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The Church and the Middle Eastern Conflict

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Simon Harak asks me to speak on the topic of the Church's positions on the Middle Eastern conflict, and that raises immediately the question: what are we referring to as "the Church?" Do we mean Roman Catholic Church, and in that case do we mean what the Roman hierarchy has to say from the Vatican, what the American Catholic bishops say or do about "the Holy Land," or where the lay and clerical membership of the Church, American or elsewhere, stands on the subject? Is it what the Church has to say, whether bishops or all Christians in the Middle East itself? All sorts of Christians tend to act in considerable Palestinian unity there, and the foreign Christians among them – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant – are largely in sympathy with them, though not particularly active.

Elsewhere in the world, too, there are Protestants and Orthodox to reckon with. I'm not especially well informed about Orthodox opinion around the world on the topic, diverse as it is in the many Orthodox countries. Between Catholics and Protestants there are significant divergences, which I'll try to deal with briefly before getting down in detail to the Catholic responses.

Protestants divide sharply. The religious right – the Pat Robinsons, the Franklin Grahams and those many who think like them – has become a major power bloc in this country, hewing close to a Messianic vision of the State of Israel itself as uniquely entitled and a part of the basic economy of salvation. They see a restored Israel, with all the territory it had – perhaps! – in David's or Solomon's time as a condition on which the return of Christ depends. This attitude

traces back to dispensationalism in 17th-century English Protestantism, and now likely has a political importance in the United States comparable to that of AIPAC and its allies. A Pat Robinson could upbraid Ariel Sharon for withdrawing settlers from the Gaza Strip because it made the *parousia* more remote, and claim that his critical illness was God's punishment on Sharon for this grave offense. Such a position, from a major proportion of American Christians, has been welcome to the Right Wing parties in Israel, no matter that the consummation of that divine project entails conversion of all Jews to Christianity on pain of death. I think they perhaps don't give as much credence to that part of the story.

Mainline Protestants have taken a very different course. At Israel's beginning, they were in much the same position as most Americans: conscience-stricken at the memory of the Shoah, supportive in consequence of Jewish aspirations for a land and practically unconscious of the existence of Palestinians. I can recall my own experience of that time, which would have resembled that of most Americans, Protestant and other. We had all heard that Israel was the land without people for the people without land and all the other slogans that went with it. I could be indignant in 1956 when the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt precluded an American Cold War response to the Soviet suppression of Hungary's revolution, but Americans, Protestants and the rest of us, tended not to discover Palestinians until such events as the 1982 siege of Beirut, or the beginnings of the first intifada in December 1987. When they then realized the sufferings of the Palestinian people, many tended to swing about a full 180 degrees to support of Palestinian freedom and full opposition to Israel's policies, even to the extent of a renewed anti-Semitism in many cases.

I happened to have made my own discovery of Palestinians in 1967, and explicitly in terms of my concern for the welfare of Israel. I realized that Israelis had just done what was not

permissible to them in their conquest of all the rest of the territory, and that if it could not be reversed it would be their destruction. That led me to grow a close familiarity with both peoples and commitment to both. The common mainline Protestant reaction in the U.S., though, when they discovered Palestinians, much like the common European reaction, was increasing anger with what people saw as Israeli injustice and despotism. Everyone realizes that it is risk to ourselves ever to appear anti-Israeli, which will be equated with anti-Semitic, but for the mainline Protestant the concept of the Israeli state as bad actor has become the prevailing idea.

For Catholics, though, the most formative experience of those years was the Second Vatican Council, the profound insights of Pope John XXIII, and the watershed decree *Nostra Aetate*, which set out to reverse nearly two millennia of Christian supercessionism and contempt toward the Jews. Those events, for all the strivings, since that time, of “restorationists” to clutch back toward the old habits of a triumphalist Catholicism, are the matrix of Catholic attitudes on the Middle East since that time.

I hope you may all be familiar with John O’Malley’s splendid recent book, *What Happened at Vatican II?*”, which clarifies so much of what transpired there. You will recognize how much Pope Paul VI dragged his feet about this decree, forcing Cardinal Agustin Bea and his allies in the leadership of the Council to battle mightily for its passage and even lose out on some key phrasings he wanted. The initial impetus for this whole movement had come from Pope John XXIII himself, who had done everything in his power, as a papal Nuncio, to rescue Jews who were in flight from the Shoah and was tremendously influenced, once he became Pope, by the pleas of Jules Isaac. All the same, when Paul VI visited the Holy Land during the actual time of the Council he seemed begrudging of the State of Israel, and implementation of the *Nostra Aetate* decree proceeded slowly, through much confusion.

