

PURSUING THE
GLOBAL
COMMON GOOD

Principle and Practice in U.S. Foreign Policy

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INTRODUCTION

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In his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human... “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.” ... “A person is a person through other persons” ... “I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.” ... knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.¹

The concept of *ubuntu* is part of the culture of southern Africa, but it also exists by other names or by practice in the Americas, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Pacific. In the lived existence of human beings, this sense of community, or ubuntu, almost always has been central to our humanity. Such an understanding of community responsibility for guaranteeing basic human needs can be seen in the ancient texts of the people of Israel, where food, water, clothing, healing, compassion, and hospitality were required as members of the community. In slavery the Israelites shared, in the wilderness they shared; when they settled in the Promised Land they shared.

In the earliest days of the United States, this need to respect, help, and protect each other was lived out by Native Americans, as well as by many of the settlers on the frontier. Interconnectedness was essential for survival. In today’s industrialized society, however, the bonds of community have frayed. Rugged individualism rules, and people are at risk to rise or fall on their own. In such a hyper-competitive, alienated world, it is difficult for us to see the myriad ways in which we are bound together—to imagine that there could be a common good

Some of us believe that the spiritual searching of modern times stems as much from this loss of community as it does from the desire to find God. For it is often true that the path to finding God is through finding community—just as the path to finding community is through finding God. This sense of community and obligation to others has significance not only within our national borders, but beyond, for it encompasses the global human family. By acknowledging our inherent connectedness to those around the world, we take a crucial step in pursuing the global common good.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood this well. He envisioned the Beloved Community, building it upon the foundational work of African-American theologian Dr. Howard Thurman, South African pacifist missionary Olive Schreiner, and others. Dr. King understood that the key to building this global community and to finding God was through love, the *agape* love about which he often preached.

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This often misunderstood and misinterpreted concept has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.²

The awareness of being bound together—of loving our neighbors as ourselves, regardless of national origin—can also be called the global common good. In re-capturing such a bond of belonging, we are able to live up to the principles upon which the United States was founded and which our diverse faith traditions command us to live. That is why this book, *Pursuing the Global Common Good*, is an important collection for all of us as both citizens and believers.

American foreign policy is one area where the principles of the global common good can be translated into concrete action. How do we challenge our government to live out the commandment to love our neighbors around the world as ourselves? How do we live out the Hebrew prophets' call to love mercy and let justice roll down like waters? How do we follow Jesus' self-proclaimed mission to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor? How do we become blessed because we are peace-makers? How do we do unto the least of these?

In short, how do we move beyond individualistic theologies of prosperity and narrow national interest to a global politics of community and compassion?

There are those who consider politics and foreign policy to be dirty words, never to be mixed with religion. Some further worry that religion—especially on the global stage—can fuel only conflict, rather than bring about reconciliation. As a result, many people are remarkably timid about going public with their faith. But political processes are simply the way in which communities of people embody their moral values, organize their common life, allocate their resources, and tackle shared problems so that all might live together with some measure of justice, order, and peace.

Thus, these essays focus on moral values and American foreign policy, on how we as a powerful and privileged nation live out our deepest principles, our commitment to each other, and to all of God's creation. In so doing, the essays tackle the challenge of working for the global common good, even as we face a dangerous world. The essays address issues of torture, genocide, and the just use of force in an age of terrorism. They call for stewardship of God's creation and for closing the appalling economic gap in which nearly half the world's population—close to 2.8 billion people—live on less than \$2 a day per day and lack safe, affordable drinking water.

In the aftermath of World War II and in response to the holocaust of six million Jews, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the deaths of millions of soldiers and civilians, and the beginnings of the Cold War, faith leaders from around the world joined diplomats in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At their gathering, these leaders wrestled with difficult questions of when the use of force was justified and how to end war as a means of settling human conflict. They showed us that theology and politics can come together for the global common good.

In the years following, their hopes have been met with both success and failure. Apartheid did fall. Wars and civil conflicts have come to an end, but others have erupted. Extreme poverty persists, despite great wealth. Torture continues to plague the world. The Kyoto Protocol was signed by many nations, but not by the United States. And the Just War Ethic, which has served as a powerful moral critique of war since ancient times, must confront the challenges of nuclear proliferation and terrorism while maintaining its moral force. These are the deep theological and political conversations we must have in the global village in which we live.

These conversations will challenge us all, faith leaders and policymakers, Americans and our partners in the international community. We will need to discern the common good among competing claims of individual interest. We will need to build trust among nations and civilizations with histories of violence and exploitation. And perhaps most importantly, we will need to demonstrate that our principled dedication to the global common good can be put into practice to address the great international challenges of our day.

The essays in this collection take up some of these pressing issues:

- Michael H. Fuchs and David Buckley begin the volume with a discussion of the global common good and its place in today's foreign policy environment.
- Professor Bryan Hehir explores how the venerable Just War Ethic relates to contemporary challenges of terrorism and nuclear proliferation.
- Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and Rev. William F. Schulz testify to the damage that torture inflicts on both its targets and our national soul.
- Barbara Lerman-Golomb and Melody C. Barnes reveal the particular threat that global climate change poses to the world's poor.
- Denis McDonough and Andrew Tillman challenge policymakers to prioritize moral obligation along with national self-interest in crafting foreign aid programs.
- Dr. Elizabeth G. Ferris sets out a principled case for acting on the Responsibility to Protect in cases of mass atrocities and genocide.
- Finally, Tom Daschle and John D. Podesta, with their decades of policymaking experience, examine the importance of broadening our foreign policy debates and decisions to include the global common good.

People of faith have a particular point of view and a particular responsibility to ask the difficult questions of governments of the world. During the civil rights movement in the United States, we used to say that if you weren't part of the solution, you were part of the problem. Dr. King said it much more eloquently when he said that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. That is what the global common good is about—working together for a world of justice and peace.

Endnotes

1. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 31.

2. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

“Many often deride the influence of values and religious beliefs in the making of U.S. foreign policy as irrelevant or not in the ‘national interest.’ This couldn’t be further from the truth. *Pursuing the Global Common Good* tells us why.”

Madeleine K. Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State
and author of *The Mighty and the Almighty*

“American foreign policy has been at its best when it linked our national interest to an engagement with the global common good. Our religious traditions are at their best when they challenge us to find realistic ways of engaging the world that are true to our moral commitments and our values. At a moment when we badly need creative thinking, *Pursuing the Global Common Good* is exciting because it suggests steps that are, at once, right, practical and visionary. By suggesting that there can be such a thing as a ‘common good’ in world affairs, this book will help open the debate we need.”

E. J. Dionne Jr., syndicated columnist, Senior Fellow
in the Governance Studies Program at the Brookings
Institution and author of the forthcoming book, *Souled
Out: Renewing Faith and Politics After the Religious Right*

“Our deepest beliefs and religious traditions tell us to respect all humanity and seek justice and peace on earth. Why, then, would we separate our highest principles from the activities of our representative government? By demonstrating how moral vision can have a concrete impact on policy, *Pursuing the Global Common Good* makes a convincing case for a U.S. foreign policy that lives up to our highest ideals.”

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action
Center for Reform Judaism

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