“Nothing but a False Sense of Security”: Mapping and Critically Assessing Papal Support for a World Free from Nuclear Weapons

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ABSTRACT
This article maps the papal peace witness’ support for a world free from nuclear weapons. Although the last concentration of scholarly work in this area dates back to the early and mid-1980s, now is a cogent time to update that scholarship by revisiting and critically assessing papal teachings and diplomatic actions that move towards banning nuclear weapons on Earth. Contemporary events motivating this article include the need to bridge the gap evident in US and global policy on nuclear weapons. Particularly relevant here is the current “everything on the table”-themed posturing, oddly mixing war and peace themes, active in the Trump administration’s policy of reinvigorating the USA’s nuclear arsenal in the face of challenge by the likes of Kim Jong-un’s nuclear ambitions for North Korea. Yet, at the same time a significant number of the members of the community of nations, including the Holy See, have signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. To undertake the task of critically mapping papal support for a world free from nuclear weapons that made it almost a given that the Holy See would sign and ratify that treaty, the present article examines the contributions of contemporary popes from Pius XII to Francis. It focuses on how these popes named and addressed what they often characterized as the moral evils manifest in nuclear weapons, when focusing their efforts to rid the world of these human-generated existential threats.

Introduction

The facts speak for themselves, in a way that is dramatic, unforgettable and unique. In the face of an unforgettable tragedy, which touches us all as human beings, how can we fail to express our brotherhood and our deep sympathy at the frightful wound inflicted on the cities of Japan that bear the names of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

That wound affected the whole of the human family. Hiroshima and Nagasaki: few events in history have had such an effect on... [human]... conscience. The representatives of the world of science were not the ones least affected by the moral crisis caused throughout the world by the explosion of the first atomic bomb. The human mind had in fact made a terrible discovery. We realized with horror that nuclear energy would henceforth be available as a weapon of...
devastation; then we learned that this terrible weapon had in fact been used, for the first time, for military purposes. And then there arose the question that will never leave us again: Will this weapon, perfected and multiplied beyond measure, be used tomorrow? If so, would it not probably destroy the human family, its members and all the achievements of civilization?

- John Paul II (1981a), addressing scientists and representative of the United Nations University in Hiroshima.

According to Ronald Bainton’s (1960/1990) influential reading of church history, Christian attitudes to war and peace developed over time. First, the pacifism of the early church gave way to support for just war and then that dangerous memory of pacifism was lost by the Crusading period. For Bainton, these positions “matured in chronological sequence” (1960/1990, 66). This chronological sequence can easily be correlated with the fortunes of the bishops of Rome, the popes. In broad terms, the Church of Rome went from (1) being a minority facing intermittent and often harsh persecution to (2) rapprochement and then establishment within the imperial structure in the late classical period to (3) certain Catholic bishops emerging as temporal leaders in medieval Europe. In that progression, the bishops of Rome seemingly left behind the communality and pacifism of the early followers of Jesus completely. The violent peak of that transition is perhaps personified most acutely in the figure of ‘the warrior pope,’ Julius II (r. 1503–1511) whose papacy frequently focused on high politics and expending the papal territory through military action (Temple 2006).

While the pacifism of the early Church was seemingly forgotten by the popes of the modern period, the embrace of a war ethic was often carefully qualified so that just war was frequently, although not exclusively, held to be the normative Catholic position on war and peace from the 16th Century until the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). For Bainton (1960/1990), just war sits in intermediate place between (1) “absolute pacifism”, which forbids participation in the direct violence of war and killing without admitting any exceptions, and (2) “the Crusade”, in which holy warriors are motivated by an ethic of reward that spills over into the afterlife. As was the case during the reign (1198–1216) of Innocent III, the crusading attitude to holy war was sometimes actively sanctioned and particular military interventions deliberatively crafted with the aid of their teaching authority by the popes (on Innocent III’s warmongering see Smith 2019). As recently as the second half of the nineteenth century, the papal prerogative was employed by Pope Pius IX (r. 1846–1878) to call on both young Catholic men and “faithful” monarchs from around the world to defend the Papal territories from the onslaught of Italian unification. Catholics from many nations responded to that call, resulting in scenes that saw Pius IX blessing the papal armies before going into battle (Coulombe 2008). At moments such as these, the papal support for war undertaken for a holy purpose seemed unshakable. Even in more measured reflection on the part of the popes, it was generally taken for granted that a war fought for a just cause required Catholic participation. As a result, during World War II in the USA, petitions to civil tribunals from Catholics for conscientious objector status were routinely refused, often based on advice from ecclesial officials (Genilo 2007). It was certainly the case that as nuclear weapons entered human history during Pius XII’s (1939–1958) reign, a just war response was generally assumed to be the default Catholic moral position on all matters related to war and peace. Concomitantly, by Pius XII’s reign, the active violence of the holy war of the Crusades had been relegated to an increasingly marginal position. There, it sat on the margins with absolute pacifism and the principled
non-violence of figures like the Catholic Worker Movement’s Dorothy Day (on Day’s peace witness see Hennessy 2017) as just war traditions dominated Catholic discourses.

Just war traditions have ancient roots in Roman and Greek ideas and became more active in Catholic life after the Edict of Milan (313 CE) granted official toleration to Christians within the context of the Roman Empire. Both Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas treated the subject matter along with a host of other theologians who were also named as Saints and sometimes, like Augustine and Aquinas, additionally as Doctors (that is, great teachers) of the Catholic Church (on the development of just war in Christian attitudes see Yoder 2009). Smith (1961) summarizes the precepts of the just war tradition as follows:

(1) It must be declared by a lawful authority.
(2) It must be undertaken for a grave and just cause proportionate to the evils brought about by its wagging.
(3) The whole prosecution of the war must be carried out with a right intention – “that good may be furthered and evil avoided”.
(4) The war must be rightly conducted, and restrained within the limits of justice and love.
(5) There must be a real possibility of success.
(6) It must be undertaken as a last resort after all other means have been unsuccessful (107–108).

The decline in civil power and reach of the bishops of Rome helped to break the connections between the papacy and war personified in Julius II reign. Indeed, it was from the eventual loss of most of their temporal power that emerged spaces for the bishops of Rome to exercise their influence in different ways. Even when the just war tradition remained prominent, the popes began employing the diplomatic structures of the Holy See in attempts to foster peace during many of the 20th Century conflicts that threatened global peace (see, for example, Pollard 2014). This concern for peace also entered into their social teaching. The resultant papal teaching on peace, in turn, has opened up new conversations about war and peace in Catholic traditions.

Recently, a stream of these conversations has been undertaken by scholars and activists who see both the Catholic Church and papal teaching as rightly moving towards a re-embracing of what are understood as the Gospel values of just peace and non-violence. This group advocates for such an embrace needs to be made explicit by the present pope via a papal encyclical devoted to the active promotion of just peace and non-violence (see, for example, Dennis 2018). As this article will demonstrate, the nuclear age helped stimulate these conversations. It has also served as a gadfly to push along the papal peace witness, even prior to the horrific bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which themselves have been frequently referenced in papal anti-war and violence limitation discourse since the end of the Second World War. This phenomenon has not yet led to the unambiguous embracing of just peace and active non-violence in accord with an absolute pacifist position in the style of Dorothy Day. Indeed, notwithstanding the end of the cold war, John Paul II (1991) was adamant that Catholics were not pacifists, stating that Catholics do not want peace at any price and adding that peace without justice was untenable (two positions that a Catholic peace theorist might argue are compatible with pacifism). Yet, John Paul II became quite widely known for his opposition to war under current technological conditions (Allman 2008).
Taking into account such subtleties, this article demonstrates that the advent of the nuclear age has resulted in a *de facto* Catholic pacifism supported by the papal peace witness as it applies to the specific case of geopolitical conflicts. This confluence helps unify principled non-violence and just war positions within an anti-war stance in that context. It does so by leading both positions to the same conclusion in the case of geopolitical conflict because of the impossibility of deploying nuclear weaponry in a manner that adequately meets most articulations of just war theory. Notable here are the criteria of proportionality and the violations upon justice and love that follow from nuclear weaponry’s nature as a macro-scale blunt instrument, making discrimination against non-combatants rarely viable.

