. The search for peace in the world is therefore inseparable from evangelization and mission; this conditions his determination to reach agreements with states. Although by the end of his pontificate Pius might have thought that too much had been conceded, the theology is clear. He also issued an encyclical of October 1931 on the arms race, *Nova Impendet.*

Part of the Church's developing theology of peace is a distancing from the power of the state – and contemporary theologians and commentators who have supported recent wars have had a too uncritical attitude to the modern state. Pius saw through this. *Quadragesimo Anno,* which gave the world the word and the concept of subsidiarity, throws down the gauntlet to both Stalin and Mussolini and, at least for some Catholics, the leaders of western democracies as well.[17] But at the same time a failure to establish a critical distance led to the behaviour of the Catholic Church in Spain under General Franco, the weakness of the Christian witness of many leaders of the Orthodox churches in Russia and eastern Europe under Communism and, not least, the appalling response of many Catholics and Protestants to Nazism.

The pontificate also saw the beginnings of the most important Catholic pacifist movement in the 20th century, the *Catholic Workers*, founded in May 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. My reference to this is brief, in spite of its importance, because the movement was the subject of my paper at a previous conference here three years ago.[18] Day and Maurin were opposed to war in all circumstances, drawing on scripture and the Fathers, at a time when many Catholics saw pacifism as a heresy. Their stance lost the movement support during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Eugenio Pacelli, elected as Pius XII in 1939, had been another protégé of Benedict. As nuncio to Bavaria he had in 1917 played

[17] The Catholic Worker movement, founded two years after the encyclical, strongly rejected in the USA State welfare programmes in Roosevelt's 'New Deal'.

[18] 'Making the Encyclicals Click: Catholic Social Teaching and Radical Traditions', *New Blackfriars* vol. 93, issue 1044 (March 2012), also my booklet *Dorothy Day* (London: CTS 2008)

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a key role in the issuing of the pope's "Peace note" and had contacts with German Catholic politicians such as Matthias Erzberger. Whatever the controversies about his role in the Second World War it is clear that he modelled the Holy See's careful neutrality on what Benedict had tried to do. Peace was a constant message of this pontificate, expressed not in long letters but short messages at Christmas and other times. Pius XII continued the thread of Benedict's theological thinking: war is the fruit of human sinfulness, above all of both totalitarianism and individualistic capitalism; men fight wars because of what has happened to them. Early in the war he put forward proposals for peace and by 1942 five "peace points" that were aimed at post-war society: the dignity and rights of the human person, the defence of social unity and of the family, the dignity and prerogatives of labour, the rehabilitation of international legal order, and a Christian understanding of the institution of the state. These points were influential since the US bishops used them to lobby the Roosevelt administration about post-war reconstruction, leading to the Atlantic charter and the setting up of the United Nations.

In his 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, the Pope expounds his understanding of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ. As has been pointed out,[19] the war makes it urgent to proclaim the doctrine of the mystical Body, and yet, after some powerful references, it rather recedes. The Pope calls Catholics to a deeper love of the Church, he rules out seeing the Church as an invisible institution and stresses that the Church's structures are part of its nature. Unfortunately the visible Church is less physical than it could be in the midst of a terrible war; perhaps it is all too mystical. As Cavanaugh puts it: "One can imagine that the Pope's words would be slight comfort to the Christian on the battlefield who finds out that a fellow member of the mystical body of Christ is trying to blow his legs off".[20]

By contrast, at the same time, Dorothy Day's theology of the mystical Body of Christ goes much further. She wrote at the outbreak of war: "St Augustine says that we are all members or potential members of the mystical Body of Christ. Therefore all men are our neighbours and Christ told us we should love our neighbours, whether they be friend or enemy."[21] You cannot take the life of another human being, let alone another Christian. It is surely clear that a strong ecclesiology, an assertive sense of Catholic identity, is an essential part of a theology of peace; this still had a long way to

[19] W.T Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell 1998) pp.211ff.

