

POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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This article addresses the topic of a new international order conceived of by the late Pope John Paul II. This order is not “new,” however, but goes back to the beginnings of his pontificate. The development of this new order will be considered. Some attention will also be given to the Holy See’s efforts to propose a different alternative to the “war on terrorism” by creating a more peaceful order based on the concepts of human dignity, development, solidarity, and the rule of law. Ultimately all nations are called to the duty of creating peace, with special emphasis placed upon the United Nations and international law.

Introduction

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in a defining moment in international relations. How states related to each other would henceforth be strongly influenced by where they stood on the “war on terror.” The United States, by the nature of its dominance in the international system and the fact that it was the victim of the terrorist attacks, became the definitive judge. In September 2001, before a joint session of Congress, President Bush summed up U.S. policy with the words: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”¹ Thereafter the United States engaged in a multifaceted “war on terror.” Coalitions were built to pursue military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. State building became the predominant means of solving the problem of rogue nations. “Unilateralism” and “preemption” returned to the American foreign policy lexicon after a decades-long absence. Strategies were developed to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and contingency plans were created in case they were deployed by non-state actors. A dense, global network of anti-terrorist and counterterrorist efforts was developed to fight this new war. But as the United States expanded its war efforts, attitudes began to change. And the war in Iraq created a deep divide among nations in the face of international terrorism. The key point of contention was how to solve this problem as an international community, since no single country could successfully achieve this by itself.

The Catholic Church has something to say about this state of affairs. The late Pope John Paul II had written and spoken extensively on this issue. Since the international system continues to be confronted with the evil face of terrorism, examining his contributions is necessitated. This paper will study the development of his thoughts on a new international order, which can potentially provide a solution to this crisis. Ultimately, his answer included the creation of a new international order based upon the key concepts of truth, peace, justice, and solidarity, emphasizing the critical roles of international organizations and international law.

The Origins of Pope John Paul II's New International Order

Throughout his pontificate, Pope John Paul II had ceaselessly championed the safeguarding of human dignity and the promotion of the common good. In a world marked by “hatred, violence, terrorism, and war”²² he called for renewed efforts to create a new international order based upon the Word of God. Only in doing so can “the shadows of poverty, injustice and secularism”²³ be dispelled. His conception of a “new international order” is not “new,” however. It is the product of Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and Magisterial Teaching revealed by God to mankind throughout the ages. The Holy Father built upon the encyclicals and other documents written and promulgated by his predecessors. In this sense, Pope John Paul II's message was “old.” What was “new” was his articulation of the faith in a way that dealt with some of the problems specific to the current state of world affairs so as to achieve the order laid down by God. He attempted to shed light upon and deepen man's understanding of the faith as it related to the relations among nations and peoples.

In his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II celebrated the centennial anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Written in 1891, this encyclical produced “a lasting paradigm” for the Catholic Church. Pope Leo XIII clarified the Church's right and duty to make judgments about “specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international.”²⁴ He was expressing the Church's deep concern over the miserable conditions of the working class, which subsequently violated their human dignity. In addressing this problem, Pope Leo XIII wrote: “no practical solution of this question will be found apart from the intervention of religion and of the Church . . . by keeping silent we would seem to neglect the duty incumbent on us.”²⁵ Moreover, he recognized that the Church could not solve this problem alone, but required the participation of the other

parties involved: political leaders, employers, and the working class themselves. The Church, as part of her evangelizing mission, must teach and spread the Church's social doctrine, and no genuine solution can be found outside the Gospel. These ideas were reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Church declared as part of its mission: "to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it."⁶

Pope John Paul II continued this mission. To reinforce his understanding of the inherent dignity of the human person, he referred to Pope John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* to emphasize that human dignity is inextricably linked to the concepts of truth, peace, and solidarity, which are key components of his conception of a new international order. In this encyclical Pope John XXIII wrote: "before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth."⁷ Since Jesus Christ is the Truth, and the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is morally obligated to address the problems of order in world affairs and provide moral guidance. Similar to Pope Leo XIII, John Paul II called upon all parties involved to play an active role in creating peace and harmony.⁸

