

A SPECTRUM OF OPINION: CATHOLICS AND THE WAR IN IRAQ

Russell Shaw

Before the war in Iraq, Catholics in the United States were sharply divided over its merits, even though many serious Catholic participants in the debate attempted to analyze the situation from the standpoint of just war (jus ad bellum) criteria. Catholic commentary ranged across a spectrum, from the opposition of pacifists to the support of neoconservatives voicing fears about weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Pope John Paul II and the Holy See strenuously opposed the war. A focal point of the Pope's critique concerned the initiation of war without specific United Nations authorization. Nevertheless it was wrong to accuse Catholics who supported the war of dissent from papal teaching, since the position advocated by Pope John Paul, like the positions other Catholics both supporting and opposing the war on just war grounds, was based on prudential judgments regarding matters of fact that allowed for a range of opinions.

I.

Michael Kinsley is a liberal columnist with whom I do not often agree. Last June, nevertheless, I thought Kinsley got things exactly right in a column in *The Washington Post*. He was discussing a strange phenomenon. Time and again, people responding to public opinion polls declare themselves certain about matters where certainty is impossible. This was eminently true of matters pertaining to the war in Iraq. After citing several examples, Kinsley wrote:

The most striking thing about polls... isn't how many people believe or disbelieve some unproven factual assertion or prediction but how few give the only correct answer, which is "Don't know." In [a] Fox News poll, vast majorities expressed certitude one way or the other about the existence of [weapons of mass destruction] in Iraq, the likelihood of peace in the Middle East and so on. Those who voted "not sure" (an even more tempting cop-out than the pollsters' usual "don't know") rarely broke 20 percent and usually hovered around 10. Four-fifths

or more were sure about everything.¹

This is a useful reminder for anyone who ventures to speak about the war in Iraq.

I know from my own experience what Kinsley was talking about. In response to a column I wrote, I got one e-mail that began: "I strongly disagree with your assessment of the Iraq war. As a Catholic and a retired army reserve officer, I am absolutely convinced that this was a just war according to the principles enunciated by St. Augustine and other Church fathers and that it was conducted justly. I believe this even if no WMDs are ever found; though I believe they will be."

Then there was the gentleman who wrote to point out that I was a journalist and therefore almost certainly wrong, whereas he was an engineer and therefore almost certainly right. This suggests that policy questions should be settled by a panel of two: a journalist and an engineer. We could be sure that whatever the journalist favored would be wrong and whatever the engineer favored would be right. What a lot of time that would save!

Joking aside, the intrinsic uncertainties involved in crucial questions of fact concerning Iraq make it difficult to see how moral judgment for or against the war—the *jus ad bellum* considerations, as they are called in just war language—could have been, or even now can be, entirely certain. For example: If the Americans and British had not attacked Saddam Hussein last March, what as a matter of fact would he have done? Would he have rushed to assemble a deadly array of weapons of mass destruction, and then launched them against us himself or shared them with terrorists? Or would he have settled down to a semi-permanent regimen of angry rhetoric and hollow threats? Who

knows? But the moral assessment of this conflict depends in large measure on which answer you think is correct.

I have a lot of sympathy for the government officials and military people responsible for setting and carrying out our policy in Iraq. As a private citizen, whose views have little or no influence on policy, I enjoy the luxury of being uncertain. These people do not. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says in speaking of just war, "The evaluation of [the] conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good."² That is an awesome burden.

However, this statement by the *Catechism* should not be required to bear more weight than it can sustain. The duty and right of public authorities to set public policy does not—as was sometimes alleged during the run-up to the war—cancel *my* duty and right, as a citizen and as a person of faith, to form my conscience on public issues as well as I can. I do not hesitate to say, "I could be wrong"; but that does not oblige me to say, "The government therefore has to be right." In speaking of war, the *Catechism* itself says that public authorities should "make equitable provision for those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms."³

Declarations of certitude were heard on all sides in the intra-Catholic debate about Iraq, even though wildly different views were often being expressed. Of course this was not uniquely true of Catholics; but I sometimes wonder whether our moral tradition causes us to expect certitude rather more than some other people do.

