

The Role of Popes and the Vatican in Negotiations for Peace

by Gerald H. Belsky

Jan. 26—In a Dec. 17 *EIR* seminar, “Peace, or Humanity’s Doom? The Case for Negotiations,” Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche emphasized that since Russian President Putin had stated on Dec. 9, 2022, that Russia may have to rethink its no-first-use nuclear doctrine in the face of America’s own nuclear first-strike doctrine and commitment to destroy Russia, the last best hope humanity has to avoid nuclear war is to accept the offer of Pope Francis to use the Vatican as a venue for immediate negotiations with no preconditions to end the war in Ukraine, an offer reiterated by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin on December 12, 2022.

Zepp-LaRouche has called for a worldwide mobilization of prominent figures, especially from the West, to add their names to an [Open Letter](#) to Pope Francis, in support of such negotiations. The letter was written by a group initiated by the Schiller Institute, calling itself Political and Social Leaders of the World to Stop the Danger of Nuclear War. Under the conditions of such negotiations, and a truce to stop the fighting before it escalates to nuclear confrontation, the deeper questions involved in creating a new peace order can be discussed, with Zepp-LaRouche’s contribution to such a discussion, her proposed “[Ten Principles](#) of a New Security and Development Architecture.”

But, in response to such a call for negotiations to begin the process of resolving this war on such a higher level, some have asked, why the pope? What is the significance of the role of the pope and the



Pope Francis

CC/Marcin Mazur

Vatican in regard to peace negotiations?

Looking at the history of the last hundred years, during the First World War, at the end of the Second World War, and during and immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we faced a Third World War, we shall briefly examine the history of the role of certain popes and of the institution of the Vatican itself, in attempts to end global war, even though in the first two cases these attempts were not successful, and, therefore, make clear the necessary role of the Vatican today in actually succeeding in initiating negotiations to stop the current real threat of imminent nuclear war.

1. Pope Benedict XV and the Christmas Truce of 1914

Before last Christmas, one thousand faith leaders of different religious denominations signed a call, initiated by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Code Pink, the National Council of Elders, and the Ukraine Peace Coalition for a Christmas Truce in Ukraine, as the first step for negotiations, modeled on the famous Christmas Truce of 1914, when German and French soldiers in some parts of the front in World War I spontaneously stopped fighting in order to celebrate Christmas fraternally. (President Putin of Russia, in fact, announced a one-day Christmas truce on January 5 for the Orthodox Christmas, in response to an appeal by Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church.) What is perhaps not as well-known as the fact of the

1914 truce itself, is that it had been first proposed by the pope at the time, Pope Benedict XV.

According to a July 19, 2014 [article](#), “World War I’s Pope Benedict XV and the pursuit of peace,” in the *National Catholic Reporter*, by British author Terry Philpot, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the disastrous first World War, the pope on December 7, 1914, called for all belligerents to hold a Christmas truce, so “that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang,” as the first step to allow for negotiations for an honorable peace.

The belligerent nations refused his appeal, but certain British and German soldiers in some parts of the front spontaneously stopped fighting on Christmas eve, and in what seemed like a Christmas miracle, started singing Christmas carols, emerged from their trenches, and even exchanged small gifts and in one documented case even played some soccer together. But such a truce did not last, and was never allowed by the officers of all sides to be repeated.

Pope Benedict XV, born Giacomo della Chiesa in 1858, had served for years in the Vatican diplomatic service, becoming Vatican Under Secretary of State in 1901, before being consecrated Archbishop of Bologna in 1907. He became pope on September 6, 1914, just after World War I broke out, and made several statements on what he saw as the characteristics of the age that had caused the war. In his first encyclical he addressed the lack of Christian love and wisdom, which had led to nationalism, racism, and class conflict, and “the contempt for authority, the injustice in the relations between classes, the attainment of material goods made into the sole object of human activity...,” repeating Christ’s words, “A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another.”



Pope Benedict XV

Giuseppe Felici

To the People

After his call for a truce was officially ignored, though unofficially celebrated by a great number of soldiers for a few days, Benedict moved more into active diplomacy for the rest of the war, although his diplomacy was hampered by the fact that most Catholics in all the countries involved supported the war!

To quote author Terry Philpot on Pope Benedict XV’s peace efforts:

In July 1915, Benedict published the apostolic exhortation “To the Peoples Now

at War and to their Rulers.” This marked a change to active diplomacy, which culminated two years later with the seven-point plan, or a peace note, as it was modestly termed, presented to the warring parties in August 1917. Benedict explained that his neutrality was “appropriate to



Illustrated London News/A.C. Michael

British and German soldiers join to celebrate an unofficial Christmas Truce in 1914.

him who is the common father and who loves all his children with equal affection.”

The peace note contained many of the proposals of the 1915 exhortation. It was posited on a peace linked to justice rather than military conquest, a demand for a cessation of hostili-

ties, a reduction of armaments, a guaranteed freedom of the seas, international arbitration, and having Belgium restored to independence and guaranteed “against any power whatsoever.”

All sides should forego claims of compensation (which were to prove so disastrous a part of the Versailles Treaty later), Benedict said. But as most of the damage, in countries such as Belgium and France, had been caused by Germany, the Allies saw this idea as effectively favoring their principal enemy. Only Britain did not oppose the note outright and was willing to explore the possibilities. Germany’s initial interest was lost when the collapse of Russia made Allied victory more [*sic*—an error, probably less likely—GB]. French President Georges Clemenceau saw the proposals as evidence that the Vatican was anti-French. (The clergy even spoke of “Papa Boche.”)

