

Church of Babylon. Patriarch Bidawid is the head of the Catholic community in Iraq, which numbers about 1 million souls. Patriarch Bidawid has been an uncompromising critic of the war since its inception, and traveled during the terrible months of January-February 1991 throughout Europe and the United States to tell the truth about how the war was taking its toll on the civilian population. In April 1991, Patriarch Bidawid lent his support to a call for the creation of a Committee to Save the Children in Iraq, together with Schiller Institute president Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and International Progress Organization president Prof. Dr. Hans Koechler. The ad hoc coalition which came into being in May, has since coordinated relief efforts as well as international campaigns to lift the embargo.

This spring, Patriarch Bidawid again took his message to a European public. Traveling through Germany, he denounced in no uncertain terms the effects of the embargo on Iraq's civilians, especially the young. Reaching Rome in April, His Beatitude issued a scathing attack on the sanctions, characterizing the U.N. embargo as "a genocide." In an interview with Radio Vatican on April 3, he said, "This embargo is something very grave," causing the deaths of about 100 babies a day. He charged the embargo had caused "malnutrition for lack of food, deficiencies in public health for lack of medicine," and stressed that the sanctions had "not struck a blow against the Army or the regime, but the people instead." He asked, "How can human consciences accept such situations when the war already has been over for a year?"

After a private meeting with Patriarch Bidawid days later, Pope John Paul II announced his decision to send a fact-finding team to Iraq to express his "concern and solidarity" for the Iraqi people. The four-man delegation, led by Bishop Alois Wagner, vice president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," was to assess the humanitarian needs so as to direct Catholic relief agencies in their efforts. Accompanying Bishop Wagner were Father Claudio Gugerotti, an official of the Congregation for Eastern Rite Churches; Gerhard Meier, secretary general of the Caritas Internationalis; and Father Moussa Adeli, director of Caritas Jordan in Amman.

The assessment brought back by the delegation must have confirmed every detail of Patriarch Bidawid's report, for just days after their return, John Paul II addressed the issue before a broad public. Delivering a speech at Saint Peter's, at his Wednesday audience on April 15, the pontiff called on the leaders of the international community to "stop the sad situation in which the Iraqi people finds itself." He said that the Iraqi people and its Christian community were "expressing their gratitude to everyone, whether it be persons or institutions, who are working to end their suffering, but they are imploring that there be an end, as soon as possible, to their suffering." The message, unequivocal, was grasped by Italy's leading daily, *Corriere della Sera*, which headlined, "Pope: End the Embargo of Iraq."

Will it be grasped by the temporal powers that be?

A moral chronicle of the Gulf war

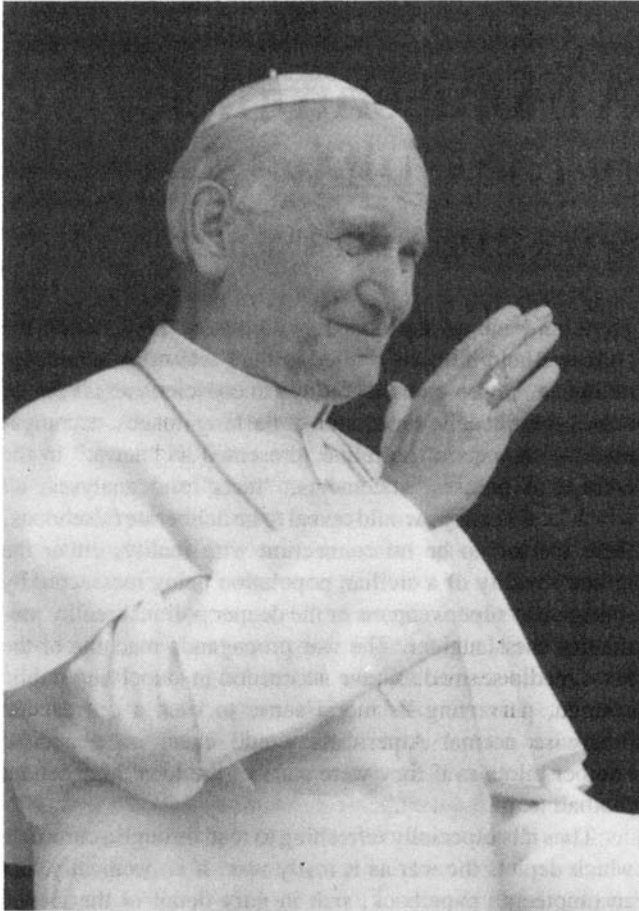
by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Thinking back on the opening months of 1991, when the Gulf war held millions riveted to their television screens or radios, the impression that returns to consciousness is one of a quasi-psychedelic succession of flashing images, accompanied by snippets of narrative, presented as "news." In the collage of phrases, statements, "facts" and analyses, all which later versions would reveal to be deliberate falsehoods, there seemed to be no connection with reality, either the military reality of a civilian population being massacred by superpower superweapons or the deeper political reality motivating the slaughter. The war propaganda machine of the mass media seemed to have succeeded in stupefying public opinion, perverting its moral sense to such a degree that otherwise normal Americans would cheer on genocidal bomber pilots as if they were stars of the local high school football team.

