

THE WAR

IN

IRAQ

—AND—

THE REQUIREMENT

OF

MORAL CERTAINTY

THE WAR IN IRAQ AND THE REQUIREMENT OF MORAL CERTAINTY

EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY

*[The] judgment of conscience also has an imperative character: man must act in accordance with it. If man acts against this judgment **or, in a case where he lacks certainty about the rightness and goodness of a determined act, still performs that act**, he stands condemned by his own conscience, the proximate norm of personal morality. [Emphasis added.]*

POPE JOHN PAUL II
VERITATIS SPLENDOR
AUGUST 6, 1993

The Holy Father's judgment is also convincing from a rational point of view. There were not sufficient reasons to unleash a war against Iraq.

JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER
PREFECT
CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, MAY 2, 2003

There are some Christians who have renounced the god of war, but more of our church leaders just remain silent. Is there any act of violence that our government could do which would cause church leaders who profess their love for the teaching of Jesus to make bold statements of love? There is torture and they remain silent, there is imprisonment without charges and they remain silent. There are anal probes and sexual humiliation and they remain silent. There are children and women taken hostages, and they remain silent. There

is the use of depleted uranium weapons which cause heinous birth defects and they remain silent, there are bomblets which children think are toys but which blow off limbs and kill them and the Christian leaders remain silent. There is the hell fire use of white phosphorous and they remain silent. There are proud boastful leaders who use Jesus' name while committing acts of extortion, thievery and domination. Yet, most church leaders remain silent.

KAREN HORST-COBB
DIVINE MUSHROOM CLOUD: A CALL TO WORSHIP

Lost sheep, such were my people;
their shepherds led them astray,
left them wandering in the mountains
forgetful of their fold,
whoever came across them devoured them.

JER 50:6,7

If there is any absolute moral law in Christianity, in Catholicism or in Natural Law Morality, it is “Thou shalt not murder.” In moral law, murder is the intentional unjust killing of a human being(s). Two Popes have said that the war by the United States Government on Iraq is unjust. Killing in an unjust war is unjust killing—murder. Yet, every bishop, archbishop and cardinal who is an Ordinary of a diocese in the United States—save one—believes, to the point of *strict moral certainty*, that the killing in this war is just. With *moral certainty* each has chosen in the midst of a most grave moral matter, intimately connected with the sanctity of human life and the recognition of the sanctity of human life, as well as with the explicit moral issue of possible large scale murder, to form his conscience consistent with George Bush’s interpretation of reality and the moral will of God rather than with Pope John Paul II’s and Pope Benedict XVI’s—or Jesus’. Each also has countenanced those souls placed in his spiritual care doing the same.

Now, subsequent analysis cannot alter the moral quality of an act already performed. Subsequent analysis, however, can help determine whether the required certainty of which Pope John Paul II speaks—which must be present for an act not to be sinful—is now present in a person’s conscience. Sub-

sequent analysis, therefore, can assess an act already performed in order to determine whether a person is morally permitted to continue participating in this act, or whether such a choice would be morally permissible for a person in the future. An act which is even partially sinful is, of course, morally impossible. Is the following affirmation, which must be considered anew with dire seriousness by the Shepherds of the Catholic Church a falsehood or a truth: All the “rigorous conditions” for the “rightness and goodness” of a war according to Catholic just war theory have been and are being met with that degree of probability that Catholic moral theory requires for *moral certainty* where the intentional destruction of human life is involved?

Although seldom taught or discussed publicly, it is a morally binding presupposition of Catholic just-unjust war theory that, before a person can justifiably kill another human being in war, he or she must be *morally certain* that each and every one of the Catholic standards for determining a just war has been met.¹ Not only met, but strictly met (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2309). They must be strictly met before the war begins (*jus ad bellum*). Furthermore, they must be strictly met in conducting the war (CCC, §2312) moment to moment during the entire course of the war (*jus in bello*). The Catholic just war theory is most definitely not a moral *carte blanche* for Catholic participation in wars supported by local politicians—although this is how it has often been interpreted and applied.

Moral Certainty or Murder

Evil does not become good simply because one is doing it with a group of people or because a person with secular authority orders it. A Catholic, whether bishop or layperson, is morally prohibited from leaving his or her conscience or the Church’s moral teachings on the doorstep of a battlefield. A declaration of war is not an open-ended moral license authorizing the Catholic to kill other human beings. It is but one of the conditions that must be *strictly* adhered to if the killing in a war is not to be murder.² If there is unresolved moral doubt whether the just war standards are being *strictly* followed, the person is morally forbidden to kill or to support killing in this instance, regardless of the secular declaration of war.

The Catholic Church places high regard on the sanctity of human life and its belief that each human being—without exception—is made in the im-

age and likeness of God and is an infinitely loved son or daughter of the “Father of all” (EPH 4:1–6). Because of the sanctity, the holiness, of human life per se, the Catholic Church’s just war theory starts from “a strong moral presumption against war which is binding on all.”³ This presumption can only be overcome by a strict application of the Catholic just war theory. Otherwise the killing in a war is unjust, that is, it is the evil of murder. Strict moral certainty in the application of the norms of the just war theory is the standard to which all Catholics are held when trying to overcome this “strong presumption against war” that is intrinsic to Catholic moral theology as taught by the Magisterium of the Church.

Moral Systems as the Guides to Moral Certainty

In Catholic moral theology there are accepted moral systems whose purpose is to guide a person to a state of *moral certainty* when there is practical doubt whether an act is good or evil.⁴ One of the methods that human consciousness can envision to achieve moral certainty, where moral doubt exists concerning which is the moral course of action to choose, is designated laxism. Laxism as a way of engaging in moral discernment for the purpose of achieving moral certainty has been condemned by the Catholic Church (Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, §§2101–2165, especially §2103). This condemnation means that specious moral arguments, those that are possibly logically precise but which the evidence shows are highly improbable in reality, may not be employed to justify a moral position before God. Self-evidently then, borderline tenable moral arguments are forbidden where moral law must be strictly observed, specifically when related to the morality of killing another human being. To repeat, laxism can never be used in any situation as a moral system to achieve the *moral certainty* necessary to act in good faith before God (RM 14:23)—and this self-evidently must include those moral situations where *strict* interpretation of the moral law is obligatory. In their various moral theologies the vast majority of Churches in Christianity would agree with this understanding in principle, although each one’s expression of it might differ.⁵

Laxism and the War on Iraq

For example, let us look at the Iraqi War, where human life is presently being destroyed daily. Given what is known about the war’s inception and its conduct, rationally there can be no *moral certainty* that the just war

norms of the Catholic Church have been strictly met or are presently being strictly met, *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello*—unless the moral system of laxism is employed to interpret the evidence and to apply the just war standards. Consider but two facts among many: How is the Catholic just war standard of non-combatant immunity being strictly met when over 650,000 Iraqi civilians are dead and hundreds of thousands more maimed?⁶ How is the Catholic just war standard of a “last resort defensive war” strictly met, when the war was clearly not the “last resort,” since the government itself called it a “preventive” war, and since the reasons given by the government for starting this war were and have been shown to be incontestably false and fraudulent. Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction which were aimed at the United States and capable of imminent deployment. Iraq had no intention of attacking the United States in the immediate future. Only a formally laxist interpretation of the evidence in the light of the Catholic just war theory with its strong moral presumption against war could arrive at or sustain a *morally certain* conclusion that this first-strike offensive war on Iraq, which has left hundreds of thousands of non-combatants dead and maimed, is morally just—*jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello*.

