

Witness to Truth

By Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

There can be no doubt that the best friend that the ordinary Muslim man, woman or child in the Middle East has in the Western world is Pope John Paul II. Before and during Gulf War I he condemned that exercise in human carnage 55 times. Before and during this present war on the Iraqi people, he has been ceaseless in his vigorous denunciation of it. If the entire Catholic Church were willing to accept and live by the truth that is being proclaimed by John Paul II, I am sure that the Church could look forward to the dawn of a never before imagined new day of peace, dialogue and cooperation with the people of Islam.

But alas, and with great sorrow it must be said that a huge percentage of American Catholics have turned their backs on the Pope and followed the morality of different drummers in regard to Gulf War II. Today, Catholics represent one-third of the U.S. men and women in Iraq who are unleashing by land, sea and air a hurricane of death and misery upon the people of Iraq. They live and act in obedience to one voice and it is not the voice of the Pope. But however grave this situation is for the Church, it is nothing short of a catastrophe for Catholicism that the United States' Bishops have all but abandoned the Successor of Peter and his unequivocal denunciation of the human slaughter and suffering brought upon people, by what the Vatican has called this "deplorable" war.

The level of calculated indifference of the American Bishops to the moral truth John Paul II is proclaiming about this war in Iraq approaches scandalous. Indeed, for anyone who is versed in American English the tone being projected is one of passive-aggressive defiance – and sometimes the refusal to follow the Pope's moral leadership is not so passive. One American bishop publicly informs his people that they are "under no obligation to embrace the Pope's stance on the war." Another American bishop fires his 12 year diocesan Peace and Justice Director over his anti-war activism, claiming budget cuts as the reason. An Associated Press story (4/11/03) while reporting on a Catholic bishop who demands that the American flag be flown "at full height at its usual place of honor" at the Church, notes that "while

Pope John Paul II is strongly opposed to the war, there have been other incidents of U.S. (Catholic) churches taking steps to rein in anti-war efforts of their staffs." A fourth bishop passes over the fact that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#2309) states that the application of just war theory standards is "subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy" and then authors a string of unproven conjectures in order to justify parting company with the Pope: "I think Saddam Hussein does have weapons of mass destruction...I think eventually he would make a preemptive strike on us...Do you have to wait until Saddam makes the first strike before you go to war. I don't think so." A fifth American Catholic bishop ignores the universally acknowledged truism that "Truth is the first casualty of war," and then proceeds to instruct his Catholic people that "it is altogether appropriate...to presume the integrity of our leadership and its judgments and therefore to carry out their military duties in good conscience." And, what of the integrity and judgments of the Pope, who has condemned this war as immoral? Is it to be "presumed" that his moral judgment is wrong, erroneous and not worthy of presumptive trust? Is it to be "presumed" that the integrity, moral rectitude and intelligence of George Bush are really equal to or superior to that of John Paul II?

It is one thing for a Catholic man like Bill O'Reilly of the Fox-TV "O'Reilly Factor" to make big money by being willing to say on national media that the Pope is not mentally competent, is out of touch with reality and "is on a personal crusade to destroy the Roman Catholic Church in America" by having "the Chutzpah to call the Iraqi war 'immoral.'" It is a second thing for Rod Dreher, a Catholic senior editor of Catholic William F. Buckley's *National Review*, to pontificate that "Catholics are not obliged to agree with the pope on this issue. The rightness or wrongness of this or any particular war is a matter of opinion." But, for a Catholic Bishop to publicly instruct his priests and people that they can "presume," that the moral guidance of the Successor of Peter is inferior to or no better than the moral guidance of a born-again Texas Protestant, whose own bishop says he is in moral error, is inherently undermining of all moral authority in the

Catholic Church – episcopal as well as papal.

Moral severity in the analysis of the holocaust or of the slave trade is an essential ingredient of a truthful Christian presentation of these realities. There are those who would prefer that, in the name of “objective” scholarship, emotions be ostracized when discussing these events. Indeed emotion can interfere with grasping the truth but so can logic. However, emotion can also serve to expand awareness concerning a reality. A good dose of emotional content in presenting the case against cocaine use can often-times expose the truth of the matter much clearer than mere abstractions. Moral severity can carry with it an emotional con-

hundreds of millions of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world stand aghast at its betrayal of the Pope. The vast majority of Christians and non-Christians beyond the borders of the United States experience it as an ignominious document for the U.S. Catholic Bishops to place before a world – a world that knows and is repulsed by governmental falsehood and the murderous actions being justified by them. It is the USCCB’s moral equivalent of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution – an abdication of moral responsibility rooted in the acceptance of government lies.

