

**Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright
Virginia Theological Seminary
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Thank you, Reverend Battle and Ed Hall, for your kind words and good evening to you all.

I especially want to thank Ed for inviting me.

I knew Mr. Hall in what the closet Buddhists among you might think of as an earlier incarnation.

He was chief of staff to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations -- the kind of job that would drive anyone to a seminary.

It is good for us that he chose VTS.

This is his kind of place -- and also mine.

The seminary's outlook is global.

It combines pride in tradition with a focus on the future.

And it's been around for almost two hundred years--which is gratifying because it makes me feel like a spring chicken.

More important even than that, VTS matters because the world in the 21st century needs so much more of what you are teaching.

In every sense of the concept, people from around the globe must learn to live in communion with one another.

To paraphrase William Sloane Coffin, the world is too small for petty divisions and hate.

Together, we must make room for better options.

With this need in mind, I will offer tonight some observations from my book, *The Mighty and the Almighty*.

Among other topics, the book touches on ethics and foreign policy, the war in Iraq and the need for inter-religious understanding.

As you can imagine, there is nothing the least bit controversial about it -- though chapter six is entitled "The Devil and Madeleine Albright."

The book was published in May, but this past summer I was in Europe where the overseas translations were being released.

While there, I gave a number of interviews and posed for photos.

Among the people I encountered was a Dutch photographer who had brought with him a stuffed bird that he referred to as a "peace pigeon."

I thought perhaps he meant a dove, but looking closely, I had to agree -- it was unmistakably a pigeon.

The photographer asked me to hold the bird while he moved about trying different angles.

After several minutes, I began to have trouble keeping a straight face.

This made the photographer very mad and he said, "Madam Secretary, you cannot smile; you must be serious; this is a serious pigeon."

I fear that from now on, whenever I am tempted to smile at the wrong time, I will think "the pigeon is serious" and all will be lost.

Birds aside, my memoir -- which was published in 2003--was easier for me to explain than this book because the memoir was primarily about me -- a subject I know better than anybody else.

I do not know more about religion than anybody else.

I am neither a theologian, nor quite frankly, well-enough behaved to lecture others about the nature of God.

But I do know something about world affairs and it is from a policymaker's perspective that I present my arguments.

I should note from the start that people in my generation were taught that it was best to keep religion as separate as possible from foreign policy.

But many of the crises we face today have a religious component that cannot be split off.

Especially after 9/11, we have to find ways to use religion to bring people together rather than divide them.

The question is how to do this.

What encourages me is that, for all the differences of doctrine, the underlying values of most religions are similar – the golden rule has roots in almost every culture.

What worries me, as one who believes in the importance of American leadership, is that U.S. foreign policy has become profoundly unpopular around the globe – and one reason is the way we think and talk about religion.

In my book, I try to explain how we might dig ourselves out of the hole we are in.

That process starts with introspection.

Ever since 9/11, President Bush has said – to his credit -- that we are at war with terrorism and not with Islam.

But he has also said that our nation has a responsibility to history to “rid the world of evil” – a tough job for mortals to do.

He has echoed the words of Jesus in saying to other countries, “You are either with us or against us.”

When Saddam Hussein was captured, he said that America was delivering God’s gift of freedom to the Iraqi people.

Even before his election, he told friends that, “I believe God wants me to be president.”

And in his second inaugural address, he said that America has a calling from beyond the stars “to proclaim liberty throughout the world and to all the inhabitants thereof.”

In the Bible, God gave the same job, in the same words, to Moses.

The problem with this approach is not that it expresses leadership in moral terms, because that is often essential.

The problem is that it comes close to equating the policies of the United States with the will of God.

That plays right into the hands of al-Qaeda.

If we are smart, we should be able to unite the world in opposition to the murder of innocent people.

But we will never unite the world around the idea that to oppose America is to pick a fight with God.

In the United States, we have grown accustomed to hearing our confrontation with terror described as a battle between evil and good.

But is that really the case?

We know what the terrorists are – or at least we think we do – but what are we?

No matter how well-intentioned we might be, our motives are often impure, our planning imperfect, our information incomplete and our actions marred by errors of omission and commission.

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that when a stranger addressed Jesus as “Good Master,” he replied, “Why do you call me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.”

So in fighting terror we might more accurately refer to a confrontation between evil and “pretty good,” or between evil and “not bad,” or between evil and “doing the best we can.”

We can make no claims to moral purity.

As former Secretary of State Dean Acheson remarked, “Good and evil can and do exist concurrently in the whole realm of human life. They exist within every individual, within every nation and within every human group.”

