

‘The Development of All Peoples Is Critically Important to Peace’

This is the edited transcript of an interview conducted Feb. 16, 2023 by Cloret Carl Ferguson for the Schiller Institute with His Excellency, the Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Archbishop Wester is based near Los Alamos, where the first nuclear weapons were developed. He is an advocate of disarmament and a Catholic leader publicly endorsing and promoting Pope Francis’s offer to host unconditional peace negotiations at the Vatican.

In 2022, Archbishop Wester delivered the homily at the United Nations Evening Prayer Service on disarmament. He has participated in numerous Interfaith activities, where he has publicly promoted peaceful coexistence and cooperation among all faiths.

The full interview is available [here](#). The title, subheads and embedded links have been added.

Cloret Ferguson: On behalf of the Schiller Institute and its founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche, I thank the Most Reverend John C. Wester for this interview.

My name is Cloret Carl Ferguson, I’m with the Schiller Institute in Massachusetts. Following his Holiness Pope Francis’s offer to host peace negotiations without preconditions among all the parties warring in the Ukraine, Helga Zepp-LaRouche initiated a call worldwide to governments, to religious and organizational leaders, and people all over the world to support this offer and to mobilize with the Schiller Institute to have it urgently adopted and acted upon.

According to coverage of Pope Francis’s African tour, His Holiness reiterated his willingness to host these peace negotiations.



Courtesy, Archbishop Wester

Archbishop John C. Wester

Message for Those Desiring World Peace

What message do you have for leaders who desire world peace, but whose voices we have yet to hear?

Archbishop John Wester: My thoughts on this would be similar to so many of us around the world.... That message would be, to really be committed to peace. Peace is not ... the absence of war, or ... the absence of conflict, but peace is something that we strive to attain. Scripture talks about right relationships. In both Testaments we read about right relationships.

God established us to be in *right relationship* with God, with one another, and with our

common home, the Earth, Mother Earth ... and really, sin or conflict or war could be defined as fragmentation, of being divided, of being cut off, of being separate from.

... I think our world leaders need to see that peace really is the goal.... There’s so many factors that are involved in war, but I think they can pretty much be boiled down to selfishness, narcissism, greed, wanting to control, wanting to have power. These are the things that start wars, and attacks.... I think that we need to see that peace is the opposite of all that. And ... encourage our world leaders in this regard....

Pope Francis is willing to serve as an arbiter, with a place where the sides can come together, particularly Russia and Ukraine ... to seek peace, and to negotiate a peace, an enduring and lasting and just peace....

One of the key elements of that is ... to listen. The Pope says to us bishops.... Yes, the bishop has the office of teaching, he must be a teacher of the faith, but a good teacher listens first.... The peace table should include a lot of silence, a lot of an atmosphere in which people can

listen to one another, not listening to defeat, not listening to get the better advantage of, not listening so I can hear a chink in your armor, but listening so that I can learn from you, and then respond....

I know this is not easy, and I know some people say, “Well, this is just a fantasy world, or you’re just dreaming, you’re being naïve.” But really, as we say when we talked about nuclear disarmament, who really is naïve? Those who insist on doing things the way we’ve always done them—world wars, regional wars, things of this nature—or to embark on a new path, the path of peace?

These are some of the points I would like to share with world leaders ... in the people’s best interest.

One of the main aspects of our Catholic social teaching is the *common good*. Too often, world leaders think only of *their* good, or *their* power, or *their* control, or *their* country’s power, *their* country’s control. We have to think of the *common* good—what is good for all people, both the world leader and the other countries ... if we’re going to have a lasting peace in our world someday. ...

To Follow Martin Luther King’s Example

Ferguson: My next question deals with the Vietnam War era. At that time, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood that he risked being criticized, attacked and isolated, and worse, for speaking out publicly against the war, as an expression of his own conscience and faith. Do you have thoughts on the necessity of religious leaders following Dr. King’s example today?

