Selections of Catholic social teaching on peacemaking
Quotes by recent popes

Pope John XXIII
1963: “In an age such as ours which prides itself on its atomic energy it is contrary to reason to hold that war is now a suitable way to restore rights which have been violated.”

Pope Paul VI
1965: “No more war, war never again! Peace, it is peace which must guide the destinies of people and of all mankind.”

1975: “It is our clear duty, therefore, to strain every muscle for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent.”

1975: “Reconciliation is the way to peace.”

1975: “The Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms — which is uncontrollable once it is let loose — and indiscriminate death as the path to liberation, because she knows that violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement which are often harder to bear than those from which they claimed to bring freedom.”

1976: “You are all brethren” (Mt 23:8). If the consciousness of universal brotherhood truly penetrates into the hearts of men, will they still need to arm themselves to the point of becoming blind and fanatic killers of their brethren who in themselves are innocent, and of perpetrating, as a contribution to peace, butchery of untold magnitude, as at Hiroshima on 6 August 1945? And in fact has not our own time had an example of what can be done by a weak man, Gandhi — armed only with the principle of nonviolence — to vindicate for a nation of hundreds of millions of human beings the freedom and dignity of a new people?

Pope John Paul II
1979: “Violence is evil”… “Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, and the freedom of human beings. Violence is a crime against humanity, for it destroys the very fabric of society.”

In turn, he exhorted persons to turn away from the paths of violence particularly by not following

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1 Pope John XXIII, Peace on Earth, 1963; par. 127.
2 Pope Paul VI, Address to the United Nations General Assembly (1965) 5.
3 World Day of Peace Message, Jan. 1, 1975, par. 6, originally from Gaudium Et Spes, par. 81.
4 World Day of Peace Message, par. 16.
6 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19751018_ix-world-day-for-peace_en.html
any leaders who “train you in the way of inflicting death…Give yourself to the service of life, not the work of death. Do not think that courage and strength are proved by killing and destruction. True courage lies in working for peace…Violence is the enemy of justice. Only peace can lead the way to true justice.”

May 1982: “Today, the scale and the horror of modern warfare – whether nuclear or not – makes it totally unacceptable as a means of settling differences between nations. War should belong to the tragic past, to history; it should find no place on humanity’s agenda for the future.”

1991 In the encyclical Centesimus Annus, he further explicitly de-links the notion of war and justice calling us “to reject definitively the idea that justice can be sought through recourse to war.”

In 1991 before the Gulf War, Pope John Paul argued that “a peace obtained by arms could only prepare new acts of violence.”

1995 “Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this.”

2002: “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.”

Before the Iraq war in 2003, he reiterates, “War is always a defeat for humanity.”

“The twentieth century bequeaths to us above all else a warning: wars are often the cause of further wars because they fuel deep hatreds, create situations of injustice and trample upon people’s dignity and rights… War is a defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed.”

“Violence, which under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse.”

Pope Benedict XVI

In 1984, the Sacred Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith led by Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, who became Pope Benedict XVI, argued that violence degrades the dignity of both the victims and the perpetrators.

In 2003, “There were not sufficient reasons to unleash a war against Iraq. To say nothing of the fact that, given the new weapons that make possible destruction that goes well beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a just war.”

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8 Pope John Paul II, Homily at Drogheda, 19-20.
14 www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/John-Paul-II/essay.html
In 2007: “Above all we want to make the voice of Jesus heard. He was always a man of peace. It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces. That he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all. He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to point of going to the cross. This is what shows the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties… This is Jesus’ true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside.”

In 2007, Pope Benedict spoke about the gospel text “love your enemies.” He says this text is the “magna carta of Christian nonviolence; it does not consist of surrendering to evil — as claims a false interpretation of ‘turn the other cheek’ (Luke 6:29) — but in responding to evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21), and thus breaking the chain of injustice. It is thus understood that nonviolence for Christians is not mere tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God’s love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the “Christian revolution,” a revolution not based on strategies of economic, political or media power.”

In 2008, Pope Benedict reflecting on the cross of Christ explained, “What are the horrors of war, violence visited on the innocent, the misery and injustice that persecutes the weak, if not the opposition of evil to the Kingdom of God? And how does one respond to such evil if not with the unarmed love that defeats hatred, life that does not fear death?”

In a March 2009 visit to Cameroon, the pope said, “Genuine religion… rejects all forms of violence…not only on faith but on principles of right reason.” Later that month, he connected discipleship to Jesus’ way described as, “Jesus… the King of the Universe did not come to bring peace to the world through an army, but through refusing violence.”

Good Friday 2011: “Above all we want to make the voice of Jesus heard. He was always a man of peace. It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces. That he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all. He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin anew with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This is Jesus’ true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside.”