According to Catholic just war norms, which only have validity for Catholics within the acceptable moral systems of Catholic moral theology, if there is not strict moral certitude that a war is just and is being conducted justly—then the killing in it is unjust. In Catholic moral theology, intentional unjust killing is always intrinsically and gravely evil—it is always murder. It is never morally permissible. A laxist interpretation of the standards of Catholic just war theory employed in order to achieve a pseudo moral certainty that supports the unjust destruction of human life is itself a grave evil, which if participated in at any stage with full knowledge and full consent is mortal sin.

Laxism: Abandoning the Cross of Vocation

Laxism cannot be the moral system applied in interpreting the word “intentional” where the destruction of human life is the issue. When over 650,000 civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands more have been maimed, spinning such indiscriminate destruction as mere “accidental” or “unintentional” collateral damage is a self-evident, morally-debased and morally-debasing falsehood, orchestrated by “the Father of Lies who was a murderer from the beginning” (JN 8:44). It makes no moral difference

whether an unjust, intentional killing is being done by a private individual or by an agent of government—if the killing is unjust, it is totally forbidden because it is morally murder and murder is gravely intrinsically evil without exception. Only a moral position arrived at through the moral system of laxism could conclude with *moral certainty* that this present war in Iraq adheres to the norms of the Catholic just war theory, e.g., that killing over 650,000 civilians and maiming hundreds of thousands more is a *strict* application of the noncombatant immunity standard of Catholic just war theory within the larger context of Catholic moral theology.

But, as noted above, it is forbidden in the Catholic Church to apply laxism in any situation, let alone as a moral system for morally justifying homicide—regardless of the individual Catholic’s rank in the Church, e.g., foot soldier or bishop. This being the case, why then are there tens of thousands of Catholics actively engaged in this war? Why then are all the bishops of all the dioceses of the U.S.—except one—justifying participation in it by those in their spiritual care? Why are the Catholic bishops by silence permitting those who rely on them for moral guidance to go to this war as if they, the bishops, were *morally certain*, within the structures and strictures of Catholic moral theology, that it is a just war in its inception and in its conduct? If a person knows that the killing which is taking place is murder (unjustified homicide), would he not communicate this in no uncertain terms, especially if he were a spiritual leader on whom people relied for their proper discernment of good and evil? After all, since murder is gravely intrinsically evil, it is morally forbidden to cooperate with it—even by calculated silence—in order to attain some other goal, regardless of how noble the goal appears to be. Intrinsically evil means, such as murder or abortion, cannot be used to achieve even the best of good ends—nor can intentional silence concerning such means be so used. Those who know that murder is taking place are called by God to be the voice of its victims, not the moral support team for its perpetrators.

Something is awfully spiritually amiss in the United States Catholic Episcopacy—as spiritually derelict as when the most powerful Catholic Churchman in the country, Francis Cardinal Spellman stood up during the Vietnam War and proclaimed, “My country right or wrong!” For American naval officer Stephen Decatur, who first used this immoral patriotic expression in 1815, to speak this way is understandable, since it but reflects an individ-

ual’s philosophy. For a Cardinal of the Catholic Church to publicly endorse that which is contrary to the Prophets of Hebrew Scripture, to the Natural Law Morality of the Catholic Church and to the very teachings of Jesus is evil. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) permitted Spellman’s statement to publicly stand unchallenged, knowing that innumerable Catholics and others within his canonical jurisdiction and beyond would assume it to be in conformity with the will of God as taught by the Catholic Church and would support and participate in the war because of it. At a bare minimum, was this chosen stance by the NCCB not that form of material cooperation with evil so common to the person(s) that William H. Whyte fifty years ago identified as “the organization man?”

And, today? At what point, in the process of justifying by silence the unjustified destruction of human life, does silence become dereliction of a Divine duty, even if said silence is mandated by institutional loyalty? At what point do individual bishops or an entire episcopacy cease to be incarnationally Jesus’ disciples and become Pilate’s deputies, washing their hands of any responsibility for the agony of bloodletting in Iraq? At what point does the tactic of ignoring murder by myopically focusing one’s attention on diocesan finances, liturgical music, corporate legal strategies and the minutiae of ritual become outright evil? Cannot evil manifest itself as silence, a silence that is the consequence of moral laxism? Cannot silence about unspeakable evil—by those whom people look upon as their authoritative moral leaders—make the unspeakable respectable and acceptable? Is what has been done and is presently being done by the U.S. Government to human beings in Iraq not unspeakable evil? In diocese after diocese in the U.S., are not Catholics being left as “sheep without a shepherd”? (NM 27:17; 1 KGS 22:17; EZ 34:5; MT 9:36; MK 6:34). Are they not being left by their shepherds to “wander aimlessly” (JER 23:2; 50:6,7), oblivious to the cunning wolves of war who seek to devour them spiritually and to use them to devour others physically? Or worst yet, are not their shepherds providing the powerful wolves, whom they fear or admire, with sheep’s clothing so that they can more facilely prey upon the flock?

Catholic Moral Law Protects Equally In Utero & Extra Utero Human Life

Again, to emphasize what can never be too strongly emphasized when dealing with the matter of the sanctity of human life as it relates to the

destruction of human life: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly states that the just war standards are to be applied *strictly* in order to achieve *moral certainty*. This is the requirement in every instance where the sanctity of human life and the possibility for the destruction of human life converge. If this were not the case the Catholic Church's moral stance against abortion would collapse, because it is morally grounded in *strictly* using the highest level of probability in Catholic moral law in favor of the presence of a human person when the life in utero is subject to possible destruction. But as noted above, this requirement of applying the highest standard in Catholic moral theology in order to obtain *moral certainty*, where the presence and sanctity of human life and the possibility of its destruction intersect, is not limited to human life in utero. Extra utero human life is every bit as much within the protection and domain of this moral tenet. That is an indisputable teaching of Catholic moral theology—regardless of who does or does not employ it, or who employs it only in a “cafeteria” style, that is, when it does not interfere with other personal or institutional interests.