After the pope’s peace note, the Vatican was excluded by secret treaty of the allies from any future “peace” treaty discussions. After the Armistice ending the fighting in November 1918, Benedict pointed out that peace had not been established; only a cessation of hostilities had occurred. He was very critical of the subsequent Versailles Treaty, as being based not on Christian Love, but on vengeance, which, he had to have realized, as others did at the time, opened the door to a new, subsequent war.

Philpot adds:

But Benedict was one of the first to recognize the flaws of the peace. He thought the Versailles Treaty to be “vengeful.” His 1920 encyclical, *Pacem, Dei Munus Pulcherrimum*, sought international reconciliation. Neither the peace treaty nor the League of Nations, from which the Holy See had also been excluded, was based on Christian principles.

In 1920, two years before Benedict’s death in 1922, his commitment to peace was honored by Kemal

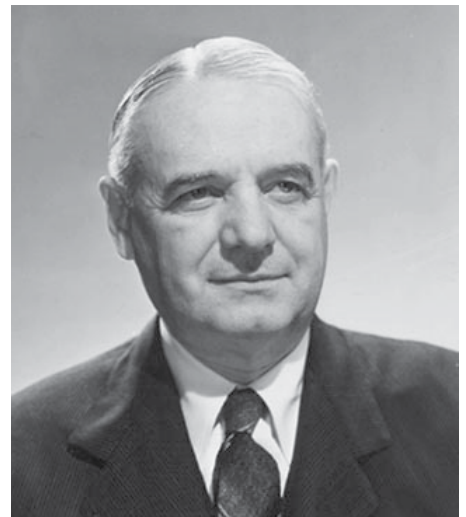
Atatürk’s new nation of Turkey, a majority Muslim nation with a secular government, which erected a statue to Benedict XV with the inscription, “The great pope of the world tragedy...the benefactor of all people, irrespective of all nationality and religion.”

2. Peace Negotiations at the Vatican To End War with Japan

The story we now recount is of the attempted, but failed, negotiations at the Vatican in the spring of 1945 to end the war with Japan. The tragically premature death of President Franklin Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, had a much greater effect than most alive then had realized. If those negotiations had been successful,



Max Corvo



Maj. Gen. William J. Donovan

they would have precluded the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. This story reveals the deliberate sabotage of such negotiations by British-Wall Street forces within the Truman administration, in order to allow the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, so as to terrorize the people of the world with a nuclear bomb, solely to impose a British imperial “unipolar” order on the post-War world.

In 1998, Lyndon LaRouche, in the [pages](#) of *EIR* magazine noted that, “At the time the fission bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not only was Japan already defeated, but Emperor Hirohito, working through the then-Monsignor Montini’s Vatican Office of Extraordinary Affairs, and in cooperation

with OSS's Max Corvo, had already delivered President Franklin Roosevelt's U.S.A. essentially the same terms of surrender signed, months later, after the bombs had been dropped." Several years later, LaRouche [reported](#) in an interview in Rome that he had received confirmation from sources in the Vatican of reports he had received directly from Corvo, who at a very young age had been the head of OSS field operations in Italy during World War II, and a close collaborator of OSS Director William J. Donovan.

In 1986, a great number of OSS files were declassified, which allowed Max Corvo in 1989 to release his 324-page book, *The O.S.S. in Italy 1942-1945, A Personal Memoir*, in which he revealed that "On December 24, Martin Quigley, Jr., reported [to the Rome OSS headquarters] to undertake a special assignment. ... [He] had been sent under cover to Ireland and was assigned the difficult task of using [his] Vatican connections to bring the war in the Far East to a quick finish."

Quigley followed up two years later with his 1991 book, *Peace Without Hiroshima: Secret Action at the Vatican in the Spring of 1945*, reporting on how he had been personally delegated by close FDR confidante, Director of the OSS General William P. Donovan, with one specific instruction, before leaving for Rome under commercial cover: "Be alert at the right time to attempt to open up communications to Tokyo looking to the surrender of Japan. After all, the Vatican is one of the few possible points for such contact."

Reflecting what he believed to be Donovan's intentions, Quigley understood that it was necessary to make contact with Japan through unofficial Vatican channels, rather than through the official office of the pope. Although the pope at the time, Pius XII, wanted the warring parties to come to him as an official peace mediator, for cultural and political reasons this would

not have worked. With Japan being a non-Christian nation, which recognized the Emperor as a deity, and the Soviet Union also not recognizing the religious authority of the pope, and the U.S. suffering from a certain popular anti-Catholic bias, any use of the Vatican as a means to open up communications, leading to secret negotiations, had to be strictly unofficial.

Nonetheless, the Vatican was a neutral state and had diplomatic relations with Japan. Japanese Ambassador to the Holy See Ken Harada had been sent as Japan's first diplomatic representative to the Vatican by the Emperor in 1942, with the specific instruction that he should be on the lookout for any possibility of peace negotiations at the neutral Vatican.



Exhibitors Herald/Michael A. Dean
Martin Quigley (left) and actor Carter DeHaven.

Spring 1945: Japan Already Defeated

What Quigley, Donovan, and all political and military leaders at the time understood in the Spring of 1945, was that Japan, its shipping destroyed, surrounded by a U.S. naval blockade, with its military outposts in the Pacific cut off by MacArthur's island-hopping air, sea, and land campaigns, was a defeated nation. The Japanese

government, with the backing of its Navy, amidst opposition to die-hard holdouts in the Army, was already sending out peace feelers to the Soviet Union, its main hope for the possibility of negotiations for peace, and attempting in a lesser way to send out peace feelers to the U.S. through Sweden and Allen Dulles, then OSS station chief in Switzerland.