February 24, 2012: “Today the concept of truth is viewed with suspicion, because truth is identified with violence. Over history there have, unfortunately, been episodes when people

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sought to defend the truth with violence. But they are two contrasting realities. Truth cannot be imposed with means other than itself! Truth can only come with its own light. Yet, we need truth. ... Without truth we are blind in the world, we have no path to follow. The great gift of Christ [who is the Truth] was that He enabled us to see the [true] face of God”.

March 11, 2012: “The truth is that it is impossible to interpret Jesus as violent. Violence is contrary to the Kingdom of God. It is an instrument of the Antichrist. Violence never serves man, but dehumanizes him.” – Angelus address.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine

496. Violence is never a proper response. With the conviction of her faith in Christ and with the awareness of her mission, the Church proclaims “that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.” (quoting Pope John Paul II)

Pope Francis

June 2, 2013: “Today we have come to pray for our dead, for our wounded, for the victims of the madness that is war! It is the suicide of humanity because it kills the heart. It kills precisely that which is the Lord’s message: it kills love! War grows out of hatred, envy, and the desire for power, as well as—how very many times we see it—from the hunger for more power.”

“So many times we’ve seen the great ones of the earth wanting to solve local problems, economic problems, and economic crises with war. Why?” the Holy Father continued. “Because, for them, money is more important than people! And war is just that: it is an act of faith in money, in idols, in the idols of hatred, in that idol that leads to killing one’s brother, that leads to killing love. It reminds me of God our Father’s words to Cain, who, out of envy, had killed his brother: ‘Cain, where is your brother?’ Today we can hear this voice: it is God our Father who weeps, weeps for this madness of ours, who asks all of us: ‘Where is your brother?’ Who says to the powerful of the earth: ‘Where is your brother? What have you done!’”

“…[B]ehind war there are always sins: the sin of idolatry, the sin of exploiting persons on the altar of power, of sacrificing them.”

July 29, 2013 in Brazil: “With less security, I was able to stay with the people, to embrace them, greet them, without armoured cars … it is the security of trusting in people … yes, there’s always the danger of encountering a madman, but then there is always the Lord who protects us, isn’t there? It is also madness to separate a bishop from his people behind bullet proof glass, and I prefer the madness of trust.”

August 18, 2013: “The true force of the Christian is the force of truth and of love, which means rejecting all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible! Faith and violence are incompatible! But faith and strength go together. The Christian is not violent, but he strong. And with what strength? That of meekness, the force of meekness, the force of love.”

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28 http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-faith-and-violence-are-incompatible. But the Word of God this Sunday contains words of Jesus that put us into crisis and need to be explained so that they are not misunderstood. Jesus says to the disciples: “Did you
August 31, 2013, on Syria and potential military strikes by U.S./France: “Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War brings on war! Violence brings on violence.”

September 7, 2013: “Even today, we let ourselves be guided by idols, by selfishness, by our own interests, and this attitude persists. We have perfected our weapons, our conscience has fallen asleep, and we have sharpened our ideas to justify ourselves. As if it were normal, we continue to sow destruction, pain, death! Violence and war lead only to death, they speak of death! Violence and war are the language of death!

“My Christian faith urges me to look to the Cross. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the Cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God’s reply: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken. This evening, I ask the Lord that we Christians, and our brothers and sisters of other religions, and every man and woman of good will, cry out forcefully: violence and war are never the way to peace! Let everyone be moved to look into the depths of his or her conscience and listen to that word which says: Leave behind the self-interest that hardens your heart, overcome the indifference that makes your heart insensitive towards others, conquer your deadly reasoning, and open yourself to dialogue and reconciliation. Look upon your brother’s sorrow – I think of the children, look upon these - look upon your brother’s sorrow, and do not add to it, stay your hand, rebuild the harmony that has been shattered; and all this not by conflict but by encounter! May the noise of weapons cease! War always marks the failure of peace, it is always a defeat for humanity. Let the words of Pope Paul VI resound again: ‘No more one against the other, no more, never! ... war never again, never again war!’. ‘Peace expresses itself only in peace, a peace which is not separate from the demands of justice but which is fostered by personal sacrifice, clemency, mercy and love’. Forgiveness, dialogue, reconciliation – these are the words of peace, in beloved Syria, in the Middle East, in all the world! Let us pray for reconciliation and peace, let us work for reconciliation and peace, and let us all become, in every place, men and women of reconciliation and peace!”

Septmeber 8, 2013: “This war against evil means saying no to fratricidal hatred, and to the lies that it uses; saying no to violence in all its forms; saying no to the proliferation of arms and their sale on the black market.”

Septmeber 18, 2013: “The Holy See shares the thoughts and sentiments of most men and women of good will who aspire to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Hence, we would like to use

this opportunity to renew our call upon the leaders of nations to put an end to nuclear weapons production and to transfer nuclear material from military purpose to peaceful activities”.  

