
Interview: Patriarch Raphael Bidawid

U.S. and Europe used double moral standard against Iraq

Fiorella Operto met His Beatitude the Patriarch of the Chaldeans, Raphael Bidawid of Iraq, in Rome on March 10. Bidawid was just back from a trip to Germany, where he participated in a seminar organized by the Evangelical Church. The following is an exclusive interview to EIR.

Bidawid: In Germany, I was asked about the latest news. We do not have direct news, first-hand news, only reports from some Iraqis who left the country via Amman, via Teheran, who told us about the situation in Iraq. It is a real hecatombe, a catastrophe. One hundred and twenty thousand air sorties with such ferocity, such hatred. What could have provoked this? Without even talking about material damages, let's talk about the victims, about the children, women, old people, the defenseless persons. Where could they find refuge? We do not have real shelters: There were only about 40 fallout shelters of the kind we saw bombed, but the bombs penetrated even there through the air ducts, and who knows how many died. The fact that they bombed those shelters means that the Military Command in Riyadh intended exactly to kill defenseless civilians. They lie when they say that they saw military installations by satellite, and anti-aircraft weapons under the shelters. And even it were so, to kill all those people for an anti-aircraft weapon!

I told the public in Germany, let's make a very simple calculation. In some 120,000 air sorties, let's say there was one person killed per mission. That's already 120,000 civilian victims, just as a minimal estimate. The real numbers will never be known. War bulletins are always manipulated, either too much or too little, by one side in order not to demoralize the targeted population and, by the other, in order to terrorize it.

From this calculation I presume that there are 150-200,000 civilians dead. Among the military the official figure is 160,000 dead, but for sure there were many more. So let's calculate half a million dead.

I say: Was it worth it, in order to free Kuwait, to kill half a million human beings? Among this half million there were engineers, teachers, medical doctors, treated like ants to squash. There is no proportion between the aim, and the means used. Yes, the U.N. authorized the freeing of Kuwait, but not to raze Iraq to the ground. Do you want to free Kuwait? Good, free it, but do not come to destroy, intention-

ally, the civilization of Iraq, because a people without a civilization is not a people any more. Then one must draw the conclusion that the aim was to deprive the Iraqi people of its civilization, of its culture. They destroyed the infrastructure of the country. Intentionally. They destroyed all the archeological sites, Ur, Babylon, Nineveh. They destroyed the oldest Christian convent, of the fourth century, our Monte Cassino, the fulcrum of monasticism—bombed. Was this also a military target? The churches destroyed: Were they also a "military target"? One of the oldest churches of Iraq, in Mosul, was bombed. They bombed in Baghdad the sanctuary of the Armenians, of the sixteenth century, a sanctuary that even the Muslims visited. A "military target"? They bombed the Cathedral of the Latins, of the Chaldeans, of the Irish. Why? Not to speak about the mosques that have been destroyed, hundreds of them. The churches, the mosques, are located in residential areas. Around the churches, the villages and the cities were created. They bombed these residential areas systematically. I ask myself with what conscience these gentlemen did it, if they still have a conscience.

Some told me, why don't you speak about Kuwait? I say: Listen, in order to right an injustice, have we committed a bigger injustice? Have you killed half a million Iraqis and destroyed a civilization to free 250,000 Kuwaitis? And so I ask myself: Was your goal really the liberation of Kuwait? The Americans themselves said it clearly. First they said they wanted to "defend Saudi Arabia"; then they said they had come to "free Kuwait"; then they said "no we came to destroy Saddam's war machine," and further on: "We came to liquidate the dictator Saddam," and so on. One must not hide behind one's finger, but call a spade a spade. Saddam said it to Kenneth Kaunda of Kenya, the last head of state to visit Iraq before the war. Kaunda said that Saddam had told him that even if he had withdrawn from Kuwait, the United States would have attacked anyway. Many knew it, it was no secret. Five hundred thousand troops, and the most advanced technologies, "to defend Saudi Arabia"? Not even during World War II were so many targets hit, nor were as many missiles and bombs used as were used in the Gulf war.

