
PROMOTING PEACE

Summary

Recipients and objectives of this iBooklet

Executive summary

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We begin with words from Jesus of Nazareth in the Sermon on the Mount, valid for people of any creed:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Mt 5,9).

"**Promoting peace**" is the second in a series of texts dedicated to **responding to the concerns** raised by the **people of God** to the Church following the listening carried out by the Synod in 2022. It is the continuation of the first theme, "**Do not judge**," which lays the foundation for **more serene and less aggressive social coexistence**, both inside and outside social networks. It is the longing of many: a serene social dialogue.

Promoting peace takes a **further step** towards achieving this, because after "do not judge" -which **avoids negative behavior**- it adds the determined collaboration to **create spaces of peace** and harmony, better understanding the **origin and types of conflict** that arise in society, **promoting respect** for all people and avoiding manipulations that divide society into opposing groups.

In our times, when **peaceful coexistence** is once again **threatened**, it is vital that we become aware of what leads to its preservation and what leads to its breakdown. There is a **close relationship** between **people's online and offline lives**. **Social media** are a communicative space that **rapidly multiplies** and spreads **content, emotions, and reactions** to what happens in society. In the digital environment, we see reflected the groups we belong to and the roles we play; and depending on how they are treated, they can become **true tribes in conflict**, prey to prejudices and oversimplifications.

For this reason, the **primary recipients** of this text are **digital missionaries**, whose role is key in **shaping attitudes**, ways of understanding, and **reacting to information** shared in society. It is crucial that they better understand how to **promote peace** and how to **defend against divisive manipulations**.

Therefore, the objectives of this iBooklet are:

- To delve into the **value of peace** and coexistence in society
- To provide **quality knowledge** about the social and **communicative dynamics** that **break peaceful coexistence**

- To offer clues for dismantling manipulations that intensify divisions between social groups, regions, or countries, and on how to generate reconciliation processes
- To promote a realistic and **co-responsible culture of peace** and respect in society and on social networks that encourages dialogue and a more harmonious social coexistence
- These purposes can be **considered universal. Peace is a common ground** for all cultures, regardless of belief, ideology, or geography. Peace poses **new challenges** for us to achieve a better, more peaceful, and harmonious world and for better coexistence.

Executive summary

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1. **Peace** is a **fragile good**, and maintaining it requires a **determined effort from everyone**. Because it is the environment in which individual, family, and community development can flourish.
2. **Peace** is the state of **human coexistence** where **individual freedom** and **respect for others** can be exercised, there are **opportunities** and a **dignified life for all people**, non-violent management of opposing interests, there is a **balance between different powers**, and **equality for all before the law**.
3. To actively promote peace, it is necessary to **better understand the human being**, how people construct their **individual identity** and how they manage their **sense of belonging** to different groups, which sometimes **come into conflict**.
4. And to know the **effect of communication** and social media, **proposing authentic dialogue** and **avoiding simplification**, polarization, and the **spread of falsehoods**.
5. Personal identity is what makes everyone recognize themselves as **distinct from others** and as their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.
6. From this, there grows the experience of the "other self," the **openness towards others** (construction of otherness) that will be **the seed of empathy**.
7. Then the person integrates into **different spheres of belonging** (family, neighbourhood, sports group, religion, ethnicity, country...) that provide a **sense of community, security and purpose**, and assumes roles according to their role in those spheres.
8. **Conflict, inherent to people and groups**, can emerge in any area. Groups must learn to **manage friction** and conflicts peacefully, **through dialogue**.
9. When those **roles and spheres of belonging become dominant**, exclusive, they **invade or expropriate personal identity**. Own thinking is punished, freedom of expression is reduced inside or outside the collective.
10. Then it may happen that **the leaders** of those belonging groups "**construct the enemy**," stirring up **historical resentments**, victimizing their own group,

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dehumanizing members of other groups. From here, it is easy to motivate followers to act with violence.

11. It is necessary to **remain alert** to these **interested manipulations**, remembering that **none of us existed** when **harm was done** in **other times**.

12. Avoiding a vision of "**good/bad**," always **too simplistic**, and inviting people to **renounce revenge** if they have been attacked.

