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The Role of Catholic and Ecclesiastical Universities in Promoting Peace and Social Justice

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Abstract

The Catholic Church is committed to promoting peace and social justice. Beyond its theological and religious nature, the Church operates as a hierarchically organized institution. Its entities function within defined legal frameworks. Throughout history, the theoretical substantiation of peace—and war—has played a pivotal role in Catholic thought. This tradition has been primarily upheld by Catholic and ecclesiastical universities. The Second Vatican Council transformed the Church and positioned these universities to actively promote social justice. However, detailed regulatory frameworks for this mission were developed later, outside the immediate scope of conciliar documents. This study examines the legal and historical evolution of Catholic academic research on peace and war. The analysis focuses on methodological issues, identifying historical and current deficiencies in the investigation of security questions. It argues that Catholic and ecclesiastical universities have yet to fully develop transdisciplinary methods, despite such an approach being most effective for supporting the Church's mission of universal peace.

Keywords: Catholic and ecclesiastical universities; canon law; social justice; transdisciplinary

1. Introduction

Pope Francis has made the Church's active role in promoting peace and social justice a cornerstone of his pontificate (Flamini 2014, pp. 25–33). He is personally engaged in this mission and has called upon the entire Church to contribute to this end (Massaro 2022, pp. 96–130). The institutions of the Church, however, participate in promoting peace in accordance with their constitutional status and within their respective legal frameworks. Both Catholic and ecclesiastical universities hold a special place in promoting peace and social justice, whether through education, research, or the development of scientific methodologies. In doing so, they also assist ecclesiastical decision-makers in peace-related social action. This academic focus directly reflects the sentiment of Pope Leo XIV, who, in his Apostolic Letter Drawing New Maps of Hope, posited that the central mission of all education is precisely the promotion of social justice and peace (Leo XIV 2025).

This study focuses on the role of Catholic and ecclesiastical universities in promoting peace and social justice. This inquiry encompasses both legal and structural frameworks while addressing methodological questions arising from the dialogue among various disciplines, particularly theology. Consequently, the analysis begins with the evolution of legislation, which has gradually facilitated dialogue between modern security policy

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and the sacred sciences. It is also important to note that transdisciplinary methodology faces numerous institutional and individual challenges simultaneously. Furthermore, the positioning of the sacred sciences, the fragmentation of schools of security policy, and the ambiguous boundaries of these disciplines contribute to methodological uncertainty. Although current canon law regulations permit transdisciplinary research, its practical implementation remains challenging due to the obstacles outlined above. The development of specific methods is beyond the scope of this study; however, I aim to examine the role that theology and the Church's teaching can play in the analysis of security issues and in integrating methods used by security policy schools. This analysis provides a starting point for a Catholic interpretation of individual security schools and for incorporating their methods. Methodologically, I primarily employ a qualitative approach, grounded in the comparative analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Before proceeding, clarification of terminology is necessary. Catholic theology traditionally operates within the framework of Peace Studies, a field with its own normative commitments (Lawler 2008). However, this article intentionally engages with Security Studies to bridge secular and theological discourses. This choice reflects an institutional reality: within many Catholic universities, academic structures are organized around International Relations or Security Studies, whereas research on peace within ecclesiastical faculties is often embedded within Moral Theology rather than constituting autonomous Peace Studies departments. Therefore, adopting this terminology does not imply uncritical conflation of the fields. Rather, it serves a transdisciplinary purpose given the increasing convergence of these domains (Kriesberg 2002). By employing the language of 'security—understood in its broadest sense—the study aims to bridge the gap between secular International Relations discourses and Catholic social teaching, allowing the Church's message to inform the dominant secular frameworks of security and conflict analysis.

2. A Historical Perspective

Historically, the university has played a significant role in shaping the Catholic Church's interpretation of war. This is not a historical accident; rather, it stems from the Church's mission to create an institution bridging reason and faith, culture and the Gospel (Buckley 1993, p. 84). The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) also called upon universities to promote the universal common good (Melé 2022). For this reason, the legislator in the Code of Canon Law considered it important to reiterate the general rule for higher education institutions (c. 807; cf. c. 800 §1), affirming the Church's right to establish these significant institutions (Cito 2004a, p. 241). However, because of the complex character of this type of institution, the Code of Canon Law does not consider the right to found them as inherent (c. 1254 §1) or exclusive (c. 233), but merely as a right of the Church. The establishment of a university always presupposes the necessary material and, above all, personnel requirements. In teaching and research, it is necessary to simultaneously meet academic standards, ensure the integrity of Catholic doctrine, and contribute to the Church's missionary mandate (Dorr 2012, pp. 137–54). The Church possesses a long tradition of harmonizing these aspects in disciplines such as philosophy, law, and, to some extent, economics. In other fields, however, such as international relations or security studies, the development of a criteria framework remains more contingent.

Security and international studies are relatively new academic disciplines. This, however, does not imply that certain themes—particularly war—were absent from the Church's academic discourse. Saint Augustine, the father of the Christian theory of just war, preached, wrote, and debated the nature, origin, and place of war in God's plan and in human society, in the manner of the rhetoricians of his time (Augustine 1845). His disciples accompanied him to his hometown of Tagaste, then to Carthage, Rome, and finally Milan

(Echeverri 1985, pp. 36–37). Following his conversion and a period of retreat at Cassiciacum, he returned to North Africa. There, serving as Bishop of Hippo until his death in 430, he preached and wrote extensively on war and peace (Echeverri 1985, pp. 38–39). His sermons analyze wars in Sacred Scripture and address the contradictions inherent in Roman warfare (Langan 1984, pp. 19–38). Although the sermon lies outside the strictly academic sphere, the Church has always maintained a close connection between the various forums for the transmission of its teachings. This interconnectedness is illustrated by the current Code of Canon Law, which treats homilies (cc. 762–772) and universities (cc. 807–822) within the same book, under the Church's teaching mission.

