

Denying the Genocide: Victoria's Catholic Diocese Opts for Dark

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PEJ News - Gregory Hartnell - The Edith Stein Society recently hosted an extremely controversial American right wing biographer of Pope John Paul II here in the city. The event, while ignored by the media generally, has precipitated a heated discussion on the internet about the credibility of the man in Catholic circles.

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Empire Strikes Back: George Weigel in Victoria

Gregory Hartnell

PEJ News

January 12, 2007

Diocesan Organization Sponsors Talk by 'Dissenting' Right-wing Papal Biographer

INTRODUCTION

George Weigel Reviled by Progressive Catholics for Pro-war Imperialist Writings

Patrick Jamieson, Editor of the Island Catholic News, the 'West Coast's Independent Voice of Prophetic Catholicism,' introduces a debate in the current January 2007 issue of that monthly (Volume 20, No. 12) on the subject of a two day conference held in Victoria B. C. where Mr. Weigel was the speaker. Mr. Jamieson notes that the conference was sponsored by the Edith Stein Society, a new group headed by Saint Andrew's Cathedral Rector Father John Laszczyk.

The front page article by Mr. Jamieson has excerpts from email letters sent to the Peace Earth and Justice website by Gregory Hartnell and Fraser Field, who take opposing positions. ICN has an excerpt from email to Mr. Hartnell by Steve Weatherbe, editor of the Business Examiner, writing in defence of Mr. Weigel's controversial 'just Iraq war' position.

A Weatherbe vs. Hartnell debate follows here at PEJ.

ICN front page article by Patrick Jamieson

[Bracketed sections have been omitted from the paper edition of ICN due to space limitations]

George Weigel, much reviled in progressive Catholic circles as a defender of American involvement in the Middle East (and earlier as a defender of the U. S. Government's drug money bankrolling of despotic governments in Central America), spoke on behalf of 'what is required to be a courageous Catholic today' according to one attendee of the Edith Stein

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Society program.

On the internet, Gregory Hartnell lodged his protest about the speaker's dissenting position with recent popes on the invasion of Iraq. Steve Weatherbe, presently editor of the Business Examiner in Victoria, weighed in to take exception to Mr. Hartnell's missive. Some other correspondence is included.

DEEPER CONCERNS

The deeper question is the rise of right wing politics and theology in the Catholic church here in Victoria and worldwide, since the election of Pope Benedict XVI.

The Edith Stein Society is a curious configuration, the brainchild of the current rector of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Rev. John Laszczyk, who arrived at the cathedral from the Comox Valley Catholic Community after a long tenure in those parts. It was Father John who built the Comox Valley church building that required \$2 million worth of repairs, money taken from the sale of surplus lands, money designated to pay back the debenture bond holders.

The very choice of Edith Stein as the patron of the group is polemical. A Jewish convert to Catholicism is hardly a sensitive choice in an era of interfaith possibilities.

The Edith Stein Society is purportedly for the purpose of promoting the Roman Catholic version of the truth. Since this is not exactly a new concept, its inception presumably tries to bring something new into the mix. The question is: what does Mr. Weigel's inclusion as a guest speaker tell us about the group?

With George Weigel, one can only hope the Edith Stein Society has overreached in its naivete. He is much too controversial for little Victoria. It is rather like inviting a Ku Klux Klan member onto a panel on race relations. Credibility is the issue.

George Weigel is not a simple spiritual speaker or academic. He is a pro-war American polemicist of the first order and a player in the promotion of current American imperial ambitions worldwide.

His reputation is as a right wing political theologian, one who does not back away from his justification of the invasion of Iraq. On the contrary his sort of Catholicism has America first.

He is also not an entirely honest intellectual. When he composed a piece on Pope John Paul II for the Catholic Encyclopedia recently, his essay entirely omitted the pope's social justice teachings. John Paul II may have manifested various sorts of inconsistencies and contradictions in his era as pope but he was consistently if not radically strong in his critique of what George Weigel is more than fond of pushing: war making and American capitalist imperialism.

So what is such a person doing as part of the Edith Stein Society program in sleepy Victoria? Is this an oversight? Have they been taken advantage of or are they fellow travelers of this Opus Dei style of spirituality? (By the way, the Catholic Encyclopedia people identified the imbalance

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and asked Canadian theologian Gregory Baum to write an accompanying essay on the social justice teachings of John Paul II.)