13. The **antidote** against the construction of the enemy and the impulse to work for peace is **the message of Jesus of Nazareth**, which makes us consider **every human being**, in any circumstance, as **an equal in dignity**, a brother or sister.

14. The three steps to work for peace are:

a. **Prevent conflicts**, deactivating manipulations and respecting everyone

b. **Manage conflicts peacefully**, with dialogue, intelligence, patience

c. **Heal the wounds** of past conflicts, through reconciliation and forgiveness.

Contents

1. Description, scope, and purpose of the topic

Peace is a longing expressed by **many people**. It is the environment in which individuals, families, and communities can **more easily develop**. But it is a very fragile good that we must guard and promote, going beyond good exhortations. To foster peace in a practical way, it is necessary to better understand the human being, how their personal identity is born, and how **feelings of belonging to groups that may be in conflict emerge**. How positions can **become polarized**, and how, sometimes without realizing it, we may be contributing to intensifying them.

Scope

Therefore, this iBooklet **will not** refer so much to **peace in the family** sphere but will seek to clarify **how conflicts between social groups** are generated and how to promote and preserve a just and harmonious **coexistence at the societal level**, something particularly threatened and necessary at this time.

Reason to study this topic

At **this point in history**, society is experiencing an **exacerbation of conflict**. In addition to the two wars most covered by Western media, there are **armed conflicts** in numerous areas of the Earth.

Moreover, **countries are** once again **dedicating many resources to rearmament**, with increasingly sophisticated technologies, and the consequences of a military conflict with the current capacity for destruction would be devastating. We must **strive to contribute** to preventing it and become aware of **what each of us can do** in this context and assume our own responsibility by understanding how conflicts are generated or intensified, **how to avoid manipulations**, and how to be promoters of peace in our spheres of presence.

Which kind of peace are we talking about

We understand "peace" not only as an **absence of war or conflicts** but as a state of human coexistence where the exercise of **individual freedom** and **respect for others is guaranteed**, where there are efficient ways to **offer opportunities** for development and a dignified life for all people, procedures for **managing opposing**

interests peacefully, where excessive concentration of power is avoided, the balance between different powers is preserved, and **equality for all before the law is maintained**.

2. Role of communication and social media in the public environment

Social environment is greatly impacted by the **tone** in which **traditional media** and especially social networks express themselves. Their words, adjectives, images contribute to reducing or intensifying the natural frictions, differences and conflicts of interest between sporting, cultural, linguistic, political groups, etc.

Disqualifying judgments, defamation or slander, the **dissemination of prejudices** or exclusive labels, denigrating or ridiculing adjectives, the dissemination of unfounded rumors or directly false news (fake news) seriously influence the ideas that some groups form about others.

Political issues, religious beliefs, convictions about the climate, health and vaccines or the value of science are often expressed in a **simplistic and radical way; the nuances in thought** and word **disappear**, being reduced to a black and white board, and thus latent conflicts intensify.

This happens particularly on **social media**. In them, the dissemination of content tends to favor simplification and polarization, since the algorithms are designed to retain us as long as possible on the network and that is why they give more visibility to the extreme and striking, fleeing from equanimity. This dynamic shows us the importance of not settling for what appears on these platforms, since the information may be biased or incomplete.

Social media algorithms can **foster polarization** on opposing sides in several ways:

- a) **Bubble filtering**: they tend to show users information that matches or is like their previous interests and behaviours.
- b) **The echo effect**: when users are mainly surrounded by opinions that reflect and amplify their own beliefs.

c) **Prioritizing provocative content**: they give more visibility to content that is more likely to generate strong reactions, such as anger or indignation, as they are often designed to maximize user engagement and retention. d) **Feedback loops**: They create feedback loops where the data generated by the user's behaviour influences what the algorithm shows them next. e) **And the manipulation of information and misinformation**: not discriminating between quality content and misinformation can inadvertently promote false or misleading information, especially if that information is designed to go viral.

Anonymity makes it easier for people to **mask themselves to express violently** what they would not be able to express face to face, but it thus intensifies the conflict in the offline world.

