

# Control of diocesan press is questioned

In response to the coordinated suicide bombing attacks on May 12, which killed 25 people at three different housing compounds in Riyadh, the government of Saudi Arabia was forced at long last to acknowledge that the problem of terrorism exists even within its own borders.

Some government officials and others in the broader society began to talk and write openly about the negative impact of extremist, anti-Western preaching and teaching within the nation's mosques and religious schools.

One of the most outspoken critics was the daily newspaper, *Al Watan*, and its editor-in-chief, Jamal Khashoggi. After the attacks of May 12, *Al Watan's* columnists discussed a number of highly controversial issues, including the central role of the religious police in Saudi society and the undue influence of a 14th-century Muslim thinker, considered to be the main inspiration for the ultra-conservative Wahhabi Islamic sect that is prevalent throughout the country.

According to a report in *The New York Times*, conservative Muslims were "particularly incensed" by *Al Watan's* cartoons, which mocked militants by depicting one as a suicide bomber, except that the sticks of dynamite around his waist were labeled *fatwas*, or religious decrees.

Critics took their complaints to Crown Prince Abdullah, the nation's de facto



**Father Richard McBrien**

## Essays in Theology

ruler, insisting that the paper had gone too far in blaming the clergy for fomenting extremism.

Although newspapers in Saudi Arabia, as *The New York Times* pointed out, are privately owned, editors and reporters "serve at the whim of the ruling family," while the press itself comes under the jurisdiction of Prince Nayef, the Interior Minister, who personally disapproves of criticisms of the religious establishment. Nayef made it plain to editors at a private meeting that he did not want to see any more articles attacking Wahhabism or the 14th-century Muslim thinker who inspired it.

A major upshot of this reaction was the firing of *Al Watan's* editor. One writer at the paper told *The New York Times*: "They are doing what the radicals want: A lot of journalists are asking what is going to change in Saudi Arabia. If they fired Jamal Khashoggi, nothing is going to change."

These recent events in Saudi Arabia came to mind while reading the extensive reports in the May 30 issue of the *National Catholic Re-*

porter on the condition of the diocesan press in the United States.

There is a serious internal conversation going on about the very nature and purpose of the Catholic press. Some wonder how a diocesan publication can be a bona fide newspaper while under the direct control and supervision of a publisher-bishop who regards it as his personal teaching instrument.

Among the questions under discussion: Has the balance tipped in recent years? Are diocesan papers more journalism or public relations? What subjects are they allowed to cover and discuss? What subjects, individuals or groups are taboo?

A number of editors and reporters today feel not only the pressure of closer scrutiny on the part of bishops and public relations officers, but also the crunch of financial cutbacks. Some diocesan papers have already forsaken weekly publication for a monthly format.

As anxiety increases, these Catholic editors and reporters do not feel free to speak their minds openly without putting their jobs at risk. The discussion, for the most part, stays underground.

In the end, changes in the Catholic press are reflective of changes in the hierarchy itself. And that is where the real story lies.

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

## Parents opt for school's faith identity

### To the editor:

Regarding your April 10 article about the closing of Nativity School in Brockport, it appears that families choose to move students to Holy Family merely because of cheaper tuition costs. That is completely wrong. Close to 25 percent of the children at our school live outside the Buffalo Diocese and many of these families have gone to our school for decades. When a new family visits us or transfers into our school the reason given is always the same — our Catholic identity. Parents know that our Catholic faith and the practice of it comes first, before everything else — that is what attracts many to our school. Weekly Mass, devotions, having priests and religious in identifiable habits teaching in the classrooms — all of this contributes to a parent's choice. So to say that parents merely choose Holy Family School for economic reasons is sadly wrong.

In my Diocese I, as pastor, still have the final decisions in our school as its administrator. The question has been raised, how can you charge such low tuition? First I am not supporting any other school. Second, the parents in our school do an absolutely wonderful job in fundraising. Third, our parishioners, teachers and parents all work together because their goal is to hand on the values and traditions of our faith to the young people. Our teachers agree that

they did not come and they do not stay at Holy Family because they want to become wealthy. Their treasure is the love of their faith and the children they share it with.

Our students also score highly on New York state standardized tests, and the 2003 Guide to Western NY Schools rated Holy Family School as 10th among private elementary schools. Our school was the highest-ranked elementary school — public or private — in the entire county.

I feel for the parents who had children in Nativity School and I know the disappointment in having their school close. At the same time I thank those parents who have chosen to support our school and its programs and values.

**Fr. Michael Rock, OdeM  
Pastor, St. Peter Church  
LeRoy**

## 'Outraged' about recent abuse charge

### To the editor:

As an alumnus of St. Michael's School, I was overwhelmed with sadness and also outraged at the recent allegation against Mr. Russell that appeared in the June 12 issue of the *Catholic Courier*. It is, of course, vital to deal with such matters in an open and honest way, as stated in the letter sent to alumni of St. Michael's. This attitude is especially important considering the microscope the Church has been under lately regarding the sexual misconduct of those we've placed in a position of trust.

Understanding this, and in no way wishing to trivialize the seriousness of this matter, I was also deeply disturbed by the aforementioned article. It is so much easier to "deal with these situations openly and transparently" when the accused is dead and has no opportunity to refute, or even address, the charges against him. A sense of fair play compels me to state what effects Ted Russell has had on

my life.  
I was  
Russell's  
The man  
was volati  
his passio  
doing was  
you failed  
his passio  
let your at  
he was ap  
eraser, or  
your direc  
the lucky  
had to sha  
of his hair  
me to be a  
erature a  
truth. He  
to recogniz  
own passio  
Other than  
was perhap  
important  
ing of my c

## Catholic Courier

©2003 Rochester Catholic Press Assn.

1136 Buffalo Road  
P.O. Box 24379  
Rochester, NY 14624  
585/529-9530  
800/600-3628 outside Rochester  
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>  
e-mail: [info@catholiccourier.com](mailto:info@catholiccourier.com)

President  
**Bishop Matthew H. Clark**  
General Manager/Editor  
**Karen M. Franz**  
[kfranz@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kfranz@catholiccourier.com)

### Editorial Department

Assistant Editor  
**Jennifer Ficcgaglia**  
[jficcgaglia@catholiccourier.com](mailto:jficcgaglia@catholiccourier.com)  
Staff Writers  
**Rob Cullivan**  
[rcullivan@catholiccourier.com](mailto:rcullivan@catholiccourier.com)  
**Mike Latona**  
[mlatona@catholiccourier.com](mailto:mlatona@catholiccourier.com)

Staff Photographer  
**Karin von Voigtlander**  
[kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com)

Editorial Assistant  
**Louis Litzenberger**  
[llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com](mailto:llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com)

### Editorial Intern

**Courtney Burns**

Photo Intern  
**Rebecca Gosselin**

### Business Department

Office Manager  
**Mary DiPonzio**  
[mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com](mailto:mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com)

Administrative Assistant  
**Arlene S. Gall**  
[agall@catholiccourier.com](mailto:agall@catholiccourier.com)

Circulation Manager  
**Donna Stubbings**  
[dstubbings@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dstubbings@catholiccourier.com)

### Graphics Department

Graphics Manager  
**Kim Parks**  
[kparks@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kparks@catholiccourier.com)

Graphic Artist  
**Linda Jeanne Rivers**  
[lrivers@catholiccourier.com](mailto:lrivers@catholiccourier.com)

### Advertising Department

Display Advertising Executives

**Tracy Moses**  
[tmoses@catholiccourier.com](mailto:tmoses@catholiccourier.com)

**Donald P. Wilson**  
[dwilson@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dwilson@catholiccourier.com)