

COLUMNISTS

The Vatican should respond to Assad's remarks

What could Pope John Paul II and New York's Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton possibly have in common? Both were sharply criticized for sitting silently and voicing no protest while Israel and the Jews were under attack.

It happened to the former First Lady of the United States on Nov. 12, 1999, while the then-candidate for the U.S. Senate was on a tour of the Middle East. According to *The New York Times*, Mrs. Clinton "sat silently" in the West Bank town of Ramallah as Suha Arafat, wife of the Palestinian leader, gave a speech "that painted a grim picture of environmental havoc and disease during the years of Israeli occupation."

Mrs. Arafat charged that Israeli security forces had used "poisonous gas" on the civilian population, causing increased cases of cancer among women and children. Immediately after the speech, Mrs. Clinton kissed Mrs. Arafat good-bye and left for Jerusalem.

The next day Mrs. Clinton told the press she had not reacted immediately because of "an incomplete translation from the Arabic and an initial sense among the American delegation that the remarks were 'part of a very common pattern of complaints that have been heard for decades and were not worthy of any particular comment at that time.'"



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

She sought to ward off further criticism by insisting that she had gone to Ramallah in the pursuit of peace. "I will go anywhere I can to promote the peace process," she said. "It is unfortunate that there are any questions about what was a very straightforward occasion."

Mrs. Clinton issued a public statement in which she said, "Everyone who supports this effort for resolving outstanding issues should refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and baseless accusations and from any public comment that could in any way affect adversely what the parties are attempting to achieve."

But the issue continued to dog Mrs. Clinton throughout her senatorial campaign in New York. Her political opponents were persistent in their efforts to drive a wedge between her and the core of her electoral base: Jewish voters. In

the end, the tactic did not work. Hillary Clinton defeated her Republican opponent by three-quarters of a million votes.

Pope John Paul II found himself in a similar situation during his visit to Damascus last month. He, too, was "sandbagged" by his host, the new head of state in Syria, Bashar Assad.

Assad's attack on Israel was far more vitriolic. He charged that Jews "try to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality with which they betrayed Jesus Christ and tortured him, and in the same way that they tried to commit treachery against Prophet Muhammad ..." He all but called upon the pope to lead an alliance of Christians and Muslims against Israel and the Jews.

The pope spoke in general about his hopes for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East among the region's three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Like Mrs. Clinton, he chose not to respond to Mr. Assad, even though his inflammatory remarks had directly contradicted official Catholic teaching on the Jews.

Many Jews (and many non-Jewish political conservatives) had denounced Mrs. Clinton for her silence during Mrs. Arafat's attack on Israel in 1999. So, too, have many Jews expressed their disappointment at the pope's silence during

Assad's attack, but in far less severe terms. Among all of history's popes, John Paul II has been one of the most sympathetic towards Jews.

He was the first pope to enter a synagogue, established formal Vatican diplomatic relations with Israel and, in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and at the Western Wall and at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, gave voice to the church's sorrow and repentance for Christian persecution of Jews "at any time and in any place" and asked forgiveness for these sins.

Although the initial reaction of Jews to the pope's silence was muted, out of respect for him personally and for his many efforts in pursuit of greater understanding between Jews and Christians, that sense of distress and sadness has continued to grow.

The pope did not seize any subsequent opportunity to distance himself from Mr. Assad's remarks, and the attempted explanations of a few of his defenders fell far short of the mark. The tendency was to blame the critics for "not listening" to other things he said.

Fortunately, it is not too late for the Vatican to reach out and heal this latest wound.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Corpus Christi celebrates the mystery of faith

Feast of Corpus Christi (June 17): (R3) Luke 9:11-17; (R1) Genesis 14:18-20; (R2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Next Sunday the church celebrates the feast of Corpus Christi. The words "Corpus Christi" mean "The Body of Christ." At every Mass, right after the consecration, the priest says, "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." I have often asked people, "What is the mystery of faith that we proclaim here?" Seldom do I get a correct answer. Most people will say, "The mystery of faith is 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.'" But "Christ has died, Christ is risen" are simply historical facts. That he will come again is a promise and a prophecy. What's the mystery?

The mystery of faith at Mass is simply the Real Presence of the risen Jesus on our altars under the appearance of bread and wine. The eucharistic acclamation is addressed to Jesus present on our altars, that is why the acclamation should always be in the second person: "Jesus, YOU have died, YOU are risen, YOU will come again." The words "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" is no acclamation. An acclamation should



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

be addressed to the person. When a team comes on to the playing field, we cheer them, we don't talk about them.

Corpus Christi is a feast to celebrate the "mystery of faith," namely, Christ's presence in our midst.

So often the emptiness of our churches and the inattention of so many at Mass makes one wonder if there is a real belief in the presence of Christ at Mass and in the Eucharist.

The feast of Corpus Christi is meant to drive home to us the reality of Christ's presence among us.

He is present to be our food, our manna, to pour strength into us so that we shall not be swallowed up in the morass

of materialism and the playboy philosophy so prevalent today in our society. Jesus promised, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have everlasting life."

Another more positive reason for the "Body of Christ" is to pour love into our hearts: love for God and love for neighbor. We are such poor lovers. We are supposed to love everybody: husbands their wives, wives their husbands; parents their children and children their parents; employers their employees, employees their employers; and so on. It seems a well-nigh humanly impossible task. It is like Jesus asking his disciples to feed 5,000 men, besides the women and children, with five loaves and two fish. Alone they couldn't do this; but with Jesus they could and did.

Without Jesus we can do nothing, not even love one another, much less our enemies. But with Jesus, with Corpus Christi, there is nothing we cannot do; we can love even our enemies. If we can't swallow our neighbor, we can't swallow Christ.

Jesus promised not to leave us orphans. He has kept this promise through

Corpus Christi. Don't let us leave him. "Come to me," he pleads, "and I will give you all you need."

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, June 18
2 Corinthians 6:1-10;
Matthew 5:38-42

Tuesday, June 19
2 Corinthians 8:1-9;
Matthew 5:43-48

Wednesday, June 20
2 Corinthians 9:6-11;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday, June 21
2 Corinthians 11:1-11;
Matthew 6:7-15

Friday, June 22
Ezekiel 34:11-16;
Romans 5:5B-11; Luke 15:3-7

Saturday, June 23
2 Corinthians 12:1-10;
Luke 2:41-51

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