

1998

## Remarks on Religious Freedom at the Columbus School of Law, The Catholic University of America

Madeleine K. Albright

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.edu/lawreview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Madeleine K. Albright, *Remarks on Religious Freedom at the Columbus School of Law, The Catholic University of America*, 47 *Cath. U. L. Rev.* 361 (1998).

Available at: <https://scholarship.law.edu/lawreview/vol47/iss2/3>

This Address is brought to you for free and open access by CUA Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Catholic University Law Review by an authorized editor of CUA Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [edinger@law.edu](mailto:edinger@law.edu).

## CENTENNIAL INAUGURAL ADDRESS

### REMARKS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AT THE COLUMBUS SCHOOL OF LAW, THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

*Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright  
Centennial Inaugural Address, October 23, 1997*

Thank you very much, Dean Dobranski, for that introduction. And President Larson, thank you very much for that present. I have to open the Marine Marathon this weekend, and now I know what I can wear.

Faculty, students, guests and friends, good afternoon. It's a pleasure to join with you in observing the centennial of Catholic University's Columbus School of Law. During the past few years, it seems we have celebrated the 50th anniversary of everything from D-Day to the founding of the United Nations to the Marshall Plan. So it's nice to know that there's something—besides myself—that is more than fifty years old.

It is also nice to know that in a year when the fighting Irish are having their troubles—the fighting Cardinals are 7-0.

Obviously, much has changed since the first half dozen students took their initial classes here. In 1897, gold had just been discovered in the Yukon. The first subway in the United States was being completed in Boston. William McKinley was the President. And the United States Secretary of State had a beard.

It was also a time when the prevailing mood in our country and around the world was one of anticipation and hope. Our grandparents and their parents looked out upon a world being brought closer together by such amazing inventions as the motor car, the telephone and the electric light.

Diplomats gathered at the Hague were expanding the scope of international humanitarian law. And editorial writers were looking ahead to the new century and predicting an era of unprecedented peace and good will.

There followed two world wars, several attempted genocides, the Holocaust, and the bloodiest hundred years in human history.

Today, we, too, are about to begin a new century. We, too, live in a hopeful era of relative peace and startling technological change. And as we look to the future, we know that we, too, will be tested by the clash between what is the best and worst in human character; between our

most selfish and aggressive instincts and what Abraham Lincoln referred to as the better angels of our nature.

This contest will be engaged on many fronts, and it will have many elements. Today, I'd like to focus on one that has been increasingly in the news lately and that I believe will continue to play a significant role in U.S. foreign policy and in the affairs of the world. That is the ceaseless quest for religious freedom and tolerance.

In the United States, we believe in the separation of church and state. Our Constitution reflects the fear of religious persecution that prompted many in the 17th and 18th centuries to set sail for American shores. But this principle has never blinded us to religion's impact on secular events, whether for the worse, as when intolerance contributes to conflict and strife; or for the better, as when faith serves as a source of moral inspiration and healing.

There are many examples of the latter in recent years, thanks to leaders of many faiths from many lands, including the efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on behalf of the environment and inter-ethnic understanding; the eloquence of Archbishop Tutu in helping to consign apartheid to the dustbin of history; the inspiring and culturally-transcending ministry of Mother Teresa; and most dramatically, the historic contributions made by Pope John Paul II to the cause of freedom.

As a native of Central Europe, and as a professor who has lectured on the region, I will never forget the impact of the Pope's visit to his native Poland while the nation was still behind the Iron Curtain and under martial law. Those visits were arranged by the church, and not the state. And the outpouring of enthusiasm astonished the government, which had assumed that years of dictatorship had caused religious faith to erode. They were wrong; for rarely has a message so important found such a receptive audience. And never has a people been made aware so suddenly of their own inner feelings and collective strength.

His Holiness argued that if people are to fulfill their responsibility to live according to moral principles, they must first have the right and ability to do so. In this spirit, he spoke with carefully chosen words of the need for solidarity with workers and among all human beings. In this spirit, he challenged the dogmas of the Communist system, which denied to millions the right to speak freely and to participate in shaping the social and political systems of their societies. In this spirit, he challenged the artificial division that Stalin had imposed by reasserting the fundamental unity of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. And in this way, he helped unleash a tidal wave of intellectual renewal and personal cour-

age that helped bring down the Berlin Wall and transform the face of the world.

Now as we strive to shape this new era, it is an important part of American policy to promote greater freedom of religion and to encourage reconciliation among religious groups. We take this stand because it is consistent with our values, and because it is one of the reasons people around the world have chosen at critical times in this century to stand with us. We believe that nations are stronger, and the lives of their people richer, when citizens have the freedom to choose, proclaim and exercise their religious identity.

