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AMERICAN CATHOLIC OPINION AND THE UNITED NATIONS

MOST REVEREND JAMES H. GRIFFITHS*

THERE WOULD PROBABLY be no semblance of order in my turbulent titular diocese of Gaza were it not for the presence there of the United Nations Emergency Forces. These troops were the first uniformed peace-preserving unit in the history of the United Nations. The situation is still too imponderable, but it may not be too roseate an expectation to regard this small contingent in the Gaza Strip as a possible pattern of things which might still come about. Granted that the implementation of such a plan would be fraught with enormous practical difficulties. The fact does remain that with all the inexorable problems and dissatisfaction, with all the sufferings and seethings of thousands of uprooted refugees cramped into that tiny sliver of terrain, there has been avoided wholesale bloodshed in one of the most sensitive areas in the world.

Mind you, I am not even insinuating that the basic arrangement is ideal or tolerable, or denying that some equitable solution to it must definitely be found. But I do think it a pity that so many persons do not advert to the fact that, were it not for the urging of the United States and the action of the General Assembly, this area which has been the crossroads of history might have become, three years ago, the Sarajevo of an horrendous World War III, and all of us might have found ourselves long since in a silent, ghostly world such as the one envisioned by the Australian Nevil Shute in his appalling science-prophecy *On The Beach*. It seems to me that it was a Vicar of Christ Himself who warned: "Nothing is lost by peace; all may be lost by war."¹

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¹ KOENIG, ed., *PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE* 554, 585 (1943).

Aside from the personal relevance of the situation which I mention, I have purposely introduced it because it is one of those intangible — yes, I would go further and call it, somewhat paradoxically, one of those negative facts which it is so difficult to appraise. Put it this way: There is much less difficulty in assaying or proving the import of a thing which did happen, than in evaluating a thing which did not happen but might have happened. As a cleric, I would say there is no problem about getting a baptismal certificate but one cannot get a non-baptismal certificate. You might get sworn testimony regarding the lack of baptism, but one simply cannot get a non-baptismal certificate.

I think that this limping, awkward metaphor might often be helpful in weighing the attitude of the general public toward the United Nations. Many are prone to think solely of some of the regrettable things which have happened as a result of weaknesses inherent in any purely human organization — especially in one which is tottering and stumbling in its infancy and in one which was born in the turbulence of war, and cradled in a world strongly and bitterly divided along ideological lines; in an organization composed of members with the most fantastically diverse spiritual, moral, cultural, political, economic, and social backgrounds.

On the other hand, the example which we have advanced may explain the tendency or reluctance of the general public to pause to consider the negative facts apropos of the United Nations. By this I mean the short memories we have for the serious things which did not happen but which might have happened had there been no United Nations.

I do not wish to multiply examples, but I do think of Iran, which today might be a Marxist satellite, save for the action of the United Nations in 1946. The Kashmir question still remains unsettled because of the nations involved, but the United Nations did succeed in effecting a truce and terminating bloody warfare. Lebanon was another tinder box. There are those who rightfully will point to the American Marines who landed, but after they withdrew at the request of the United Nations, the peace has been kept.

Each one of the examples cited is an instance of a focus of infection wherein frightful carnage might have ensued; wherein the terrible conflict which hangs like the sword of Damocles over our heads might have fallen with inconceivable devastation, not only on these restricted areas but on all mankind. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that the solutions or stopgaps, if you will, were perfect or even nearly perfect. But I do not regard it an exaggeration to say that thousands, possibly millions, of men and women are alive today who might have perished — and this because something did not happen; negative facts, if you will pardon the expression, which so many have long since forgotten.

Those who wish to do so might very effectively cite other instances in which the techniques have bogged down pitifully, and they would be substantially accurate and correct. But let us pause and ask ourselves whether these failures vitiate the gains which have been achieved. Would it have been better that more powder kegs should have exploded? Many may regard this as mealy-mouthed, weak argumentation. But somehow or other, I can't seem to ignore the warning which was ignored

twenty years ago: "Nothing is lost by peace; all may be lost by war" — a warning which rhythmically recurs and recurs whenever I hear well-meaning hotheads impulsively blurt out, "Let's get it over with," or escapist from reality disgustedly crying, "Let's wash our hands of the whole crew."

