

The Martyr of Mosul

On April 1, Palm Sunday, after bullets were fired into the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul during mass, the pastor, Fr. Ragheed Ganni, a Chaldean Catholic,

e-mailed friends at the *Asia Times*: “We empathize with Christ, who entered Jerusalem in full knowledge that the consequence of His love for mankind was the cross. Thus while bullets smashed our church windows, we offered our suffering as a sign of love for Christ.”

The attacks continued. Father Ragheed wrote again: “Each day we wait for the decisive attack, but we will not stop celebrating mass; we will do it underground, where we are safer. I am encouraged in this decision by the strength of my parishioners. This is war, real war, but we hope to carry our cross to the very end with the help of Divine Grace.”

As the bombings in Mosul and Baghdad rose during April and May and priests were kidnapped, Father Ragheed grew weary. In his last e-mail, May 28, he wrote, “We are on the verge of collapse.”

A day before, Pentecost Sunday, a bomb had exploded in his church, and Fr. Ragheed seemed dispirited. “In a sectarian and confessional Iraq, will there be any space for Christians? We have no support, no group who fights for our cause; we are abandoned in the midst of the disaster. Iraq has already been divided. It will never be the same. What is the future of our Church?”

Though tempted by despair, Fr. Ragheed did not give up hope. “I may be wrong, but I am certain about one thing, one single fact that is always true: that the Holy Spirit will enlighten people so that they will work for the good of humanity, in this world so full of evil.”

On Trinity Sunday, a week after Pentecost, after mass, Father Ragheed and three subdeacons were seized, taken away, and murdered. Their killers placed vehicles loaded with explosives around the bodies so that no one would dare approach them.

The story of “The Last Mass of Father Ragheed, a Martyr of the Chaldean Church,” is related by Sandro Magister of www.Chiesa.

Father Ragheed had completed his studies in Rome in 2003, Magister writes, and had returned full of hope. “That is where I belong, that is my place,” he said of Iraq, “Saddam has fallen, we have elected a government, we have voted for a constitution.”

Since 2003, an immense tragedy has befallen the Iraqi Christians. In 2000, Chaldeans, Syro-Catholics, Syro-Orthodox, Assyrians from the East, Catholic and Orthodox Armenians, and Greek-Melkites together numbered 1.5 million. Today perhaps 500,000 remain. Hundreds of thousands have found sanctuary in Syria and Jordan, tens of thousands in Egypt and Lebanon. Among the refugees are many of Iraq’s professionals, doctors, and teachers, who could have helped build a better future for all in Iraq.

The region around Mosul and Nineveh, writes Magister, is the “cradle of Christianity in Iraq. There are churches and monasteries that go back to the earliest centuries. ... Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is used in the liturgies.”

As the war has dragged on, life has become hellish for the remaining Chris-

tians. Yet they have never resorted to bombings or assassinations.

Father Ragheed is neither the first nor last of the Iraqi martyrs. When Pope Benedict gave his speech in Regensburg touching on Islam, Fr. Paulos Iskander was kidnapped and beheaded in retaliation by the “Lions of Islam.” Fr. Joseph Petros was also murdered. A Catholic nun told the Vatican news agency Fides, “The imams preach in the mosques that it is not a crime to kill Christians. It is a hunting of men.”

In May, St. George’s Assyrian Church in the Dora neighborhood, a Christian enclave of Baghdad, was burned down, destroying what had survived a fire-bombing in 2004. The Assyrian International News Agency reports it was the 27th church destroyed by Muslim gangs since the liberation of Iraq.

Now the ancient practice of the *jizya*, the “head tax” Muslims have traditionally imposed on Christians, Jews, and religious minorities, is being reinstituted. According to AINA, “Al Qaeda is demanding that Christians pay 250,000 dinars (around \$200) for the right to remain in their own homes, a sum equivalent to an average month’s salary in Iraq.”

All this, and the news of Father Ragheed’s murder, moved Benedict XVI to raise the issue with President Bush. For when Bush left the Vatican he told reporters, “He [the Pope] is worrisome about the Christians inside Iraq being mistreated by the Muslim majority. ... He was concerned that the society that was evolving would not tolerate the Christian religion.”