And this same thing, when combined with the **lack of humility or prayer**, reflection and **dialogue**, means that the content creators themselves can easily fall into the temptation of believing themselves to be owners of the truth, **listening only to those who think alike**, sugarcoating the ears only with the fans, and end up losing the synodal key with which the Church calls everyone to also live on social media.

It is evident then that **prejudices or negative labels** are **easily inserted** into narratives of good guys and bad guys that simplistically explain events and intensify discord. And people will treat each other in real life depending on those narratives: with respect, dialogue and collaboration, or with fear, **distrust, aggressiveness**.

Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a **critical attitude** and seek diverse and reliable sources to obtain a broader and more precise vision of the topics that interest us, and to become aware of the processes that favour polarization and simplification of thought.

Responsible and conscious participation of **influencers and followers** in the digital environment is necessary; may we all be **awake and attentive** to preserve **social coexistence** in a climate of **dialogue, respect and attention** to all people. And everything described in the next chapter can help with this.

3. Understanding people and conflicts

Personal identity and areas of belonging

In this section we describe how **personal identity** arises and how we **progressively integrate into groups and collectives that sometimes come into conflict**. Therefore, understanding human beings better is more necessary than ever in such a polarized society.

Personal identity is what makes everyone recognize themselves as **different from others** and their thoughts, feelings and behaviour as their own. Normally, around three years of age we have a certain **awareness of ourselves**. Starting from this personal identity, between 4 and 6 years old we progressively **integrate the existence of others** (construction of otherness): those closest to us in the family. This is important, because **if this awareness of others is not built**, it will be more **difficult to generate empathy** in the future.

With growth, this experience of **being part of social groups** expands towards **broader circles**, which are areas of belonging.

In them there are also **the roles or ways of behaving** expected of a certain type of member of society: by sex, social class, surname, profession, skin colour, dialect, area of origin...

These **roles and areas of belonging** make up the **intermediate social bodies**, which are broader communities than the family, but in which the person is usually **known by name**. These are, for example, associations, clubs, faith communities, circles around sports, hobbies or political preferences... There are often **common goals**, distinctive symbols, activities and some degree of internal organization that gives them cohesion and continuity. These communities often provide **security and purpose to individuals**; They also become **mediators of meaning** to understand events in the environment: they offer reading keys, ways of understanding, and hierarchies of values.

Most people exercise various social roles and live in different areas of belonging (linguistic, ethnic, professional, gender, sports, associations, etc.) without these

But **devolving** will lead to these areas rivalries, competitiveness, friction, and in some cases **conflicts and discords** can and do **arise**.

Conflicts, inherent to human coexistence

But all coexistence between people, at all scales, involves managing **natural differences** in preferences, ways of understanding, pace of progress, interests, etc. It is common for these differences to **transform into conflicts**. People can develop strategies and behaviours aimed at the peaceful resolution of these conflicts. Political systems, laws, and education in many cases have been created in history for this, although it is not always possible to channel conflicts without violence.

In fact, as a whole humanity progresses in many aspects, but **continues to resort to violence** and in the extreme case to wars to **resolve certain conflicts**.

And in social life, **we can all aggravate** or contribute to conflicts. **No human being or group is immaculate**; no one is **immune** from **making mistakes**, blurring the focus, or actively contributing, at least in part, to ongoing conflicts.

As we say, human beings are **social by nature**. And part of social life naturally generates friction or conflict. Let's now see how conflicts with groups other than your own can intensify.

When conflicts get more intense

When these roles and **areas of belonging or social communities** become **dominant, exclusive**, imposing against those who do not belong to them, **they invade or expropriate personal identity**. One's own thinking is punished, **freedom of expression** inside or outside the group **is reduced**, and answer formulas are provided to any emerging question.

At that moment a reduction in the margin of individual freedom begins, the person becomes **uniform with the group** and begins to be very manipulable. This is aggravated when the different groups are in conflict, either because they are assigned a differential value in society, or because their conflict is encouraged by the interests of some sector. And **conflicts between exclusive groups** can **deactivate** the individual **will for dialogue**.

• Construction of the enemy and use of historical resentments

In a social climate of tension, it happens that **consciously or maliciously** on the part of some **opinion leaders**, one group begins to consider itself a “**victim**” of grievances or injustices on the part of another.

