
Book Reviews

The Pope, in Truth And in Metaphor

by Nina Ogden

John Paul II: A Personal Portrait of the Pope and the Man

by Raymond Flynn with Robin Moore and Jim Vrabel

New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001

204 pages, hardbound, \$22.95

The Accidental Pope: A Novel

by Raymond Flynn and Robin Moore

New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000

394 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

Former Ambassador to the Vatican Ray Flynn's unusual biography of John Paul II is a lively recollection of Flynn's personal relationship with the Pope: from then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyla's visit to Boston in 1969, when Flynn was running for his first election to public office; through Flynn's 1993-97 service as U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See; to Flynn's return to Rome for the events of Jubilee 2000. Because Flynn was Boston's longtime mayor before his appointment as Ambassador to the Holy See, his book has the quality of a dialogue reflecting his own growth as a politician and diplomat. It develops through his unique experiences with John Paul II, as a personal model of tough and moral public service.

Of particular interest is Flynn's coverage of Pope John Paul II's year-long fight in opposition to the United Nations Conference for Population and Development, held in Cairo in September 1994. *EIR* readers may remember the full-page ads taken out by the Schiller Institute in the *Washington Post* and in newspapers in Egypt, entitled "Stop the UN's Killer Conference," in the days leading up to that conference. Some may also remember the broadside "Message to the Delegates to the UN's Cairo Conference from Mother Teresa: Whatever You Did Unto One of the Least of These You Did Unto Me," which Mother Teresa asked the Schiller Institute to

print, and to "get it into the hands of all the delegates from all the countries of the world who will be in Cairo."

Flynn's description of his own politically daring activities gives a behind-the-scenes look at the challenge of changing American policy. He says of the period leading up to the Cairo Conference: "The Pope took a lot of heat for the relentless nature of his campaign. Some people couldn't understand why he kept it up day after day. . . . In addition to agreeing with him on the issues, I appreciated what he was putting himself through. You have to have been in politics to understand what it takes to go that far out on a limb for something you believe in, especially when it's not popular and when there's a good chance your position might not prevail."

The Pope sent a personally signed letter to every head of state in the world and to the UN Secretary General, denouncing the Cairo proposal for promoting a "society of things and not of persons." The U.S. State Department sent a directive to all U.S. embassies, Flynn said, "explaining the party line as far as Cairo was concerned. . . . A few weeks later I was called to Washington to receive a briefing . . . by the Clinton Administration's 'point person' on the Cairo conference, Assistant Secretary of State for Global Affairs Tim Wirth and his staff. . . . I knew he thought population growth was the single most serious threat the world faces today and that he was so gung-ho on the issue that he had a 'condom tree' prominently displayed in his office at the State Department. . . . I wasn't surprised, then, when my briefing turned into an hour-long lecture on why the U.S. policy was so obviously the correct one and how the Pope and the Catholic Church just 'didn't get it.' "

"Before our meeting, I was supposed to be a member of the U.S. delegation to the Cairo Conference. After it, my name was taken off the list."

Flynn's exchanges with Pope John Paul II were usually warm and personal. When, some months after Flynn became Ambassador, his son Ray became ill and needed to be hospitalized, the Pope not only prayed for his recovery, but also asked, "Much bills? Very expensive? . . . Maybe the Pope can help. The Pope has some small money. Not Church money, but the Pope's small money. Maybe he can help."

Flynn thought long and hard before deciding to reveal John Paul's spontaneous offer of help (which he did not accept) in the book. He ultimately did describe it "because of what it reveals about Karol Wojtyla, not the Pope, not even the priest, but the man."

In April 1994 the Pope summoned Flynn to a formal meeting, saying, " 'Ambassador, I think it is necessary that I talk to your President' [about the upcoming Cairo conference]. . . . He knew that if I told the White House that his request to talk to the President had been relayed to me by another Vatican official . . . the request wouldn't be taken as seriously as if I could say it came directly from the Pope. He figured that would help guarantee that the call would happen. Little did he know — or I know — how hard it would be to arrange."

