

Seeing the Image of God in Others: Key to the Transformation of Conflicts

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

September 11th, 2001, the terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, with yet another attack foiled over the Pennsylvania countryside but doubtless intended to shock us just as much, marked a watershed in our American lives. We have behaved, in many ways, differently since then, conscious of an enemy whose threatening character is constantly borne in upon us, and reacting against this perceived peril. Perhaps in some ways this differs less from the way we behaved before the Cold War broke, when the menace we had so long felt from the Communist bloc so suddenly lifted, and with it the dread of nuclear warfare and the Mutually Assured Destruction – MAD – which it promised. We had a decade of relief, a brief blossoming of hopes for a peaceful world. It was punctuated of course by the Gulf War and marred by tragedies in the Balkans and Ruanda, but we saw progress in South Africa, in Ireland, and seemingly in the Middle East. 9/11 put an abrupt end to that.

All of us have vivid recollections of that day. I spent that evening sitting on a panel at a local TV station, NECN, discussing the event. Some things had become clear to me even over that day; first, of course, that we could not allow such things. Terrorism, which until then had caused its measure of death and destruction, mercifully, on a much smaller scale than the terrible wars of the 20th century, had now graduated to a scale of massive carnage. We could do little more to the nineteen individuals who had carried out this outrage at the cost of their own lives, but others, who as persons or organizations or even states had supported and encouraged their action, had to be held accountable. Beyond them, though, there existed a sea of anger at the United States and its policies on the part of people who had driven no planes into our towers. How were we to respond to them?

This constituted an unusual situation for the United States. For most of our history we have enjoyed, deservedly or sometimes undeservedly, a startlingly high

reputation with the peoples of the world, as beacon of justice, of liberty, of all the good things that others wished for. We happen not to be seen so in our own time, but instead as agents of much injustice, of the deprivation of freedom, of the monopolization of the goods of the earth, of indifference to the destruction of the planetary environment, of callousness to people's suffering in vast areas of the world. When I spoke of this on that program on the night of 9/11, another member of the panel, a Professor, responded angrily that if people thought so about us, we must make them fear us. Without stopping to think I snapped back at him that I thought the nineteen individuals who had hijacked those planes that day had been trying to do precisely that to us, and I asked: did he want to join them? Not pleased with that answer, this man who had unexpectedly become my adversary replied: we had been taught all these years that we should deal with such animosities by diplomacy, and look where it had got us. Still, I'm afraid, not tempering my own answer with enough respect for him, I retorted: "Well, our diplomacy must not have been very good."

And this is the point. If we, as persons or as a nation, do not attend to the grievances of those who act against us and respond to their concerns, we have failed at the most fundamental level of human interaction. It is for this reason that I chose my theme for this evening: respect for the dignity of the other, as the measure of any hope we may have for the transformation of our conflicts.

Phrasing that in terms of recognizing in the other the image of God acknowledges the common heritage of the three Abrahamic religions which unite in basing the dignity of all human persons on their creation in the image of God. It has always impressed me that the most prominent human rights organization in Israel takes the name *B'Tselem*, "in the image," from the biblical phrase *b'tselem elohim*, "in the image of God." This yields a basis for human rights broader than the purely individualist one that we have inherited from the 18th century Enlightenment.

Working with people in seemingly endless conflicts, trying to open up for them, by dint of interpreting their situation, some options to heal their relations, one does get a

constant reminder of one's own helplessness and inadequacy. But I shall be speaking here out of my own experience, which has been with peoples in conflict for a very long time. It has always seemed best to me to do this out of the limelight, to deal with the conflicting parties themselves rather than with a public, to publish books or articles only very occasionally. My writing has been mostly direct correspondence with the parties to conflict. But here is the experience.