We are **not** referring here to **genuine victims** (victim is “any person who has been subjected to a serious traumatic event in which their dignity and safety (including their life) has been endangered by said event, without their knowledge.” could not have foreseen, nor caused it. The victim is characterized by not having been able to foresee what was going to happen to him and for not being a directly causal factor in what happened to him. Your natural desire should be to stop being a victim, through the mechanisms that society must alleviate your situation. For example, fair punishment for the aggressor or support policies, subsidies and attempts to repair the damage (such as social recognition).

But **sometimes**, victims can settle into **abusive victimhood** and based on their humiliated and injured situation, **claim rights and privileges** that go beyond the fair application of the Law and fair reparation for the damage. For example, entering the struggle for power or demanding exceptional social intervention by appealing to **their history of suffering**. They are **victims who want to be more than victims**.

And a third case is the **interested victimization** of those who are **not actually victims**, but who **take advantage of historical resentments**, stoking emotions linked to **past events**, presenting their protagonists **as if they were current**, and demanding all kinds of compensation from contemporaries.

De-humanizing the others

It is that third case, **self-interested victimization**, the **first step** in the **construction of the enemy**. It is done fundamentally through the **manipulation of public opinion**, the media and **direct actions** of leaders with social influence.

When it bears fruit, people then **easily renounce** our basic **convictions** and **priorities**, and we allow ourselves **to be carried away** by the **slogans** that others create, beginning to consider **people from other groups** as “**enemies**” as beings who **are not human** or deserve any respect, and that they **must disappear**.

This is the **dehumanization of the other**, who thus goes from being a neighbour to being considered someone who is both **dangerous** (it seeks to take away what is ours, whether material, cultural or spiritual, and even further destroy us as individuals and as a group) and **despicable** (it is an animal, it is not human, it has no positive values, it is disgusting and perverse).

This process **turns us into manipulable masses** that get ready to defend or attack, without understanding the risks and damages that they will suffer. Today the risk of escalation and destruction on a planetary level **is greater than ever**.

Without the construction of the enemy there are **no armed conflicts or wars**. Every war is preceded by a, sometimes slow and persistent, construction of the enemy that is intended to be destroyed. **Wars begin in the social pedagogy of grievance and humiliation** of “mine” by “the others”: thus, historical resentments are fuelled. In this way the fuse is easily lit by isolated events, sometimes even “preventive” attacks or attacks carried out “in the name of threatened peace.”

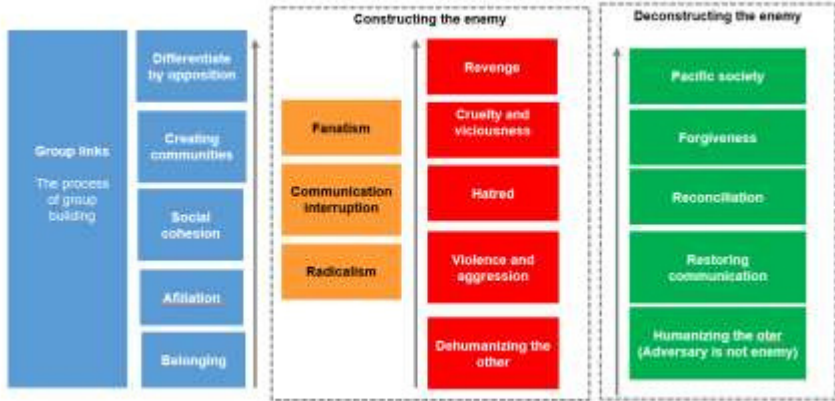
With the generalization of considering **others as enemies**, without **individuality**, it is **easier** for people **on both sides to fight**, although most of them would have only wanted to live in peace and not kill to achieve it.

Unfortunately, the **technicalization of war**, which tries to avoid victims in one's own field, produces, in return, an enormous depersonalization because, so to speak, it is no longer a matter of killing someone but just **pressing a button**.