In a closely coupled trend that is evident from what is perhaps the most famous statement (actually, originally a title) in papal teaching “If You Want Peace, Work for Justice” (Paul VI 1971), the popes of the nuclear age have come to hold a view of positive peace. That is, in common with a just peace framing they have come to see peace as consisting of much more than the mere absence of war. Instead, peace is marked by positively defined conditions including social justice (compare Galtung 1969), support of the common good, an emphasis on the dignity of the human person, and, more recently, a clear concern for socio-ecological flourishing (see, for example, Francis 2015). In accord with the promotion of the values accompanying these commitments and the general sentiments expressed by John Paul II in this article’s epigraph, a world free of nuclear weapons has been a significant feature of the papacy’s vision and action for substantive peace since even before the destructive power of nuclear weaponry first made itself evident to the human moral imagination in 1945. Four years prior to the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pius XII drew on the expertise available to him through the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to address that group. Commenting on the moral implications of the then advancing atomic science, he warned against any use of nuclear technological innovation for evil purposes (Pius XII 1941a). In November 2017, on the occasion of the opening of a conference on nuclear disarmament and with his characteristic pastoral acumen, Pope Francis (2017b) was explicit that nuclear weapons had no legitimate role in politics. Taking these two headline-grabbing moments as bookends, this article maps the responses of popes to the nuclear age and critically assesses the efficacy of their contributions towards ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

**Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958)**

The first pope of the nuclear age, Pius XII, came to the throne of Saint Peter during the Second World War. In its twilight moments, World War II saw the deployment of two intentionally horrific nuclear bombs on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese cities that had Catholic minority populations.¹ Pius XII was also the first of pope to reign during the cold war and became widely known for his opposition to communism. Yet, Pius XII had initially tried

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¹For example, in 1945, Hiroshima was home to a Jesuit community that included the future superior general of the order, Pedro Arrupe, who was literally knocked to the ground by the deployment of the first nuclear bomb. His later recounting of that experience and his companion’s efforts to contribute to addressing the aftermath of that inhumane action via international speaking tours was one of the factors that allowed Arrupe to build the cultural capital to be elected superior general of the Jesuits. He then used that platform in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to amplify the order’s charism for justice and peace (On Arrupe’s influence see Bishop 2000/2007; Modras 2004). Arrupe did so by building upon a contextual method of “look, judge, act” partly inspired by John XXIII (1961b) and with its origins in the socially transformative methodology of Young Christian Workers founder Cardinal Joseph Leo Cardijn (On Cardijn see Zotti 1990).
to maintain a neutral position between the developing blocks of countries. However, by 1948, in the wake of the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia and volatile Italian election, along with moves orchestrated by Moscow to limit Catholic Church activities in Eastern European countries, the pope “moved the Vatican into the forefront of the political, as well as the spiritual, anti-communist forces” (Kent 2002, 191).

Before this shift took place and previewing Paul VI’s famous teaching on positive peace cited in this article’s introduction, Pius XII chose as his motto “Peace, the Work of Justice”. Concomitantly, his first radio address focused on peace as the greatest gift from God that can only arise via human acts of justice and charity (Pius XII 1939). Concerning the Vatican’s approach matter of war and peace during this papacy, it is important to note the tensions over how Pius XII chose to manage the Holy See’s relations with the Italian Fascist and German Nazi regimes that have generated a critique that he ought to have done more to publicly counteract Nazi genocidal policies (on the contested legacy of this papacy see Friedlander 1966; Binchy, 1970; Falconi 1970; Cornwell 1999). Notwithstanding the present deserved controversy, Pius XII did make a concerted effort to broker peace amongst the allied and axis powers, including 28 direct diplomacy efforts in 1940 alone (Naughton 1943). Moreover, he strove to protect human dignity during the war. In that regard, he employed the Holy See’s diplomatic corps to promote the rights of prisoners of war and encourage the just treatment of Jews.

For Pius XII, peace within society was connected to the peace within the community of nations. His commitment to social justice in this area was expressed in his teaching (see, for example, Pius XII 1943b). It was also evident in the pope’s use of the Vatican City State to harbour Jews, over a million of whom escaped the Shoah thanks to being afforded sanctuary in that and other Catholic institutions (Walker 1945; Marchione 2000). Previewing and even going beyond University of Notre Dame’s conflict transformation theorist and practitioner John Paul Lederach’s (1997) notion of sustainable peace, Pius XII (1941b) was emphatic that positive peace needed to have a universal, lasting dimension that was not built on destruction but left intact the nobility of all nations while also meeting their vital needs and addressing issues of identity by ensuring the honour of all (compare Jeong 2000).

Given such a broad conception of positive peace, it is not surprising that Pius XII would also be concerned by the development of dangerous nuclear technologies as they represent a threat to satisfying vital needs while ensuring the honour of all remains intact. In addition to the above-mentioned condemnation of the immoral uses of nuclear technology (Pius XII 1941a), Pius XII (1943a) was emphatic that the energy released via nuclear fission must never be allowed to explode: “it is important above all, however, to prevent this reaction from taking place as an explosion... Otherwise, a dangerous catastrophe might occur, not only in the locality itself but also for our whole planet”. Comparably and building upon the just war tradition to mark a movement towards the aforementioned de facto Catholic pacifism as it related to geopolitical contexts, Pius XII (1944) invoked the argument that under modern conditions it was clear that conceiving of war as a means of international conflict resolution was now “out of date” due to increasingly “monstrous means of hostility” that served to “destroy all that has been built up throughout the ages”. To understand the significance of this framing, it is necessary to return to the importance of just war traditions in Catholic discourses.
As they are named in the introduction above, the second, third, fourth, and sixth just war criteria were clearly violated by the final massive bombing campaigns undertaken with both conventional and nuclear weapons as the closing acts of the Second World War. Taking into account such violations, Pius XII adopted a de facto pacifism in the geopolitical realm, which had a different starting point but would find common ground on the level of conclusions with an anti-war stance also active in the principled pacifism. Further, this confluence came at a time when principled pacifism was making political inroads in response to the horror of potential nuclear engagement during the cold war period. Here, it is important to emphasize that the pope’s position was firmly rooted even before the divisions that would mark the cold war became evident to policymakers. Indeed, Pius XII’s peace witness was motivated by commitments to promoting justice and fairness. In the immediate aftermath of the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pius XII had an audience with US generals Dwight Eisenhower and Mark Clark during which he reminded them of the duty to deal charitably with defeated enemies (Kent 2002). In a somewhat of cryptic fashion, the pope added in his Christmas message for 1945 that those exacting punishment for crimes ought to avoid inflicting damage that they would denounce as criminal actions were they done by others (Pius XII 1945).

Pius XII (1948) was also explicit in upholding the fallout of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as evidence that the nuclear bomb was “the most terrible weapon which the human mind has conceived up to date” not the least because, he continued, it had been produced by science unmediated by love. To counteract the terror unleashed upon the world as a result of this love deficit, the pope actively supported the United Nations (UN) as the best forum for promoting international cooperation which could mitigate against nuclear deployment, and thus preventing the cold war from becoming hot. He also upheld the harms caused by nuclear testing as a reason that planned detonations should cease in accord with an obligation of conscience pertaining to both nations and their leaders (Pius XII 1955). To delineate support for this position, he cited scientific evidence across a range of fallout issues in his Christmas message for 1955 as reasons to ban the testing and deployment of nuclear weapons. This argument co-occurred with his invocation of an urgent need to limit armaments in general and take up international peacebuilding (Pius XII 1955). Here, it should also be noted that Pius XII’s teaching on what today might be called “weapons of mass destruction” (on this concept see Thakur 2015) and what he termed “ABC warfare (atomic, bacteriological, chemical warfare)” was unambiguous in condemning any notion of these technologies’ legitimate use in conflict as a matter of principle and emphasizing that they could never be deployed to satisfy the traditional just war criterion of self-defence, even after all peaceful means of conflict resolution had been exhausted (Pius XII 1954b). As such, while he retained the just war criterion of legitimate self-defence, in common with principled anti-war pacifists, he nonetheless advocated for international treaties to ban ABC armaments, framing such weapons of mass destruction as unjustifiable technologies of warfare (Pius XII 1954a). Thus, cogently for both Catholic and wider contexts, he provided an example of how one need not be an absolute pacifist in order to support international agreements banning nuclear armaments or other weapons of mass destruction.
In a point this article returns to in the conclusion, taken in a systemic sense, these teachings of Pius XII leave only the thinnest of spaces for any political actor to pursue a nuclear armament policy based upon deterrence. Further, that space Pius XII leaves is only a pragmatic, not a principled, one. This analysis rings true given the simple fact that the preferred outcome of an effective international treaty would be to remove that policy option from the repertoire of state actors, with non-state actors being similarly restricted under a legally binding and enforceable framework. Indeed, Pius XII (1953) stressed that in the face of ABC warfare that seemed so palpable during the cold war period, such intentional agreements were the only legitimate response. Here the pope added that in-kind responses are untenable when it comes to ABC weapons, adding that the leaders of targeted polities ought to tolerate the injustice of being placed in the cross hairs of such armaments rather than respond in kind (Pius XII 1953). In summary, the whole nuclear weapons enterprise, deterrence included, is firmly characterized as illicit over the arc of Pius XII’s teaching.