Despite the words of his apologist (included in the internet dialogue excerpts) who claims "the vision he provided was both entirely consistent with the Church's teachings," Mr. Weigel, like every other propagandist, picks and chooses his facts to suit his theories, even as an author of an adulatory if not quite 'definitive' biography of the late Pope.

His current program is to ride the coattails of the present pope who is probably more to his liking politically, although Benedict too opposes the American policy in the Middle East. It will be interesting to see how Weigel manipulates all that to his own perspective.

[Read on...](#)

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Gregory Hartnell Writes...

As I ponder the barbarity, criminality and foolishness of the execution of Saddam Hussein, I wonder why the notorious American Catholic neo-con dissenter George Weigel was invited by a group headed by the Rector of St. Andrew's Cathedral to speak [at a two day conference held] in September [in Victoria].

According to an article written by Steve Weatherbe which appeared in both the B. C. Catholic and the Diocesan Messenger, the George Weigel Conference entitled "Discovering the Catholic Way of Life" was organized by the Edith Stein Society. Mr. Weatherbe writes that 'the group comprised St. Andrew's Cathedral pastor Father John Laszczyk and a half dozen lay people.'

[The conference was held at the Victoria Conservatory of Music for two days in September last year. Tickets cost \$55. The event was advertised in both the Cathedral bulletin, and the June and September numbers of the Diocesan Messenger, and further info was available by contacting the Cathedral through its email address, standrewsoffice@shawcable.com.]

Mr. Weigel is well known to be a pro-American apologist for the invasion of Iraq, despite the condemnation of that unjust war by the late Pope John Paul II. Even the present pope, though often confused when it comes to matters geopolitical, is quoted by Dale Vree, editor of the Berkeley-based New Oxford Review, as saying that 'there was not sufficient reason to unleash a war in Iraq.'

Mr. Weigel is published regularly in the American neo-con journals First Things and Crisis, both of which take dissenting positions from that of the two popes on this grave issue. By choosing to put the supposed interests of his own nation state ahead of the mind of Holy Mother Church, as embodied in the seasoned and well-reasoned teachings on war and peace of these eminent theologians, Mr. Weigel is in effect saying that he knows better. Need I emphasize that this is not a pro-life position?

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[He has done this instead of following the example of Saint Thomas More, who resisted the temptation to exonerate the adulterous and murderous behaviour of his decadent monarch (King Henry VIII of England); Saint Thomas chose a glorious martyr's death. He correctly put the teachings of the Church before those of his own nation state, represented by the obnoxious king. It is a pity that a great intellectual of the stature of Mr. Weigel cannot see fit to humble himself and follow this wise saint's model behaviour.]

The Rector of Saint Andrew's Cathedral and the Bishop of the Diocese of Victoria would never dare invite a liberal dissenter [on matters such as abortion or euthanasia] to speak to the Catholic faithful [in the Diocese. This begs the question; why have they abused their offices by inviting this blood-soaked neo-con ideologue to vent his venomous and heretical pre-emptive war propaganda in the Cathedral parish of Saint Andrew the martyr, and given this event their stamp of approval by advertising it in the Diocesan Messenger and the St. Andrew's Cathedral bulletin?]

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Steve Weatherbe Writes...

I've been following the debates in the American Catholic press about the Iraq War and nobody engaged in these debates on the other side is simply dismissing him as "intellectually dishonest" because he "dissents" from the Vatican on the war. [I wonder how many times, Greg, you have invoked the Vatican position to end an argument. Somehow it doesn't seem like you. But anyway,] the Catholic Catechism makes clear that it is the job of secular governments and not religious leaders to make the prudential judgements required on whether particular circumstances warrant war.

It is the duty of governments and presidents such as Bush and Harper to make these decisions. That is not to say the discussion should end there or that we should not debate the justice of the decisions made. [But the discussion should also not end with Vatican pronouncements either. The Church should and has set the conditions for just warfare. But it is the job of governments to assess those conditions in the light of their duty to protect their citizens to do justice in the world and the job of citizens to assess -- and debate -- their governments' performance of those duties. The Vatican can contribute to the debate but its contribution is not authoritative, nor does it claim it to be.