This truth should remind us that the world is more complicated than we might learn on the first day of Sunday school.

Consider for example the current situation in Iraq and the Middle East.

An Iraqi engineer, a Palestinian schoolteacher, an Israeli farmer, a Lebanese businessperson, and an American soldier may have perceptions of right and wrong that are utterly different but equally as sincere and understandable given the differences in where they live and what they have experienced.

To acknowledge this is not to fall into the trap of moral relativism, as the self-righteous might suggest.

To acknowledge this is the first step toward a coherent diplomatic approach to the Middle East.

The struggles in that region are not simply between good and evil--for the truth is that all sides, including the United States, have made mistakes.

The real challenge is to identify the arrangements that will enable people who have been killing each other for generations instead to live together in peace.

This quest is not helped by moral one-upsmanship; it depends instead on the determined pursuit of moral results.

To accomplish that, we must recognize that there can be no decisive military solution to any of the actual or potential conflicts in the region - not in Iraq, not between Israel and her neighbors, and not between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

The real choice in every case isn't between victory and defeat, but between movement toward reconciliation and a retreat into endless strife, between a future in which children can play without fear, and one where Jewish and Arab children alike draw pictures of coffins.

Compromise is essential, but for some unthinkable.

There are elements within Islam, Christianity and Judaism alike who believe that wars in the Middle East have been foretold by scripture and that the decisive battle between good and evil will take place in that region.

This isn't a point I am qualified to argue, but I do know this: Armageddon is not a foreign policy.

Those who believe God is directing events might begin by obeying God's commandments instead of ignoring them.

Because there is nothing pre-ordained about murder and mayhem in the Middle East.

To seize the sword instead of the olive branch--that is a choice.

To teach children to hate--is a choice.

To glorify murderers as martyrs--is a choice.

To dehumanize and disrespect the dignity of others--is a choice.

These are all choices, and what people have the capacity to choose, they have the ability to change.

We cannot make choices for those who live in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.

But we can try to persuade all sides that there can be no progress for any side through violence.

A two-state solution will never be accepted by everyone, but it has already been accepted broadly enough to provide a basis for moving toward peace.

That will not happen by accident, nor by waiting for thunderbolts from above.

It will demand sophisticated and hard-headed diplomatic engagement on the part of all concerned, including the United States.

And it will require that the forces of moderation throughout the region do more to support each other, so that extremists are easier to isolate and indiscriminate killing is seen as the crime that it is, not as a sign of heroism, holiness or strength.

If U.S. leaders are to recapture the respect they have lost, we must do all we can to turn swords into ploughshares in the Middle East.

We must make the most of a disastrous decision to invade Iraq – a decision that combined in equal measure absolute moral certainty and astonishing ignorance of history and culture.

Above all, we must fight the evil of terror without forgetting that terror is not the world's only evil.

As America's secretary of state, I was privileged to represent my country in nations across the globe.

I had many meetings with high officials in fancy offices.

But these were not the meetings I remember the most.

The people I will not forget are those I encountered in refugee camps and rehabilitation centers, in health clinics and safe havens for trafficked women and girls.

These are the places where human character undergoes its toughest tests and where most people live on less money each day than we spend for a cup of coffee.

Among those I visited were women in Africa infected with HIV/AIDS.

Because of the infection, they were shunned by their families.

Other women refused to be tested to avoid being shunned while many of the men refused to believe anything they were told about the disease or how it could be prevented.

I held in my arms the children of such parents; children born with HIV and already dying from it.

Some say the struggle against this disease is hopeless, but it is not.

For I also saw health care workers fighting to stop the disease through truth-telling campaigns that were unafraid to shock, and to ensure that contraceptives were both available and affordable.

We know that such efforts make a difference for they have already reduced infection rates and saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

While in office, I visited with children in Sierra Leone who had lost limbs in that country's bloody civil war.

Some of the children were too young even to know what they were missing.

I remember especially a little girl named Mamuna who wore a red jumper and who – while we talked--used her one arm to play with a toy car.

Mamuna was three years old.

I could not help but ask how anyone could have used a machete against that girl.

After all, whom did she threaten?

Whose enemy was she?

Mamuna was not alone in the camp where we met.

There were many others, of all ages, waiting for prosthetics to replace the limbs they had lost.

If there was self-pity in that camp; I did not see it.

If there was anger and bitterness; I did not feel it.

What I saw instead were teams of dedicated doctors and volunteers – animated by religious faith--doing all they could to celebrate the gift of life.