Anyone who reads this document cannot help but breathe in the air of public relations gimmickry and sycophantism that



War is not a mere matter of opinion.

tent whose purpose is to help enlighten and to help motivate a change of mind and a change of direction. What, except moral severity, does the “pieta” photo that accompanies this article call forth?

This brings us to the breach of unity with the Successor of Peter published by the United States’ Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 19, 2003, one day before this war commenced. Tens of millions of Catholics and non-Catholics in the U.S. and

permeates it. It presents as facts known fictions propagated by the government’s mind-manipulation, pro-war media blitz. It condemns Iraq for doing what the U.S. has been engaged in for most of the 20th century - “repression” e.g. El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, etc., “disregard for civilian life” e.g. abortion, Nagasaki, Vietnam, East Timor, Gulf War I, the Iraqi embargo (400,000 children are dead as a direct result of U.S. maintained sanctions according to UNICEF.), etc., and then offers this as

implied proof that the war is just.

The Bishops' declaration says not a word about John Paul II consistently proclaiming that "pre-emptive war" does not meet the just war standard, let alone the morally demanded conclusion

Fortunately for the moral integrity and spiritual credibility of the Catholic Church the Pope has a few breaths left to speak vigorously on behalf of the anawim...

that follows from this i.e. it is unjustified homicide. In fact the U.S. Bishops by this document spurn the Pope as a group. They place John Paul II and George W. Bush on equal moral footing by instructing U.S. Catholics that they are equally free in conscience to choose between the two. They thereby teach that the truth of Christ and His Church on the matter of war in Iraq is being authentically proclaimed by both men, even though each presents a position diametrically opposed to the other! How removed from the Pope can the U.S. Bishops get beyond saying, "War has serious consequences, so could the failure to act." Not going to war is exactly what the Pope states must be done morally – no pre-emptive war! What the U.S. Bishops call "failure to act", and impliedly employ as a justification for this war, is precisely what the Pope says cannot be justified morally.

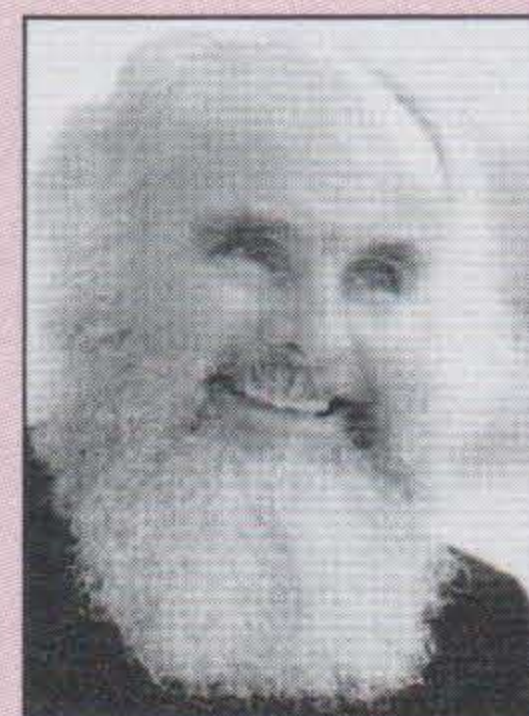
From all the powerful statements that John Paul II has made denouncing the war, the only statement the Bishops choose to quote at length in their statement is this: "The political leaders in Baghdad have an urgent duty to cooperate fully with the international community, to eliminate any motive for armed intervention." People know that such limited and non-representative selections of papal thoughts do not come from a desire to adhere to the presence of the Spirit of Truth. And, what a transparent act of faux moral courage for the Bishops to boldly declare that "any decision to defend against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction by using our own weapons of mass destruction would be clearly unjustified." People know moral "duct-tape" when they see it! The "slight of hand" deviousness that these rhetorical tactics represent is not the face of Catholicism that should be placed before the human community.

With this document the Catholic Bishops of the U.S. present themselves to the world as the spiritual mirrors of those ayatollahs who step up to religiously endorse every war that the local Muslim political leadership brings about or those Rabbis who justify every murderous theft that Israeli politicians conduct against

the Palestinian people. There is no way to calculate the long-term damage that has been done to the Catholic Church world-wide, e.g. in Muslim countries, Hindu countries, China, etc. by the witness to Christ being given by the United States' Episcopacy. Baptized nationalism parading under the name of all that is Catholicism is a disaster for the Church throughout the planet. What a staggering misfortune it would have been for the Catholic Church if the Pope had gone the way of the U.S. Bishops! What a dreadful blow it is to the Church, beyond the latitudinal and longitudinal perimeters of the United States, that the U.S. bishops went the way they did.

