

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Pope 'helped broker' Mid East crisis meeting

Robert Mickens
In Rome

FOREIGN MINISTERS from 13 countries assembled in Rome this week to try to resolve the escalating Israeli-Hezbollah conflict at a meeting that a high-ranking Italian bishop claimed the Pope Benedict helped broker from his summer holiday chalet in the Italian Alps.

As *The Tablet* went to press, participants at Wednesday's international conference – which included the so-called “Lebanon contact group”, the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank – were looking for a way to halt a humanitarian crisis, verify conditions for a ceasefire and assemble a multinational peace-keeping force in the region between Israel and Lebanon.

It is “no mystery” that Pope Benedict XVI helped contribute to the summit in Rome, according to Bishop Rino Fisichella, rector of the Pontifical Lateran University and chaplain to the Italian parliament. He told the Italian Catholic newspaper *L'Avenire* on Sunday that the Pope and Rome remained “points of



People pray for peace in the Middle East during a Mass in Washington. Photo: CNS/Leslie E. Kossoff

reference for mediation and diplomatic comprehension”.

Last week the Holy See press office said the Pope had designated Sunday as a day of prayer and fasting for peace in the Middle East. The communiqué said the Pope was urging people to pray for an immediate ceasefire, an opening of humanitarian corridors, and the start of negotiations leading to a just and lasting peace.

During his Sunday Angelus Pope Benedict repeated those words, practically verbatim. “I forcefully renew the appeal,” he told several thousand people who gathered outside a small chalet in Val d'Aosta where he has been on holiday since 11 July. “I take this occasion to reaffirm the right of the Lebanese to a united and sovereign country, the Israelis' right

to live in peace in their state, and Palestinians' right to a free and sovereign homeland.”

He also repeated his concern for “the innocent civilian population, unjustly assailed in a conflict”, both those “in Galilee who are forced to live in shelters” and “the great multitude of Lebanese who, once again, are seeing their country destroyed, have had to abandon everything and flee elsewhere”. Finally, he urged charitable organisations – as he did in the original communiqué – to do what they could to get help to people in the region. His own charity arm – Cor Unum – began collecting monetary donations that it said would be forwarded to Caritas Lebanon, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, and other aid organisations working in the region.

Later on Sunday, while visiting the small parish of Rhemes Saint-Georges, Pope Benedict seemed to answer critics, such as respected church historian Alberto Melloni, who have begun questioning whether he and the Holy See have done enough up to now to help bring an end to the Middle East conflict. “All that we can do is bear witness to love ... That means above all to raise a cry to God: we can pray!” he said.

Lebanon's Maronite Catholic bishops have asked the UN Security Council to pass “an immediate resolution for a ceasefire, out of mercy for innocent civilians”. They also called for international condemnation of the Israeli offensive in Lebanon and the opening of humanitarian corridors.

BRUSSELS

EU to fund embryonic stem-cell research

James Roberts

CATHOLIC MEMBERS of the European Parliament failed this week to halt EU funding for stem-cell research using human embryos. While a number of mainly Catholic countries, led by Germany, forced a compromise agreement in Strasbourg on Monday, which restricted funding for stem-cell research in certain circumstances, church leaders said that the destruction of embryos would still be promoted.

Janez Potocnik, the EU's research commissioner, assured the Science Ministers of many of Europe's mainly Catholic countries that the EU would not support the destruction of human embryos with the aim of obtaining stem cells. After this undertaking was given, Germany, Slovenia and Italy withdrew their opposition to the funding proposals, while Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Malta and Lithuania continued

to oppose them for “ethical and moral” reasons. A number of predominantly Catholic countries – Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Slovenia – supported the funding proposals even before they were made marginally more restrictive.

However, funding of research using embryos that would otherwise be discarded – for example, from in vitro fertilisation centres – will be allowed. Scientists at Newcastle's Centre for Life carry out research on such embryos, and the restriction agreed by Mr Potocnik will not prevent Britain – which led the campaign for the EU funding – from benefiting. There will be no funding of research aimed at human cloning for reproductive purposes.

In a strongly worded statement the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the European Communities (Comece) condemned the funding decision, saying that while the EU might not fund the destruction of human embryos, it will

fund “research on embryonic stem cells resulting from such destruction”.

“This declaration is most unsatisfactory because European funding of research on embryonic stem cells entails the risk of promoting at the level of the member states the destruction of human embryos,” Comece said.