November 1, 2013: Being saints is not a privilege of the few, “as if one had a great inheritance. All of us, in baptism, receive the inheritance of being able to become saints. Saintliness is a vocation for all. For all of us, and this is why we are called to walk the path of holiness, and this path has a name and a face: the face of Jesus Christ. He teaches us how to become saints. In the Gospel, He shows us the path: that of the Beatitudes. The Kingdom of Heaven, indeed, is for those who do not base their security in material things, but rather in the love of God; for those with a simple and humble heart, who do not presume to be right and do not judge others; for those who know how to suffer alongside those who suffer, and to rejoice with those who rejoice; who are not violent, but instead merciful and who seek to be architects of reconciliation and peace”.

January 1, 2014: “On this, the first day of the year, may the Lord help us to set out more decisively on the path of justice and peace; may the Holy Spirit act in our hearts, loosening bonds and warming hardened hearts so that they open up to the tenderness and weakness of the Child Jesus. Peace requires the force of meekness, the non-violent strength of the truth and of love.

“…[H]ear the cry for peace of those people oppressed by war and violence, so that the courage of dialogue and reconciliation might prevail over the temptation for revenge, arrogance and corruption.”

January 1, 2014, World Day of Peace message: “For this reason, I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!

“From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world’s peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself.

“Nevertheless, 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 disarmament.

“...I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right”.

May 15, 2014: “Everyone talks about peace,” he observed; “everyone claims to want it, but unfortunately the proliferation of weapons of every type leads in the opposite direction. The arms trade has the effect of complicating and distancing us from a solution to conflicts, all the more so since it takes place to a great extent outside the boundaries of the law. Therefore I consider that, while we are gathered in this Apostolic See, which by nature is invested in a special service to the

33 http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2013/11/saintliness-is-vocation-for-all.html
cause of peace, we can unite our voices in expressing hope that the international community may make new, concerted and courageous efforts against the proliferation of weapons and to promote their reduction.”

June 9, 2014, prayer with Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas at Vatican: “Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict; yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity.

“Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: ‘Never again war!’; ‘With war everything is lost’. Instil in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace… Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace.”

June 11, 2014: “I am thinking of those who live off human trafficking or slave labour; do you think these people who traffic persons, who exploit people through slave labour have love for God in their hearts? No, they haven’t fear of the Lord and they are not happy. They are not. I am thinking of those who manufacture weapons for fomenting wars; just think about what kind of job this is. I am certain that if I were to ask: how many of you manufacture weapons? No one, no one. These weapons manufacturers don’t come to hear the Word of God! These people manufacture death, they are merchants of death and they make death into a piece of merchandise. May fear of the Lord make them understand that one day all things will come to an end and they will have to give account to God.”

July 14, 2014: “Open our eyes and our hearts and give us the courage to say: ‘No more war!’ “War destroys everything.” Give us the courage to take concrete actions to build peace.”

August 19, 2014, on the Islamic State: “It is licit to stop the unjust aggressor. I underscore the verb ‘stop;’ I don’t say bomb, make war -- stop him.”

September 8, 2014: War is just “senseless slaughter” and should never be seen as inevitable or a done deal, Pope Francis said.

“War drags people into a spiral of violence which then proves difficult to control; it tears down what generations have labored to build up, and it sets the scene for even greater injustices and conflicts,” he said in a written message to a world summit of religious leaders.

“War is never a necessity, nor is it inevitable. Another way can always be found: the way of dialogue, encounter and the sincere search for truth,” he wrote.

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35 Talk to 7 New Ambassadors http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-address-to-seven-new-ambassadors-to-the-holy-
see?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+zenit%2Fenglish+%28ZENIT+English%29
38 http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2014/08/19/pope-francis-i-would-to-iraq-to-help-stop-violence/
October 1, 2014: “In a special way we all say forcefully, continually, that there can be no religious justification for violence, in whatever way it manifests itself.”

October 20, 2014: The Holy Father wished to dedicate the opening of the Consistory to the Middle East, and in particular, the situation experienced by Christians. Pope Francis thanked those brothers from the region for their presence, remarking that “We share a desire for peace and stability in the Middle East, and the will promote the resolution of conflicts through dialogue, reconciliation and political commitment.

November 26, 2014: Condemns “state terrorism.” The pontiff also insisted that although dialogue with the self-proclaimed Islamic State currently menacing much of the Middle East seems “almost impossible,” for his part, “the door is always open.”

November 27, 2014: Earlier in the month, the Buenos Aires daily La Nación reported that Father Juan Carlos Molina, an Argentinian priest, had a recent personal conversation with Pope Francis, in which Molina said to the pope, “Be careful, they could kill you.” Francis replied, “Look, it’s the best thing that could happen. To you, too.”