I found myself drawn in 1972 to the conflict in Northern Ireland. I was then a doctoral student at Union Theological Seminary in New York, studying ecumenical theology in the heyday of its popularity right after the Second Vatican Council. Northern Ireland had come to look like the 17th century with its struggle between Catholics and Protestants, at a time when I had learned that Protestants were my fellows in Christian faith. Some things had prepared me to walk into this: marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, deep opposition to the war in Vietnam, some years of relating closely to the Rastafarian community in Jamaica at a time when they were scapegoats for anything that went wrong in the island. For motivation, here I was, an ordained Catholic priest. There is no other activity I more enjoy than to say Mass. I stand at the altar and say, in the name of Christ, "This is my body, which shall be given up for you." I could not see others, who are body of Christ, Protestant and Catholic, exposed to peril, and not be there with them.

So I went to Northern Ireland in the company of other American theology students, Catholic and Protestant. That we were together, and less threatening to people there because we came from outside their conflict, made it easier to meet people from all parts of both communities, including the armed militant groups of both sides as well as clergy, politicians and neighborhood people. I made a supposition about the militants, Republican and Loyalist, those who were classified as the "men of violence," or terrorists, that I was not dealing here with psychopaths, but with people who had put their own lives at risk out of service to their own communities. I could disagree with their judgment that they had no other option than violence, but had to treat them with respect.

What did I learn from this? The most basic lesson of all was that, in order to be friend of one side in a conflict, one need not become enemy to the other, but can be the partisan of the peace, a peace that will not cover over the wrongs either side has suffered. For the outsider to become the partisan of either side in such a conflict is to become excess baggage. There are plenty of partisans there already, and it is not the outsider's conflict. It was my experience that, in every meeting with the Loyalist leadership, the conversation began with their admission that they had done terrible things, and wanted to find another course. With the IRA it was different. They saw themselves as soldiers, and wanted to be assured that they were fighting the just war. I could never concede this to them until, by the time of their cease-fires, so many years later, they had committed themselves to building an Ireland in which the Protestants, too, could live and be themselves.

My own relation to the Northern Irish, developing in ways I could not walk away from, kept me there for the next nine years, living in London but spending a week to two weeks of every month for all those years in Belfast, and I have never in fact quit that relation to Northern Ireland in all the thirty six years since. When my theology student partners went home after a summer, as I had expected to do myself, I became associated with a most interesting man, an Austrian Jewish Holocaust survivor, Richard Hauser, twenty years my senior, who had been deeply involved for years in the very things that most concerned me. Richard had married Hephzibah Menuhim, the pianist sister to violinist Yehudi Menuhin. Hephzibah traveled regularly on concert tours with Yehudi, but treated her music as her recreation and her work as what she did with Richard and myself, intervening in conflict situations and social crises. We made a strange trio, and working with them introduced me into many other conflicts: with both Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, as well as with Lebanon and the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey; with the emergence of former colonies in Africa, Angola and Mozambique from Portuguese suzerainty, with Rhodesia becoming Zimbabwe, and the liberation of South Africa; with India as it passed through the emergency period under Mrs. Indira Gandhi, with East Timor suffering Indonesian conquest; with the struggles of dissidents in the

Soviet Union. And we were involved, always, with prison reform, with schools, with the elderly and with battered women and children.

My first intuition with the militants of Northern Ireland eventually proved itself, as these movements and organizations, the very ones most involved in the conflict, were themselves the ones that took the major initiatives toward the peace. I had had the experience for some six weeks during the hunger strike in the prison in 1981, of mediating between the IRA's Army Council and Britain's Northern Ireland Office. Part of my recommendation at that time had been that it be made possible for the prisoners to use the prison as a place to plan the peace. In later years, until the Maze Prison, Long Kesh, was emptied and torn down, I spent much time in its H-Blocks, conversing with prisoners from both sides in sessions that we dignified with the name of "seminars," about a future of peace.

Decisions had to be made, of course, by the leadership of each organization outside the prison, but the thinking was done there in the cell-blocks. People on either side came to the recognition that neither would ever have a satisfactory life in Ireland unless they learned to accommodate the other side. Accommodation sounds a very meager form of reconciliation, but it had vital importance. The mantra of my own conversations in the prison was that both sides needed to become the guarantors of one another's difference. It is from such thoughts as these that there came the cease-fires of 1994 and the process of negotiation that has led to the actual establishment of a functioning power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. The long delay resulted from the fact that those who regarded themselves as the righteous, who had never taken to the gun, were so slow to learn that the name of the game was now accommodation, but instead continued looking for victory over the other side.

