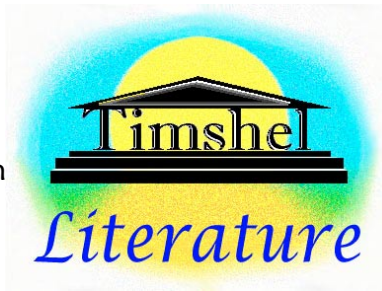


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**Just Thinking, 03/03/03:
Questions to Questions, Faith to Faith**
by Justin Katz

Catholic writer Amy Welborn has posted a piece on her Web log that picks up and meanders with the questions that surround war and Catholicism. She makes a fair and deliberate attempt, but the bottom line — my bottom line, at least — with her analysis is that she misunderstands the motivation of Catholics who disagree vehemently with the Vatican even more than she seems to explain away the real problems that the United States currently faces.

I'm a neophyte at Catholicism, so it is entirely possible that my answers with respect to my religion are wrong — perhaps even that my questions are inappropriate. But then, perhaps it affords me a broader view. I look at these men who are charged with guiding the Church that perpetuates my religion, and I ask, *is this my faith?* Is this my faith, whose leaders make of themselves propaganda pieces for Arafat and for Hussein? Am I a follower of a religion that cannot muster the moral strength to turn its back on monsters — *monsters!* — while correctly cautioning those who openly and honestly seek counsel before battling those monsters and praying that *somehow* war can be avoided?

I don't want the Pope's "rubber stamp," as Amy characterizes the position held by people with whom I share a conclusion. I want clarity. I want the perspective and "the Long View of the oldest continually existing institution in the world," and surely that Long View would see the folly in urging compromise at all costs when it is obvious that only one side discusses and negotiates in

good faith. Amy asks what I want from the Pope, if not a “go get ’em.” The answer is simple: I want a statement that does not thrust my religion in among the haters and the anarchists and the communists who are protesting the war. I do not want him to express total support for violent force. But I would prefer that he not put his position, the position of the Church that I follow, so in line with the suicidal ideologies that fester in the Western world. Amy does me and those with whom I agree injustice by imagining that we have not considered the Pope’s stand. I submit that we are so pained because we have.

We are so incredulous because we want guidance from our Church, which rightfully presumes to offer it in so many practical matters in our lives. We look to the Pope for some inkling of this guidance, and we get the opinion that, as a practical matter, as a matter of action, it is not the time for war. But we ask what else can be tried, and to that question, we get vague answers — *pray, trust in God*. Well, of course, we should put our faith in God, but what do we *do*? If I catch a deadly but curable disease, no Catholic would tell me that medicine is not the answer. Our Church does not declare that we must only pray and trust in God to end abortion. Our religion calls on us to act, not just to pray. So what do we *do*?

Amy complains that we defenders of the war are “starting to sound a little robotic — and strained — as well.” For my part, that is because for all of our logic and our practical considerations and suggestions and defenses, we have received only more ruminations, more rambling admissions of confusion that conclude that anybody who has a solution must be wrong. We get more questions:

Why Hussein? Why now?

Because the allowable time for attempting peaceable solutions with Hussein has passed. Now. We who feel thus cannot conclude otherwise than that the wonderers and questioners, whose objections never change, even as they concede opposing arguments, are merely seeking to

delay because they do not want it to be *now*. They do not want it to be the case that it has *long* been Hussein and that Hussein is the most blatantly unruly of the children, to whom the others look to discern their own boundaries. They do not want it to be the case that September 11 was mainly significant because it woke us up to the reality that we had taken our eyes off the sands slipping through the glass and because it drew Saddam's deadline in bold letters of flames: Now!

Furthermore, having disconnected their arguments from practical concerns, they are free to suggest that, to be moral and consistent, the United States would have to declare war on all tyrants of the world simultaneously. Is this the wisdom of the Long View of the Church that I feel to be the focal point of Truth in this world? It cannot be that the lesson learned from watching "nations and empires rise and fall" is that issues as profound as those around war are such that the problem of one dictator cannot be said to be only resolvable through war until all other dictators are declared in that state, as well. Here, the argument becomes that we cannot possibly have exhausted all peaceful means with Hussein while there are other regimes for which those possibilities are not exhausted.

Amy asks:

Why **not** pray for peace? Why **not** pray for a peaceful and **just** resolution? Why **not** pray for ...I dunno...God's will be done, maybe?

This is either dishonest or uncharitable. I have not heard anybody declare that they will not pray for peace, only that they will not pray for peace *on the Pope's terms*. In those terms, there is no such thing as peace through war. The other possibilities are never exhausted. In the Vatican's presentation of peace, God's will is declared as already known, and the United States is acting against it. The much-touted Just War Theory is but so many scribblings on parchment, and the beleaguered man cannot defend himself. The Pope's peace, at least as he has allowed it to be

presented, does not really leave the question of a “just resolution” open. Because, as the Pope has cast peace, particularly by not negating more-extreme phrasings, the defense of the United States is excluded. The lives of the people of Iraq are excluded. The simmering war of cultures is left to simmer even longer in the hope that the pot will not crack. The only solution is supernatural. And so I ask again, is this Catholicism? Do we not act? Do we not take upon ourselves the responsibility for evil that we, ourselves, have brought into the world?

Amy ends with a question: “What is it that we **really** care about?”

In the practical, material matters of my life, I care about the safety of my family and all of those to whom I extend my love. That includes my countrymen. It also includes the rest of my human family, those who live behind a wall of terror that only the United States, by some method or other, can break. And I care that it sometimes seems as if our immediate families must be threatened for our society to care about families elsewhere.

In the spiritual matters of my life, I care about finding Truth and understanding how it is that I should live and live to find my way to God. And when those who lead the institution that is the keeper of the Long View to God seem to manifest — whether through abuse, craven self-concern, or moral vagueness — those things that I find inconsistent with my sense of faith, I ask through an almost unbearable pain: Is this my religion?