For Catholics, including bishops, an objective truth, held as a matter of conscience before God, is this: what the Pope says on issues of morals, e.g. war, is not a mere "matter of opinion." What the Pope says on moral matters is infinitely more serious than this for Catholics, even when he does not speak infallibly. Indeed, even non-Catholics and non-Christians know this about the Catholic faith. Fortunately for the moral integrity and spiritual credibility of the Catholic Church the Pope has a few breaths left to speak vigorously on behalf of the *anawim*, to speak out against those who grind the faces of the "nobodies of this world" into the dirt, so that the "somebodies of this world" can sleep comfortably in beds covered in silk and draped with purple. Fortunately for the Catholic Church the Pope has a catholic conscience and the courage to stand by it in order that the Church can be what Vatican II envisioned it being: "the conscience of society." People know the difference between the Church speaking truth to power, and the Church kowtowing to power; people know when tribal allegiance becomes the primary allegiance, when currying favor replaces proclaiming the Gospel. People know a document that neither Jesus nor the Pope would have written, when they see it.

The People of God, especially those whose future is early death or a lifetime of pain and grief brought on by this war, deserve infinitely more than the U.S. Catholic Bishops give them in their March 19, 2003 statement – and so does the man they disowned, John Paul II. And, does not the Man, whose name the U.S. Bishops never once mention in their document, whose teachings they never once state, whose words they never once quote, who they seemingly "do not know" (Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:54-62; Jn 18:15-27) when it comes to this war, deserve much, much more from those He entrusted to speak in His name, from those He chose to guard the faith and morals of His flock? ■



REV. EMMANUEL CHARLES McCARTHY, is a Melkite Catholic priest of the Eastern-rite who is presently the Acting Rector of St. Gregory the Theologian Melkite Seminary in Brookline, MA. He is the father of 13 children.

In memory of
Marie M. Lercari
Assistant Editor
Vocations And Prayer Magazine

Born in New York on April 15, 1943 Marie Lercari passed away in Woodland Hills, CA, on April 24, 2003.

For ten years, Marie Lercari devoted her time and talents to *Vocations and Prayer Magazine*. Her presence and her loyalty were a blessing and a gift to the Rogationist Fathers and to the editorial staff of this magazine. Her dedication and her competence as Editorial Assistant were remarkable. Her special ability for warm dealing with authors and customers was most appreciated. Marie's good heart for helping, in any possible way, whomever was in need, was simply exceptional.

Prior to working with the Rogationists, Marie worked with the same loyalty and dedication at St. Andrew Abby in Valyermo for 15 years. She organized and developed their local ceramic and religious store.

Diagnosed with cancer, the last five years of her life were her "Via Dolorosa." The Rogationist Fathers and the staff of *Vocations and Prayer Magazine*, grateful for the gift of Marie, present, along with sincere prayers, their heartfelt sympathy to the Lercari Family.

Born to Eternal Life

Marie's sufferings were multiple, severe and extended over long stretches of time. They always seemed present, either just around the corner or pressing down unbearably upon her. Yet, it was while she was struggling on this prolonged Via Dolorosa that she would phone me to cajole, persuade, "pressure" me into writing another article for *Vocations and Prayer*.

I last spoke to Marie the day before she was born into Eternal Life. She could not speak. Her sister, Michelle, kindly put the phone to her ear and Marie and I prayed across three thousand miles. We prayed with some of her favorite friends in heaven: the Blessed Mother, St. Edith Stein, St. Padre Pio. Just before giving her a final blessing over the telephone I said, "Marie, let us say the prayer of the thief who dies with Our Lord." So, we prayed together, "Jesus, remember me in your Kingdom." Then I said, "Now, Marie, be absolutely certain that what Jesus says to the man next to Him on the



cross He now says to you: 'I promise you, this day you will be with me in Paradise.'"

I intended to call back the next day but before I could Jesus had fulfilled His promise to Marie. Memory Eternal!

*Rev. Emmanuel Charles
 McCarthy*

Close to the Heart of God

The aphorism "A picture paints a thousand words," is one that will never become a cliché. It is imbued with rich meaning. I've always preferred dictionaries

that include pictures, and there could not be a greater way to convey the meaning of the term "friend," than to show a picture of Marie Lercari.

Marie sought "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and she sought for it more passionately and earnestly than anyone I had met before. We knew her before and after her battle with cancer. Though beleaguered, tormented and haunted by the disease within, she remained close to the heart of God and eager to serve. Though physically and emotionally taxed with a cancer that consistently returned for unwelcome and often intolerably painful visits, Marie did not lose her faith, her desire to seek and know God, or even her sense of humor. In memory of Marie, I would like to share a simple poem:

Glory in Your Eyes

*you suffered like a saint
 you served like saints do too
 you offered us your greatest gifts
 you gave the best of you
 and now that you are gone
 and it is time to say good-bye
 in memories we see the glimpse of
 glory in your eyes*

Bruce L. Thiessen