The EU decision came in sharp contrast to the announcement by the United States President, George W. Bush, last week that he was using the first veto of his administration against a bill that would have expanded federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. “As science brings us ever closer to unlocking the secrets of human biology, it also offers temptations to manipulate human life and violate human dignity,” Mr Bush said. “Our conscience and our history as a nation demand that we resist this temptation.”

(See *Soul searching*, page 8)

CHINA

China to halt illicit ordinations

Ellen Teague

THE CHINESE Government is to stop the illegitimate ordination of Catholic bishops, in the interests of encouraging further dialogue with the Vatican, according to an auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong. Speaking at a church seminar in South Korea last week, Bishop John Tong Hon said that the Chinese Government has called a halt to episcopal ordinations, such as those held earlier this year, where the Catholic Patriotic Association nominated new bishops without the approval of the Holy See.

The immediate public response from the Vatican – which condemned the ordinations as a

“serious attack on religious freedom” – convinced Chinese officials that the ordinations were damaging prospects for diplomatic relations with Rome. Bishop Tong mentioned that international media coverage too had prompted them to reconsider their confrontational stance.

Discreet talks between Chinese officials and a visiting Vatican delegation, which arrived in Beijing during late June, produced no concrete results, the bishop revealed. However, the willingness of both sides to engage in direct negotiations has been regarded as a major advance. Two senior Vatican officials extended their stay by a day in order to meet top Chinese officials, including the

director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, Ye Xiaowen.

Bishop Tong felt the process to normalise Holy See-China relations would proceed slowly due to the Chinese Government's concern about the Catholic Church's power, as well as the role of Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong in garnering international support for religious freedom on the mainland. “In that sense, we should not expect much in the near future, but that day will come,” Bishop Tong said. He noted that Catholics in China, from both “open” and “underground” communities, total about 13 million – 1 per cent of mainland China's 1.3 billion people.

BRAZIL

Pope backs moves to save rainforest

POPE BENEDICT has given unconditional support to recent efforts by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, to save the Amazon rainforest, writes Robert Mickens.

The Pope sent a high-ranking personal envoy to Brazil, where the Orthodox Church held an international symposium on the environment from 13 to 20 July. More than 200 scientists, ecologists and leaders of the three monotheistic religions took part in the symposium, held on 10 boats that wound their way through Amazonian rivers.

“I sincerely hope, Your Holiness,

that the sixth symposium, dedicated to the Rio of the Amazons, will again attract the attention of peoples and governments concerning the problems, the needs, and the urgency of a region whose ecological balance is so tried and so threatened,” the Pope said in a message he sent with papal envoy, Cardinal Roger Etcheberry.

The primary object of the “floating” conference was to spark international cooperation to preserve the Amazon, which environmental experts say is central to maintaining climate stability, biodiversity, and water cycles

around the globe. In his message the Pope said the Amazon's “rivers and forests, in their beauty and grandeur, speak to us of God and his work for the benefit of humanity”. He noted that the “immense region” was “an open book whose pages reveal the mystery of life”.

Benedict XVI underlined the importance of the Catholic and Orthodox churches working together in promoting a catechism on creation. He said this could have “an important impact on the perceived value of life itself and on the adequate solution of inescapable social problems”.

PHILIPPINES

Cleric faces court after giving sanctuary

Vincent McKee

RELATIONS BETWEEN the Catholic Church and Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo continued to decline this week following an announcement by the country's Justice Minister that a Manila bishop who gave shelter and food to a band of military officers fleeing custody last February may be indicted for aiding a fugitive.

Bishop Antonio Tobias of Novaliches, Metro Manila, a critic of the Arroyo Government, acknowledged hiding Lieutenant Lawrence San Juan and six colleagues at his home while they were being pursued for alleged involvement in an attempted coup in Manila in August 2003.

“If in the Government's view I did something punishable by law, I'm willing to answer for my so-called misdeeds; let the coun-

try be my judge,” Bishop Tobias said. When Mrs Arroyo's Justice Minister, Raul Gonzalez, publicly threatened charges, Bishop Tobias countered: “Sanctuary is sacrosanct ... and beyond the laws of man. It is better that they [the soldiers] betray me than I betray them.” The events occurred last February, after Mrs Arroyo proclaimed a state of emergency, and issued arrest warrants for Lt San Juan and his comrades.

