

Justice for Terror

Christian conversations on eliminating the support base of terrorist movements

Introduction

The Tragedy of September 11 emotionally uprooted America. Confusion and fear invaded our once secure daily lives. Feelings of anger, patriotic pride and resolve are now coming together in a way that we have not experienced in this nation since World War II. And in the midst of all this, many Americans are turning to God and the local faith community for comfort and answers.

Our first response, as a nation, is to bring those responsible for the terror to justice. Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, President of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, writing on behalf of all the bishops to President Bush stated, *"Our nation, in collaboration with others, has a moral right and a grave obligation to defend the common good against such terrorist attacks. Therefore, we support efforts by our nation and the global community to seek out and hold accountable, in accord with national and international law, those individuals, groups and governments which are responsible."*

Our nation has chosen military action in its pursuit of justice. Once it is completed, however, we will still need to work to make the world a better place. Again, Bishop Fiorenza writes, *"As we undertake the heavy burden of defending the common good, in morally appropriate ways, against global terrorism, we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal and responsibility of using our nation's considerable influence and power to contribute to a more just and peaceful world. Among other things, I hope our foreign policy will give new emphasis to deepening our engagement with the Arab and Muslim worlds and, in particular, will continue every effort to press for a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."*

Issues once at the margin of national attention are now, because of the diabolical actions of an extremist cult, at the center. These legitimate issues were co-opted by an illegitimate prophet for his own fanatical and political goals. There is no justification for terrorist activities. But we must be aware that despair and anger grow in the seedbed of poverty and injustice. While few in the Arab and Muslim world support the action of the terrorists, many recognize the issues and are vulnerable to the call to anger and vengeance. We must get to the root causes of terrorism. We must eliminate the support base for the terrorist movements. If poverty, powerlessness, and injustice are eliminated, then few will respond to the radical call of Osama Bin Laden and others like him.

This four-part study seeks to offer a Catholic/Christian framework to discuss the War on Terrorism. It begins with a review of the moral guidelines for war. If our goal is to eliminate terror, then we do not want to breed more terror through the very means we have chosen to combat it. It also engages several of the key issues: the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the U.S./U.N. Sanctions Against Iraq, and Economic Development & the American Lifestyle, and calls the participant to appropriate personal and political action.

In these dire times, it is good if our pastoral leaders help draw us closer to God. But, it is not enough. It is good if we hug our loved ones a little tighter. But, it is not enough. If we are to be free from terror, if we are to be safe in our homes, then we must focus and take action on the hard issues. The gospel message of peace and justice must become the central pastoral concern of our faith communities. America's future depends upon this. The fate of the world will be determined by it.

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