One expects church to have been a factor in all this. In Ireland, the various churches were rather disappointing, and the protagonists, those who were engaged in creating the peace in their organizations and in the prison, had in many cases become thoroughly disillusioned with church. But it was their ingrained disposition of readiness

to respect the dignity of the other, a most profound residue of their faith, that ultimately guided them past their apprehensions and enmity to that goal of accommodation.

If churches and their leadership had often seemed to have little more to say about the conflict than “Don’t blame us,” there were outstanding clerical figures, unfailingly critical but always respectful, who offered genuinely helpful advice and guidance to the militant groups. None was more important than Father Alex Reid of the Clonard Monastery off Belfast’s Falls Road, who gained the respect of the IRA and its leadership and became critically important to its planning of the peace. It is fascinating to learn that, through the mediation of his Redemptorist superiors in Rome and of then Archbishop Justin Rigali, Pope John Paul II kept constantly abreast of Alex Reid’s work.

On the Protestant side, Presbyterian Minister Roy Magee was of equal importance in his influence with the Loyalist paramilitaries, helping them to create openings for peace. It was he who discovered and encouraged the extraordinary work of prisoner Gusty Spence, convicted of multiple murders, who devoted himself to educating his fellows in the prison in their history, in the character of their own community, and in the opportunities to transform their society into one of peace. Gusty became an important catalyst both for Protestant and for Catholic prisoners.

This fascinating history of the prison in Northern Ireland has its counterpart in what happened on South Africa’s Robben Island, the prison located far out in the harbor of Capetown where Nelson Mandela worked with his fellow prisoners at developing the transformative ways of peace, of forgiveness and reconciliation for his country. We may very well be seeing, if we care to look, comparable things happen in the Israeli prisons where political Palestinians – one thinks of Marwan Barghouti – are building consensus now on how to achieve a just peace.

My own work, especially since the early 1980s, has concentrated mostly on the Middle East conflict with much contact since 1982 with all the many parties, Christian and Muslim, of Lebanon; with continued close involvement with Iraqi Kurds and

eventually, upon the request, in 1992, of Jalal Talabani, now President of Iraq, with the Kurds of Turkey; and especially, since I began in 1985 to relate very directly to their principal leadership, to Israelis and Palestinians and to the American administrations which have been so necessary a part of all efforts at the resolving their conflict.

The work in Lebanon required me, for the first time, to work out my own response to Muslim faith. The great priority, for the Catholic Church and in fact for all Christians in the latter 20th century, of reconciliation with the Jews after the long and dreadful history of Christians persecuting them, had been part of my life long before it had the endorsement of the Second Vatican Council, in fact from my childhood years during the Second World War. Meeting Palestinians in earlier years had never raised the question about Muslims, since Christian and Muslim Palestinians are first agreed on the importance of their being Palestinian, but now I was meeting Christian and Muslim Lebanese in the midst of war.

I had to sort out my response to Islam for myself, existentially as well as theologically, and by the time I had very laboriously done so, I began to realize that most of those around me in Lebanon, Christian or Muslim, had never gone through this exercise or seriously asked themselves these questions. And so a major part of my activity in Lebanon came to be raising these questions. Not until many years later, in 1999, after I had spent considerable time in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, did I write this experience up, at the request of a most remarkable Franciscan Friar, Ivo Marcovic of Sarajevo. Ivo translated my article into Serbo-Croat and published it in a Franciscan quarterly and, in shortened form, in a popular newspaper for the benefit of Croatian and Bosnian Catholics, and it is only in that form that it has ever been published.

I do approach these topics as theologian. What struck me most was the common heritage we have, Jews, Christians, Muslims of the Abrahamic family of faiths, in knowing that the Lord is with us, that the Lord is reason for us to have faith, to live without fear out of trust in God's presence, in contrast to those who believe that the task

of life in a world of myriad dangers is a matter of protecting ourselves from all the dreadful things that could happen to us.