Archbishop Wester: Yes, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of my heroes. He’s one of the people ... who Pope Francis singled out when he talked to the Joint Session of Congress. We were so proud of our Holy Father ... that he chose Martin Luther King as one of the great heroes of our country, really one of the great heroes of the world, and of all time, as an advocate for peace and racial justice—somebody who’s very life



CNA/Ben Mazur

Pope Francis

and teachings, showed that peace is possible, that we can make progress, peaceably without violence.... He gave his very life for that cause, and he’s a real martyr, and a prophet and a true teacher.

What Dr. King showed is that what we do is grounded in Scripture. It’s grounded in the Word, the Word of God. It’s grounded in our relationship with God and with one another ... the right relationship. Yes, we do take

risks sometimes, when we speak out publicly.... But we take the risk because it’s mandated by God. For us Christians, it’s mandated by Christ, or by Allah or Adonai, depending on your faith tradition. The point is that it is God who motivates us, God who calls us.

We’re not speaking “our” truth or “our” word. As



National Park Service

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, Aug. 28, 1963.

religious leaders, we’re [speaking the Word of God], we’re prompted by the Word of God, and that’s what Dr. King was prompted by, the Word of God. That’s what gives us our strength, and that’s what gives us the ability to take risks.... We pray that these risks don’t lead to violence as, sadly, it did for Dr. King and others. But nonetheless, we take the risk knowing that God is our guide and our protector and knowing that we’re doing it for the right reasons, and that we’re doing it to

help and to serve humanity. Not for our own glory, our own self-aggrandizement, but we're doing it for the good of others, for the good of the church ... of the common good, as we say....

I think that's important. Sometimes people will say, "Well, you just go back to your church, your temple, or your mosque, and say your prayers, and leave us alone." But that's not what faith is all about. We're not called to live in a bubble, we're called to live in *this* world, in *this* society, and to be leaven in the world, and to help the world to hear the Word of God, believing strongly that in hearing and responding to it, it will bring peace. It will bring about the common good....

We have a *right* to do it, thanks be to God, in the United States of America.... We're not a theocracy. We don't mandate what people do as religious leaders, but we have gentle persuasion, we preach the Word, speak the Truth as best we can, and pray that the Word of God will work in that truth.

Ferguson: I would like to interject, here, that we're trying to reach out to a broad segment of the world population by initiating something called The "Coincidence of Opposites," which was an idea derived from Nicholas of Cusa, who was a Cardinal in the 15th Century. That's something Mrs. LaRouche has initiated also. Hopefully, you'll get to study more about how that's been ... in our work internationally.

The other side is that which brought an end to the Thirty Years War—"the advantage of the other" principle of the [1648] Treaty of Westphalia. That was the foundation of the notion, which basically says, "Stop finger-pointing. We're not going to be like the kids on the playground. Rather, we can find an end, not only to our current hostilities, but establish a lasting peace to avert future wars." This was



Gerard ter Borch

Ratification ceremony of the Peace of Westphalia (Münster), 1648.

one of the ideas that we based our work on—"the advantage of the other," how to get the other side to believe that they are inherently good, and we have to work together. What do you think about that?

'All that God Created Is Good'

Archbishop Wester: You're hitting upon something that's very, very important ... that actually resonates with us as Christians, and ... so many other world religions as well. In *Genesis*, God looked at all that God had created, and God saw that it was very, very good. Or as my mom always told us as children, "There's a little bit of good in the worst of us, a little bit of bad in the best of us; it behooves the rest of us not to talk about any of us." This principle is so important that you described so beautifully....



Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa

This gets back to what I said earlier about listening to the other. What Pope Francis also talks about, is not just listening to the other, but listening

with the idea that there's goodness in the other, as you say, the advantage of the other, that God's creation is good and that people are fundamentally good.

... A priest that I was fond of ... in my San Francisco years, always said, "I always assume the best in



VOA

A collapsed building in Diyarbakir, Türkiye, following the massive Türkiye-Syria earthquake, February 26, 2023.

everybody until proven otherwise.” The flip side of this is precisely what people do when they’re going to go to war, or when they’re going to subject a race, a certain culture, or a certain class of people. We demonize them, we dehumanize them. We use words.

