

TRUTH & PEACE

A GOSPEL WORD IN A VIOLENT WORLD

SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT 2024-2025



Foreword

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In 1963 Pope St John XXIII issued his groundbreaking Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth). At a very fraught time, it was an impassioned plea not only to the Church but to all people of goodwill for an end to war and the banning of nuclear weapons. He called for the promotion of peace founded on a commitment to the inviolable dignity of every human being. His successors have seen the devastating effect of wars and conflicts since 1963 and have repeated the same call.

The 2024 – 2025 Social Justice Statement, *Truth & Peace: A Gospel Word in a Violent World*, scrutinises the signs of our own times in the light of the Gospel, sees the violence and asks why the world is as it is and what is needed for there to be peace. It also asks the question: is peace possible? And in a world where many think peace is a mirage, the Statement puts its faith in the possibility of

peace. In doing so, it looks back to *Pacem in Terris* and looks also to Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*.

Drawing upon Scripture, the Statement invites us to put our trust in the power of the crucified and risen Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life and also the Prince of Peace. From him, we learn to embrace a culture of encounter and to commit to the way of dialogue at both the macro and micro level.

Words are never enough to make peace. Action is required. But words such as found in this Statement can help us understand the current situation and how we might work together to create a world which better matches both human desire and the divine plan. The Australian bishops offer this Gospel word to all who are committed to speaking the truth and working for peace in a violent world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

CONTRIBUTORS

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On the Brink

“A global ceasefire is urgent: either we do not realise it or we are pretending not to see that we are on the brink of the abyss.”¹ In a place like Australia the words of Pope Francis may seem overstated, but not when we consider the facts worldwide.

The last century was the most violent in human history, with the piles of corpses of Auschwitz and Hiroshima its demonic emblem. At the dawn of the new century and the third millennium there were hopes for a time of peace. But that was not to be. In 2022, it was reported that there were 55 state-based conflicts around the world and 82 non-state conflicts.² According to the United Nations, this is the highest number of violent conflicts the world has faced since the Second World War. Two billion people live in countries wracked by such conflicts.³ We are all too aware of some conflicts such as the slaughter in Ukraine and the Holy Land, with the media saturated with reports of these wars and the immense human suffering they bring. But other conflicts – without the same global implications, perhaps – tend to be overlooked or forgotten. The scale of human suffering is immense, the loss incalculable.

There are also rising tensions in the Pacific and the build-up of military power that accompanies them. In the Asia-Pacific region too there are conflicts about which we hear little. The military coup in Myanmar continues with both peaceful protests by citizens and armed conflict between the military and resistance groups. The Rohingya people continue to be driven from their homes and chased from country to country. Public demonstrations by pro-

democracy groups in Hong Kong have ended because of a government crackdown which has seen pro-democracy supporters arrested and jailed. The violence in West Papua continues, and there have been new outbreaks of strife in Papua New Guinea. The cries of human suffering are heard close to our shores and even in our own land.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LIE

Surveying the violence of this time and the devastation it brings, we look back to the apocalyptic conflicts of the last century, when totalitarian ideologies drew the world into a vortex of violence never seen before. Fascism and Communism in their various forms were based upon falsehood; they were the triumph of the lie. At their heart was a lie about God and the human being and therefore about what makes for a flourishing human society, even what makes for human liberation.

Speaking from his Polish experience, Pope John Paul II said this in his *Message for the World Day of Peace (1980)*:

The path from a less human to a more human situation, both in national and international life, is a long one, and it has to be travelled in stages. Those who love peace know this and they say so... Those committed to violence know it also, but they do not say so, and they deceive public opinion by holding up the glittering prospect of a radical and speedy solution, and then settle into their lie and explain away the constantly repeated delays in the coming of the freedom that had been promised and the abundance that had been assured.⁴

At their core both Fascism and Communism were atheistic, and that is where the lie began. For the Bible, God is truth and the source of all truth to which human beings have access. In the beginning, God speaks a word which is utterly reliable and powerful, true in that sense: God says, “Light” – and there is light (Gen 1:3). The biblical creation story testifies to the truthfulness of God’s word and its power to bring light out of darkness, fullness out of emptiness and order out of chaos. The divine word is unfailingly trustworthy.