Once armed **conflicts are over**, societies get rid of their remorse by making **memorials** or erecting triumphal arches and monuments to the “**unknown soldier**.” An anonymous soldier without history who is made out as if he had no family, no friends, no comrades. The reality, however, is that a **good part** of these soldiers was **torn from their family**, their work and their world, and dragged to the front to fight

against other men, who, like them, were torn from their families, their friends. and their worlds.

The process of groups building



Source: imission.org

4. How to respond to the intensification of conflicts

Too often **conflicts** have **led to wars**. And the citizens have been convinced that it was essential to fight. Here are **some insights** regarding those attitudes.

Any war causes great losses

Wars are the maximum expression of any conflict, but they are not improvised or spontaneous; **the wars of the future are generated today**. Its genesis is complex, and there are always party interests at stake. That is why we must be attentive to situations of hatred and polarization that can trigger conflicts, and progressively worse if we are careless. Therefore, its **origin** and causes **can and should be traced**. There are **economic reasons** (appropriating the wealth of others), **cultural or religious reasons** (desire to impose one's own model of life), **historical reasons** (identities harmed in previous times), psychological reasons (mistrust, competitiveness and dominance or desire for glory). and there is always a **desire for possession** and control over the **property of others**.

In wars **everyone loses something**, in some way, **even the victors**, because **no one can bring the dead back to life**; broken families are on both sides; **resentment and hatred** are generated sometimes for generations. It takes **years to rebuild infrastructure**, homes and, above all, the lives of people who suffered injuries, pain, separations, hunger, abuse, fear, attacks.

The consequences of war are **terrible and undesirable** and that is why the desires for peace that in modern times have given rise to the Kantian idea of perpetual peace are very old. However, modern history is full of **war conflicts** that, being so frequent and intense, have produced the emergence of **movements in favour of peace** and the opposition of very significant sectors of civil society to all types of war.

Avoiding a simple vision of good-bad people

Although **most of us say we prefer peace** and no one wants war in their home, or in their city, or in their country, there are times when **people see war as something necessary** to defend themselves or to defend interests or ideas.

This happens when conflicts lead to aggression, an attempt at domination and/or possession in which the aggressor tries to dominate or even exterminate the victim and dispossess him of all his property. In these cases, it is possible to **distinguish the aggressor from the attacked**; the innocent is assaulted by an ambitious evil man. **Philosophers and theologians** who reflect on the character of war **admit the possibility** that there are **just wars**, those in which someone defends himself from previous undue aggression.

But on **many occasions** wars are the result of **historical conflicts**, bitter, old and difficult to resolve, in which the **categories of innocent and guilty are blurred** because the vicious circle of **aggression-revenge-aggression** goes back to decades and sometimes **centuries** of conflicts. **Nobody really knows who started it.**

In practice, **these wars begin** by claiming a supposedly **just cause** and disguising the initial **aggression** as if it were a **response** to one that is **claimed to have preceded it**. Being Manichean at this point, assuming that there are always **very good guys** and **very bad guys**, may be a **simplistic way** of understanding what has happened

and, what is worse, **it may not help** at all when trying to forge foundations that make peace sustainable in the future.

This **does not imply an easy relativism** that makes everyone equally responsible for everything, but rather it must serve so that we always contribute to supporting the paths that can lead to harmony and ending war. Always remembering that understanding the causes of a conflict that lead to a war **does not mean justifying the war itself**.

Holding the answer and renouncing revenge

A first step is to affirm that, no matter how far the aggression is, **no one is obliged to respond with greater aggression**. At least an “eye for an eye”, maintaining containment in the response, is an advance, although it does not prevent conflicts and wars.

A **higher degree** - from the moral and from the Christian points of view - would be to ask that he **renounce revenge**, hoping that this attitude will **lead to peace** and non-aggression, while promoting the diplomatic path to **negotiate peace conditions**.

This can sometimes mean an **act of heroism**, and therefore we should **not expect** it to be the **usual behaviour**; **heroism can be asked for, but not required**. No one can be forced to have such a level of generosity and virtue.

In these situations, the **intelligence of leaders** - which has also existed in history - is desirable to interpose **new dynamics of negotiation** or dialogue that break the vicious circle of aggression-revenge.

And that in the processes that may precede a war conflict, the phenomenon of “construction of the enemy” is avoided, and the ways of understanding the other as a person are enhanced.