Classical university education emerged in the 12th century, closely linked to cathedrals, abbeys, and monasteries (Shank 2023, pp. 15–32). The medieval classics of war theory were largely authored by mendicant friars who elaborated on security issues within the framework of theological or canon law treatises. St. Thomas Aquinas[1] and St. Bonaventure,[2] for example, did much to make war, as a reality of human life, an integral part of Christian academic discourse. However, their treatises were fundamentally in line with the scientific ideal of the time, presenting security issues—above all, war—from a moral and theological perspective. The supremacy of dogmatics, "the queen of sciences," was unquestionable in this system (Gagliardi 2020). Consequently, their theological discourse often lacked the historical and geopolitical analysis that would have served a more complex understanding of security issues. When references to the social and historical aspects of war did appear, they were invariably framed within a theological context. Canon law warrants special attention due to its specific areas of concern and distinct methodological approaches (Biscardi 1977, pp. 51–73). In the domain of war and violence, the interdisciplinary discourse is more palpable here than in theology, even if not in the modern sense of the term. The Church possessed its own legal system, which, in its methods, terminology, and structure, drew heavily from other legal traditions, particularly Roman law—a process that intensified notably in the 13th century (Nicolini 1978). The primary mission of law is to regulate communal life, including matters related to the military. Consequently, legal institutions such as the *Treuga Dei* (Truce of God) or the penal issues arising from the use of specific weapons required more practical reflection than abstract just war theories. Thus, the institution of the *Treuga Dei* represents a unique convergence of disciplines under the auspices of canon law. This legal institution, grounded in biblical and theological foundations and serving to limit military force, presupposed a synthesis of theology, canon law, and social reality (Callahan 1987, pp. 445–66). A more precise intersection of these disciplines can be found in the evaluation of medieval weaponry, such as crossbows and siege engines (Erdő 2014).

Overall, however, canon law, as a sacred legal system, also regarded theology as its ultimate point of reference. Consequently, the final interpretative framework for security issues was provided not by law, but by theology. This is well illustrated by Gratian, a central figure of twelfth-century legal thought and a professor at the University of Bologna (Kuttner 2018). He collected conflicting sources on war from Holy Scripture, the Church Fathers, and papal letters, aiming to synthesize them into a coherent system (Corey and Charles 2018, p. 90). According to Stephan Kuttner, however, for the founder of the school—the "father and master" of the two laws (*ius utrumque*)—law served merely as a tool for systematizing theological truths (Kuttner 2018, pp. 36, 234). The issue of war was not examined through a multi-, inter-, or transdisciplinary method; rather, the process involved a sophisticated compilation and harmonization. The same applies to prominent university figures of related traditions or subsequent eras, such as St. Ivo of Chartres (Bauer and Lesaffer 2005, pp. 43–54) or Francisco de Vitoria (Mantovani 2017, pp. 119–41). Regarding the latter, it must be emphasized that Vitoria reframed the question of war during a sensitive geopolitical period: the age of colonization. In developing the legal framework for a just war, their

thinking remained deeply rooted in a theological and salvation-centered (soteriological) system. While they applied legal criteria and accounted for emerging security issues, moral and theological aspects remained central to their evaluation.

This system of criteria was further reinforced by the Church's defensive stance following the Council of Trent. The Council's dogmatic canons, which typically concluded with the formula *anathema sit*, were—as John W. O'Malley aptly points out—not conducive to dialogue with other disciplines (O'Malley 2006, p. 308). The Council of Trent also established a closed system for university education. Its theology focused primarily on refuting Protestant doctrines and defending the faith; consequently, this model demonstrated little openness to understanding broader social issues. It is worth noting, however, that according to Günther Wassilowsky, it was not necessarily the Council itself, but rather its subsequent mythologization and curial interests that reinforced this trend of isolation (Wassilowsky 2016, pp. 69–98). The seminary system, mandated by the Council of Trent, focused specifically on the training of clergy alongside the university structure. While this was a significant development, its curriculum reflected a philosophy of education described by Giuliano Brugnotto as *fuga mundi*—a flight from the world (Brugnotto 2001, pp. 228, 231). This approach excluded subjects that would have enabled modern, innovative examinations of security issues. However, it must be noted that the social sciences as independent disciplines had not yet emerged in any university curriculum during that period. Thus, the absence of these subjects reflected the era's general academic landscape rather than a specific deficiency of the Tridentine model.

3. Foundations for the Theological Research of Security Issues Before the Council

The emergence of a more nuanced approach to security policy issues at Catholic universities is intrinsically linked to the strengthening of the Church's social teaching. Beginning with Pope Leo XIII, the pressing social questions of the modern age entered the Church's pastoral sphere. While Leo XIII initially addressed the labor question (Leo XIII 1891), this focus soon expanded to encompass broader social and security challenges (Zahm 1895, pp. 200–14; Rehrauer 2007, pp. 599–623).

Pope Leo XIII addressed security issues broadly, encompassing topics such as international reconciliation, armed conflicts, religious freedom, and slavery (Leo XIII 1890). Addressing such multifaceted challenges implicitly necessitated a more intensive dialogue between theology and the social sciences—such as sociology, economics, and political science—within Catholic universities (Montan 1994, p. 67). Although Leo XIII emphasized the critical importance of education in several writings (Ireland et al. 1903, pp. 321–64), he maintained that only the restoration of scholastic philosophy and Thomism could establish a stable social order. Consequently, he directed seminaries and universities to evaluate the 'errors of the modern age' through this specific lens (Leo XIII 1879). Similarly, his 1893 encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*, viewed the interaction with the sciences as a significant challenge requiring careful navigation (Leo XIII 1893). Subsequent social encyclicals continued to address specific aspects of security, including social order, justice, the conflict between labor and capital, and the common good (Pius XI 1931b; John Paul II 1987). At Catholic universities, however, these issues were primarily addressed within the curricula of theology, legal, and social philosophy (Roche 2003, p. 25). The result of the first codification (1917 Code of Canon Law, cc. 1372–1383), and Pius XI's 1931 apostolic constitution *Deus scientiarum Dominus* reflected this prevailing paradigm (Pius XI 1931a). Augustin Bea pointed out that the latter document already indicated a general crisis in Catholic higher education: due to a strongly dogmatic orientation, the positive sciences were marginalized. Consequently, a genuine dialogue between disciplines had not yet emerged, even as the