I am not a moral relativist. I take for granted the existence of absolute moral norms. I agree entirely with Pope John Paul II when he says such norms are an

indispensable condition of a just society. As he puts it: "In the end, only a morality which acknowledges certain norms as valid always and for everyone, with no exception, can guarantee the ethical foundation of social coexistence, both on the national and international levels."⁴

At the same time, it is important not to confuse certitude about moral norms with certitude about murky and contingent matters of fact. Many things of importance to judging the situation in Iraq were not clear when we went to war and are not clear now. I need only mention those magic words "weapons of mass destruction" to illustrate the point.

My first task here is to give an overview of the spectrum of Catholic opinion. In doing that, I shall skip the *ad hominem* sniping, the anti-Americanism, and the other bits of nastiness that often colored the debate as churchmen and theologians argued their cases in the heat of the moment. Do you find it surprising, by the way, that churchmen and theologians can be extremely disagreeable in debate? I don't. After all, nothing makes some people freer in saying harsh things about others than the certainty that *they* are right. (Unless, perhaps, it's uncertainty.)

II.

Let us begin with Catholic pacifism. I do not mean to disparage pacifism in saying it is the easiest position to describe, since anyone opposed in principle to war and violence was naturally opposed to war and violence in Iraq. At the same time, we have to distinguish two different kinds of pacifism: pure or absolute pacifism, which rejects all war and violence—period; and functional pacifism, which hedges round the use of

violence with so many conditions and restrictions as almost, if not quite entirely, to rule it out.

Absolute pacifism is easily illustrated in the case of the traditionally pacifist Catholic Worker movement. A page-one editorial in the seventieth anniversary issue of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper had this to say about Iraq:

We ask fellow believers to ponder their own conflicts of conscience, between nationalism, which can quickly metamorphose into unbridled idolatry, and the Church's mandate to respect life and to work for peace for all peoples. Furthermore, we encourage Catholics to refuse to obey this idolatrous state, for the sake of lasting peace.

We stand together in saying no to war, this one or any other....

War never again!⁵

The theme of nationalism as a threat also appeared in some other, non-pacifist Catholic critiques.

As for functional pacifism, I turn to a statement issued last December by the Catholic peace organization Pax Christi USA. It made a number of arguments against the war: the suffering already endured by the Iraqi people, the prospect of "countless" casualties (including "thousands" of American soldiers and "tens of thousands" of Iraqi civilians), "environmental devastation," the likelihood that America's allies would be alienated and anti-Americanism would increase. It said there was no evidence of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or support for al Qaeda, and denied that Iraq currently was a threat to its neighbors.

Pax Christi USA also offered an argument that touches on questions of international law as well as Catholic social doctrine. It is worth quoting at length:

Pax Christi USA fundamentally challenges the Bush administration's foreign policy doctrine. While the Bush doctrine says a strike on Iraq would extend "the benefits of freedom, democracy, prosperity and the rule of law," waging a war on Iraq will instead tear apart the seams of international security, opening the door to the establishment of policies based solely on regime change in sovereign states. Every nation that has ever practiced regime change as a policy has been condemned by history as an aggressor nation. Therefore Pax Christi USA finds the Bush administration's policy of regime change both unwise and unjust and thoroughly incompatible with any criteria for establishing the basis for peace.⁶

Similar criticisms turned up elsewhere on the spectrum of Catholic opinion.

One of the ironies of the intra-Catholic debate was the convergence in opposition to the war between Catholic pacifists on the one hand and Catholic paleo-conservatives on the other. Prominent figures in this latter school included Patrick Buchanan and Joseph Sobran, political writer for the Catholic weekly *The Wanderer* and other publications.

The paleo-conservatives' position appeared to be based on philosophical convictions about limited government and on geopolitical views concerning America's appropriate role in the world. From both perspectives, they saw Iraq as an instance of serious overreaching, an exercise in national hubris, which the United States most likely would come to regret.

The paleo-conservatives' opposition also was strongly colored by the belief that the war was in the interests of Israel more than the United States. Buchanan argued this view in a long, widely-noted article in the March issue of his magazine *The American Conservative*. It contains many quotations from government officials, academics, and journalists to support and illustrate its thesis. I quote two paragraphs at the heart of it:

This is a time for truth. For America is about to make a momentous decision: whether to launch a series of wars in the Middle East that could ignite the Clash of Civilizations against which Harvard professor Samuel Huntington has warned, a war we believe would be a tragedy and a disaster for this Republic. To avert this war, to answer the neocon[servative] smears, we ask our readers to review their agenda as stated in their words....