This, in the space age? This, when the globe has shrunk to the size of an apple? This, when withering weapons rocketed and even massively retaliated can only make the fantasy and fiction of Nevil Shute a frightening fact?

Is this a simpering, puny appeal for strong, righteous men to espouse the collective craven mentality of a rabbit warren? To abandon and to decline to defend their sacred human rights and freedoms against imperialist aggression and Marxist infiltration? By no means! But it is an appeal to leave no stone unturned, to regard no sacrifice too great, to consider no demand on patience too exorbitant to build a juridical world order and an acceptable international organization whereby it may be implemented. It cannot be done in a day, or a year, and probably not even in a decade. But we must build for posterity and if we take only one step forward at a time — and no step backward — we still shall have made progress and, trivial though it be, it is worth all our sweat and tears — particularly when we contemplate the alternatives.

To the impetuous who feel that this is merciless procrastination, it would be opportune to recall that it took from 1776 to 1789 to mold thirteen small, former colonies along the eastern seaboard — for the most part a homogeneous, unilingual grouping — into the crude but solid beginning of a great national entity. How titanic is the task when we are dealing with the whole

world with its maddeningly multiple diversities?

Candidly, we have followed up till now a rather unusual methodology. In a sense, it resembles somewhat the technique followed by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologica*. We have been raising the objections before we have addressed ourselves to the subject.

To the mercurial subject "American Catholic Opinion and the United Nations" I might address myself immediately by using a venerable scholastic rejoinder, and simply say, "Nego suppositum," or "I deny the assumption." I have given long and serious thought to this topic and I cannot honestly discover any characteristically Catholic opinion in the field which would vary from the cross-sections of public opinion of the general American citizenry.

Despite the convictions harbored by some persons outside the Catholic fold regarding a legendary monolithic massiveness of opinion among Catholics, I find it rather difficult to get them to agree consistently on anything more than the Apostle's Creed. With reference to the United Nations, I think that they share the attitudes of their fellow citizens. Some like chocolate, and some prefer vanilla, and some don't give a rap for either.

Possibly it is the third group which should give us the greatest concern. I mean the uninformed and the apathetic. Whether we like it or whether we don't, the United Nations organization is a paramount factor, not only in world affairs today, but also in the individual life of the private citizen. Even if he looks at it only taxwise, the private citizen cannot afford to ignore it.

Now I know as well as you that the intri-

cate organization is far beyond the IQ of millions. Of them, and the specialized fields, I am not speaking. But I do have in mind the Catholic of average or better than average intelligence, who should at least have some informed opinion one way or the other on this international instrument. And still you know, as I do, plenty of persons in this bracket who think of it only as a big "palaver palace" on the Manhattan Riviera. I dislike cliches, but I find it hard to abandon the good old ostrich, even though ornithologists tell us he doesn't stick his head in the sand as the proverb claims. I regret to say it but there are too many ostriches among our Catholics apropos of foreign affairs in general and the United Nations in particular. They seem to feel that because they cannot see, they cannot be seen.

Among American Catholics as among other American citizens, there are the other two groups who have an attitude favorable or hostile to the United Nations and to the concept of an international community. I think that you will agree that in both groups there are men and women of basic integrity and sincerity, men and women who have given time and study to the subject and to the aspect which they support. Likewise, it is well to recall that in this controversial area, in an organization which is worldwide, everything is not completely black and white. There is a great deal of gray — that gray of which St. Augustine was no doubt thinking when he stressed "in dubiis libertas" (in doubtful things, liberty). Now because of this very fact, the remainder of the phrase of St. Augustine is particularly appreciable in this situation: "sed in omnibus caritas" (but in all things, charity). Particularly among Catholics of differing opin-

ions on this subject, there is no place for bitterness and acrimony nor for bilious name-calling or unfounded aspersions on loyalty, nor again, for the supercilious omniscience of the self-anointed prophet.