I also visited clinics and talked to families in impoverished regions from Haiti and Honduras to Thailand and Bangladesh.

I saw people who lived a dozen to a room, or half a dozen to a cardboard box; people struggling to survive in crowded neighborhoods where water is consumed from puddles not bottles and nothing grows except the appetites of small children.

There are those among us who romanticize poverty; others just try not to think about it.

But make no mistake, extreme poverty is a jail in which all too many of our fellow human beings are sentenced for life.

Helping them escape is not simple, but we have learned that progress can be made through a combination of giving more, teaching more, expecting more, empowering women and developing more equitable rules for labor, investment and trade.

During my years in office, I was often told that such issues were of concern only to do-gooders -- and not relevant to the more important challenges of national security and geopolitical chess.

After all, most of the poor and sick are far away and out of sight; they do not in any case buy our products, supply our oil, or threaten us with their weapons.

Perhaps this explains why America ranks next to last among the industrialized nations in the percentage of wealth shared with the developing world.

This record of neglect is shameful, and also dangerous.

For the truth is that our country cannot long survive as an island of prosperity in a sea of misery.

We cannot be safe if the world around us has grown desperate.

We cannot have peace of mind if our neighbors lack even a piece of bread.

If the United States is to mobilize the world against the dangers that most threaten us; we must mobilize our own assets to defeat the dangers that most threaten the world's majority; we must truly confront the axis of evil—poverty, ignorance and disease.

I have heard it said that the globe is divided between us and them.

I was taught differently – to believe there is only one category, in which we all have a place, a category sometimes referred to as “all creatures here below.”

As I mentioned earlier, I was raised a Roman Catholic, though I became an Episcopalian upon marriage.

I later found out that my family's heritage was Jewish.

If, as a child, I had been sent to temple instead of to church, I would have grown to adulthood with a different group identity.

I was born overseas.

If not for the Cold War, my family would have had no cause to emigrate to the United States and I would never have become an American.

Nature allows us to choose neither our parents nor our place of birth, narrowing from the outset the groups to which we belong.

It is true that some of us will weigh competing philosophies and convert from one religion to another.

Some of us may find reason to shift our allegiance from one country to the next.

But more often, we remain within the same general categories we dropped into at birth or, as in my case, where events beyond our control have placed us.

That is not much of an accomplishment.

It is fine to be proud of the groups with which we identify.

But it should not be that hard for us to imagine ourselves in the shoes of somebody else.

Benjamin Franklin once wrote that the “most acceptable service to God is doing good to man.”

We cannot, I suppose, be certain of that, but we can at least presume that we have been given our consciences for a reason.

That is why we each must struggle to separate right from wrong and to do all we can to conquer the hate outside us while preventing its growth within us.

It is why we must not hesitate to stand up for freedom and respect for others in our own country and across the globe.

And it is why we should embrace a simple but basic principle, which is that every individual counts.

Respect for the dignity of every human being is the place where religious faith and faith in political liberty have their closest connection.

A philosophy that begins with that principle has a huge advantage when matched against the propaganda of those who see God’s commandment as “Thou shalt kill.”

It challenges the legitimacy of dictators and tyrants who claim virtual divinity for themselves.

It provides a basis for unity across every border.

It enables us to gain from the contributions of all people.

And it is in keeping with the fundamental basis of our kinship with one another, that each of us was made in the image of God.

Before closing, I would like to read one passage from my book, because I think it is particularly appropriate for this audience:

Ours is a country of abundant resources, momentous accomplishments and unique capabilities. We have a responsibility to lead, but as we fulfill that obligation we should bear in mind the distinction pointed out by John Adams. Liberty, at least in the sense of free will, is God's gift, not ours; it is also morally neutral. It may be used for any purpose, whether good or ill. Democracy, by contrast, is a human creation; its purpose is to see that liberty is directed into channels that respect the rights of all. As the world's most powerful democracy, America should help others who desire help to establish and strengthen free institutions. But, in so doing, we should remember that promoting democracy is a policy not a mission, and policies must be tested on the hard ground of diplomacy, practical politics and respect for international norms. Our cause will not be helped if we are so sure of our rightness that we forget our propensity, as humans, to make mistakes. Though America may be exceptional, we cannot demand that exceptions be made for us. We are not above the law, nor do we have a divine calling to spread democracy any more than we have a national mission to spread Christianity. We have, in short, the right to ask—but never simply to insist or blithely assume—that God Bless America.

Thank you very much and now I would be pleased to respond to any questions you might have.