By contrast, the serpent in Gen 3:1-5 says that God is a liar, that the divine word is unreliable and untrustworthy. “Did God say that you should not eat of any tree in the garden?”, the serpent asks. “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden”, Eve reports accurately, “but God said that if we eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden then we shall die”. “You will not die”, replies the serpent. In other words, God is a liar; the divine word is unreliable and untrustworthy. “For God knows”, continues the serpent, “that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”. In other words, God is not only a liar but an oppressor, keeping the human being down: “Break free...and you too can be God, deciding for yourself what is good and what is evil”. The prospect is dazzling, and a choice has to be made: whom to believe? The fruit proves irresistible. The human being prefers to trust in the serpent’s word, not God’s – and ends up finding the very opposite of what the serpent promised and the human being sought. In reaching for an ultimate freedom, trying to be God, the human being ends up with an ultimate slavery, the seal and symbol of which is death, the consequence of sin as the Bible sees it.

Like the serpent, the lethal ideologies of the last century spoke a lie about both God and the human being; and therefore they were responsible for the death of millions and untold suffering for those who survived. The lie destroyed trust, and the death of

trust meant an end of peace and the beginning of war, as Cain kills his brother Abel (Gen 4:1-16). Brother has been killing brother ever since; and the blood of those killed, like the blood of Abel, cries to God from the earth (Gen 4:10).

These ideologies saw the human being as a slave, where the Bible sees the human being not as a slave but as a creature possessed of a unique and magnificent dignity as a co-creator with God. Implied by the serpent was the lie that you are either God or nothing. For the Bible, the human being is not God: that is fundamental, and at the root of all sin is the drive to make the creature God and God a creature. But to say that we are not God does not at all mean that we are nothing. God in fact calls the human being into the circle of the divine creativity when God calls Adam to name the newly formed creatures (Gen 2:19-20). God could have given them names but chooses not to; God prefers to let the human being help order the chaos with language, naming the creatures with a word, just as God began to create with a word in the beginning.

For totalitarian ideology, God is cancelled and the state becomes god, with the human being a slave to the state, a mere cog in the great wheel of power. This was and is the ideology based upon the great lie, bearing all the serpent’s venom; and though we have entered a new century and a new millennium, the venom – like the plague bacillus in Albert Camus’ novel *The Plague* – never dies. It takes other forms, as we see now with new death-dealing ideologies, new kinds of totalitarianism and the terror they spawn.

THE EROSION OF TRUTH

Speaking to university students in Lisbon in 2023, Pope Francis urged them to work for a new world where all can live in peace:

Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. But let us find the courage to see our world not as in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this.⁵

Such audacious thinking requires careful questioning of what has led us to the brink of the abyss. What are the forces that have led us here? Prime among them is the erosion of truth and the emergence of a post-truth culture.

Facts have always been contested and falsified in public life, but something new has emerged in recent times with the convergence of a number of factors:

- A plethora of competing truth claims, largely because of new technologies and social media. Platforms like Facebook and X enable the rapid dissemination of fake news and conspiracy theories, with confirmation bias leading people to a ready acceptance of claims that confirm their beliefs, allowing misinformation to spread within ideologically aligned networks which often generate a culture of indignation and manufactured outrage.
- The absence of generally accepted authorities to assess truth claims and the demise of traditional gatekeepers of factual information, as traditional journalism undergoes great change and we see the rise of partisan news sources which favour ideological appeals over factual accuracy.

- Algorithms which help create a fragmented public space where truth claims go unchallenged or unexamined by the public in the way a functioning democracy presumes.
- The power of a well-resourced persuasion industry and big data analytics, the goal of which is not to inform or educate but to influence.
- A promotional culture geared to self-promotion and self-branding, more concerned with image than truth.
- A privileging of emotion and cognitive bias in order to deal with the competition and confusion produced in such a context.
- A generalised atmosphere of social distrust, especially of “elites” and experts, in which populist movements and post-truth political communication thrive.
- Changing ethical perceptions of what level of misleading or “spin” is and is not acceptable, with even blatant lying overlooked in public discourse.