The Vatican Curia was fully receptive to the fears expressed by the Eastern churches, Catholic and Orthodox, who in fact did successfully alert the Council as a whole to these dangers, with the result that the decree came to be not just the Catholic-Jewish one that was first envisioned but a decree on the relation of the Catholic Church to other religions in general, with special emphasis on Islam, second only to that on Judaism. Nevertheless, reconciliation with the Jews, after all the centuries of their persecution by Catholics and other Christians, became a main objective of Catholic Church policy, while reconciliation with Muslims did not. (Once again, what do we mean by “Church,” its top only or the whole communion?).

Protestants, of course, were also vastly affected by the spirit of the Vatican Council and shared these perceptions. Catholics could be as much angered by what they saw as cruelty and injustice toward Palestinians, but were less likely to let that become their central data.

I’ve been a member, since 1992, of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, joining it first because I was asked to accompany a group of Holy Sepulchre Knights and Ladies on a visit to the Holy Land that year and introduce them to people of both Israeli and Palestinian communities, so that they wouldn’t see only Holy Places of the past. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, made up of practicing Catholics, generally not without means, has been commissioned by the Holy See to take special care for the Christian presence in the Holy Land, and there is no better service can be done for that than to foster peace. I have taken, since then, to visiting the whole geography of Holy Sepulchre lieutenancies in the United States and Canada. My message to them has always been that when they go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they should see it not only as a museum of sacred events and monuments, where the inhabitants are basically only tour guides. I’ve been known to tell the Holy Sepulchre audiences that, when they go to the Holy Land, it is not simply the “Jesus theme park,” but a place where

important events are occurring at present. A Christian theology of incarnation should make us all aware that in these people, of diverse ethnicity and faith, we are always encountering the suffering Christ. For us outsiders, I would understand our responsibility as promoting reconciliation – but not without full attention to justice – for both peoples.

The Knights and Ladies, of course, and other Catholics and Christians visiting the region and seeing, in the first instance, the plight of the Palestinian Christians, are as likely as anyone else to become angry. I find it necessary, every now and then, to remind them of that Catholic priority of seeking reconciliation with the Jews, but never at the cost of accepting injustice or indulging Israelis in an approval of those policies that may well be their actual destruction.

I keep concentrating here on popular Catholic perceptions rather than official acts of the Holy See, because for all its interests in central control and discipline over Catholic thought, the Holy See cannot prevail over widespread Catholic opinion.

The Holy See, in the early days of the Zionist enterprise, was implacably supercessionist, as was prevailing Catholic opinion. At Pope Pius X's meeting with Theodor Herzl on January 25th, 1904, receiving Herzl's promises of protection for the Christian sanctuaries in a Jewish state, he responded, according to Herzl's diary: "We cannot prevent the Hebrews from going to Jerusalem, but we could never sanction it.... The Jews have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people."

Herzl attempted a distinction, that "our point of departure had been the distress of the Jews and that we desired to avoid the religious issues." But the Pope could not be deflected: "The Jewish religion is the foundation of our own," he said; "but it was superceded by the teachings of Christ, and we cannot concede it any further validity. The Jews, who ought to have

been the first to acknowledge Jesus Christ, have not done so to this day.... We pray for the Jews that they may be enlightened.... And so, if you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you.”

It’s noteworthy that there is only religion here, supercessionist religion at that, no politics. No Palestinians are in sight. “If you come to Palestine and settle your people there...” says the Pope. There is no thought to what their coming would mean to the Palestinian population in place. We may conclude from this that the Church of that period (Holy See rather than the community as a whole) thought mainly of its own institutional interests and had little concern with the wider political world other than to protect itself.

Subsequent years, with the two World Wars, the great depression, the blockbuster ideologies of Fascism and especially Communism seen as threats to the Church, the rise and fall of the League of Nations and its replacement by the U.N., and the rise of the ecumenical movement, itself still seen as threat in earlier years, modified this outlook to the point that the Holy See, with its Observer Mission at the U.N., took a distinct interest in the General Assembly resolution for the Partition of Palestine (GA Resolution 181, November 22, 1947). That interest focused still on the institutional interest in the Holy Places, and the Holy See’s major insistence was on the international status of Jerusalem, which was to be under the supervision of the United Nations.