Parenthetically, it should always be made abundantly clear that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is explicit in teaching that a government permitting or ordering someone to take a human life does not relieve that person of his or her moral responsibility before God. That person is required to evaluate *strictly* whether killing a human being in a particular war, or any act of killing a human being, is moral or immoral under the application of Catholic moral theology as it relates to all homicide:

The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel. Refusing obedience [emphasis in original] to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community. “Rendering therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” “We must obey God rather than men.”

So states the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§2242). The “defense” that “The king (or the parliament) ordered me to do it,” is no moral defense to unjustified homicide, murder. Such a justification results from employing

laxist moral thinking where *strict* interpretation of the moral law is obligatory for overcoming the strong and morally binding presumption against war. Laxism, as a moral system for interpreting just war theory in order to morally validate one's obedience to the laws of a state or to the directives of governmental authorities, is as far removed from strict as hell is from heaven. For Catholics the state is never the final arbiter of morality.

The conclusion from all this is that the U.S. Catholic Bishops as a public entity, whose moral responsibility it is to correctly inform the consciences of the people in their respective dioceses on moral matters, are presently engaged in employing the forbidden moral system of laxism to justify the mass destruction of human beings in this war on Iraq, as well as, to justify their silence regarding that destruction. Whether any bishop is sinning in doing this (RM 14:23), no one can judge outside the individual bishop and God, since only he and God know his subjective awareness of the evil which he is engaged in, which he is “morally” supporting, and which he is leading others to “morally” support and engage in. But what can be said with certainty is that this watered-down, laxist episcopal use of Catholic just war theory is having a trickle-down effect into the parish pulpits and through them a corrosive moral effect on the immortal souls in the parish pews. A piously silent episcopacy has created an equally piously silent clergy which has in its turn nurtured a piously silent laity. And all this, while tens of thousands of their fellow Catholics go off to kill and maim other human beings 6,000 miles away in a war that does not even have a remote probability of meeting with *strict moral certainty* the required standards of the Catholic just war theory. But in the end the silence that flows from episcopal chair to pulpit to pew is nothing more or less than a disciplined organizational quietist witness to the same erroneous and laxist interpretation of Catholic just war theory that Cardinal Spellman advocated with reckless flamboyance forty years earlier.

A Vacuous “Moral Loophole”

In case what I have just said be less than fully understood, let it be clarified instantly, and thereby close a potential moral “loophole”—a moral “loophole” that practically every just warist who has supported a war runs for, when the real reasons for the war and what really went on during it are discovered and publicly revealed. No Catholic bishop, nor anyone else for that matter, can use the self-exonerating excuse of invincible, non-culpable

ignorance in a matter of morality related to homicide, unless he genuinely desired to know—and actively sought to know—the factual truth of the matter at the time of his decision: “Are there or are there not more than 650,000 Iraqi civilians dead and hundreds of thousands more maimed with the numbers increasing daily?” “How did this happen?” “How is it happening, if Catholic just war principles are being strictly adhered to by the U.S. government and properly taught to the Catholic soldiers by their Catholic chaplains?” “Was the use of depleted uranium planned as part of the war’s strategy and could this have been known or reasonably assumed before the war began?” “Did or did not Saddam Hussein have weapons of mass destruction?” “Did he or did he not have the technical capability and the intention of using them against the United States in the immediate future?”⁷ In Catholic moral theology, a person may not claim invincible ignorance, and hence non-culpability for his or her choices, if that person is playing the moral ostrich and sticking his or her head into the sand of government lies and propaganda in order to avoid seeing what one knows is there to be seen, but does not want to see—for some reason. The intentional flight from awareness of facts and truths, which if known would alter a person’s moral position, is itself immoral. When it results in participating in or supporting the destruction of human life it is gravely immoral, and one cannot then employ the alibi, “I didn’t know,” as an escape from moral culpability.

However, personal ignorance—culpable or non-culpable—does not preclude others from seeing and naming, with eternal life and eternal death seriousness, the moral catastrophe that has befallen the U.S. Catholic Church and many other U.S. Christian Churches. Moral laxism, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, has been the *de facto* moral system chosen by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, and most U.S. Catholics and other Christians, for justifying the killing and maiming of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and for morally permitting tens of thousands of American Catholics and other Christians to go off and do this killing. If the Catholic bishops had adopted the same laxist moral system to attain *moral certainty* with regards to the possible destruction of a person via abortion, no one would be able to ascertain whether they were for or against abortion. However, whether a person lives in the womb or in Fallujah, laxism, as the chosen moral system for deciding if a life can be justly destroyed, is an anti-witness to belief in “the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death.”

Planned Ambiguity and Consent-bestowing Silence

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and each bishop who is a member of it must immediately cease and desist from engaging in this most grave evil. The Conference and each bishop must unambiguously inform those for whom they are morally responsible that Catholics must not support or participate in this war. The bishops must be as unequivocally straightforward in their condemnation of unjustified killing in Iraq as they are with their condemnation of unjustified killing in the womb. They must insist that Catholics must neither support nor participate in this killing because this killing is murder, according to the required *strict* application of Catholic just war theory standards within the context of Catholic moral theology and moral systems.

There is no other morally acceptable alternative. When confronted with murder, silence serves the murders and those who profit from murder, never the victims. Silence is a choice and therefore is subject to discernment as to whether it is in conformity with the call of the moral will of God as revealed by Jesus. The Bishops’ calculated witness of planned ambiguity and consent-bestowing silence—not to mention the jingoism that they are passively permitting to pass as Catholic moral theology—is cooperation with and complicity in unjustified killing. To justify a grave evil is to promote that grave evil. Silence gives consent, especially where a serious moral matter is concerned and where the silent person is understood to be an official moral leader.

For bishops to remain silent in the face of a grave evil, knowing their silence will be interpreted and used as a sign of moral acceptability, is to bestow upon evil a nonverbal, body language “*imprimatur*.” This then allows people to engage in the evil with a clear conscience because the “*imprimatur*” communicates loudly and clearly that:

“We bishops may disagree with the policies, practices and politics relating to this war. But, there is nothing about them that would undermine our moral certainty that the strong moral presumption against war has been overcome by the strict application of Catholic just war theory. Therefore you may take part in this war and support it if you wish.”