And with such ferocity, such incredible hate. The problem of Kuwait would have been easily solved by negotiations. There were other means. Saddam Hussein said many times that he was ready to negotiate, but he said that all the

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problems of the region had to be dealt with at the same time: Palestinians, Lebanon, Cyprus. And the Golan Heights: Not only was it occupied by Israel, it was even annexed. The government of the United States accuses Saddam of having annexed Kuwait. But what about the Golan Heights? It was annexed with a vote of the Israeli Parliament! But nobody speaks anymore about it. By what law?

They speak about "international law" but is there one "law" for them and another "law" for us? Are there two weights and two measures? Or is Israel the son of the lady and we are the sons of the servant? In these months, more than a million Russians are arriving in Palestine. They will become naturalized Israelis, and the citizens of Palestine will be expelled. By what law? And the United Nations does this? What an irony! The United Nations was created to ensure peace; and it gave the authorization to kill human beings. It is incredible.

I said it to [U.N. Secretary General Javier] Pérez de Cuellar, whom I met at the U.N.O. last Wednesday [March 4] together with the Vatican Observer at the U.N., Msgr. Renato Martino. We spoke for 40 minutes. Pérez de Cuellar listened to me with attention and respect. I told him openly: You should be the ones who protect the world from wars, and you came to make a war? I asked him: Did these gentlemen of the coalition really follow the mandates of the U.N. as they were meant or not? Pérez de Cuellar listened without saying anything. The United Nations is finished. The United States holds hegemony over the world.

EIR: How was your visit to the United States?

Bidawid: It went well. In Europe as well as in the United States, I met the presidents of the Bishops' Conferences, the religious leaders of the other Christian communities, and the World Council of Churches. In the United States I met the National Council of Churches and the Catholics. But, as a general observation, I must say that I was shocked by the fact that even the clergy do not have a real idea of the situation, that they do not know more than what they see, hear, and read. And that's it. It is a "monovision," only one voice, and only one image everywhere. And everybody repeats what the TV said and nothing else. They were surprised when I explained the situation and they told me: We never heard these things! And I said: Before making a decision, you must know, and think about your Christian brothers in those

countries. You must ask, you must be informed. An important bishop of a U.S. city, maybe the only one who spoke clearly, with much courage, came to Jordan and Iraq, saw the situation with his own eyes, and said what he had to say with conscience. Of course many did not like what he had to say. I was impressed by his courage also because not even his archbishop dared to speak up.

Do you know what one of these U.S. archbishops told me? Aren't you scared to speak up? "Why should I be?" I said. "Am I saying something wrong? I am telling the truth as it is. I am not here to defend the person of Saddam, nor his regime, nothing of the kind. I am not a politician. I am here to speak the truth to you, about the situation as it is. Whoever our President may be, we respect him, obviously according to our conscience. If I were ordered to do things against my conscience, I wouldn't do it and I would protest."

The archbishop told me: "If I spoke like you I would be scared even to leave my house." To which I responded: "I congratulate your excellency for the courage you have shown."

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In Europe and in the United States the fear of Israel has penetrated to the bones! But why? Many criticize me because I speak like this. I respond that I must speak like this, I must speak the truth because if everybody behaved like you, we would lose the rights of our faithful. I must defend the life of my faithful! The way to defend them is not by submitting to the interests of the United States and Israel. We do not have enemies—everybody is a brother, Arabs, Jews, Christians, Muslims, are all our brothers. And we defend the existence of Israel. We assert that Israel has the right to exist, but not at the expense of another people.

Only Israel must exist? Why? And the Palestinian people, all wandering, without a homeland, without houses, without land! People used to talk about the "wandering Jew," but today the situation is reversed. Justice must be done for every people, but I say justice is indivisible. Justice must be applied without discrimination. Is there one "justice" for Israel and one for the Palestinians? If the Israelis want to live in peace, they must give justice to the Palestinians. Without justice

there will be no peace. Not now, but in ten or a hundred years, the Arabs will avenge themselves. Woe to that moment! I do not know how much the U.S. will be able to protect Israel then. Time is not on the side of Israel or the United States.

From what I saw, the United States does not promise anything good. I am thinking of the Roman Empire, how it collapsed, and it will be worse for the United States. While I was there, I happened to watch American television and I saw that in San Francisco they were holding a congress of these "gays," and they were holding weddings before the TV cameras, of men with men, and women with women. And two men kissed each other on camera. I asked myself: How long can this nation last? The Lord will punish this people, exactly like Sodom and Gomorrah.