**John XXIII (r. 1958–1963)**

Further clarity was given to the papal peace witness during the relatively short reign of Pius XII’s successor. John XXIII is well-known for convening the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that marked a turning of the Catholic Church towards the world. That renewing orientation, in turn, re-affirmed and deepened Christian commitments to substantive peace and the gospel of non-violence (Dear 2005; Paul VI 1965b). He came to the papal office with an extensive diplomatic record in places including Bulgaria, Turkey, and France (Hayles 1965). It was at the last post where he was stationed when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed with nuclear weapons. The resultant destruction and loss of life left a deep impression of wrongdoing for the diplomat. This impression is evidence of how the future pope’s work as a diplomat frequently revealed a commitment to peace and justice. Indeed, one of his last roles before attending the conclave in 1958 was as the Holy See’s permanent observer to UNESCO (Capovilla 1964). As his papal motto, he chose “Obedience and Peace”. Like his predecessor, John XXIII (1958) elected to employ his first media broadcast to promote positive peace as characterized by flourishing. Specifically, he called on the leaders of the world to listen to the people in their care. In his pastoral style, he intoned that regular people “do not ask for those monstrous war machines produced in our time which threaten to bring fratricidal massacres and worldwide havoc but peace; that peace which would enable the human family to freely live, flourish and thrive” (John XXIII 1958). In support of this flourishing-themed approach, John XXIII (1959) was keen to promote solidarity amongst all people as the necessary foundation for “traveling toward a real and solidly based peace” lest humanity drift blindly into a new war characterized by “monstrous weapons” that promised both “victor and vanquished alike...nothing but a scene of universal ruin and destruction”. He explained his philosophy to counteract this drift in address to members of the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi when speaking in Germany just prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall, which become one of the most important symbols of division during the cold war. On that occasion, John XXIII (1961a) named his desire to be “a man of peace in the deepest meaning of the word”. He buttressed this commitment by returning to an image of positive peace manifest in an ethic of accompaniment so important to peacebuilding (Coy 2012) and “resolving to walk...
along the road with anyone as far as possible, without compromising either justice or truth” (John XXIII 1961a, 387–388).

This ethic of solidarity transferred well into what is perhaps John XXIII’s greatest diplomatic success: his invocation of thirst and love for peace felt by common people during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He explicitly named that thirst in one of his October 1962 radio addresses. Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy, were respectively sent the text of that radio address through the Soviet and US embassies in Rome prior to its broadcast. The day after its broadcast, news of the papal address was published as the headline story in Pravda, the official communist newspaper of the Soviet Union. That same day, Khrushchev sent a telegram to the US President that offered the compromise that got high level negotiations in motion to end the crisis. He proposed that if Kennedy agreed to a non-aggression pact with Cuba, ending the US blockade of the island nation, along with the removal of nuclear missiles from Turkey, then Soviet Union would withdraw its missiles from Cuba (Zizola 1978). In so much as the space for this solution was opened by the papal radio address, Khrushchev accepting John XXIII’s framing of the Soviet leader as a lover of the people and lover of peace helped to de-escalate the Cuban Missile Crisis that palpably threatened to spiral into a nuclear war (Hebblethwaite 1984; George 2013). That framing, when integrated into Khrushchev’s self-identity, provided an exit path, which allowed the Soviet leader with to save face. Support for this reading of history was given by Khrushchev himself, who, when reflecting on the events of the Cuban Missile with the benefit of hindsight, later said of John XXIII’s intervention: “What the pope has done for peace will go down in history” (Nikita Khrushchev quoted in Hebblethwaite 1984, 445).

Here, the pope had profited in his peacebuilding endeavour from the simple fact that he was one of the few world leaders who had no substantive pull to align with either the Soviet Union or the USA in the polarizing dynamics of the cold war. Indeed, John XXIII’s geopolitical location in this regard helped both Khrushchev and Kennedy engage with the pontiff’s framings of peace without raising the suspicion of their constituencies. This move ultimately provided a path to exit the spiral of conflict without having to acknowledge defeat. Such an exit path may have been crucial to superpower leadership at that moment in the history of the cold war, when the future of the world was substantively endangered by nuclear posturing (compare Zizola 1978). The pope’s orientation towards peace, vision-driven but pragmatic when necessary, both mitigated against nuclear threats and transferred into John XXIII’s magisterial teachings. Indeed, his playing a small but extremely helpful role as a “pacificer and reconciler” (Hebblewaite 1984, 445) informed one of John XXIII’s most significant contributions to Catholic Social Teaching. It was the advice and insights he generated and received in contributing to the brokering of an end to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which were the immediate stimulus for the crafting one of the most cogent encyclicals to date for this article’s subject matter: Pacem in Terris (promulgated in 1963). This connection is evidenced by the fact that the drafting process for that magisterial document began only two weeks after the resolution of the crisis (Zizola 1978). As such, it was an initiative to prevent nuclear deployment during arguably the hottest moment of the cold war that precipitated the first, and at the time of writing only (although, as noted above, this may soon change), papal encyclical specifically dedicated to peace.
This was a significant development because encyclicals are the most authoritative form of teaching given by the Bishop of Rome. Although admittedly most Catholics are likely unaware of their status, “the faithful” nonetheless understand that they are important documents. According to Catholicism’s norms as articulated by many moral theologians, encyclicals are binding upon a Catholic’s conscience. This binding nature means that without prayerful reflection, the default reaction to the teachings contained in this category of magisterial document is meant to be assent (Gaillardetz 2003). With *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), the first encyclical addressed to all people of good will and not just Catholics and their ecclesial leaders (John XXIII, 1963a) produced a firm articulation of the need to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Significantly, he did so in a paragraph that also quoted his predecessor’s exhortation that the world must not be allowed to descend into a third world war (John XXIII 1963a, no. 119). When naming the causes of the arms race, John XXIII (1963a) does acknowledge that nuclear weapons may act as a deterrent. However, he shades that conclusion with myriad lines of argument that serve to indicate deterrence rests upon faulty logic. Further, he reiterates that claim both before and after *Pacem in Terris*’ key paragraph naming the need to ban nuclear weapons. In a point significant for the present article’s conclusion, it should be emphasized that even when naming the efficacy of deterrence, he does so in a highly qualified manner: “Moreover, 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” (John XXIII 1963a, no. 111). In addition to the danger for the prospects of a vibrant Earth community marked by social justice that is posed by nuclear testing, John XXIII (1963a) cites reasons for coming to the conclusion that the world needs to be free from nuclear weapons, which would reappear in the teachings of his successors. These reasons include (1) the problematic possibility of accidental deployment, (2) the unjustifiably high cost of arms racing while poverty exists in the world, (3) what he characterizes as the misplaced nature of the premise that any balance of power in armaments could bring positive peace,\(^2\) and (4) the climate of fear created by nuclear weapons. The latter was palpable at the time and was manifest in a virulent form during the Cuban Missile Crisis, one that helped to lay bare the dangers posed by arms racing. Building on these points, John XXIII (1963a) continues:

Hence justice, right reason, and the recognition of man’s dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stock-piles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned. A general agreement must be reached on a suitable disarmament program, with an effective system of mutual control. (no. 112)

John XXIII (1963a) then goes on to assert the need for mutual cooperation amongst peoples and individuals on both practical and spiritual levels. The pope cites such cooperation as a means to overcome both the “balance of power” logic and the premise that war could ever again be an acceptable means of conflict resolution within the community of nations. Indeed, this sentiment is reaffirmed in a later section of *Pacem*.