That is the religious world of the ancient nature-religion polytheists, for whom the world was one of terror. For them, the many forces that surround us, seen symbolically as divinities, are indifferent to us at best, hostile at worst. The task of religion in their lives was to buy these dangerous forces off, to bribe them, but all with the knowledge that the task is hopeless, that sooner or later they will destroy us. Those many in our own time who regard themselves as post-religious, without faith, find themselves actually in much the same state, seeing threats in every quarter, seeing their life's task as basically one of defending themselves and those dear to them against the horrors that might otherwise overtake them, and seeing true safety nowhere.

Our monotheistic faith contrasts as completely with dualism, with every concept that the world is divided between good and evil, and that fighting and destroying the evil is the true meaning of our lives. This was the world of our Cold War, and is now the Manichaean world of those who see empires of evil about them and constitute their life as a crusade, full of violence and loathing, against them. That brings us back to the post-9/11 world with which we started, a turmoil of resistance to evils whose nature or motives we refuse to question or discuss – we have no dealings with the evil. On this basis we demonize persons, groups, races, religions. All of us must be familiar with efforts to construe even our monotheistic faiths as instruments for the battle with evil, and thus to debase them into dualisms. Thus they are often depicted as if that were indeed their true nature.

As a Jesuit, I have another strong anchor drawing me toward respect for persons, even those most opposed to me and all I hold for true, and recognition of their dignity. This is contained in the spiritual guidance given us by the founder of our Jesuit order, St. Ignatius Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, a manual for orienting our basic approach to a life in faith. It has become familiar to anyone who has ever made a Jesuit retreat. An introductory page in this manual is called the "*Praesupponendum*," the "Presupposition"

for the exercises. When I identify myself as a Jesuit I have always hoped this might be the most Jesuit thing about me.

Ignatius, 16th century soldier that he was, determined to live a life of faith after seeing the hollowness of the life he had led to that point, went through a lengthy period of reflection as a hermit in a cave at Manresa in Spain. When he emerged he structured his experience into this manual, the *Spiritual Exercises*, and began, even as a student in the universities of Salamanca and Paris, to guide others through these exercises, so that they could make their own decisions about their lives. Because he was not a trained theologian at this stage, his work attracted the dangerous and suspicious attention of the Inquisition.

The essential question in all this is: Whom shall I exclude from my moral community? At the very beginning of Ignatius' book, he has this remarkable page, the Presupposition to the Exercises. It reads:

To assure better cooperation between the one who is giving the Exercises and the one who receives them, and more beneficial results to both, it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to save the proposition of another than to condemn it as false. If he is unable to save the proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it, and if he understands it badly, it should be discussed with him with love. If this does not suffice, all appropriate means should be used so that, understanding his proposition rightly, he may save it.

This short paragraph has been put through many processes of translation. The original was in Ignatius' rough local vernacular Spanish. It was rendered into Latin and into a more literary Spanish and eventually into numerous other languages, those more often translated from the Latin or from the more elegant Spanish than from the original. The paragraph scandalized many editors of the *Spiritual Exercises* to such an extent that it was left out of several editions, and when it was retained the final sentence was often

translated to mean that the one giving the Exercises should argue the case with the exercitant so as to win the argument and make him abandon his proposition. Not so the original, in which Ignatius is still, even at that stage, arguing that he should be helped *to save* his proposition, not to abandon it.

You see the radicalism of this procedure. At one time I used to carry it about, copied out by hand in the original rough Spanish, as Ignatius wrote it, in a diary/date-book which I carried about in my pocket, until I ripped out the page to give it to a close associate of the great Lebanese Shi'ite Imam Musa al-Sadr, the Ghandi-like figure who had founded a Movement for the Dispossessed of all creeds in Lebanon and was most universal in his dialogue with all creeds, Christian and Muslim, an ever radical voice of peace. Musa, by the time I met his associates, holy man that he was, had already been “disappeared” in Colonel Khadafi’s Libya, surely killed, but his Shi'ite followers in Lebanon, used to the idea of vanishing Imams who would return, sought in every way to plead with Libya for his release. I found that his spirit closely matched what I had learned from the Ignatian *Praesupponendum*.

