

# MEDIA HYPE OVER POPE'S DEATH

On September 21, *Time* ran a provocative article, "Was John Paul II Euthanized?" The piece quoted Italian intensive care specialist Dr. Lina Pavanelli, who charged that Pope John Paul II violated Catholic teaching by refusing medical care that would have prolonged his life. Pavanelli's allegations were as nonsensical as *Time's* understanding of Catholic teaching was ignorant.

According to an Associated Press story that ran five days later, Pavanelli "acknowledged she didn't have access to John Paul's medical records." In addition, other errors in her argument were quickly countered by the Vatican. For instance, Pavanelli charged that the pope should have been given a nasal feeding tube earlier than March 30, three days before his death. But this was done, the Vatican noted, only after John Paul could no longer ingest food or liquids; he was never without sustenance before getting the feeding tube. Father Jonathan Morris, on the Fox News website, asked why Pavanelli believed the pope would have initially rejected a feeding tube, only to accept it shortly before dying, if he was trying to deliberately hasten his own death. Despite all of this, Pavanelli stood by her allegation that the pontiff's death was the result of assisted suicide.

*Time* acted irresponsibly not only in casting suspicion on the pope's passing, but also in misrepresenting the Church's teachings on end-of-life issues. It claimed that "Catholics are enjoined to pursue *all means to prolong life*." (Our emphasis)

Not true—the Catechism of the Catholic Church says this about end-of life care: "Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of 'over-zealous' treatment. Here one does not will to cause

death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted" (no. 2278). Thus, *Time* was clearly off the mark.