How can such a people survive? They commit these immoralities in the name of freedom. But what liberty is this? There are no more values. Not even the pagans went that far. And I see the disintegration of what has been the great nation of the United States, which cannot last much longer. They shouldn't delude themselves, with their victories against the innocent and helpless.

Also in Europe I see so much immorality. If the Europeans had to undergo the persecutions that we Christians of the Orient underwent for so many centuries, there wouldn't be a Christian left here. But there are still 15 million Christians in the Middle East. I saw so much irresponsibility in Europe. Europe should help the Christians to survive in the Middle East, because to defend the Christians means to defend themselves. Do you know that Christians are escaping from the Middle East, from Jerusalem, from Turkey? Every week four or five Christian families arrive in France from Turkey.

Just as an example: Coming back from Germany, I found on the plane, a daily called *Il Giornale Nuovo*, and I saw my picture and a long article against me, titled "Saddam like Che Guevara." The journalist had isolated some of my sentences and reported them out of context. Really an example of morality!

EIR: How do you judge the conference that just ended in the Vatican, in the presence of the Pope, the Middle East Patriarchs, and the presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the nations in war?

Bidawid: It was very good, very well prepared. We discussed the Middle East situation after the war and the perspectives. After the introduction by the Holy Father, Monsignor Tauran of the Secretariat of State expounded the Christian doctrine of peace. Then I spoke on "The Christian churches of the Middle East in the face of the Gulf war." After me Monsignor Sabbah, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, dealt with the same subject. The next day we discussed what possible consequences this war may have on relations among the various monotheistic religions. The Maronite Patriarch Sfeir spoke, and after him Monsignor Teissier, the president of the Bishops' Conference of Western Africa and Archbishop of Algiers. Everybody spoke. At the end we discussed the final communiqué, which

you probably read in *Osservatore Romano*, a beautiful document. We Patriarchs drew up a draft, the presidents of the Western Bishops' Conferences drew up another one, and then we formed a committee of Cardinals and Patriarchs who prepared the final draft, which we discussed again with the Holy Father. We made many changes and then we agreed on the final version, which I like very much. It is very courageous, and clarified several issues. Then the Pope asked that we all participate in a general audience where he gave the closing speech. We gathered around the Pope to show to the world that the Church shared the same ideas, that the whole Church follows the line of the Pope.

The Holy Father is very disappointed because, in spite of all his efforts, they went ahead with the war. More than 55 times he spoke against the war, in favor of peace. His was "a voice crying out in the wilderness," because what the United States had decided was an order.

I saw that in Europe many are very critical toward the U.S. government, but they do not speak openly. In Germany many seemed fed up with the United States and they were happy that I criticized what had happened. But the Europeans are politically unable to react. And France, how could France do it? It has been the European nation which was most pitiless against us.

There is a verse of the Psalmist which says, "Whatever the Lord wants he does"; we could paraphrase this to say that today, "Everything that Bush wants, is done." And after this victory, who will stop him? The U.S. government is crowing over this victory. But what victory is it? They ought to be ashamed. To massacre a small country! They should be ashamed, the United States and their allies, even the Europeans. Even you Italians. These gentlemen speak of the Geneva Convention. But what did *they* do? They slaughtered retreating troops. And even the Arabs should be ashamed. If the Arabs had shown solidarity to Iraq, there would have been no war. The Arab nation is finished. It no longer exists, for the next century. The Arabs who allied with the Bush government are sellouts. Bush bought them with money.

I see a very dark future for the Middle East. With this U.S. hegemony, I don't see how we can have peace. Perhaps not this year, but perhaps within two or three years, another war will break out, because the Palestinians will not surrender. Will Arafat go away? Another will come, but the people will not die. Peace is built on justice, and respect for human dignity.

EIR: What are your next steps?

Bidawid: Right now I am gathering as much aid as I can for my people, because as you know, "first you live, then you philosophize," medicines, milk, rice. We thank whoever wants to help us, through Caritas Internationalis which is channeling aid through Caritas in Jordan, and from there to Iraq. I will try to do everything I can here in Europe, because once I get back to Iraq, I will not be able to leave again.