When the College of Cardinals elected Cardinal Karol Wojtyla pope in 1978, the international system was still in the midst of the Cold War, with the world divided into two exclusive blocs. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked in an ideological power struggle, backed by many conventional and non-conventional weapons. In such a zero-sum environment, the possibilities for cooperation, collaboration, and dialogue were constrained. Pope John Paul II kept the Church above the ideological blocs and provided moral direction.⁹ Even in this Cold War environment, the Pope called for peace at all levels: between peoples, within countries, within neighborhoods, within individuals.¹⁰ He reminded us of Christ's words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Mt. 5:9). By remaining above the fray, he contributed to the downfall of Communism in East Europe. John Paul's emphasis on the power of culture, religious freedom, and human rights undermined Soviet authority which ultimately led to its undoing.¹¹

When the Cold War ended in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the other events that followed in Central and Eastern Europe, the historical moment arrived for the realization of a new world order. The constraints of the competitive bipolar system were lifting. In September 1990 President George H.W. Bush presented his "Toward a

New World Order” speech before a joint session of Congress. In his address, President Bush proclaimed that an objective of the United States was the creation of a new world order: “freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace, an era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony.”¹² At this point in history, President Bush recognized that this order was still struggling to emerge, but it was one quite different from that of the Cold War. It would be a world: “Where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle, a world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice, a world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.”¹³

President Bush identified the renewed role of the United Nations in standing up against aggression. The Cold War rivalry neutralized this international organization, but the hope was that it could finally perform the role originally intended by its founders in 1945. In the new post-Cold War order, the revitalization of the United Nations centered on the multilateral effort to remove Saddam Hussein’s military forces from Kuwait.

President Bush’s speech reflected to some extent the Catholic Church’s position on the international order: the emphasis on the rule of law, international organizations, peace and justice, freedom and rights. Pope John Paul II persistently repeated these ideals. With the end of the Cold War, the expectation arose that dialogue and solidarity would be given the chance to predominate state relations. The Pope saw the collapse of Communism as a positive development in international affairs. The Marxist ideology and its political and economic implementation failed to consider the value of the human person. But Marxism’s disappearance left behind a vacuum in several regions of the world. In his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, the Pope revealed his concerns as to what may fill it: secularism, consumerism, and radical capitalism. All of these possess the dangerous potential of exploiting the human person if they are not placed in the service of human freedom. The Pope attempted to fill the vacuum with a new moral order based upon the concepts of peace, solidarity, and justice.

Ironically, the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War dampened the outlook for a new world order envisioned by the Pope. The Holy See pursued an intensive diplomatic effort to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis. The Pope dispatched personal envoys to the United States and Iraq. Private letters were issued by the Pope to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and U.S. President George H.W. Bush, stressing the importance of dialogue, peace, and justice, and stating that war was not the solution to international problems. This was a theme John Paul II

would repeat over and over again in his public speeches. In the end, however, Saddam Hussein refused to comply with U.N. Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. The U.N.-backed allied coalition launched Operation Desert Storm, ending with the defeat of Saddam Hussein's armed forces and the liberation of Kuwait.

After the military success of the First Gulf War, a new peaceful order did not arise as many had anticipated. Conflicts which brewed beneath the surface during the Cold War were now unleashed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in December, 1991. In facing these conflicts, the United Nations and other international organizations proved inadequate. The United States expressed reluctance to become involved. The catch phrase of the day became the "new world disorder." The decade of the 1990s witnessed genocide in Yugoslavia and the Congo, the proliferation of nuclear weapons to India and Pakistan, the Asian flu infecting the globalized economies of Southeast Asia, and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. In addressing each of these issues, the Pope witnessed an opportunity for international cooperation. His pleas, however, were generally ignored by the international community.

At the turn of the millennium, the Holy Father once again called upon all nations to commit themselves to a "century of solidarity." At the time various efforts in multilateral diplomacy were resulting in a number of praiseworthy initiatives for the creation of an authentic community of nations. But much work still needed to be done.¹⁴ The events of September 11th drastically heightened the threshold in achieving this goal.

