

“From the 'scheme of war' to the 'scheme of peace':
Pope Francis's no to war”.

(ENG and ITA)

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for the invitation.

The title I have chosen for this conversation is taken from the interview that the pope gave to the journalists coming back from Malta, last April, and it says a lot, I think, about his position.

In the last two months of war, the position expressed by the Successor of Peter has been clear, unequivocal and radically opposed to war and rearmament.

First of all, I would like to clear the field of some misunderstandings and some interpretations, which are unfortunately the fruit of an all "horizontal" culture typical of social media: I am speaking about the enormous mass of information we receive from the web: unfortunately to receive so much information does not seem to have good information.

So it happened, for example, that columnists and commentators, and even diplomats, for weeks criticized the Pope for never mentioning Vladimir Putin in his public speeches.

A short look at the recent history of the Holy See and papal diplomacy would have helped to understand that NEVER the popes, in their public appeals, have named the aggressor, never mentioned by name "the bad guy". Previous popes have not done so.

And I merely recall St. John Paul II, who in 1998 never named Milosevic, the Serbian president whom everyone in the West called the "Hitler of the Balkans". Pope Wojtyla did not name the American, British and Spanish presidents who in 2003 wanted to start the wretched war in Iraq, based on false information. A war that destroyed a country by turning it into the refuge of all terrorists and destroying the possibility of coexistence between people of different faiths. ù

John Paul II, already sick and trembling, pleaded in vain with those leaders not to wage that war. Without ever naming those who were preparing it. This, unfortunately, we have forgotten and have forgotten it those "schoolteachers" ready to lecture the Pope even when they show little knowledge of the history of the papacy and the Holy See.

A second preliminary observation: stating a radical no to war does not mean being "equidistant," that is, not recognizing that there is an aggressor-Putin's Russia-and a victim, Ukraine. Pope Francis has expressed in every way his closeness to the aggressed Ukrainian people, made appeals, phoned President Zelensky the day after

the start of the war, publicly kissed the flag of the Ukrainian resistance, sent two of his close cardinals several times to bring comfort and concrete help to the affected populations, called this dirty war A SACRILEGE.

But at the same time he has never ceased to call for peace and a negotiated settlement of the conflict. Where, then, does this position originate?

First of all, we must recognize that it is a position that does not originate from geopolitical considerations, but from the Gospel itself. Let us recall the incident that occurred in Gethsemane, when Peter - in self-defense - drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest who was violently arresting Jesus. Well, Jesus orders Peter to put the sword back in its sheath and heals the ear of the high priest's servant, which Peter had cut off. The Gospel message is against all violence, against all hatred, against all war.

An interesting book has just been published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana and publisher Solferino, which contains everything the Pope said about war and peace. But not about this war in Ukraine, but about all wars. In fact, the collected speeches cover the entire timeline of his pontificate. Well, reading the papal interventions carefully, is it possible to grasp the deep evangelical root of the Pope's position, which presents peace as a gift to be asked from God, because men alone cannot give it to themselves.

Francis recognizes that the root of war, of all war, arises in the human heart, from our nature wounded by sin. He also recognizes that war and peace have to do with our daily behaviors, with the way we express ourselves and especially with the way we look at others. Only brotherhood - and I would like to recall here the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* - is the answer to war and hatred.

There is a risk, which we must avoid. Is the risk of reducing and minimizing the scope of papal appeals. It is the risk of putting the Pope's words in the freezer, sterilizing them, instead of understanding them and making them our own. This is the risk run by those who say: yes the Pope speaks like this because he is Pope, because he cannot say different things. His is a prophetic message - or rather, it is a utopian message. What he indicates and what he asks cannot be realized....

Here is the objection, which sometimes serves only to avoid being questioned by the evangelical radicality of Francis' message in order to continue to justify the madness of the frantic rush to rearmament and the inability to implement concrete attempts to negotiate for peace.

And here I would like to state very clearly that the evangelical and prophetic root of the Pope's appeals against war are embedded in a tradition, in a century-long magisterium, which has seen all of Peter's Successors call for peace and seek to stop war, with a crescendo of intensity, clarity and awareness, culminating in St. John

XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. Pope Francis has made strides in this regard, and in Hiroshima he went so far as to call unjustified and immoral not only the use of atomic weapons, but also their possession.

Here we come to a crucial node, a turning point. Recognizing the evangelical root of Francis' pronouncements against war does not mean forgetting how much healthy realism there is in his words.

The Pope today is the most realistic and far-sighted world authority! From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has been telling us that it is already underway, that World War III is already being fought, but in pieces. So many wars are going on, so many wars that we forget about because they don't break out close to home.

But underlying the Pope's realism is also another fundamental consideration. I would like to quote here the words that Don Lorenzo Milani wrote in his Letter to the Judges about war. These words were recently reminded to us by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin.

Quoting a paper by Nobel Prize Max Born, published in 1964, don Milani recalled ***“that in World War I the dead were 5% civilians 95% military (it could still be argued that civilians died 'incidentally'). In the second 48% civilians 52% military (it could no longer be argued that civilians had died 'incidentally'). In the Korean one 84% civilians 16% military (it could now be argued that the military died 'incidentally')”***

The Pope and the Church live in the world, take reality into account. The Social Doctrine of the Church takes reality into account. That reality of facts that made Pius XI - in an encyclical as prophetic as *Quadragesimo Anno* - speaks about the international imperialism of money, with words and analysis written in 1931, in the aftermath of the Wall Street crisis, but very current even today. Here, we need to look at reality, that is, the misfortunes caused by the latest wars, which have not solved the crises but have accentuated them by creating instability and an ocean of innocent deaths. From these considerations one can understand the Pope's radical no to war.

