



## Romanian Catholic Diocese of Canton *Office of the Bishop*

March 7, 2003

Beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord, Jesus Christ,

Great Lent, which we now begin, is traditionally a time in which we take stock of ourselves, our lives, and the direction in which we are headed. In the common language of the Catholic Church, it is a time for a deep “examination of conscience” as we fast, pray, and otherwise attend to the call for repentance issued by the Church for the forty days before we celebrate the Resurrection of her savior, Jesus Christ.

A serious examination of conscience requires that we recognize that there are times in the life of each Christian when one’s faith is seriously and urgently challenged by the events taking place around him or her. Like it or not, these challenges show us just how seriously—or not—we are living our baptismal commitment to Christ. Most of us, most of the time, would prefer to keep our heads in the sand, ostrich-like, than to face truths about ourselves. This is why the Church has found it so vitally necessary to have seasons, such as Lent, during which we must pull our heads out of the sand and take a good, hard look at the world around us and how we are living in it.

We cannot fail, as we examine our consciences, to take into account the most critical challenge presented to our faith in our day: the fact that the United States government is about to initiate a war against the people of Iraq. For Romanian Catholics who are also United States citizens, this raises an immediate and unavoidable moral issue of major importance. Specifically stated the issue is this: does the killing of human beings in this war constitute murder?

The Holy Gospels reveal our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ to be nonviolent. In them, Jesus teaches a Way of life that his disciples are to follow, a Way of nonviolent love of friends and enemies. However, since the latter half of the fourth century the Church has proposed standards that, if met, would make it morally permissible for Christians to depart from that way in order to engage in war. These standards have come to be known in popular language as the “Catholic Just War Theory.”

According to this theory, if all of the conditions it specifies are adhered to, the killing that is done in fighting a war may be justifiable and therefore morally allowable. This theory also teaches that if any *one* of the standards is not met, then the killing that occurs is unjust and therefore morally impermissible. Unjust killing is by definition murder. Murder is intrinsically evil and therefore absolutely forbidden, no matter what good may seem to come of it.

The Church teaches that good ends do not justify the use of evil means. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states this principle succinctly: “One may never do evil so that good may result from it.” (1789) One contemporary example of this would be abortion. Abortion is intrinsically evil; hence regardless of the good that may seem to issue from it, a Catholic may never participate in it.

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Paragraph 2309 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. *The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy*” (emphasis added). Since war is about the mass infliction of death and suffering on children of God, Christians can enter into it and fight in it only if the war in question strictly meets all the criteria of the just war theory, and only if these same standards are likewise meticulously observed in the course of fighting the war. Vague, loose, freewheeling, conniving, relaxed interpretations of Catholic just war theory and its application are morally illegitimate because of “the gravity of such a decision.”

“The evaluation of these conditions of the just war theory for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good,” states the *Catechism*. (2309) However, the nation-state is never the final arbiter or authority for the Catholic of what is moral or for what is good for the salvation of his or her soul. *What is legal can be evil and often has been.* Jesus Christ and his Church, not the state, are the ultimate informers of conscience for the Catholic.

This is why the Church teaches as a norm of conscience the following: “If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order such arrangements would not be binding in conscience.” (*Catechism* 1903) She also warns “Blind obedience [to immoral laws] does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out” (*Catechism* 2313). When a moral conflict arises between Church teaching and secular morality, when contradictory moral demands are made upon a Catholic’s conscience, he or she “must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29).

Because such a moment of moral crisis has arisen for us, beloved Romanian Catholics, I must now speak to you as your bishop. Please be aware that I am not speaking to you as a theologian or as a private Christian voicing his opinion, nor by any means am I speaking to you as a political partisan. I am speaking to you solely as your bishop with the authority and responsibility I, though a sinner, have been given as a successor to the apostles on your behalf. I am speaking to you from the deepest chambers of my conscience as your bishop, appointed by Jesus Christ in his Body, the Church, to help shepherd you to sanctity and to heaven. Never before have I spoken to you in this manner, explicitly exercising the fullness of authority Jesus Christ has given his Apostles “to bind and to loose,” (cf. John 20:23), but now “the love of Christ compels” me to do so (2 Corinthians 5:14). My love for you makes it a moral imperative that I not allow you, by my silence, to fall into grave evil and its incalculable temporal and eternal consequences.

Humanly speaking, I would much prefer to keep silent. It would be far, far easier for me and my family simply to let events unfold as they will, without commentary or warning on my part. But what kind of shepherd would I be if I, seeing the approach of the wolf, ran away from the sheep (cf. John 10:12-14)? My silence would be cowardly and, indeed, sinful. I believe that Christ, whose flock you are, expects more than silence from me on behalf of the souls committed to my protection and guidance.

Therefore I, by the grace of God and the favor of the Apostolic See Bishop of the Eparchy of St. George in Canton, must declare to you, my people, for the sake of your salvation as well as my own, that any direct participation and support of this war against the people of Iraq is objectively grave evil, a matter of mortal sin. Beyond a reasonable doubt this war is morally incompatible with the Person and Way of Jesus Christ. With moral certainty I say to you it does not meet even the minimal standards of the Catholic just war theory.

Thus, any killing associated with it is unjustified and, in consequence, unequivocally murder. Direct participation in this war is the moral equivalent of direct participation in an abortion. For the Catholics of the Eparchy of St. George, I hereby authoritatively state that such direct participation is intrinsically and gravely evil and therefore absolutely forbidden.

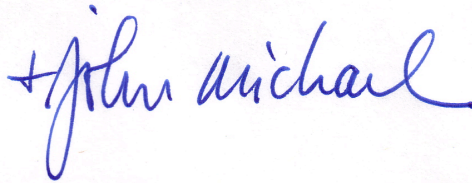
My people, it is an incontestable Biblical truth that a sin left unnamed will propagate itself with lavish zeal. We must call murder by its right name: murder. God and conscience require nothing less if the face of the earth is to be renewed and if the salvation offered by Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is to reach all people, including us. We have no choice before the face of God but to speak unambiguously to the moral situation with which we are confronted and to live according to the Will of Him who gazes at us from the Cross (*Catechism* 1785).

Let us pray for each other and take care of each other in this spiritually trying time. To this end our Church is wholeheartedly committed to the support of any of our members in the military or government service who may be confronted with situations of legal jeopardy due to their need to be conscientious objectors to this war. Let us also pray in earnest with the Mother of God, who knows what it is to have her Child destroyed before her eyes, that the destruction of families, lives, minds and bodies that war unleashes will not take place.

Finally, my brothers and sisters in Christ, be assured that Our Lord is aware that our "No" to murder and our prayers for peace are our faithful response to his desires. He will remember this forever and ever, and so it is to him we must now turn, in him we must now trust.

Amen.

Sincerely in Christ-God,



(Most Reverend) John Michael Botean  
a sinner, bishop