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September 4, 2013

Most Reverend Paul Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City
via fax to 721-5210

Dear Archbishop Coakley:

Once again the United States rushes headlong towards another unjust war. It is our duty as Catholics to defend the right of the Syrian people to life as vigorously and aggressively as we defend the rights of unborn children. How can we not do this? We are supposed to defend life from the moment of conception to the time of natural death, but all too often, when it comes to civilians living in war zones, our defense is limited to meaningless statements so wrapped in ambiguity and double talk that it appears as though all choices regarding participation in the unjust wars of the United States are morally equal. But this is not true. All responses to unjust war are not equal. A thing is what it is. **If a war is unjust, willing participation on the side of injustice is the moral equivalent of willing participation in abortion or euthanasia.** You don't have any problem forbidding mothers, fathers, and health care professionals from participating in abortions. Why don't you forbid participation in unjust war?

So the question of the hour is what will you, as the Archbishop of Oklahoma City, do to defend the right to life of the people of Syria? Will you raise holy hands, and invoke your authority as the Archbishop of Oklahoma City, and forbid Catholics subject to your jurisdiction from participating in this unjust war? Isn't that what Jesus would do, if he were here right now? Or do you think He would say . . . "Well, I don't think violence will solve anything, and we should certainly pray for the people of Syria, but if you must, go ahead and kill any one you care to kill in Syria."

When we rushed into the unjust war on the people of Iraq, one bishop – the Most Reverend Michael Botean, sent his people a letter in which with great love and theological clarity he explained to them how willing participation in the Iraqi war was the moral equivalent of willing participation in an abortion. He then issued an edict forbidding participation in the war.

I pray that as we face this latest moral challenge, that you will rise to the occasion and defend the right to life of the people of Syria as aggressively as you defend the rights of unborn children. Isn't that what archbishops are supposed to do? Aren't you to rescue the poor and the lowly, to deliver them from the hand of the wicked?

There is no serious argument that the Syrian Escalation is a just war. Pope Francis has already made his judgment, as have the bishops and patriarchs of Syria, and I think the prudent course is to heed their words and act accordingly to protect Catholics subject to your jurisdiction from participation in this grievous moral crime. That is your duty, that is why you are the archbishop. *Sine poena nulla lex.* Now is the time to forbid the Catholics of your Archdiocese from participation in this grievous moral crime. I promise to pray for you to make the right decision. Enclosed is a statement by Syrian Trappistine nuns regarding the situation there at this time.

Sincerely,

Bob Waldrop



Statement of the Trappist Nuns of Azeir, Syria

Today we have no words, except those of the Psalms that the liturgical prayer puts onto our lips in these days:

Rebuke the Beast of the Reeds, that herd of bulls, that people of calves...oh God, scatter the people who delight in war...Yahweh has leaned down from the heights of his sanctuary, has

looked down from heaven to earth to listen to the sighing of the captive, and set free those condemned to death...

Listen, God, to my voice as I plead, protect my life from fear of the enemy; hide me from the league of the wicked, from the gang of evil-doers. They sharpen their tongues like a sword, aim their arrow of poisonous abuse...

They support each other in their evil designs, they discuss how to lay their snares. "Who will see us?" they say. He will do that, he who penetrates human nature to its depths, the depths of the heart...Break into song for my God, to the tambourine, sing in honor of the Lord, to the cymbal, let psalm and canticle mingle for him, extol his name, invoke it...For the Lord is a God who breaks battle-lines! ... Lord, you are great, you are glorious, wonderfully strong, unconquerable.

We look at the people around us, our day workers who are all here as if suspended, stunned: "They've decided to attack us." Today we went to Tartous...we felt the anger, the helplessness, the inability to formulate a sense to all this: the people trying their best to work and to live normally. You see the farmers watering their land, parents buying notebooks for the schools that are about to begin, unknowing children asking for a toy or an ice cream...you see the poor, so many of them, trying to scrape together a few coins. The streets are full of the "inner" refugees of Syria, who have come from all over to the only area left that is still relatively liveable.... You see the beauty of these hills, the smile on people's faces, the good-natured gaze of a boy who is about to join the army and gives us the two or three peanuts he has in his pocket as a token of "togetherness".... And then you remember that they have decided to bomb us tomorrow. ... Just like that. Because "it's time to do something," as it is worded in the statements of the important men, who will be sipping their tea tomorrow as they watch TV to see how effective their humanitarian intervention will be....

Will they make us breathe the toxic gases of the depots they hit, tomorrow, so as to punish us for the gases we have already breathed in?

The people are straining their eyes and ears in front of the television: all they're waiting for is a word from Obama!

A word from Obama? Will the Nobel Peace Prize winner drop his sentence of war onto us? Despite all justice, all common sense, all mercy, all humility, all wisdom?

The Pope has spoken up, patriarchs and bishops have spoken up, numberless witnesses have spoken up, analysts and people of experience have spoken up, even the opponents of the regime have spoken up.... Yet here we all are, waiting for just one word from the great Obama? And if it weren't him, it would be someone else. It isn't he who is "the great one," it is the Evil One who these days is really acting up.

The problem is that it has become too easy to pass lies off as noble gestures, to pass ruthless self-interest off as a search for justice, to pass the need to appear [strong] and to wield power off as a "moral responsibility not to look away..."

And despite all our globalizations and sources of information, it seems nothing can be verified. It seems that there is no such thing as a minimal scrap of truth ... That is, they don't want there to be any truth; while actually a truth does exist, and anyone honest would be able to find it, if they truly sought it out together, if they weren't prevented by those who are in the service of other interests.

There is something wrong, and it is something very serious...because the consequences will be wrought on the lives of an entire population...it is in the blood that fills our streets, our eyes, our hearts.

Yet what use are words anymore? All has been destroyed: a nation destroyed, generations of young people exterminated, children growing up wielding weapons, women winding up alone and targeted by various types of violence...families, traditions, homes, religious buildings, monuments that tell and preserve history and therefore the roots of a people...all destroyed. ...

As Christians we can at least offer all this up to the mercy of God, unite it to the blood of Christ, which carries out the redemption of the world in all those who suffer.

They are trying to kill hope, but we must hold on to it with all our might.

To those who truly have a heart for Syria (for mankind, for truth...) we ask for prayer...abounding, heartfelt, courageous prayer.

The Trappist nuns from Azeir, Syria

August 29, 2013