



III EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS BRATISLAVA, 17-20 March 2022

Peace in Europe H.Em. Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

The Catholic European Social Days were initially planned to explore new beginnings in Europe beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, with the hope of learning from the many who suffered and the many who gave so generously of themselves in response. But the war in Ukraine has broken in upon these Social Days, and Cardinal Krajewski and I have recently gone there from neighbouring Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, to embody the "the presence, not only of the Pope, but of all Christian people who want to draw closer" and vigorously to proclaim: "War is madness! Stop, please! Look at this cruelty!" (Angelus 6.3.2022)

You might ask: In Ukraine, did I see the war where missiles fly and bombs fall, the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment" (*FT* 257)? No, I was on the western border.

Instead, I saw the war in another way: in displaced and desperate eyes, in personal and family histories abruptly ended. People who are physically alive but whose life until now has violently ended.

It is a mirage to endorse war as a valid response to any situation of imbalance or tension. Most often, illegitimate intentions and sordid ulterior motives -- such as hegemonic ambitions, abuses of power, and ethnic, racial or religious prejudices -- lurk behind the official rationale for war as an effective, reasonable or unavoidable option (*FT* 256). "Faced with the barbarism of the killing of children, and of innocent and defenceless citizens, there are no strategic reasons that hold up: the only thing to be done is to cease the unacceptable armed aggression" (Angelus, 13.3.2022).

Today's military technology includes ultra-sophisticated weapons with unimaginable destructive power. Weapons have become so automated and mechanized that war is often waged by remote control, anonymously, "virtually". When a hi-tech soldier fires a missile at a hospital or people fleeing, what does he see on his screen? It looks like a video game.

At the same time, I saw seeds of peace germinating in refugees being welcomed and beginning to breathe and to hope again. The care they received from volunteers and aid workers is a praxis of love. On Sunday the Holy Father again urged “the welcoming of the many refugees, in whom Christ is present, and [giving] thanks for the great network of solidarity that has formed” (Angelus 13.3.2022).

You may know that, as a young boy, I was a refugee too, as my family fled Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s. Thanks to the practical love shown us, we were able to find new life.

But besides individual Samaritans, how does peace operate at the level of groups, especially in and by states? Half a century ago, *Gaudium et Spes* explained that peace is a responsibility that belongs to the entire human family, called to become the “family of God” (GS 40). Pope Francis’ frequent invitation to *fraternity* is founded on this conviction: all of humanity, from individuals to states and multi-national entities, must direct history towards the realization of peace. This is an objective for everyone, though it acquires a particular importance for Christians, since it means showing the world the life-saving work of Christ. Today the war in Ukraine makes it imperative for each and every European, whether Christian or not, whether believer or not, to commit to a true peace that permits all to flourish – to achieve their integral human development and nothing less.

We are living in a “world war fought piecemeal” (FT 25; 259). Globalization connects the conflicts, but more importantly our faith connects us with those who suffer. “Let us not forget the wars in other parts of the world, such as in Yemen, in Syria, in Ethiopia” (Angelus, 27.2.2022)

Every war must be seen as a failure of politics and, as St. John Paul said, “a defeat for humanity,” because, as Francis wrote, it “leaves our world worse than it was before” (FT 261). For this reason, our hearts must be moved by the tragedies endured by the civilians involved, and must connect with the pain of the victims, refugees, orphans, and those who suffer mutilation in body and spirit, even if these are often considered an inevitable or collateral side effect of these events. When Jesus saw suffering, his own insides were “moved with pity.”

This is a question for our consciences: How do we, as Christian or non-Christian citizens, as laity or clergy and hierarchy, contribute to peace in Europe? Are we showing love of neighbour? Are we influencing the European Union, NATO and national governments to do so too? Conversely, how have we contributed – and continue to contribute -- to war in Europe? Such an examination of conscience invites us to meditate on the violent history of the 20th century and the first 20 years of the 21st. The vocabulary and thinking of such an examen may be found in *Fratelli tutti*.¹ Today our prayer is insistent: “In the name of God, listen to the cry of those who suffer, and put an end to the bombings and the attacks! Let there be real and decisive focus on the negotiations, and let the humanitarian corridors be effective and safe. In the name of God, I ask you: stop this massacre!” (Angelus, 13.3.2022).

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¹ “The injustice of war” §§ 256-62.