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\(^2\)In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII (1963a) also dismissed the notion that achieving a balance of power could be a plausible justification for acquiring atomic weapons.
in *Terris* that names the conviction that conflicts must be settled through negotiation, rather than war, as one of “the signs of the times” that ought to be read by earnest individuals striving for any peace characterized by social justice (John XXIII 1963a, no. 126). While John XXIII (1963a) acknowledges the support given to that premise by the “terrifying” prospects of modern weapons and their use so central to cold war arms racing, he nonetheless is emphatic that “in this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice” (no. 127).

With that teaching, John XXIII removed a primary foundation for the just war tradition. The premise that war can no longer serve a just purpose remains a recurring, if at times qualified, theme in the teaching and diplomacy of the popes who have occupied the Chair of St. Peter in the nuclear age. However, they do not teach a shallow or simplistic conception of peace (see John Paul II 2002, on the valuable contribution of *Pacem in Terris* to the contemporary papal peace witness). For example, John XXIII’s understanding extols a vision of peace that extends out from the Holy See and cross-fertilizes with the thirst of people, most especially felt by those without wealth and privilege, for positive peace. As he said during one his last public engagements while accepting the Balzan peace prize, “the desire for a just peace has entered the mind and hearts of all without distinction but more markedly, it seems, those of the working classes” (John XXIII 1963b, 493). Here, we gain insight into how, for John XXIII, peace is a positive state marked by justice. In this light, embodying positive peace is an essential human duty that is shirked when decision-makers use any form of nuclear armament within strategy or policy as they had too often during the cold war period.

**Paul VI (r.1963–1978)**

John XXIII’s untimely death that threatened the continuation of his vision (Zizola 1978). A key papal moment dealing with peace at a time of multiple transitions in the Catholic Church (O’Malley 2010) came when Paul VI committed to re-convening the Second Vatican Council. At the same time, he also publicly signalled, via a telegram addressed to the US, Soviet, and UK governments, his approval for the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which retained the right to underground testing. In that open telegram, Paul VI presented his advocacy for continued initiatives towards more substantive peace (Clancy 1963). This open telegram helped set the tone for the council’s treatment of peace issues in *Gaudium et Spes*, which was given further momentum when Paul VI addressed the UN General Assembly in New York. That apostolic journey to the USA, the first ever to North America by a reigning pope, can be read as part of a series of pilgrimages for peace designed to problematize cold war mentalities (Huber 1967). For his address at the UN, Paul VI symbolically selected the feast of Saint Francis, which had the additional advantage of coinciding with Vatican II’s autumn 1965 session. This choice of timing also rests, in part, on Francis of Assisi being associated with peace (Boff 2006). In that rousing address, speaking to an assembly that had been increasingly bifurcated along cold war lines of power and allegiance, Paul VI (1965a) famously declared, “No More War! War Never Again!” (emphasis in the original). He also directly addressed nuclear weapons as part of his general condemnation of war under contemporary conditions by echoing a statement
he made during the first trip to India by a reigning pope the year before Paul VI (1964). He subsequently repeated that statement in the more authoritative venue of an encyclical in *Populorum Progressio*. Therein, Paul VI (1967a) addressed the urgent need for integral human development as a response to both direct and structural violence. Paul VI (1965a) urged governments to undertake a task worthy of their effort and to work for an end to all weapons of mass destruction. He further called upon leaders of richer polities to redirect a portion of the expenditures earmarked for such weaponry to the least economically developed countries in the world. Moreover, Paul VI (1965a) dismissed the premise that true peace could be built up merely by the power politics or balance of forces that featured in cold war superpower policies. As an antidote to these problematic methods, he proclaimed the need for solidarity marked by love in order to finally dissolve the nuclear threat. For Paul VI (1965a), such an outcome was necessary because:

Arms, and especially the terrible arms that modern science has provided you, engender bad dreams, feed evil sentiments, create nightmares, hostilities, and dark resolutions even before they cause any victims and ruins. They call for enormous expenses. They interrupt projects of solidarity and of useful labour. They warp the outlook of nations. ...But your courage and good qualities urge you on to a study of means that can guarantee the security of international life without any recourse to arms.

The pope's address had a significant impact in Rome, as evidenced by Paul VI being welcomed back from New York with rigorous applause by those bishops gathered in assembly for Vatican II. A key result of the momentum generated by Paul VI's UN speech was the final form of *Gaudium et Spes* (De Roo 2012), which is a Second Vatican Council document officially promulgated by Paul VI (1965b) that addresses the Catholic Church's relationship with the contemporary world and contains a remarkable peace witness connecting duties of social justice to imperatives for peacebuilding. This Pastoral Constitution also explicitly undertakes a re-evaluation of war that cites the indiscriminate and “horror and perversity” magnifying-nature of “scientific weapons” (Paul VI 1965b, no. 80). Indeed, in that same paragraph, the document emphasizes that for this set of reasons the use of such weapons is illicit, even to satisfy the self-defence criterion that is so important to just war theorists. The bishops issued a strong condemnation of deterrence via amassing ever more destructive high technology weapons, a policy choice that was then presented by governments as a means of ensuring 'peace through strength' via holding nuclear weapons. The council fathers explicitly named the amassing of “scientific weapons” to supposedly ensure peace as an unsubstantial policy choice. Here the bishops asserted that this project of hording high-technology weapons distracts from essential duties to people living in poverty. They continued that, rather than ensuring peace, the amassing of armaments increases the risk of an all-out war, which, further, would be an affront to God and all humanity. In this manner, *Gaudium et Spes* coupled (1) ultimate fate, itself connected to duties owed vertically towards the divine in Catholic consciousness, and (2) social justice, correlated with duties owned horizontally towards neighbours, as dual-track motivations for working towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons (Paul VI 1965b).

Offering further support for the premise that peace is irreducibly coupled to justice and employing the World Day of Peace Message format, which he inaugurated as an annual Catholic tradition (Paul VI 1967b), Paul VI (1971) asked, “why do we waste time in giving
peace any other foundation than Justice?” Amplifying such ethical sentiments, he taught that justice and peace are jointly “fostered by personal sacrifice, clemency, mercy, and love” (Paul VI 1975). In this light, the pope cautioned against adopting a view of human nature that saw war and violence as inevitable (compare Hamburg and Hamburg 2013). Largely supplanting the aforementioned traditional Catholic emphases on just war, Paul VI (1969) instead affirmed that peace represented a contextual imperative for “disarmament, first of all, limitation of nuclear weapons”, nonviolent arbitration, collaboration, the toleration of diverse forms of government, and the redirection of military expenditure to contribute to integral human development”.

Previewing an aspect of the methodology via which these themes would be expressed throughout the pontificates of his successors, Paul VI departed from the virulent anti-communism that characterized the end of Pius XII’s reign to welcome a series of communist leaders to the Vatican. The purpose underlying these diplomatic occasions was to facilitate the opening of communicative channels to prevent thermonuclear war (Burleigh 2007). In his teaching, the need to prevent nuclear deployment trumps the ideological differences that had prevented Pius XII from perusing such a policy. This new approach was in line with the Second Vatican Council fathers’ teaching as promulgated by Paul VI (1965b) that “even with those who oppress the Church and harass her in manifold ways.. we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace” (no. 92). Paul VI’s diplomatic meetings with both Western and communist political leaders further built upon the related premise that it is a tangible possibility for humanity as a whole to effectively respond to widespread and authentic cries for peace (Paul VI 1972). Dealing with that subject matter, Paul VI (1975) offers a sharp contrast between the violent logic of dropping a nuclear weapon on the city of Hiroshima that resulted in “a butchery of untold magnitude”, and the creative politics of “a weak man”, Mohandas Gandhi, who “armed only with the principle of non-violence” was able “to vindicate for a Nation of hundreds of millions of human beings the freedom and dignity of a new People” (compare Jahanbegloo 2013).