On the one hand, we have the extremist who regards the United Nations as some kind of a magic formula for immediate peace which has been distilled in a polyglot alembic and which cannot fail in dealing with any intricate international problem. He often forgets the warning about "artificial uniformity" or "mechanistic unitarism" which can produce nothing unless it be preceded by true adherence to principles of peace or to juridical order.

Both he and his adversary in the opposite school of thought do not realize that there actually is no such thing as the United Nations, but rather the member nations which make it up, with their pluralistic points of view. On the truly great issues which come before the United Nations there is rarely a unanimous vote. There are nearly always the "ayes," the "nays," and the abstentions. In other words, the United Nations merely mirrors the thinking of the world and in the world — thinking and tendencies which not infrequently have been changed and improved precisely because of the open debate to which the subjects have been submitted.

It would be naive to think that we are suggesting that power politics does not enter into the situation or that strategic blocs do not exist. On the other hand, it is equally true that there are entities which are really not committed and which can be and have been convinced because it has been possible to thrash things out. I believe that this too might be termed one of those negative facts of which we have already spoken.

One finds some American Catholics who brush the whole United Nations aside casually and imperturbably with the observation that it is merely a sounding board for communist propaganda. Who would dare deny that the Marxists have grasped the opportunity, oft times unashamedly, to broadcast their viewpoint or to justify their malfeasance? But one should recall too that the United Nations' debates and deliberations are a "two-way street," and that they become a sounding board too for the effective pronouncement of the principles of the Free World — statements which might never reach the statesmen of dozens of nations were it not for the meetings and discussions carried on in these international assemblages.

As a matter of fact, the very doctrine of the Church, which is unknown to scores of statesmen of regions not of the Christian tradition, has been proclaimed time and again by delegates. I think of a few very recent examples. Only the other day in a discussion of "apartheid," a representative of Ireland read into the record for the information of the large numbers of the Afro-Asian bloc the courageous statement of the hierarchy of South Africa regarding this burning question. Ten days ago, in the debate on the rights of the child, several delegates were able to place before the body the teachings of the natural law on the rights of the unborn child. And in the beginning of this month, I personally had the opportunity of speaking before representatives of eighty-four nations in the General Assembly hall, and of citing textually the principles and the position of the Holy See regarding the necessity of technical assistance to the underdeveloped regions of the world. From subsequent conversations I know personally

that representatives of many of those areas were completely unaware of the position and the sympathy and the understanding of Pope John, as enunciated in the letter of last July to the *Semaines Sociales Francaises* at Angers. So, when it comes to the charge of the sounding board, we really would do well to pause a trifle and realize that it is a "two-way street."

Then again, since today we are dealing with American Catholics, it is scarcely necessary, but it is opportune to recall that the United States admittedly enjoys a position of pre-eminence in the councils of the United Nations. We are now one of two great powers of the world with all the responsibility that goes with power. Let us face it realistically: In the space age our traditional policy of neutrality and isolation is a thing of the past. Every man and woman, and, therefore, every American Catholic, must share in the consequences of world happenings.

Consequently they must be keenly conscious of their civic responsibility which is part and parcel of our Catholic teaching. This civic responsibility is not limited to the town meeting. It reaches all the way to the federal government here in Washington. Because of the world position of the United States, it reaches now into the sanctum of the General Assembly, the councils, the committees in which the United States plays such a leading role. Have Catholic Americans sufficiently made known to their government their attitude regarding problems with which the United States delegation must deal in the United Nations? I think you will concur that they have not. Yet it is elemental democratic procedure that there be communication between the people and the government. This is a deci-

sive factor in determining the course of action on most of the important issues before the country.

It serves no purpose for any Americans, and particularly Catholic Americans, to sit back resignedly to decry and criticize the activity of the United Nations, or especially the position taken by the United States in the United Nations. We may not abandon what is our privilege and duty, that is, to make our opinion known on any question to the government. But it is equally important that the opinions expressed be not hasty, heated and haphazard. They must be based on information and understanding of the issues at stake. All over the nation there are other groups which are availing themselves of their privilege and informing themselves; groups which are constantly making known to the government and its deputies in the United Nations their viewpoints on critical questions. Catholic Americans may do no less. Hence, it is of the utmost necessity that they be informed and articulate.