Evidence and expertise no longer matter and alternative facts are offered. Public figures can offer an opinion on almost anything; and in the world of social media almost anyone can be a public figure. Reason takes a back seat and feeling matters more. Power is conceded to those with wealth and charisma enough to create spectacle in the place of truth. The show is what matters. The virtual replaces the real, with conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza theatricalised by a media reporting “live” from the battle-zone, to the point where unless we see it in the media it has not really happened. The virtual becomes the real.

In recent decades, disinformation and misinformation have become more widespread. Disinformation is information which is false and the person or organisation disseminating it knows it to be untrue. Misinformation is also information

which is false, but those disseminating it believe it to be true.⁶

Across the globe, many political arguments centre on the truth, or otherwise, of claims made by politicians and their supporters. In the current conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, claims and counterclaims about disinformation by each side in the conflicts have been used to justify war and the deaths of tens of thousands, the mass destruction of infrastructure and immense suffering and dislocation. The fog of war has rarely been so thick and dark.

Disinformation and misinformation may not be a new phenomenon, but what is new is the way the internet and social media have enabled widespread and rapid dissemination of disinformation and misinformation.

Recent electoral campaigns in countries like Australia and the United States have seen political organisations use the internet and social media very effectively to influence people's thinking and voting. Political campaigns no longer rely only on television, radio and print advertising to push their message. There is evidence too that some governments use social media to spread disinformation in other countries in an attempt to influence the outcome of an election to their own advantage.⁷

Artificial Intelligence adds a very powerful new tool to the kit of those who want to spread disinformation, allowing them to generate photographs, videos and audio messages which mislead and deceive.

What is increasingly clear is that the more disinformation and misinformation proliferate, the greater the risk of conflict. The connection is unmistakable.

In the end there is no such thing as truth in a post-truth world; and if there is no such thing as truth,

there is no such thing as a lie. There is only your truth and my truth, your facts and my facts; and truth can be manufactured or at least manipulated in any way you choose. Any notion of objectivity is abandoned; the turn to the subject is complete.

No wonder Pope Benedict XVI posed the question: "How can we fail to be seriously concerned about lies in our own time, lies which are the framework for menacing scenarios of death in many parts of the world?"⁸ He was echoing what Pope John Paul II had said in his 1980 Message: "Violence flourishes in lies and needs lies. It seeks to gain respectability in the eyes of the world by pretexts that have nothing to do with its reality and are often contradictory". Pope John Paul spoke with the conviction of a man who had seen the worst of both Fascism and Communism.

THE EFFECTS OF POST-TRUTH

In such a world, there is no agreement about some basic facts. Yet without that it becomes impossible to form a civil society in which we can defend ourselves and even the rule of law is eroded, though authoritarian regimes can and do use the law to subvert the rule of law.

So too is the basis of democracy eroded, since it depends on citizens weighing evidence and debating policies on an informed basis. This becomes practically impossible when facts are regarded as a matter of opinion or partisanship.

Accountability is also eroded, as political figures pay no penalty for lying or spreading disinformation, and alternative facts are tacitly accepted. This leads to increasing destabilisation of democracies and the rise of extremism.

Authoritarian movements of various kinds can inflame grievances and mobilise followers by spreading disinformation to undermine democratic processes, though again authoritarian regimes can

and do use democratic processes to undermine democracy.

We have seen the rise of a populism which sets “the people” against “the elites” who are seen as the source of all the people’s grievances. The categories are ideologically constructed fantasies, but they are effective in creating and sustaining the polarisation on which this kind of populism depends. Various authors have analysed the way in which post-truth, populism and polarisation converge to create the violence and political instability we now see spreading across the globe.⁹

On the international level, the waging of war has changed, even if its demonic logic remains unchanged. A rules-based international order is rejected, and we see a kind of hybrid warfare, not always waged by states but pursued at times through surrogates. It is often a kind of violence without violence, with war waged under the guise of peace, as battles are fought in a “grey zone” between peace and open conflict. This involves the use of lethal autonomous weapons, the weaponisation of bots and drones and new forms of chemical and biological attack.

Nations wage war under the guise of peace, with economic sanctions, cyber wars, fake news and outright lies the order of the day. This is not war as we have known it, but it is nonetheless lethal. It is not surprising that Pope Francis has often claimed that we are already fighting a Third World War in piecemeal fashion, coming in stages and in various locations around the world.

