

# A Summons to Repentance, A Call to Peacemaking

*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 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.* <sup>1</sup>

THE WAR IN IRAQ CONTINUES, steadily descending into a vortex of ever-deepening violence and revenge. Each day brings news of mounting deaths and casualties, and more revelations of abuse, degradation, and torture of Iraqi and Afghan prisoners at the hands of the military. Most people in this country have no idea how many Afghans and Iraqis have been slaughtered, how many lives destroyed, or how the futures of our own soldiers have been permanently scarred by the atrocities.

Now the veil of secrecy is being pulled back. We are beginning to see how international laws, and the Geneva Conventions, have been violated in the extreme, from the beginning. We are beginning to understand why the current administration *refuses* to hold the United States accountable to the International Court of Justice.

At this very dangerous and painful moment, we firmly restate our Christian opposition to this war, and to the subsequent effects of this unjustifiable rampage of unchecked power. There is nothing in the Christian tradition which might justify what has happened in the last two years. The space between humanity and inhumanity, between respect for the 'other' and wanton murder of the 'other,' is not gray. Many international groups overseeing human rights estimate that more than 17,000 Iraqis <sup>2</sup> have been killed since the beginning of the war. More than 800 US soldiers have lost their lives, and over 4,600 have been wounded. <sup>3</sup> The moral issues are clear, and faith communities have a God-given responsibility to speak out, in the name of the God of the living and the dead, of the wounded and the orphaned. To remain silent is to place our very souls in peril.

We realize that restating our opposition to this war is not enough. We are summoned to *repentance* in the most profound way. Repentance will mean saying No to the policies, secrecy, culture of violence, and lack of accountability, which have brought our nation to this dark hour. It will mean genuine grief for all the dead, and for the indignities suffered by Muslims at our nation's hands. Repentance will call us to counter the wave of hatred, by forming links of compassionate solidarity in the work for peace.

It is the wish of many of our leaders to "put all this behind us." Persons of conscience must resist this call to collective amnesia. As a nation, we must stand under the searing judgment of these events, hold our leaders accountable in light of their oaths of office and international law, and demand an end to violence and empire-building.

These are harsh times, and the call to repentance is equally demanding. Our faith in the God of life, our following of Jesus of Nazareth, and our plea for the coming of the Spirit of peace, ask nothing less of us.

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1. The Most Reverend John Michael Botean, Romanian Catholic archbishop of Canton, Ohio, Address to the Catholic Peace Fellowship. *Sign of Peace*, vol. 2.2.
  2. Sources: *Iraq Body Count* (an independent U.S.-British monitoring group); CBC News. Approximately 11,500 were civilians (source: The Independent [U.K.] 23 May 2004).
  3. Source: *Iraq Body Count*.

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