You note that this is not simply a proposal of Christian charity in our discourse. It is a theory of knowledge, applicable to all, Christian or not; specific to the Christian only insofar as it is a practical living-out, in its openness to the other, of Christian faith. If I am to win all the arguments, know it all beforehand, my mind has already shut down. The proposition of the other, of course, refers to what is truly important in the other’s perception, experience, conviction. It is not as if there were no truth criterion. If I am to learn, I must approach the other’s proposition with openness. Winning an argument will get me nowhere and I will lose the light that the other’s perception could give me. But the other will learn also, coming to an understanding of his own proposition that will enrich it and lead deeper into truth.

I said that I find, in this Presupposition to the Ignatian Exercises, the most Jesuit thing by which I would like to define myself. We Jesuits are often seen as people who win arguments, who have an answer to everything, whose objective is to turn people

away from their own “propositions” to ours. But that is the very opposite to what Ignatius proposes here. There is a bit of the “Don’t, please, turn me over to the Inquisition, at least until you’ve thought about this some more.” But at its root there is a way of life.

Now we may meet persons or groups whose proposition truly repels us. Here the “terrorist” may be our primary example. But it is this determination to save the other’s proposition that has led me to take seriously, to converse with, to strive to save the proposition of those identified as “terrorist,” whether the ideological leadership of IRA or the Loyalist UDA or UVF and the common sentiment of their followers, those who, “understanding [their] proposition rightly,” became the initiators of the serious work for peace in Northern Ireland. It brought me to seek out Yasser Arafat when he was most despised as “terrorist,” to Yitzhak Shamir when he seemed the least likely of Israel prime ministers to work for peace, to Ariel Sharon as well as to likelier men like Yitzhak Rabin or Ehud Barak, to Druze leader Walid Joumblatt and all the other leaders of warring factions, without exception, in Lebanon, the Hezbollah leadership included, all to be respected so as to find what truth lay hidden behind their often violent impulses. It meant treating respectfully and listening with sympathy to Serbs, Croats and the suffering Muslims of Bosnia. And it means the same with all the marginalized communities and classes of people here in our own country.

And now, before I conclude, I must come to the issues that most concern us all now, the issues of our post 9/11 world in which we can see that we have done so badly.

I think we can all see that we have not, as a nation, responded to that crisis by addressing the issues on which so much of the world responds to us with anger. I watched with care the PBS series, “America at the Crossroads.” Drawing on their best talent, Robert MacNeil, as their narrator, PBS avoided the most obvious pitfall of damning Islam as such for our problems, instead contrasting the vengeful actions of our enemies with the actual peaceful teaching of their Islamic faith. But there has been no

attempt to plumb the mentality of those who attack us, to understand their proposition or to see them as possessed of human dignity.

In our collective rage, we have let ourselves become embroiled in this seemingly endless war in Iraq, where our objectives have become so obscure and where we are entrapped, prevented from extricating ourselves by the very sight of the damage we have ourselves wrought. We have alienated those, in Europe and elsewhere, most anxious to be our allies, who are now required to invest their lesser power in containing our most dangerous excesses. We have endangered especially those in the Middle East itself most closely aligned with us, who run the risk that their own regimes, often not the most wholesome, may be overthrown by those with whom we would then find ourselves again at war. Our instinct has been to tighten the ring ever tighter, but our troubles and the troubles of those afflicted by our impulses only get worse. What are we to do?

I propose that our greatest problem now is the distrust of ourselves that we have generated among friend and foe. That something is asserted by our official leadership has become an *a priori* reason to distrust it. More than anything else, we need to redeem the reputation of our country – for justice, for truth, for freedom, for all those things for which we have normally been admired throughout our history.