To confer upon a person a clear conscience in relation to a form of homicide is to remove a major barrier to engaging in that activity. It is also to supply a significant tool by which others can recruit people for the activity. Such an “*imprimatur*” in a capitalist society or in a communist society is worth its weight in gold. To a government planning to go to war or at war, it is worth more than ten regiments or ten battleships or ten television networks. A silent, nonverbal, body language “*imprimatur*,” however, can also be cooperation with unjustified intentional homicide. In the case of the present war in Iraq it pointedly appears to be that—despite its enormous value in the secular domain.⁸

Undermining Catholic Moral Authority and Moral Theology

The present episcopal witness is also publicly undermining the entire structure of the Catholic Church’s moral theology and moral authority in the United States and beyond. A moral authority that authorizes by public witness a laxist system of moral discernment regarding mass homicide has, thereby, concretely morally validated every possible choice of human behavior. The semblance of a justification can be found for any act—especially where some desire, pleasure or self-interest of the actor is at stake. If the official moral leaders and teachers of the U.S. Catholic Church can employ a laxist interpretation of Catholic moral principles *vis à vis* the mass homicide of war, rather than interpreting just war standards *strictly* as required by the Church’s own teaching, then why cannot every Catholic in every situation use the same laxist interpretive paradigm? If the episcopal teachers of moral theology validate by their public witness an Orwellian doublespeak inversion of meaning then the word lax would be permitted to masquerade as *strict*. This would allow laxism to appear to be an acceptable moral system when doubt exists as to whether an activity is mass murder or not. Moral consistency would dictate that the same Orwellian charade of moral discernment be available to all Catholics in all moral matters.

Laxism would thereby become an acceptable moral system of interpretation in relationship to all human behavior as serious as, or less serious than, mass murder—albeit under cover of the nomenclature of a newly defined meaning for *strict*. Lest it be perceived as absurd that such an Orwellian inversion of meaning could take place in the Church, consider the moral logic that has been used to render nugatory in Christian moral theology Jesus’

teaching, “Love your enemies.” Burning Jews, heretics and witches at the stake, torture, wars, abortions, political oppression, shaming, violent revolutions, slavery, indeed practically every form of inhumanity and cruelty imaginable, has been interpreted by the Christian Churches at one time or another to be morally consistent with following Jesus’ command to “Love your enemies.” Where the moral will of some god other than the God revealed in and by Jesus becomes the standard by which Christians make their decisions, history shows that it takes almost no effort to logically, theologially and emotionally “see” hate as love, fear as freedom, evil as good, domination as service and lax as strict.

The time has come for the Catholic bishops of the United States to publicly repent, to publicly change their minds and their behavior regarding this matter of human slaughter in Iraq. As their silence has given consent to mass murder, as well as, consent to the use of a condemned moral system (laxism), so now let them reclaim their moral tradition and moral authority by saying, with one voice, in language that the simplest soul can comprehend: “This war is unjust and killing in it is murder according to Catholic moral theology. Therefore, our Catholic men and women can no longer participate in it or support it.”

Unjustified Killing Is Not Open to Ex Post Facto Justification

Finally, while it is not precisely on the topic of this essay, let there be no belated, contorted, retroactive duck-and-cover efforts at self-justification. It is morally unacceptable to maintain that,

“While we started the killing unjustly, we cannot now stop killing since we are there killing. We will only stop killing the other side when the other side, whom we have unjustly attacked, stops killing us and those who have aligned themselves with us.”

Unjustified killing does not become justified when the party, that the unjust lethal aggressor intends to kill, defends itself from the lethal aggressor. In Catholic just war theory, an international United Nations peacekeeping operation may be morally acceptable in Iraq to restore order to a society which the United States has ravaged. But the unjust, lethal aggressor responsible for initiating the carnage and chaos has no moral right to any

longer be present in that society under the phony auspices of being a concerned and benign peacekeeper. It is absurd to make the child abuser the person in charge of the rehabilitation of the abused. Nonetheless, an unjust lethal aggressor does have the moral obligation, as does the child abuser, to finance the restoration of what is destroyed—which of course can never include quenching the soul-searing pain it has caused by the loss of life, limb, love, sanity and family for hundreds of thousands of human beings in Iraq and in the United States.

Blind Guides

The Catholic bishops of the United States today are doing great harm to the Church Universal, to the U.S. Catholic Church, to the people of Iraq, and to the American people. By their chosen silence they have become moral accessories to unjustified woe, waste and desolation in human life. Accessories are enablers. The bishops by continuing to project, via their silence, an aura of *strict moral certainty* with respect to this war on Iraq are a significant moral support apparatus for recruiting for it, for voting for it, for electing representatives who endorse it and for continuing to kill and maim people in it. The U.S. bishops, however, by taking this morally laxist position are acting in lockstep with a seventeen-hundred-year-old *modus operandi* made visible in all the Churches of Christianity—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Theirs is but the contemporary Americanized meme of the old Constantinian pastoral practice of pious and politically street-smart “blind guides” (Mt 15:14) leading those they have kept blind down the primrose path of holy homicide on behalf of the local power brokers, economic elites and lords of war—instead of leading their flocks along the Way that the Lamb of God teaches by word and deed.⁹

It is time to stop! A laxist moral system of interpretation is forbidden because it undermines all obedience to morality. The *de facto* witnessing to its validity is a most grave episcopal failure—especially when applied where a *strict* interpretation is obligatory. Such a witness is the public camouflaging of evil under the veneer of good and beneath the trappings of Christian religiosity. It is giving a false, misleading, Orwellian doublethink witness concerning the Way of Eternal Life. It is placing “is” where “is not” belongs. A bishop’s supreme obligation, as a bishop, before God and to his people is the salvation of souls. Being a CEO administering and protecting the assets of

a corporation is a secondary episcopal occupation, if that. When the latter of these tasks controls the interpretation of the former, rather than the former controlling the operations of the latter, then an about-face is the only way back to being faithful to the vocation to which one has been called by Christ-God. This is a vocation to shepherd along the Way of Eternal Salvation those whom God has entrusted to you. It is a commission to protect His lambs, His anawim, from the craft of the wolves of evil and to feed His sheep with the teachings of Jesus and with Jesus.

*Everyone will readily agree that it is of the
highest importance to know whether
we are not being duped by morality.*

EMMANUEL LEVINAS
TOTALITY AND INFINITY

Endnotes

1. “In a case where he (a person) lacks certainty about the rightness and goodness of a determined act, still performs that act, he stands condemned by his own conscience.” *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*: Encyclical Letter addressed by the Supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II to all the bishops of the Catholic Church regarding certain fundamental questions of the Church’s moral teachings (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, Vatican Translation), §60.

“Practical doubt is equivalent to a verdict of conscience forbidding the act until the doubt has been cleared up practically. This principle, with its profound insight into truth, is held and taught by all teachers in the Church.” Bernard Häring, “Basic Principle Regarding Doubt,” in *The Law of Christ*, Vol I (Paramus, NJ: The Newman Press, 1966), 171.

2. The generally accepted Catholic just war theory standards are as follows:
- Just institution: the war must be declared by the legitimate authority authorized to declare war;
 - Just cause: only a defensive war can be morally just, offensive war of any kind is not morally justifiable;
 - Just intention: vengeance, hate, the unjust confiscation of the wealth or the property rights of others, their labor force or their markets are morally forbidden intentions;
 - Last resort;
 - Success is probable;
 - Just means: the means chosen must be indispensable for accomplishing the end;
 - Civilian or non-combatant immunity from attack;
 - Proportionality: the harm done to a people by a war cannot be greater than the harm that would have occurred if the war did not take place. No defensive strategy, *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bello*, that exceeds the limits of proportionality is morally permissible.