In the course of that evolution, the diplomatic relations of the Holy See, now reconceived within the newly sovereign state of Vatican City, made it a listening post for the ambassadors accredited to it, and this in turn engendered a new and interesting status for the Holy See’s own diplomats, the nuncios accredited to countries Catholic, Protestant, of other religions or with an

intentional separation of church and state. The Holy See's nuncios were no longer primarily representative of institutional power but of valuable information and some degree of moral influence. That there were nuncios to Arab and other Muslim countries made their issues, and of course the safety of the small Christian communities within them, of interest to the Holy See.

A key figure here was Archbishop (later Cardinal) Pio Laghi, who was Apostolic Delegate (i.e., a diplomat accredited to the bishops of the local Catholic Church rather than to the governments of their countries) to Jerusalem and Palestine from 1969 to 1973. That remit included Israel and Jordan, and simultaneously Laghi was Pro-Nuncio to Cyprus and Apostolic Visitor to Greece. In later years he was Nuncio to Argentina. In 1980 he was made Apostolic Delegate to the United States. And when in 1984 full diplomatic relations were established between the U.S. and the Holy See, he became Nuncio. His influence therefore extended to the Catholic Church in the United States.

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, Laghi made it his business to convince his Roman superiors that, in the Holy Land, they were dealing not merely with a museum of holy stones but with a Christian community, Catholic and other, of unique value, the remaining representatives of the first Christian community of New Testament times. Their interests, and those of the rest of the Palestinian people among whom they lived, must be attended to.

I've noted the rather wary stance of Pope Paul VI toward this region, his hesitations about the *Nostra Aetate* decree, his begrudging attitude to the state of Israel on his 1964 visit to the region. This changed radically with the advent (1978) of Pope John Paul II, who brought to the Holy See both a life-long familiarity with Jews, from the time of their persecution in the Shoah, and a commitment to Catholic reconciliation with them. With that he combined a full

appreciation of the rights and interests of Palestinians, not of Catholics or Christians only but of the whole captive or exiled Palestinian population. A real dynamic entered now into the activities and attitudes of the Holy See toward the region, an urgency for the peace, for the safe future of an Israel that would not be on a suicidal course, and for justice for the Palestinians. I rely here somewhat on George Weigel's exhaustive biography of Pope John Paul II, *Witness to Hope* (Harper-Collins, Cliff Street Books, 1999), which, however, does not get to the papal visit to the Middle East in the millennial year 2000.

Msgr. Luigi Gatti, one of my own contacts through this period and the regional officer for the Middle East in the Holy See's Secretariate of State, alerted Weigel, in an interview which he cites, to the importance of a homily the Pope gave at Otranto, October 5, 1980 (Weigel 701). John Paul started from the abiding character of God's covenant with the Jews, instancing alongside it the Church's appreciation of Islam's faith in the God of Abraham. Thus far he was entirely in the context of the *Nostra Aetate* decree. He related the founding of the State of Israel – and it is worth remarking that this is the first time that term, “the State of Israel,” was ever used in a papal statement – to “the tragic experience of so many sons and daughters of the Jewish people in the Holocaust.” But he then linked this with “the painful condition of the Palestinian people ... a large part of whom are excluded from their land.” He noted also the torments of Lebanon and of Jerusalem. This homily, little noticed at the time, Gatti noted, set the strategic framework of the Holy See's policy in the Middle East for the '80s and '90s. Parallel statements of respect for Jews and the Israeli state and recognition of the right of Palestinians to a homeland became standard for the Pope through the 1980s.

With the Gulf War of 1990-91 the Pope paid close attention to the precarious position of the minority Christian communities, always seen as the cat's-paw of Western imperial powers,

throughout the Middle East. His concern, too, was still for future negotiation on the status of the Holy Land and its Christian institutions. This put him in a difficult lock between Arab and Israeli interests. Opposed to the war on principle, he did not see it as his role to parse the classical criteria of a just war, on the basis of which he would be expected to bless or curse the use of armed force in the crisis. Instead he saw it as his task to urge nonviolent means to resolve the conflict, taking care to maintain respectful relations with all sides.

Vatican organs such as *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Civiltà Cattolica* were full of such urgings, and the Pope himself was constant in his statements against the use of force. Always a strong supporter of the United Nations system, John Paul was put in this case into unaccustomed opposition to the actions taken by the organization at the urging of the United States and its allies.