Church became increasingly involved in evaluating social issues, precisely because of the war and the unstable security environment (Bea 1941, pp. 447–49). José de Ghellinck, however, identifies the document's novelty in its regulation of specialized seminars, special courses, and library development (Ghellinck 1935, pp. 299, 303). Some of this specialized training—whether in Church history or biblical theology—may have conceivably touched upon themes of peace and war (Ghellinck 1935, pp. 299, 303). Regarding library development, acquisitions expanded to include non-theological works, such as those in economics (Schlag 2017, pp. 97–101; Keane 1891, pp. 25–46). Regarding library development, acquisitions expanded to include non-theological works, such as those in economics (Schlag 2017, pp. 97–101; Keane 1891, pp. 25–46). While this suggests a connection to fields related to human security, it has not yet constituted a true intersection of security studies and theology. Moreover, in many post-Tridentine institutions, the social sciences remained peripheral. There were, however, important historical exceptions. For instance, at The Catholic University of America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, sociology and psychology were successfully integrated into the academic curriculum. Under the leadership of figures like William J. Kerby in sociology (Nuesse 2000; Lescher 1991) and Thomas Verner Moore in psychology (Ross 1992; Neenan 2000), these disciplines flourished as integral parts of the university's research mission. This demonstrates that leading Catholic institutions were pioneering the dialogue between faith and modern social sciences well before the mid-20th-century shifts (Blasi 2005). Nevertheless, such integration remained exceptional rather than widespread, and the Church's messages of peace were not yet supported by deep interdisciplinary research (Benedict XV 1914; Benedict XV 1920; Pius XII 1939). According to David T. Zabecki, the greatest military-technological revolution in the history of warfare occurred during World War I (Zabecki 2015, pp. 1–3). Mechanization, air power, and long-range weapons created an unprecedented, three-dimensional, and brutal theater of war. Total war, the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, the suffering of the civilian population, and extensive environmental damage fundamentally challenged the theological framework of just war. While some theologians did address these issues, university curricula continued to focus primarily on the applicability of existing moral theological categories rather than on the transformed nature of warfare (Johnson 2003).

This lack of a deeper connection between theology and other disciplines is also noteworthy in relation to the security challenges of World War II. The systematic attempt to exterminate the Jewish people, the advent of nuclear weapons, and the treatment of noncombatants presented challenges that demanded complex research. Amidst the war, on the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Pius XII issued the *encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu* (Pius XII 1943). This document addressed the role of archaeology, history, linguistics, and literary studies within the field of biblical scholarship (Slivka 2010, pp. 106–16). It served as a crucial prerequisite for the shift in perspective that, following the Second Vatican Council, enabled the Church and Catholic universities to address security issues by integrating insights from other disciplines (Slivka 2010, p. 112). The encyclical was published in 1943, during the cruelest period of the systematic extermination of the Jews. In this perilous age, when Nazi ideology branded the Jewish people as inferior and sought to erase their historical role, the Holy See's response was not merely diplomatic but also theological and scientific (Slivka 2010, p. 107). The encyclical opened the door for modern scholarship to demonstrate that historical criticism does not weaken, but rather strengthens, the historical credibility of the Old Testament and the unique, divinely ordained role of the people of Israel (Slivka 2010, p. 112; Bover 1944, p. 437). By invoking scholarly authority, it refuted ideologies that attempted to negate the significance of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the encyclical did not immediately precipitate a major methodological breakthrough beyond the parallel use of scientific disciplines. According to Joaquín Salaverri, most

biblical scholars limited themselves to applying modern historical-critical methods, failing to take the crucial step of "theological completion." Consequently, the deep theological synthesis required by both the spirit of the document and the theological interpretation of modern security challenges remained absent (Salaverri 1969, pp. 5–14).

4. The Impact of the Conciliar Turn on the Positioning of the University and Theology in the Field of Peace and Security

The declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* on Christian education was promulgated during the final phase of the Council (28 October 1965); consequently, many issues, including those concerning universities, remained incompletely elaborated (Flannery 1975). It addresses Catholic universities in only one article (no. 10) and theological faculties in another (no. 11). However, this declaration must be interpreted in conjunction with other major conciliar documents, particularly the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. These documents advocate for a broad dialogue between the Church and contemporary society (Boeve 2018, p. 99). They also identify numerous areas falling within the scope of human security, including human rights, the dignity of the person, international relations, the challenges of the global community, technological development, economic and social inequalities, and the establishment of a just social and political order. Robert E. Cushman notes that the Council was immediately preceded by the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which placed human security and the Church's role in promoting peace at its center, extending beyond the simple dichotomy of war and peace (Cushman 1965, pp. 132–38). The Council further expanded the range of security issues in which it considered the Church competent, establishing the promotion of the common good as a general principle for its institutions (GS. 40–45, 63–72, 77–90) (O'Collins 2014, pp. 95–96, 785), and it integrated questions requiring thorough research and dialogue between theology and other disciplines into ecclesiastical discourse (Hrynkow 2017).

A significant outcome of the Council is interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, which has evolved into a distinctive instrument of soft power and crisis management (Phan 2012). The Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, concerning the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions (nos. 3–5), and the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* on ecumenism (nos. 1/2, 2/7, 2/12, 2/23) both assign a central role to the promotion of peace (Byrnes 2023, p. 247). It became evident that if the Church seeks to fulfill the Council's objectives—to act as a promoter of the common good and regional and global peace, and to serve as an effective agent of soft power at the international level (Chong 2003, p. 387)—Catholic universities must provide the essential intellectual foundation for this endeavor (Engebretson 2009, p. 42–54). Given that the Council aimed for a Catholic interpretation of social issues, this presupposed dialogue between theology and disciplines such as economics, sociology, and international relations (Cattaro and Russo 2016). Following the Second World War, military science, international studies, and security policy gained new momentum, and in the Cold War environment, social challenges were viewed in a new light, presenting universities with a renewed opportunity to engage in the Church's peace mission at an academic level (Boeve 2018, pp. 95–116).