Thus it is especially refreshing to read through a chronicle which depicts the war as it really was. It is, ironically, not an umpteenth paperback, rich in gory detail of the Desert Shield buildup, which tells the deeper story, but a rather unassuming volume collecting the statements made by one man between Aug. 26, 1990 and March 6, 1991, the man being John Paul II. What is outstanding in the book, issued in English on the anniversary of the Jan. 15 ultimatum, is the unbroken continuity of the pontiff's concentration, throughout the terrible months of crisis and war, on the underlying moral principles which were being sorely tested. This steadfast emphasis on the universals, rather than on the elusive and, more often than not, equivocal ephemerals of daily events, allowed the Church to maintain a position of moral leadership which virtually every other social institution lost—or sacrificed—to its war aims.

Constant efforts at intervention

From the onset of the crisis in late summer 1990, the pope consistently pointed to a matrix of problems, some rooted decades, if not centuries, in the past, which must be identified and addressed, if war were to be avoided. Thus, when speaking to a conference of Latin Rite bishops of the Arab region, convened in Rome on Oct. 1, 1990, John Paul II identified the crisis unfolding as "the extremely dangerous tensions affecting the Gulf; the drama of Palestine; the tragedy of Lebanon." This theme was to be elaborated in further pronouncements, as the pontiff expressed his conviction that



Pope John Paul II: "There is a relationship between force, law and values which international society cannot afford to neglect. States are today rediscovering, especially as a result of the various structures of international cooperation which unite them, that international law does not constitute a kind of extension of their own unlimited sovereignty, or a protection of their interests alone or even of their attempts to increase their sphere of power and influence. Instead, it is truly a code of behavior for the human family as a whole."

peace in the region could not be guaranteed until the injustices done to the Palestinian people and to the Lebanese were rectified. This approach, which led critics to accuse the pope of introducing linkage into the Persian Gulf crisis, he maintained and elaborated throughout, insisting that only through a negotiating conference, representing all the involved parties on an equal footing, could a lasting solution be found for the three forms of crisis.

The pope's method of intervention was twofold. On the one hand, he appealed to the world community at large to pray for peace, and more specifically to the Christian institutions to intervene through ecumenical dialogue with representatives of the other two monotheistic religions in the area, Judaism and Islam; on the other hand, the pope addressed the discrete individuals in positions of political power, be it George Bush or the U.N. Secretary General, or Saddam

Hussein, urging them to be guided by the higher powers of reason and morality, rather than the dictates of political expediency. In both approaches, the force exerted was of a moral, not political, nature.

On March 4, 1991, addressing a meeting of the patriarchs and bishops from the countries affected by the war, the pope explained his motives and his method:

"This exalted mission of the Church in the world and for the world does not respond to criteria or ambitions of a political nature. With humble means, in conformity with her spiritual nature, the Church tries to *evoke or arouse the sense of truth, justice and fraternity* which the Creator placed in the heart of each individual, of each person always considered in his or her transcendent and social dimension.

"These basic considerations motivated my many recent interventions in which the peace in the Gulf and, in a certain sense, the peace of the world were threatened. It seemed necessary to me, indeed, to recall the great principles of morality and international law which should always inspire the behavior of peoples and their leaders, the principles of a morality and law which challenge in a like manner the conscience of every person and which are to be applied everywhere and are applicable to each of the members of the international community."

In this spirit, the pope issued his plaintive call on Christmas 1990, appealing to the world's leaders to avert war:

For the area of the Gulf, we await with trepidation
for the threat of conflict to disappear.

May leaders be convinced
that *war is an adventure with no return!*

By reasoning, patience and dialogue,
with respect for the inalienable rights
of peoples and nations,

it is possible to identify and travel
the paths of understanding and peace. . . .

Again, on Jan. 12, just prior to the outbreak of war, he reaffirmed: "Yes, peace is possible; war would be a decline for all humanity." To Bush he restated his "firm belief that war is not likely to bring an adequate solution to international problems and that, even though an unjust situation might be momentarily met, the consequences that would possibly derive from war would be devastating and tragic. We cannot pretend that the use of arms, and especially of today's highly sophisticated weaponry, would not give rise, in addition to suffering and destruction, to new and perhaps worse injustices." His appeal to Bush on Jan. 15 was direct and pressing: "I especially pray that you will be granted the wisdom to make decisions which will truly serve the good of your fellow-citizens and of the entire international community." The pope's appeal to Saddam Hussein, issued the same day, emphasized the need that both sides be open to dialogue: "I truly hope and earnestly implore the Merciful God that all the

parties involved will yet succeed in discovering, in frank and fruitful dialogue, the path for avoiding such a catastrophe. This path can be taken only if each individual is moved by a true desire for peace and justice."