For example, when we talk about immigrants, you notice people talking about hordes coming across the border, a tsunami, we’re being attacked by a tsunami. These conjure up ideas of locusts and pests and pestilence and natural disasters. We don’t look at them, the immigrant, as a human being, as a person fleeing persecution, difficulty, and economic hardship, etc. But we look upon them as *things*; we’ve objectified them. We’ve ceased to see them as human. This is so critical in coming to peace terms and coming away from war, and that is to see “the advantage of the other.” The goodness of the other and to see that God’s creation is indeed good.

To be able to do this is not easy. This is what’s hard; to be willing, as an individual, to say to myself, I may be wrong. I may have stereotyped this person in an unjust way, because this is what I grew up to believe. Or this what I’ve been taught to believe. But, to be able to see the prejudices and the bigotries that I’ve taken on.

We’ve confronted that here in New Mexico with systemic racism. We’ve had prayer services, especially after the murder of George Floyd and others, as tragic instances in our country, ... these difficulties we have to face, by recognizing that we bought into this narrative

that’s wrong, this racism.

... You have to teach somebody how to hate. We’re not born that way.... We need to see the goodness of the other person....

I would put it this way, as a religious leader. We need to see others the way God sees others. That God looks upon each of his children and sees them as good, and lovable, and loving; that’s what were called to do. It’s not easy, but we are made in the image and likeness of God; God’s given us the capacity to do it. And so, we’ve got to really challenge ourselves to see the goodness in each other.

... Sometimes people say, “Oh well, Russia is terrible, for what they’re doing to Ukraine.” Well, what does that mean? ... Gradually people begin to say, “All Russians are bad.” Now, if you confront them, they’d say, “Well, no, I don’t believe that.” But on an affective level, kind of by osmosis, people begin to take this in, and they start telling you, “All Russians are bad.”

We have to be careful.... Even when we see people who are hardened criminals, we have to be able to look beyond the surface and say that that person is better than the worst thing he or she has ever done. And to be able to say, “This is a human being who may be the victim of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, or a victim of child abuse when growing up, whatever it may be.”

That’s not easy, because instinctively we have the “flight or fight” instinct in us as human beings, and we kind of instantly want to say, “Friend or foe? Do I need to be afraid of you, or can I be your friend?” And so, quite often once we hit that foe button, ... we’ve cut them off, we’ve categorized them, and now it’s okay to kill them, ... or to enslave them, or to take advantage of them, or whatever. That’s a very basic principle. I’m so glad that you brought that out, because this gets to the heart of what these peace talks and negotiations are all about: To see the goodness in others, to see one another as God sees us.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche’s ‘Ten Principles’

Ferguson: That idea which I initiated in this discussion actually is part of something, I hope you will examine.... It’s part of what’s called the [Ten Principles](#) of a New International Security and Development Architecture that our founder Mrs. LaRouche has put out as a discussion topic. The last of those ten principles, the major one, which she said she wants to get the world community to discuss, is the idea you just elaborated. [That man is fundamentally good.] Because she felt that

this was probably the origins of how the world got into such a state that it is today. On so many levels, you have this kind of problem.... That was [Principle] Number Ten.

Archbishop Wester: I can't thank you enough for pointing me to that. It comes handy in our work for worldwide verifiable nuclear disarmament. Those principles that you speak of would be very helpful for us as we can point to them instead of nuclear arms, to solve our problems and our differences. Your founder had great insight and enlightenment that we all can benefit from.

'Development Is the New Name for Peace'

Ferguson: Pope Francis remarked to the world, "Hands off of Africa," and to the Congolese whom he visited, that they are "infinitely more precious than any treasure" found in their fruitful soil. This brought to mind the focus of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI: development being the new name for peace.

Do you think the mission to raise the standard of living of all people and nations can provide the basis to durable worldwide peace?

Archbishop Wester: Yes, I certainly do. This, again, is a profound question.... The development of all peoples is critically important to peace. Poverty obviously is a great reality. It is the cause of so many wars.... If you look at all wars, sadly, money has a lot to do with them. Wealth has a lot, whether it be oil, or mineral rights, or water rights, or whatever you want to translate that, has a lot to do with our conflicts, instead of sharing the goodness that God has given us. We want to hoard it and control it.

Remember Pope Paul also said, "If you want peace, work for justice!"...

