

Respond

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News, said his desire to wage war on U.S. citizens — both military and civilian — grew out of his anger, in part, at the U.S. support for the Iraqi sanctions. And several intelligence reports have indicated there may have been meetings between Iraqi officials and bin Laden's representatives in the months before the Sept. 11 attacks.

Of course, even if they oppose the sanctions on Iraq, millions of Muslims and Arabs did not support the Sept. 11 attacks. For example, *National Catholic Reporter* noted in its Sept. 28 edition that a spiritual leader of Hezbollah, a militant Lebanon-based group, used language that essentially declared his belief that the suicide hijackers went to hell, not heaven, as they allegedly believed they would. That's because they killed themselves and did wrong against others in the process, the leader said.

Still, the fact remains that bin Laden, reportedly still in Afghanistan, has called for a war of terror against the United States regardless of whether the Islamic world supports him or not. And as the *Catholic Courier* went to press Oct. 2, it appeared that some sort of strike against bin Laden and possibly Afghanistan's Taliban rulers was imminent. Hence, the question some Catholics have been asking is how will we fight terrorism in a way that remains true to the church's teachings calling for an end to war and its causes?

Just war

U.S. Catholic leaders have been universal in deploring the Sept. 11 attacks. But they have cautioned the nation to consider with gravity and a sense of restraint, whatever steps it takes to end terrorism.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, president of the United States Conference of Catholic



Nancy Wiechec/CNS

Anti-war demonstrators march Sept. 29 in Washington. Thousands of people urged no retaliation for the Sept. 11 attacks on that city and New York.

Bishops, wrote a letter Sept. 19 to President Bush that combined patriotic and Christian concerns about the attacks. The bishop expressed support for efforts to "seek out and hold accountable" those responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks.

"As we undertake the heavy burden of defending the common good, in morally appropriate ways, against global terrorism, we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal and responsibility of using our nation's considerable influence and power to contribute to a more just and peaceful world," the bishop wrote. "Among other things, I hope our foreign policy will give new emphasis to deepening our engagement with the Arab and Muslim worlds and, in particular, will continue every effort to press for a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Despite the peace-loving sentiments in his letter, the bishop's words made it clear that he was supporting some kind of armed response, albeit limited, to the Sept. 11 attacks. In doing so, Bishop Fiorenza implicitly invoked a centuries-old teaching of the

church that allows states to defend themselves under certain conditions. This teaching is commonly called the just-war theory.

The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" in section 2309 lays out the following conditions for a legitimate defense by military force:

- The aggressor must have inflicted "lasting, grave and certain" damage.
- "All other means of putting an end to (the aggression) must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective."
- "There must be serious prospects of success."
- The war waged "must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated."

One proponent of the just-war theory is Deacon Michael Mahoney, pastoral administrator of St. Mary's Parish, Scottsville. He spent 20 years in the U.S. Marines, retiring as a major in 1985. During his service, among other things, Deacon Mahoney served off the coast of Iran during the 1979-80 hostage crisis. He has studied terrorism, and he holds a master's degree in national security and strategic studies.

"You cannot bury your head in the sand," Deacon Mahoney said about terrorism. "No responsible government should leave terrorists running around able to inflict terror or harm on innocent people."

But Deacon Mahoney stressed that he truly believes in the church's teaching that even during war the moral law must be observed to the fullest extent possible. In practical terms, that means that soldiers, trained to kill and prepared to be killed, should always risk their lives before endangering those of civilians, he noted.

The deacon added that he believed the United States should treat this war as if it were a police force hunting a mass murderer on the loose, using commando teams to get bin Laden, not massive military force. On that note, Deacon Mahoney said he didn't want the war on terrorism to become a war on the people of Afghanistan.

He added that Christians need to pray for peace at this time.

"I'm convinced that when we pray for the world, we change the world."

Interestingly, the former Marine echoed many Catholic pacifists' call for the United States to reexamine its foreign policy if it wants an end to terrorism. Poverty and powerlessness breed terrorism, Deacon Mahoney noted, and no Third World insurgency has ever been defeated through military force alone, and, for that matter, few insurgencies have been defeated, period.

"Everything in my training and experience tells me that we're not going to eradicate terrorism, but we can remove much of its power."

God on whose side?

Jan Bezila, coordinator of Pax Christi Rochester, a branch of the national Catholic peace group, criticized the plan for military retaliation for the Sept. 11 attacks. Like many Catholic peace activists, she invokes the nonviolent life Jesus led as

her inspiration for doing so.

"Many of our citizens have suffered terror and death in what could be recognized as a very painful call for America to change direction," she said. "Scripture is succinct regarding our decision: 'I set before you life and death, and the blessing and the curse; choose life so that you and your descendants might live.' In our national shock and sorrow, our nation, guided by the Pentagon, is instead rushing toward a protracted war of retaliation."

Yet Deacon Mahoney disagreed with Catholic peace activists on the issue of retaliation, noting his belief that total nonviolence by states in today's world is impractical. He likened militaries to police forces who simply have to protect people in a world marred by sin. However, pacifists, he said, do play an important role in calling people to think about how life truly should be lived. He noted that he believed that the church needs both the pacifist and just-war tradition. No sane person, pacifist or not, really wants war, he said.

"If you go to war, you should go with deep regret."

Parish ponders

St. Patrick's Parish, Victor, hosted a forum the evening of Sept. 13 to discuss a Catholic response to the attacks. About 50 people from area parishes attended, said Father Doug Della Pietra, a co-presenter, and follow-up sessions may take place as well. The forum was also presented by Deacon Tom Driscoll.

Among the questions people asked were: "How do I live nonviolently and not appear to be unpatriotic?" and "What does God allow for violent justice?" The parish also planned to publish the questions in its bulletin, and urge parishioners to reflect upon how they would answer such questions.

In a follow-up interview, St. Patrick's parishioner Bob Pizzutiello, a discussion participant, said he was pleased with the relative restraint President Bush showed in his nationally televised remarks before Congress Sept. 13.

Pizzutiello said he had several concerns about the war on terrorism. For one, he said, how do you defeat an enemy that is willing to kill himself to end others' lives? On the other hand, he said, not responding to the terrorists militarily could signal weakness and invite even more attacks. And, like many Catholics, he wanted the United States to take out the terrorists without killing innocent civilians.

Whatever happens in the days ahead, Deacon Mahoney said that he hoped that the current crisis would not drive the West and the Islamic world apart permanently. Christians and Muslims are both called to live moral lives, and both worship one God, he noted.

"I don't think, to be honest, that there's such a radical difference between the West and Islam," he said. "I don't see that there is any sort of dichotomy between the God they serve and the God we serve. God is one."

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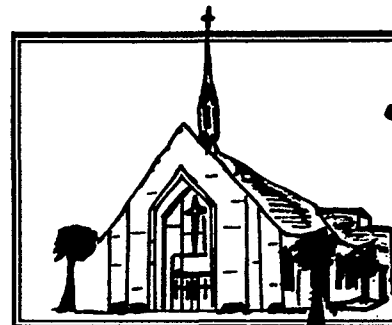
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