

# AN APPEAL TO HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS



## THE WAY OF VIOLENCE IS DEATH

This week rumors fly that you may “endorse” a military crusade against the people of Iraq and Syria. I pray that these rumors originate in the United States propaganda programs and that this is not an option that is being seriously considered by the Holy See. An objection to my comment may be immediately raised that “ISIS is the target, not the people of Syria and Iraq,” but we cannot attack ISIS without attacking the civilian population, so any war on ISIS is also a war on civilians. That's the way it is with modern war. It serves no useful purpose to pretend otherwise, but accepting the propaganda pretense would serve a nefarious purpose.

From the beginning of its violent crusade against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States has carefully managed public perceptions of its actions. It positioned the United States as a victim of aggression, even though the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan had not attacked the United States. It stated that it was rescuing the peoples of those countries from their “evil governments.” It proclaimed that its actions were just, even though the two primary moral authorities of the time, Pope John Paul II and then-Cardinal Ratzinger, said otherwise. The United States government wants the perceptions it manages around its objective actions to be considered “without a doubt” as “truth and reality.” But the Catholic Church does not (or should not) rely on “perceptions” cleverly manipulated by a sophisticated propaganda campaign as a basis for moral judgment. Instead, we must look at the objective facts of each situation in light of the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and 2,000 years of Catholic history and theology.

ISIS is today proclaimed as “true evil incarnate,” the same brush used to paint public opinion regarding the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. Certainly, ISIS is not on any list of “good guys” in the modern world. But neither is the United States. It is evident, from the objective facts on the ground, that the violence directed against the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan over the past two decades has not brought about a better situation. Indeed, the present crisis with ISIS is a direct result of the overwhelming blood lust that the United States and Great Britain unleashed on the region. These wars in one form or another have gone on for two long decades without a moment of peace. Hundreds of thousands of civilians perished in the first decade of those wars (mostly through the consequences of our blockade of the Iraqi civilian economy) (1), and additional hundreds of thousands were killed since 2001, many of those deaths were in the most grisly and painful ways (2).

The United States unleashed this violence for the exact same reason that ISIS does what it does – to instill fear among its intended victims. The United States military leaders bragged about their “shock and awe” doctrine at the time of the invasions of both Iraq and Afghanistan (3). We went in with overwhelming force, knowing full well the consequences for the defenseless civilian populations of our attacks on those nations' technological infrastructure.

We ignore at our mortal peril the role that Western culture plays in the development of ISIS. The organization is much more Western in its orientation than Islamic. This is evident in their barbaric tactics, which derive from Western military war fighting principles. Terrorize your enemy! Kill his women and children! Destroy the fields! Poison the wells! Spread fear everywhere! This is the objective reality of modern military power. It's what Britain did in India and Ireland and Malaysia and Africa and Afghanistan and the United States did to the people of the Philippines, the Vietnamese, our own Native Americans and Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the age of 18, the average resident of the United States has seen over 200,000 televised acts of violence, incorporating 40,000 murders. A child witnesses 8,000 televised murders before leaving elementary school! (4)

Life is cheap in modern mass media. ISIS is throwing back at the West what we teach to the world.

This is not a moral defense of terrorists. It is simply a reflection on the sources of the violence of modern terrorism. If we want to solve a problem, we'd best get to the root of the situation. We could kill all of the ISIS fighters tomorrow and a new threat would arise before they were in their graves, as long as the structures of sin which drive terrorism continue to operate.

The Christians of the Middle East pay a high price for the violence of the West. Before we attacked, the Catholic Church of Iraq begged us to not attack their nation. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. The US Catholic Bishops turned their back on them and praised that war by their exceptionally faint condemnation of it. The bishops proceeded then to go on about their business, which did not include doing anything substantive to defend the rights of the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to life. It is said that one-fourth of the United States military is Catholic, which is one of the reasons why the US Bishops are guilty of material cooperation with the objective evil of unjust war. For a further development of this thesis, see <http://www.justpeace.org/warresponse.htm>.

Which brings us to the present situation. How can we imagine that there is a military solution to the problem of Islamic radicalism? Modern terrorism is largely a product of Western military, economic, and political domination of Islamic cultures. It is absurd to say that MORE military violence and MORE political domination, will somehow, miraculously, bring about peace, instead of the more likely result of more war, more suffering, more death.

How many children are we willing to burn to death to pursue this chimeric military solution? We cannot say that the number is “zero” because if in fact we endorse military action, then we must accept all of those consequences and that includes burning many children to death in the most cruel, merciless, and barbaric of methods.

What then shall we say about the ancient Christian communities of the Middle East, who appeal to us for help in this time of their most grave need? We must offer them refuge! We must open our borders and our doors to all of them. We – the peoples of the West, the United States and Europe – created the situation that has now put them in such jeopardy. They live precariously in refugee camps and in villages at risk of violence because of our nations' actions. It is therefore our moral duty to provide them with escape.

Is it a tragedy that these ancient communities must go into a diaspora? Of course, but there is no other alternative that is consistent with the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The time for a better alternative was in 2001 and 2003 and we did not choose the way of peace and justice, but instead went all in for violence, fear, and barbarism. Sow not in furrows of injustice, the Bible says, lest you reap a seven-fold harvest. Behold the fulfillment of this prophecy every day on the evening news!