In the encyclical "Fratelli tutti" Pope Francis writes:

"Easily people opt for war by advancing all kinds of seemingly humanitarian, defensive or preventive excuses, even resorting to the manipulation of information. In fact, in recent decades all wars have claimed to have a 'justification' (...) The issue is that, beginning with the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the enormous and growing possibilities offered by new technologies, war has been given uncontrollable destructive power, affecting many innocent civilians. In truth, 'never has humanity had so much power over itself and nothing guarantees

that it will use it well.' So we can no longer think of war as a solution, since the risks will probably always outweigh the hypothetical usefulness attributed to it. Faced with such reality, it is very difficult today to sustain the rational criteria matured in other centuries to speak of a possible 'just war'. Never war again!"

Of course, if someone comes to destroy my house, if he kills my family members, I have the right to defend myself, to resist, to fight. No one doubts or questions that. But it's one thing to have the right to self-defense, it's another thing to take the excuse of this war to disproportionately increase arms spending, "a madness" the Pope has said several times. This makes the arms manufacturers and traffickers happy, and takes away resources that could be committed to building hospitals and helping starving peoples, thus creating conditions of greater justice in the world and thus decreasing the risk of wars.

It made my heart ache to learn from **Cardinal Raphael Sako**, during the trip to Iraq with the Pope in March 2021, that in that country ITALY is synonymous with a well-known brand of guns from our country used by everyone, from the regular army, by the irregular militias and by terrorists.

And in regard to the right to legitimate defense, mentioned in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the first part, number **2308**, is always quoted, which justifies the defensive war, but one forgets to mention when it comes later, number **2309**, that is, the strict conditions that the Church believes to define for this use of violence. Here I would like to underline just a few:

*"that all other means of ending it have proved impractical or ineffective;
- that there are well-founded conditions for success;
- that the use of arms does not cause evils and disorders more serious than the evil to be eliminated. In evaluating this condition, the power of modern means of destruction plays a great role "*

I would like to underline these last words. The wars of today are not like those of a hundred or two three hundred years ago. Today's wars, due to modern means of destruction, always have devastating results. And we are seeing it clearly.

But I would also like to draw your attention to the condition just mentioned where it is asked that really everything has been tried to keep the peace.

And then questions arise here. Questions also echoed by Pope Francis in the recent interview with the editor of *Corriere della Sera*, when he spoke directly about NATO's barking. We must ask ourselves, for example, why the Minsk agreements were never put into practice.

A war never breaks out suddenly. A war has been preparing for years. And the tragic thing is that this time we are witnessing a fratricidal war, between brothers who share the same faith, the same Christian baptism, who speak a similar language.

In the preface that the Pope wrote for the book "Against the war" that I have already cited, Francis recalls the words of Bishop Don Tonino Bello, he loved to repeat: conflicts and all wars *"find their roots in the fading of faces"*. When we erase the face of the other, then we can make the noise of weapons crackle. When we keep the other, his face like his pain, in front of our eyes, then we are not allowed to damage his dignity with violence.

When we forget the other's face, when the other instead of a brother becomes an enemy and we erase his being a man or a woman, and his dignity ... this is the beginning of war, of every war.

Finally, allow me to refer to another speech by the Pope, also full of realism. Is the speech for Regina Coeli, 1° May.

"While we are witnessing a macabre regression of humanity," said the Pope, "I wonder, along with so many anguished people, if peace is truly being sought; whether there is the will to avoid a continued military and verbal escalation; whether everything possible is being done to silence the weapons. "

Questions, just questions. But if we are sincere, if we look at reality, we must recognize that the answer is NO. No, we are not doing everything possible for peace! No, we are not doing everything possible to reach a negotiation to a compromise, because every negotiation is done when each of the contenders is willing to give up something.

And then, let me also underline the pope's question on the military AND VERBAL escalation. Yes, there is also a verbal escalation, because war, every war, involves the demonization of the adversary. But every demonization makes peace, the resumption of dialogue, mutual recognition more difficult.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing the failure of international organizations, primarily the United Nations. The Holy See seems to have remained the only one to believe in multilateralism and the indispensable role of the United Nations in preserving peace and international cooperation. Where are the United Nations in these wars?

Another failure, in my opinion, is that of Europe. We have witnessed the protagonism of some leaders, the race for rearmament, the inability to propose - in addition to sanctions and the sending of weapons to Ukraine - also viable ways to achieve peace. Europe's interest cannot be to destroy Putin's Russia economically and militarily. This war and the twenty years that preceded it have cooled the hopes that were kindled after

the fall of the Berlin Wall. Do we really think we can build a Europe in peace without Russia?

The Pope's appeals, his words, therefore deserve to be shared, supported, multiplied. At a time when we unfortunately see a lack of capacity and political will to walk paths of peace, we all have the duty to cry out that we want peace.

And we acknowledge with the Pope that in order to achieve peace it is necessary to apply schemes of peace, not to speak of peace by continuing to apply schemes of war, military alliances and economic colonizations, as is unfortunately happening.

Thanks for your attention
