

'Loyal' Catholics should follow pope

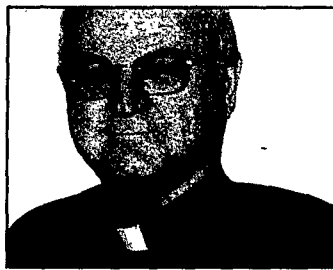
Pope John Paul II's opposition to the war against Iraq created an embarrassing problem for his conservative base in the Catholic Church.

These individuals have been torn between their respect and affection for the pope (not to say their dependence on him for their credibility with the media, secular and Catholic alike) and their deep political loyalty to the president of the United States and his conservative political agenda.

How does a "loyal" Catholic, steeped in a self-styled "fidelity" to the church's magisterium, justify giving greater weight to the moral convictions of a born-again, Methodist politician from West Texas than to those of the successor of Peter and on an issue as momentous as war and peace?

It cannot be done, of course — not without some extraordinary efforts at spin control. One of the most straightforward attempts surfaced in an op-ed piece in *The Wall Street Journal*. The column, entitled "Finally, A Rapid Response" (3/7/03), was written by Rod Dreher, a Catholic layman and senior writer for William F. Buckley's *National Review*, the most widely read conservative weekly in the country.

Dreher distinguished himself last year when the sexual-abuse crisis in the Catholic Church received almost nightly coverage on



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

television. Alone among irate conservative Catholics — irate not only because of the predatory behavior of the abusive priests but also, and especially, because of the malfeasance of the bishops — Dreher pointed a finger of criticism at the pope himself for having named such men to the hierarchy and then for having failed to exercise effective leadership in the crisis — leadership that should have included the removal from office of some of the most clearly culpable bishops.

Mr. Dreher takes after the pope once again in his *Wall Street Journal* column. "Hardly a day goes by," he writes, "without Pope John Paul II denouncing the march to war, meeting personally with world leaders or dispatching high-level diplomats [including Cardinal Pio Laghi to Washington] to beseech the belligerents to stand down."

But then comes the column's kicker. "Now, Catholics are not obliged to agree with the pope on this

issue. The rightness or wrongness of this or any particular war is a matter of opinion. ... The 50% of America's Catholics who stand by their president, and not their pope, in this matter do not thereby diminish their standing as Catholics."

That surely has the sweet aroma of "cafeteria Catholicism" to it. The "culture of dissent," so often excoriated by George Weigel, the U.S. bishops' favorite columnist, seems to have infected the ranks of self-described loyal and faithful Catholics.

As for Mr. Dreher's effort to exonerate such Catholics, where does it say — in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (which he cites in his column) or any other ecclesiastical source — that a Catholic is free to disagree with the pope on matters of war and peace because his views on such issues are only "a matter of opinion"?

And by what conservative logic does Mr. Dreher conclude that Catholics who prefer the moral guidance of a born-again Protestant politician to that of the Bishop of Rome "do not thereby diminish their standing as Catholics"?

Consistency seems to have been one of the first casualties of the run-up to war against Iraq.

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

Let down by God Squad's views on war

To the editor:

I was disappointed by the "God Squad's" shared endorsement of U.S. military action in Iraq at a recent presentation cosponsored by the Catholic Family Center. Rabbi Marc Gellman ennobled the intervention as a "liberation of oppressed people" from a tyrannical dictator. Monsignor Thomas Hartman was silent about "just war" concerns.

By retelling the story of the old man who rescued stranded starfish on a sunny beach, the futile effort was justified because it "mattered to this one starfish" who was cast back into the sea.

The story needs updating. The old man is President George W. Bush. While saving individual starfish he trampled blindly over children sharing the beach and crushed their sand creations. He ignored the entreaties of lifeguards. He proceeded with arrogance and impatience. People now fear his presence. For years to come, an oil slick from the old man's yacht will poison the region and beyond for all God's creatures.

I support our men and women in uniform and pray for their prompt safe return. I agree that Saddam Hussein has mistreated his people, but I do not believe that reliance on U.S. military might is the best response. America needs to crowd out evil with acts of goodness. Money wasted on

armament and logistics could have built hundreds of schools, hospitals and agricultural stations along the entire expanse of the so-called "axis of evil." These positive acts demonstrate the responsible use of power. They require patience and cooperation but will lead to peace and restore America's stature as a caring nation.

John E. Curran
East Main Street
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Urges joining novena for priesthood

To the editor:

The crusade continues. It began last spring as a novena for the holiness of our priests and for an increase in vocations to the holy priesthood. Since that novena, it has continued every Sunday. And now, as we complete a year, we would like to renew the novena aspect for the four Sundays of May, the month of Our Lady, and the five Sundays of June, the month of the Sacred Heart. The cause is great. The need for prayer for the cause is great. We invite you to join us at St. Cecilia Church on Culver Road between I-490 and East Ridge Road on these Sundays to add your prayers and voices to those of a dedicated group of laity to show our concern, our support and our love for our priests and to ask God's blessings on the great gift of priesthood. Please think about it. You just might discover that you get as much from your effort as you give it. If you have questions, please call me at 585-865-2594.

Dorothy A. Florack
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Return to moral values

To the editor:

Are we heading in the right direction?

We read in the Gospel of John 15:12, "This is my

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