We charge that a cabal of polemicists and public officials seek to ensnare our country in a series of wars that are not in America's interests. We charge them with colluding with Israel to ignite those wars and destroy the Oslo Accords [the 1993 agreed outline for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement]. We charge them with deliberately damaging U.S. relations with every state in the Arab world that defies Israel or supports the Palestinian people's right to a homeland of their own. We charge that they have alienated friends and allies all over the Islamic and Western world through their arrogance, hubris, and bellicosity.⁷

Pat Buchanan, it will be observed, is no mean polemicist himself.

Joseph Sobran sometimes also took this line, but in explaining his opposition he tended to put more emphasis on the notion of limited government. In one column, for

instance, he contrasted the "visceral conservative"—typified by the pro-war *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard*—with the anti-war views of a "genuine conservative" like himself. Of the latter, he wrote:

The true conservative, though he may accept war as a tragic necessity at times, regards it with foreboding and a sense of loss, never with enthusiasm. All political enthusiasm is against his grain. His patriotism doesn't preclude skepticism about his rulers; even the most venerable institutions, he knows, are bound to be administered by men flawed by original sin.

As to the Iraq war, Sobran said:

It all began with the 9/11 attacks. These quickly led to all sorts of wild charges against Iraq—that it was harboring terrorists, sharing WMDs with them, and so forth. Skepticism about these charges was shouted down. The drive for war took on a life of its own—spearheaded by the "neoconservatives" who had sought to destroy Iraq long before 9/11—and the doubtfulness and even irrelevance of many of the charges didn't seem to matter. Nor do they seem to matter now. The war's apologists will keep coming up with new justifications for what has already been done.⁸

Numbered among the neoconservative supporters of the war about whom Sobran and Buchanan complained were several prominent Catholics, who argued along specifically just war lines. Michael Novak, George Weigel, and Father Richard John Neuhaus are representative of this group.

At a key moment in the pre-war debate, when the administration was being publicly opposed by the Vatican, the American Ambassador to the Holy See, James

Nicholson, invited Novak to Rome as a guest of the State Department, to lecture on just war doctrine and Iraq. Novak spoke February 10, and his text quickly appeared on the *National Review* website and elsewhere. It is a passionate defense of the proposition that a military attack on Iraq would be a just war—a "lawful conclusion," he argued, to the just war of 1991, whose settlement terms had been "brazenly flouted" by the unjust aggressor Saddam Hussein for a dozen years.

The centerpiece of Novak's *jus ad bellum* argument was to link the Iraqi regime to terrorism. Here is how he made the linkage:

How does Iraq fit into that picture? From the point of view of public authorities who must calculate the risks of action or inaction vis-à-vis the regime of Saddam Hussein, two points are salient. Saddam Hussein has the means to wreak devastating destruction upon Paris, London, or Chicago, or any cities of his choosing, if only he can find clandestine undetectable "foot soldiers" to deliver small amounts of the sarin gas, botulins, anthrax, and other lethal elements to predetermined targets. Secondly, independent terrorist cells have already been highly trained for precisely such tasks, and have trumpeted far and wide their intentions to carry out such destruction willingly, with joy. All that is lacking between these two incendiary elements is a spark of contact.

Given Saddam Hussein's proven record in the use of such weapons, and given his recognized contempt for international law, only an imprudent or even foolhardy statesman could trust that these two forces will stay apart forever.... For public authorities to fail to conduct such a war would be to put their trust

imprudently in the sanity and good will of Saddam Hussein.⁹

Like Joseph Sobran, Michael Novak is a very talented rhetorician. Still, I must confess that it is not clear to me that in these circumstances going to war was the only option available to prudent public authorities who wished to keep something bad from happening. I believe it was the much-maligned Hans Blix who asked, "What was wrong with deterrence?"

Of course, other Catholics arguing from a just war perspective concluded that this war would *not* meet *jus ad bellum* standards governing the resort to war. That notably was the case with Pope John Paul II.

In saying this, I must point out that some of the criticism emanating from Rome went beyond just war arguments and ventured into other, sometimes problematical areas. At times one could detect functional pacifism in what was being said. At other times the voice of anti-Americanism could be heard. This was not true of the Pope, but it was true of some of those around him—so much so that a friend of mine from the United States who works in the Roma Curia remarked to me over lunch last March that those were not easy times to be an American at the Vatican.