The New International Order: Organizations and Law

On September 11, 2001 the world witnessed a dramatic event with sweeping implications which was completely unexpected. In light of the tragic events that took place, the Pope steadfastly maintained his message of peace. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were the worst terrorist acts on American soil. Nearly 3,000 innocent people from over 90 countries were killed, along with the devastation of the symbols of American economic and military power. The American people united themselves as they had not done since the attack on Pearl Harbor sixty years earlier. The entire world expressed its unity with the notable quote: "today we are all Americans." Two days later, Pope John Paul II received James Nicholson as the new U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. In his address, the Pope stated: "I pray that this inhuman act will awaken in the hearts of all the world's peoples a firm resolve to reject the ways of violence, to combat everything that

sows hatred and division within the human family, and to work for the dawn of a new era of international co-operation inspired by the highest ideals of solidarity, justice and peace.”¹⁵

After the attacks, the world community, including the Pope, waited anxiously to see how the United States would react. It did not lash out immediately, but over the period of several weeks planned its counterstrike against those responsible for the September 11th attacks. The United States proceeded to crack down on the al-Qaeda terrorist organization. Along with coalition forces, and backed by U.N. Security Council resolutions, the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban regime which provided a safe-haven for Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, and his operatives. The Catholic Church lent quiet support for this mission. She made no official public statements. She viewed it as an act of self-defense against a terrorist organization that proved to be an imminent threat.¹⁶

By the end of the summer of 2002 the Bush Administration expanded its efforts in the “war on terror.” The president adopted a new orientation in foreign policy referred to as the Bush Doctrine. This doctrine was detailed in the president’s 2002 National Security Strategy. It consisted of four main principles: spreading democracy, preemptive action, unilateral action, and the benefits of U.S. primacy for international security. In light of this doctrine, in a post-September 11th environment, the Administration decided to remove Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein from power on the grounds that he violated numerous U.N. Security Council resolutions, possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), had links to al-Qaeda, and therefore posed a threat to the United States.¹⁷ This decision on the part of the Bush Administration was at odds with Pope John Paul’s message of peace and solidarity.

During the military build up for the invasion of Iraq, the Holy Father pursued an intensive diplomatic initiative to achieve a peaceful solution. The Pope met personally with Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who were key allies in the “coalition of the willing,” as well as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. He dispatched Cardinal Pio Laghi with a personal message to President Bush, and Cardinal Roger Etchegaray to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. On Ash Wednesday, the Pope mobilized the spiritual energies of the faithful by calling for a day of prayer and fasting for peace. He continually expressed his profound concern for the potential innocent victims of a war in Iraq. The Vatican took the position that the United States should work with other countries through the United Nations. Time should be given for the U.N. weapons

inspectors to complete their mission, and war should only be pursued as a last resort. The common catchphrase was that the situation in Iraq should be resolved by the “force of law and not the law of force.” To do otherwise would set a dangerous precedent for the actions of other nations, leading to a century of war rather than peace.¹⁸ On March 20th the United States and its allies invaded Iraq.

With the relatively quick end of the conventional war in Iraq and the rise of the insurgency, the Holy See began to adapt its position. In October 2004, Vatican officials decided to put aside their disagreements with the U.S.-led coalition and take a more nuanced line on Iraq, appealing to the international community to commit troops and financial resources to secure a free, stable, and democratic Iraq.¹⁹ There was a realistic fear that if Iraq was left to its own devices, it would fall into civil war resulting in the establishment of an Islamo-fascist regime.

At the same time, the Vatican once again reinvigorated the Pope’s message of peace. He used the occasion of war as an opportunity to present to the world his vision of a “new international order.” The underlying components of this order are: truth, solidarity, human dignity, peace, rule of law, and justice. The chief mechanisms are international organizations and international law. Of particular importance was the contribution of the United Nations for “the promotion of respect for human dignity, the freedom of peoples and the requirements of development, thus preparing the cultural and institutional soil for the building of peace.”²⁰ In the wake of the war in Iraq, the Holy Father highlighted the “fundamental role” of the United Nations. The Pope was truly convinced that the U.N. could “become a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being...a family of nations.”²¹ This was consistent with his emphasis on solidarity and subsidiarity, in the sense that terrorism was a global issue that needed a global solution.

