

**COLLOQUIUM ON
ETHICS OF WAR AFTER 9/11 AND IRAQ**
Georgetown University, November 11, 2005

The Role of the Church
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In my brief remarks, I would like to explore two key questions: What is the Church's role in promoting peace, especially in these challenging times? And what resources do we bring to this task?

We are all aware that the Holy See, other national Episcopal conferences and our own U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have responded extensively to the events of 9/11, the broader phenomenon of terrorism, and the pre-war debate and ongoing conflict related to Iraq. My focus will not be on the substance of the Church's response to these important questions, but rather on the vital role and significant resources that the Church brings to questions of war and peace.

The events of 9/11 and the conflict in Iraq cast a deep shadow over our nation and world. The specter of global terrorist networks and the threat of future terrorist attacks have generated fear in our nation and this fear makes it both difficult and important to have substantive and civil discussions about the course of our nation's policy. The human costs of the war in Iraq (over 2,000 American lives lost and many more Iraqi deaths) demand that we engage in serious dialogue. The fact that members of our families and communities are serving a great personal risk in Iraq makes it both more difficult and more essential that we examine the foundations, applications and directions of our nation's war policies.

What role can the Church play in helping our nation to address critical questions of war and peace, especially in these challenging times? The Church can help create a space for moral and civil dialogue. This statement highlights two related, but distinct, roles: creating a space for moral dialogue and creating a space for civil dialogue.

Creating a space for moral dialogue

Locating moral discourse and advancing ethical analysis in public policy debates is always challenging. There is frequently a risk that pragmatic or strategic considerations will eclipse moral ones, especially in the life and death decisions of war and peace. Likewise partisan and ideological agendas can overwhelm ethical considerations.

With humility, I share my belief that the publication of the U.S. Bishops pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, as well as the Conferences statements on 9/11 and Iraq, have contributed to strengthening moral discourse on issues of war and peace in our country. These Catholic efforts, together with those of other religious traditions, helped make it more possible to engage in robust moral dialogue. I have found it very encouraging in recent years that the Catholic Church's teaching on war and peace has come to inform wider public debates. Now we routinely find policy makers, military leaders, public commentators and many others using the vocabulary of "just war" and struggling with ethical questions regarding war and peace. This was not always the case.

Creating a space for civil dialogue

The Church brings its rich moral tradition to public discourse on war and peace, but it also should bring a certain humility and clear commitment to respectful dialogue. In the 1983 Pastoral Letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, the U.S. bishops made an important distinction between "universal moral principles" and "applications of these principles" to specific circumstances. We acknowledged that while the "universal moral principles" were "binding in conscience", the "applications of these principles" involved "prudential judgments" that could "change or which can be interpreted differently by people of good will." The Bishops went on to quote the Second Vatican Council:

“Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. ... They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #13)

At the same time that the bishops call for civil dialogue and a respect for legitimate differences, they argue that Catholics should take the prudential judgments of the Church’s pastors and teachers seriously. The Church’s application of basic moral principles cannot be simply ignored: “[T]he moral judgments that we make in specific cases, while not binding in conscience, are to be given serious attention and consideration by Catholics...,” for example the Holy Father’s pleas for alternatives prior to the war in Iraq.

Creating a space for moral dialogue on questions of war and peace in our day is an essential task for the Church and it involves several critical elements:

1. The Church must clearly articulate the Church’s moral tradition on war and peace, especially its universal moral principles so that its teaching can be known by Catholics and understood by all people of good will.
2. We must also courageously apply this moral teaching to the concrete and complex questions of war and peace in our day.
3. Church leaders should acknowledge that people of good will might legitimately disagree about the application of the principles to specific situations. This acknowledgement creates space for dialogue and acknowledges that prudential judgments of complex factors are involved.
4. The Church must challenge all people to reflect upon and apply the moral principles with integrity and challenge Catholics in particular to take seriously prudential judgments made by the Church’s leaders.
5. Finally, we bishops must call everyone, especially policy makers, to focus on the “common good” through honest discussion and mutual charity, avoiding the destructive forces of political and ideological polarization that often turn important discussions into unproductive debates. We should “build bridges, not blow them up.”

Today’s Colloquium is an example of how the Church can convene people of good will in an effort to move beyond the paralyzing politics of polarization and into an honest and challenging dialogue in search of the common good.