The key issue was the question of "unconditional surrender," the official policy of the Allies. But as Quigley wrote in his book, since all surrenders ultimately involved some sort of "conditions," the key issue for the Japanese, before they would even consider

surrendering, was: Would the Emperor be retained as the head of state? If that condition could be met, then negotiation was possible; if not, then the Japanese would fight to the last man.

Quigley described the situation in the following way:

Whatever the real origins of “unconditional surrender,” now that the war against Germany was over, Washington leaders were concerned in late May 1945 whether something should be announced to clarify its precise meaning for the Japanese.

The tragic death of Roosevelt as the war was reaching its end complicated resolution of the issue. Had he survived, his prestige as a four-term President who had led the United States to victories over the Axis would have made his voice pre-eminent. In view of all that is known of F.D.R., it would seem likely that in the end he would have accepted the viewpoint of the State Department that the Emperor should be kept.

A clear advance announcement that the Emperor would remain in office, if that were the will of the Japanese people, might well have led to an earlier end of the war....

This viewpoint of the State Department, Quigley reports, was presented by Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew (who was, in effect, Acting Secretary of State, since Secretary of State Edward Stettinius was preoccupied with running the San Francisco Conference writing the Charter of the United Nations) in a meeting with President Truman at the end of May 1945. Relying on a memorandum that Grew wrote, Quigley states definitively that Grew had told Truman, “If some indication can now be given the Japanese that they themselves, when thoroughly defeated and rendered impotent to wage war in the future, will be permitted to determine their own political structure, they will be offered a method of saving face without which surrender will be highly unlikely.”

The Truman Problem

Grew gave Truman a draft statement for possible inclusion in a speech he was to give May 31 which called on Japan to surrender, or otherwise face “prompt and utter destruction,” but assured that the Japanese the Emperor would be retained if that were the will of the Japanese people. Truman made no commitments but claimed that his “own thoughts were following the same line.” He told Grew to meet the next day with Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, Navy Secretary James Forrestal, Navy Chief of Staff Admiral Ernest King, and a few others, to discuss the issue.

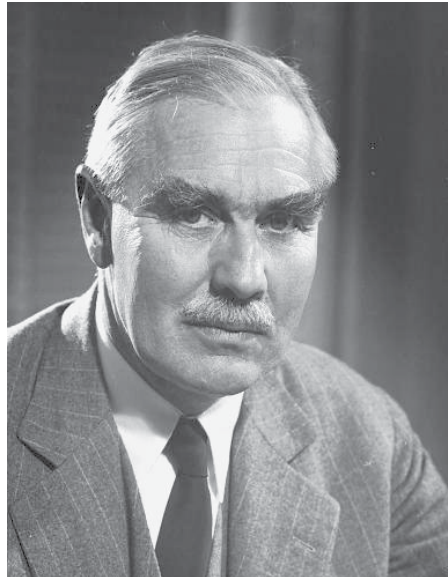
At the meeting in Stimson’s office at the Pentagon (which all the above attended, except for King), according to the memorandum of Grew cited by Quigley, Stimson, Marshall, and Forrestal “were all in accord with the principle but for certain military reasons, not divulged, it was considered inadvisable for the President to make such a statement just now. The question of timing was the nub of the whole matter according to the views presented.”

Quigley writes, “There is no record of a Truman memorandum on the Grew initiative. Nor is it

known what the ‘certain military reasons, not divulged’ were. One speculation was that the timing was judged inopportune on account of the savage battle for Okinawa; another is that the top American leaders were looking ahead to the employment of the atom bomb.”

Since all the American political and military leadership agreed “in principle” with retaining the Emperor, which was the ultimate Occupation policy (and the Battle of Okinawa ended on June 22, 1945), the question of “timing” had to be waiting to state this policy *until after the atom bombs were ready be dropped*, lest Japan surrender too early!

As *EIR* has documented, the Wall Street-British faction inside the U.S. government, led by Stimson, insisted on using the atomic bombing of Japan as a means to create the terror necessary to force the Russians to agree to a post-War imperial world order



Philippe Halsman

Joseph Grew, U.S. Under Secretary of State.

(“British brains and American brawn”), in opposition to the pro-FDR circles, such as the pro-FDR patriotic faction within the OSS led by General Donovan.¹

It was this decision to postpone the surrender of Japan—to use the atomic bombing of Japan for its geopolitical shock value—as well as the machinations of British Intelligence and British allies within the OSS to discredit Donovan’s patriotic faction of the OSS, that explains the failure of the American initiative to open up peace negotiations with Japan at the Vatican.

Quigley, in order to carry out Donovan’s plan, at the end of May 1945, about the time of Grew’s meetings with Truman and the Pentagon, and about three weeks after the surrender of Nazi Germany, approached a young member of the Vatican’s diplomatic service whom he knew, Monsignor Egidio Vagnozzi, a protégé of the very powerful General Manager, or Assessore, of the Vatican’s Holy Office, Monsignor (later Cardinal) Alfredo Ottaviani.

A Possibility of Peace

He recruited Vagnozzi to be his unofficial intermediary to the Japanese Mission to the Vatican, revealing his OSS identity, convincing Vagnozzi to risk his diplomatic career by acting outside of official channels to do God’s work for peace. Quigley was thus able to make contact through a Japanese cleric at the Vatican, the ecclesiastical advisor to the Japanese Mission, to the Japanese Ambassador to the Vatican Ken Harada, conveying that there could be a communication channel with the U.S. government to discuss peace terms via a well-connected American businessman, who had excellent contacts in both the Vatican and with high officials in the U.S. government, who could arrange to have a high-level official come to Rome within a few days to carry out secret negotiations in a secure location.

