

Vatican by Leonardo Servadio

Pope's life said to be threatened

Bush's "diplomacy" revealed: A Christian Democratic leader says John Paul II's pro-peace stand has put him at risk.

Pope John Paul II's calls for peace "have distanced him from the support of many people and have caused disrespectful public responses and even more insolent and threatening private comments," said Christian Democratic member of the European Parliament Roberto Formigoni on Friday, Feb. 8, during a conference at the State University in Milan. Said in less diplomatic words, Formigoni meant that someone threatened the life of the Pope. Formigoni is a leader of the political movement Movimento Popolare, closely tied to Comunione e Liberazione, a movement often accused of being "integrist," i.e., of being more loyal to the Church than to the state and its political interests.

But what are these threats? Formigoni said that "people should re-read, for instance, Bush's answer to the Pope's letter." Formigoni was referring to the letter the Pope sent to Bush on Jan. 15, the day established by the U.N. as the deadline for Iraq to comply with the U.N. order to leave Kuwait. In that letter, the Pope wrote that war should be avoided, that people should not answer violence with more violence. The Pope had sent a similar letter to Saddam Hussein, calling on him to make wise decisions of historic importance. Bush answered that he "shared the Pope's desire for peace" and agreed with his "appeal for Saddam to withdraw," but at the same time he ordered the attack.

Interviewed by several journalists on his statement, Formigoni confirmed what he had said, and underlined that he never spoke without be-

ing well informed—but refused to give more information. Formigoni stated that he had given all the evidence he had to Interior Minister Scotti, and to the police chiefs of Milan and Rome. "There is more to be said, but I cannot say more. What I know, I have already told the relevant authorities."

Formigoni's statement hit the Italian political scene like a bombshell. Representatives of the Liberal and Republican parties attacked Formigoni, suggesting that his remarks were nothing but political propaganda. The Socialist-linked daily *La Repubblica* published a front-page cartoon showing Formigoni in the act of pushing a terrorized John Paul II off a balcony. The conservative daily *Il Giornale* tried to "explain" that Formigoni meant that it is Saddam Hussein who threatens the life of the Pope.

But there is no question that, even though the Vatican secretary of state refused any official comment, Formigoni is, besides Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, the politician closest to the Pope. The reality is that in recent years, despite the relatively recent establishment of full diplomatic relations, U.S.-Vatican relations are increasingly tense. Already at the time of the U.S. invasion of Panama and the protracted siege of the Vatican embassy, where Gen. Manuel Noriega took asylum, tensions were visibly growing to a point of a potential crisis.

The fact that there are some Catholics who think that Bush's war is a just one, should not mislead anybody:

The Church can hardly accept the imperial policy implied in the concept of the New World Order expressed by Bush and Thatcher.

As early as November, the Jesuit magazine *Civiltà Cattolica*, in its lead editorial, had denounced the United States for preparing a war whose aim was to get rid of Saddam not for juridical or ethical reasons, but for economic and power reasons. The Catholic magazine *Il Sabato*, very close to Formigoni, revealed in early February that the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, Thomas Patrick Melady, had been "irritated" by that editorial in *Civiltà Cattolica*. *Civiltà Cattolica*'s editorials are all reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat of State.

The most recent issue of *Civiltà Cattolica* criticized the United Nations for having set such a definite deadline as Jan. 15. That issue had been reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat, too—reportedly by Secretary-designate, Msgr. Angelo Sodano.

Even former Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, who has always been known as a pragmatist, has now attacked the U.N. for being too subservient to U.S. orders. In a lecture at the Milan Catholic University on Tuesday Feb. 12, Cardinal Casaroli stated: "It is necessary that the U.N. ensure that its positions not be a function of partisan interests," and further, "the more than painful events which are occurring cannot but violently shake the already thin trust in the force of law and international institutions." Casaroli called for a "revision" by the U.N. The language is diplomatic, but the message is unmistakable.

Formigoni's statement is not an isolated one; it reveals that the war in the Gulf is a broader one, a war which threatens the whole of humanity and any single institution which is not part of the "New World Order."