MEXICO

Call for week of prayer over election result

Colin Harding

MEXICO'S CATHOLIC bishops have called for a week of prayer for national reconciliation beginning on Monday, after the defeated left-wing candidate in the 2 July presidential election, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, said last week that he would never accept the result unless there was a vote-by-vote recount.

The bishops' statement read: “Over and above our ideological differences, we share a common history, values and destiny, which now hang in the balance. Within families there can always be legitimate differences of opinion, but there is no room for hatred and much less for violence.”

Mr López Obrador's supporters have been protesting in the streets since their candidate made allegations of widespread electoral fraud. They plan to hold their biggest demonstration yet on Sunday, when more than a million people are expected to converge on Mexico City's main square.

The conservative victor, Felipe Calderón of the ruling National Action Party (PAN), has refused to countenance a recount, saying that such a procedure would be a slur on the honesty and ability of the electoral authorities.

Monitors from the European Union said that they found no evidence of fraud. Mr Calderón's winning margin was 243,934 votes, less than one percentage point of the total amount of 41 million ballots cast.

Mexico has a history of electoral fraud. It was ruled for more than 70 years by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which made vote-rigging a fine art before being defeated in 2000 by the PAN.

UNITED STATES

Vox Clara reviews American Mass translation plans

Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

THE COMMITTEE of bishops appointed by the Vatican to oversee the continuing translation of the Mass into English has been considering US amendments and adaptations for the main prayers of the Mass.

Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans, a member of the Vox Clara Committee, said members reviewed and discussed each of the changes proposed by American bishops to the text prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL).

The Vox Clara Committee, which ended a five-day meeting at the Vatican on Friday last week, advises the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments on English-language translations. The congregation must approve translations adopted by a national bishops' conference before use.

Archbishop Hughes said Vox Clara spent time on the translation approved in June by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops because it was the only conference to have approved the text with amendments and adaptations. The ICEL text of the Order of the Mass has been adopted by the bishops' conferences of England and Wales, Australia, New Zealand and Scotland. The Canadian and Irish bishops are expected to vote on the text in October, and Indian bishops in January.

Currently, the United States is the only country that does not use the phrase "consubstantial with the Father" in describing Jesus. The US bishops proposed to continue using the phrase "one in being with the Father". During the American bishops' June meeting in Los Angeles, Archbishop Hughes' motion to use the word "consubstantial" was defeated. While he would not share details about the Vox Clara discussion of the term, he reiterated his personal position that "consubstantial" has a very significant and sacred history in the Church. It is a term that helped sort out controversy in the fourth century about the divinity of Christ.

Archbishop Hughes cited the priest's prayer from the penitential rite as a further example of why a new translation is needed. It now reads: "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life." The new text says: "May Almighty God have mercy on you and, having forgiven your sins, lead you to everlasting life."

"Because of the way it was translated," he said, "people have been led to believe that some kind of absolution was being offered."

As for the Creed, which is being changed from "We believe" to "I believe", the archbishop said: "It will be important for celebrants to explain that each person coming to celebrate the Eucharist is invited to express his or her faith, which is the Church's faith."

AUSTRIA

'Arrogant' judges attacked by Church

Christa Pongratz-Lippitt

In Vienna

THE AUSTRIAN Supreme Court's decision that a gynaecologist who failed "sufficiently" to warn a pregnant woman that her baby might have Down's syndrome must be held financially responsible for the child's care has come in for widespread criticism in Austria, from the Church, Catholic associations and others outside the Church.

Bishop Klaus Küng of Sankt Pölten, who has a degree in medicine and is responsible for family affairs in the Austrian bishops' conference, said that "by signalling that handicapped life is a case for damages, the Supreme Court's decision is a disastrous sign that points in totally the wrong direction". The decision was, moreover, "arrogant", as only God could judge over life and death.

At an ultrasound examination in the twenty-third week of pregnancy, the gynaecologist noticed certain anomalies. He told the pregnant woman to have further tests but did not tell her that the anomalies could be the first signs of Down's syndrome. The woman waited until the thirty-second week before going for further tests and then the baby was diagnosed with Down's syndrome. By this time it was too late for an abortion. The mother claimed the doctor gave her "insufficient information" and the Supreme Court agreed with her. Her child is now nine years old.

