

“Forgive One Another” and the Commandment to Love One’s Enemies : In Remembrance of
UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961)

This year’s symposium is being held on United Nations Day. Since October 24, 1945, when the United Nations Charter was ratified by the United States and the requisite number of other nation-states soon after World War II, the international community celebrates an annual observance of the official founding of that international organization. The Preamble to the United Nations Charter, states, *inter alia*, that the Peoples of the United Nations are determined,

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and.... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours,.”¹

The Preamble and the accompanying Chapters of the United Nations Charter commensurate with the themes professed by Cardinal Kasper regarding mercy, relevant to the issues of forgiving one another and one’s enemies. The visit of His Holiness, Pope Francis, to the United Nations, in occasion of that Organization’s 70th anniversary, culminated with an address to the United Nations General Assembly. Pope Francis echoed the themes of mercy, reminding the United Nations of its most important duty,

The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.²

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/index.html>.

² <https://holyseemission.org/contents//statements/56054736193b87.20279259.php>.

Pope Francis also mentioned the sacrifices of United Nations personnel, in particular the death of Dag Hammarskjold, second Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1961. Hammarskjold, as revealed by the publication of his diary of poetry entitled Markings in 1964, understood the relationship between mercy and God's will, on the one hand, and his own political role within the organization that he led. In entries written shortly after assuming the UN Secretary-Generalship, he expressed his recognition of God in his political vocation,

Not I, but God in me.... I am the vessel.... The draught is God's. And God is the thirsty one.³

According to Hammarskjold's biographer, Brian Urquhart, who also served as his Assistant Secretary-General, understood the meaning of Christianity in Hammarskjold's political vocation,

The springs of Hammarskjold's sense of vocation ran deep. They were traditional, intellectual, and religious. His identification with Christian thought was not messianic, but rather in the old tradition of the imitation of Christ in sacrifice and in service to others. He was a member of that small and lonely band who throughout history has engaged at the same time in trying to deal with the hard world of political and social reality and in searching endlessly for a spiritual meaning which transcends the world.⁴

Hammarskjold's work, notwithstanding the political realities, represented the United Nations Charter's ideals which are synonymous to the Christian idea of mercy. While visiting refugee camps or installing peacekeeping soldiers, Hammarskjold understood his vocation as to

³ Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964) pages 90-91.

⁴ Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjold* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) pages 23-24.

extend the peace of the international community to those who needed it. More importantly, Hammarskjold understood that the extension of such mercy came, not with a lawyer's advocacy, but rather with one's personal conviction and individual spirit. Mercy would then benefit from a "stronger line of defense".⁵

Hammarskjold's actions and policies became a model for his successors, setting a standard that has been rarely met since his death. The United Nations has continued to struggle to enliven the practice of mercy within the international community. The breath of mercy, notwithstanding Hammarskjold's loss of his own in 1961, remains within the corridors and chambers of the United Nations.

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 23.