It is **easier to avoid wars** in **democratic societies**, with established principles of tolerance, polyarchy and scheduled resolution of controversies and conflicts, than in **autarchies** or **dictatorships**.

Democracies usually have more resources to avoid wars than autocracies, among other reasons because **civil society usually has many reasons to oppose war**, and public opinion acts as a brake. Also, because diverse approaches and opinions coexist more easily. This does not prevent there from having been cases in which the opposite has occurred, where the fanaticism of public opinion has prevented a government's attempts to avoid war. The human capacity for self-deception operates both in the powerful and in civil society.

On the other hand, it happens that in societies subject to a **dictatorship** or that are in a serious institutional and coexistence crisis, those in power **resort to the creation of an external enemy** to achieve **greater internal cohesion** and, in this way, promote the conflict to practically strengthen their political power.

5. Antidote. Consider that every person worths respect (following Jesus of Nazareth)

Is there a way to break that vicious circle?

Yes, there is. A **new foundation** for peaceful social coexistence was provided by the community of **disciples of Jesus of Nazareth** during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. With his teachings, **Jesus initiated an ethical revolution** by considering **any human being** in any condition as a "**neighbour.**" Up until that moment, the **predominant ethical** systems, including the biblical tradition, considered a "neighbour" to be **those belonging to one's own people, ethnic group, tribe**, etc. On the other hand, various Eastern traditions had cultivated the experience of brotherhood with all existence and respect for all beings, but without granting value to each human individual.

The Apostle Paul wrote the earliest book of the New Testament: his letter to the Galatians (3:28) around the year 50-56 CE. He said: "There is **neither Jew nor Greek**; there is neither **slave nor free**; there is neither **male nor female**; for you **are all one in Christ Jesus.**" The most defining social differences of what a person was, their position in the social hierarchy of the time, are erased in a fraternity of equals in dignity that was completely unprecedented for the mentality of his contemporaries. The Christian tradition continued to deepen this idea, and during the 3rd and 4th centuries, the controversies over the **identity of Jesus** (Christological controversies)

used the **concept of "person" applied to the Trinity**, but later this concept was extended to **human individuals**.

That conviction that every person, in any moment and condition they may find themselves, has an **inherent dignity** that must be respected, has been **transmitted over the centuries** to Western culture (Cf. *Dignitas infinita*, Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 03/25/2024).

In fact, it has given rise to **ethical codes**, legal, and political systems designed—at least in the realm of what should be—to **safeguard that dignity**.

Certainly, so-called **Christian cultures have not exemplified** their convictions in many aspects, but they have **preserved and transmitted** some essential **elements of this message**. Both on an individual scale—moving beyond "an eye for an eye" towards a **culture of forgiveness**—and on a social scale.

This way of understanding coexistence suggests that one **should not respond to aggression** by **increasing it**; that force should not be used to respond to violence. **That war**, in short, **is not desirable**, and that human beings should use their intelligence to **generate other forms of resolution**.

Christian Churches also echo this radical anthropological novelty. And they add the supernatural component: **authentic peace in the hearts of people is a gift**. It is a gift that the **Risen Christ brings to hearts**. And from that peace, **respect and benevolence**, and even charity, towards all people, regardless of their situation, are always **promoted**.

Now let us see what can be done in the prevention, management, and healing of conflicts.

Prevent: dismantling manipulations

Civil society has a great role and a great opportunity here. Part of the solution lies in **early detection of manipulations, questioning those proposals**, pointing out attitudes that try to inflame us, and exposing the disagreements cultivated for self-interest.

When someone is **using historical narratives as an incentive for war today**, we must remember that **none of the contemporaries existed** back then, therefore **no one has merit or blame for past events. We are all products of the same historical wave.** Other events would have led to the birth of different people: **each of us might not have existed.** In that sense, we **are all brothers in a received existence** and worthy of **equal respect.**

Our **responsibility is not for the past**, but **for the present** moment and the possible future. We must be aware of the **future consequences of our current attitudes.** The first step is to **recognize the dignity of each person**, beyond their social role, their affiliations, or their historical ancestors.