The Ambassador was initially not sure if this offer was a trap of some sort. But after considering the matter very carefully, taking into account that the Vatican diplomatic representative who had made the approach was sponsored by one of the most powerful officials in

1. On the role of Henry Stimson, the leader of the Teddy Roosevelt “Carry a Big Stick” anglophile imperial faction in the U.S., in delaying the surrender of Japan in order to drop the only two atomic bombs we had, as well as the opposition of most U.S. military leaders to the atomic bombing, see Stu Rosenblatt, “How Henry Stimson bombed Hiroshima, and Nagasaki too”, *Executive Intelligence Review*, March 12, 1999.

the Vatican, and also remembering the Emperor’s 1941 charge to him when first taking up his post, to look for any possibility of peace negotiations, he sent a top-priority coded message through the Vatican radio available to the Mission to the Japanese Foreign Minister, outlining the offer he had received. At the same time, he made clear he had made no commitment, and dismissed any discussion of “unconditional surrender.” He was looking for further direction from the Japanese Foreign Ministry to this initial attempt to open up a channel of communication, while protecting himself from any charge that he was colluding with the enemy.

After a few days, with no response from the Foreign Ministry, the Ambassador decided that he must know more about this peace offer in case the Foreign Minister were to ask for more details. He sent back a message to his Vatican interlocutor asking for more details about what were the proposed terms of peace, because removing the Emperor would never be accepted.

Quigley knew that he was not authorized to engage in direct negotiations with the Japanese government, but only to open up a channel of communications. He decided to provide some sort of answer to keep the line of communications open. After a few minutes of reflection, Quigley wrote the following note: “Major points in a surrender document are likely to include: 1. Occupation of Japan by American forces. 2. No permanent transfer of territory to the United States. 3. No change in status of the Emperor, unless decided by the Japanese people.”

A Japanese Opening

This message was delivered in his own words, relayed through intermediaries to Ambassador Harada, who composed another priority, coded message to the Japanese Foreign Minister, which made clear that the American in question was not asked by anyone in the U.S. government to make a specific offer to the Japanese, but could facilitate that any message from the Japanese government could be passed on to the U.S. government. Most importantly, the message from the Ambassador stated the American believed that while it would be difficult to get the U.S. to change its demand for “unconditional surrender,” that term could be subject to “different interpretations.”

This communication of messages to the Japanese Foreign Ministry; Quigley’s reports to the OSS about his initiative to open up communications, including the

question from the Japanese Ambassador; and Quigley's answer regarding the terms of surrender, should have been expected to have led to responses and questions from both Washington and Tokyo to their respective representatives for further follow-up. Yet, surprisingly—and mysteriously to both Quigley and the Japanese ambassador—there was no follow-up. Neither Washington nor Tokyo ever responded to these messages. The question Quigley could never satisfactorily explain is, why? He implicitly knew, but didn't think he could explicitly state it, because the answer was so horrifying. From the U.S. side, it was clear that the Truman administration did not want to negotiate peace till it had used Japan as a sacrificial lamb to demonstrate the power of the atomic bomb.

The U.S. failure to respond is far more egregious and evil. The U.S., through British radio intercepts and its MAGIC code-breaking program, could read Japanese diplomatic and military radio transmissions. This means that key people in the U.S. had seen the very messages that Ambassador Harada had sent the Japanese Foreign Ministry about Quigley's attempts to open up preliminary channels for negotiations. As Quigley points out, not all raw MAGIC decoded data was distributed to the relatively few key officials who had a need to know; the responsible military intelligence authorities distributed daily MAGIC summaries only to Army Chief of Staff General Marshall; the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy; the intelligence chiefs of the Army and Navy; and the President. No one was supposed to keep a copy or to ever speak about MAGIC to anyone else.

Yet, Quigley was able years later to find the MAGIC decoded messages of Harada in the National Archives, because General Marshall had returned his copies to one file in the Office of Army Intelligence, which were ultimately turned over to the Archives. What he discovered is that on three occasions the issue of these Harada messages had been the top item in the MAGIC Daily Summary—there is no excuse that somehow nobody in authority saw them! Since the most important military question of the day in June 1945 was presumably how to end the war in Japan, how could these messages and Quigley's reports on the same matter be missed?

Quigley argues that if anyone had put together his reports to the OSS and the MAGIC intercepts of the Harada messages on the same subject, their significance

for opening up a potential channel for negotiations for peace with Japan would have been obvious. But, the OSS was not on the recipient list of MAGIC, though Quigley thought it possible that Gen. Donovan knew about it. When these Harada messages came in with Quigley's reports, Donovan was not in Washington, and Quigley never discovered whether a special report he had addressed to Donovan was ever seen by him.

British Treason Against the Human Race

As a way of further explaining why Quigley's initiative was not acted on, he reports that the OSS Italian section was being dismantled under pressure from British Intelligence, which wanted to eliminate its intelligence rivals, and that Donovan, a close confidant of FDR, was detested by Truman. But these facts were mere reflections of the British taking over Washington with Truman as their stooge. Patriots like Donovan were being pushed aside.

What Quigley had to know—but only hints at by saying that some “speculate” that the “military” reason American leaders would not state openly at this time the intention to keep the Emperor, was that they wanted to drop the bomb—was that this was the same reason his peace opening on behalf of Donovan was deliberately officially ignored.