For further elucidation of these standards see the following:

- ❑ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), §§2307–2317. [ISBN 0-89243-565-8]
 - ❑ *Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (National Catholic News Service, 1984), §§80–110. [ISBN 1-55586-863-0]
 - ❑ *Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response* (Washington, DC: Office of Social Development & World Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1993), 9–11. [<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/harvest.htm>]
 - ❑ John Howard Yoder, *When War is Unjust* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984). [ISBN 0-80662-077-3]
 - ❑ Ronald G. Musto, *The Catholic Peace Tradition* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1986). [ISBN 0-88344-263-9]
3. *Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (National Catholic News Service, 1984), §§66–78. [ISBN 1-55586-863-0]
4. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Moral Systems in Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985), 318–319.

Moral Systems:

By this term Catholic theology means not the various philosophical or theological systems of morality, law, etc., as a whole, but the various theories as to how one is morally bound to act where there is a serious doubt whether a [moral] law exists or whether it applies to the case in hand and this doubt cannot be directly resolved by closer study, etc. This question does not arise in a case where a specific end must be achieved without fail (for instance, for the validity of a sacrament: D 2101) [D, Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, edited by Adolf Schömmetzer, Freiburg i, Br., 32nd ed., 1963] therefore the best means to that end must be used. In other cases the question is answered as follows:

- a) *absolute tutorism*: one must always decide in favor of the [moral] law, even when its existence is doubtful, so long as any doubt at all remains of one's freedom from the law; this is a rigoristic view which is impossible in practice, misunderstands the moral nature of freedom as such and is rejected by the Church (D 2303);
- b) *probabiliorism*: a person may decide in favor of freedom only if the reasons against the existence of the [moral] law are substantially sounder and more probable. To this it can be objected that a [moral] law only binds if its existence is certain and that there is a presumption in favor of freedom, a moral value willed by God. But the Church allows this opinion (D 2175FF.);
- c) *equiprobabilism*: freedom may be chosen if the grounds for it are as good as those for believing that the [moral] law exists;
- d) *pure probabilism*: the presumption is in favor of freedom if there are serious reasons in its favor and the claim of the [moral] law is not certain. Probabilism and equiprobabilism in practice usually lead to the same conclusion since it is no easy task to weigh the reasons pro and con and the matter is always left to some extent to one's prudent estimation. Together they represent the most common view and if they are presupposed, then room is left in these doubtful cases for other considerations;
- e) *laxism*: the merest trace of a right to freedom justifies one in deciding against the [moral] law. Since we are normally concerned with a certainty that is only moral—not physical or metaphysical—and therefore some semblance of an argument against the [moral] law can generally be found, laxism would undermine all obedience to [moral] law and general norms of conduct. It is condemned by the Church (D 2101–2165, ESPECIALLY 2103).

See also:

- ❑ F. J. Connell, "Systems of Morality," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Thomson Gale, 2002), 876–880. [ISBN 0-7876-7694-2]
- ❑ Bernard Häring, "The True Basis of Morality," in *The Law of Christ, Vol I* (Paramus, NJ: The Newman Press, 1966), 175–189.

5. Because of the structure of human consciousness the possibility of doubt is cognitively impossible to completely escape in this world. Therefore, all human beings and by extension all Churches, religions, theologies and philosophies have to work with approximately the same set of moral systems elucidated above. How they work with them and how they name them may or may not be consistent with Catholic moral theology, but work with them they must since practical moral doubt is a universal phenomenon. Yet choices concerning what is good and what is evil have to be made in the face of it. Even if a person's governing law of conscience is not a precisely written panoply of moral rules and regulations but something as simple and as straightforward as "To do God's will" or "To love as Jesus loves," or "To be a good person," there is no escaping the possibility of moral doubt arising in a particular situation. Hence there is no way to avoid utilizing one or the other of the moral systems in order to resolve "What is God's will here?" or "What does it mean to love as Jesus loves in this situation?" or "What does being a good person call for here?". Likewise there is no way to avoid one or the other of the moral systems in applying concretely a highly detailed moral code, if that is one's norm or law of conscience. So while this essay is written through the lens of Catholic just-unjust war moral theology, the moral realities it deals with are not only Catholic, they are also catholic.

6. *Lancet* (2006). Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey. 368:9545;1421–1428.

According to a study published in the October 14, 2006, edition of the peer-reviewed scientific journal, *The Lancet*, as many as 654,965 more Iraqis may have died since hostilities began in Iraq in March 2003 than would have been expected under pre-war conditions. The survey was conducted by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad. The deaths from all causes—violent and non-violent—are over and above the estimated 143,000 deaths per year that occurred from all causes prior to the March 2003 invasion.

"To put these numbers in context, deaths are occurring in Iraq now at a rate more than three times that from before the invasion of March 2003,"

said Gilbert Burnham, MD, PhD, lead author of the study and co-director of the Bloomberg School's Center for Refugee and Disaster Response.

As found in the original *Lancet* survey, published in 2004, the majority of deaths in Iraq were due to violence—although there was a small increase in deaths from non-violent causes, such as heart disease, cancer and chronic illness. Gunshots were the primary cause of violent deaths. “Our total estimate is much higher than other mortality estimates because we used a population based, active method for collecting mortality information rather than passive methods that depend on counting bodies or tabulated media reports of violent deaths.

NOTE: *The Lancet*, published in Great Britain, is one of the premier peer-reviewed medical journals in the world, normally read only by people who possess the expertise to comprehend the highly detailed medical, scientific and mathematical concepts with which findings are arrived at and presented. However, the results of this particular research project, as did those of the 2004 study, made their way into popular mass media world-wide. The study is available on *The Lancet* website ([www/THELANCET.COM](http://www.thelancet.com)) and also on the M.I.T. website ([HTTP://WEB.MIT.EDU/CIS/PDF/HUMAN_COST_OF_WAR.PDF](http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/human_cost_of_war.pdf)). [M.I.T. co-sponsored the study and has added additional APPENDICES not included in the article as published in *The Lancet*.]

7. The following is from an interview given by John F. Donoghue, Catholic Archbishop of Atlanta, GA, a few days after the beginning (3/19/03) of the war on Iraq and published in the *Georgia Bulletin* (3/27/03), a Catholic diocesan weekly:

The Pope and other leaders had said we have to use diplomacy. We've tried that and you constantly get the same answer back from Saddam ... I think Saddam does have weapons of mass destruction. I think eventually he would make a preemptive strike on us ... [President Bush] has the right and the obligation to protect the citizens of this country when he thinks all avenues have been exhausted ... I think diplomacy has run its course. How much proof do you need ... I don't know where else we could go. He (Saddam) could have killed thousands of people with a preemptive strike. I think he eventually would make a preemptive strike on us ... I don't think human life means

anything to him ... Do you have to wait until Saddam makes a first strike before you can go to war? I don't think so."