INDIA

Controversial British priest finally laid to rest

Anto Akkara

In Delhi

SEVENTEEN MONTHS after three hasty and informal burials, Fr Mark Barnes – a British national who had served in India for four decades – was solemnly interred on 22 July. The ceremony, which was attended by about 200 local people, more than a dozen priests of Jalandhar Diocese and was led by its Vicar General, Fr Mathew Nilapana, marked the end of a controversy that brought the lower caste Indians, with whom Fr Mark worked, into conflict with the Church.

"We are happy that finally everything has ended peacefully," Fr Nilapana told *The Tablet* on Tuesday.

Born in India when his father was serving in the British Army, Fr Mark returned in 1964 as a Capuchin priest and worked in the Jalandhar Diocese in northern Punjab state near the border with Pakistan.

The 71-year-old priest, who was relieved

of diocesan duties in 1989, was running an independent centre known as St Mary's Convent, at Gumtala, a suburb of the Sikh holy city of Amritsar, when he died following an explosion inside his room on 15 February 2005. Though police said he died while making cartridges for his handgun, some local people say the explosion was caused by a mystery package delivered to him by two people, one of whom was found dead next day. The priest was known for clearing large tracts of wasteland along the border areas and handing these to the landless poor for cultivation, as well as helping others to set up looms for the textile industry in Amritsar.

According to Fr Franco Mulakkal, spokesman for the diocese, after the priest died, church officials wanted to bury him in the diocesan priests' cemetery at the cathedral church in Jalandhar. However, when Fr Mark's sister, Anne Wakeling, flew in the next day, the body was taken by his "followers" to the Gumtala centre where he

lived and was buried without church officials being informed. The same night, the body was removed and buried first in a Sikh cemetery and later in the local Christian cemetery. Following this, Ms Wakeling filed a legal complaint regarding the removal of the body from the centre, while Jalandhar Diocese filed a case alleging the denial of a proper church burial to the priest.

The judge asked both the parties to make an out-of-court settlement for a final and proper burial. As a result the diocese consented to the priest being buried, contrary to church norms, in the centre he founded, as demanded by his "followers" and his sister. In return, five women whom Fr Mark referred to as nuns, and who were living at St Mary's Convent, have left the convent compound, which is now under church control.

Ms Wakeling, who flew from Britain for the ceremony, told the BBC that her family was happy that Fr Mark was buried "with the love, respect and dignity he deserves".

IN BRIEF

Medjugorje apparitions review

Cardinal Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, announced a commission to review the alleged Marian apparitions at Medjugorje and pastoral provision for thousands of pilgrims who visit the town each year. Cardinal Puljic told Catholic News Service on Monday: "I am awaiting suggestions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on theologians to appoint." On Tuesday, thousands converged on Medjugorje to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first alleged apparition to six young people. The Vatican continues to monitor events at Medjugorje, but it has not taken a formal position other than to support the bishops' ban on official pilgrimages.

Bertone visits Pope

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone met Pope Benedict privately during the Holy Father's holiday in Valle d'Aosta on Monday. The current archbishop of Genoa – who succeeds Cardinal Angelo Sodano as the Vatican's Secretary of State on 15 September – arrived in the village of Les Combes around 11 a.m. and remained with the Pope all afternoon. Anonymous sources said that the cardinal and the Pope discussed the appointment of a Secretary for Relations with States, the number two position in the Secretariat of State, to replace Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, who is to head the Vatican City State and Governorate.

Refugees afraid to go home

Armed clashes have ended, but trouble persists for thousands of displaced people in camps in East Timor. Security has improved in Dili, the capital, since José Ramos Horta became Prime Minister, but many remain fearful. Some families guard their homes by day and return to sleep in camps at night, despite unhygienic conditions there causing many children to fall ill. According to Fr Apolinario Aparicio, Vicar General of Dili, the Church is helping displaced people to return to their communities, but he estimates that at least 12,000 people continue to take refuge in 12 Catholic churches and centres around Dili. (See *After the pain, justice*, page 12)

Exhibition on Pope's life opens

An exhibition on the various stages of Pope Benedict's life in the archdiocese of Munich was opened by Cardinal Friedrich Wetter of Munich on Tuesday. Historians presented two volumes of sources and essays on the Pope's life in Munich, one of which is devoted to the history of the junior seminary at Traunstein which the Pope attended from the age of 12 until he was 16 (1939 to 1943). They hope to clear up questions concerning Joseph Ratzinger's compulsory membership of the Hitler Youth at the end of the Second World War.