[20] P. 212.

[21] 'The Mystical Body of Jesus Christ', *Catholic Worker* October 1939, quoted in my booklet *Dorothy Day* (London: CTS 2008) p. 41.

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go. It also needs to be seen in the context of the abject failure of the German bishops to oppose Hitler.[22]

Commentators often overlook the Pope's condemnation in 1945 of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which brought the war to an end. In a discourse, Pius called the first bombing "an infernal massacre" and an "outrage against civilization".[23] This act further pushes down the scales – the case against war is strengthened. It posed a theological problem because it revealed humanity's arrogance, the willingness to destroy the delicate balance of nature. One of the few people to realise this was another who would not have claimed to have been a theologian, Ronald Knox, in his short but profound essay *God and the Atom.*[24]

In the 1950s there does seem to have been a more ambiguous approach from Pius XII. He talks a lot about it only being possible to have peace with justice and he almost seems resigned to another world war. In 1956 he seems to chide the West for not responding militarily to the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Also in that year he made what was to be the last magisterial condemnation of absolute pacifism and conscientious objection.[25] We can see this as part of the general decline of his final years.

During the 1950s the *Catholic Workers* experienced a revival because of their opposition to nuclear weapons and, in particular, civil defence exercises. We also now see reflections from established Catholic theologians about war. These include Paul Hanly Furfey, Gordon Zahn and John Ford. Ford issued a strong condemnation of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which he dubbed "the greatest and most extensive single atrocity in the history of all this period". Towards the end of the decade too we see the first writings about war and peace from Thomas Merton, extensively censored by the authorities of the Cistercian order.[26] A major figure too is John Courtenay Murray, who is happier to concede to the state its own autonomy in a way that would become controversial. Among non-Catholics there had been the famous written dispute in the 1930s

[22] For the terrible details see Paul Furfey, "The Civilian COs" in Thomas Shannon (ed.), *War or Peace? The Search for New Answers* (New York: Orbis 1980), pp.188ff.

[23] Ibid. p.192 (at least one edition misprints the Pope as Paul VI).

[24] Sheed and Ward 1945. See my brief discussion in *Ronald Knox* (London: CTS 2008) and in my paper "Was Ronald Knox a Theologian?" in the Colloquium 'Ronald Knox A Man for All Seasons' held at Heythrop college, 23–24 May 2013, publication forthcoming.

[25] See James Finn, "Pacifism and Justifiable War" in Shannon, op. cit., p. 7, quoting John Courtney Murray.

[26] Among editions of his writings focused on peace are William T. Shannon (ed.), *Passion for Peace* (New York: Crossroad 1995); Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions 1966) and *On Peace* (London: Mowbray 1976). See also my *Thomas Merton* (London: CTS 2009).

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between the brothers Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr,[27] the beginnings of the work of John Howard Yoder from the Mennonite community and the Methodist Stanley Hauerwas. Nearly everything was taking place in the United States – not much in Europe. One can scour the pages of the invaluable volume *Ressourcement*[28]and not find any theological reflection about war, although people must have been familiar with the denunciations of war by the Fathers. Yves Congar published his childhood diaries of occupied France in the Great War, and De Lubac suffered dizziness and headaches because of a head wound he received as a soldier, but they do not seem to have written about war and peace.

What you have done works but needs to be followed up later on as noted

Angelo Giuseppi Roncalli, for all his north Italian peasant background, was still cut from the same cloth as his predecessors. A diplomat long before he became Patriarch of Venice, a man who had served as a medical orderly in the First World War, his final and greatest encyclical in 1963 was *Pacem in Terris,* the subject of another paper. It has been extensively studied and criticised[29] and in part set to music by the French Jewish composer Darius Milhaud. Like Benedict,[30] St John does not use the criteria of the Just War tradition; while there are Natural Law reflections on the nature of war and on the need for order in society, it is the nature of modern warfare which is always before our eyes, hence the ringing claim that war is now irrational – *alienum a ratione.* This is what breaks new ground and it is the strongest doctrinal condemnation of war, aimed at all people of good will. Had others written the letter they might well have been silenced; Thomas Merton wrote that it was just as well that there were no Cistercian censors in the Vatican.