The development of peoples is so critical to the peace initiative. This gets at the root cause of war and conflict, conflict and violence. It gets back to that notion that God meant for us to be in right relationship.

There's a little anecdote.... Sister Marilyn Lacey worked in San Francisco, helping refugees, asylum seekers, forced immigrants coming into the Bay Area, getting them resettled and helping them to get oriented and set roots.... There was one woman who came in, I think from Bhutan.... She was very hungry, they fixed a meal for her, but she didn't eat, and they said, "Well, you said you were hungry but you're not eating." And she said to them, "Well, where are the others?" And they said, "What do you mean?" She replied, "Well, we don't eat alone in my culture, we always eat with others; we never eat alone."

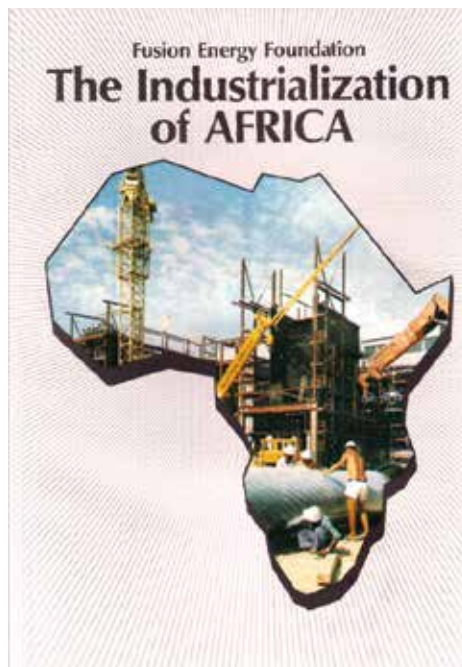
That was a very telling thing for me—that deeply ingrained within her, is the idea of sharing, of solidarity, which is another Catholic justice theme, topic. Which is the opposite of clinging, of hoarding, which starts wars.... Forced migration is forced because of a lack of sharing, a lack of whatever it may be, economic stability, jobs. It's also partly because of persecution and crime ... drugs. We need to recognize this as a very important reality in order that we get to the root cause.

... Years ago, somebody proposed that if we could get the wealthiest 1% of individuals to share at least 0.7% of their wealth with the whole world every year, it would eradicate desperate poverty. We never came close to that, sadly. But this is the kind of notion I think is absolutely critical to get to the root causes. It's one thing to talk about the immediate reality, the precipitating causes of a war,

trying to find peace. But what you just referred to, in the Thirty Years War, how can we prevent future wars? This is one of those archetypal principles, basic principles that go beyond the local regional politics, that help us to see in general, going toward the future, how we can prevent war.

One of the very good ways to do it, is ... to work with people on how we can help them, not give them a *handout*, but a *hand up*, how we can assist people to use their natural resources for their good.

... Third World countries are Third World countries



Campaigner Publications

Proceedings of a 1979 conference in Paris, sponsored by Lyndon LaRouche's Fusion Energy Foundation, promoting the industrialization of Africa—a half-century before Helga Zepp-LaRouche's Ten Principles of a New International Security and Development Architecture.

because they've been victimized by First World countries. They've been colonized.... They've raped the country, they've stolen the mineral rights or the goods, etc. and then left the people bereft.... That's another example, when you look at the history of this. You see this again and again. Instead of sharing ... it's been rather a hoarding and a controlling. And this is what gets at, causes war. This is very important, I'm so glad you asked this question ... it leads us to say that we need to look at root causes in our conversations about peace. We have to look at the root causes of war and the fundamentals of peace, and how we can live in such a way that we can finally, one day, be rid of war in our planet.

We Are One Common Human Family

Ferguson: There's been this horrible disaster that hit Türkiye and Syria. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the head of our organization, issued a [call](#) for getting rid of the Caesar Sanctions the U.S. is imposing on Syria.

Cardinal Mario Zenari, the Papal Nuncio to Syria, who is there overseeing the humanitarian aid from the Church, said, "I see a sea of pain here." It's so horrifying that, even after rescuing people from the rubble, from these two earthquakes, how can we keep them alive? Can we make sure that they can rebuild, after eleven, twelve years of war—but now, on top of that, those people are suffering, very unjustly.