For the martyrdom of Christianity in its birth cradle, blame must fall heavily upon the men who conceived this misbegotten war. ■

We Are the War Party

Congressional Republicans who doubt the Bush Doctrine face a primary purge.

By W. James Antle III

WHEN PRAISING one of his colleagues, Congressman Walter Jones is quick to commend steady commitment to principle. It's a trait he knows something about. Since winning his House seat in 1994, the seven-term North Carolina Republican has been one of the most reliable Christian conservatives in Washington. "I'm just doing the best I can with every day God gives me," Jones drawls. But back home, some members of his party worry that he has changed.

On one issue, at least, Jones clearly has. The steadfastly pro-military congressman—his district houses a fifth of the Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune—drew headlines and appreciative chuckles from talk-radio listeners when he had French fries renamed "freedom fries" on congressional menus to protest France's opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. But Jones didn't limit his support for the troops to publicity stunts. He wrote letters to the families of over 2,000 servicemen killed in Iraq and attended the memorial services of fallen Marines. These tasks, combined with growing doubts about prewar intelligence, turned Jones into his party's most impassioned opponent of the war—and perhaps the most legislatively active.

Jones co-sponsored legislation setting a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. He has also introduced a joint resolution stating that any expansion of the war into Iran must be expressly authorized by Congress. Not everyone is happy with his change of heart on Iraq, however. Onslow County Commissioner Joseph McLaughlin has decided to challenge him in next year's Republican primary.

"Since 1994, I have been a Walter Jones supporter," McLaughlin said in an announcement speech. "But it just cannot be that the congressman from the 3rd district, which probably has more troops in the fight than any other district in the country, would have more in common with Nancy Pelosi and the rest of the Democrats than with the Republican leadership." His candidacy already has prominent supporters. "Disloyalty is something you just can't tolerate," Onslow County GOP Chairman Ronald Cherubini told *The Politico*. "That's the way military people look at it. As a party, we have sent [Jones] a letter saying we cannot support you anymore..."

The Jones-McLaughlin contest is one of several races across the country that will test whether the Republican Party will tolerate dissent on the Iraq War. The handful of antiwar GOP legislators has always faced tremendous pressure within the party. Now they are increasingly facing primary challengers.

Congressman Wayne Gilchrest has represented Maryland's first district for nine terms. Like Jones, the Vietnam combat veteran voted both to authorize the war and to end it. He opposed the surge and has backed timetables for pulling our troops out of Iraq. Gilchrest has defeated 23 primary opponents since 1990, but this time he is likely to face three-term state Sen. Andy Harris, who will be able to compete for the support of party regulars. Harris, a former commanding officer at the John Hopkins Naval Reserve Medical Unit, will challenge Gilchrest on the war.

"I'm not one who's become part of the Washington fabric that led to our problems in 2006," Harris told local reporters. "Returning to the viewpoint of Ronald Reagan—strength, not surrender, decreasing the size of government, decreasing taxes—that's the true conservative base."

And the conservative base still by and large supports the Iraq War. While Republican antiwar sentiment has grown, 59 percent of GOP voters told CBS News that they opposed a timetable for withdrawal. By contrast, 65 percent of independents and 83 percent of Democrats are in favor. This jarring disconnect explains why some Republicans are working to solidify the party's pro-war stance even as the rest of the electorate is moving in the opposite direction.

The most spirited primary fights may involve the two most visible Republican critics of Bush's Iraq policies, one of whom is rumored to be weighting a presidential run while the other is already in the race. Nebraska Atty. Gen. Jon Bruning has declared his intention to take on Sen. Chuck Hagel, while several candidates are said to be pondering a bid against Congressman Ron Paul—including former Paul staffer Eric Dondero.

A Hagel-Bruning race would not be a gentlemanly contest between two Midwesterners. In his announcement, Bruning said there was "no doubt that we're at war with an enemy who will stop at nothing to defeat and kill us" and fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq is "the most important issue of our time." That's why, he contin-