In what may be read as an eerie coincidence in light of this commitment to nonviolent transformative politics, Paul VI died on 6 August 1978, which was also the anniversary of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, an episode he framed as an act of extreme inhumanity and that he frequently referenced in his World Day of Peace Messages (e.g., Paul VI 1971). When he passed away, Paul VI left behind a substantive teaching on why the human community needed to rid itself of the weapons technology that had facilitated such incomprehensible levels of death, destruction, and lingering disease (on the human and environmental impact see Hershey 2009). Further, in accord with the peace witness given expression in Gaudium et Spes, Paul VI (1975) clearly condemned the international arms trade. He also problematized the related premise that positive peace could be brought about through policies that encourage arms racing as a means of deterrence. A prime example being invoked here was “MAD”, a policy, particularly fashionable for the superpowers during the cold war, of pursuing mutually assured destruction through second strike nuclear capacity (compare Lieber and Press 2006). Paul VI (1974) specifically characterized such approaches as an attempt to “stamp terror with the name of Peace” (compare Walker 2012). Further, in a point significant for this article’s conclusion, he urged that deterrence be purged from the world’s policy landscape (Paul VI 1974).
John Paul I (r. 1978 for 33 Days)

John Paul I’s papacy only lasted for a short period of time. This brief reign prevented him from even promulgating a World Day of Peace Message. Nonetheless, there is every indication that, had he lived longer, John Paul I would have employed his teaching office and his diplomatic influence to emphasize the importance of nuclear disarmament in harmony with the trajectory of his predecessors. In general terms, John Paul I (1978a) was committed to peace and the end of war to satisfy what he named, recalling John XXIII’s embodied framing, as an essential and universal human “thirst for peace”. Connecting threads present in his successors’ teachings, John Paul I (1978a) saw such a thirst for peace as especially active among people living in poverty “who pay more and suffer more in troubled times and in wars”. More specifically and when laying out his plans for his papacy during the requisite speech to the people of Rome and the world, he expressed a commitment to encourage and give “support for all the laudable, worthy initiatives that can safeguard and increase peace in our troubled world” (John Paul I 1978c). During his address to the diplomatic corps sent to the Vatican by national governments around the world, John Paul I (1978b; compare Carrette and Miall 2017) expressed a willingness to be invited to employ the Holy See’s resources to work with national governments and international agencies “in the search for better solutions to the great problems that see at stake détente, disarmament, peace, justice, humanitarian measures and aid, development etc”. As part of his argument for upholding a constructive role for the contemporary Catholic Church to participate in the building of positive peace along these lines, John Paul I highlighted the unique position of the Holy See in global politics, which he characterized as allowing Vatican’s diplomats and the pope to speak “freely and disinterestedly” in the service of humane causes and across political divides (John Paul I 1978b) such as those enacted through cold war dynamics. That positionality was employed in a grand manner by John Paul I’s successor.

John Paul II (r. 1978–2005)

John Paul II was a giant of a pope who travelled extensively, carrying out impactful pastoral visits around the world (see, for example, Donovan 1985). The longest serving pope of the nuclear age, John Paul II endured many challenges that were active during his pontificate including those posed by liberation theology, clerical sex abuse, priests’ participation in electoral politics, artificial birth control, and the debate over women’s ordination. He remains a controversial figure within critical Catholic circles due to his handling of some of these challenges facing contemporary Catholicism. Yet, notwithstanding these significant controversies, he was made an official saint of the Catholic Church less than a decade after his death. John Paul II was thus honoured in a ceremony that also saw John XXIII canonized. They are the only two popes from the nuclear age thus honoured to date. John Paul II was masterful in his political gestures and worked tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to thaw the cold war. A particular concern in this work was to allow for his homeland, Poland, to determine its own affairs and polices. Thus, he has been considered a notable political actor in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (see, for example, Szulc 1995; Weigel 2017).
his long pontificate, John Paul II frequently returned to explicit teachings on nuclear weapons both during and after the cold war.

The contemporary popes have continuously upheld the importance of collective responsibility as an essential part of the equation for establishing a world free from nuclear weapons. In this spirit and speaking at Hiroshima during a time when cold war dynamics still marked world politics, John Paul II (1981a) emphasized that the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons required moral conversion. In doing so, he pleaded for peace as the best means to counteract the “manmade” scourge of war through “conscious choice” and “deliberate policy”, even as he invoked militaristic language: “Our future of this planet, exposed as it is to nuclear annihilation, depends on one single factor: humanity must make a moral about-face. At the present moment of history, there must be a general mobilization of all men and women of goodwill” (John Paul II 1981a). John Paul II (1985a) further stressed the capacity of moral good to overcome the evil represented by nuclear weapons in a radio address to the people of Japan on the occasion 40th anniversary of the deployment of nuclear weapons:

To speak of Hiroshima and of Nagasaki is to become vividly aware of the immense pain and horror and death that human beings are capable of inflicting upon one another. But it is also to be conscious of the fact that such a tragic destiny is not inevitable. It can and must be avoided. Our world needs to regain confidence in its capacity to choose moral good over evil.

Recalling Pius XII’s treatment of ABC weaponry, for John Paul II, the non-optional nature of avoiding nuclear weapons extended to any arms of mass destruction be they nuclear, biological or chemical. According to his social teaching, holding such arms represented a shirking from duties owed to both the rest of humanity and God (John Paul II 1985b). In a similar light and even after the cold war had ended, he argued for the importance of non-proliferation of nuclear arms and a complete ban on nuclear testing. He asserted that the best way to achieve these goals was via effective and binding international agreements (John Paul II 1996). In a teaching given at a time when the cold war appeared intractable, John Paul II (1981c) plainly asserted that the conditions of contemporary warfare and, in particular, the “nuclear terror that haunts our time” (no. 12), mean that disputes must now be solved with dialogue that builds up justice and peace rather than war. In this light, he wrote,

today when even conventional wars become so murderous, when one knows the tragic consequences that nuclear war would have, the need to stop war or to turn aside its threat is all the more imperious. And thus we see as more fundamental the need to have recourse to dialogue, to its political strength, which must avoid recourse to arms. (John Paul II 1982b, no. 4)

In commenting on the closely connected area of solidarity, John Paul II (2000) lamented the very desire of states to acquire nuclear weapons. Here, he does so while noting the possible consequences of the weakening of non-proliferation regimes in the cold war period fuelling effective governance vacuums would facilitate the spread of nuclear capabilities to non-state actors:
The alarming increase of arms, together with the halting progress of commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, runs the risk of feeding and expanding a culture of competition and conflict, a culture involving not only States but also non-institutional entities, such as paramilitary groups and terrorist organizations. (John Paul II 2000, no. 18)

In order to solidify in the minds of policymakers that other unbearable risks are associated with nuclear weapons, John Paul II went further into the realm of the empirical. At a time when cold war dynamics troubled most peace-minded people in the world, a prime example of the pope taking a more empirical approach came as part of his appeals to the UN and the nuclear powers in 1981. Presented on his behalf to world leaders by a delegation of travelling scientists, in that series of appeals John Paul II drew on expertise of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to examine the consequences for the survival and health of the human community if nuclear weapons were deployed. The basic argument employed on these envoy visits was that the health systems of even highly developed urban areas could not cope with the demands of treating fallout victims. So, for example, a memorable fact provided by those scientists and written into the message they carried with them from the pope was that if Boston was struck by a nuclear weapon and somehow all its state of the art medical treatment capacity survived the explosion, it would take a mere 400 patients suffering in the mode of many of the victims at Hiroshima to overcome the city’s impressive medical resources as they stood in 1981. As delivered to world leaders by the team of delegated scientists, John Paul II’s (1981b) message digesting the moral implications of such stunning facts employed medical language to succinctly conclude that “an objective examination of the medical situation that would follow a nuclear war leads to but one conclusion: prevention is our only recourse” (7).

Yet, while John Paul II deepened the papal peace witness as it applied to such relatively more subtle but nonetheless significant concerns related to the roles of non-state actors and human health, his overall contribution was sometime uneven from a principled pacifist point of view. Indeed, his entry into the intricacies of achieving nuclear disarmament in a world already negatively marked by nuclear weapons sometimes resulted in accommodations with the status quo. For example, in what may be read as a concession to the status quo realities of the cold war, John Paul II (1982a) permitted a small moral space for nuclear deterrence in his address to the United Nations special session on disarmament. Here, it might be noted that according to Catholicism’s norms as named by moral theologians, a speech of this variety is less authoritative than more considered reflections released in encyclicals (the most binding form of papal teaching for Catholics) and other written reflections that have gone through multiple edits and checks, such as the World Day of Peace Messages (Gaillardetz 2003). Regardless, it is important to illustrate how small and qualified a space he conceded. In this regard, when naming a certain value to deterrence, John Paul II (1982a) framed it as only and properly transitional to fuller disarmament:

In current conditions ‘deterrence’ based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. Nonetheless in order to ensure peace, it is indispensable not to be satisfied with this minimum which is always susceptible to the real danger of explosion.
Moreover, John Paul II (1985b) was firm in teaching that true peace must reach beyond such minimums by crossing not only East-West boundaries but also North-South ones and acting as a unifying force in relation to divisions caused amongst “the small and the weak, the poor and the voiceless” who suffer the most as a result of such fractures (no. 2, emphasis in the original). However, “the spectre of nuclear weapons” (John Paul II 1985b) was, for the pope, the prime example of a barrier to the morally required boundary crossing. He came to this conclusion because of the “overwhelming danger in the gigantic stockpiles of arms and in the threats of nuclear war” (John Paul II 1984).