Of course, some have felt justified in abstaining from active interest because they have found the United Nations to be irreligious. If there be noticeable an atmosphere of cool secularism, this may be due to the studied neutralism which is occasioned by the multiplicity of religious persuasions in the eighty-two member nations. Let us leave aside for the moment the nations which are officially atheist. Would or could Catholics join in the public prayer offered by a Buddhist monk or a Moslem imam? All nations from vast Brazil to tiny Luxembourg are present as members on an equal footing, and each is sensitive and jealous of its religious and cultural traditions. Let us hasten to say that the situation is regret-

table — aye, deplorable — but that it is one that must be faced in its practical implications.

But of course it has been pointed out to me when I have commented on this lamentable condition that non-Christians are not impressed by the charge often made by Catholic Americans that there is no mention of the name of God in the Charter of the United Nations nor in the Declaration of Human Rights. These gentlemen have hastened to remind me that neither is there any mention of the name of God in the Constitution of the United States nor in the American Bill of Rights, although Catholic Americans do not denounce or repudiate them. Does this make our American instruments godless? Does it make the United Nations documents acceptable because the American ones are similarly fashioned? Of course it doesn't! It merely proves that all four documents are deplorably defective in this regard. But I must confess that it is somewhat difficult to explain.

Nor is that the only thing which I find it difficult to explain. I do understand, humanly speaking, the resentments of some American Catholics who complain that they are opposed to paying taxes to support an organization which they personally feel has not produced proportionate results. Likewise, I can appreciate the position of those who clamor for Charter reform and who deplore the veto — which I do — though I must confess that I often wonder how many of them realize that the United States was also quite insistent on the veto at San Francisco in 1945. But at times it is difficult to explain to foreigners the amazing attitude of some Catholic Americans who readily espouse political isolationism in contrast with the sheer internationalism of their

compassion for the hungry, the naked, the homeless of any quarter of the globe — and not for any strategy of cold war, but purely because of the warmth of their Christian charity.

Baffling as are these paradoxical phenomena, I find most unintelligible the position of some Catholic Americans who, living in this air age which has annihilated distances and perforce brings us daily into contact with the most remote peoples, nevertheless shy away from the mere mention of the international community, as though it were incompatible with Catholic teaching or practice — as though it were possible or permissible to secede from the universal solidarity of the human race.

When we speak of the sense of the universal solidarity of the human race, we have not in mind any mere mechanically contrived unity of a super-organization. It is something deeper than that. It is something which springs not solely from the destruction of distances and differences, nor even from greater familiarity and intercourse with other peoples. It is rooted in human nature, in the natural law. It will rise to the surface and there it must be understood and guided in a systematic, a juridical fashion.

Pope Pius XI, in his inaugural encyclical, "Ubi Arcano," spoke of a "code of common laws . . . such as was possessed in the Middle Ages by that true society of nations which was the community of Christian peoples."² But that true society of nations passed when nationalism, both political and religious, first took over, to be followed by exaggerated militarism which in turn compounded the two into imperi-

alism. And yet, there has remained the nostalgic remembrance of the lost unity of the past.

All these natural factors, for the past seventy-five years especially, have been engendering a hazy, but definite, longing and groping towards a social, political and religious unity. Pope John unmistakably sensed it in the years which he spent on the shores of the Hellespont and in the City of Light in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe.

Indeed, the Church of Christ for years has watched this groping for spiritual and political unity with unfeigned concern and true maternal interest. She has wisely promoted the wider development of the recognition of the universal solidarity of the human race, as she has also approvingly regarded the establishment of some kind of international community for the practical implementation and realization of this sublime ideal.

All the modern Popes have repeatedly provided the nations with sage directions whereby they might discharge the obligations incumbent on them, to subordinate the claims of their nationalism to the needs of the human community and to promote the organization of these latter efforts.

Just sixty years ago, on April 11, 1899, Pope Leo XIII hailed the International Peace Conference being held at The Hague. In his discourse, "Rivedere qui oggi," the great Pontiff speaks of this gathering in the Netherlands as a ray of sunshine to brighten the end of the century. He begged Heaven to grant that this international assemblage — made up of men of varying religious persuasions — might be the first step leading to the experiment of resolving

² *Id.* at 347.

disputes among nations by means of purely moral and persuasive measures.