Regarding the mystery of why the Japanese Foreign Ministry did not respond to this potential peace opening, Quigley writes:

Post-war speculation by Ambassador Harada... was that the Japanese decision to try to seek peace through the good offices of the Soviet Union was so firmly established that no alternative could be considered. This is surprising in that...the Japanese Supreme Council had in the middle of May considered the possibility of making peace through several places, including the Vatican. The Harada cables suggested a way of using the Vatican unofficially, a method which might have removed the cultural or religious objection on the part of the Japanese leaders. In addition, by the time of the Harada messages on June 2 and June 12, evidence should have been accumulating that the Russians were stalling and showing no disposition to be an intermediary for peace. By then, Japanese intelligence services should have been alerting the political leaders

that the U.S.S.R. was preparing for military action against Japan.

Lyndon LaRouche made the following [remarks](#) from his knowledge of these peace negotiations at a Schiller Institute conference in Rüsselsheim, Germany on February 22, 2009, which he said that he learned about from Max Corvo, who had been chief of intelligence in Italy for the OSS during World War II. Corvo had been introduced to LaRouche by former OSS intelligence circles when LaRouche was working on the SDI concept with President Reagan in the early 1980s. LaRouche told the conference audience:

... Max Corvo, who was the actual field organizer for U.S. intelligence in Italy, during the period after Sicily: He was one of the people who planned the U.S. Sicily operation. And because of his job in Sicily, he became appointed by Washington, as the chief of the intelligence in the field, for all Italy. In this connection, and toward the end of his service in Italy, he had a contact with a certain Monsignor, who was then in charge of the special department of the Vatican diplomatic office, called Montini [Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, later, Pope Paul VI]. And, he was involved in that, because he was on the ground, and discussed a number of things with Montini, including the fact that the Japanese ambassador tried to negotiate, or was negotiating with Washington, for a peace agreement—which was later killed. It was killed by Truman. And we dropped two nuclear weapons on Japan—totally unnecessary—when Japan was ready to surrender. But Truman and Churchill did not want Japan to surrender. They wanted to drop these two nuclear bombs, as soon as Truman found out about them, on Japan. And they held back the peace agreement, until they dropped the nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Pope Paul VI

Fotografia Felici

Then, after that point, they negotiated with Hirohito. And they gave Hirohito exactly *the same plan of surrender, which had existed beforehand!*

3. Dialogue for Peace: The Pope, JFK, and Khrushchev

The most dramatic example of the direct intervention of a pope for peace was the extraordinary dialogue between Pope John XXIII, President Kennedy, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during and after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, to both help to defuse the crisis and—through the dialogue on “intense and impassioned conceptions,” to use the phrase of the poet Percy Shelley—under the existential threat of nuclear annihilation, to create, through such a dialogue, the glimmer of hope for a potentially more lasting peace, which led to the offer by JFK to end the Cold War, made in his American University speech of June 1963.

This peace process is described by the Catholic peace activist James W. Douglass in his groundbreaking book on the Kennedy assassination, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*, in the

following way:

Although John Kennedy was in deepening conflict with his own Cold War government, he was supported in his turn toward peace by two improbable companions, a dying pope and a beleaguered Communist. In the final year of Kennedy’s life, Pope John XXIII and Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev became the president’s greatest allies in his pursuit of peace. They made all the difference. Without them, his isolation would have been almost complete. With them, he could begin to lay the foundations for a more peaceful world.

The unlikely trio of the capitalist president,



Şermin Güner, sculptor

Statue of Pope John XXIII, in front of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Istanbul, Turkey.

the dying pope, and the Communist premier began to conspire for peace in the midst of an equally unlikely event for such collaboration, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Because the Missile Crisis shocked and sobered Kennedy and Khrushchev, in spite of themselves they joined hands and began an about-face from war—with the active support of the pope and his secret peacemaking agent, a New York journalist, Norman Cousins. It was Cousins who, because of the behind-the-scenes cooperation of this odd trio, later dubbed them “the improbable triumvirate.”²

The start of the dialogue coincided with the outbreak of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when President Kennedy went on national TV to announce that he had instituted a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent any more military shipments from Russia, and to demand that Russia remove its missiles: By

2. This dialogue for peace is described in James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*, Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, New York, 2010, pp. 337-350. It is detailed in personal experience by the Pope’s “secret agent” for peace, Norman Cousins, in his book, *The Improbable Triumvirate: John F. Kennedy, Pope John, Nikita Khrushchev*, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc, New York, 1972

coincidence, the third annual private and informal U.S.-Russian peace conference was just getting underway, this time in Andover, Mass., of Russian and American delegations. The dialogue had been established by the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (commonly called SANE), made up of prominent figures from East and West, who each had connections to their respective governments, who wanted to figure out a way to begin a peace process between the U.S. and Russia. One of the key figures pulling this group together was the author Norman Cousins, one of the founders of SANE, who was the editor of the *Saturday Review* magazine.

Shocked by what they heard the President say in his address to the nation about the Missile Crisis, the Americans at this gathering gave the Russians the option of leaving under the conditions of U.S.-Soviet confrontation. The Russians decided to stay, if the Americans wanted them. By mutual and unanimous agreement, they all continued to meet and discuss the question of finding a way to peace, even if, at the same time, the two delegations each defended its nation’s respective positions on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A Channel for Dialogue

“Into this volatile, peace-seeking community,” to use James W. Douglass’s characterization, came Father Felix Morlion, a Dominican priest and prominent theologian, educator and diplomat, who had created the Pro Deo University of Social Studies in Rome to promote ecumenical education for dialogue among different nations, cultures, and religions. (James W. Douglass would serve as his assistant in 1964, and heard directly from him and Norman Cousins when he visited there about the story we are about to tell.) Morlion had met Cousins earlier in 1962 and had told him, “All the world will come to acclaim and love this gentleman, Pope John. He is not arbitrary or fixed. He has a profound respect for people of all faiths. He wants to help save the peace.”