It is nearly impossible to rationally fathom how an intelligent man—seeing scores of millions of people around the world publicly demonstrating against the need for a war on Iraq, against the Bush administration's and the U.S. media's claims that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction—could with *strict moral certainty* come to the above moral conclusion. It is even more difficult to understand how *strict moral certainty* is achieved when the two top weapons inspectors and evaluators of Iraq's weapons programs for the United Nations, Hans Blix and Maj. Scott Ritter, USMC, were continually and publicly saying there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, nor any capability of producing such weapons in the foreseeable future. The Archbishop's ability to achieve *strict moral certainty* with regard to morally endorsing the war on Iraq becomes even more strange once it is recognized that he had direct access to one of the best intelligence gathering operations on the planet, the Vatican's Secretary of States Office, and either did not consult it or did not believe it, since this Office opposed the war as morally not justifiable.

How can an Archbishop overcome with *moral certainty* the Catholic Church's morally binding strong presumption against war by the strict application of the Catholic just war theory when the Vatican itself is telling him the conditions for a just war under Catholic moral teaching are not met here? Could he possibly be unaware of Cicero's historical validated *caveat* that, “The first casualty of war is truth.”? Does he not know that the renowned Catholic moral theologian, Rev. Bernard Häring, says that: “the first rule of prudence is *factum non praesumitur, sed probari debet*, a fact, an act or action, may not legally be ‘presumed’ to exist or have taken place, but must be demonstrated.” In order for Catholic just war theory—or any just war theory—to properly function it depends on factual accuracy. Therefore *strict moral certainty* in regard to the facts one is employing to justify killing other human beings is mandatory, if the strong moral presumption against war is to be overcome. How then, in the face of all of the above, does a highly educated man rationally arrive with *strict moral certainty* at the conclusion that going to Iraq and killing people is morally justified, and then publicly communicate that conclu-

sion to those immortal souls who rely on him for authentic moral guidance in discerning good from the snares and deceptions of the Evil One?

8. On March 19, 2003, the day that the war on Iraq began, Bishop Wilton Gregory, then the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a formal statement concerning the war on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. The statement contained many good and noble moral and spiritual thoughts. But the critical sentence in the entire statement is: “We support those who accepted the call to serve their country in a conscientious way in the armed forces.” By any rational interpretation of that sentence, it has to mean that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is *morally certain* that the strong moral presumption against this war has been overcome by the *strict* application of the standards of the Catholic just war theory. Otherwise no bishop could make such a public statement, because he would then be in a state of moral doubt concerning whether the killing and maiming of people that was to take place was justified. But as noted earlier, in Catholic moral theology it is not permitted to act in a state of moral doubt. One must only act with *moral certainty*—and in those events where human life is subject to possible destruction or where the validity of a sacrament is at stake, moral doubt can be resolved and moral certainty attained only by a *strict* application of the law. The moral maxim or reflex principle that can normally be employed to achieve moral certainty, namely, “In doubt the possessor is to be favored,” is not morally available where the destruction of human life is the issue of conscience. It goes without saying that the moral system of laxism is also completely out of the question as a means of achieving *moral certainty* where doubt exists regarding whether it is morally justified to kill a person. Again to repeat what has been said before but cannot be repeated too often because of a systemic operational malformation of conscience throughout not only the Catholic Church, but also, if truth be told, throughout most of the Churches of Christianity: Because killing a person is legally justified, this does not mean that in this particular instance (war or capital punishment) it is morally justified. Likewise, because Catholic moral theology, in the justified homicide tradition, accepts that it is sometimes possible to morally kill a person, this does not mean that in this particular case the conditions that Catholic moral theology demands in order to acquire the obligatory *strict moral certainty* have been met.

It is not that Bishop Gregory as the spokesperson for the U.S. bishops does not know how to explicitly and unequivocally declare that something is morally unjustified and therefore prohibited as an option. At one point he states, “Any decision to defend against Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction by using our weapons of mass destruction would be clearly unjustified.” So here at least, in this one aspect related to the war on Iraq, he is *morally certain* that the strict application of Catholic just war theory would not allow for a particular tactic.

Consider depleted uranium (DU) weapons as intrinsically evil weapons of indiscriminate mass destruction:

An unavoidable moral query in terms of Catholic just war theory and the above moral declaration by the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is critically pertinent here: Are not, armor-piercing bullets, shells, bombs and missiles made with depleted uranium (DU), weapons of indiscriminate mass destruction? Why? The extremely dense DU munitions burn on impact. The fire releases microscopic, radioactive and toxic dust particles of uranium oxide that travel with the wind and can be inhaled or ingested. They also spread contamination by seeping into the land and water. In the human body, DU causes harm to internal organs due both to its chemical toxicity as a heavy metal and its release of radiation (*alpha* and *beta* rays). Because of its pervasive and indiscriminate effects, DU is has been classified as an *omnicidal* weapon—one that causes the death of all life. In this sense, depleted uranium is a war on life itself and on all that supports life—air, water and soil. DU remains radioactive well beyond its half-life of 4.5 billion years.

It should be noted that a recent European Parliament Report, European Committee on Radiation Risk 2003 (ECRR 2003) concludes that Atomic Bomb studies from 1945 onward underestimate the radiation risk by more than 1000 times and failed to consider the internal exposure and diseases caused by *alpha* and *beta* rays. They did not consider a classified memo (October 30, 1943) of the Manhattan Project that, in case the Manhattan Project objective of producing plutonium fission and hence an atomic bomb did not succeed, depleted uranium (DU) munitions would be deployed towards the attainment of the same objective. Therefore, as early as 1943 it was known what DU could and would do as a weapon.

This means, contrary to propaganda, the government was well aware of its indiscriminate lethal effects long before its use in the first Gulf War.

