

# Who came down on the 'Catholic Register'?

by Robert L. Gallagher

The *National Catholic Register*, a private U.S. weekly newspaper known for its "conservatism," has declared war on *30 Giorni*, a rival, orthodox Catholic monthly edited in Rome and known to be close to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The *Register's* Dec. 30 issue includes two front-page articles which denounce the monthly—whose U.S. edition is named *30 Days*—for being too "European," having "a fixation" with Masonry, and even being "anti-Semitic." *30 Giorni* is "shocking, at least to the Anglo-Saxon reader," explains the *Register*.

You're right, if you think this tempest must have something to do with the Middle East crisis, and the strong Vatican criticisms of Bush. But the pretext is even more interesting.

A lead article in *30 Giorni* on the Polish presidential elections endorsed Solidarity leader Lech Walesa over outgoing Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. "The story painted a bleak picture of Mazowiecki and other Polish intellectuals opposed to Walesa," writes the *Register*, "in particular the circle associated with the Krakow publications *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and *Znak*."

*30 Giorni* wrote: "On the Polish question, this magazine openly declared its support for Walesa because it seemed to us that he could have guaranteed a ray of freedom. We particularly agree with him on two points: 1) freedom for Catholics from the factiousness of Catholic intellectuals . . . ; 2) his desire to deal directly with the real power without using 'experts' as filters or mediators."

In other words, *30 Giorni* denounces Mazowiecki's practice of hiring Harvard economists like Jeffrey Sachs to deal with the International Monetary Fund and the Great Powers of North America and Europe.

In addition, *30 Giorni's* November issue reported that the diaries of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński show that the liberal Catholic circles around *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and *Znak*, which the *Register* describes as "Mazowiecki's Krakow friends," had at the time of the Second Vatican Council launched a vicious attack on Cardinal Wyszyński for "exaggerating" the importance of Catholic devotion to the mother of Christ. The article also indicated that "the Catholic circles that govern the new post-Communist Poland of today" were

"understudies" of the secular left.

In Poland, and among the Polish, these are all big issues. When the publisher of the French edition of *30 Giorni* saw the November issue, he notified the Rome editorial offices that he would not distribute it. The explanation from the editor of the French edition Robert Masson: *30 Giorni* was violating Mazowiecki's "honor." *30 Giorni* responded by producing and distributing a French edition from Rome.

Now in the wake of Walesa's victory, the largest-circulation national Catholic newspaper in the United States is trying to punish *30 Giorni*, by trying to organize a readership boycott of its large U.S. edition edited by Rev. Joseph Fessio, S.J., a former student and personal friend of Ratzinger.

Explains Masson: *30 Giorni* "sees Masons and Jews everywhere. Its coverage of Israel is consistently very harsh on the Jews."

Through a glass darkly, this refers to exposés that have appeared in *30 Giorni* on two subjects: 1) the return to power of the Masons in eastern Europe; and 2) the policy of Israel to drive all non-Jews out of Jerusalem.

## The Jerusalem issue

*30 Giorni's* July 1990 issue reported: "There is a systematic plan to turn Jerusalem into an entirely Jewish city by buying out Christian and Muslim properties. Behind the plan: ultra-Orthodox Zionists—supported by parts of the government . . . influential sectors of the government bureaucracy are supporting the hegemonic designs of more fanatical elements of religious and Zionist extremists in the Holy City . . . young zealots are systematically installing radical Zionist cells in the Muslim zone, bearing the Torah in one hand and a gun in the other, supported by the financial lobbies of American Jewry and government funds." Stories of Israel government harassment of poor Christians and Muslims who refused to move filled an entire article.

What objection could the *Register* possibly have to such coverage? The violent Israeli attack on the former Greek Orthodox Hospice of St. John of Jerusalem, during the week before Easter no less, is well known. Answer: The truth of what's going on in Israel makes Saddam Hussein look like a hero, to both Christians and Muslims.

And up until early December, the *Register* itself provided more or less objective coverage of the present Middle East conflict. It documented how Hussein was on excellent terms with the Vatican, how he has helped the Church more than any other Arab leader, and how Iraqi-American Catholics were criticizing Bush. Then the U.S. Bishops Conference issued its statement questioning whether Bush's Middle East adventure could be justified by St. Augustine's "just war" doctrine. Then somebody, or something, cracked down on the *Register*, and the newspaper came out for Bush—attacking the Bishops in its Dec. 9 issue. It's not clear where the pressure on the *Register* is coming from, but it's clearly not coming from Rome.