For the pope, this malaise sparks legitimate fears and worries that obliged political actors, too often distracted by cold war posturing during the time he gave this teaching, to work for the progressive dismantling of nuclear arsenals via international agreements:

The only way to respond to this legitimate fear of the consequences of nuclear destruction is by progress in negotiations for the reduction of nuclear weapons and for mutually agreed upon measures that will lessen the likelihood of nuclear warfare. I would ask the nuclear powers once again to reflect on their very grave moral and political responsibility in this matter. It is an obligation that some have also juridical accepted in international agreements; for all it is an obligation by reason of a basic co-responsibility for peace and development. (John Paul II 1985b, no. 2, emphasis in the original)

As such, in a feature that spanned both the cold war and post-cold war periods of his papacy, John Paul II was emphatic that the Holy See would never grow weary of promoting the cause of ending all arms racing. A principle path to this goal was promoting total nuclear disarmament supported by legally binding and effective international agreements. Given this policy goal, arms racing was always characterized as a symptom of a larger problem. In this framing, human endeavours such as economics, science, and technology that are meant to be at the service of people and the common good are scandalously militarized and thus corrupted away from their proper purpose. As a result and tying together the threads of his teaching presented above, the solution for John Paul II to the problems posed by nuclear weaponry was their complete banning as part of a larger movement towards a fairer and more just international order. The justification for nuclear deterrence thus melts away over the moral arc of John Paul II’s social teaching on peace.

Benedict XVI (r. 2005–2013)

Benedict XVI had to face many of the same recurring tension-generating themes that marked his predecessor’s pontificate. However, he did so coming from a more formal and systematic theological background, rather than a pastoral one. Benedict XVI was the first pope of the nuclear age whose entire pontificate took place after the end of the cold war. He came to the throne of St. Peter with a reputation as a rather inflexible theological enforcer, having previously been in charge of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for almost a quarter of a century. That congregation is responsible for the maintenance and policing of Catholic theological orthodoxy, including as it applied to liberation theology and the theology ordination. It followed that while some Catholics were elated by the results of the papal conclave in 2005, others
were deeply ambivalent. These divisive dynamics within Catholicism remained active throughout the pope emeritus’ reign. During his papacy, many of Benedict XVI’s critics, some of whom had clashed with him in his former role as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, saw his pontificate as overly insular (for example, Boff 2014). Notwithstanding, as he reported in his first World Day of Peace Message, Benedict XVI (2005) chose his regal name to indicate his personal commitment to peace. He made that choice to invoke the spirit of St. Benedict for the way the former launched a renewal of culture in Western Europe (compare Dreher 2017). The name choice was simultaneously meant to recall the legacy Pope Benedict XV in recognition of the twentieth Century pontiff’s work for international conflict resolution during World War I (Benedict XVI 2005; see Pollard 2014 on Benedict XV).

In this light, it might be said that the pope emeritus’ systematic mind-set afforded him a certain analytical advantage. That advantage, in turn, helped to deepen the papal peace witness. This acumen is evident, for example, in how easily the passages cited in this section graft onto the format of an academic article. Applying that acumen and identifying blockages preventing the peaceful renewal of global cultures, Benedict XVI’s attention was drawn to the role of arms racing that had been revived in the post-cold war period. A particular concern of his papacy was how expenditure on armaments served to perpetuate domestic and local inequalities. As a result, where some found the post-cold war world to be a safer place, he argued for an urgent need to both revitalize non-proliferation efforts and move to decommission existing nuclear weapons:

Vast areas of the world are caught up in situations of increasing tension, while the danger of an increase in the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons causes well-founded apprehension in every responsible person. ... one must acknowledge with regret the growing number of States engaged in the arms race: even some developing nations allot a significant portion of their scant domestic product to the purchase of weapons. The responsibility for this baneful commerce is not limited: the countries of the industrially developed world profit immensely from the sale of arms, while the ruling oligarchies in many poor countries wish to reinforce their stronghold by acquiring ever more sophisticated weaponry. In difficult times such as these, it is truly necessary for all persons of good will to come together to reach concrete agreements aimed at an effective demilitarization, especially in the area of nuclear arms. At a time when the process of nuclear non-proliferation is at a stand-still, I feel bound to entreat those in authority to resume with greater determination negotiations for a progressive and mutually agreed dismantling of existing nuclear weapons. In renewing this appeal, I know that I am echoing the desire of all those concerned for the future of humanity. (Benedict XVI 2007, no.14)

Coupling the future of humanity with the need to foster a healthy natural world, Benedict XVI (2009) further situated an imperative for nuclear disarmament within the framework of a socio-ecological duty to care for our planet:

We cannot remain indifferent to what is happening around us, for the deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all. Relationships between individuals, social groups and states, like those between human beings and the environment, must be marked by respect and “charity in truth”. In this broader context one can only encourage the efforts of the international community to ensure progressive disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons, whose presence alone threatens the life of the planet and the ongoing integral development of the present generation and of generations yet to come. (no. 11)
Additionally, while appealing to the needs of future and present generations, Benedict XVI (2006) was emphatic that any policy resting upon the acquisition and holding of nuclear arms was no longer tenable and only served to increase anxiety of the type felt during the cold war, further indicating how the political actors in the post-cold war period had failed to deliver in a full enough manner on the promise of a more peaceful and secure world. In short, there was still many threats to peace that manifest themselves in similar and sometimes, as with issues like proliferation and unaccounted for nuclear warheads, in more worrying ways as they did during the cold war period. As such, according to his teaching, non-proliferation of nuclear weaponry must have as its telos their complete decommissioning:

Unfortunately, threatening clouds continue to gather on humanity’s horizon. The way to ensure a future of peace for everyone is found not only in international accords for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also in the determined commitment to seek their reduction and definitive dismantling. May every attempt be made to arrive through negotiation at the attainment of these objectives! The fate of the whole human family is at stake! (Benedict XVI 2006, no. 15)

Given the potential for nuclear arsenals to be used for destructive purposes, it is not surprising that Benedict XVI also explicitly condemned the stockpiling of weapons for deterrence as folly in a post-cold war world by referencing the high costs of such policies on multiple levels related to direct and structural violence. As such, he identified the overlaps between those manifestations of death, destruction, and the suppression of human potential that are avoidable and unduly limit socio-ecological flourishing. Further, Benedict XVI did so in his first World Day of Peace Message after coming to the Chair of St. Peter, wherein he stated unambiguously:

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 persons 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. The truth of peace requires that all – whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them – agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. The resources which would be saved could then be employed in projects of development capable of benefiting all their people, especially the poor. (no. 13)

Thus, Benedict XVI synthesized and systematized his predecessor’s contributions in a manner that is easily drawn upon to lend rhetorical support for a binding and effective international treaty designed to purge nuclear weapons from this world. As a result, he simultaneously situated deterrence strategies employing what Pius XII had called ABC technologies as isolated outliers on the global policy landscape. After Benedict XVI chose to abdicate his throne in 2013, both these strands of papal teaching that serve to problematize the holding nuclear weapons were given compounded, clear, pastoral, political, and moral expression in the reign of his successor.

**Francis (r. 2013–Present)**

Taking a cue from his predecessor, Francis also chose his regal name, in part, for its associations with peace. His papal name is nod towards the spirit of St. Francis, who is
known for his commitments to caring for ecology, walking in solidarity with people living in poverty, and building peace (compare Boff 2014). Pope Francis has reflected those interlocking commitments in his papacy, often attempting to demonstrate through his teachings how they are interconnected. As part of this set of concerns, the topic of nuclear disarmament has been a significant feature of Francis’ social teaching, diplomatic work, and public statements. Perhaps most importantly, despite justifiably continuing tensions regarding clerical sex abuse and gender inequality within the institutional Catholic Church, the overall arc of Francis’ teachings on social justice, substantive peace, and ecological health issues is refreshingly unambiguous, and accessible. In this manner, his teaching of these themes both co-occurs with and supports the contemporary papal commitment to a world free from nuclear weapons. For example, when asked by Hiroshi Ishida, a Japanese reporter, during one his trademark mid-air press conferences about the importance of nuclear disarmament to avoid piecemeal conflict from erupting into an all-out third world war (see also Francis 2016), he stated: “It is true, the example of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, humanity has not learnt its lesson, they haven’t learned” (Francis 2014b).