Iraq, and our responsibility for so much that has gone wrong there, plagues our relation with all the regional and international players. We have unleashed endemic conflicts, like that between Sunni and Shi'ite factions which had lived at peace with each other for so long, that now seem in every way beyond our resolving. It has become cliché to say that, in Iraq, we have no good options left.

When that is so, my own experience with conflict tells me that we must approach the subject from a different angle, see other factors than the direct confrontation we are dealing with. In the background of all the resentments Middle Eastern people and many others have toward the United States is our action, often our inaction or ineffectual action, toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israelis, of course, seeing how we have

bungled so much else, would prefer not to believe this. They dread the touch of our leaden hands. But it remains that the one best chance we have to make our voice respectable in Iraq or anywhere else in the Middle East – or the rest of the world – is to act effectively for a just settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. Most of us in the United States are determined never to betray the state of Israel, but in fact we endanger it if we encourage it to make itself a fortress in defiance of all its neighbors.

I have written of this before, in fact published a book in 2004, *Negotiating Outside the Law: Why Camp David Failed*. From many years of close involvement with all the parties, Israeli, American and Palestinian, I conclude that the efforts toward peace that so much encouraged us through the '90s were tainted by a fundamental structural flaw, a neglect of international law. This, rather than malice on anyone's part, brought about the collapse we all witnessed with such disappointment. When we do not follow the rule of law, the only alternative is to premise the outcome on superiority of political and military power. And that is what was done. This of itself turned every proposal into a *Diktat*. Even had the "generous proposal" of Camp David been better than it was, it could never be accepted in its character as *Diktat*. That had to mean disappointment for the Israelis, as they would not thereby have gained the one thing they most needed, namely the peace.

I don't believe this conflict is really so difficult to resolve if only we did approach it according to law. Law has been so much neglected, through the encouragement given by the United States, that many Israelis now suppose it would prejudice the case against them. But the law would in fact protect both parties and their genuine interests. Its true effect would be to overcome the manifest disparity of power, enabling the parties to negotiate with each other as equals, equals before the law, the only way that a negotiation can succeed. Nor would the law determine the outcome. Instead it would require the parties to negotiate agreements that would satisfy and bind both sides. Even the contested matter of Palestinian refugees, the nightmare of Israelis, would require negotiation of agreed numbers according to the phrasing of the famous General Assembly

resolution (194), which provides that this can be done only in such manner as can be done in peace.

An Israeli government will not likely provide that the negotiation follow the law. It will happen only if that is the decision of the United States. But that decision would be followed, and would lead to agreed solution of the conflict, its transformation into peace.

Another obstacle has arisen, and this is the last thing I wish to address, a matter integral to my theme of respecting the dignity of the other as the way to transform a conflict. This is the election of Hamas to the Palestinian leadership a year ago January. Israel, often compelled to this policy by United States demand, has tried ever since to undermine this elected Hamas government of the Palestinian Authority, by economic boycott and other means, massive in their violence toward the entire Palestinian population.

For myself, I had watched Hamas action closely over many years, had seen their many efforts to stanch the violence of which their movement was a part and their actual faithfulness to a cease-fire that had lasted over a year before their election victory. I had been planning for some while before that to travel to the region in company with Reverend Jesse Jackson and others, people with whom I had gone to Belgrade during the Kosovo war, when we had brought back three captured American soldiers with us and striven to reopen some diplomacy in a situation where diplomacy had disappeared, to be replaced only by bombing. I had been with them to Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories in 2002, on a useful visit. I had been making a pest of myself with Jackson and the others for much of the year before that election, insisting that we needed to repeat the visit.

Jackson asked me immediately for an assessment of what the Hamas electoral victory meant. I saw good reason to hope that Hamas, having acquired new non-violent options and new responsibilities through its success which it had never imagined it would carry, should be expected to respond positively and might well be the party that would

make real peace with Israel. I insisted that, when we made our visit to the region, we must now begin in Damascus to meet with Hamas leader Khalid Mish'al.