Consider the following legal, scientific, medical and historical facts:

- ❑ In 1991, in Gulf War I, the U.S. broke a 60-year taboo and introduced DU to the battleground, a radiological weapon which is truly a weapon of indiscriminate killing and mass destruction. What is worse: the flash annihilation from an atomic bomb or the slow, ceaseless, multi-generational mutilation caused by DU weapons?
- ❑ Radiological weapons (including target-guided, DU-containing bombs and missiles) currently being used by the U.S. in Iraq are forbidden under Articles 35 & 55 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict (Protocol I). In Catholic just war theory and in Catholic moral theory as it relates to the destruction of human life does premeditative and continual use of forms of violence and agents of violence that are explicitly illegal under the major international law treaty governing war render the war unjust?
- ❑ The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) condemns the use of DU weapons and supports the calls for a ban on their use. “A basic principle in radiation protection is that all exposures should be justified; that is, the benefit for those exposed should exceed the risk. This is the standard for medical radiography. The military utility of DU weapons for the users does not justify any added health risk for non-combatants, no matter how small. The precautionary principle states that in the absence of convincing proof that a substance or process is harmless, the presumption must be risk. This principle applies clearly to the use of DU weapons.”
- ❑ According to the IPPNW, “DU weapons indiscriminately contaminate the places in which they are used, and the contamination persists long after the conclusion of hostilities, adding to the radioactive and toxic burden imposed upon civilians, wildlife, and ecosystems. From this perspective, DU weapons should be considered a form of ecological warfare prohibited by the Geneva Conventions.”
- ❑ Prior to that war the American military did an in-depth analysis of

DU weapons and warned that the radiation and heavy metal released by them under battlefield conditions could cause kidney, lung and liver damage, chromosomal damage, neurocognitive disorders and a variety of cancers.

- ❑ The U.S. left 300–800 tons of depleted uranium in Iraq after the first Gulf War.
- ❑ In Gulf War II, “1900 tons (3,800,000 pounds) of DU was used in 2003, equivalent to nearly 250,000 Nagasaki bombs.”
- ❑ The American Gulf War Veterans Association reports that of the 697,000 military personnel sent to Iraq for Gulf War I, half have reported serious illnesses and more than 30 percent are chronically ill and are receiving disability benefits from the Veterans Administration—most are in their mid-thirties at a time in their lives when they should be in the prime of health (such a high occurrence of various symptoms has led to the illnesses being named Gulf War Syndrome).
- ❑ DU, uranium 238 (²³⁸U), is a potent radioactive carcinogen. Aerosolized particles, released from exploded munitions, enter lungs, open wounds, the food chain and water. Once taken into the human body it can produce cancer of the lungs, bones, blood, reproductive organs or kidneys.
- ❑ A child playing with a spent DU shell for one hour has received in that hour twice as much radiation exposure as he or she would have normally received in a whole year.
- ❑ Tons of radioactive waste are polluting major Iraqi urban centers. Spent DU shells litter the ground. Millions of DU rounds have been poured into Iraq by U.S. and British military operations.
- ❑ Children are 10 to 20 times more sensitive to radiation exposure than are adults.
- ❑ After Gulf War I pediatricians reported a six to twelve times increase in children in Basra with childhood leukemia.
- ❑ Dr. Huda Ammash dedicated herself to scientifically documenting and reporting on the alarming rise of cancers and birth defects in Iraq after Gulf War I. Two month after Gulf War II began she was arrested

by the U.S. military and imprisoned. She was charged with building weapons of mass destruction.

- ❑ The Iraqi National Ministry of Health has produced for international health conferences detailed epidemiological reports and statistical studies showing a six-fold increase in breast cancer, a five-fold increase in lung cancer and a 16-fold increase in ovarian cancer.
- ❑ A thorough understanding of the power of DU weapons, to be weapons of indiscriminate destruction of people and of large areas of land into the indefinite future, was completely available in the public domain on a worldwide basis at least since 1995. Also available was the fact the United States had employed such weapons on a significant scale in Gulf War I.
- ❑ Dr. Helen Caldicott, a pediatrician, wrote in an editorial in the Baltimore Sun on October 6, 2002: “Do President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld understand the medical consequences of the 1991 War and the likely health effects of the next one they are planning? If they don’t, their ignorance is breathtaking. Even more incredible, though, and much more likely, is that they do understand but don’t care.”

Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter on Catholic Moral Theology, *Veritatis Splendor*, states that: “Certainly, in order to have a ‘good conscience’ (1 TIM 1:5), man must seek the truth and must make judgments in accordance with that same truth.” Bernard Häring in his eminent treatise on moral theology, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. 1, says: “The effort one is obliged to make in order to acquire certainty is to be measured by the importance of the action itself and the consequences which are anticipated.” How, in light of all that has been said above, is it even conceivable that a person *strictly* interpreting Catholic just war theory could rationally arrive at a state of *moral certainty* that such weapons were morally permissible? If they are not morally permissible then Catholic soldiers, pilots, etc., would be morally forbidden from using them because their use would be unjustified, that is, the moral equivalent of murder or of attempted murder. Consider: If a child dies from a cancerous brain tumor which was initiated by exposure to the radioactive and toxic dust released

by the explosion of a DU weapon, who is her killer? George Bush? Richard Cheney? Donald Rumsfeld? Condoleezza Rice? The U.S. Catholic Bishops? The soldier in Iraq who is using this type of munition to kill the enemy? God? No one?

Is not Iraq today saturated with uranium contamination from these DU munitions and is their toxicity not at this very hour indiscriminately initiating and feeding the lethal destruction of people’s internal bio-chemical milieu (neurological, reproductive, genetic, respiratory, digestive, excretory, immunological), and will this not continue into the indefinite future? How does a Catholic bishop rationally arrive with *strict morally certainty* at the conclusion that DU weapons are NOT morally unjustified weapons of indiscriminate mass destruction? How does he determine with *strict moral certitude* that a war that has every intention of employing such weapons on a large scale is a just war according to the stringent standards of the Catholic Just War Theory? How does he arrive with *strict moral certainty* at the decision to remain silent as members of the Body of Christ who are in his spiritual care go off to kill and contaminate and to be killed and to be contaminated by this heinous instrument of indiscriminate destruction? What does respect for life, reverence for life and the sanctity of human life mean when this is what is included in it?

9. One of countless examples of the American Hierarchy acting as “blind guides” leading Catholics into war, Catholics whom they have kept as morally blind as themselves, occurs on April 18, 1917. Cardinal James Gibbons, the Archbishop of Baltimore, writes in a letter to President Woodrow Wilson, that is signed not only by him but also by the other U.S. Archbishops, “We are all true Americans ... Our people, as ever, will rise as one man to serve the nation.” Cardinal Gibbons on the threshold of the U.S. entrance into the demented hellhole of WWI also writes, that when war is declared “the duty of a citizen [is] absolute and unreserved obedience to his country’s call.”