The Church recognizes that the U.N. possesses its share of shortcomings due to the failure of its members. She is also aware that certain ideologues, which hold the Catholic Church in contempt, have infiltrated the organization. The Holy See is not naïve about this, but still “considers the United Nations organization a significant means for promoting the universal common good.”²² In his address at the U.N. Millennium Summit in 2000, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State of Vatican City, cited the duties of the United Nations: to preserve and promote peace, to promote development and human rights, and guarantee equality among its members. In fulfilling these duties, the U.N. can help to build a “civilization of love.”²³ The Holy See would not view its withdrawal from the United Nations or even the suspension of

the United Nations system as a positive development in world affairs. The Holy Father stated: “The task of watching over global peace and security and encouraging the efforts of States to preserve and guarantee these fundamental goods of humanity was entrusted by Governments to an organization established for this purpose—the United Nations Organization.”²⁴ There is little doubt that reforms are needed. And the Church has pushed this issue on many occasions.²⁵

International organizations, such as the United Nations, are an essential part of the new international order. Once again drawing upon Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, the Church believes these organizations are the embodiment of the community of nations, and can lead to the consensual establishment of a world public authority which the new moral order requires. This new public authority would not be a super-state, but would respect the principle of subsidiarity and the proper authority of the state.²⁶ The Holy See’s diplomacy is geared towards the creation of a strong international community and implicit in this is the concept of multilateralism.²⁷ In a message to the U.N. General Assembly, the Pope expressed his firm conviction that questions of international security, justice, and development can be solved through a multilateral approach.²⁸ The Church realizes that the “war on terror” has deep and complex underlying causes and will require an international effort. This effort should not focus solely on short-term military action, but upon political, social, economic, and educative means, which can be carried out only by international organizations.

Closely connected with the Church’s support for international organizations is her emphasis on the role of international law. This was the theme of the Pope John Paul II’s 2004 World Day of Peace address. International law has formulated “universal principles that are prior to and superior to the internal law of states and that take into account the unity and the common vocation of the human family.”²⁹ It is the primary means for securing the new international order. The Pope further declared that international law should “become exclusively a law of peace, conceived in justice and solidarity.”³⁰ It possesses the potential to become the guarantor of peaceful relations among states and peoples.

The Holy See knows, however, that the implementation of an international legal system faces very serious challenges. International law does exist, but it depends on the willingness of the states to abide by it. It lacks the main components of a domestic legal system. There is no legitimate legislative body that can formulate a set of binding laws; no judicial body that identifies the laws, interprets them, and identifies violations; and no executive body to enforce them. International law can prove to be dangerous because it lacks universality. There is no general

base of norms at the international level generally recognized by all states. The state decides all of this, and international law can be developed by the powerful to exploit the weak. In addition to all of this international law is very ambiguous and therefore open to manipulation. Given these weaknesses, however, international law is still important. States do work hard at it, and it does control their behavior to a certain extent. It increases predictability and shapes expectations on how states should relate to one another. It provides procedures for conflict prevention and resolution, as well as increasing the costs of aggressive actions. It is these benefits that the Pope wishes to promote. Once again one must consider the alternative of a world without international law. It has developed over centuries because statesmen have found it to be useful, if imperfect. It provides a sense of order in an anarchical system.

The challenge facing Pope John Paul II's conception of a new international order is implementing its ideals and values in the real world. In the world as it ought to be the international system should consist of a community of states which cooperate in order to protect and promote the efforts of each state to develop its own order of the common good. In reality, the international system is made up of various actors who do not share a common system of values, and is conflict-ridden. It is not a community. The creation of international organizations and international law which will create authentic peace is extremely doubtful in such an environment, but not impossible.

Where the world of ideals and values and the world as it is intersect is in the world of policy, the world as it can become. This is where decision makers wrestle with idealism and realism. Some of the elements of this world are already in place. International institutions do exist at both the universal and regional levels. These institutions can be classified into several functional categories. Some are protective, such as the United Nations and International Criminal Court, NATO, and the European Court. Others are promotional, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the European Union, and multinational corporations. This dense network of institutions across functional and regional dimensions helps to contribute to a systemic effort to create the international common good. What is missing, however, is the development of a vision of the human person, and this is where the message of Pope John Paul II becomes so important. With the help of international organizations and international law, supported by the United States and the other nations of the international community, the new international order can be achieved. The "war on terrorism" provides the powerful incentive for working towards this new order—peace. The Pope challenges the nations of the world to answer the

following question: “Is this not the time for all to work together for a new constitutional organization of the human family, truly capable of ensuring peace and harmony between peoples?”³¹

Notes

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