Do you have more to say about what the Church is doing, and what our viewers, and readers might do, to try to alleviate the suffering of people there, especially with the sanctions?

Archbishop Wester: That's a very good point.... You bring up several points from our Catholic perspective. Catholic Relief Services is in over 100 countries throughout the world with almost a billion-dollar budget per year, to help approximately 100 million people throughout the world. So that certainly is a very concrete way, along with all the other "usual suspects," the Red Cross and all the other agencies that can help.

We use Catholic Relief Services because they can get in there to the people in Syria and in Türkiye and in so many places. Often where they are, they have people

on the ground, already.... A lot of the tragedy we saw in Syria, Türkiye, and surrounding areas, a little bit of Israel, in parts, was because of poor construction, which was because of people trying to cut corners, trying to make a living, to make money.

Again, if we had a better distribution of goods in our world, people would be less inclined to do those kinds of things. I'm not saying it's a magic wand that will get rid of it. Greed is something we human beings have to fight all the time.... Buildings that were built properly are intact and the buildings that were not built properly or not up to code, for whatever reason, are not intact. Over 41,000 people have perished because of that....

This is my own opinion: If nations around the world could invest in the United Nations and put their faith in the United Nations. I know that the United Nations does have a lot of support, but it doesn't have a fulsome support from all of our countries throughout the world, including the United States, ... what I perceive to be a hesitancy to trust, for everybody to go all-in with the United Nations and to talk to one another and to solve some of these world problems.

How can we all come together as one common human family and help one another? We have technologies and scientific ability and capacity in a lot of our countries to be able to help those other countries and to assist them. But instead, ... we have these sanctions based on different realities.... Look at the sanctions we've had on Cuba for these many decades. They just are there; they become part of our everyday reality. We just got inured to them and we don't think about them. But we don't think about the suffering that causes, so many people are caused to suffer because of them.

We must have an urgency of solving problems, and not just set up sanctions. That should be a red flag immediately. But to keep working at solving the problem, so we can lift those sanctions, so people can live ... more fully human lives that God intends for them to live.

All these things are connected—the finances, the economy, the capacities, the infrastructure, the way we get together as a world. These are all connected. We have to be caring for another.... USAID [U.S. Agency for



CC/Romanuspontifex

Cardinal Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio to Syria.



helps to inspire people toward being good for the sake of good.

Archbishop Wester: That’s beautiful. I can see that I have a lot to learn from you, and I’m looking forward to doing that, and I hope we can talk again. And I gladly accept.

Ferguson: I thank you so much for giving us your time and your thoughts, and hopefully these words will inspire others to get on board with what his Holiness is doing to bring peace to this world. Because we do need a miracle.

It’s time to revive the “Spirit of Bandung”—the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement of the developing countries—for a new, more just economic paradigm for all nations, including the U.S., Russia, and China. Here, delegates to the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, 1955.

International Development], for example, does a lot of good, but those are usually handouts. To really help means giving them a hand up, and helping them to help themselves, giving them the capacity and the motivation and the ability to do that. Then they can be on their own feet....

That tragedy is an awful thing, but as one of the people from, I think it was Türkiye, said, “Yes this is a natural disaster, but it’s also a human disaster. It’s a human-made disaster because of our inability to help one another, and especially economically.”

The ‘Spirit of Bandung’

Ferguson: I propose at some point, that you grant us another discussion time, where we can talk about the emerging “Spirit of Bandung,” the Bandung Conference of 1955, and this Non-Aligned Movement—not cutting oneself off and not taking sides, but the spirit of Bandung amongst these developing countries to organize a new, more just economic arrangement, including the United States, including Russia, including all the Western powers, to come together around development and make that the centerpiece of a new paradigm.

That’s something that we at the Schiller Institute have been working for. We could discuss that; it’s so needed, and like you said, we need a more lasting means, by which people can be given the means to lift themselves up and contribute to the world community’s needs. I think that gives a sense of true worth, when they realize they are able to do something good in the world. That always

Archbishop Wester: Yes, we do. And thank God for Pope Francis, he’s doing his best, and so are you, and so are so many others. Together, there’s a lot of hope. I feel a lot of hope.

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