We have also learned that the denial of religious freedom or threats to it can cause fear, flight, fighting and even all-out war. So we have developed a focus in our policy on regions where religious divisions have combined with other factors to engender violence or endanger peace. To implement our policy, we have publicly identified the promotion of religious freedom as a foreign policy priority.

I have instructed U.S. diplomats to provide frequent and thorough reports on the status of religious freedom in the countries to which they are accredited. Second, we have intensified the spotlight given to religious freedom in the reports we issue annually on human rights practices around the world. Third, we are modifying our procedures for reviewing requests for political asylum to ensure that those fleeing religious persecution are treated fairly. Fourth, we promote religious freedom through our foreign broadcasting, by sponsoring programs and exchanges that foster understanding, and through our work in international organizations such as the UN Human Rights Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Fifth, we often raise issues related to religious freedom with foreign governments and their representatives.

That was the case, for example, earlier this year when I discussed restrictions on religious activity in Vietnam and, more recently, when President Clinton raised with President Yeltsin our serious concerns about Russia's new law on religion.

Next week, during the US-China summit, we will be stressing to President Jiang Zemin the importance of respecting the religious heritage of the people of Tibet and of ensuring that China's growing Christian community is allowed to worship freely, without harassment or intimidation.

Finally, we reinforced our commitment to religious tolerance last winter when my predecessor, Warren Christopher, established an Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. The Committee includes distinguished scholars, activists and religious leaders representing the major

spiritual traditions in the United States. Its purpose is to help direct attention to the problem of religious persecution abroad and to provide advice on how to achieve reconciliation in areas now sundered by religious enmity. In February, I chaired the first meeting of the Committee and I look forward to its recommendations and observations later this year.

As we proceed with our efforts to promote religious freedom, we should be mindful of one danger, which is the possibility that—as we pursue the right goal—we may choose the wrong means. For example, legislation has been introduced in Congress that would create a White House Office for Religious Persecution Monitoring that would automatically impose sanctions against countries where religious freedoms are not fully observed.

Although well-intentioned, this bill would create an artificial hierarchy among human rights with the right to be free from torture and murder shoved along with others into second place. It would also establish a new and unneeded bureaucracy and deprive U.S. officials of the flexibility required to protect the overall foreign policy interests of the United States.

I have said many times—for I believe it in my heart and have experienced it in my life—that the United States is the greatest and most generous nation on the face of the Earth. But even the most patriotic among us must admit that neither morality, nor religious freedom, nor respect for human rights were invented here—nor are they perfectly practiced here.

It is in our interest, and it is essential to our own identity, for America to promote religious freedom and human rights. But if we are to be effective in defending the values we cherish, we must also take into account the perspectives and values of others. We must recognize that our relations with the world are not fully encompassed by any single issue or set of issues. And we must do all we can to ensure that the world's attention is focused on the principles we embrace, not diverted by the methods we use.

Perhaps the clearest intersection between American interests and the principle of religious tolerance occurs in regions where ethnic and religious differences contribute to division and the risk of violence. Here, the United States works to persuade parties of their mutual stake in learning to get along and their mutual responsibility for doing so. For example, President Clinton has been personally involved in encouraging multi-party talks aimed at achieving a durable settlement to the dispute in Northern Ireland.

Those talks resumed recently, following a cease-fire declaration by the IRA, which shares with Unionist paramilitary groups the responsibility for maintaining a climate of nonviolence. We are very proud of the role that former Senator George Mitchell has played in establishing the framework for discussion. And we will continue to support ecumenical initiatives aimed at bridging differences between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and at addressing long-standing problems of economic inequity and discrimination.

In Bosnia, we are working to promote reconciliation in a land that has literally been torn apart by conflict among three communities of differing ethnicity and religious faith. To that end, we have reinvigorated our commitment to the implementation of the Dayton peace accords. And although many serious obstacles remain, we have made significant progress in recent months.

For example, municipal elections have been held; and it is clear from the results that many Bosnians do not want, and will not accept, a country permanently frozen along ethnic lines. They want to go home and, in fact, the return of refugees and displaced persons has increased.

In addition, the cause of justice received a boost earlier this month when ten persons indicted for war crimes surrendered to the Tribunal in the Hague. The cause of security has benefited from the destruction of thousands of heavy weapons. The cause of truth has been served by a substantial increase in independent television and radio broadcasting. The cause of prosperity is gaining ground in those communities that are implementing the Dayton accords. And the goal of reconciliation is being advanced by the emergence of a new leader of the Bosnian Serbs, who appears to understand that implementing Dayton is the key to a decent future for her people.

Many Americans, when they think of Sarajevo, may remember the Olympics held there in 1984. But the Sarajevo of that time was also the ecumenical city—host to mosques, churches—both Catholic and Orthodox, and synagogues, as well. So when cynics suggest that the people of Bosnia cannot live together, I can only say but they did, they have, they must and they will again.