During the same year, 1899, Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, his Secretary of State, wrote to Count Mouraviev, Secretary of Foreign Affairs for Russia, lamenting the fact that there was lacking in the international consortium of nations a system of legal and moral means proper to determine and to make good the right of each. He urged on the Russian diplomat the establishment of an institution of arbitration, invested with authority, clothed with all the necessary moral prestige, and fortified with the indispensable moral guarantees of compliance and impartiality. Of these efforts was born the Permanent International Court of Arbitration of The Hague, one of the first modern steps toward the realization of an international community.

Even St. Pius X, who held himself aloof as much as possible from diplomacy, the better to concentrate on the direct spiritual apostolate to souls, in a rare instance wrote to Archbishop Falconio, Apostolic Delegate in the United States, in 1911 to praise the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on the occasion of its founding. It is noteworthy that St. Pius X, with his usual peasant sagacity, remarked that the foundation "might not immediately, or wholly, accomplish its purpose," but he praises it and the zeal of its founders. St. Pius did not expect immediate miracles nor did he regard the foundation as perfect — but he welcomed it as at least partially contributing to the solution of the problem of peace.

When St. Pius X died of a broken heart as war broke out in 1914, his successor, Benedict XV, repeated the proposals of Leo XIII for the institution of agencies of arbitration. He went further and proposed

a means of providing coercion to enforce juridical measures which may be enacted. Indeed, from the letter of Cardinal Gaspari, Secretary of State, to Mr. Lloyd George, it is clear that Benedict XV expected the nations to apply sanctions (general economic isolation, including boycott) against the state which would refuse to submit international questions to arbitration or to accept the decisions handed down in arbitration.

As the First World War raged on, the concept of the League of Nations came to the fore. On May 23, 1920, when hostilities had ended, Pope Benedict XV gave to the world his timely encyclical, "Pacem Dei." In this letter he wrote: "It is much to be desired that all states, Venerable Brethren, putting aside mutual suspicion, should unite in one league, or rather a sort of family of nations, calculated both to maintain their own independence and safeguard the order of human society."³ But even before that, in 1917, Pope Benedict XV, in his famous peace proposals, had suggested an international institution for *compulsory* arbitration.

The League of Nations, which the United States repudiated, went on for many years after Benedict XV himself had died in 1921. Whatever else may have been the defects of the League of Nations, certainly the absence of an informing, unifying spirit, fundamentally moral, has been recognized, even by its most enthusiastic supporters, as its greatest handicap. On the other hand, Catholic supporters of the League of Nations such as Eppstein and Gonzague de Reynolds and many others, have argued that the failure of Catholics to rally more warmly to its support was in no small measure the reason why the League lacked the

³ *Id.* at 290.

vivifying principle and acquired instead a laic and humanitarian ethic.

If we opposed or ignored or merely abstained from an organization which had good objectives, as Pope Benedict XV himself admitted it had — even though it were imperfect in many respects — we could hardly hope to work for its improvement or perfection; we could hardly be regarded as without responsibility for the League's inglorious demise in the late thirties. We Catholic Americans of today would do well to ponder this accusation which is not totally without foundation.

Shortly after he had ascended the Chair of Peter, Pope Pius XI in his encyclical "Studiorum Ducem," on the seventh centenary of St. Thomas Aquinas, insisted that in the teachings of St. Thomas there are provided the principles of a "true society of nations." Again in his Christmas allocution of 1930, the same Pius XI, sickened by some of the emotionalist appeals for peace in that day, based solely on fear and on revulsion against the filth and blood and lice of war, cried out: "The peace for which humanity longs is not to be identified with sentimental pacifism, confused, undiscerning and heedless of dangers. True peace is the work and fruit of justice, perfected by love."⁴

If the four first pontiffs of this century at various times and in different ways alluded to the need of creating and evolving juridical international institutions to guarantee the fulfillment of treaties and to preserve peace, Pope Pius XII, the great teacher, had scarcely taken in hand the tiller of the bark of Peter than he promulgated his masterful encyclical "Summi Pontificatus," in which

he expounded forcefully his favorite theme of the universal solidarity of the human race. In doing it, Pius XII laid the basis for an international community which, with characteristic prophetic foresight, he saw later coming into existence.

