

## **TWO DEATHS**

*In the early days of the Spring of 2005 two deaths that claimed the attention of the world occurred. One death was inscribed by a huge question mark. The other death was marked by a large, loving, and appreciative exclamation mark. Of course we are referring to the deaths of Terri Schiavo and the Pope John Paul II. It was just a turn of fate that caused these deaths to occur at near the same time. These deaths were noted by people from all parts of the world, but for different reasons.*

*The manner of Terri's death in the final phase created anger, fear, distrust, and anguish on the part of many. Polls that were designed in an unbiased fashion revealed that a majority of the people were not in favor of removing Terri's feeding tube. Yet, some commentators and reporters spoke of Terri being in a "vegetative" state and thus hopeless. Many friends and the parents did not agree. Some found the term improper and obnoxious. A person is a human being and remains a human from birth to death. An ill person is still a human being. After Terri's feeding tube was removed large crowds gathered around the hospice and protested the action. The deliberate and death assuring actions of the Courts were questioned. What made it necessary for Terri to die at this time? Was the desire of the husband, who had already established another family, sufficient justification for the stance of the judges? Why was the desire of the parents to take care of their daughter denied? Is the "law" completely without mercy? Is the judiciary in complete control of an ill person's destiny? Did Terri really want to die? Who knows?*

*The two deaths were very different. The situations were starkly different. The controlling factors were very different. No civil authority said, "Pope it is time for you to die. The police will not allow your friends to feed you. So get on with your dying." No that was not the fate of the Pope. The Pope did have a physical disability that was a severe handicap but he continued his ministry. It is evident that he made decisions related to his life and death. No doubt but that he sensed his approaching death. He made the decision to not return to the hospital. He wanted his death to be a witness of faith, a testimony of dedication, a sign of commitment. He died in his home, confident that he would not be without a home. And millions of people around the world gained strength, and comfort, and hope from his ministry of compassion and his dedication to the call of faith.*

*Now, what may be some of the short and long term consequences of these two deaths? Terri's death has already created a demand for a real examination of the relative authority residing in, and the responsibilities of, the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of our Government. Who makes the "laws of the land"? Who can say to an ailing human being, "You are no longer fit to live"? Such questions and related questions have many sensitive angles requiring answers that contain compassion, sensitivity, and integrity.*

*The Pope's death has already caused many people to gain a deeper insight into and an appreciation of the "faith dedicated" life. The Pope was admired, and appreciated because of his commitment to compassion, freedom, and the sacredness of life.*

*The Roman Catholic Church will have cause to examine some of its fundamental beliefs and practices and come to terms with ministry in the contemporary world. Likewise, members of all faiths will seek to perceive their works with new vision and enriched hope.*

*But do not be surprised. These two deaths, though significant in ways beyond our present comprehension, will not obliterate human frailty, nor the tendency toward depravity. Both of these deaths will be used by some, under the guise of modernization, to create anger and discord among the people of this land. The healing awaits the fray!*

*Your just wait! And listen! And hear! And act as concerned citizens! These two deaths signal the conflicts of stressful opinions and options.*

*Hughston R. Peyton*