In building peace, momentum matters. So I was encouraged by the Pope's visit in April to Sarajevo where he delivered a passionate plea for reconciliation and inter-ethnic healing. I was pleased by the decision in June of the leaders of the faith communities in Bosnia to create a joint council to promote respect for human rights and to issue a Statement of Shared Moral Commitment. And I welcome the address earlier this month by the new Archbishop of Zagreb, who expressed warmth to-

wards the leaders of other faiths in his country and cited the need for—and I quote—“the people of spirit who will bring understanding, negotiations and peace to an excessively radicalized and tense public life.”

Community and religious leaders play a vital role in Bosnia and throughout the Balkans; for the ethnic hatred that splintered that region was not a natural phenomenon. It was not something in the water or a virus carried through the air. Rather, it was injected into the informational bloodstream; it was taught, published, broadcast, and yes, even preached over and over again. And the fears aroused were manipulated by ruthless leaders for the purpose of enhancing their own position, power, and wealth.

The physical and psychological wounds that resulted from the devastation of Bosnia were deep and will take time and treatment to heal. The United States has made a commitment, which we should keep, to assist and persist in that healing process.

There are some who see in the rivalries that exist in the Balkans and elsewhere—in the Middle East, the Gulf, Africa and Asia—the potential for a vast clash of civilizations, in which differences not only of spiritual tradition but of culture, history and ideology divide the world into bitter contending camps. The United States has a different view.

We are the defender of no one faith, but the respecter of all and of the right of all to proclaim and exercise faith. We are friends with nations in which the predominant religion is Buddhist, and others where it is Christian or Hindu or Islamic or Jewish. We are, ourselves, a nation of all these faiths and more, and of those without religious faith and of those within whom such faith and doubt engage in constant struggle.

In our policy towards other nations, we do not act or judge on the basis of religion or cultural tradition, but on behavior, on compliance with international norms. And when those norms are not observed, we express our opposition to the acts in question, not to the religion of those involved.

For this reason, we reject stereotypes; for we know that actions in violation of international standards, including extremist violence and terror, are not the province of any particular religion, culture or part of the world.

In recent years, we have seen bloody acts of terrorism committed by Hindu separatists in Sri Lanka and Kurdish separatists in Turkey. We have seen a Jewish man who had been raised in the United States murder 29 Arabs while they were at prayer in a Hebron mosque. We have seen a Japanese cult release poison gas in the Tokyo subway. We have seen Islamic suicide bombers destroy the lives of people riding on buses

or shopping in the streets of Jerusalem. We have seen extremists engaged in a grisly campaign of terror against their co-religionists in Algeria. And we have heard Serbian leaders justify the campaign of ethnic cleansing and mass rape inflicted upon Muslims in Bosnia as a defense, in their words, of "Christian Europe."

Clearly, the central conflict in the world today is not between the adherents of one religion or culture and another. Rather it is between those of all cultures and faiths who believe in law, want peace and embrace tolerance and those driven, whether by ambition, desperation or hate to commit acts of aggression and terror.

The great divide now is not between east and west or north and south, but between those imprisoned by history and those determined to shape history.

Almost half a century ago, the nations of the world enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the principle that every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. To those who argue that the Universal Declaration reflects western values alone, I would point to the first Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference held in Indonesia more than four decades ago. There, the representatives of 29 nations from China to Saudi Arabia and from Sudan and Libya to Iran and Iraq cited the Universal Declaration as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations." And countries on every continent reaffirmed the Declaration just four years ago at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights.

Today, our great opportunity in the aftermath of Cold War and the divisions is to bring the world closer together around shared principles of democracy, open markets, law, human rights and a commitment to peace.

For almost as many years as I have been alive, the United States has played the leading role within the international system; not as sole arbiter of right and wrong, for that is a responsibility widely shared, but as pathfinder—as the nation able to show the way when others cannot.

Now we have reached a point in history when no nation need be left out of the global system, and every nation that seeks to participate and is willing to do all it can to aid itself will have our help in finding the right path.

In that effort, religious freedom and tolerance are among the great principles we strive to defend. By so doing, we maintain the vigor of our own freedoms; we serve our interest in a world where civilizations cooperate and communicate instead of clash and collide; and we honor not

one, but all of the great spiritual traditions that lend meaning to our time here on Earth.

By teaching the rule of law and broadening the horizons of a new generation of leaders, this great school of law and this fine Catholic University are contributing to the goals of freedom and tolerance upon which our future depends. For that, I congratulate you. I wish you another 100 years, at least, of prosperity and progress. And for the invitation to speak today, I thank you very much.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Dec. 10, 1948, G.A. Res. 217 A(III), U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948).

S. 772, 105th Cong. (1997).

H.R. 2431, 105th Cong. (1997).

H.R. 1685, 105th Cong. (1997).