A second illustration of this terrible ongoing problem in which many of the American Catholic Hierarchy are ensnared can be found fifty years later in regard to yet another war of the U.S. Government. In moral defense of a war—that the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, referred to in

1966 as “an overwhelming atrocity,” that was taking place in a country that in 1967 Daniel Berrigan, S.J., called “the land of the burning children”—Cardinal John O’Connor, then Military Chaplain O’Connor, wrote a 256-page book in 1968 entitled, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*. The Forward of the book is by the Republican Leader of the U.S. Senate, Senator Everett Dirksen. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey gives the book a wholehearted endorsement on its front and back flaps. The back cover notes that “Commander John J. O’Connor ... holds [an] M.A. degree in Advanced Ethics.” The book received extensive positive coverage in the secular and the Catholic press and soon became a moral and a morale handbook for military chaplains. It also became an apologetics primer for bishops, priests and ministers who were morally approving of members of their flocks going to Vietnam to kill people on behalf of the American cause. Indeed, the Commandant of the Marine Corps (General Leonard F. Chapman), acting as “top brass,” issued an official bulletin touting the book to officers in his chain of command and stating that it should be used as background for troop training and that it provides “a reassurance for the serviceman that his participation in Vietnam is just, and that he is fulfilling an obligation to his country.” [See APPENDIX for an exact replica of this notification.]

It is telling, however, that nowhere in the 256 pages of this Catholic Military Chaplain’s book is Jesus mentioned, let alone quoted, even once, to morally justify a position that is taken. The book could have been written exactly as it is if the incarnation, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus never happened. Any secular moral philosopher could have written it.

So why use the title, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*, since Jesus Christ has nothing to do with the presentation of the contents? Why should a Christian Chaplain write and publish a book that any philosopher or political scientist could have written word-for-word? Why were so many major secular supporters of the war so zealous in their desire to get this utterly unoriginal defense of the war widely distributed? The answer, of course, is that the medium of a message is as much a part of a message as the words. *Chaplain* O’Connor brings to the verbal message the loud and clear unwritten, nonverbal message that the U.S. war in Vietnam is in conformity with the will of God as revealed by Jesus, or at least as under-

stood by the Church. Therefore no Christian need have any qualms of conscience about going to Vietnam and killing Vietnamese as President Johnson and his military staff so order.

Ordination to the priesthood is here conscripted as a public relations tool to place the war—for political, recruiting and combat morale purposes—under the canopy of Divine approval, thereby allowing every Christian symbol to be enlisted to sell it, to recruit for it and to prosecute it. *Chaplain* is what “baptizes” the war. *Chaplain* is what makes the war and makes participation in the killing and mayhem of the war a legitimate Christian activity in the minds and hearts of most everyday Christians. The same book written by Mr. John J. O’Connor, a Vietnam veteran, would be very unlikely to make it even to publication, let alone be the subject of the marketing blitz generated by *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*.

Now, after being morally dead wrong on the most catastrophic American moral breakdown up to that time, John O’Connor has bestowed on him Cardinal Spellman’s former episcopal chair, Cardinal-Archbishop of the most prestigious Catholic diocese in the United States, New York! In fairness to Cardinal O’Connor it must be stated that when he belatedly recognized that he was wrong about the Vietnam War, he had the moral rectitude to do what few high public figures or ecclesiastical officers would have the courage to do, unless caught: he freely said he was wrong. In an article entitled *The Cardinal, Gays and Lesbians*, Nat Hentoff writes, “O’Connor had enough integrity to confess his error unequivocally. During the Vietnam War he wrote a book, *A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam*. It was as he wrote “a justification, moral and legal, for the American intervention in Vietnam.” “That’s a bad book,” he told me during one of our first conversations. “I regret having published it.”

However, the problem addressed in this endnote is not simply the problem of two U.S. Cardinals, fifty years apart, whose religious work on behalf of ventures in nationalistic militarism has resulted in untold numbers of simple Christians killing and being killed, maiming and being maimed, driving others mad and being driven mad. These two members of the professional religious elite of their Church are but two magnifying lenses through which to view the consequences of the morally-blinding

pathogen that has invaded the U.S. Hierarchy and through it infected the entire U.S. Catholic Church. But, this moral virus did not arise *sui generis* in the American Catholic Church or in any other American Church. It was transmitted here as a highly-virulent strain by European Christians from all their mainline Churches—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. For every American bishop, priest or minister morally blinded in mind and heart by nationalistic militarism under the cloaking device of Christian rhetoric and ritual, there are ten thousand European predecessors who have carried this moral disease across 1700 years. Cardinal Gibbons and Cardinal O’Connor are but momentary vectors of a long-standing moral malaise in the Church, which can perhaps be made somewhat more visible meditating on the words of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Those who administer the Law have no knowledge of me.

*The shepherds have rebelled against me,
following things that have no power in them.*

JER 2:8

Betrayal by the religious ruling class—in order to curry favor with powers which they admire and lust after but which are in fact devoid of any power to do what God wants done for humanity—is obviously not a problem that first appears on the scene with the bishops of the United States in the twenty-first century or even with the Constantinianization of the Church in the fourth century. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and others are well aware of the problem hundreds of years before Jesus.

The lust for powers that God does not want his religious leaders to have—because these powers are impotent in bringing about, or even hostile to bringing about, His divine design for the eternal well-being of humanity—seem to be the primeval temptation to betrayal and to evil that presents itself to people of heightened religious consciousness. Jesus Himself at the very beginning of His public ministry has to vigorously fight against this temptation in the desert. Some Biblical interpreters see His battle against this temptation in the desert—to choose the use of power other than that power which is of God—to actually be the beginning of a lifelong struggle with the desire to confront and conquer evil with some-

thing other than the power of the one He knows Himself to be since the moment of His baptism: The Suffering Servant (IS 42:1FF.). The power of the Servant is the power of self-sacrificial, nonviolent, forgiving, suffering love toward all, friends and enemies. The temptation to conquer evil and death by substituting the powers of the world for the power of the Servant is only forever vanquished by Jesus, according to these interpreters, when in Gethsemane He commands Peter to “Put up your sword,” and when on Golgotha He prays, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” and willing accepts the consequences. One of these consequences turns out to be death. The other turns out to be what every human being longs for at the very root of his or her being: Resurrection unto Eternal Life with God—who is Father/Mother/Parent/Love.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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1 Oct 1968

MARINE CORPS BULLETIN 5070

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps
To: Distribution List

Subj: "A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam," by J. O'Connor

Encl: (1)(SC) "A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam"

1. Purpose. To promulgate information on the use of the subject book.

2. Information. "A Chaplain Looks at Vietnam" contains a compilation of U. S. policy on Vietnam which affects the military. The author has ably refuted many of the popular allegations in the press which create incorrect opinions of U. S. policy by the American public. This book creates a reaffirmation of faith in our leaders over the years, a reassurance for the serviceman that his participation in Vietnam is just, and that he is fulfilling an obligation to his country. This information is not otherwise readily available to all personnel who have participated or who will participate with the Marine Corps in Vietnam and is considered essential.

3. Action. Addressees will incorporate enclosure (1) in their Vietnam reference materials to be used as background for troop training.

4. Reserve Applicability. This Bulletin is applicable to the Marine Corps Reserve.

5. Self-cancellation. 31 March 1969.

H. Nickerson, Jr.
H. NICKERSON, Jr.
By direction

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