The context is crucial. St John was dying of cancer; only a few months before, the world had been shaken by the Cuban missile crisis (where he played an often neglected role in diffusing) and in January he had hosted an historic visit to Rome by the daughter of Nikita Khruschev and her husband (the editor of *Pravda*). His agenda was reconciliation in the world and averting nuclear war. He also saw the

[27] See the account of this by Stanley Hauerwas "Tragedy and Joy: The Spirituality of Peaceableness" in *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 135ff.

[28] P. Murray, G.Flynn, with P. Kelly (eds.), (Oxford 2012).

[29] For example by Paul Tillich in *Theology of Peace* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press 1990), chapter 11.

[30] Benedict's 1917 Peace note is referred to in a footnote to section 112.

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letter as a religious act, signing it on Maundy Thursday, wearing a stole.[31]

The Council and since . . .

This year [2015] sees the golden jubilee of *Gaudium et Spes.* Compared to its predecessors, Vatican II was noted for not issuing *anathemas;* but warfare against innocent civilians was unequivocally condemned and the Council Fathers made it clear that everything had changed: "The horror and perversity of war is immensely magnified by the addition of scientific weapons. For acts of war involving these weapons can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction, thus going far beyond the bounds of legitimate defence . . . all these considerations compel us to undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude."[32]

Since nuclear deterrence policies entail an intention to commit such acts against innocent civilians, the Council was effectively condemning modern warfare as it was seen in 1965. This is the climax of what St John XXIII had written; we have reached a new stage in the process. Dorothy Day and members of the Catholic peace movement went gone to Rome to pray and fast for peace and to lobby the Council Fathers: this is a fruit of that prayer. The Council also endorses the place of absolute pacifism in the Church by defending the rights of conscientious objectors, thus reversing Pius XII's condemnation of 1956.[33]

The pontificate of Paul VI confirms the shift. His visit to India, his address to the UN, and his profound encyclical *Populorum Progressio* all testify to his part in the development of the path we have been tracing. Before becoming Archbishop of Milan he was a papal insider and diplomat. What is striking is his opposition to the Vietnam War, particularly as the South Vietnamese government was pro-Catholic. His stance brought him into conflict not only with the US government but, at least at the beginning of the war, with the US bishops.

The thread of critical reflection about war and peace in the 1950s blossomed during the Vietnam War, a formative theological event for American Catholicism. Because of theological reflection and

[31] On all this, see Peter Hebblethwaite *John XXIII* (London: Chapman 1984), chapter 23.

[32] Section 80.

[33] The collection of essays edited by Thomas Shannon, referred to in note 22 above, explores the tension between pacifism on the one hand and the Just War doctrine on the other; see also John Coleman, *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1991) especially the paper by Kenneth Himes, 'Pacifism and the Just War Tradition in Roman Catholic Social Teaching', pp. 329ff. In this paper I do not deny that there is a tension, even an inconsistency, but it is clear that if the Just War criteria are strictly applied we now all end up in the same place.

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non-violent actions such as the burning of draft papers pioneered by the *Catholic Workers* and the Berrigan brothers, the bishops shifted their stance almost completely during the war from uncritical support given by Cardinal Francis Spellman at the beginning to clear condemnation of American actions by most of them by 1972.[34]

A whole paper, if not a whole conference, could be devoted to the theology of peace of St John Paul II who, unlike his predecessors, had been a professional moral theologian rather than a diplomat, and one who had suffered in the war. His theology of the human person will always rule out the infringement of the person's rights and dignity entailed in any act of violence: to give in to violence is to deny our essential humanity. Moreover his view of the intrinsic character of moral acts will always weigh against killing and war – it is significant that in his encyclical on moral teaching from 1993, *Veritatis Splendor,* he quotes *Gaudium et Spes'* condemnation of the taking of innocent human life, along with other abuses.[35] Five years later he shifted Catholic teaching on the death penalty significantly in *Evangelium Vitae* – for him war is really part of how he sees the sanctity of human life, created in the image of God.