Flynn describes an eye-opening, five-day struggle on his part, simply to inform President Clinton that John Paul II wished to talk with him. After three days of attempts to inform the President of the Pope's request, Ambassador Flynn decided that it wasn't incompetence on the part of the White House staff that was preventing his call from getting through, but a deliberate act to block his call. "I was frustrated before but now I was angry," Flynn wrote. "By Tuesday morning, I'd had enough. I got on a plane, flew to Washington and went directly from the airport to the White House. I walked into the Executive Office and told the President's secretary that even though I didn't have an appointment I needed to see her boss . . . and that I'd wait as long as it took."

"Finally, near the end of the second day of my one-man sit-in, I was called into the White House Situation Room. Several top aides were already there. . . . Assistant Secretary of State Tim Wirth chaired the so-called meeting. 'Ambassador Flynn,' he said, 'a lot of countries have concerns about the Cairo Conference and the draft document. But the President has left it up to me and my staff to negotiate with the other countries. Nobody is getting a chance to lobby the President on this one.'"

Flynn's description of how the "standoff" was resolved—when he finally was allowed to see President Clinton and tell him of the Pope's request, President Clinton answered, "I'd love to talk to him"—gives some insight into how the worst aspects of the Cairo population-reduction agenda were prevented from being implemented. While the event illustrates the political background surrounding U.S.-Vatican relations, it also highlights the characteristic willingness by both the Pope and the Ambassador to act outside the straitjacket of everyday "go along to get along" politics.

The Pope's 'Relentless Campaign'

As this book review goes to press, what Flynn described as Pope John Paul II's "relentless campaign" again made headlines. On July 23, seven years after the Pope-to-President diplomacy described in Flynn's book, television viewers around the world saw President George Bush sitting rigidly at his first visit to the Holy See, as John Paul II told him, "Your nation's founders, conscious of the immense natural and human resources with which your land had been blessed by the Creator, were guided by a profound sense of responsibility toward the common good, to be pursued in respect for the God-given dignity and inalienable rights of all." In this context of "a world of solidarity," the Pope spoke of the cancellation of the debt of poorer nations and the goal of peace through development.

"Another area in which political and moral choices have the gravest consequences for the future of civilization con-



Ray Flynn, Pope John Paul II, and President Bill Clinton, in August 1993.

cerns the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life itself," the Pope said. He spoke of "an assault on innocent life in the womb, leading to accommodation and acquiescence in the face of related evils such as euthanasia, infanticide, and, most recently, proposals for the creation for research purposes of human embryos, destined to destruction in the process."

Since Bush's return to Washington, his advisers, whose aim is to court the Catholic constituency out of the traditional FDR Democratic Party alliance, have been desperately trying to spin the Pope's remarks on cell stem research. But the Pope issued a follow-up statement, again placing his uncompromising concerns in the context of "the equal dignity of all members of the human family." Bush's poll ratings among Catholics have plummeted, and he has found, to the dismay of his so-called "Catholic" advisers, that just talking the talk and quoting Mother Teresa in his inauguration address will not propitiate the followers of John Paul II, whose political courage Flynn's book illustrates so well.

Those who know of the harassment aimed at Flynn as a result of his political courage, would consider *John Paul II: A Personal Portrait of the Pope and the Man*, to have been written in a very animated yet restrained and dignified manner, as becomes the subject matter. In the novel *The Accidental Pope*, on the other hand, Flynn and Moore are free to paint various institutions and their thinly disguised leaders with unrestrained insider wit. The book's "good guys" work to implement Flynn's own mission of a "pro-life, pro-family, pro-needy" faith. The "bad guys," including U.S. State Department idiots and plotters, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, all kinds of geopoliticians in both church and state, and assassins in sheep's clothing, are really bad. Even for those who don't usually read thrillers, it is a great companion book to *John Paul II: A Personal Portrait of the Pope and the Man*.