

The Neuroscience of Choosing Peace Within Meditation, Pope Leo XIII, and the Inner Architecture of Global Peace By Dr. Angelika Wagner

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INTRODUCTION

It is only through grace that I was invited to write this chapter, which will be published on September 11, 2025 a “hinge moment” of remembrance. No one knew, at the time of the request, that I was actually in New York on 9/11. Yes, the dust, the falling body parts, the screams. I couldn’t look up at the sky for seven years.

Then, one day, a trauma therapist at my university did a session with me. In twenty minutes, I could lift my gaze. I could see the sky again.

That moment changed the course of my life. From then on, I would study war, peace, and trauma personally, spiritually, and scientifically.

As we now face violent global flashpoints in Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran, the question becomes even more pressing: Is World War III imminent? I am the daughter of Ukrainian refugees. I grew up hearing stories of war from my mother. I didn’t believe them. I thought they were exaggerated. Yet here we are again, fifty years later, in a rinse-and-repeat cycle.

Because, like addiction, war is generational. Trauma is embedded not only in stories, traditions, and holidays it is also encoded in our DNA.

So, I ask you: How is your peace maintained within?

Do you believe peace is a choice, or an unattainable mystery? Is your soul reaching toward the light, or is it trapped in a world that thrives on outrage? These are not rhetorical questions. They are the spiritual emergency of our time.

Pope Leo XIII and the Moral Engine of Peace

Pope Leo XIII, the “Pope of the Rosary,” fiercely advocated for both social justice and inner holiness. He wrote that true peace is born not from the absence of conflict, but from the presence of truth and justice.

Peace, he taught, is first and foremost an internal state a moral harmony that begins within the soul and radiates outward into

families, communities, and nations. It is spiritual before it is political.

And in that same spirit, I ask: Are you chasing peace or fleeing from yourself?

My Path: From Prayer to Neuroscience

My lifelong journey into the brain began at age eight. My mother became gravely ill with a rare kidney tumor. I prayed every day, pleading with God to keep her alive. She survived for 25 more years. That miracle of healing taught me that **prayer is real** and powerful.

As a neuroscientist, mother of four, trauma expert, and global educator, I have walked many difficult paths. From school hallways filled with chaos to correctional facilities filled with despair, I have seen what happens when trauma takes root.

But I have also seen transformation.

Over decades of study and lived experience, I have come to understand that **peace is not passive**. It is a muscle. A moral discipline. A divine gift.

And yes, it is available to anyone willing to claim it.

Pure Consciousness: The Seat of Peace

Pope Leo wrote that the dignity of the human person is obscured when we live in ignorance of our spiritual nature. In the same way, meditation is not an escape it is a return. To breathe. To the body. To God. To self.

When you meditate or pray, you peel back the layers of trauma, addiction, grief, and generational programming. You reclaim your light.

In addicts, prisoners, exhausted mothers, and even in myself, I have witnessed how silence and stillness when paired with compassion can birth transformation.

In today’s fractured world, the **inner sanctuary** is no longer optional. It is a necessity.

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Global Trauma, National Addiction

In my research, I've studied the link between personal trauma and national identity. One of my most startling discoveries came while analyzing addiction patterns in Japan. I found that the country's unhealed collective trauma was directly influencing the dominant types of substances abused.

That work earned me recognition as a Top Global Scientist but more importantly, it validated something deeper: **peace is not just personal it is collective, generational, and geographic.**

From the United States to Ukraine, from the chaos of Gaza to inner-city schools, I see the same pattern: Pain becomes ideology. Ideology becomes conflict. Conflict becomes an addiction.

The world scrolls itself numb. It forgets to breathe. It forgets to feel. It forgets to hope.

But **prayer and meditation remind us.** Silence is not emptiness. Silence is the crucible of miracles.

Meditation and Prayer as a Moral Act

Pope Leo XIII viewed the family as the first school of peace, the community as its garden, and the Church as its heart. In that light, **meditation is a moral act.** A choice. A protest against noise. A refusal to participate in the mental violence of modern life.

In my years as a teacher, I saw it clearly. Even when the school day began and ended with prayer even with daily Mass and Rosary recitation there was still a restlessness among the children. A friction under the surface.

I began asking myself: **What can truly calm this restlessness? What can I give them that will help them find themselves in peace, not in anger?**

The answer, I found, was **stillness, breath and prayer.**

From Family to the World: Practical Peace

Pope Leo taught that peace must be built on justice, sustained by reason, and guided by virtue. Likewise, **inner peace is not weakness it is a courageous choice.**

In **families**, ten minutes of daily meditation or prayer can transform households.

In **schools**, it builds resilience, focus, and emotional regulation. I've used breathwork and music to help trauma-affected children rediscover joy.

In **prisons**, it restores dignity. The 100 inmates I worked with in Los Angeles found that their first prison wasn't a cell it was in their mind. Meditation and prayer gave them the key.

In the **workplace**, it quiets the frantic executive and reveals the visionary.

In **communities**, it teaches us to listen before we react.

Ultimately, peace doesn't come from treaties or headlines it comes from **hearts aligned to the Divine.** Can millions of people stop for one hour to pray for peace?

The Rosary, the Breath, and the Beads

Pope Leo saw the Rosary as the ultimate meditation: contemplative, repetitive, surrendering. Each bead is a breath. Each prayer, a vibration of peace.

But this is not just Catholic wisdom it is universal.

Muslims use tasbeeh. Hindus and Buddhists use mala. Indigenous cultures use song and drumming. All around the world, spiritual practice aligns with biological healing.

Why? Because sustained stillness heals the brain.

Neuroscience confirms it:

Chronic trauma shrinks the hippocampus and inflames the amygdala.

Cortisol floods the bloodstream.

The logical mind (prefrontal cortex) shuts down.

We become wired for war.

But meditation? It rewires the brain for peace.

Functional MRI scans show increased gray matter, decreased inflammation, and stronger left-right hemisphere connectivity. The parasympathetic nervous system is activated. Heart rate slows. Clarity returns.

In biological terms: peace is neuroplastic. It can be grown. Practiced. Rebuilt.

Will You Choose Peace?

Peace is a discipline. A divine download. A daily invitation. You can scroll or you can breathe.

You can argue or you can pause.

You can repeat the war or you can birth a miracle. So, I ask you:

Will you choose peace today?

If not now when? When millions of people pray together, peace will become a reality.