5. Catholic Universities in the Service of Peace After the Council

The Council did not undertake the fine-tuning of universities' legal status, nor did it fully develop the associated research methodologies; rather, both legal frameworks and methodological approaches have evolved gradually. The Code of Canon Law, which provides the regulatory framework for higher education within the Church, confines itself to establishing fundamental principles for both Catholic universities (cc. 807–814) and ecclesiastical universities (cc. 815–821).

In the context of security issues, it is essential to distinguish between these two types. A Catholic university engages in teaching and research across all disciplines, yet does so in the light of Catholic doctrine. An ecclesiastical university, by contrast, is dedicated specifically to the sacred sciences. This distinction fundamentally determines the role of theology in specific research endeavors: while theology serves as the central discipline at an ecclesiastical university, at a Catholic university, it fulfills a supporting, auxiliary, and integrative function. Paul VI redefined the concept of peace—not merely as the absence of war but as an active commitment to justice and development (Paul VI 1971, nos. 2, 17). This linkage of peace, justice, and development conferred legitimacy upon those disciplines at Catholic universities—such as economics, sociology, international relations, and security policy—that examined these structural issues. In accordance with conciliar principles, these disciplines were no longer viewed merely as secular sciences but as essential instruments for the construction of peace. A more significant challenge, however, was—and remains—the integration of these sciences into the Church's theological framework and the establishment of a balanced, reciprocal relationship between theology and other disciplines. The declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* recognizes the methodological autonomy of individual sciences, affirming their right to "their own principles, method, and freedom of research" (Gravissimum Educationis, no. 10). Furthermore, the document addresses theological faculties and departments separately (Gravissimum Educationis, no. 11), emphasizing the importance of "auxiliary sciences" alongside the sacred sciences. This approach does not rest on the assumption of equality among the sciences. Rather, the significance of the conciliar text lies in the fact that it situates the dialogue between the sacred and auxiliary sciences within the broader context of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, as well as the question of human progress—issues that have evolved into specific religious instruments of the Holy See's soft power, that is, its capacity to promote world peace (Byrnes 2023, pp. 232–45; Bakhtadze and Gegenava 2025, pp. 80–82). Thus, it was already evident from the conciliar texts that universities would play a particularly important role in implementing the Council's missionary mandate. However, the development of a comprehensive regulatory framework and the clarification of methodological issues remained to be accomplished. Pope Paul VI, for instance, did not immediately issue new regulations for either Catholic or ecclesiastical universities. Nevertheless, he issued numerous magisterial statements that reinforced the social mission of these institutions. In the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) and the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, he identified educational institutions as playing a vital role in promoting peace and social justice. In the latter, he explicitly characterizes universities as instruments of "merciful love" (Paul VI 1967a).

Of indirect but significant importance for the universities of the Church is the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, which regulated the functioning of the Roman Curia. Unlike the aforementioned documents, this was a legally binding text, even though it addressed the supervisory body of ecclesiastical higher education—the Congregation for Catholic Education—only briefly (arts. 76–80) (Paul VI 1967b). Nevertheless, in light of the declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* (no. 12), the constitution designated a competent body for the international coordination of Catholic higher education. According to legal commentaries, the interpretative provision of *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* assigned a key role to all Holy See offices in promoting the Church's social work. This mandate applied specifically to every dicastery, including the congregation responsible for higher education (Pérez de Heredia y Valle 1983, pp. 281–82).

Through the Congregation's competence, the opportunity arose to enforce conciliar principles by supervising universities, particularly through the approval of statutes and the fostering of institutional development (Urru 2003, pp. 149–50). The mission of the competent bodies in this regard was maintained even following the reforms implemented by

John Paul II (John Paul II 1988a pp. 888–90) and subsequently by Pope Francis (Müller 2006, p. 10). In the current law of the Roman Curia, there is no explicit reference to peace within the definition of the competencies of the Dicastery for Culture and Education. However, the interpretative provisions of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* confirm the role of the entire Curia in advancing peace and social equity (Francis 2022, p. 382). The general intention of the legislator, therefore, presupposes that the dicastery responsible for universities will contribute to this universal mission in accordance with its specific competence (Fabris 2024, pp. 301–15). Moreover, Pope Francis has reaffirmed the principle of cooperation among dicasteries (Francis 2022, p. 384). Consequently, it can be assumed that the operational plan of the dicastery responsible for Catholic universities will also encompass the promotion of peace and social justice, particularly through alignment with the perspectives of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (art. 165) (Francis 2022, p. 432). The systemic functioning of the Curia thus assigns a mission to the Dicastery for Culture and Education in the promotion of peace, even if this is not explicitly stated in its founding competencies (Vitali 2024, p. 29). Thus, the documents issued by the competent bodies are of outstanding importance (Grocholewski 2003, pp. 147–67). Without claiming to be exhaustive, particular mention must be made of the document issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education on the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (Congregation for Catholic Education 2017). This document approaches the mission of the university specifically from the perspective of human, social, and environmental challenges (no. 22). In addition, it identifies specific security challenges, ranging from "multiple crises"—such as economic, financial, labor, political, environmental, demographic, and migration crises (no. 3)—to direct security threats, including the constant menace to peace, international terrorism, mutual distrust, and hatred (no. 3). Furthermore, it highlights social injustices such as poverty, unemployment, and exploitation resulting from the unjust distribution of goods (no. 4), as well as cultural conflicts, such as the "clash of civilizations" linked to migration and intolerant populism (no. 4). This clearly indicates the intention of the competent body to ensure that universities address these issues at an academic level. Pope John Paul II promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, widely regarded as the "Magna Carta" of Catholic universities (John Paul II 1990). This legally binding document considers the promotion of peace as an essential activity of Catholic higher education institutions (nos. 32–33). Beyond this foundational text, numerous papal and Holy See documents of varying legal weight address universities either partially or exclusively. Generally, the promotion of peace remains a consistent theme in these magisterial statements. Special attention is warranted for post-synodal apostolic exhortations addressing regions where peace is fragile. Whether concerning Africa (John Paul II 1995, pp. 40–41, 62–63; Benedict XVI 2011 pp. 773–75), the Middle East (Benedict XVI 2012, pp. 761–62, 792–93), South America (Francis 2020 p. 237; see also Spadaro 2020), or Asia (John Paul II 1999), these documents consistently highlight the role of universities in promoting peace and social justice. Magisterial documents concerning the laity are also relevant, particularly given that the lay faithful predominantly possess the specific expertise required for academic research in security policy (John Paul II 1988b, pp. 514–17). Ultimately, Angelo Vincenzo Zani rightly asserts that the Church's peace mission cannot be effectively realized without the research contributions of Catholic universities (Zani 2018, pp. 405–13). However, a significant challenge remains: documents across different levels of the legal hierarchy provide only brief or indirect references to the specific methods by which this should be achieved.

