
THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Pope challenges United States on Middle East

Robert Mickens
In Rome

POPE BENEDICT has insisted on an immediate ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, directly challenging the American-led position that conditions are not yet right for a halt in fighting.

Speaking on Wednesday in St Peter's Square, where he resumed his weekly general audiences, the Pope said: "I renew a pressing appeal for an immediate cessation of all hostilities and all violence!"

Before a crowd of some 40,000 youngsters who were in Rome for an international congress of altar servers, Pope Benedict said, "Nothing can justify the shedding of innocent blood, no matter what side it comes from."

He recalled the "chilling images" of the children killed in the Lebanese town of Qana and urged "the international community and all those more directly involved to put down conditions for a definitive political solution to the crisis as soon as possible".

It was the Pope's second appeal this week.



The Pope, speaking from a balcony at Castel Gandolfo, appealed for a Middle East ceasefire. Photo: CNS/Alessandro Bianchi, Reuters

"In the name of God I turn to all those responsible for this violence, so that all sides immediately lay down their arms!" Pope Benedict said on Sunday at his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. He carefully avoided mentioning any country by name – including Lebanon, which has born the brunt of Israeli shelling. However, he forcefully pointed out that the "ever more serious and tragic situation that the Middle East is experiencing" had achieved nothing except an escalation of death and hatred. This, he said, was proof that "instruments of violence" could not bring peace and stability to the region.

Several hundred people who jammed into the courtyard below his window for the Angelus chanted "Peace! Peace!" and he responded by saying, "Yes, peace!"

The Pope then called on "governments and international institutions" to "spare no effort in obtaining the necessary cessation of hostilities" in the region. While the United States leads a small group of countries opposed to an immediate ceasefire, the European Union this week approved a motion for an instant halt in the fighting.

During his lengthy appeal on Sunday the Pope also urged "people of good will" to intensify the shipment of humanitarian aid to "those populations so tried and needy".

Even without naming any countries or groups involved in the fighting, it was undoubtedly Pope Benedict's most pressing and heartfelt appeal for peace in a conflict that is now stretching into its fourth week. He lamented the "hundreds of dead, the many wounded, the numberless mass of homeless and refugees, the destruction of homes, cities and infrastructures" and the "growth of hatred and desire for revenge". He said: "These facts clearly demonstrate that it's not possible to re-establish justice, create a new order and build an authentic peace through instruments of violence." Several days earlier the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said the current conflict is part of a bigger strategy to "create a new order in the Middle East" and that arresting hostilities at this point would not bring lasting peace.

At a multinational summit here in Rome on 26 July the Americans blocked a motion for an immediate ceasefire.

AUSTRALIA

Aborigines 'reclaim' church

Mark Brolly
In Melbourne

A MURAL commemorating Pope John Paul II's historic visit to the Australian Outback 20 years ago has reignited divisions in a Sydney parish between the Aboriginal people and clergy appointed by Cardinal George Pell.

Last Sunday, worshippers who arrived at St Vincent's Church in the inner suburb of Redfern were surprised to find a mural painted on the eastern wall of the church commemorating the late Pope's 1986 address in Alice Springs on the Aboriginal contribution to Australia and the Church. The mural had been painted during the previous 24 hours without the knowledge of the parish priest, Fr Gerry Prindiville, a member of the Neocatechumenal Way.

The parish has been divided for several years between Aboriginal people and their supporters – inspired by the late parish priest Fr Ted Kennedy, a veteran campaigner for jus-

tice for Australia's indigenous people – and the clergy appointed to succeed him (*The Tablet*, 28 May and 18 June, 2005).

Cardinal Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, described the situation at Redfern as "painful". "Those who want a situation of peace are unable or unwilling to control the extremists. The parish clergy continue to have my full support. They have been subject to regular abuse, harassment and provocation, often during Mass itself, which I have never encountered anywhere else. This usually does not occur when the press is invited to be present.

"The role of the few aborigines who come to Mass is not one of the issues of contention, but the challenges presented by the human suffering in Redfern are enormous."

But the preacher at Sunday's Mass, Jesuit priest, lawyer and social justice advocate Fr Frank Brennan, told the congregation: "Not even the Pope would have imagined that 20 years later his words would be set in stone

here with this splendid mural which we will now bless ... We thank you for the inspiration of these words and the sacredness of this place ... We praise you and ask your blessing on this mural of our Church."

Fr Prindiville and representatives of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry could not be contacted before *The Tablet* went to press but the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on Monday that Fr Prindiville said the mural's artists "must have broken in to do it".

"It concerns me that someone can break into my church," he told the paper.

The article quoted "Griffo", one of those who painted the mural, as saying: "We were reclaiming the church for the Aboriginal people. We had to sort of sneak in, not let the priests know what we were doing." But he insisted entry was not forced, with access being gained through a window.