The relevant lesson for Francis (2014b) here is that nuclear weaponry, even if does not result in the end of the world, represents a “terminal culture” that needs to be purged from the human story. As such, he fully embraces the need for a nuclear weapons ban. Further, the pope has offered myriad reasons in support of that position. This was made clear in his first World Day of Peace Message, when Francis (2014d) named the folly inherent in holding stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction and explicitly situated his teaching in this regard in continuity with his predecessors:

as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities. For this reason, I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons. (no. 7)

He has also added a more personal touch to this now established papal tradition of seeking to purge nuclear armaments from the world. For example, in a message to a conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons he greeted “the Hibakusha, as well as other victims of nuclear weapons testing who are present at this meeting” (Francis 2014c). In a related attempt to personalize the threats to peace manifest in nuclear weapons, while also working to ban them from the geopolitical landscape, in late 2017 in the run up to the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2018, Francis issued a card that featured a photo from 1945 of some of the victims of the Nagasaki bombing. The photo captures one boy carrying his younger brother to be cremated. In this image of “the fruit of war”, as Francis explains as the closing sentiment on the obverse of the card, “the young boy’s sadness is expressed only in his gesture of biting his lips which are oozing blood” (Francis quoted and translated in Cullinane 2018). At the time of final edits for this article, the pope is planning to journey to Hiroshima and Nagasaki for late fall 2019. His papal journey is expected to

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3An image of the front of the card is available here https://cdn.cnn.com/cnnnext/dam/assets/171231164318-nagasaki-1945-exlarge-169.jpg and of the obverse of card here https://cdn.cnn.com/cnnnext/dam/assets/171231164556-il-frutto-della-guerra-exlarge-169.jpg.
include time for in person dialogue with invited *hibakusha* and platforms upon which to speak out firmly against nuclear weapons and the dangers of war.

Moreover, in accord with his contemporary predecessors, Francis references not only the mass-killing affected by nuclear weapons as a reason to ban their use, but also the suffering they inflict in the world along with the squandering of money and resources they represent. He further suggests that these energies and resources could be better directed towards fostering what Paul VI (1967a) termed ‘integral human development.’ Here, efforts for nuclear disarmament are firmly placed within the present pope’s general work to foster solidarity for the marginalized. Like his predecessors, this concern to promote a culture of inclusion co-occurs with his anti-nuclear weapons position. In this regard, Francis (2014c) teaches that under the current status quo, when funds are squandered on nuclear armaments it is “the poor and the weak living on the margins of society who pay the price” as resources are diverted away from projects that support the common good like healthcare, free education, and the struggle against extreme poverty. The contrast could hardly be greater between this teaching of the pope and President Donald Trump’s subsequent committing of at least 1.2 trillion dollars to upgrade the US military arsenal in February 2018. In further contrast, at the same time the US President’s policy package aspires to make it easier to deploy nuclear weapons, the Trump administration was working to eliminate the already inadequate insurance-based “Obamacare” and other social programs in order to make space for tax cuts. It is well known that tax cuts of the sort the US president advocates disproportionately benefit the wealthiest demographics in the USA.

As an antidote to such segmentation, Francis’ exhortations against the very presence of nuclear weapons in this world reach across a spectrum of arguments and efforts. Indeed, even before Trump was elected, Francis (2015) was clear on the need to eliminate nuclear weapons due to the way they serve to enhance the destructive capacity of war felt by both members of human cultures and the rest of the ecological world. Interestingly, he expressed this view with reference to the grip that segmented interests have on the moral imagination. Moreover, he did so by appealing to the desire that many decision-makers have to leave behind a strong legacy:

> War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons. . . . Politics must pay greater attention to foreseeing new conflicts and addressing the causes which can lead to them. But powerful financial interests prove most resistant to this effort, and political planning tends to lack breadth of vision. What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so? (no. 57)

Here, political duties in the post-cold war world are shaded as ultimately requiring the elimination of war. Therefore, taking up these duties necessitates the elimination of war-magnifying technologies. The moral reasons for such a plea to decision-makers are profound as Francis (2015) makes clear when, as part of his encyclical reflecting on the importance of caring for our common home at this juncture in planetary history, he notes:

> Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used. We need but think of
the nuclear bombs dropped in the middle of the twentieth century, or the array of
technology which Nazism, Communism and other totalitarian regimes have employed to
kill millions of people, to say nothing of the increasingly deadly arsenal of weapons
available for modern warfare. In whose hands does all this power lie, or will it eventually
end up? It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it. (no. 104)

As such, for Francis nuclear weaponry is never worth the interlocking layers of social
and ecological oppression that invariably accompany such armaments. To amplify this
line of argumentation: as with the ecological crisis, nuclear weapons represent an
existential threat brought about by virulent combinations of consumerism, inequality,
and other forms of violence. Humanity thus needs to address these forces of violent
segmentation in the spirit of solidarity in order to build up the common good. In this
regard, Francis emphasizes that paths serving segmented interests of power politics,
armaments manufacturers, and inequality merely “offer false hopes to those clamouring
for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence,
rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts” (Francis 2013,
no. 60).

As a result of his consciousness of these dynamics and in a point this article returns
to in the conclusion, Francis has also been clear, well before the Autumn of 2017, that
nuclear weapons do not have any place, even as deterrents, in state policy. For example,
in his message to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear
Weapons, Francis (2014c) was unequivocal about the shallow nature of such policies:

nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for
an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among peoples and states. The youth of
today and tomorrow deserve far more. They deserve a peaceful world order based on the
unity of the human family, grounded on respect, cooperation, solidarity and compassion.
Now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster
a climate of trust and sincere dialogue.

Perhaps for emphasis and to present this point in a more authoritative form of Catholic
Social Teaching, Pope Francis (2016) again condemns nuclear deterrence as an unsui-
table foundation for substantive peace in the 50th World Day of Peace Message:

An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples
cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsi-
bility, respect and sincere dialogue. Hence, I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition
and abolition of nuclear weapons: nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutual assured
destruction are incapable of grounding such an ethics. (no. 5)

For Francis, these ethics all come back to his well-known support for cultures of
inclusion, encounter, and dialogue (Pope Francis 2014a). Francis’ commitment to
growing these cultures is why the Holy See, recalling the earlier geopolitical boundary-
crossing undertaking by John XXIII and his successors in the cold war period, sup-
ported the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 but only as a first step on a path towards
complete disarmament (on this intervention see Gallagher 2015). More substantively,
Francis (2017c) repeats the aforementioned coupling of a preferential concern for those
on the margins with an imperative to purge nuclear weapons by underscoring:

the strong ties between human rights and nuclear disarmament. Indeed, committing
oneself to protecting the dignity of all people, in a particular way those who are weakest
and most disadvantaged, means also working with determination to build a world without nuclear arms. We have the God-given ability to work together to build our common home: we have the freedom, intelligence and ability to direct technology, to limit our power, at the service of peace and of true progress.