We cannot completely delegate the preservation of peace to organizations. It is also the **responsibility of all of us as citizens** to not let ourselves be dragged along, to have the discernment to stop it.

This requires a leap in the **level of maturity, awareness**, and ability to handle the **frictions and conflicts of coexistence**, strengthening communication, reflection, and understanding of reality, peacefully managing our conflicting interests, consolidating systems that preserve the separation of powers, and with-it individual freedom, equality before the law, and respect for others.

We must **work on all levels: personal, communitarian, and institutional.** Educating in the **appreciation of one's own existence** and that of others, promoting critical thinking and the ability to dialogue with those who think differently.

Institutions that have endured over time and that in the **past committed atrocities** against populations or countries can **now publicly regret** the wrongs committed by their leaders in other eras.

As part of their shared responsibility in improving the present, they can also implement actions to **mitigate the negative consequences** of past events, in collaboration with the contemporary inhabitants of those areas.

Managing conflicts peacefully

This is probably the **greatest achievement of societies**: providing channels for social groups with **divergent or opposing** interests to find **satisfactory solutions for everyone**. The underlying basis is surely an adequate legal framework and its regular enforcement. This is complemented by the **capacity for dialogue and negotiation**, appropriate mediation, and sufficient flexibility to partially yield one's own aspirations to achieve the benefit of all. But **cultural and communicative factors** also drastically impact these processes, either aiding or hindering them. **The spread of prejudices or false information** about contrasting groups can generate, and indeed does generate, conflicts and tension. Conflicts cannot be eliminated, but it can be avoided that they **create discord** (internal division).

Maintaining peaceful and just coexistence will always **require effort**, dedication, dialogue, and sometimes peaceful but **visible social pressure** to create **spaces for negotiation**.

Healing: social reconciliation as a step towards the peace we aim to rebuild

This text would be incomplete if it did not refer, at least in general terms, to the **processes of social reconciliation** following conflict and the laying down of arms. In many countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Europe, the stage **following internal violent conflict** is being experienced, and society is attempting to **rebuild coexistence** within a **peaceful framework** of participation and opportunities for all. But this necessarily requires sometimes very complex **reconciliation processes**.

Reconciliation is a process in which opposing individuals or groups, whether offensive or defensive, definitively and visibly **renounce maintaining a destructive relationship** and firmly commit to establishing or reestablishing a constructive relationship aimed at repairing the past, **establishing a peaceful present**, and ensuring a future of peace and cooperation for the common good.

There are two key terms in it: destructive relationship and constructive relationship.

- A **destructive relationship** is one that is inspired by these three convictions:

1. My cause has absolute value, and this authorizes me to use any means to conquer or defend it.
2. Anyone who opposes my cause is an enemy and nothing more; to me, they have neither dignity, nor family, nor history, nor projects. I forget that they are a human being.
3. My enemy is completely to blame for the conflict. I am innocent.

- In contrast, in a **constructive relationship**, the three traits of the destructive relationship are not assumed. It is based on three principles:

1. It is important to repair the injustices committed in the past as much as possible, evaluating them in the light of ethics.
2. We must reestablish a peaceful present by making a firm decision never to fall into those injustices again.
3. It is necessary to adopt measures now to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in the future.

The **ethical foundation** of reconciliation is the conviction that **no cause**, no objective, no matter how noble, necessary, and useful, **can take precedence** over the essential core of **intangible human rights**, nor can they violate them. These rights **include life**, the **dignity** of the person, moral conscience, etc., and they cannot be violated for any reason. Murder, mutilation, kidnapping, death threats, torture... have no moral justification under any circumstances.

To achieve **genuine reconciliation**, it is necessary to incorporate **some elements** that will surely be uncomfortable for everyone, but are indispensable:

a) Truth.

Authentic reconciliation must know and recognize the **truth of the injustices committed**. Half-truths are not enough; it is necessary to accept everything that can be known about the truth. Experience shows that, at times, most injustices were **committed by one** of the opposing sides. But in almost all cases, these injustices are **distributed proportionally** and **disproportionately**. For example, the committee that diagnosed what happened in Nicaragua during the Somoza

dictatorship found that 95% of the major human rights violations were committed by the government through the army; and 5% of these equally intolerable human rights violations were committed by the guerrillas.

b) Justice.