Father Morlion asked the group of Russians and Americans at the Andover conference if they would like a papal intervention into the Cuban Missile Crisis. After talking on the phone with the Vatican, Morlion knew that the pope wanted to issue a statement

proposing, in the name of peace, to end both the “military shipping” of the Russians and the U.S. blockade of Cuba. He asked the members of each delegation, “Might a papal intervention in the Cuban crisis—even if only in the form of greater responsibility—serve an important purpose? Would a proposal to both nations be acceptable that called for a withdrawal both of military shipping and the blockade?”

Cousins called the White House and spoke to President Kennedy’s policy advisor and speechwriter, Ted Sorenson, while a member of the Russian delegation called the Kremlin. Sorenson told Cousins after talking to JFK, “The President welcomes the offer of Pope John’s intervention.” But he also said that the President didn’t want the pope to believe that his proposal “meets the central issue,” since the issue was not the military shipping, but the fact of the missiles that were placed in Cuba, which must be removed, “and soon—if the consequences of the crisis are to be averted.” The response of Khrushchev to the pope’s proposal, however, was reported to the group as “completely acceptable.”

Father Morlion called the Vatican to report the responses of Kennedy and Khrushchev, which led to the pope issuing a public statement for peace and moral responsibility the next day, which was delivered to both the U.S. and Soviet embassies, which deferred to Kennedy’s reservations about his specific proposal, but which stated unambiguously the absolute need for negotiations between the two nations to stop the nuclear showdown: “We implore all rulers not to remain deaf to the cry of humanity for peace ... to reassume negotiations.... To set in motion, encourage and accept discussions at all levels and at any time is a maxim of wisdom and prudence.”

A Reaffirmation of Principle

The Schiller Institute’s worldwide campaign today to support Pope Francis’s current call for immediate negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, is a reaffirmation of this obvious principle. Would that world leaders today would respond to Pope Francis’s plea, as Kennedy and Khrushchev did to Pope John’s!

The actions of Pope John to stop World War III are exemplary of the approach needed today. The Cousins book reports:

In line with President Kennedy’s reservations,

[the pope] made no specific reference to the military shipments or the blockade. Instead, he directed himself to the clear obligation of political leaders to avoid taking those steps that could lead to a holocaust. He said that not just Americans and Russians, but all the world’s peoples were involved, and that their fates could not be disregarded. He said that history would praise any statesman who put the cause of mankind above national considerations.

The pope’s appeal was headline news around the world, contrary to the virtual blackout in the West today to Pope Francis’ call for negotiations. *Pravda* had a banner headline citing the pope’s plea to Cold War leaders “not to remain deaf to the cry of humanity for peace.” After Khrushchev announced that he would pull the missiles out of Cuba, leading Soviet newspaper *Pravda* reprinted the pope’s message, praising the “realism of the pope concerning the question of peace,” as a commentary on the necessary resolution of the Crisis.

Khrushchev said, in a subsequent meeting with Norman Cousins, who would unofficially represent the Vatican in back-channel discussions (explained below), that “This message” of the pope at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, “was the only gleam of hope.”

In fact, Khrushchev used the pope’s message to give himself the moral backing that he was acting as a statesman who avoided world war, rather than a coward who had backed down to the United States. This is the point that law professor and associate dean of the University of Mississippi School of Law Ronald J. Rychlak makes in his November 11, 2011 [article](#) in *Crisis Magazine*, “A War Prevented: Pope John XXIII and the Cuban Missile Crisis”:

With his plea, Pope John XXIII had given Khrushchev a way out. By withdrawing now, he would be seen as a man of peace, not a coward.

But Khrushchev’s continued praise of the pope for his efforts to achieve peace was not just for pragmatic reasons. He was genuinely moved by what the pope had to say on this matter, because he was confronted, as was JFK, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, with the horrifying reality that all of humanity could be destroyed by his decision.



DoS

President Kennedy with Chairman Khrushchev at the U. S. Embassy residence in Vienna, Austria, June 3, 1961.

The Threat of Nuclear Annihilation

At the Andover peace meeting, Father Morlion, obviously after consulting with the Vatican, raised the question to the Russian delegates of further discussions between Russia and the Vatican on the question of peace, and he proposed that Norman Cousins be the “unofficial and unattached” intermediary between the pope and Khrushchev for these discussions. The proposal was passed on to the Russian government, and a month later Cousins was contacted by Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin and informed that the Morlion proposal had been accepted and that Soviet leader Khrushchev would meet with him.

Pope John had decided that he must do everything to stop global war with the limited time on this earth left to him, because he had discovered the month before the Cuban Missile Crisis that he had an advanced case of cancer. He would, in fact, die in June 1963, one week before Kennedy’s American University speech proposing to end the Cold War, which was the result of the dialogue process the Pope had initiated.

When Cousins informed the White House of this development, he was invited to meet with President Kennedy, before his meeting with Khrushchev, and then the Pope, and thus began a three-way back-channel discussion for peace, which had to have been the

intention of the project of Pope John and Father Morlion. JFK told Norman Cousins in his initial meeting that Khrushchev “will probably say something about his desire to reduce tensions, but will make it appear that there’s no reciprocal interest by the United States. It is important that he be corrected on this score. I am not sure Khrushchev knows this, but I don’t think there’s any man in American politics who’s more eager than I am to put Cold War animosities behind us and get down to the hard business of building friendly relations.”