This situation was repeated, in yet stronger terms, with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March, 2003. This time the United Nations membership, including close allies of the United States, was itself in opposition to the American drive for war. I happened to be in Rome during a week just before the actual invasion, saw the daily mass demonstrations of the Roman public against the war and the peace banners hung out from the windows of most apartments in the city. I was able to meet with Cardinal Pio Laghi, an old Bush family friend from the time he had spent in Washington as Nuncio, just before he travelled to Washington, at the Pope's behest, in an effort to persuade President George W. Bush against invading. Laghi, I know from his subsequent report, found Bush totally deaf to any such appeal, convinced that he had a higher calling to war directly from a divine Father.

Following the initial Gulf War of 1990-91, and in the period running through the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accord, the Vatican worked through to its “Fundamental Agreement” with the State of Israel (December 30, 1993) and the full exchange of diplomatic relations. Historians of the reign differ widely over whether these negotiations were driven by the Madrid and Oslo events or whether they were primarily initiated by the Pope himself as a way of removing a bone in the throat of relations with the Jewish community, which had been so great a priority of the Church since *Nostra Aetate*. There is much to be said for both perspectives. Yet throughout the process the Holy See and its negotiators worked protectively on careful formulas for the status of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land and the institutions of the Christian communities. Given the assiduous work done on these issues, it is extremely disappointing to see that the remaining points on the bilateral negotiating agenda, on which depended the implementation of any protections for the status of Christians, have to this day been left unresolved. Negotiating sessions with the Israelis are regularly put off, postponed or unproductive, and the Christian institutions remain still unprotected and exposed to arbitrary actions of Israeli government over such issues as taxation, visas for religious workers and many others.

For the millennial year 2000, the Pope was anxious to make a visit to the Holy Land. Establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel had been very satisfying for Israeli government, but John Paul was anxious to solidify his support for Palestinians as well.

In February, during what was Arafat’s ninth visit to the Pope, the Vatican signed a pact with the PLO guaranteeing Church rights in the expected Palestinian state. Freedom of religion and the status of Christian churches were promised and the Vatican recognized the ‘inalienable national legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,’ stating that ‘unilateral decisions and actions

altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable.’ The wording was taken as a reproach to Israel and a reaffirmation of Vatican support for a Palestinian state. This was not new, but it lent moral authority to the Palestinian cause, adding to the pressures on Israel. The Foreign Ministry summoned the Vatican’s envoy to a meeting at which Israel expressed “great displeasure” at the inclusion of the Jerusalem issue and “other issues which are the subjects of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a permanent status.”

Early in March there appeared a first outline of what would become a sweeping papal apology for the historic failings of the Catholic Church, expected later in the month. When it appeared, as a solemn prayer for reconciliation at a special Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on March 11th, it caused astonishment. The Pope apologized and begged forgiveness from victims and their descendants for many historic transgressions of the Church, including especially the perennial persecution of the Jews, the Crusades and the Inquisition. The gesture, having no precedent in Catholic history, made a deep impression worldwide.

The Pope came to the Holy Land by way of Jordan. Competition had arisen about rival sites for the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan, and the Vatican gave reassurance that the Pope would visit both the Jordanian and Israeli sites. He arrived at Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion airport Tuesday, March 21st, greeted by Israeli Prime Minister Barak and President Ezer Weizman, and telling how he had looked out, like Moses, over the Promised Land from the heights of Mount Nebo in Jordan the previous day. On the 22nd he visited Bethlehem, venerating the purported site of the birth of Jesus, cordially greeting Yasser Arafat and his wife Suha, who had come to meet him. He spoke extensively at the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, where

he deplored the plight of Palestinians. To finish his day, he said Mass at the Cenacle, traditional site for the Last Supper.

Thursday the Pope visited the Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem. His words were stirring, especially his repeated quotation from the Psalms:

I have become like a broken vessel.

I hear the whispering of many – terror on every side! –

as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God'. (*Ps* 31:13-15).