January 2, 2015: “Today, World Day of Peace, ‘Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters’: this is the message of this day. Because wars make slaves of us, always. It is a message that affects all of us. We are all required to fight against every form of slavery and to build fraternity.”

March 20, 2015: “Justice can never be wrought by killing a human being.”

June 8, 2015: “It is not enough to talk about peace, peace must be made. To speak about peace without making it is contradictory, and those who speak about peace while promoting war, for example through the sale of weapons, are hypocrites. It is very simple.”

September 17, 2015: “We need to find a solution, which is never a violent one, because violence only creates new wounds…Yet, the Church responds to the many attacks and persecution that she suffers in those countries by bearing witness to Christ with courage, through her humble and fervent presence, sincere dialogue and the generous service in favour of whoever is suffering or in need without any distinction.”

The pope remarked that “in Syria and Iraq, evil destroys buildings and infrastructures, but especially the conscience of man. In the name of Jesus, Who came into the world to heal the wounds of humanity, the Church feels called to respond to evil with good by promoting an integral human development of ‘each man and of the whole man’.”

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September 23, 2015, U.S. Congress: Being at the service of dialogue and peace also means being truly determined to minimize and, in the long term, to end the many armed conflicts throughout our world. Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade.47

September 25, 2015 at the UN: War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and between peoples.

The Preamble and the first Article of the Charter of the United Nations set forth the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between the nations. Strongly opposed to such statements, and in practice denying them, is the constant tendency to the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass distraction, such as nuclear weapons. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction – and possibly the destruction of all mankind – are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as “nations united by fear and distrust.” There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.

September 27, 2015 (prison visit): It is painful when we see prison systems which are not concerned to care for wounds, to soothe pain, to offer new possibilities… This time in your life can only have one purpose: to give you a hand in getting back on the right road, to give you a hand to help you rejoin society.

November 20, 2015 (Syria escalation): “What shall remain? Ruins, thousands of children without education, so many innocent victims and lots of money in the pockets of arms dealers. Jesus once said: ‘You can not serve two masters: Either God or riches.’ War is the right choice for him, who would serve wealth: ‘Let us build weapons, so that the economy will right itself somewhat, and let us go forward in pursuit of our interests. There is an ugly word the Lord spoke: ‘Cursed!’ Because He said: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers!’ The men who work war, who make war, are cursed, they are criminals,” Francis said.

“A war can be justified — so to speak — with many, many reasons, but when all the world as it is today, at war — piecemeal though that war may be — a little here, a little there, and everywhere — there is no justification — and God weeps. Jesus weeps.”

He went on to say that there are the poor peacemakers who, perforce to help another person, and another and another, spend themselves utterly, and even give their lives — as did Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, against whom the powerful, worldly cynic might say, “But what did she ever accomplish? She wasted her life helping others on their way to death?” He repeated, “We do not understand the way of peace.” 48

December 2, 2015: “It is obvious that today’s world is in need of mercy and compassion, or rather of the capacity for empathy.”

December 17, 2015: At the same time, he pointed to a positive development, saying we are witnessing from those with more mature consciences a growing “nonviolent reaction” to the wars and terrorism that have marked this year.49

December 25, 2015: “Mercy is the most precious gift which God gives us, especially during this Jubilee year in which we are called to discover that tender love of our heavenly Father for each of us. May the Lord enable prisoners in particular to experience his merciful love, which heals wounds and triumphs over evil.”

January 1, 2016: World Day of Peace Message: “There are many non-governmental and charitable organizations, both within and outside the Church, whose members, amidst epidemics, disasters and armed conflicts, brave difficulties and dangers in caring for the injured and sick, and in burying the dead.” (talks of journalists, photographers, priests, missionaries who risk lives during armed conflicts)

“With this in mind, I would like to make a threefold appeal to the leaders of nations: to refrain from drawing other peoples into conflicts or wars which destroy not only their material, cultural and social legacy, but also – and in the long term – their moral and spiritual integrity.”50 (as diplomacy ramps up in Syria for a united front vs. ISIS)

January 1, 2016: Angelus: “The enemy of peace is not only war, but also indifference, which makes us think only of ourselves, so that we create barriers, suspicions, fears and narrow-mindedness. These things are the enemies of peace.”

January 11, 2016: To Diplomatic Corp: “The mystery of the Incarnation shows us the real face of God, for whom power does not mean force or destruction but love, and for whom justice is not vengeance but mercy.”

October 21, 2016: Pope Francis’ homily examined what is required to nurture peace and unity: humility, gentleness and magnanimity… “The evil spirit always sows wars,” he said.51

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49 http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/12/17/pope_francois%E2%80%99_address_to_four_new_ambassadors/1195077
51 https://zenit.org/articles/popes-morning-homily-where-theres-arrogance-therell-be-war/