So] instead of hiding behind the Vatican's opinion of the war in Iraq, why not simply challenge Weigel's arguments with your own. That would be intellectually honest.

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[Excerpts from another Steve Weatherbe letter to Gregory Hartnell]

[It's heresy to disagree with the Magisterium on doctrine, faith and morals.]

It would be heretical to disagree on, for example, what makes a Just War. But to disagree on

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whether a particular war is just is not heresy. And by simply stating that two popes don't think the Iraq war is just is far from heresy. By invoking those two popes, you are doing precisely what I charged you with: avoiding a discussion of the issues. The discussion is over, you seem to be saying: the popes have spoken.

On the other hand, you are a strong supporter of the Island Catholic News, which regularly challenges the Magisterium on faith and morals: Church teaching on priestesses, divorce, etc. Isn't this inconsistent?]

As for Weigel's "overturning" traditional church teaching on the Just War, he has merely argued for its growth in the direction of the pre-emptive strike. It doesn't contradict traditional teaching, which was once much more expansive than what is currently in the Catechism. For example, traditionally there is no limitation to self-defence. The Church in the past taught war was justified [to punish wrong doers (who may not have threatened the state going to war at all -- as with Canada going to war to protect Belgium's neutrality in WWI) and to support allies.

[For Weigel to propose an addition to what is in the Catechism is no more heresy than to advance the idea that Mary is co-redemptrix. Yet. If the Magisterium expressly condemns pre-emption as heresy, of course, then it's heresy.]

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Fraser Field writes...

I attended the Weigel conference which wasn't about his just war position at all.

Weigel takes a view on the war [that] is a matter of prudential judgement about which Catholics may disagree. [Abortion and euthanasia etc. are not.]

Weigel's brilliant and inspiring conference concerned what is required to be a courageous Catholic today. The vision he provided was both entirely consistent with the Church's teaching and fascinatingly presented with stories and examples.

To reduce the man to his views on the war is to miss so much. He is widely recognized as the author of the definitive biography of John Paul II and was asked by the holy father to write that biography.

[The pope had enough confidence in him to ask him to do this. It would seem we should have enough confidence as well not to dismiss him on the basis of hearsay.]

Ad hominem attacks are always the sign of a lazy thinker.

[If you're interested in engaging Weigel's ideas we'd love to hear from you and debate them.]

You should have come to the conference and addressed the man himself if you really are convinced you have something to say. Weigel would have treated you with a lot more respect

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that [sic] you have afforded him.

[God bless you.]

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George Weigel's Intellectual Dishonesty: Gregory Hartnell rebuts Fraser Field

While I admit that I did not attend the conference in question, I reserve the right as a thinking faithful Catholic to criticize the thought of a man who distorts the popes' peace messages to suit his own ideological purposes, without encouraging such nasty mischief by giving him my hard-earned Canadian dollars.

I am sure that Mr. Field would agree with me that it would not be prudent to attend, for example, a pornographic film such as 'The Passion of the Christ' just because the subject matter happens to be about the last hours of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It does not surprise me that Mr. Weigel would not address his public dissent on the issue of whether the Iraq war is just or not. He is probably having a crisis of conscience these days, witnessing the chaos that has been unleashed there by a supposedly Christian American President that based his rationale for the obscene misadventure on a huge lie. It is easy for Mr. Field to assert that 'the vision he [Weigel] provided was both entirely consistent with the Church's teaching and fascinatingly presented with stories and examples' when that vision excludes any reference to the one major issue upon which he takes a strident position of public dissent from that of the last two popes.

I can't help but note the irony, also, of Mr. Field's statement with respect to ad hominem attacks: "ad hominem attacks are always a sign of a lazy thinker." It seems to me that that is a classic example of an ad hominem attack against my person, and that Mr. Field should apologize to me for it.