These things are part of the story, but they need not detain us now. The important question is: What did the Pope say?

First of all, it is necessary to recall that Pope John Paul pressed his campaign for peace in many ways besides making statements. He met with Tony Blair, Tariq Aziz, and other prominent personages. He dispatched Cardinal Roger Etchegaray to Baghdad to see Saddam Hussein, and Cardinal Pio Laghi to Washington to see President Bush. He also gave at least tacit encouragement to a series of public comments by such other Vatican

worthies as Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal James Francis Stafford, an American who is president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal Roberto Tucci, former head of Vatican Radio, Archbishop Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the Secretary for Relations with States, and others. By any standards, this was a major effort by the Holy See.

No doubt the clearest thing about the Pope's position was that he was passionately opposed to the war, and this opposition was more and more forcefully and passionately stated as time went by. The nearest thing to a systematic exposition of his views can be found in his annual address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, delivered January 13, 2003. Its theme was the primacy of natural law in international relations. Here John Paul sets out a number of principles as the underpinning of world justice and peace—"a 'yes to life'", "respect for law," "the duty of solidarity," "no to death," "no to selfishness," and lastly "no to war." Under this last heading, he says:

War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between states, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences....And what are we to say of the threat of a war that could strike the people of Iraq, the land of the prophets, a people already sorely tried by more than twelve years of embargo? War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations. As the charter of the United Nations and international law itself remind us, war

cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.¹⁰

A critic of the Pope's position on Iraq suggests that his stand was motivated by interrelated concerns in six areas. These are: 1. a significant rise in terrorist activity; 2. an escalation of Christian-Muslim tensions into the dreaded clash of civilizations; 3. the danger of reprisals against the small, vulnerable Christian communities in the Middle East; 4. damage to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, particularly in regard to protecting the Holy Places; 5. the disturbing implications of the idea of "preemptive" or "preventive" war; and 6. the legitimization of American "unilateralism" at the expense of the United Nations. This critic of papal policy concedes that these are "serious concerns."¹¹

In considering Pope John Paul's position, it is helpful recall two other things.

First, he also opposed the first Gulf War in 1991. The reason appears to have been based on the *jus ad bellum* consideration that alternatives to war existed. One writer says: "In his view, war is an option of last resort, and in this case other options remained to be explored."¹²

Second, the Holy See supported the post-9/11 American-led military attack on Afghanistan in 2001. Although this backing was expressed in a low-key manner, compared with the opposition to the war in Iraq a year and a half later, the support was quite real.

What made Afghanistan different from Iraq? Evidently Rome saw Afghanistan as a case of legitimate self-defense by the Americans. Al Qaeda had used the country as its base for years with the connivance of the Taliban regime; the Taliban refused to stop sheltering al Qaeda after 9/11, even when directly challenged to do so; and therefore military action was the only means available to the United States to defend itself against further terrorist attacks launched by al Qaeda with the support of the Taliban.

Many bishops and bishops' conferences also made statements on the war in Iraq. Like the Vatican, most were critical. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued several statements that stopped short of condemning the war but did express doubts about its conformity to just war standards. A statement by the body of American bishops at their general meeting in November, 2002, noted their "serious concerns and questions" and said in part:

Based on the facts that are known to us, we continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature. With the Holy See and bishops from the Middle East and around the world, we fear that resort to war, under present circumstances and in light of current public information, would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching for overriding the strong presumption against the use of military force.¹³

III.

Some time late last year I began telling my family and friends, "I watched the first Gulf War on television in a hotel room in Rome, and it looks like I'm going to watch the

next one the same way." On March 21, with "shock and awe" proceeding in Iraq, I boarded a plane at Dulles Airport and flew to Rome.

In the week that followed, I spent a lot of time glued to the TV set and watching the war unfold via CNN, BBC, and, now and then, via the considerably starker, grimmer images available—without sound—courtesy of the Al Jazeera Arabic television channel. Instead of being in a hotel room, though, I was in Saint Martha's House—the Vatican guesthouse a stone's throw from Saint Peter's Basilica. It is more than a little disorienting to watch the mayhem and destruction of modern warfare unfold, with the greatest shrine in Christendom looming in your window a short distance away.

