

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

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Letter From the Chairman June 26, 2003

Greetings again, everyone,

Madeline Albright's resume` bulges with experiences and qualifications, the foremost being former United States ambassador to the United Nations and former Secretary of State. When she speaks, people listen, so when I had the chance to hear her lecture last Sunday I listened intently. In that audience of over 10,000 convention-goers, I think that only those who had a grasp of prophecy could have really connected the dots between her analysis of current events and what the future holds.

"I am in my seventh decade now, and have seen few periods with more dangers or turbulence than this one," said Secretary Albright, who has seen her share of terrifying times, beginning with flight from Nazi-controlled Czechoslovakia with her parents during World War II. "I learned early in life that there is great evil in the world." And now, she explained, world conditions are developing like "the perfect storm," where several factors hold potential to come together with powerful, and perilous, results.

The threat of terrorism is an obvious factor, as is the ongoing struggle in the Middle East, the new menace in North Korea, and numerous other hot spots. Add to the mix a fragile worldwide economy "generating more anxiety than jobs," plus, perhaps less obvious but equally important, potential divisions between long-time alliances, and world leaders are being hard-pressed to prevent "the perfect storm" from forming. The Secretary detailed these dangers, and also lamented the terrible lack of understanding that most westerners have about the nature of world conditions.

"The challenge is long term, unpredictable, and deadly," she said of the war on terror, adding confidently that the free world will not be intimidated or shut down. However, she warned that this war must be fought on many fronts – militarily, politically and economically; with much better education, better dialogue, and somehow bringing diverse religious faiths together in "a unifying force instead of a divisive force." In fact, she proposed that world military battles today are really the lesser of our problems. The bigger conflicts in the world are the "battles of ideas" which eventually ignite physical clashes.

One of the more interesting observations the Secretary put forward was that the Middle East turmoil has not only "highlighted the need for peace, but has also underlined the logic of peace." The "logic of peace" – what an intriguing concept! It is plainly logical, she explained, that only peace can deliver to people the common desires for which all humanity seeks. What escapes human logic, however, I thought while listening, is how we can actually find our way to peace. For example, early optimism for President Bush's recently-proposed "Roadmap to Peace" for the Middle East has quickly faded in light of the continuing killings. "The obscene has become routine, as bombings are reported every week," is how Secretary Albright described it. Isaiah described it similarly, only with an added spiritual dimension.

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made for themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness!" (Isaiah 59:7-9)

Justice and righteousness are only two of several spiritual dimensions that are the critical missing elements in world peace efforts today. Secretary Albright's analysis, insightful as it was, still missed the greatest arena of battle – the spiritual. This is where the logic of peace really resides. Jesus told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Only God holds the roadmap to peace, and real peace among people can come only through us first making peace with Him. Until humans humbly submit to Him, we will keep on generating conditions that will swirl and foment until they do combine to spawn the "perfect storm." At that time the world will be forced to look to Him, because Jesus Christ will dramatically arrive on the scene (Matthew 24:30, Revelation 1:7). The storm will be quickly stilled, and only then can a real, lasting peace process begin.

The "logic of peace" has always been a part of the gospel message. Paul wrote in Romans 10:15, "As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'" However, the logic of spiritual peace escapes most people, as Paul revealed in the next verse: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For as Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'"

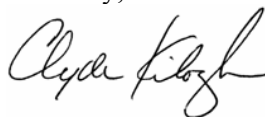
In lieu of the gospel report, people choose to believe in something else and obey their baser urges. Secretary Albright astutely observed, "To seize the sword instead of the olive branch is a choice; to teach children to hate is a choice; to dehumanize and disrespect is a choice. When people have the ability to choose they have the opportunity to change." She tried to cast an optimistic glow upon the potential for the world to change, if we just somehow keep working at it. I appreciated her leadership skills and efforts to encourage the crowd, but I just couldn't muster much enthusiasm for relying on the potential of human nature. On the other hand, brethren, we who hold forth the gospel of the Kingdom of God are by no means pessimists. We are among the most optimistic, and realistic, people in the world! Why? Because our optimism rests not on human efforts but on the guaranteed return of Jesus Christ and the spiritual reconciliation with God that will truly change the world.

One more important thought came to mind while listening to her speech. Even if relatively few people believe our report, we must continue to proclaim it as boldly as possible, because we, just as much as Secretary Albright, are ambassadors! Paul certainly tried to lift the vision of the Corinthians to see this high calling when he wrote, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Those words are for us as well – "*we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us!*"

In the question/answer session someone asked, "what was the most rewarding part of being Secretary of State?" She replied, "It may sound 'hokey,' but it was representing the United States. I always sat behind a sign that said 'United States,' and that was a gift and an honor." Someday people may ask us, "What was the most rewarding part of your being a firstfruit, being in the Church of God in this age?" May we be able to say, with all our heart, "It was representing Jesus Christ on this earth. We always lived behind a sign that said, 'the Church of God' and that was a gift and an honor."

May we represent Him well and confidently in this increasingly stormy world.

Sincerely, in Christ's service,



Clyde Kilough