

August 5, 2007

Dear Brother in Ordained Ministry,

I write in the name of the executive board of the Elephants in the living Room with a sense of urgency. It seems to us that, by and large, the moral dimensions of our nation's invasion of Iraq are not being raised in the pulpit and other places (e.g., parish bulletins) we use to proclaim the Word. In our image an elephant is sitting in the U.S. Church's living room and we are trying to ignore it.

Both the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Bishops have taken positions on the morality of the invasion and occupation. The most recent instance, a July 19th statement by the Chair of the USCCB Committee on International Policy, is enclosed.

We suggest that the lectionary readings for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (the weekend of August 18-19) invite a prophetic word on this issue. The civic leaders' discrediting and persecution of Jeremiah for disheartening the soldiers and the people by his preaching is an uncomfortably apt picture of what happens when government policies are resisted by prophetic words (First Reading). Speaking against the invasion and occupation well exemplify the tension Jesus is announcing when he says he has come not to bring peace, but division (Gospel). The upcoming beatification of Franz Jagerstatter (Oct 26) officially adds to the "cloud of witnesses" who surround us (Second Reading).

The gospel mandate is clear: love one another, love your enemies, put away the sword, forgive, blessed are the peacemakers. We are always unworthy servants of the Word, even as we try to be faithful to its challenges. Let us not be silent about our nation's actions in Iraq.

Fraternally,

Tom Lumpkin

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Iraq Situation Unacceptable, Unsustainable, U.S. Bishops' Statement

July 19, 2007

WASHINGTON – The current situation in Iraq is unacceptable and unsustainable with the human and financial impact on Iraqi and American lives staggering, the U.S. bishops said in a message to Congress.

In a July 17 letter, Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, FL, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on International Policy, reiterated the bishops' call for members of Congress and the Bush administration to break the political stalemate in Washington and "forge bipartisan policies on ways to bring about a responsible transition and an end to the war.

The letter, released by the USCCB on July 18, was written in response to a June 28 request for a meeting on Iraq from Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio. In it, Bishop Wenski agreed to meet with Ryan and a group of 13 other Catholic House Democrats to discuss how to move toward the goal of a "responsible transition" to end the war in Iraq.

Pointing to the "dangerous and deteriorating situation in Iraq," Bishop Wenski noted the "staggering costs" of the war.

"Too many Iraqi and American lives have been lost. Too many Iraqi communities have been shattered. Too many civilians have been driven from their homes," he said.

"The current situation in Iraq is unacceptable and unsustainable, as is the policy and political statement among decision makers in Washington," the bishop said.

He criticized congressional members of both political parties in not opposing the "authorizing the use of force" when the American bishops, "in solidarity with Pope John Paul II, repeatedly raised grave moral questions about military intervention in Iraq and the unpredictable and uncontrollable negative consequences of an invasion and occupation."

"Sadly," he added, "many tragic consequences we and others had feared have come to pass."

U.S. military action in Iraq has brought with it "new moral responsibilities toward the people of Iraq," Bishop Wenski noted, urging that the United States begin the process of making "provisions for refugees who have fled their native land in search of safety for their families.

He noted the bishops' conference concerns "for Christians and other minority groups who have suffered in the aftermath of military action in Iraq along with the rest of the Iraqi population."

"Our Conference is under no illusions regarding Iraq," he said. "None of the alternative courses of action are without consequences for human life and dignity. There is no path that leads to an unambiguous

"Nevertheless, our nation must have the moral courage to change course and to break the policy and political stalemate in Washington so that we can walk a difficult path that does the most good and the least damage in human and moral terms," Bishop Wenski said.

In a statement dated June 25 and released June 27, Bishop Wenski said that the deadly cycle of violence must stop in Iraq if justice for all in the warring nation is to be realized.

Calling for immediate action to protect Christian Iraqi and all other religious minorities there, he pointed to the recent attack on the holy shrine in Samarra as “a heinous crime and an ominous sign of the political and sectarian violence engulfing Shia and Sunni communities” and the “particularly disturbing” killings of a Catholic priest and three deacons following Sunday Mass.

Father Raheed Ganni and three subdeacons – Basman Yousef Daud, Wahid Hanna Isho, Gassan Isam Bidawed – were killed June 3 immediately following Sunday Mass in Mosul.

“These incidences of violence make the possibilities of secure, stable, democratic Iraq ever more difficult to achieve,” the bishop said. “The deadly cycle of violence must stop if peace with justice for all Iraqis is to be achieved.”

In the statement entitled “A Plea for Solidarity with Religious Minorities in Iraq,” Bishop Wenski pointed to the estimated prewar Christian population of 1.2 million that had dropped to an estimated several hundred thousand as Christians have been “forced to flee” to neighboring countries or to other areas of Iraq as internally displaced persons.

“In a special way, we are deeply concerned for Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq who are especially vulnerable,” he said. “Christians fear an existential threat to their ancient presence in Iraq.”

“We call for an immediate halt to the deliberate violence against our Christian sisters and brothers and other religious minorities in Iraq,” the bishop said on behalf of the U.S. bishops’ conference.

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Prayer for World Peace

by Joan Chittister, OSB

Great God, who has told us "Vengeance is mine,"
save us from ourselves, save us from the vengeance in our hearts
and the acid in our souls.

Save us from our desire to hurt as we have been hurt,
to punish as we have been punished,
to terrorize as we have been terrorized.

Give us the strength it takes to listen rather than to judge,
to trust rather than fear, to try again and again
to make peace even when peace eludes us.

We ask, O God, for the grace to be our best selves.
We ask for the wisdom to be builders of the human community rather than destroyers.
We ask for the humility as a people to understand the fears and hopes of other peoples.
We ask for the love it takes to bequeath to the children of the world to come
more than the failures of our own making.

We ask for the heart it takes to care for all the peoples of the world as well as ourselves.

Give us the depth of soul, O God, to constrain our might. Amen