As the week wore on, I became aware of something even odder than that—something that was happening not on the screen in the corner of my room but inside me. A televised war, I discovered, can become rather dull. Much of the time was spent on briefings by military people and press conferences by civilian officials and politicians. Hardly exciting stuff. Even the scenes of action—the shooting, the explosions—tended to grow stale as the networks ran the same footage over and over. And eventually I found myself thinking, "Come on—let's have some action! A little excitement, please! *Let's blow something up!*"

Televised war had become a form of entertainment. When it failed to entertain me, I felt cheated. Do we need another just war criterion? It would fit under the heading of *jus in bello*—moral norms governing the conduct of war—and might go something like this: Do not turn killing human beings into amusement for jaded television viewers. War is not an extension of the Super Bowl.

Before the war began, I expressed my views, among other places, in a question-and-answer interview with Zenit, an international Catholic internet news agency based in Rome.¹⁴ The interview also was published in the *National Catholic Register*. It appeared online a week before the fighting began. The war nevertheless went ahead on schedule despite me.

Since I have been quoting other people, as a matter of accuracy and honesty, in order to make it clear what was actually said at the time, I shall also take the liberty of quoting myself. In reply to a question about why the White House and the Vatican disagreed, I said this:

Leaving aside rhetoric and name-calling—and there has been plenty of both in this debate—the main reason for the difference concerns differing prudential judgments. President Bush and his people believe the consequences of not going to war—especially the risk of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction ending up in the hands of terrorists—would significantly outweigh the bad consequences. The Holy Father and his people clearly believe that whatever good might come from overthrowing Saddam Hussein would not be proportionate to the bad results, such as provoking more terrorism, adding fuel to the burgeoning Christian-Muslim conflict already being played out in other areas of the world, and causing longterm damage to the United Nations and the international common good. For the most part, I think, the Vatican and the White House share the same moral principles, but they disagree about the likely outcomes of various courses of action. On the whole, I believe the Vatican's view is the correct one.

Another question was whether the prudential judgment about going to war did not rest with the public authorities, while other people, including churchmen, were obliged to defer to them. I answered as follows:

There are several ways of responding to that. For one thing, the United States is hardly the only country likely to be impacted by what does or doesn't happen in Iraq, so it seems to me an instance of unilateralism to say that the relevant prudential judgment belongs only to the civil authorities of the United States. Many nations have interests at stake here and have a right to be involved in the decision. As for the right of the Church authorities to speak out and be heard, it is necessary to recognize that they bring a special, and highly relevant, dimension to this matter which legitimates their participation in the debate. On the whole, they are far more politically disinterested than the civil authorities can possibly be, and they also are, as one might expect, far more in touch with the Christian moral tradition. When, responding to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States attacked al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Holy See supported that action on the grounds that it was legitimate self-defense—and I do not recall hearing people who now invoke the dividing line between God and Caesar doing so then.

After the war, my interim conclusions were summed up in a column published in several Catholic newspapers.¹⁵ On the *jus in bello* issues relating to how the war had been fought, I wrote:

Credit the coalition...with trying to hold down civilian casualties

as just war doctrine demands. But the cruise missiles and smart bombs still sometimes malfunctioned or went astray through human error, and many innocent people—we may never know the actual number—were killed or maimed.

That raises the question of whether, despite good intentions, the enormous destructiveness of sophisticated modern weaponry makes observing just war criteria like "proportionality" and "discrimination" a practical impossibility today.

And on *jus ad bellum* matters I said this:

As to the war's purposes—Saddam Hussein is gone, and the departure of this tyrant and his evil regime is a big plus. The danger is that Saddam's toppling will be used as precedent for more, reckless adventures in regime toppling....

What about the famous weapons of mass destruction? None have been found—at least, not yet. Perhaps they will be. But if they aren't, it will be hard not to conclude either that American intelligence was very bad or the American government played fast and loose with facts to get its way. Or possibly a bit of both.

Again—troubling to say the least. As are the early signs that victory on the battlefield in Iraq may not have reduced the overall terrorist threat.

I would see no reason to make changes in any of those summary statements now.