Reconciliation involves a **process of reparations** for **every victim**. Above all, the victims who lost their lives demand reparation... unfortunately, no one can bring them back to life, but the **indirect victims** in their family environment, etc., have the **right to effective reparation**.

c) Dialogue.

It is a **fundamental tool** in the reconciliation process, **to resolve** family, neighbourhood, social, political, or religious **conflicts**. In fact, dialogue has **prevented violent confrontations** throughout history in many parts of the world... Authentic dialogue involves **truly listening** to the reasons of the considered adversary and the **openness of both parties** to modify their own position to some extent, to reach a solution that satisfies both parties.

d) Forgiveness.

There is **no complete reconciliation** without **forgiveness**. *“There is no peace without forgiveness,”* said Desmond Tutu, the South African archbishop. Asking for forgiveness and granting it. No **civil law can force** anyone to grant or ask **for forgiveness**; only moral law can. Often, it is the **most difficult thing**. As the Jesuit theologian Joseph Moingt says, *“the paradox of forgiveness is that no human law can impose it, despite being the cornerstone of life in society.”* Reconciliation is consummated when requested forgiveness and offered forgiveness are intertwined.

The Gospels as a Source and Inspiration for Social Reconciliation

Social reconciliation is a challenging and strenuous process that involves individuals and institutions. Jesus calls **those who work for peace** “**blessed**” or “**happy**,” because **they will be called children of God** (Mt 5:9). This means they act in the same way as the Father. When he sends his apostles to proclaim the Gospel, he gives them the mission to **spread peace** (Mt 10:11-15). And the first gift he offers to his disciples after his resurrection is his peace (Jn 14:26-27). But “**not as the world gives**” — with **winners and losers**, a peace maintained by force — but **a peace that arises from within people** and from **mutual respect and service**.

Jesus addresses every person (especially foreigners, those considered impure or sinners, women, etc.) as subjects of a relationship equal to everyone else. He treats **each person with respect and naturalness**. He presents himself without submission before the powerful and without arrogance before the weak, showing self-respect and respect for the dignity of all. And with tenderness and mercy toward those who suffer pain, rejection, and contempt.

But in the realm of interpersonal relationships, Jesus takes a further step in his proposal for human fulfillment. He invites his followers **to act in the same way that God himself does** when someone offends them: **by forgiving**. This means that forgiving is no longer an attribute only of God. Jesus introduces dynamics of forgiveness into human history, here and now.

The individual process of forgiving involves, first, **renouncing revenge** in the face of offenses, recognizing the personal dignity of the offender and becoming aware of their human limitations. It involves acknowledging one’s **own feelings of anger, sadness, rejection**, and processing one’s own wounds appropriately. Thus, one can purify personal memory to forgive and live without resentment. And, if applicable, to restore the broken relationship.

It is important to note that **forgiving does not mean justifying bad actions**, eliminating the role of justice, or forgetting the facts. It is a personal process that is free, voluntary, and benevolent, allowing one to read the same events with different

categories and to process negative feelings so that they lose their overwhelming power. The **aggressor does not necessarily need to repent** or ask for forgiveness, although this can facilitate the process. **It is an option** that can also be unilateral on the part of the one who has been attacked or offended, and it benefits them: it frees them from the burden of resentment and the desire for revenge, restoring their inner peace.

The act of forgiving lies at the conjunction between the human and the spiritual. It requires, of course, the will of the injured person to process their attitude towards the offender or aggressor, but it also requires God's help. It begins with an awareness of the mercy that God has shown towards oneself.

Forgiveness is an extensive topic that we cannot delve into here, but it is the interpersonal starting point for a **culture capable of peacefully managing differences** and conflicts that arise on other scales.

---**Matthew 6,14-15:**

"If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

1 Peter 3,9:

"Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult; but, on the contrary, a blessing, because to this you were called, that you might inherit a blessing".

Matthew 18,21-22:

"Then Peter approaching asked him, *"Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."*

Colossians 3,13-14:

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do".

Mark 11,25:

“When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions.”

6. Map of messages and general infographic



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