TRUTH, TRUST AND PEACE

All of this points to a crisis of truth which creates in turn the crisis of trust lying at the heart of the world’s current convulsions; because without trust there can be no peace and certainly not the reconciliation which lies a step beyond peace. The grammar underlying this statement is that truth

creates trust and trust creates peace. We say: speak truth to build trust and build trust to make peace. To speak the truth is already the beginning of peace-making.

Peace will always seem a mirage in a post-truth world where we cannot distinguish the truth from a lie, because peace depends upon the truth and war is always based upon a lie. The first step to peace is speaking the truth. As Pope John Paul II insisted: “It is pre-eminently truth that is the serene and powerful driving force of peace”.¹⁰ And truth, he goes on, requires that we name things for what they are:

Murder must be called by its proper name: murder is murder. Political or ideological motives do not change its nature... The massacre of men and women, whatever their age, race or position, must be called by its proper name. Torture must be called by its proper name; and so... must all forms of human oppression and exploitation.¹¹

After the horrors of the Second World War, a commitment to sowing the seeds of peace grew stronger internationally. The Church too, reading the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, shared this commitment and spoke a word of truth and peace. Pope John XXIII’s Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) was a potent contribution from a Church wanting to help create a world in which war would never again be the means for settling disputes and world affairs would be reordered on the basis of truth and trust.

For the first time an Encyclical Letter was addressed to “all people of good will”. The Successor of Peter wanted to speak not just to his own community but to the whole world. The Gospel upon which he drew was not just for the faithful but was God’s gift of good news to a world which

seemed to be drowning in bad news. It was a word of hope in a world where much seemed hopeless.

Pacem in Terris was issued in 1963, not long before Pope John died. This was at the height of the Cold War as the Berlin Wall was being built. It was also the time of the Cuban missile crisis which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Our own time is different, but the same sense of foreboding and even alarm is widespread; and what Pope John wrote sixty years ago can still speak as we seek to identify the ways of peace now.

The Pope insists that peace flourishes when there is respect for the moral order ordained by God and imprinted on human hearts. That order insists on the inherent dignity of every human being proclaimed in the Bible and the inalienable God-given rights and responsibilities which flow from this sense of the human person. Respect for these rights and responsibilities is what properly orders relations between individuals, citizens, public authorities and nations. It is what makes the international community something other than a chaotic and bloody free-for-all. St Augustine describes peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquillity of order¹², by which he means a situation in which the truth about the human being is fully respected and realised.

This sense of dignity is based on an understanding of the truth of the human person. “Before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity”, Pope John writes, “it must be based on truth”.¹³ The truth of which he speaks is the truth of the human being created in the image of God. Its opposite is the lie about who and what the human being is, spoken always and everywhere by Satan, the great deceiver, “the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Pope John stresses that God is the prime truth on which this moral order is founded:

*Such an order—universal, absolute and immutable in its principles—finds its source in the true, personal and transcendent God, who is the first truth, the sovereign good, and as such the deepest source from which human society, if it is to be properly constituted, creative and worthy of human dignity, draws its genuine vitality.*¹⁴

He speaks of the true God, not the false gods who are always the lords of lying and therefore the lords of dying. Some forms of atheism want to reject the false gods; and they are right to do so. But in the process they also reject the true God and therefore end up back in the clutch of the murderous false gods they are seeking to escape.

In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John argued that the arms race of his day needed to stop and that nuclear weapons should be banned. The claim that peace can be maintained by opposing sides balancing the number and types of weapons they stored was profoundly mistaken. The only way to build genuine and lasting peace was and is to build trust between nations.

For the Pope, ending the arms race and banning nuclear weapons is achievable on three grounds. First, it is reasonable to argue that relations between countries should not be governed by the use of force, but by principles of truth, justice and genuine cooperation. It also makes sense to end the arms race because no-one wants to live with the fear that an arms build-up, especially of nuclear arms, could cause mass destruction. Thirdly, an end to the arms race would benefit humanity because the vast funds saved could be used to promote the economic and social welfare of people across the world.¹⁵ This has been echoed by Pope Francis, who has suggested that the funds spent on weapons and military equipment could be diverted to a global fund to tackle poverty and world hunger.¹⁶ Such arguments are as persuasive now as they were in

1963, as many nations commit to lifting military spending to record levels.

