

July 16, 2023

78th anniversary of "Trinity" the first atomic bomb

*My command to you is:
Love your enemies, Pray for your persecutors.
Matthew 5: 43-48*

Dear Holy Father,

We, members of the Pax Christi New York State Council, urge you to proclaim *ex cathedra* the removal of "Catholic" Just War Theory (CJWT) from our Moral Tradition and raise Jesus's Gospel Nonviolence to a *de fide* teaching. We see no need to replace the theory with another. The answers to all our moral and religious questions about war are found in Jesus and his Gospel. Our work to establish Pax Christi, the peace of Christ, in the world is constantly hampered by the lack of authoritative teaching about Jesus's nonviolence.

One hundred years ago during WWI, Pope Benedict XV was desperate to end the war in which millions of baptized Catholics and Christians were killing each other on the basis of nationality. He drew up a peace plan and presented it to all the governments involved in the war, including President Wilson in the U.S. which had entered the war on Good Friday, April 6, 1917; however, Benedict did not use his authority to forbid Catholics to participate in the killing.

Benjamin Joseph Salmon was one of a very small number of US Catholic conscientious objectors who refused to train and kill in World War I. He was threatened with a death sentence for his refusal and imprisoned for two and a half years. Near the end of that time, he wrote a 235-page treatise on conscientious objection to war, capital punishment, and homicide, which we have called his "Magnum Opus." It can be found on a website, bensalmon.org, dedicated to making known Ben's life story and prophetic Gospel witness. On page 114 Ben wrote, "...since the justice of man cannot dethrone the justice of God, there is no such animal as a "just war". On page 210 he wrote, "Many Catholics are naturally perplexed by the fact that the Pope has not *ex cathedra* forbidden participation in war... **I have a faith that someday the Pope will declare that the command to not kill means to not kill.**" It seems Ben was the first faithful Catholic in history to write a complete refutation of "Catholic" Just War Theory!

In March 2022, you addressed a group of educators and agreed with Ben Salmon when you said, "There is no such thing as a just war: They do not exist!" In September, you responded to a question about the sale of weapons to Ukraine, saying that it could be "... morally acceptable if done under the conditions of morality... it can be immoral if done with intentions of making more war or selling weapons... The motivation is what, in great part, qualifies the morality of that act. To defend oneself is not only licit, it's also an expression of love towards one's homeland; whoever doesn't defend something doesn't love it. Instead, those who defend, love." We would say, those who follow Jesus and "love one another as he has loved us" are called to love their enemies and

defend without violence. Your change of mind and approval of killing in self-defense with modern weapons, as an expression of love of country, had consequences. In November, Cardinal Robert McElroy received a standing ovation from his brother bishops at their Assembly when he encouraged them to contact their Congressional representatives to support more weapons for Ukraine. Now we are left to wonder if cluster bomb and depleted uranium munitions, that our Catholic president, Joe Biden, has promised to send to Ukraine, will meet your "conditions of morality," whereas the Gospel allows no killing.

Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli signed a Vatican concordat with the Nazis in WWII but, like Benedict XV, Pius XII did not forbid German Catholics to kill in the war. In the Ukraine War, Orthodox Christians are killing each other because their national loyalty overshadows their common faith and baptism. Perhaps what is needed is an Ecumenical Council of all the churches who share the same Trinitarian formula for baptism in order to forbid all killing.

Because of "Catholic" Just War Theory's existence for 1700 years and its place in our Moral Tradition, we do not believe an encyclical could end the confusion it has caused. We pray you will do now in WWII what Pope Benedict failed to do in WWI and fulfill Ben Salmon's dream of a pope who would "teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded" (Matthew 28). "Them" refers to the baptized but, for centuries, successors to the apostles have allowed and even encouraged the baptized to obey military commanders and carry out the works of war. We believe that no encyclical or non-infallible teaching, or Eucharistic Revival that does not recognize the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Jesus' nonviolent Agape, will succeed in freeing us from our slavery to violence, militarism and war.

*Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say,
and his teaching made a deep impression on the people
because he taught them with authority, and not like their own scribes.*

Matthew 7, 28-29