



INTERVENTION OF THE AMI ECCLESIASTICAL ASSISTANT Msgr. Dr. Werner Freistetter

Msgr. Freistetter's presentation was divided into two parts. The first part discussed "Terrorism as Ethical Challenge: Human Dignity and Human Rights", from a pastoral letter from the German Bishops issued a few years ago. The second part consisted of his reflections on Christian hope, derived from texts from Pope Benedict XVI.

Terrorism as Ethical Challenge: Human Dignity and Human Rights

The basis of the fight against terrorism is human dignity and human rights. The primary role of the state is to protect the people from terror threats. An essential precondition in the fight against terror, as well as the other obligation of the state, is to respect human rights and human dignity. According to the Encyclica "Pacem in Terris" of Pope John XXIII, the right of the individual is prior to the common welfare and recognition of inalienable and invulnerable human dignity; Msgr. Freistetter believes that this should be the directive for dealing with terrorists and terrorism.

Respecting the rule of law is important for avoiding the rule of violence. There are two Christian views in the rule of law: first, it is oriented and limited by divine law and human rights; and second, its aim is the protection of inalienable and invulnerable human dignity and rights. According to Msgr. Freistetter, the law is a key issue for ethics of peace and a source of public welfare.

However, there are limitations to the constitutional actions in the fight against terrorism. For instance, certain measures could erode the principles of law. While states have to counter terrorism resolutely in order to protect its people, it should be done without abandoning the rule of law. Msgr. Freistetter points out that even terrorists have human rights, which should be respected. In addition, torture should be prohibited since it is an infringement of human rights.

September 11 led to the creation of many safety laws to deal with terrorism. However, the responsibility to protect citizens remains a challenge because fundamental rights have to be respected and any course of action must not discriminate or disrespect the human dignity. The international community must cooperate to prevent violence and bring terrorists to justice. In addition, international law must be updated and improved. While state interests are still important, individual persons must be given priority. The responsibility to protect the human rights is a step towards just peace and a life with dignity.

Global Justice is a precondition for a peaceful world. Marginalization, injustice and inhuman social circumstances cause acts of terror and violence. However, Msgr. Freistetter asserted that unfair distribution can never be accepted as justification for terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, policies against terrorism should also address poverty, injustice and strained relations between ethnical or religious groups. This is a task not only for governments, but for concerned and affected communities and the Church as well.

Christianity and Islam have to work on good mutual relations. Inter-religious dialogues between Christians and Muslims, and other religious groups can counter any misunderstanding and prevent violence. Citing Pope John Paul II, Msgr. Freistetter said that the public should refuse the religious or moral legitimization for terrorist attacks and that cooperation is needed in order to eliminate social and cultural reasons for terrorism.

Reflection on Christian Hope

Progress in Moral Affairs. Msgr. Freistetter expressed the view that renewal has to do with the nurture and spread of hope. Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere; in the case of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation or progress because a person's freedom and decision-making is always refreshed anew. But new generations can learn and build on the knowledge and experiences of the ones that went before them if they choose to.

Beyond structures. Many people put their hopes in structures; but moral well-being and the right state of human affairs cannot be guaranteed by structures alone. The best structures can only function if communities, guided by convictions, are capable of inspiring or motivating people to agree freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own, but must always be gained anew by the community.

New generation and good structures. Every generation must also make its own contribution to establishing convincing structures of freedom and of good, which can guide succeeding generations to the proper use of human freedom.

Redeemed by love. It is not science that redeems man, it is love. When there is an experience of great love, there is a moment of redemption, which gives a new meaning to his life. People need unconditional love.

The great hope. People need greater and lesser hopes that keep them going day by day. However, Msgr. Freistetter stressed that these are not enough without the great hope, which can come only from God. It comes to individuals and communities as a gift. God, the One that gives humanity unconditional love, is the foundation of hope.