When Cousins met with Khrushchev, who was aware that the pope was dying from cancer, the Soviet leader made clear his genuine appreciation of the pope’s efforts for peace. “During that week of the Cuban crisis,” he stated, “the pope’s

appeal was a real ray of light. I was grateful for it.” To show his appreciation, and to improve relations with the Vatican, which up to that point had not been particularly good, he agreed, at the pope’s request, to release an ill Ukrainian archbishop, who had been imprisoned by the Soviets.

Khrushchev also honestly admitted that he was “frightened” by the prospect of nuclear war, when Cousins directly asked him, “How did it feel to have your fingers so close to the nuclear trigger?” As he honestly told Cousins, “If being frightened meant that I helped avert such insanity then I am glad I was frightened. One of the problems in the world today is that not enough people are sufficiently frightened by the danger of nuclear war.” When Cousins informed Khrushchev that there was no person in politics in America aspiring to be President more committed to peace than Kennedy, Khrushchev replied, “If that’s the case, he won’t find me running second in racing toward that goal.”

When Cousins subsequently met with Pope John XXIII, and brought greetings to him from both JFK and Khrushchev, who were both aware of the pope’s pain from cancer and impending death, the pope told him, “Pain is no foe of mine. Wonderful memories give me great joy now and fill my life. There is really

no room for the pain.”

After he heard the report of Cousins’s meeting with Khrushchev, the pope made clear, “Much depends now on keeping open and strengthening all possible lines of communication. As you know, I asked the statesmen (during the Cuban Crisis) to exercise the greatest restraint and to do all that had to be done to reduce the terrible tension. My appeal was given prominent attention inside the Soviet Union, I was glad that this was so. This is a good sign.... World peace is mankind’s greatest need. I am old but I will do what I can in the time that I have.”

Pacem in Terris

What he did with the little time that he had left was to finish his great [encyclical](#) *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), which provides a principled basis for peace among nations. In the same, but more condensed way Helga Zepp-LaRouche elaborates in her “Ten Principles,” a Natural Law basis for a new security and development architecture. *Pacem in Terris* has certain similarities to Zepp-LaRouche’s Ten Principles, and readers are encouraged to read both and compare the principles contained in them, to see where they cohere, and to also see where they differ. Both are committed to the idea that the universe is based on justice and truth. In fact, the title page of the encyclical has a short summary of the qualities of peace among nations—which are consistent between both documents: “That peace between all peoples must be based on truth, justice, love and freedom.”

In fact, the first section of the encyclical, entitled “Order in the Universe,” boldly proclaims, “That a marvelous order predominates in the world of living beings and in the forces of nature, is the plain lesson which the progress of modern research and the discoveries of technology teach us. And it is part of the greatness of man that he can appreciate that order, and devise the means for harnessing those forces for his own benefit.”

He makes clear that the purpose of government is to “promote the Common Good,” and so should be that of relations among nations. But in dealing with relations among states, he directly addresses the distinction between “a false philosophy of the nature, origin and purpose of men and the world,” clearly referring to Christianity’s criticism of Communism, and “economic, social, cultural and political undertakings, even when such undertakings draw their origin and inspiration

from that philosophy,” because the “undertakings clearly can’t avoid being influenced by the changing conditions in which they have to operate. Besides, who can deny the possible existence of good and commendable elements in these undertakings, elements which do indeed conform to the dictates of right reason, and are an expression of man’s lawful aspirations?” So, even if political and social movements are based on a philosophy that we consider false, such as communism, they may have good and commendable elements we can work with.

Mutual Trust and the American University Speech

When Norman Cousins next met with Khrushchev in April 1963, even before the encyclical was published, he presented him, on behalf of the pope, a Russian translation of *Pacem in Terris* before anyone outside of the Vatican had yet seen it. Khrushchev asked him what parts of the encyclical should be discussed now. Cousins pointed to, perhaps other sections, but focused on the section on “mutual trust” as the basis of peace, instead of an arms race: “If [disarmament] is to come about, the fundamental principle on which our present peace depends must be replaced by another, which declares that the true and solid peace of nations can consist, not in equality of arms, but in mutual trust alone.”

Khrushchev promised to read the rest of the encyclical carefully, but then brought up the problems he had with trusting America. JFK had made clear he wanted to conclude a nuclear test ban treaty, but the sticking point had been the number of inspections allowed in each nation to verify the treaty. Khrushchev thought his negotiators had worked out an agreement of three inspections a year, which he had to sell to the other leaders in the Supreme Soviet, who thought the purpose of the inspections was to carry out spying. Now, Khrushchev discovered, the U.S. was demanding not three but eight inspections a year, which he said made him look like a fool in front of his hardline critics. So, how could he trust the U.S.?

Cousins, who was aware of this dispute, tried to argue that there was some sort of misunderstanding about the number of inspections, that the U.S. had never agreed to just three, but Khrushchev could not budge on this question, because he had sold the prospective treaty on the basis of what he believed had been the U.S. position, and now he could not go back to hardliners—who didn’t want any inspections, because they didn’t

trust the U.S. intentions at all—and convince them to go from three to eight.

Kennedy similarly told Cousins, when he met with him, that he politically could not sell the U.S. Senate on a nuclear test ban treaty that contained anything less than eight inspections a year. So, it looked like the peace process had reached an impasse, a dead end, because, without some concrete action, even if it were just an initial arms agreement, the peace process could not go forward. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev needed some concrete agreement to prove to their critics that their joint desire for peace, forged out of the horror of the threat of nuclear war from the Cuban Missile Crisis, and nurtured by their dialogue with Pope John, could move forward.

