

The Three Avenues to Peace

Pope John Paul II strove to advance the role of peace in the lives of both Catholics and non-Catholics during his pontificate. The Holy Father's messages promoting peace were dealt a new canvas following the terrorist attacks of September 11th. The most recent and possibly most applicable message of Pope John Paul II is found in his homily for the 38th World Day of Peace on January 1, 2005. In this message, John Paul II exposes "the critical need...to promote peace using consistent means, giving importance to dialogue, to works of justice and to educating in forgiveness."¹ This statement should and must be taken as a direct command to utilize these three avenues (dialogue, works of justice, and educating in forgiveness) to achieve peace in the wake of terrorism.

The first avenue to peace is dialogue. Dialogue is one of the most basic forms of communication known to man, yet dialogue is one of the most underused forms of conflict resolution. Pope John Paul II was the first pope to renounce the actions of NAZI Germany during the Holocaust and resume constant dialogue with the Jewish faith. This gesture should be taken and applied to terrorism. Dialogue between the west and the terrorists could serve as a stepping-stone to the ultimate goal of peace. Another example of dialogue being used to avert conflict can be found in a more modern example, which is ongoing. Last year, North Korea was found developing nuclear weapons, which are considered a dangerous threat to the progression of peace. Many nations could have

¹ Pope John Paul II, "Homily for the 38th World Day of Peace," 1 January 2005, 2 November 2005 <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2005/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20050101_world-day-peace_en.html>.

easily made a decision to invade North Korea and avoid attempts at achieving peace altogether, but they choose to follow the first avenue to peace. Six nations entered into dialogue with North Korea, and since this dialogue has provoked the Koreans to curb their nuclear development and limit it solely to the private energy sector. Without the opening of this dialogue between North Korea and the other nations, the world would have taken a step away from peace, and toward hostility. The nations of the world should take note of these two historic uses of dialogue and follow suit. If nations can open a dialogue between the terrorists of September 11th, they can take the first step towards understanding why the attacks took place, and what they can do to appease the transgression toward the western world and Christian cultures. This effort requires not only the participation of the terrorists, but also that of the people of the United States. Change can only be brought about through the efforts of both parties. Once this dialogue begins to achieve results, the world will be able to live without the constant fear of where the next major terrorist attack will be.

Next, Pope John Paul II expressed a need for justice to work toward peace. In his homily on the 37th World Peace Day in 2004, he stated “People are becoming more and more aware of the need for a new international order that will make the most of the experience of the United Nations Organization...”² A modern development in the promotion of international justice is the International Court at The Hague. This court has served as an international standard for justice over the past few decades, in conjunction with the United Nations. Justice is an element of society where the citizens of the world

² Pope John Paul II, “Homily for the 37th World Day of Peace,” 1 January 2004

and the children of God must be unbiased and fair. This is a major issue in ensuring justice for those accused of terrorism. In the United States since September 11th, a bias exists towards those of middle-eastern and Arabic descent. This bias is harbored in many of the citizens encountered in daily life, but must be overcome to ensure justice. Once a nation can overcome its bias and fear toward a particular group of people, the process of justice can begin. Justice is simply fairness, and terrorism centers on the lack of justice in the Christian people. Ever since the Spanish Inquisition, when the Christian armies of Spain drove the Moors back to the African continent, middle easterners have been faced with the wars of Christians. In modern times, justice for the Middle-Eastern people has also been challenged by wars from the west. These wars must end, and justice must be given to the people of the Middle East before peace can be ensured. As a people, we must continue to produce and exhibit ideals of justice throughout our everyday lives. As more and more people exhibit honest, noble, and just ideals through their actions at school, work, and other activities, it will catch on like a trend and spread rapidly around the globe. When this rapid spreading of justice occurs, all fears of terrorism will be wiped from the face of the earth.

The final, and perhaps most important element in the process of ensuring peace is educating for forgiveness. Educating for forgiveness has been a constant theme throughout the writings of John Paul II. In his 1979 “Message for the World Day of Peace”, the pontiff chose as his theme “To Reach Peace, Teach Peace.”³ This message is the core for any attempt at peace. Later in the message, the Pope states, “an education

³ Pope John Paul II, “Message for the World Day of Peace,” 1 January 1979

worthy of the name must have as its first task, and produce as its first beneficent result, the ability to see beyond the unfortunate facts of the foreground.”⁴ The situation which has arisen following September 11th is a perfect canvas for the application of this ideal. The Church, parents, and governments must begin the process of engraining peace into the rising generations. Once the nations of the world begin to establish the process of educating and instilling forgiveness into the young people, it will become second nature. Once the human race realizes there is no need to harbor anger, they will only then begin to live as Jesus Christ hoped for them to live, in peace, loving their neighbors as they would love themselves. This concept should form the basis of moral thought for the peace initiatives started after September 11th. One place where forgiveness is constantly at the forefront is within the Church. The role of the Church in this post-September 11th world is to foster forgiveness and promote peace. Through both classes within Catholic Schools, Sunday Schools, and at Mass each Sunday, the Church can continue to foster educating to forgive and working toward the ultimate goal of peace. Once this fostering develops into a continued second-nature attitude harbored in all people, peace can be set as the next goal on the highway of human progress. There is no need for anger, transgression, and hardship. These three ideals are those the terrorists want us to have. As a people, we must bind together, and show them we can peacefully resist them by forgiving their very actions. A protest against terrorism involving forgiveness, the exact same forgiveness Pope John Paul II showed his would-be assassin in the 1980s, would

⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Message,” 1979

cripple the very institution of terrorism itself. To reach this goal of peace, or to even begin to set it as a destination, people must learn to forgive.

In conclusion, Pope John Paul II outlines three avenues to peace, which when combined, will surely progress the world toward this ultimate goal. Dialogue, justice, and forgiveness all must be included in any successful attempt at peace. Once the human race combines these goals, a process which has already begun, the goals peace and defeat of terrorism can be realized. There is no need for war against terrorism, show love and forgiveness. Pope John Paul II exhibited these ideals throughout his life, when the people of the world imitate the actions and practice the teachings of this great pope, the world will begin to become what he envisioned, a peaceful refuge for all God's people.

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