Nonetheless, when the first bombs were dropped on Iraq, the pope (after stating "I have done everything humanly possible to avert a tragedy") was the first to characterize it from a moral standpoint: "The beginning of this war also marks a grave defeat for international law and the international community."

The pope had intervened to prevent war, knowing full well what the tragic consequences of the immediate conflict and its political and social aftereffects would be; but, above all, his efforts were shaped by the understanding that such a war would signify a violation of international law and morality, in ultimate analysis, a violation of the laws of creation. This fundamental concept is worth developing at length in the pope's words: "There is a *relationship between force, law and values* which international society cannot afford to neglect. States are today rediscovering, especially as a result of the various structures of international cooperation which unite them, that international law does not constitute a kind of extension of their own unlimited sovereignty, or a protection of their interests alone or even of their attempts to increase their sphere of power and influence. Instead, it is truly a code of behavior for the human family as a whole.

"The law of nations, the ancestor of international law, took shape over the centuries by distilling and codifying certain universal principles which are prior to and higher than the domestic law of states and which were commonly acknowledged by those taking part in international life. The Holy See is pleased to see in these principles an expression of the order willed by the Creator. We may recall, by way of example, the equal dignity of all peoples; their right to cultural existence; the juridic protection of their national and religious identity; the rejection of war as a normal means of settling conflicts; and the duty to contribute to the common good of humanity. As a result, states came to the conviction that it was necessary . . . that the community of nations be endowed with universal rules of coexistence applicable in all circumstances. . . . Otherwise, the law of the jungle would prevail."

Social policy and natural law

Such a concept represents an indictment of the Thornburgh Doctrine, articulated for the Panama invasion, which holds that U.S. domestic law has a higher priority than international law. The pope's indictment proceeds from the only appropriate philosophical starting point, that of international law as embedded in natural law. It comes as no surprise, then, that the pope should include in his elaboration of the concept of natural law explicit reference to economic and social policies which underlie justice. In his same address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Jan. 12,

which we quoted above, he concluded by asking: "How can one fail to mention at this point the great barrier which continues to separate rich peoples from poor ones? . . . [which] does not only constitute an imbalance but also represents a threat to peace. . . . The entire international community owes it to itself to set about making economic and social changes, and particularly to resolve the problem of foreign debt by those countries least prepared to face the demands being placed upon them."

Speaking to the clergy of his diocese in Rome on Feb. 17, as the conflict was raging, the Pope again addressed the "socio-economic reality" of the war. "We know," he said, "that the world is divided into different 'worlds': the First World, the Second World and the Third World; and many people say . . . that there is also a Fourth World. Our concern is that the war can create even greater gaps between these worlds." Following the cease-fire, the pope outlined the challenges of the postwar world in a meeting with the region's Church leaders: "It is no longer possible to ignore the problems of an economic order. In this region of the world, inequalities exist, and we all know that when poverty and the lack of prospects for a future are torturing a people, peace is in danger. The international economic order must, in effect, always tend more towards sharing, and reject the monopolization or the selfish exploitation of the planet's resources. It must assure just recompense for natural resources, permit access to all the resources necessary for living, assure the harmonious transfer of technologies and fix acceptable conditions for the repayment of the debt of the poorer countries."

It is to be hoped that the appearance of this volume in English is a harbinger of a renewed Vatican effort to halt the war, which is being continued through the U.N.-enforced embargo against Iraq, and to counter the ominous "new world order" announced by the White House. Beyond this, however, is a desire to engage single citizens in an educational dialogue regarding the moral issues at stake, to mobilize them for the good. "As human beings and as Christians," he said on Feb. 2, 1991, "we must not become accustomed to the idea that all of this is unavoidable. Our hearts must not be allowed to yield to the temptation of indifference and fatalistic resignation, as if people cannot avoid being caught up in the spiral of war." Each individual, the pope stressed, makes a difference: "Each of us according to his or her place—the place which God's Providence has assigned to us, according to our abilities—*has to change the world*, and to take up once again one of its most ancient challenges, the challenge of peace."

The booklet "John Paul II for Peace in the Middle East: War in the Gulf: Gleaning through the Pages of L'Osservatore Romano," published by the Path to Peace Foundation, can be obtained at no cost by writing to the Holy See to the United Nations, 20 East 72 St., New York, N.Y. 10021. Please include \$3 postage and handling.