Cousins insisted to Khrushchev that he had to trust JFK, who earnestly wanted peace. But, he said, something else was needed, to overcome the hardline opposition both faced, to move the process forward, some new element. Khrushchev told Cousins that he was willing to trust the President. He was willing to accept the three inspections he thought was a U.S. policy “misunderstanding,” but he could not resell the eight inspections idea; that was dead. The next move was up to the President.

Khrushchev and JFK

When Cousins reported this to JFK, the President remarked on the irony that both he and Khrushchev had a similar political problem, in that they both had to deal with hardliners in their respective governments, who opposed any moves toward peace. Cousins thought he had failed in his mission, but Kennedy insisted that “we cannot fail.” There must be a way. Kennedy told Cousins, “I can’t accept the fact of failure. We have to try and find some way of getting through and breaking the deadlock.” Then he looked intently at Cousins and simply asked him, “Do you have any suggestions?”

Cousins, undoubtedly inspired by his yearly discussions with Russian counterparts, his discussions with the pope and the recently released encyclical, told Kennedy, “I feel the stage may be set now for what might be the most important single speech since you came into office. Perhaps what is needed is a breathtaking new approach toward the Russian people, calling for an end to the Cold War and a fresh start in American-Russian relationships.”

JFK said he wanted to think about it, and asked Cousins to send him a memorandum on the subject,

which he did. Cousins was then informed to send ideas for a speech outlining such a new bold approach to Ted Sorenson, for a speech the President planned to give in June 1963 at American University.

In this groundbreaking [speech](#), Kennedy essentially offered to end the Cold War. He was directly inspired by the pope’s *Pacem in Terris* to create trust on a much higher level by recognizing the human qualities of his ostensible enemies, recognizing that as human beings they had many of the same qualities, hopes, and fears as Americans. He acknowledged, very importantly, the tremendous sacrifices the Russian people had made in World War II, of such a magnitude that their losses surpassed those of any people in history, and he praised their tremendous courage. This created an entirely new basis for trust.

Here is how James W. Douglass describes the speech:

The U.S. president in his greatest speech echoed the call of *Pacem in Terris* for cooperation with an ideological opponent. In the American University address, Kennedy made the same distinction the pope did:

“No government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue. As Americans, we find communism profoundly repugnant as a negation of personal freedom and dignity. But we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements—in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture and in acts of courage.”

Kennedy then took the pope’s theme and ran with it. He first cited Russians’ and Americans’ mutual disgust with war, reminding his American audience of what war had done to the Soviet Union and what it could do to the entire planet:

“Today, should total war ever break out again—no matter how—our two countries would become the primary targets. It is an ironic but accurate fact that the two strongest partners are the two most in danger of devastation. All we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours.”

Following up Pope John’s support of “meetings [with ideological opponents] for the attainment of some practical end,” Kennedy praised agreements with the Soviet Union as essential to ending the arms race before it was too late....

...Then came the heart of the speech, the most eloquent statement of John F. Kennedy's presidency:

"So, let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

...Kennedy asked us all to "reexamine our attitude toward the Cold War, remembering that we are not engaged in a debate, seeking to pile up debating points. We are not here distributing blame or pointing the finger of judgement."

To take the first step in this process, he called for a treaty to outlaw nuclear tests in the atmosphere, a "limited nuclear test ban," since banning atmospheric tests didn't require on-site inspections; verifying them

was easily done by instruments in the air, and he made a bold unilateral pledge:

"To make clear our good faith and solemn convictions on this matter, I now declare that the United States does not propose to conduct nuclear tests in the atmosphere so long as other states do not do so. We will not be the first to resume."

Khrushchev called this speech the "greatest speech of any American President since Roosevelt." The Russian media widely covered it, and in an unprecedented action, did not try to block the Voice of America when it broadcast the speech into Russia. Ironically, as James W. Douglass notes, the American media virtually blocked the American University speech by hardly mentioning it at all!

Contrast the lofty sentiments in this speech to rethink our sentiments about the Cold War—and the call by Pope John to sit down for negotiations with our ideological opponents, to discover what is noble and good in them, with whom we can cooperate, in order to avoid nuclear holocaust, with the blood curdling calls by political figures today to destroy Russia, with no concern whatsoever of the consequences.

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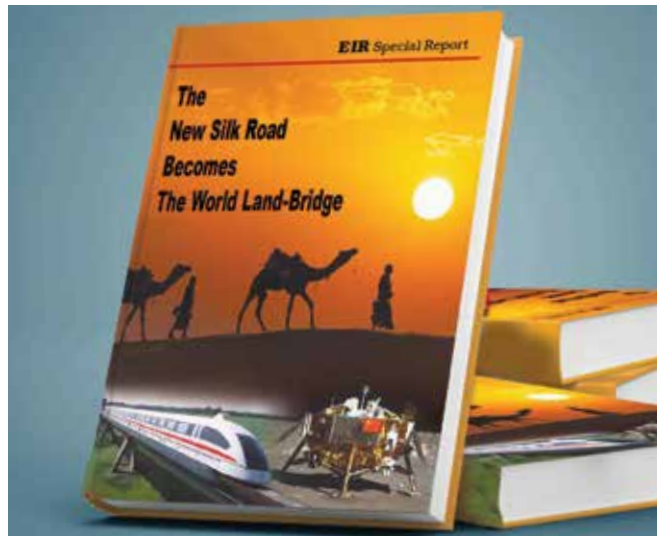
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