I might add, though, that as time goes by, the impression grows that, underlying the reasons for war offered to Americans at the time, was a geopolitical strategy for political change and stabilization in the Middle East, within the framework of American hegemony.¹⁶ One finds a formulation of it, perhaps deliberately bland, in an Op Ed article in *The Washington Post* by President Bush's National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. Likening the U.S. role in the Middle East today to the role it played in the reconstruction of Europe after World War II, she writes:

With the liberation of Iraq, there is a special opportunity to advance a positive agenda for the Middle East that will strengthen security in the region and throughout the world....From Morocco to the Persian Gulf, nations are taking genuine steps toward political and economic openness. The United States supports these steps, and we will work with our friends and allies for more.

Rice leaves no doubt that getting rid of Saddam Hussein was the necessary first step toward turning the dream into a reality.¹⁷

In concluding my interim assessment, I made it a point to say that an interim assessment was all that was really possible where the prospects for a peaceful, democratic Iraq were concerned. I wrote:

[P]ostwar Iraq is a work in progress. We are far from knowing how it will turn out, and at this stage triumphalism and prophecies of doom are equally premature. All that can be said with certainty of—and by—those of us who opposed the war on moral grounds before the fact is that military victory hasn't proved us wrong. The future is anybody's guess.

I think that is still true.

IV.

Finally, I want briefly to discuss two special questions that often came up in the intra-Catholic debate about Iraq. The first was whether Catholics who disagreed with the Pope and supported the war were dissenters. The second was why the Pope and the Holy See put so much emphasis on acting within the framework of the United Nations.

Start with the first question. Some of those who accused people like Michael Novak and George Weigel of being dissenters were plainly just having fun—turning the tables on ideological opponents in the Church who, on other issues, had accused *them* of dissent. Still, to the extent the accusation may sometimes have been meant seriously, it was missing the point.

With the exception of the Catholic pacifists, the arguments from morality made by Catholics both for and against this war expressed prudential judgments based on matters of fact that were not clear and allowed for a legitimate variety of opinions. To use an earlier example: Did Saddam Hussein have weapons of mass destruction or did he not; and if he had them, did he mean to use them? It made an enormous difference how one answered that; and despite assertions of certitude one way or the other, before the war no one could really be sure. The same is true of other *jus ad bellum* issues.

To say that people who concluded that the preponderance of evidence pointed to the rightness of the war were dissenting from papal teaching was absurd. Pope John Paul also was expressing a prudential judgment in condemning the war, and, although he expressed it passionately and frequently, nothing he said suggested anything to the contrary.

One might also ask, as some did, whether Catholic soldiers were at liberty to participate in the war on the side of the coalition, despite the Pope's opposition to the war.

Very many did, of course. This is what I said in my Zenit interview:

Catholics in the armed forces should react on this occasion as they always should react—by forming their consciences in light of sound moral principles, the counsel of prudent moral advisors including those who speak for the Magisterium of the Church, and their best understanding of the facts, and then doing what their consciences tell them to do. I suppose most if not all will elect to carry out the orders of their military commanders to the best of their ability. If they do that on the basis of sincerely formed judgments of conscience, they won't hear any criticism from me.¹⁸

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien of the Military Archdiocese for the United States took a similar line in a March 25 letter to Catholic military chaplains.¹⁹

The second issue concerns the United Nations and the importance Pope John Paul and the Holy See attached to it. Many American Catholics seemed to find this incomprehensible. As one of my correspondents put it, "The role of the UN is clearly to subvert the authority of the U.S. and other free countries, especially those that would foster the spread of Christianity."

For Catholics who think this way, Pope John Paul's stand was especially hard to understand, considering that he had tangled with the UN on several well-publicized occasions in the past over abortion, population control, and other issues. In the case of Iraq, nevertheless, he and the Holy See insisted that any action should be taken within the framework and with the authorization of the UN. Why was that?

Start with the fact that the Holy See has supported the United Nations from the beginning. There are Vatican observer missions at the UN in New York and Geneva; the Vatican regularly takes part in UN meetings of all kinds. This may partly reflect the Holy See's desire to be a player on the international scene; it was not so many years ago, after all, that Pope Benedict XV sought—and rather humiliatingly was refused—a place at the peace talks after World War I.