6. The Promotion of Peace by the University: The How?

Ecclesiastical documents not only encourage but explicitly call upon Catholic universities to promote peace. The Code of Canon Law establishes a general norm applicable to all Catholic higher education institutions: they must contribute to the fuller development of the human person (c. 807). This mandate is reinforced by the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which delineates specific objectives, including "the support of the poor, the disadvantaged, and minorities, social justice, human dignity, the natural environment, and a more just distribution of global resources" (John Paul II 1990, nos. 32–34). These categories correspond to the fundamental areas of human security (McDonald 2002, pp. 278–79). However, scholars such as Gary King and Christopher J. L. Murray emphasize that merely identifying these areas is insufficient; the concepts must be clearly defined and supported by rigorous quantitative research (King and Murray 2001, pp. 585, 598). This scientific demand—conceptual clarification and methodological rigor—defines the role of the Catholic university in the Church's missionary activity. The application of this mandate varies across different faculties and specializations. For instance, Joseph W. Bellacosa and Andrew L. Anderson argue that Catholic law faculties bear a responsibility to train lawyers who represent the interests of the most vulnerable and utilize the law as an instrument of social justice (Bellacosa 2000, pp. 314–16; Anderson 1999, pp. 103–24). This approach aligns with the fundamental role of law in a constitutional state. Following World War II, in response to the perversion of the Nazi legal system, Gustav Radbruch formulated the principle that law and justice are inseparable (Radbruch 1946, p. 107). Similarly, Ronald Dworkin posits that law possesses a fundamental moral minimum (Dworkin 1986, p. viii).

While legal science regards the dimension of justice as an intrinsic element of law, Catholic universities face more complex challenges when attempting to contextualize security issues within a Catholic framework in other disciplines. In economics, for instance, a fundamental difficulty lies in harmonizing the Church's social teaching—grounded in the preferential option for the poor and the primacy of the common good—with mainstream economic theory, free market principles, and global capitalism (Burrus et al. 2023, p. 153). This challenge is further complicated by the fact that, as P. H. Liotta and Taylor Owen point out, economic security (vulnerability to poverty and global economic shifts) and environmental security (resource depletion, pollution) are now considered key elements of human security (Liotta and Owen 2006, pp. 38, 42). According to Andrew Yuengert, teaching economics can become a genuine "intellectual trap" for a Catholic university attempting to reconcile the theological principles of the common good with the empirical methods of modern economics (Yuengert 2011, pp. 48–49). Similar dilemmas arise in relation to international studies and its specialized branch, security policy. Catholic universities worldwide have established such training programs. However, an analysis of these curricula rarely clarifies how the research conducted—whether in terms of methodology or content—specifically contributes to the Catholic distinctiveness of security policy or to the Church's crisis management mechanisms. This gap reflects a broader issue identified by Christopher S. Browning and Matt McDonald: the discipline of critical security studies itself has yet to develop a sophisticated and compelling ethical framework (Browning and McDonald 2013, pp. 235–55).

From a methodological perspective, it is important to note that, unlike law and economics, formulating general criteria in the field of security policy (or more broadly, international security studies) is impossible due to the fragmented and diverse nature of the discipline (Holmes 2015, pp. 17–24). The field is characterized by competing theoretical schools and lacks a single, generally accepted concept. Each paradigm defines security differently, prioritizes different actors, and focuses on distinct threats. The Catholic university must therefore examine each school individually. This includes realism, which views the

state as the central actor (Morgenthau 2014, pp. 53–60); neorealism (Waltz 2014, pp. 124–29); liberalism, which emphasizes international institutions and economic interdependence (Keohane and Nye 2012); and neoliberalism, where special emphasis must be placed on the significance of soft power for the Church (Nye 2021, pp. 1–13). Attention must also be paid to the Copenhagen School, known for its sectoral approach and securitization theory (Buzan and Hansen 2009; de Wilde 2008, pp. 235–55); critical security studies, which centers on human security and emancipation (Booth 2012); and (post)structuralism, which deconstructs the discursive formation of threats (Campbell 1998, pp. 497–521).