Therefore he condemned high profile wars, and in particular both wars launched against Iraq by the United States and others in 1990 and 2003. "No more war!" was the slogan (originally used by Paul VI at the United Nations) that he used at the time of the first Iraq war, which he then quoted in subsequent letters.[36] In the case of the second Iraq war he was unsuccessfully pressurized by right-wing American Catholics not to oppose US actions, as was Cardinal Ratzinger.[37]

III Living "Virtual Pacifism": a Theological Model

If my outline is correct, there are two elements which should now characterise the Church's approach. It is no longer original to argue that a shift has taken place:

[34] See David J. O'Brien "American Catholic Opposition to the Vietnam War: A Preliminary Assessment" in Shannon, op. cit., pp. 119ff., together with other essays in the volume.

[35] Section 80.

[36] E.g. *Centesimus Annus* section 52, which also refers to Benedict XV's first message as pope, *Ubi Primum.*

[37] For a description of these moves by George Weigel and Michael Novak, see Mark and Louise Zwick, "The Iraq War and the Vatican" in D. L. O'Huallachain and J. Forrest Sharpe (eds.), *Neo-Conned! Again Hypocrisy, Lawlessness, and the Rape of Iraq* (Vienna, VA.: IHS Press 2005), pp.355ff. For a further critique of the position of Novak and Weigel over legitimate authority in relation to the Just War tradition, see William T. Cavanaugh "To Whom Should We Go? Legitimate Authority and Just Wars" in the companion volume *Neo-Conned: Just War: A Condemnation of War in Iraq,* pp. 269ff.)

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> Although the Roman Catholic Church retains the Just War theory, it has in practice shifted to a position of virtual pacifism since the 1960s, especially since the pontificate of John Paul II. For the first time since the conversion of Rome, Western nations now go to war without the sanction of their churches' leaders.[38]

The nuclear paradigm: unmasking wickedness

Albert Einstein once said: "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything but our modes of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe."[39]

I have tried to show how the *nature* of modern warfare has fundamentally changed Catholic moral evaluation of war.[40] While this begins to be true in the trenches, one fell development trumps all the others – the use of nuclear weapons in 1945 and the threat to use them again, even now. Overlooking this is a serious error; intrinsic to their use is the intention to kill large numbers of people, including civilians, indeed the only time they have been used that was the only thing that happened. What is odd is that the moral evaluation took so long.

By the time of the accession of St John XXIII in 1958, we can at least say that in the Catholic academic world in the United States there had been serious reflection about war, showing that there was a gulf between that world and that of Cardinal Spellman and the bishops. But this is more than one can say of this country. However, in 1961 there appeared *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*: amongst its contributors were two major Catholic lay philosophers, Elizabeth Anscombe and her husband Peter Geach.[41] Although the introduction was written by Archbishop Tommy Williams, all the contributors were laypeople, not clergy who would not raise their heads above the parapet to challenge the possession of nuclear weapons by this country. This failure took longer to eradicate in Britain than one might have expected; we should here pay tribute to the work of Brian Wicker, a (lay) member of this association.[42]

[38] Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2007), p. 86.

[39] Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden, eds., *Einstein on Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1960), p. 365, quoted in Thomas Gumbleton, "The Role of the Peacemaker" in Thomas Shannon, op. cit. p. 225.

[40] I am not suggesting that it is the only factor. In the latter years of the century one would add shifts in the understanding of nature and grace in Vatican II documents, particularly *Gaudium et Spes,* together with the effects of the new emphasis on dialogue, leading towards a conscious building up of peace rather than simply the avoidance of war.

[41] Walter Stein (ed.), London: Merlin Press 1961.

