

THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE:

THE ISSUE OF MORAL PURPOSE IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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I am deeply honored by the invitation to return to Atlanta to receive an honorary doctorate from Emory University and to give this commencement address. My theme this morning, "The Challenge of Peace: The Issue of Moral Purpose in American Foreign Policy," has been a persistent topic in American history. Its content has changed over the years -- from the idealism of Wilson to the realism of Morgenthau -- but the need to provide moral purpose for the direction of American power has been a continuing thread of our history. There have always been critics of the theme -- exemplified by Dean Acheson's remark in the 1960's that there are two kinds of problems in foreign policy, moral problems and real problems -- but the critics have never won the day.

Indeed, the 1970's saw a resurgence of the relevance of moral argument in the foreign policy debate when the human rights policy of our government sparked new interest in moral and political questions. The 1980's have focused the moral argument on a different dimension of policy -- the threat of nuclear war.

Both issues -- human rights and the nuclear arms race -- illustrate the complexity of this topic. Both highlight the fact that exclusion of the moral factor from the policy debate is purchased at a high price, not

only for our values as a nation but also in terms of our *interests*. Yet both can also illustrate that the inclusion of the moral dimension in the design of foreign policy is not a simple task, either for citizens or for policymakers.

My purpose today, however, is not to stress the difficulty of relating moral purpose and policy, but to argue the necessity and possibility of constructing this linkage. The necessity of moral analysis in the policy debate is rooted in the character of the issues we face in the last two decades of this century. The major issues of the day are not purely technical or tactical in nature; they are fundamental questions in which the moral dimension is a pervasive and persistent factor.

We live in a world which is interdependent in character and nuclear in context. Interdependence means we are locked together in a limited world. The factual interdependence of our economies raises key questions of access to resources for the industrial nations, but also justice in the economic system for the developing nations. The nuclear context of the age brings sharply into focus the problem of keeping the peace in an interdependent world governed by independent states.

The Catholic bishops of the United States in their pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," spoke of today's dual challenge: building the peace in an interdependent world and keeping the peace in the nuclear age. Both tasks exemplify the necessity of shaping our factual view of the world in terms of the demands of moral order. The absence of moral vision can erode both our values and our interests.

The possibility of meeting the moral challenge in our conception of foreign policy is rooted in two resources of our country and our culture. The first is the religiously pluralist character of the nation. The purpose of the separation of church and state in American society is not to exclude the voice of religion from public debate, but to provide a context of religious freedom where the insights of each religious tradition can be set forth and tested. The very testing of the religious voice opens the public debate to assessment by moral criteria.

The second resource is part of the constitutional tradition, itself a bearer of moral values including respect for life and reverence for the law, a commitment to freedom and a desire to relate it to justice. To ignore the moral dimension of foreign policy is to erode both our religious and constitutional heritage.

Two cases in the foreign policy debate of the 1980's test our capacity as a nation to use the moral resources of culture and church in determining both the ends and means of policy. They are the nuclear arms race and Central American policy. A detailed treatment of the two is not possible here; I seek, rather, to illustrate a theme by using these two topics.

The theme is that the perspective we bring to an issue is as pertinent to shaping a morally responsible policy as the values and principles we use to analyze specific policy choices. On both the nuclear question and Central America, U.S. policy, I believe, would benefit from a change of perspective if we are to pursue both political and moral purpose more effectively.

The nuclear arsenals and strategy of the superpowers present a political and moral problem of unique dimensions. Pope John Paul II specified the moral challenge of the nuclear age when he stood before the monument at Hiroshima and declared: "In the past it was possible to destroy a village, a town, a region, even a country. Now it is the whole planet that has come under threat." It is precisely this sense -- that all our political assumptions, as well as our moral judgments, about war are faced with a qualitatively new challenge today -- that permeates the entire pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops. This perspective has policy implications.

The policy implications flow from a judgment that nuclear weapons constitute a qualitative difference in the nature of warfare. In the past, war was used as a last resort to protect key political values. In our time, the use of nuclear weapons would threaten all our values -- political, cultural and human. Such an acknowledgment drives one to the conclusion that the prevention of nuclear war must be given primacy in the political process.

The Catholic Church has had a long and painful experience with Communism -- the facts of the story are embodied in the history of Lithuania, Hungary and Poland, for example. As bishops, we do not underestimate the dangers and problems of dealing with the Soviet threat. We cannot be naive; some "cold realism" is needed, as we stated in our pastoral letter. But the depth and seriousness of U.S. -- Soviet divisions on a whole range of issues should not make us lose perspective concerning a central moral and political truth of our age: if nuclear weapons are

used, we all lose. There will be no victors, only the vanquished; there will be no calculation of costs and benefits because the costs will run beyond our ability to calculate.

There is no policy objective which can substitute for this basic goal: the prevention of any use of nuclear weapons under any conditions. To give primacy to prevention requires insulating U.S. -- Soviet efforts to control the arms race from other dimensions of the U.S. -- Soviet relationship. If we tie efforts on arms control to every issue on the U.S. -- Soviet agenda -- from Afghanistan to Africa -- there will always be enough division among us to prevent our seeing a fate we share under the nuclear cloud.