The Pastoral Resources of the Church

What pastoral resources does the Church bring to the tasks of fostering dialogue on the ethical questions of war and our common mission to seek peace? Beyond the rich resource of our social teaching, the bishops identified pastoral strategies that include: praying, sharing and teaching, and speaking and acting. (*The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 1993)

Praying: “Every liturgy is a call to and celebration of peace. The cause of peace should be constantly reflected in our prayers of petition.” (*The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 1993) We should never underestimate the power of prayer; it has the power to inspire and transform us and our world. The Eucharist builds bonds of peace. In the face of the fear of terrorism, prayer helps us to deal with grief and anger and to move us beyond our fears. In the face of war, prayer inspires us to work for peace and to support and remember those touched by war, including refugees and the members of the military and their families. In the face of hatred, prayer helps us to view the world through the eyes of God and challenges us to love and pray even for our enemies; and in the face of divisions and confusion, prayer reminds us of our dependence on God, fostering the humility that we need to engage in an authentic search for truth and peace.

Sharing and Teaching: We also shouldn’t underestimate the potential of preaching and teaching. Of course preaching must be carefully and courageously done. Preaching should center on the intersections between the

message of the scriptures and the personal and social challenges we face. It should help us to read the signs of the times and to form our consciences, but it should do so in ways that encourage believers to struggle with complex questions that do not have easy answers.

I have frequently found that in homilies it is more important to ask the right questions than to give the correct answers. It is also critical that we have the courage to ask the tough questions. If the homilist avoids the difficult questions of war and peace, he risks making faith seem irrelevant to critical questions of our day. Two extremes must be avoided: ignoring issues of war and peace runs the terrible risk of isolating faith from the major issues of our day; and pursuing a partisan or ideological agenda compromises the integrity of the Church's teaching office. Peace is integral to the Gospel; it must also be integral to our preaching, especially as we face wars and "rumors of war."

Teaching in our schools and seminaries, our religious education and formation efforts, our colleges and universities is critically important. Peace lies at the heart of our faith and should lie at the center of our curricula. But teaching must also be done carefully and courageously.

We can minimize ideological debates and engage people in honest dialogue if we remember to: stay focused on the Church's social teaching on war and peace, especially its basic principles; acknowledge that persons of goodwill might legitimately disagree over how to apply this teaching to the complex situations of war and conflict; and encourage dialogue and respect for the dignity of each participant in the discussion.

Speaking and acting for peace: I have already spoken of the importance of the Church speaking for peace. We are called to speak clearly and courageously in sharing and applying the Church's teaching on war and peace in ways that contribute to a robust and civil dialogue for the common good. But the Church is also called to act for peace. In fact our actions for peace help give greater credibility to our teaching on peace. Acting for peace takes several forms: through Catholic Relief Services and other Church institutions we reach out beyond our shores to the victims of war, aiding in reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts; through Migration and Refugee Services and diocesan refugee resettlement programs we assist victims fleeing persecution and war; and through military chaplains and parishes throughout the country we extend pastoral care to members of the military and their families. All of these actions, in addition to providing real support and assistance, they remind us that war has names and faces and our work for peace touches the lives of real people at home and abroad.

Finally, through advocacy and legislative networks, we work with policy makers to shape our nation's policies on war and peace. Through engaging our Catholic people in the public square and equipping them with the Church's social teaching we create a community of conscience for peace and justice.

Conclusion

I end where I began. What is the Church's role in promoting peace, especially in these challenging times? We must create a space for civil and moral dialogue. We must pray unceasingly for peace and allow ourselves to be transformed by God's own peace. We must preach and teach clearly, carefully and courageously, sharing a moral framework for discussions of war and peace. We must act to aid those threatened by war and speak out on issues of war and peace with policy makers.

What resources do we bring to this task? We bring a rich tradition of teaching, vibrant communities of faith that pray and learn, an extensive network of individuals and institutions that work for peace, and extensive experience aiding victims of war and providing pastoral care to members of the military.

How can the Church make a positive contribution? We contribute to the cause of peace by being faithful to who we are: a pilgrim people open to the guidance of the Spirit's call to be peacemakers, who humbly acknowledge that we do not have easy answers, but who know we have a responsibility to face the difficult questions, and who willingly share the insights of our teaching and moral tradition, as together we walk the uncertain road to peace and justice with courage and civility.