Moreover, analyzing the schools themselves is insufficient; the intellectual–historical and philosophical theories that underpin their arguments must also be scrutinized. It may well be that the security policy school under examination possesses only a fragmented understanding of its own underlying intellectual currents. To illustrate this without claiming exhaustiveness, the Copenhagen School provides a useful example by integrating theories developed in other fields. For instance, its concept of the linguistic act was motivated by John Langshaw Austin's speech act theory (Austin 1962), while its treatment of religion as a special reference object draws upon Søren Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical" (Kierkegaard 1954). The distinct, gap-filling task of the Catholic university, therefore, lies in conducting a Catholic analysis of these individual schools to determine the compatibility of their elements, thereby enabling the formulation of proposals for decision-makers to evaluate specific security challenges.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Church's social teaching can serve as a conceptual starting point for this endeavor. Deep theological reflection on the issues discussed by security schools—such as the fundamental concepts of peace and war—is already present in these foundational documents (Catholic Church 1997, nos. 2302–2317). However, the specific methodology, including the precise integration of theology, remains a task for universities to develop. The previously mentioned document from the Congregation for Catholic Education, issued on the anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, briefly addresses the methodological dimension and identifies human, social, and environmental security challenges (Congregation for Catholic Education 2017, no. 26). Although it does not explicitly employ the term "transdisciplinarity," its call for the creation of "cooperation networks" for research conceptually aligns with this approach. Nevertheless, the text does not provide a comprehensive elaboration of this methodological question.

A concrete example of this synthesis can be observed in the analysis of migration. The Copenhagen School's theory of 'securitization' explains how political actors frame migration as an existential threat to national identity or public order, often disproportionately linking it to terrorism and border control (Adamson 2006, p. 165). Realist security scholars, such as Myron Weiner, argue that international migration may pose a fundamental threat to the stability and societal security of receiving states, thereby justifying strict border controls as a prerequisite for maintaining national order (Weiner 1992, p. 104). A Catholic university critically engages with this realist premise by contrasting it with the Church's Social Doctrine and missiology. As Michael A. Blume argues, while states possess the right to control their borders, this right is not absolute and cannot override human dignity (Blume 2002). This position is further reinforced theologically by Daniel G. Groody, who argues that the Church must view migration through the lens of the Incarnation, recognizing the migrant not as a problem to be solved, but as a central locus of mission and a reflection of God's own movement toward humanity (Groody 2013). Building on these theological foundations, academic research within a Catholic setting offers a critical synthesis: it acknowledges the realist concern for stability while critiquing the legal positivism that effectively criminalizes the existence of irregular migrants. Blume emphasizes that 'the dignity of a person in an irregular situation does not expire as a visa or a passport does

(Blume 2002). From this perspective, the university proposes a security framework where the protection of the state and the protection of the person are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary goals.

7. The Place of Theology in the Evaluation of Security Issues

Ecclesiastical legislation mandates that "in every Catholic university, lectures must be held on the theological questions related to the sciences taught there" (LG 10; John Paul II 1990, no. 19; c. 811 §2). This theological engagement—and, where appropriate, specialized theological research on security policy paradigms—facilitates the integration of Catholic teaching into security studies at a Catholic university.

The law specifically refers to "theological questions pertinent to the given discipline" (c. 811 §2). However, Davide Cito clarifies that this mandate refers specifically to Catholic theological teaching approved by ecclesiastical authority, rather than theology in general (Cito 2004b, p. 258). Furthermore, this requirement is distinct from religious studies understood as a secular scientific discipline dealing with religion (Bernhardt 2012, p. 965). This distinction is crucial: the secular and value-neutral study of religion aligns more closely with the standard methodological approach of security policy, as both treat religion primarily as an object of study (Ogden 1978, pp. 3–17). While the Catholic university is positioned to integrate the theories and methods of religious studies—as well as the teachings of various religions—into security policy research, the catholic interpretation, illuminated by faith, is a legal obligation. The central question for the Catholic university extends beyond asking "how does religion in general affect security?" to addressing "what the message of Catholic witness conveys regarding security and specific challenges." Theology is an internal, normative reflection, a characteristic that distinguishes it from the descriptive investigation typical of religious studies (Cox 1994, pp. 3–31). According to Alvaro del Portillo (del Portillo 1999, pp. 87–90) and Carlos José Errázuriz (Errázuriz 2000, pp. 196–200), knowledge of Catholic teaching is not merely abstract theory but a right realized in concrete life situations. The Christian faithful possess the right to receive assistance from ecclesiastical authority to fulfill their general apostolic mission (c. 229). In the context of security studies at a Catholic university, this implies that the curriculum must present security issues in light of Catholic teaching. The legislator reinforces the Catholic orientation of the curriculum with further guarantees (Galvin 2000, p. 118). Significantly, those who teach theological subjects in any institution of higher education must possess a mandate (mandatum) from the competent ecclesiastical authority (c. 812). While this legal requirement has been the subject of debate, it serves to ensure that students receive the Church's authentic teaching regarding specific security paradigms and challenges. Naturally, such legal guarantees cannot replace professional expertise, whether in theological or security policy research.

Strictly interpreted, the legal mandate (c. 811) could be satisfied by presenting the Church's social teaching on peace, security, and war through a dedicated course in security studies. From an academic standpoint, however, greater effectiveness is achieved through targeted research involving multidisciplinary collaboration—including military and defense experts—to develop curricula that present security theories through a Catholic lens (Murzaku and Rice 2025, p. 1). While the Church has addressed specific security challenges—such as nuclear deterrence (Christiansen 2017), lethal autonomous weapons systems (German Bishops' Conference 2024, pp. 63–64), migration (Francis 2018a), and terrorism (Auza 2016)—most lack comprehensive treatment, and a unified Catholic security framework remains undeveloped (King 2015, pp. 171–72). Moreover, given the profound transformation of warfare, the Magisterium faces growing pressure to develop an integrative framework offering clear guidance on both major global trends and specific security

challenges. In this endeavor, individual Catholic universities or university networks can serve as vital partners to the Holy See.

8. Ecclesiastical Universities and the Sacred Sciences in the Service of Peace

Ecclesiastical legislation obliges Catholic universities to maintain a theological faculty, institute, or at least a department (c. 811 §1). Institutes dedicated to the sacred sciences play a dual role: they contribute significantly to the Church's missionary mandate and are fundamental in shaping the university's Catholic identity. The canonical norms governing ecclesiastical universities and higher education institutions (cc. 815–821) primarily concern the internal functioning and life of these institutes. However, the influence of this legal framework extends to the entire Catholic university, particularly through inter-faculty cooperation and the methodological demands of joint research. The comprehensive legal framework for ecclesiastical universities is currently provided by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (Francis 2018b), which replaced the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*. The latter, issued in 1979 following the Second Vatican Council, already contained significant references to the promotion of peace and social justice within ecclesiastical universities. Certain interpretative provisions—such as the mandate that faculties should seek solutions to human problems, injustice, conflicts, and the absence of peace in light of revelation (art. 66)—clearly indicated the conciliar orientation of theological research (de la Peña 2020, pp. 273–98).