But it was not the words so much as the sight, broadcast live on Israeli television, that touched the hearts of Israelis. The Church, and especially the Vatican and that particular Pope, work very extensively through symbols, pageantry, and that is one of the strongest Catholic ways of communication. Later, during that summer, I heard Rabbi Stephen Cohen, who had been so responsible, from the Israeli side, for the establishment of diplomatic relations, describe the effect of this, and the Pope's later appearance at the Western Wall, thus: Jews had been so persecuted, so beaten about the ears for so many centuries by Christians, that they had trouble hearing the many much better things that the Pope and other Christians said in these recent years. The sight of the Pope there, at the Yad Vashem, at the Wall, had an altogether different effect on Israelis. Here at last was a man who cared, who understood Jewish suffering.

The afternoon's event was less successful. Leading representatives of the three Abrahamic religions assembled at a new hall erected at the Pontifical Institute Notre Dame, a pilgrimage hostel at the edge of the Old City walls. The Pope addressed them formally, the

Chief Rabbi and the Grand Mufti took sharp verbal shots at one another's positions on the city of Jerusalem, and the Grand Mufti eventually walked out.

On Friday the Pope went to the Galilee, celebrating a Mass attended by 100,000 people at the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. He delivered a homily on peace from which both Israelis and Palestinians felt a sense of endorsement. He went to Nazareth the following day, and was cheered by a mixed Muslim and Christian crowd, despite the still festering dispute over building a mosque in the face of the Christian basilica. It was a day of joy at the site that had been the source of so much tension. The Pope concluded his day with formal courtesy visits in Jerusalem, to the assembled Consuls General, to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch and the Grand Mufti.

The final day of the visit, Sunday, saw the crowning event, the Pope's visit to the Western Wall. Approaching the Wall, as pilgrim, like a Jew, with no mention of Jesus, he prayed, head bowed, and inserted, in Jewish fashion, a paper bearing his prayer into a crevice between the massive stones. The paper was retrieved as soon as he left, this man who, escaping from a Nazi slave labor camp during World War II, had come home to find all his close friends and neighbors, Jews, simply gone. His petition was for forgiveness for all the harm that Christians had done to Jews throughout their common history. That done, he visited the Holy Sepulchre and departed.

The visit had been a moment of light in the midst of the year 2000's descent into darkness. Deborah Sontag reported in *The New York Times* that, as soon as the Pope was gone, Israel resumed its normal discord. Ovadia Yosef, spiritual head of the Shas party, was under the Attorney General's investigation by now for his threats to the life of Yossi Sarid. That very day,

Clinton had had his disastrous meeting in Geneva with Hafez al-Assad, and all hopes of peace with Syria seemed dashed. There were anxieties about another flare-up on the Lebanese border. The following day would see a police recommendation that Binyamin Netanyahu, the former Prime Minister, and his wife be brought up on charges of bribery, fraud and theft while in office. His days in politics seemed, for the time, to have ended. But one note of grace did come through that day. Interior Minister Natan Sharansky, a fair-minded man so often counted among the hawks of Israeli society, announced that the lands belonging to the Palestinian village of Kafr Kassem, which had been confiscated decades earlier to make room for the development of an Israeli town, would be returned, a significant step toward equality for Israeli Arabs.

That very emotional visit of John Paul II to the Holy Land rather summed up papal policy toward the Middle East. The subsequent reign, of Pope Benedict XVI, has seen efforts by the Vatican to maintain the relative good will attained by Pope John Paul, and stand by the solidarity he had expressed for Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs. There have been spectacular pratfalls, such as the Regensburg lecture, the Good Friday prayers and the Williamson affair. The Pope and all his curia have had to backpedal and apologize profusely on each of those, but the underlying intention has remained what it was with John Paul, though less deft. Response by Pope and Holy See to the stunning Muslim initiative, represented by the *Common Word Between Us and You* document, seeking reconciliation with the Christian world, has been slow and rather bemused, as if they weren't quite sure how to understand it, and worked from the supposition that any such initiatives should come, by right, from themselves and not from any others.

But what does this all amount to? I raised the question at the start of this lecture whether, in asking what the Church has to say on the Middle East, we needed to talk of the Holy See or of

the generality of Catholics (or all Christians, among whom we'll find still more variants). The Holy See itself has gone through major changes of outlook over the time we have spoken of, from the dismissive attitude toward all "non-Catholics" (the term we used to employ so casually and which so offended all those who found themselves so defined by a negative) to a much broader concern with human rights, with the safeguarding of human life (let's talk seamless garment here) and the welfare of all peoples.