There is a global Arms Trade Treaty, but some powerful nations are not signatories, and many others simply ignore it. Despite the treaty, therefore, the international arms trade continues to grow, amounting to something like \$127 billion in 2018-2022, with the US by far the biggest dealer with 41.7% of the trade, followed by France (11%) and Russia (10.5%). Corporations profiting the most from the business of weapons production and sales are the US companies Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics, the Chinese companies Norinco and AVIC, and the United Kingdom company BAE Systems. India is the largest importer, with Australia ranking fourth.

The arms industry has a life of its own and a privileged place in the global economy. It is also an undoubted factor in fomenting conflict around the world, since it depends upon conflict for its business. It becomes almost obscene in a world where 9,000 people die of hunger each day. In more ways than one, the global arms trade is a linchpin of “the culture of death”, which Pope John Paul II named.¹⁷

Drawing on the Gospel, the Church and its leaders have consistently urged world leaders to shun war as counter-productive and to work instead to make peace. Two years after the release of *Pacem in Terris*, the bishops at the Second Vatican Council warned that increasing militarisation does not assure security and peace:

*The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree. It is much to be feared that if this race persists, it will eventually spawn all the lethal ruin whose path it is now preparing.*¹⁸

Speaking before the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1965, Pope Paul VI made an impassioned plea for an end to war: “No more war! Never again war!”¹⁹

Pope John Paul II added his voice to this chorus of Pontiffs urging the world to turn away from war as a means of resolving conflict:

*In the name of God and in the name of the human being: Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for people! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one’s dignity and freedom!*²⁰

This call to shun war is the larger context of the repeated appeals to loosen the hold of the arms trade and bring it to an end. But underlying both appeals is the call to stop lying and to speak the truth. To renounce war is to commit to speaking truth; it is to renounce lying.

It was Aeschylus who said that “the first casualty of war is truth”. Truth is not only the first casualty of war; it is a casualty of all that leads to war. But it will be truth alone that leads away from war and into peace.

The Architecture of Peace

In recent years, Pope Francis has made his own appeal for an end to war in the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

At the core of the Pope's commitment to peace is the truth that we are sisters and brothers and that to see the other as an enemy is not to see the truth of the other but to see a lie:

Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace.²¹

He insists that the rule of law must prevail as a means of resolving conflict and encourages the tireless use of negotiation and mediation as set out in the Charter of the United Nations Organisation. But he acknowledges that rules by themselves will not suffice if we continue to think that the solution to current problems is deterrence through fear or the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

What is needed, the Pope says, is to identify and adopt the practices which promote peace in society and between nations. He speaks of “the architecture of peace”, of how peace is to be constructed. This presumes that peace does not just happen. It must be built, piece by piece and element by element over time. It is a slow and arduous task that requires patience, courage and creativity. But there is no more pressing task in the world we know.

At the core of peace-making for Pope Francis is dialogue; and building a culture of dialogue is an

essential element of “the architecture of peace”. Dialogue between different groups of people requires an encounter between those people, a willingness to leave their comfort zone to meet with and listen to people who may be very different and have very different views. A commitment to dialogue helps to break down the tendency for one person or group to amass power for themselves and instead to promote a commitment to the common good where there is true justice and respect for the dignity of all people.

Genuine dialogue seeks the truth despite these differences and requires that all involved in the dialogue bring respect and openness to the table. The Pope insists that there are fundamental, objective truths which all participants can strive to discover and accept despite their differences – the kind of transcendent truths and values recognised by the category of “crimes against humanity”.

A culture of dialogue presumes a culture of encounter which is therefore another essential element of “the architecture of peace”. A culture of encounter is grounded upon the recognition of the dignity and rights of all people, especially those who are vulnerable, powerless or on the margin.

Instead of closing in on ourselves and clinging to our own positions and convictions, we choose instead to welcome opportunities to listen to others and understand what they think and why. This is the opposite of life in a bubble or in an ideological echo-chamber which a post-truth world imposes. It involves the attempt to see the truth of the other, since we cannot make peace with someone we cannot see. Only a new kind of seeing will enable the connection that dialogue presumes.

Dialogue based on encounter does not mean abandoning what we hold to be fundamentally true.