But a more fundamental reason, I believe, can be found in a papal document published four decades ago. I mean Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. On a number of occasions in 2003, its fortieth anniversary year, John Paul II and the Holy See have made it point to stress its continued relevance and importance. For example, the Pope's message for the annual World Day of Peace was entitled "*Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment.*"

But a commitment to what? John Paul says an important dimension of the "prophetic" character of *Pacem in Terris* is its advocacy of an international "public authority" committed to, and able to promote, the universal common good. He writes:

Not surprisingly therefore John XXIII looked with hope and expectation to the United Nations Organization, which had come into being on June 26, 1945. He saw that Organization as a credible instrument for maintaining and strengthening world peace, and he expressed particular appreciation of its 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which he considered "an approximation towards the establishment of a juridical and political organization of the world community." What he was saying in fact was that the Declaration set

out the moral foundations on which the evolution of a world characterized by order rather than disorder, and by dialogue rather than force, could proceed. He was suggesting that the vigorous defense of human rights by the United Nations Organization is the indispensable foundation for the development of that Organization's capacity to promote and defend international security.²⁰

No one who reads either Pope John's encyclical or Pope John Paul's Peace Day message can suppose that these popes regard the United Nations—as it existed in 1963 or as it exists now—as the ideal embodiment of an international public authority committed to the common good of all nations and peoples. But neither can anyone miss the fact that they consider the UN, with all its faults and weaknesses, to be an essential step along the way. This is the reason, I believe, why Pope John Paul insisted on working within the United Nations framework in the case of Iraq; in his view, to do otherwise risked weakening the UN and undermining the longrange papal plan for a just and peaceful world order.

Foreign policy realists will consider what I have just said an example of utopian unreality and a good illustration of why the Holy See's position on international issues need not be taken seriously. My own view is that, given the dangerous instability of the world we live in, and given the grave risks to the United States in attempting to exercise global hegemony—no matter how good the intentions may be—the ideal held up by John XXIII and John Paul II is the truly realistic option before us.

But of course I could be wrong.

Russell Shaw is a writer and journalist in Washington, D.C. From 1969 to 1987 he was press secretary of the Catholic bishops' conference of the United States. He is author or coauthor of sixteen books, editor of Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine (1997), a consultor of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and an adjunct professor of communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome.

¹ Michael Kinsley, "Untethered to Reality," *The Washington Post*, June 20, 2003.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2309.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2311.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 97.2.

⁵ "Stand For Peace," *The Catholic Worker*, May, 2003.

⁶ "Pax Christi USA Statement on War Against Iraq," December 10, 2002.

⁷ Patrick J. Buchanan, "Whose War?," *The American Conservative*, March 24, 2003.

⁸ "Joseph Sobran's Washington Watch," *The Wanderer*, June 26, 2003.

⁹ Michael Novak, "'Asymmetrical Warfare' & Just War," National Review Online, February 10, 2003.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, "No to Death, No to Selfishness, No to War, Yes to Life, Yes to Peace," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, January 15, 2003.

¹¹ Michael M. Uhlmann, "The Use and Abuse of Just-War Theory," *Claremont Review of Books*, summer 2003.

¹² Stratford Caldecott, "Was the War Just?," *Inside the Vatican*, June-July 2003.

¹³ Office of Communications, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Bishops Express 'Serious Concerns and Questions' about Possible War with Iraq," November 13, 2002. George Weigel, for one, does not agree that there is a presumption against war in the just war tradition. It is an argument probably best left to Weigel and the bishops. See George Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," *First Things*, January, 2003.

¹⁴ Zenit news agency, March 13, 2003.

¹⁵ Russell Shaw, "What's Next for Iraq?," *Arlington Catholic Herald*, June 19, 2003.

¹⁶ John B. Judis writes of what he calls the new imperialism as an element in the thinking of neoconservatives in and out of government who exert an influence on American policy: "Like [Theodore] Roosevelt and the late-nineteenth-century expansionists, the new imperialists want to transform the politics and allegiances of countries and regions, and they are willing to use force unilaterally to do so. Like the old imperialists, the new ones see overseas intervention in evangelical, although secular, terms." Among the neoconservatives of this persuasion Judis lists people like Paul Wolfowitz, William Kristol, Richard Perle, and Robert Kagan. John B. Judis, "History Lesson," *The New Republic*, June 9, 2003.

¹⁷ Condoleezza Rice, "Transforming the Middle East," *The Washington Post*, August 7, 2003.

¹⁸ Zenit news agency, March 13, 2003.

¹⁹ "Carrying Out Military Duties in Good Conscience," *Origins*, April 3, 2003.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, December 18/25, 2002.