[42] E.g. *First the Political Kingdom* (1967) and *Nuclear Deterrence: What Does the Church Teach?* (1985)

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In the US *The Challenge of Peace* was a serious effort to address the issue in the 1980s, although it was later criticized for consequentialist reasoning. The US Catholic Bishops went along with a conditional, short term acceptance of the deterrent (also implied in a speech by St John Paul II to the United Nations given in 1981), although their analysis angered the American Right. But in Britain in the 1980s the Catholic Church at official levels avoided the debates that were taking place in other bodies such as the Church of England with its report *The Church and Bomb*.[43]

Again the clearest condemnation of nuclear weapons in the 80s came from Catholic *laypeople* in the 1987 book *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism*.[44] Grisez and the others are, of course, the heirs of Anscombe and Geach, as they are over other issues to do with the sanctity of life. We should note that the most effective and damning critique of nuclear weapons and of the nuclear deterrent does not come from "liberal" or "progressive" moral theologians but from those considered to be among the most "conservative" in the English-speaking world, reflecting the position twenty years before. Eventually in 2006 the bishops of England and Wales condemned (following the lead from the Scots hierarchy) nuclear weapons and the Trident programme.[45]

The nuclear issue is decisive. How can we believe in or trust a country which is committed to acts of wickedness? That part of the defence infrastructure (the most expensive part) which is tied up with the nuclear deterrent poisons the whole defence capability and structure of this country, just as it poisons an international body like NATO. Nuclear-weapon states like ours lose any moral credibility in the world or any claim to be a force for good, and the falsehoods and secrecy which stem from the whole rotten tree make it very difficult to trust what national and military leaders say. Many fail to realise this.

I referred above to theologians who are considered to be conservative. Consider these words from the first World Peace day message of Pope Benedict XVI, at the beginning of 2006:

[43] *The Church and the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* (Church House publishing 1982). See also David Brown, *Choices* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983).

[44] By John Finnis, Joseph Boyle and Germain Grisez (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987). The only Englishman among the authors is primarily a lawyer rather than a theologian. The book strongly criticizes the American bishops for their consequentialist approach to the issue. Grisez is thought to have been an important influence behind *Veritatis Splendor* six years later.

[45] www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk, search under 'Trident' or under the year. It is sometimes claimed that Cardinal Basil Hume resisted such a condemnation when he was President of the Bishops' Conference as a result of the influence of Catholic military figures such as Michael Quinlan.

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> What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless person of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.[46]

A lot of people do not know that *Papa Ratzinger* said this.

So the shift against all modern warfare goes into a higher gear after Hiroshima. The papacy, again, is quicker at realising this than others. We may not feel under the same shadow as people did thirty or fifty years ago, but the issues remain, indeed the astronomical costs of renewing and maintaining the Trident system in this country, which no mainstream politicians are prepared to challenge, keep the issue urgent. What are we saying as a community? The last Pope – a man often lionized by theological and political conservatives –told us bluntly that a key plank of this country's defence policies and capability is a *pack of lies.*

Elizabeth Anscombe remarked on wickedness in her 1961 paper: "The principal wickedness which is a temptation to those engaged in warfare is the killing of the innocent, which may often be done with impunity and even to the glory of those who do it."[47] The intention to kill the innocent, and the power to do so, undermines the culture of our society far more than we are often prepared to admit, and this should determine how we react to the continuing possession of nuclear weapons. It poisons the culture of the country, which goes hand in hand with a growing militarism in our society after recent wars.[48] The Church is called to unmask wickedness, unpopular as this may make us; it also raises the question of the participation of Catholics in the armed forces.

The paradigm of opposing the civitas terrena: the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ

I suggested earlier a link between condemning modern warfare and distancing ourselves from the state: devotion to Christ the King

[46] The whole message can be accessed from the Vatican website. See also the condemnation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* (London: Continuum 2005), paragraph 208. We have moved away decisively from a short-term toleration of the deterrent.