For thirteen and more years, from 1945 until he died in 1958, Pius XII never ceased to drive home the Church's teaching on an international community. In his Christmas Message of 1948, following the establishment of the United Nations, he said: "The Catholic doctrine on the State and civil society has always been based on the principle that in keeping with the will of God, the nations form together a community with a common aim and common duties. Even when the proclamation of this principle and its practical consequences gave rise to violent reactions, the Church denied her assent to the erroneous concept of an absolutely autonomous sovereignty divested of all social obligations."⁵

Five years later, in 1953, in addressing the Fifth Annual Congress of Italian Catholic Jurists, Pope Pius XII, who during a period of eight years had had the opportunity to observe and appraise the new United Nations, told the jurists: "The institution of a community of nations, which today has been partly realized but which is striving to be established and consolidated on a higher and more perfect level, is an ascent from the lower to the higher, that is, from a plurality of sovereign states to the greatest possible unity."⁶

Here we find Pius XII announcing his realistic acceptance of *the fact* of the United Nations, as a partial realization at least of

⁴ Allocution of Pius XI to the College of Cardinals, *Benedetto il Natale* (1930).

⁵ Koenig, *Pius XII and the U.N.*, 52 CATHOLIC MIND 143, 147 (1954).

⁶ *Ibid.*

the much desired international community. In 1948 he had expressed the hope that the United Nations, after eliminating the weaknesses stemming from its origin, which was, of necessity, a solidarity in war, would become "the full and faultless expression of this international solidarity for peace."

It is the purest kind of captious carping to distort this and similar statements of the great Pontiff as some Catholic Americans have done. They assert that neither here nor elsewhere did Pius XII even insinuate indirectly approval of the United Nations. They add that he merely expressed the hope that the United Nations would improve, as though one might hope for the expansion, strengthening or improvement of something which he regarded as fundamentally wrong or basically objectionable!

Almost as though to confirm the theory that the indifference or hostility of Catholics was partly responsible for the failure of the League of Nations, Pope Pius XII, in a discourse on "Catholics and International Life," declared that "Catholics are extraordinarily well equipped to collaborate in the creation of a climate without which a common action on the international plane can have neither substance nor prosperous growth."⁷ In the course of this same speech, he left no doubt as to what he meant about the responsibilities of Catholics in the matter of international life. The Pontiff declared: "Catholics are saddled with a great responsibility. They, above all . . . must realize that they are called upon to overcome every vestige of nationalistic narrowness, and to seek a general fraternal encounter of nation with nation."⁸

If I may, I would leave you with this thought of the responsibility of all Catho-

lics, and therefore of American Catholics, with reference to the international community and, in this moment in history, with reference to the United Nations. Whether they like it or whether they don't, it is a historical reality which they may not ignore, nor of which they may predicate magic formulae for true peace nor demand sudden miracles for lasting peace. Good Pope John, while he was the first observer of the Holy See at UNESCO in Paris, speaking of this specialized agency, cautioned us not to be precipitous or unreasonable. With his typical geniality and homespun wisdom, he said: "I like always to remind the fearful and the impatient that the work of the Hexameron in the Book of Genesis took six days to be completed and that there was a determined task for each day. We must learn to wait."

Catholic Americans have been bountifully blessed by God with the goods of the earth, which fact begets a concurrent responsibility to share them with the underprivileged and economically underdeveloped members of the international community. They have intelligently met and gloriously and generously satisfied this responsibility.

In God's providence these United States have achieved a tremendous power in world affairs and all citizens of this republic have a correlative responsibility to see that their country plays its proper role and plays it properly in the international community as it now exists; to correct its defects, to further its noble objective which is, after all, the achievement of true and lasting peace. Catholic Americans, then, who are members of a supra-national Church and are uniquely equipped, must shoulder this responsibility together with their fellow citizens.

⁷ POLLOCK, ed., *THE MIND OF PIUS XII* 81 (1955).

⁸ *Id.* at 82.