War is big business in the United States. There are powerful economic and political forces that drive our foreign policy, and nobody makes money on peace, therefore we have so little peace in this modern world. That's why, knowing the risk these people face, there are few voices in the United States or Britain calling out – “let us airlift these people to safety and give them homes.” Instead, we effectively say, as we said to the European Jews in the 1930s, “We are going to leave you behind for the wolves to devour because that suits our purposes.”

Violence will not pave the way for peace in the Middle East. More violence will only produce more violence. The situation will continue to spiral downward. A decade ago, many of us predicted that there would be no good outcomes from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and we were right. All the promises of the war party turned out to be lies. If the United Nations, instigated by the United States, escalates the American wars in the Middle East to “World Wars,” a decade from now things will be even worse than they are today.

It is never wrong to do what Jesus said: love your enemies!

Pope Francis! Do not lead us back to those dark days of our history when Popes proclaimed crusades for what, at the time, were thought to be righteous reasons but we know, with the clarity only given by hindsight, were evil campaigns of looting and destruction.

This is my appeal to you, Pope Francis, you who have taken upon yourself the mantel of a man of peace. Did Francis of Assisi make war on Islam? No, he did not. In the midst of a Crusade, when everyone was shouting either “Death to the Muslims” or “Kill the infidels”, Francis went to Egypt and preached peace to the Sultan! Lead us in the path of peace, Pope Francis, not into the failed labyrinth of war.

The Blessed Msgr. Oscar Romero said – and I have taken the liberty of universalizing this quote –

“All who are marked by Christ's baptism, which is Spirit and fire, must be people of eternal hope, they cannot yield to pessimism. Neither must they let an earthly political program exhaust their ideals of eternal glory and triumph. The great hope of all the baptized must stand above all the desperate plans of the earth's political leaders.”

I pray God's blessing for you as you discern the signs of these times, and offer these two prayers, one to Msgr. Romero, and the second to Our Lady of Sorrows, to help you in that process. I am,

Your little brother in the Lord,

/sig/

Bob Waldrop

Oscar Romero Catholic Worker House

1524 NW 21, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106 USA

405-200-8155

<http://www.justpeace.org>

(1) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctions\\_against\\_Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctions_against_Iraq)

(2) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ORB\\_survey\\_of\\_Iraq\\_War\\_casualties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ORB_survey_of_Iraq_War_casualties)

(3) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock\\_and\\_awe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock_and_awe)

(4) Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Children, violence, and the media: a report for parents and policy makers. September 14, 1999. Accessed 14 June 2006. Previously available at:

<http://judiciary.senate.gov/oldsite/mediavio.htm> .

Please print a copy of this document, sign it, and mail it to –

His Holiness, Pope Francis

Apostolic Palace

00120 Vatican City

**A PRAYER to MSGR. OSCAR ROMERO**  
*for the Christian Communities of the Middle East*

Blessed Msgr. Oscar Romero,  
When you walked among us,  
you defended the poor and the powerless.  
You spoke the truth of the Gospel to all.  
You called the violent to peace,  
the arrogant to humility,  
the oppressors to justice,  
and all to the peace of Christ which passes human understanding.

We come before you today, with hearts of fear,  
on behalf of the peoples of the Middle East,  
who have suffered grave sins  
against justice for many decades.  
Pray for all at risk of violence today,  
and for those who work for peace and justice.  
Help us to discern the signs of these times  
so that we speak with your voice of beauty and wisdom  
to reprove the ruthless, rebuke the violent,  
and defend the widow and the orphan,  
so that all who wield violence in this world  
will repent of their injustice,  
ceasing to do evil, and learning to do good.

O God, who by the example of Oscar Romero of El Salvador,  
has given us an example of fortitude in the face of grave danger,  
selfless love before greed and aggression,  
and a Christ-like response of peace  
to bloodthirsty violence and death,  
grant that we who reverence his life may imitate his  
example of fortitude, wisdom, love, and beauty,  
so that we become peacemakers  
bringing justice and reconciliation for all.  
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF SORROWS**  
*on behalf of all who will die today because of  
war, injustice, economic chaos, and exploitation.*

Our Lady of Sorrows,  
most holy and afflicted mother of martyrs,  
you stood beneath the cross and witnessed the agony of your dying Son.  
Look with a mother's tenderness and pity upon all who will die today because of  
war, economic chaos, injustice, and exploitation, especially the children.  
Prepare them for the agony, despair, and terror of the violence that is upon them.  
Comfort them and hold them close to the bosom of thy Wounded Heart  
as they drink deeply of the bitter cup which is forced upon them.

Wipe their tears, calm their fears, welcome them to peace and safety.  
Eternal rest grant to them, and may perpetual light shine upon them.

Pray for all who work for peace and justice,  
that God will give us strength to stand against the  
demons of violence and war that prowl  
about the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, help the helpless,  
strengthen the fearful, comfort the sorrowful,  
bring justice to the poor, peace to all nations,  
and solidarity among all peoples.

O Christ our God, Lord of Glory,  
who blessed us from your Mother's womb,  
have mercy on us and save us.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,  
have mercy on us.