[47] "War and Murder" in Stein, op. cit., p. 48. Anscombe had tried in the 1950s to prevent Oxford University from awarding an honorary doctorate to President Harry Truman.

[48] Shown particularly since the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts – examples of this renewed military culture would be Armed Forces Day, the Military Covenant, and the success of charities such as *Help for Heroes.* The way in which funeral processions of repatriated soldiers through Royal Wooton Bassett caught the public imagination would be another example.

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symbolises this. As theologians in the "Radical Orthodoxy" school have pointed out, this is strengthened by a renewed reading of St Augustine's *City of God.* Augustine does not suggest a partnership of equals but keeps the *civitas terrena* firmly in its place. Thus the Church can become a centre of resistance to those in power, to the forces of violence and oppression. The earthly city is built on violence and war, so as we unmask the evil of militarism we can see that the Emperor has no clothes. "The earthly city will not be everlasting; for when it is condemned to the final punishment it will no longer be a city. It has its good in this world, and rejoices to participate in it with such gladness as can be revised from things of such a kind . . . the earthly city is generally divided against itself by litigation, by wars, by battles, by the pursuit of victories that bring death with them or at best are doomed to death"[49] Domination and self-interest are its guiding lights – and Augustine is redefining political and public life.[50] But we are offered the chance of salvation and forgiveness of sins, as John Milbank puts it:

> God and the heavenly Jerusalem – our 'true mother' – reach down in compassion for the salvation of the world. Salvation from sin must mean 'liberation' from cosmic, political, economic and psychic *dominium,* and therefore from all structures that belong to the *saeculum,* or temporal interval between the Fall and the final return of Christ. This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community.[51]

By contrast the state needs a culture of war; it has a "para-liturgy"[52] of war; we see this in the rituals that surround Remembrance Sunday, partly because of the decline in the practice of Christianity. All that many have left is a form of ancestor-worship. The state demands loyalty to a narrative, so political leaders want to justify the First World War so promoting the message of a century ago. If you want young people to fight, you cannot tolerate the questioning of the morality of war. It is also effective bereavement psychology: the loss experienced by parents of a dead soldier who *believe* that their offspring died in a just cause is lightened, even if it was not just – so evaluating war is uncomfortable.

[49] *De Civitate Dei* xv.4 (Bettenson ed. p. 599).

[50] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, pp.9ff., drawing on Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God", *Milltown Studies* no.19/20, pp. 55ff. Williams is answering the charge of Hannah Arendt that Augustine led Christians to withdraw from political and public life. See also R. Markus, *History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, rev.ed., 1988).

[51] *Theology and Social Theory,* 2nd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell 2006), p. 394. See also Virginia Woolf, *The Three Guineas,* which also explores the link between opposition to war and distancing from the state (I am grateful to Dr Marije Altorf for this insight).

[52] Cavanaugh uses this term to describe the role of torture in Pinochet's Chile.

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So the theological shift is uneven. Some readers will remember what a slide rule was: theological development about war and peace is similar. The middle part of the rule has moved ahead of the rest. Popes, theologians, religious orders, the peace movement, Justice and Peace groups have moved, remarkably; but many laypeople, clergy and bishops are stuck.[53]

Conclusion

This development towards what Professor Beattie called "virtual pacifism" can give us all hope. While this paper was being prepared we were made aware of the sufferings and deaths of our fellow Christians in northern Iraq and Syria. The response was American air strikes and talk of further military action. This response is a moral blind alley: by contrast our tradition will venerate these innocent men, women and children as martyrs. Hard as it may be to assert this from a country where we do not face persecution, our faith teaches that martyrdom is the path to glory and victory, *not* won through violence and the force of arms. So we pray for them; indeed, we can pray *to* those who have died as martyrs – that our response to their sufferings will be faithful to Christ's teachings about peace.

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[53] A good example of how parts of the slide rule have not moved on would be the failure of the churches in Britain to challenge or condemn the NATO military action in Afghanistan since 2001.

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