According to W. J. C. Weren, however, the 1979 Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* did not precipitate a methodological breakthrough. Beyond reiterating general conciliar principles of dialogue, the document failed to situate the theological investigation of social and political issues within a robust interdisciplinary framework. Consequently, the role of the social sciences remained marginal, even though these areas—particularly security issues—would have necessitated more active dialogue between theology and other disciplines (Weren 1995, pp. 188–200). Nevertheless, Weren observed a transformation underway in ecclesiastical universities that was partly hermeneutical (Weren 1995, p. 194) and partly contextual (Weren 1995, p. 198). From a hermeneutical perspective applied to security, this implied linking the Christian tradition to contemporary security challenges. From a contextual perspective, it meant that empirical data provided by the social sciences began to move to the forefront of theology and Catholic teaching. Weren correctly argued that theology, whether in Europe or globally, must respond to social and security challenges (Weren 1995, p. 198). He also astutely observed that due to internal fault lines within the Church—arising from regional differences and varying degrees of secularization—the academic ethos and methodological approaches of theological faculties diverge significantly. The author concludes, however, that "we live in a world of different theologies, where no single theology can boast of being the standard by which other theologies are judged" (Weren 1995, p. 194).

To prevent ambiguity and to supplement the Code of Canon Law, John Paul II issued the motu proprio *Ad tuendam fidem* (John Paul II 1998). As contemporary canonists have highlighted, while this move was occasioned by the need to harmonize the 1983 Code with the *Professio fidei*, it legislatively filled a *lacuna legis* by establishing Canon 750 §2 as a formal legal norm. This norm requires that 'everything definitively proposed by the Magisterium must be firmly accepted and held' (Salvatori 2002, p. 457). This requirement is particularly relevant for Catholic universities conducting research on issues of security and peace. Faculty members are bound by a moral framework rooted in magisterial teaching; consequently, they cannot disregard the Church's teaching, which limits the use of military force to legitimate defense and rejects wars of aggression. This framework

also includes prohibitions regarding total war (GS, no. 80), violence against civilians, and the unchecked arms race (GS, no. 81). These norms, enshrined in conciliar documents, constitute authoritative teaching that must be firmly accepted with religious submission of intellect and will (can. 752).

Beyond these binding norms, Catholic universities also engage critically and constructively with evolving magisterial positions. A significant contemporary example is the reception of Pope Francis's 2017 condemnation of the possession of nuclear weapons (Francis 2017). This shift moves beyond traditional deterrence theory toward a framework of total prohibition (Christiansen and Sargent 2023). While not yet definitively proposed in the sense of Canon 750 §2, this teaching represents a significant development in the Church's moral doctrine and invites serious theological and interdisciplinary engagement. This work illustrates how Catholic academic research receives and integrates magisterial teaching into the broader discourse on international security, providing a moral compass for policy-oriented disciplines. Consequently, theological scholarship contributes to the fulfillment of the legislative mandate that the Catholic university must investigate and teach disciplines such as security or foreign policy according to Catholic doctrine (c. 809).

9. The Transdisciplinary Repositioning of Theological Research

The post-conciliar era witnessed growing openness to dialogue between theology and other disciplines. However, the realization of this dialogue varied significantly across regions and academic fields. It is essential to distinguish between the levels of cooperation: multidisciplinarity involves the parallel but synthesis-free cooperation of disciplines; interdisciplinarity implies an integrative synthesis; while transdisciplinarity represents the cooperation of knowledge that transcends the boundaries of individual disciplines. Transdisciplinarity emerged from the critique of the strict demarcation of scientific disciplines (Bernstein 2015, p. 1). Its essence lies in the mutual permeation of disciplines and methodologies throughout the research process, a synthesis that is inherently reflected in the outcomes. The recognition that complex, real-world problems cannot be adequately addressed from the perspective of a single discipline underlies modern security studies. Indeed, this field is defined not as an autonomous discipline but as an interdisciplinary domain integrating political science, international relations, sociology, and military science (Buzan and Hansen 2009, pp. 10–14). While religion was marginalized in security thinking during the Cold War, by the late twentieth century—particularly following Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis and the events of 11 September 2001—it became evident that religion occupies a prominent place in security policy (Williams n.d., pp. 1–2), political thought (Doyle 2007, p. 627), and, in some instances, national security strategies (Lucius 2013, pp. 50–70).

In the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, which governs ecclesiastical universities, Pope Francis places heightened emphasis on the dialogue between theology and other disciplines. This constitutional framework aligns with Pope Francis's broader "philosophy of the periphery" (Francis 2014). During his apostolic visit to Budapest, in an address at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Pope Francis articulated a vision of active theology grounded in dialogue, stating: "With the help of science, we seek not only to understand, but to do the right thing." He specifically warned against the dangers of closed ideologies and outlined an ideal of knowledge that is relational, open, and constructive (Francis 2023, pp. 92–98). Such an approach is indispensable for cultivating a culture of peace and dialogue. Furthermore, the Appendix to the Constitution explicitly identifies priority research areas, including peace studies, ecology, the social sciences, and Islamic and Judaic studies (Francis 2018a, Appendix). These fields all point to the necessity of deeper, transdisciplinary research that bridges theology and security studies. Simultaneously, the