We do not come blank to dialogue, ready and willing to absorb without discernment whatever is offered. Dialogue based on encounter presumes that we know our own position and hold to what we believe to be true, but that we listen to the other in the belief that they may speak a truth we have not heard before. As such, it presents an opportunity for mutual learning and for the building of trust.

It may well require that, without letting go of what we hold to be true, we loosen our grip as we listen to the other. This is a kind of “unfreezing” of positions and convictions which moves us beyond stereotypes to a sense of shared suffering and agreed outcomes for the benefit of all.

A renewed commitment to a culture of dialogue based on encounter in social relationships and in international relations would not only break down misunderstanding and build trust; it would lead us to discover more deeply the truth that the other is not my enemy but is my sister, my brother, even my friend.

Another essential element of “the architecture of peace”, according to Pope Francis, can be truth-telling about the past and the healing of memories this can bring. This is a complex and painful journey, but it brings a purification which has to happen if there is to be a healing of often long-standing memories which can fester like a cancer at the heart of human relations.

The South African experience is instructive. After a long period of brutal racial polarisation, the democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC had as one of its guiding principles that forgiveness was in the interests not only of individuals affected by the horrors of the apartheid era but of the nation as a whole. It gave victims a chance to tell their stories of violence and abuse; but it also gave perpetrators a chance to

admit their wrongdoing and, in some cases, to gain amnesty for their offences.

Both Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu were inspired by their Christian faith; but the principles of the TRC apply beyond South Africa or the beliefs of Christianity. The TRC was not perfect, but it showed the universal truth of what Pope Francis says about the need to build a culture of dialogue based on encounter if there is to be peace and even reconciliation.

THE DIALOGUE OF GOD: JESUS

The true God, who is the source of all truth, is a God of encounter and dialogue; and we who are created in God’s image are created therefore not for war but for encounter and dialogue.

The God of the Bible has revealed himself not only as *logos* (word, thought, reason, principle) but also, and more particularly, as *dialogos* (dialogue, conversation, exchange, interaction). This is seen supremely in Jesus who is the *logos*: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). But he is also, and more particularly, the *dialogos*: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In Jesus, God chooses to enter fully into an encounter with humanity, to bring the dialogue that began in the moment of creation to its completion.

Jesus comes as the fulness of divine truth, which will be seen in all its glory only once he is raised from the dead. When he does rise from the tomb, his first words are: “Peace be with you”. He who is the truth of God is also the peace of God beyond the atrocities of Calvary, the dark mountain on which all the violence of this world and all its lies are gathered. The fruit of the dialogue between God and humanity which comes to its completion at

Easter is the peace “which the world cannot give” (John 14:27).

The making of peace is a great task for humanity. It is a work to be done, an art to be learnt and practised. But the fulness of peace can come only as revelation, a gift from the God who wants to give it but who will not force it upon us. God wants to work with us in the making of peace and waits for us to say yes to the gift.

John 8:39-45 shows Jesus in heated exchange with those who will send him to the Cross, those who will choose the way of lethal violence. His opponents who will call for his death say to him: “Abraham is our father”, to which Jesus replies, “If you were Abraham’s children you would be doing what Abraham did. But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing what your father did”. They then say to him, “We have one father – God”. To which Jesus replies, “If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father’s will. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native tongue, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me”.

The exchange points to the conflict at the heart of the world – the conflict between the truth of God, spoken by Jesus the Word made flesh, and the lies of Satan, spoken by those whom he begets, those who become murderers like the father of lies who was a murderer from the beginning. The link between lying and death, untruth and violence, could hardly be clearer.

Where there is no truth, there is no trust; where there is no trust, there is no peace; and where there is no peace, there will be death. But truth will have the last word when Jesus rises from the dead; both God’s trust in us and our trust in God is vindicated;

and the peace the world cannot give is on offer forever.

EDUCATING FOR PEACE

Peace does not just happen or fall from the sky. Its fulness may be God’s gift, but on the way to that fulness, peace-making can and must be taught and learnt. Therefore, education is vital for building a culture of peace, teaching the art and “architecture of peace”, how to shape a culture of dialogue based on encounter.