Given the moral sharpness evident in this comment that was given just prior to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on United Nations’ Human Rights Day, it is no surprise that Francis supported the work for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. His support extended to employing the Holy See’s status as a diplomatic entity to both sign and then ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons the very day it opened for signatures (UNODA 2017). During his January 2018 annual address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Francis explained that decision to sign and ratify the treaty. Specifically, his explanation referenced integral concepts’ intertwined nature with positive peace, when urging other governments to follow suit:

Integral disarmament and integral development are intertwined. Indeed, the quest for peace as a precondition for development requires battling injustice and eliminating, in a non-violent way, the causes of discord that lead to wars. The proliferation of weapons clearly aggravates situations of conflict and entails enormous human and material costs that undermine development and the search for lasting peace. The historic result achieved last year with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference for negotiating a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear arms, shows how lively the desire for peace continues to be. The promotion of a culture of peace for integral development calls for unremitting efforts in favour of disarmament and the reduction of recourse to the use of armed force in the handling of international affairs. I would therefore like to encourage a serene and wide-ranging debate on the subject, one that avoids polarizing the international community on such a sensitive issue. Every effort in this direction, however modest, represents an important step for mankind. (Francis 2018)

The previous November, giving voice to the important development cited in this article’s introduction, Pope Francis gave an address to a symposium at the Vatican that was studying the prospects for a world free from nuclear weapons. He further advocated for integral disarmament. Francis was emphatic that this disarmament goal was realistic, obtainable, and necessary. The central portion of his address provides a fitting synthesis to close this brief survey of Francis’ contribution to the contemporary papal peace witness as it applies to the project of purging the world of nuclear weapons:

A certain pessimism might make us think that “prospects for a world free from nuclear arms and for integral disarmament”, the theme of your meeting, appear increasingly remote. Indeed, the escalation of the arms race continues unabated and the price of modernizing and developing weaponry, not only nuclear weapons, represents a considerable expense for nations. As a result, the real priorities facing our human family, such as the fight against poverty, the promotion of peace, the undertaking of educational, ecological and healthcare projects, and the development of human rights, are relegated to second place. Nor can we fail to be genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices. If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned. For they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race. International relations cannot be held captive to military force, mutual
intimidation, and the parading of stockpiles of arms. Weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, create nothing but a false sense of security. They cannot constitute the basis for peaceful coexistence between members of the human family, which must rather be inspired by an ethics of solidarity. Essential in this regard is the witness given by the Hibakusha, the survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, together with other victims of nuclear arms testing. May their prophetic voice serve as a warning, above all for coming generations!

Conclusion: Supporting a Complete Ban on Nuclear Weapons as a Milepost on the Path to a More Vital World

Almost immediately after Francis’ above-cited address promoting integral disarmament, on 10 November 2017 Reuters reporter Phillip Pullella (2017) released a story that was headlined “Pope, in Change from Predecessors, Condemns Nuclear Arsenals for Deterrence”. That framing was picked up by variety of news outlets. Additional claims were made by some highly respectable peace-oriented commentators asserting that Francis was the first pope to call for a ban on nuclear weapons that extends to their possession as justified by their supposed value as deterrents (see, for example, Roche 2017; compare1997). However, this article has mapped a longer genealogy for that position dating back to John XXIII’s Pacem in Terris. That position also finds a considerable measure of support in both (1) Pius XII’s commitment to the just war category of proportionality that seems impossible to fulfil with nuclear weapons being employed even as deterrents in strategy or policy and (2) his pre-Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings prohibition on manufacturing technology that could allow the atom to explode. Moreover, throughout both the cold war and post-cold war periods the seeds Pius XII provided for a just peace ethic grew, although not without grafting or always linearly, in the subsequent pontificates. These seeds reach a fuller, clearer, and undeniably important expression with Francis’ recent pronouncements that leave no doubt that the papal office has fully embraced the premise that a complete ban on nuclear weapons is wholly necessary for deep ethical reasons. Obviously, such a ban would render obsolete any function of deterrence. In accord with that point, the continuous teaching on the necessity of banning nuclear weapons provides a consistent witness against the ultimate value of deterrence: in a world free of nuclear weapons, their supposed value as deterrents would be a null point. As the current work for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the remarkable number of nations who have joined the Holy See in signing the treaty serve to indicate, a significant and growing group of international political actors agree. A peace ecology perspective (Amster 2015) would also concur, highlighting, in accord with Francis’ above-mapped teachings, how the future of a vital Earth community marked by social justice requires such a ban. Presently, retaining nuclear weaponry even for deterrence is evidently, for the papal office, an untenable policy for a number of social and ecological reasons (Francis 2017a). As Francis (2017b) taught in November 2017, it follows that nuclear armaments ultimately represent “nothing but a false sense of security”.

From a Peace Studies perspective concerned with the transformation of conflict-inducing energies and social inequality into life-nourishing forces (compare Lederach...
(2001), there is an exciting possibility in play here. Namely, that the Holy See’s diplomatic corps, the Vatican’s global and locally embedded reach that gives the Catholic Church a claim to being the planet’s largest NGO, and the world’s over 1 billion Catholics along with others inspired by the current pope or the truth he expressed in that accessible manner will rally around Francis’ logic on disarmament. One result of such a confluence of ends and means would be the activation of energies for contributing to an enforceable and complete ban on nuclear weapons for all state and non-state actors. While the incarnation of integral disarmament certainly faces many barriers, not the least of which are the tendency for most Catholics to be unaware of the substantive context of papal teaching, a confluence in this regard can only positively contribute to a total nuclear ban. Here, the promulgation of an authoritative papal encyclical promoting just peace and active non-violence in the post-cold war period to supplement John XXIII’s teaching in *Pacem in Terris* would be a significant contribution. A consultative process is currently active for such a new papal letter and, if promulgated, it will add momentum to the cause for nuclear disarmament. A comparable momentum has already been generated by Francis (2015) the encyclical *Laudato Si* helped to nourish work that creatively combines social and ecological approaches in mutual-enhancing manner to effectively care for our common home.

Of course, the two ethical projects are intimately related. A world that moves more substantively towards incarnating socio-ecological flourishing will have to address the challenges and threats to that mutually beneficial state posed by the very presence of nuclear weaponry (compare Francis 2019). Here, acknowledging the longer genealogy of Francis’ support for a nuclear ban that includes a rejection of deterrence’s justifiability can only help the cause. This statement rings true as Catholics, who may have more conservative leanings and a corresponding greater openness to the teachings of one of his predecessors, come to realize that Francis’ position that nuclear weapons ought to be purged from this world runs through the contemporary papacy in a manner that of necessity discounts deterrence as a tenable option. This realization moves towards an integral disarmament by helping to decouple banning nuclear weapons from left and right politics both within and to a certain extent outside of the Catholic Church. Such decoupling is facilitated by the realization that all of the post-nuclear deployment popes, be they thought of as right wing, centrist or leftist, to do offer support for working towards a world that is purged of nuclear weapons. Within this unifying vision for a more peaceful world, deterrence is unconscionable and the possession of such weapons of mass destruction could therefore never be legitimate. In support of this vision, wide dialogue is urgently needed given the Trump administration’s posturing with nuclear weaponry directed not only to North Korea but also to Iran. Particularly troubling is how this posturing is manifest in policies like the one framing so-called “small” or “low-yield” nuclear warheads as morally licit. When judged against the teaching mapped in this article, such framing seemingly facilitates what is the extremely problematic Trumpian logic that “if you have nukes, why not use them” so that “everything is on the table”. In a point supported by several strands in the papal

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4This point has been expressed by the notion that its social teaching is the Catholic Church’s best-kept secret. (For an example of the use of the related nomenclature, see DeBerri et al. 2004.) Although, the so-called “Francis effect” (Reese 2014), whereby people are paying increased attention to the teaching and actions of the pope, may be shifting this situation in the case of the present papacy.
peace witness as mapped above, this malaise lays bare a basic problem with upholding nuclear weapons as deterrents: they are never solely deterrents, that someone could press the button matters. As this article has demonstrated, in sharp contrast to the polemically charged discourse and policies espoused by the Trump administration, the contemporary papal peace witness contributes foundations for a wide dialogue concerning how a world free of nuclear weapons would help grow socio-ecological flourishing on Earth. Here, we come to another parallel with *Laudato Si’* that not only explicitly echoes but also moves beyond *Pacem in Terris* in being addressed not only to people of goodwill but to all persons on this planet as an invitation to “enter into dialogue” about caring for our common home (no. 3). Such deep dialogue would help to reveal flaws and deficiencies within papal teaching and practices of the Catholic Church. As a result of being revealed, these flaws may then be transformed in light of Francis’s implied goal of establishing a deeper, non-militaristic security focused on mutually-enhancing integral relationships creatively combining familiar, social, ecological, political, and spiritual energies. This integral outcome is the ultimate transformative consequence of papal teachings on banning nuclear weapons and their antecedents being strengthened by further dialogue so that they can be more fully incarnated in the life of the Catholic Church, and ultimately in the life of the world. In this light, the basic premise that banning nuclear weapons is a key milepost on multiple paths towards a more vital world can unambiguously be said to receive a strong measure of support from contemporary papal contributions to positive peace. The challenging question now, as in all comparable matters related peace education in general and the efficacy of papal teaching and practice in particular, is whether a critical mass of people will listen, enter into dialogue with their neighbours, and help begin the journey along diverse paths towards a world free from nuclear weapons. At the very least, as this article demonstrates, there are many stimuli for starting that journey towards integral disarmament that can be sourced in the papal peace witness as it has been expressed during the nuclear age.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**Notes on Contributor**

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