Selective thinking about the life issues is a hallmark of certain Catholics in the neocon camp. I do not know Mr. Field personally, so hesitate to categorize him as falling in the latter category. However, neocons typically obsess about sexual issues such as abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, etc. but remain silent or apologetic about the death penalty or unjust wars such as the Viet Nam or Iraq debacles. While I agree with the pro-life positions of the Church on the former issues, I do not see how one can selectively single out these issues of human sexuality, and ignore the sinfulness of such a war as is plaguing the Iraqi and American people in our day.

As for the matter of my supposedly dismissing Weigel "on the basis of hearsay," I would encourage Mr. Field to do a little more research. To help him out, I provide for his contemplation the following article from the New Oxford Review's Editor Dale Vree which effectively exposes Mr. Weigel's intellectual dishonesty on the matters at hand.

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The Dale Vree article 'Relevant Public Authorities' is reproduced at the PEJ website under the title: George Weigel: why did St. Andrew's Rector invite him to speak in Victoria?

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Steve Weatherbe rebuts Gregory Hartnell

I think you are way off the mark categorizing abortion, euthanasia and fetal stem cell research as "sexual" issues. These are not the same at all as same-sex marriage, marriage after divorce, artificial birth control, premarital sex, and so on. And calling Weigel's views on the Iraq war as heresy is totally unwarranted.

Like Fraser Field said, this is a matter of prudential judgement for governments to make. There is no Catholic dogma on the war in Iraq that I know of. And since I agree with Weigel on this war, I guess you've labelled me a heretic too.

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Gregory Hartnell rebuts Steve Weatherbe

You're right, Steve, that I have rarely 'invoked the Vatican position,' (whatever that is) 'to end an argument.' But I will admit to citing the documented thought of any pope, including living ones, with whom I can assent in good faith, to start an argument. That's what I tried to do with my January 1 letter to the editor of ICN, and I appreciate your response.

I believe that the first time that I have ever criticized the thought of a living pope in print was last year in these same pages, in response to Pope Benedict XVI's lamentable gaffes at Regensburg. While I do admit to having reservations about the notion of papal infallibility, I don't think I need be apologetic about finding myself in communion with the thought of Popes John Paul and Benedict on the unjustness of the war in Iraq.

As a trained historian, I am admittedly foggy with dates, terrible on original research, and sloppy in self-editing, so I do apologize to you now, Steve, and to other interested readers who may have also found fault with my rebuttal to Frank Field with respect to my listing 'abortion, euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research' as human sexuality issues. Obviously, euthanasia is not, and I apologize for my lack of professionalism in not editing myself properly.

The important point that I apparently failed to make in my rebuttal to Mr. Field was not whether or not these important human life issues pertained to human sexuality, but rather that they were rarely matters of dissent among what I have been calling, for lack of a better term, the 'neocon' camp in North American Roman Catholicism. My second less important point which led to the confusion is to note that among the neocons, there is rarely any appreciable dissent whatsoever when it comes to Church teaching on issues of human sexuality.

While I do admit to being influenced by Dale Vree, Editor of the New Oxford Review, and Joseh Sobran, a conservative American columnist in the Wanderer, in their long-standing opposition to

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this war, I do not take cues from them as to whether I refer to Mr. Weigel's writing on the war as being 'intellectually dishonest.' Nor do I apologize in categorizing such confused rationalizations for naked imperialism as 'heretical.'

When I dissent, as I occasionally do, from the official teaching of the Popes on matters of ordination, for example, I know that I am taking an heretical position, and I admit it publicly, as I do now. It is not something that I feel comfortable doing, but it must be done.

Mr. Weigel's position on the Iraq war is a scandalous position of public dissent from the documented opposition to it of the last two living popes. Whether that makes him a heretic is not for me to decide, nor is it for me to determine whether you are a heretic for seeing some justice in the war, Steve, but Mr. Weigel should have the intellectual honesty to admit to his readers and audience that he is, in fact, not in communion with the Popes on this matter.

In fact, I would say that in advocating an obscene overturning of all known traditional thinking on the so-called 'just war doctrine,' Mr. Weigel has led many thousands of impressionable well-intentioned conservative North American Catholics astray into a gray area of relativistic ethical ambiguity, precisely the sort of Waste Land of contingency that the great poet T. S. Elliot warned against, and that Pope Benedict himself has warned against in his well-publicized musings on the dangers of relativism.

Peace of Christ

Gregory Hartnell

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