Teaching and education are, says Pope Francis, “the primary means of promoting integral human development; and they are essential for the defence and promotion of peace. In a word, teaching and education are the foundations of a cohesive civil society”.²²

Recently the Pope gathered 6,000 children from the Italian Network of Schools of Peace at the Vatican and encouraged them to be “artisans of peace”, not war-mongers but peace-mongers, urging them be active in promoting their dream of a new vision for the world. The Network is committed to educating the young people of Italy about peace, justice, human rights, citizenship and responsibility, and it may have something to offer here in Australia.²³

Promoting cohesion has been a strength of Catholic education in Australia for over 200 years, and our schools provide a unique opportunity for the teaching of peace and educating in what “the architecture of peace” requires. Given the urgency of the task, it is worth asking, how might our schools be more focused and creative in teaching the way of truth, trust and peace? No doubt this is already happening in the schools in many ways, direct and indirect; but as the world grows more violent, might still more be done? This is a question for our educational leaders.

ACTION FOR EVERYONE

Faced with the great challenge of making peace in the world, we can feel powerless. We can think that peace-making belongs only to the great political decision-makers of the world. But that is not true. Peace is the work of everyone, and we can all do something to be peace-makers. Indeed it is a duty imposed on us by the Gospel. Peace is to be made on both the macro and the micro level. We need to act small but think big, to act locally but think globally.

The truth is something not just spoken: it is also done. This is why St Paul speaks of the need to “do the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). In that sense, truth is a verb rather than a noun. Like love, it presumes action; and it is to action that we commit ourselves if we are people of truth and peace. Pope John Paul II entitled his *Message for the World Day of Peace (1980)* “Truth: the power of peace”. When truth is not just spoken but done, it becomes power – power enough to turn “swords into ploughshares, spears into pruning-hooks” (Isa 2:4), power to set us free (cf. John 8:32).

Here are some suggestions of things you might do. None of them is high-powered; each is simple. But any of them or all of them could make a real difference:

- Start with yourself. Invite God to nurture peace in your heart. Examining the things that happened over the course of your day when you pray before bedtime is a good practice. Ask yourself how you responded to conflicts. Did you reach out in friendship and love to others, show kindness or offer or receive forgiveness? Ask God for the grace to make peace in your life.
- Prayer is essential to peace-making. At each Mass we pray for the gift of peace, and parishes might gather to pray for peace outside Mass, e.g. by praying the Rosary.
- Take action on an issue that matches your passion and skills.
- Set up a group to read, discuss and pray about one of the Church documents referred to here, such as Pope Francis’ *Fratelli Tutti*, chapters 6 and 7.
- Make your views and concerns known to your local Member of Parliament.
- Give priority to encounter rather than taking action on a computer.
- Reach out to a local reconciliation group if you want to support First Nations Peoples, or a refugee support group or service if you want to work with refugees seeking justice.
- If you are interested in trying to address conflict in another part of the world, there may be ethnic community organisations from the conflict zone in your local community. You could reach out to them to learn more and to give them support. You could also offer to help Caritas Australia with its work in war-torn countries.
- Focus on listening more and talking less in your conversations.
- Learn about the culture and history of the people you are accompanying and supporting.
- Serve them by helping them do what they decide is a priority rather than coming to them with a plan.
- Ask the friends you make in these situations if they would like to share some of their experiences with your parish or school.
- Seek advice from them on what issues they are making a priority in their advocacy with governments.
- Come together regularly with others working in the same area to reflect prayerfully on the work you are doing for peace.
- Approach your local school to find out how it educates students to be peace-makers.
- Join an ecumenical or interfaith group which seeks to foster dialogue and peace-making.

None of us speaks the whole truth, which is why truth-speaking and peace-making belong to the whole community. The violence in Australia and other parts of the world make it all the more urgent that all who believe in Jesus Christ work together with everyone of good will, all who love truth, to show the world that there is a realistic way to peace, a genuine peace built upon speaking truth and building trust.

The stakes are high. In launching his book, *Hope in These Troubled Times*, the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann said that “the fight for truth

against falsehood is a matter of life and death. It is the struggle for the survival of humankind”.²⁴ Another German theologian declared that “any genuine search for peace must begin with the realisation that the problem of truth and untruth is the concern of everyone; it is decisive for the peaceful future of our planet”.²⁵ ■

NOTES

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Endnotes

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