As it became evident that our visit would not happen immediately – Jackson had a knee replacement and was not allowed by his doctors to travel such distances for a long time – I began writing regularly to Mish'al of these new options and responsibilities that had fallen to his party. We made the visit eventually in August, when the war in Lebanon was over. Jackson and I did have our meeting, of many hours length, with Mish'al and several of his political bureau. My interest was to ascertain, first, if he and they were religious fanatics. The answer was distinctly no. Their religious faith is of great importance to them but no matter of fanaticism, and it includes their duty as Muslims to respect the peoples of the book, Jews and Christians. They pride themselves on the way that, through centuries of Christian persecution, they as Muslims had been the protective refuge of Jews.

What then were their intentions? Quite simply, a Palestinian state “on the 1967 borders.” Were they seeking the destruction of the state of Israel? Definitely not, that was no part of their program. Their refusal to grant their formal acceptance of Israel as a state had to do with reciprocity, Israeli acceptance of Palestinian entitlement to a state of their own, and borders, assurance that recognition of Israel's right to exist would not entail acceptance of an Israeli right to take any part of Palestine that they pleased. Were they, then, the Damascus leadership around Mish'al, a hard-line faction seeking to undermine a more moderate leadership around Prime Minister Haniyeh in Gaza? Again, the answer was a definitive and convincing no. The movement is thoroughly unified in its program, despite all the difficulty of communicating in a situation of separation where those in Gaza, those in the West Bank, in Amman and in Damascus can never communicate other than by means that are always under full Israeli surveillance.

You can see that I've devoted much of my time this last year and more to this question of Hamas, and it convinces me of the need for us Americans, for Israelis, to address them if we are to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians. That in itself, I

believe, is a primary need for our own country, if we are to be a respectable voice anywhere in the Middle East. Resolving/transforming the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum will not of itself end our troubles in Iraq, but it would take much of the venom out of the situation and without it we simply have no standing there. I argued this strongly to the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which did fully recognize it. Short of the effective action on the Israeli-Palestinian front that is so much within the powers of the United States, anything else we do about Iraq – have more soldiers or fewer, leave soon or stay longer, employ the stick or the carrot, implement or ignore any other of the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group – is nothing more than moving about the deck-chairs on the sinking ship.

There are a lot of people with whom the United States now refuses to talk. We do not talk to Iran. We do not talk to Syria. We talk neither with Hamas nor Hezbollah, and there are other peoples and organizations that we classify with The Evil and refuse to talk to. So many of those whom our country would wish to influence, the only people who could actually make a difference in matters that our country would like to affect, are left un-talked-to through this policy that one has to wonder who is being isolated, they or the United States (and Israel) who will not talk to them.

Think of this. During the two and a half decades that the U.S. and Israel had maintained their No-Talk policy toward the PLO, the eventual interlocutor with whom even now they are so anxious to talk, rather than with Hamas, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simply stagnated, with no progress toward resolution or peace. If, over that time, we had been talking, the peace would very likely long since have been established. There would be no Hamas and no Hezbollah. There would have been no invasion of Lebanon – in 1978, in 1982, in 1993, in 1996 or again in the summer of 2006. Israel would not have suffered the suicide bombings, the opprobrium of its occupation policies or the growing militarization of its society. It would be living prosperously in concord with its neighbors in the region, including those in a Palestinian state. And the rest of the world, too, including ourselves, would have been spared many troubles.

In all of this, the critical component is that we treat our adversaries with respect. We have this extraordinary common ground, in Abrahamic faith, among the principal parties to these conflicts we are dealing with, that each bears the image of God and possesses the full dignity that implies. We ignore that frequently, but at our peril, especially our moral peril. Without it, our professions of faith are very hollow. With it, if we follow through, pursue our adversaries not with vengeance but with our hunger to understand, to plumb the depth of their hurts and resentments and open to them the depth of our own, demonstrate our compassion and active help for those who suffer from the results of our combat and keep always in our eye the humanity of the other, that reflects their intrinsic dignity, we can expect to find in them not enemies, but brothers and sisters with whom we can build a future of peace.