What we see in the interventions of Pope John Paul II – in the wars, in the interrelation with Israelis and Palestinians, in the efforts to quell the violence in Lebanon through its long civil wars and unrest, in the respectful dealings with all the regimes of the region – does proceed primarily from the same basic concern for the safety of Catholics and Christians in the Islamic societies of the Middle East. It has acquired a further focus in that priority search for reconciliation with Jews, out of shame for the nearly two millennia of supercessionist theology and persecution, and the broader concern for human justice has radically modified the outlook and activity of the Holy See, without overriding the Church's own institutional interests. There is defensiveness about Pope Pius XII and his activity on behalf of Jews or lack of it during the years of the Shoah. In his lifetime, Pius was celebrated for his active interventions to save Jewish victims from the Nazis. The condemnations arose only with the Rolf Hochhuth play, *Der Stellvertreter*, in the 1960s. Yet we have learned that we can now appeal to the Church, at all its levels from grassroots to the Holy See, when justice issues are at stake, though the response is not entirely predictable at any of these levels.

We are currently a gravely wounded Church. We find the effectiveness of official statements and actions of Catholic hierarchy seriously curtailed. We have left far behind the

enthusiasm of the times of the Second Vatican Council and Pope John XXIII. “Restorationist” efforts, in the eras of both Paul VI and John Paul II, have drained much of that enthusiasm. The emergence of long-hidden scandals has generated massive cynicism about the Church among people many of whom who had already begun recognizing a history of arrogant clericalism. Catholics, particularly in Europe, where so many have simply given up on the Church, or in the United States, where we have developed a kind of civil war within the Catholic community, have become selective in what they will pay attention to. It’s not only on the Left that we are in the Catholic cafeteria. Our rather ferocious Right Wing will trumpet anything they hear from bishops or the Vatican that fits their quite political neo-conservatism. We know that of the social issues – abortion pre-eminently, but also end-of-life concerns or single-sex. More recently, in the Catholic wars over Obama, Catholics of that streak have even caviled at the lack of stridency from the majority of the bishops or the Holy See and begun calling for the firing of the editors of *L’Osservatore Romano* because they give less exclusive weight to those issues and have praised various Obama policies. More liberal Catholics have tended to tune out bishops’ and papal exhortations, regarding them as largely without relevance.

When we hear such things as the strong papal objection to our wars, or the grappling with basic justice issues with regard to peoples – Israeli, Palestinian or more widely Arab; Christian, Muslim or Jewish – they are barely audible, even to American bishops. Only with the greatest timidity will the American Bishops’ Conference echo these judgments of the Holy See. At the start of the Gulf War, in 1990, Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco addressed a letter to the George H.W. Bush Administration, questioning whether a counter-invasion against Iraq, at that time far from being a certainty in public consciousness, would meet just-war criteria. Pope John Paul was at that time urgently raising moral objections to such an invasion and seeking

alternatives ways to address the conflict. When the U.S. bishops met in Washington that November they at once passed a resolution endorsing Archbishop Quinn's letter and then proposed that a statement be composed on behalf of the Conference itself. A ginger-group of Bush-friendly bishops then organized a vociferous campaign simply to prevent the bishops of the Conference from saying anything whatever on the subject. They were successful.

And in fact, when it comes to a clash with neo-conservative American attitudes, especially in the broad areas that have been assigned to "national security" or in uncritical embrace of the principals of free-market capitalism, our Catholic Right will consistently decide against any papal teaching to the contrary and our bishops will stand back and keep their mouths shut. The great biography of Pope John Paul II by George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, which I drew on earlier, while it is practically hagiographical through most of its length for all its enormous scholarship, demurs when it tells of the Pope's objection to American policy in the Gulf War of 1990-91. He puts the Pope's lack of enthusiasm down partly to confusion in the Vatican Secretariate of State at a time of transition in its leadership, and partly to outright moral failure on the part of the Pope, whom he sees as neglecting the teachings of the Catholic just-war tradition. He simply mocks the efforts of the Catholic Patriarch in Baghdad, Rafaël Bidawid, to prevent the invasion.

I would have to conclude, then, that the actual influence of the Catholic Church in matters of Middle East policy, especially in the United States, has become quite tenuous. Few, of bishops or lay leadership, other than on some university campuses, will risk addressing it. Conformity to general public pressures constitutes the norm for most of our people. Our bishops

are timid in this area, and most of what the much better Vatican teaching says is widely ignored.

We will have to put our house in order before that will much change.