

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

**Opening Remarks**

by Bishop John Ricard, SSJ, Chairman, USCCB Committee on International Policy

On behalf of the Committee on International Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I want to thank you for joining us for this *Colloquium on Ethics of War After 9/11 and Iraq*. In particular, I want to extend my gratitude to our friends at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame for cosponsoring this Colloquium with the Bishops' Conference.

We gather today as a remarkably diverse assembly of bishops, church leaders, academics, policymakers, policy analysts, and leaders of non-governmental organizations, but we are united in a desire to explore critical, and sometimes neglected, questions related to the ethics of war and peace.

We gather today in the shadow of two events that have led many people to reflect anew on moral questions of war and peace: the terrible terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the initiation and prosecution of the war in Iraq. Both of these events challenge us to examine new questions.

The ethics of war and peace raise difficult questions in the best of times and these are not the best of times. The attacks of 9/11, terrorist attacks in other developed nations, and the ongoing violence and instability in Iraq have contributed to an increased sense of vulnerability in the United States. Paradoxically, this new sense of vulnerability comes at a time of unparalleled U.S. military, political, economic, and cultural power. This new combination of U.S. vulnerability and U.S. power creates an environment in which civil debate on the ethics of war is difficult and the risks of moral slogans in the name of peace and ethical shortcuts in the name of security are great.

Although not a major topic for our Colloquium today, the treatment of prisoners and detainees under U.S. custody illustrates the moral responsibilities and ethical risks that arise from U.S. vulnerability and power in the wake of 9/11 and the initiation of war in Iraq. Our Bishops' Conference has worked in recent weeks to support Senator McCain's efforts in Congress to prohibit cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of persons under custody or control of the United States government and to provide uniform standards for the interrogation of persons under detention of the Department of Defence. The Conference maintains that the reported instances of prisoner abuse by members of the U.S. armed services compromise human dignity and could seriously undermine the wider counter-terrorism effort. There can be no compromise on the moral imperative to protect the basic human rights of any individual incarcerated for any reason.

Today we do not seek to rehearse past debates. Our purpose is to reflect on future moral challenges in light of what we have learned from recent experience. This Colloquium is designed to apply and examine elements of the just war tradition, especially those questions posed the attacks of September 11 and the preemptive/preventive military intervention in Iraq.

The tragedy of 9/11 highlighted new questions for the just war tradition that arise from the emergence of global terrorist networks. The events of 9/11 prompt us to ask: How does the tradition guide and shape our thinking and acting? Do contemporary interpretations of the just war tradition adequately address the emergence of global terrorist networks? Is "war" an appropriate paradigm for addressing terrorism? What light can the Church's moral tradition shed on the phenomenon of global terrorism and the struggle to overcome it?

The preemptive/preventive military intervention in Iraq also raises a host of difficult ethical questions: Why has the Holy See and our Bishops' Conference raised grave moral concerns and questions regarding the decision to

initiate the war? Is preventive war consistent with the just war tradition? Is there an important distinction between preventive and preemptive war? How should the world address the potential dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of “rogue” regimes with possible ties to global terrorist networks? How should the just war tradition limit and restrain national responses?

The debate leading up to the war in Iraq and the continuing debate over global terrorism have focused attention on weapons of mass destruction. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continues to plague the world. More recently this question has been raised in connection with Iran and Korea, but it still simmers in the disputes between Pakistan and India, and between Arabs and Israelis. What morally responsible and more effective approaches should be taken to address and prevent nuclear proliferation? How are non-proliferation or counter-proliferation regimes related to the moral obligations of existing nuclear powers with respect to arms control and disarmament? More specifically, how does the issue of nuclear proliferation intersect with the U.S. Administration’s nuclear policies?

The just war tradition places a moral emphasis on the use of force as a last resort. In today’s world, what constitutes last resort? What are the alternatives to the use of force? What role might non-violent conflict resolution play in contemporary Catholic teaching on war and peace? What are the tools that come from the growing field of conflict prevention and conflict management that can inform policy makers in the future?

Finally, we will examine the Church’s role in promoting peace. As many of you are aware, the Holy See, other national Episcopal conferences and our own U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops spoke out in response to the events of 9/11 and in the debates over the war in Iraq. The Church predictably, but forcefully, rejected the ideology and tactic of terrorism, but also suggested that the struggle with terrorism required far more than a military response. The Church pointed to underlying unjust conditions that make fertile fields for the recruitment of terrorists. The Church also raised grave moral questions regarding the initiation of war in Iraq, but now points to the new moral responsibilities that are incumbent upon our nation as it occupies a country torn by violence and in need of reconstruction.

The engagement of the Church after 9/11 and the war in Iraq raises important questions: What is the Church’s proper role in public discussions of the issues of war and peace? What are the responsibilities of pastors, teachers, ecclesial and lay leaders? How can the Church strengthen its pastoral roles in ministering to those in the military and in promoting peace and the vocation of peacemaking?

As you can see from the agenda and the list of participants, we have an interesting and diverse group of presenters and participants who will help ensure that our dialogue reflects a variety of disciplines and perspectives on some of the pressing moral and policy challenges facing our nation. I am grateful in a special way to our presenters for their time and expertise, but I am also very grateful for all who are with us today. You bring both a wealth of experience and a willingness to wrestle with critical questions of the “Ethics of War After 9/11 and Iraq.” Together I am sure that we will have a day full of important questions, thoughtful discussions and rich exchanges. May all we do today serve the cause of peace with justice. As the Lord himself said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt. 5:9)