Letter from Rome

The Pope's appeals just don't work like John Paul II's did," a Vatican official told me the other night as we watched a news report on the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, following his endorsement of the G8 Summit's call for a ceasefire. "He's too ... cerebral," the official said, disappointedly. I suppose we all got too used to the Wojtyla interventionist style, which is why some people here have begun to wonder how Benedict XVI sees the Church playing any sort of diplomatic role at all in the Middle East or indeed anywhere else. It did not help that *L'Osservatore Romano* covered its pages with photos of him on a mountain holiday during the explosive first week of the current crisis. But when Italy's most prestigious paper, *Corriere della Sera*, ran an article by Church historian Alberto Melloni that expressed perplexity at Pope Benedict's apparent detachment, other pressmen, from hierarchy-controlled publications, jumped out of their pews to the Pope's defence. The editor of *L'Avvenire* blasted Melloni's article as vulgar and not serious. "The Pope is praying!" he wrote with indignation. No Catholic could quibble with that as a response to the troubles of the Middle East. But what of the diplomatic efforts of the Holy See? The current Secretary of State is effectively serving out his notice and his replacement, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who is due to take up the post in September, is a canon lawyer by training rather than a diplomat. And since the Pope moved Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Vatican's expert on dialogue with Muslims, to Cairo to be papal nuncio, he has not replaced him in Rome. So what is going on here? Could it be we are witnessing a sort of "Benedictine Revolution", with the Pope keen for the Church not to be involved in the diplomatic and political scene but focusing instead on being a more prophetic Church? One that, like Jesus, relinquishes all claims to power, prestige, and greatness? If so, the Pope will need our prayers, too.

No end in sight for the torrid heat that is consuming Rome. The noisy (but not very rainy) thunderstorms of the past few nights have hardly been "cool" comfort following the most blistering weekend of the year. Of course, all of Europe is sweltering at the moment. Scores of people have died in France. And I'm told that in London security announcements at all the Underground stations are warning people to carry water with them at all times, and to leave the Tube trains if they are "feeling not well". But the Romans do not need any public nannies to offer such gentle heat-beating tips. As they say, "The Romans have seen it all." And, as for water, there's

always been an abundance of that here, thanks to the ancient aqueducts that still tap the springs in the hills outside the city. People drink bottled water at restaurants and sometimes at home, but it used to be extremely rare to see a native walking around with the store-bought stuff. There was no need, because a continuous natural supply can be found for free on most corners. These are the funny little drinking fountains that look a bit like short, stout, fire hydrants. They are called the *nasoni* (the big noses) because of their iron spouts from which a continuous stream of water flows into a travertine drain below. Just inside the St Anne's Gate at the Vatican, the Pope's employees routinely fill their jugs and bottles with water that flows from a large marble slab into something that looks like a sarcophagus. And often peering from the outside of the gate are envious pensioners who beg the Swiss Guards to fill their bottles, too. They obviously believe that the Vatican still gets the choicest stuff.

It's the last weekend for the *Festa de Noantri*, one of the most popular summer folk celebrations in Rome. The old Trastevere neighbourhood is the site of this "Festival of We Others", as the Romanesque name means, and there will be booths with food, games and entertainment until Sunday. The party's high point was actually last Saturday with the beloved procession of the "Madonna of Noantri". It began on small boat in the murky waters of the River Tiber and then continued on foot through the narrow, cobble streets of the charming neighbourhood. It is said that the procession's statue was actually pulled up in a surprised fisherman's net one night some two centuries ago – probably a time when the river was still "blond", as a popular Roman song goes, and not its present-day colour of petrol. This fisherman's tale is just one of the "modern" legends of Trastevere. The quarter boasts the oldest basilica in Rome dedicated to the Virgin Mary and a number of other precious little churches. More recently Pope Pius IX built a massive tobacco factory, though it's long been out of business. But what I think is most interesting is that up until the 1960s the Trasteverini made a clear distinction between the residents of "Rome proper" and they who lived on "the other side of the Tiber", as the name of the quarter suggests. It makes sense when one considers that no bridges near the quarter connected the two sides of the river until the late 1880s. When I first moved here I met an ancient man who boasted of having "never gone to Rome" during his entire life. No, it wasn't Cardinal Ottaviani.

Robert Mickens