Giving primacy to prevention of use and to efforts to control the arms race means stating our differences honestly but precisely. Rhetorical points made by dividing the world starkly into good and evil are neither honest nor precise. Such language fails to identify the very narrow but specific area of common interest which we share.

A perspective which gives primacy to control of the arms race can lead beyond the necessary hard bargaining of reciprocal agreements on nuclear weapons to one of the proposals the Catholic bishops made in the pastoral letter. We argued for "independent initiatives" as part of a policy to control the escalation of the arms race. When negotiations are at a standstill as they are today, either side can take well-defined steps which would be significant but would not mortally weaken its deterrent capacity. In my view, a U.S. decision to reconsider deployment of the MX missile would be justified in terms of its very disputed strategic

significance; it would also be an excellent way to respond creatively to a stalemated diplomatic situation. We should reconsider deployment of the MX and call for reciprocal action from the Soviets. The conflictive history of the MX indicates we would risk little by not deploying it; we might gain much in taking a step which runs counter to the presently depressing tide of U.S. -- Soviet relations.

The role of perspective in setting the moral purpose of policy is not confined to the cosmic question of nuclear war. The continuing debate about U.S. policy in Central America is urgently in need of moral and political perspective. Two kinds of moral arguments are receiving inadequate attention, I believe, in our policymaking, yet both are rooted in our cultural and constitutional history. If we lose this kind of perspective in the shaping of policy, we risk the corruption of the values the policy is said to defend.

The first concern is human rights; it is impossible to understand the reality of Central America and the revolutionary drama being played out there without understanding the human rights basis of the struggle.

The case of El Salvador is typical; the roots of the revolution are surely local; they reside in the soil of long-standing injustice and inequity, in the perception of the majority that the country has been run against them, not for them. This is not to deny that outside forces are active in Central America; it is simply to say that the fundamental basis for unrest exists prior to outside interference. One can only hope that the recent elections, which the Salvadorans again bravely took seriously, opens a new chapter within El Salvador. But, of course, we are in El

Salvador -- through our advisors, our aid and our pervasive political presence. Because we touch the country so directly, there is need for perspective on how we touch it. To design U.S. policy without explicit human rights criteria is to misunderstand the situation we face and the role we play. To tie U.S. military aid to explicit human rights criteria is not to foist our values on others, as some allege; the purpose of such standards should be to confine U.S. military power to its very narrow legitimate role in a wider political effort for dialogue and negotiations. To fail to constrain military assistance by human rights criteria, as the Administration and the Congress have just done, is to involve us more deeply in El Salvador without a clearly defined purpose or direction.

Nicaragua must also be seen in human rights terms. Concern for human rights within Nicaragua, expressed again on Easter Sunday by the Nicaraguan Catholic bishops, must surely be a dimension of U.S. policy. In no way can we ignore abuses in this area. Present policy, however, undercuts our human rights language and leverage. While we proceed to give El Salvador military aid without human rights restraints, we seek to use human rights arguments with Nicaragua, but we fail to provide economic aid which is needed for humanitarian reasons and would provide the United States with a legitimate form of influence in Nicaragua.

Instead, we now are using quite illegitimate measures as the World Court has plainly said. This raises an important issue of perspective. If the constitutional tradition of the United States stands for anything, it is respect for the rule of law. This deep domestic tradition has influenced our foreign policy; the United States has spoken and acted

often since World War I to build a rule of law internationally precisely because our domestic experience has taught us the value of the law.

Resort to covert action, including the specific act of mining Nicaraguan harbors, erodes respect for law -- even if it is done in the name of freedom. There must be a complementarity of purpose and means in our policy. We lose both moral perspective and purpose when the measures we use undermine a fundamental value like respect for the fragile form of international law which we have in the world.

I am neither blind to the danger nor sympathetic to the imposition of an alien ideology in Central America. We have an obligation to resist this, both for the people of the area and for ourselves. But the means used to oppose such a possibility must be consistent with our constitutional and cultural traditions. Today, the face we show the world in Central American does not reflect the best of either of those traditions.

My plea is for perspective and purpose in keeping the nuclear peace and building a secure and just peace in Central America. Such an effort surely requires policy wisdom, but it also requires a certain quality of citizen vision. I have concentrated on perspective and purpose in key policy areas today not because you will all be directly involved in policy questions, but because you will all be indirectly involved in molding our moral perspective as a nation. As you take your place as fully adult citizens, make space in your lives for moral perspective and purpose, and require those who do represent us to reflect the best of our constitutional, cultural and religious traditions.

Let me conclude quite simply with a word of thanks. Thank you again for the honors you have bestowed on me today -- not only the honorary degree but also the honor of having been invited to speak to you. Thank you, too, for your attention and patience. In return, I want to offer to each of the graduates my most sincere congratulations, and to all of you my very best wishes and prayers for the days and years ahead.