results achieved through such inquiry can assist the Church in the effective exercise of its soft power. According to Jesús Manuel García Gutiérrez, the Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* repositions theology by prioritizing lived experience as a methodological starting point, moving away from a strictly abstract doctrinal approach (García Gutiérrez 2019, p. 160). Bruno Esposito highlights a similar shift, arguing that the Constitution's interpretative norms establish the inductive research method as a standard, thereby marking a departure from the deductive method that has traditionally dominated theological discourse (Esposito 2020, p. 97). Applied to the relationship between security policy and theology, this implies that argumentation should commence with the analysis of real-world conflicts, concrete manifestations of injustice, and specific security challenges. However, mirroring the previous legal framework, the Constitution upholds the canonical guarantees, confirming that divine revelation remains the indispensable framework for research. Regarding faculties of philosophy, it specifically mandates the methods of Scholasticism and St. Thomas Aquinas (art. 64 §1), which are characterized by logical rigor, the dialectical confrontation of arguments and counterarguments, systematic construction, and the absolute primacy of Catholic teaching (Leinsle 2010, pp. 5–12). Scholasticism traditionally served to understand revelation and faith, operating distinctly from the modern concept of transdisciplinarity, which is predicated on the methodological equality of disciplines.

Consequently, the document is best understood as an attempt to resolve the tension between tradition, dogma, and methodology. It simultaneously strives to preserve the Catholic identity of theology while enabling it to respond effectively to emerging security issues. Therefore, one cannot derive a definitive methodological prescription solely from the document. The investigation of security policy issues using the tools of the social sciences, yet governed by theological principles, necessitates concrete research initiatives. Only through the empirical experience gained from such endeavors will it be possible to develop methods that are appropriate to both theological teaching and the realities of the modern world. In light of these developments, the legislative framework regulating ecclesiastical and Catholic universities may eventually require further amendment.

10. Conclusions

Academic institutions—and subsequently, the universities of the Church—have historically played a pivotal role in addressing human and social security issues broadly. The Church has consistently asserted its competence to address all questions affecting humanity in the light of faith. However, viewing itself as the custodian of absolute truth, the Church traditionally situated security issues—most notably war—within a strictly theological perspective. The complexity of these issues emerged primarily through crises precipitated by historical armed conflicts.

Canon law, representing a unique convergence of legal science and theology, offers an early example of a complex approach to security. The *Treuga Dei* (Truce of God), for instance, is simultaneously a legal institution and a response to a social challenge, yet its foundations are deeply rooted in biblical and theological tradition. A similar reflection, extending somewhat beyond pure theology, occurred regarding certain medieval weapon systems. In these cases, however, the final conclusion was invariably drawn from a theological aspect. Thus, we cannot yet speak of true trans- or interdisciplinarity; rather, these represent early, nascent manifestations of multidisciplinarity.

The pontiffs of the nineteenth century correctly assessed that the social problems of their era were fundamentally security challenges. This is illustrated by the evolution of the Church's social teaching, which eventually encompassed the security challenges of the modern age. However, a truly novel Catholic approach was initiated only after the Second Vatican Council. Various ecclesiastical documents, possessing differing degrees

of legal force, integrated ecclesiastical and Catholic universities into the conciliar vision. This entailed active involvement in the Church's missionary, social, and peacebuilding mandates, alongside the establishment of dialogue through academic research.

Nevertheless, these ecclesiastical documents remained reticent regarding specific methodological questions of how this academic dialogue should be structured. They primarily reference the general necessity of dialogue between disciplines and the preservation of Catholic truths of faith. The practical realization of this dialogue varies across disciplines. While in areas such as law or economics the Church's position on common or divergent points can be more readily discerned, in the field of international studies or security policy—which concentrates on security issues—the task is more complex. These disciplines are inherently fragmented, reflecting the diverse positions of numerous competing schools.

The imperative for Catholic and ecclesiastical universities is to develop a distinct methodology for the Christian and Catholic interpretation of security policy paradigms and, along these lines, to conduct in-depth analyses of security challenges. Pope Francis, in the Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium, urges a theology that engages in dialogue and proceeds from concrete experiences (inductive reasoning). Consequently, Catholic theology must assume a new role in this process.

However, the document exhibits a tension arising from its simultaneous openness to transdisciplinarity and its adherence to strict canonical guarantees, alongside a commitment to the classical Thomistic value system. This demonstrates that the theological interpretation of security issues is not a closed system but an open, dynamic process fraught with dilemmas, in which boundaries, methodology, and fidelity to Catholic teaching are constantly renegotiated.

At a Catholic university, theology and Church teaching remain the regulating principle and framework. Where research in security policy or international studies is conducted, theology provides the specific Catholic orientation. Theology does not replace but rather orients, assists, and in some instances supplements the findings of security studies. This is particularly crucial in areas where the Magisterium has definitive teaching authority. Security policy generally involves topics that are more fluid than bioethical issues, such as abortion or euthanasia. Consequently, researchers enjoy greater latitude when analyzing security policy schools or specific security challenges.

The primary challenge remains methodological rather than principled. In theory, the potential for multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary research exists, either within the Catholic university or jointly with external institutes. However, due to a lack of conceptual clarity, leadership commitment, institutional structures, and particularly human resources, a distinct Catholic research culture in this field has yet to fully develop. Yet, it is precisely this research that could refine the system or even prompt legislative amendments. Furthermore, such scholarship would render a profound service to both local ecclesiastical authorities and the Holy See in evaluating security issues and promoting global peace.

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Notes

[1] Furthermore, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiae*, developed a comprehensive theory wherein peace (pax) is not merely the absence of war, but an 'ordered concord' (*ordinata concordia*) founded upon justice. He maintained that for the sake of restoring this order, war could be permissible under strict moral conditions (legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention). By this, he systematically integrated the theory of just war into the theological framework of virtue and justice. (Reichberg 2016, pp. 35–39, 133–36, 355–58).

[2] In the moral philosophy of Saint Bonaventure, justice is one of the cardinal virtues that regulates humanity's relationship with others. Following Saint Augustine, he regards peace as the "tranquility of order" (*tranquillitas ordinis*), which arises from rightly ordered and just relations. With this theological foundation, he contributed to the discourse on social order and justice. (Quinn 1974, pp. 39–40, 44).

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