"This is our church," he said. "Fr Ted gave it to us. It's on our land. In memory of Fr Ted, we decided to paint the mural."

SPAIN

Theologians blamed for confusing the faithful

Robert Mickens

In Rome

CATHOLIC BISHOPS in Spain have blamed “erring” theologians – and the media that circulate their views – for what they say is the widespread secularisation that has taken root in the Church in the 40 years since the end of the Second Vatican Council.

In a pastoral instruction issued at the end of March, the Spanish bishops say theologians have “disturbed ecclesial life and the faith of simple persons” through their dissent from the hierarchy, false teaching on the person of Jesus Christ, and negation of such “truths of our faith” as “the resurrection of the flesh, individual and final judgement, purgatory, and the real possibility of eternal damnation (hell) or eternal happiness (heaven)”.

The 20-page document is said to have been prepared over the past few years in co-ordination with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and its then prefect, who is now the Pope. The respected Italian theological journal *Il Regno* published a translation of the instruction in its July edition. It said that the Spanish bishops were proposing it as a model for other episcopates both “in its content and its form”.

Theology and Secularisation in Spain appears to have been largely inspired by the CDF declaration *Dominus Iesus*, issued in 2000. It condemns a number of “erroneous theories” for the “damage they cause to faithful

and simple people”. But the instruction never identifies the authors of such theories. Rather, their names are found amid some 200 footnotes. It cites CDF condemnations of three Jesuits – Frs Roger Haight, Jacques Dupuis and Anthony DeMello (the last two are now dead), at least four other religious priests – Frs Tissa Balasuriya OMI, Leonardo Boff OFM, Diarmuid O’Murchu MSC and Marciano Vidal C.SS.R, and lay theologians Reinhard Messner and Juan Jose Tamayo.

“We bishops have recalled on various occasions that the principal issue the Church of Spain must deal with is its internal secularisation,” the introduction to the document says. They say this is due to the loss of faith and the “loss of intelligence of faith”. Throughout they are particularly critical of theologians – again without naming them – who criticise the Magisterium, adding that those who openly criticise the bishops “sow doubts and confusion among simple persons”.

In their instruction the Spanish bishops also condemn the erroneous use of the historical-critical method in interpreting Sacred Scripture; certain theologies of religious pluralism that confuse Christ’s role as unique Saviour of humanity; women’s ordination; a dichotomy between “hierarchical church” and “people’s church”; negation of the distinction between the ministerial priesthood of the ordained and the common priesthood of the baptised; the blessing of homosexual unions; and the denial of original sin.

CHINA

Crowds throng to funeral of Chinese bishop

Ellen Teague

THOUSANDS OF Catholics attended the funeral in China last week of a 90-year-old Catholic bishop who was described on his parish website as being “a bishop loyal to the Pope and a patriotic Chinese”.

The funeral of Bishop Augustine Zheng Shouduo of Xinjiang started with a procession from St Anthony’s Cathedral in Xinjiang, southwest of Beijing. Thousands walked behind the coffin as it made its way to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Church in Poli, a Catholic village in the suburbs where the bishop lived for many years. The main celebrant at the service, attended by several government officials, was Bishop Joseph Li Hongguang, Bishop Zheng’s former coadjutor, and many other bishops and priests concelebrated.

Bishop Zheng, who remained loyal to the Vatican but was approved by the Government, died of natural causes on 16 July. After being accused of counter-revolutionary crimes in 1964, he spent 15 years in a reform-through-labour camp.

■ The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, is to go to China for the first time later this year, visiting five cities including Beijing, at the invitation of senior leaders of the Chinese Protestant Church.

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INDIA

Church warns over convert law protest

Anto Akkara

In Delhi

CATHOLICS IN the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh are warning against public protests over legislation requiring religious converts to declare to police and government officials their intention a month ahead of the actual conversion itself.

Some Christian and secular groups have loudly criticised the state’s government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, for passing the new rule in an amendment to the state’s 1968 Freedom of Religion law, which had up until then only required a declaration to be made within a month of the conversion taking place.

Hindu fundamentalists claim that Christians are engaging in “dubious” – or forceful – conversions.

Such claims are strenuously denied by Pascal Topno, the Archbishop of Bhopal, the state’s capital. But the Archbishop added that open

opposition would only exacerbate the allegation.

“By too much public protest, we will only play into the hands of the (BJP) government over claims that we are inducing conversions,” Archbishop Topno told *The Tablet* on Tuesday. “We are concerned about this legislation and will campaign against it quietly. But we are also not afraid and will carry on with our normal work.”

Under the new law, police will investigate any proposed conversion to determine whether it is being made under “force or allurements”.

Failure to register a conversion in advance could result in a fine or imprisonment, with a priest facing up to a year in jail for not reporting the time and place of the proposed conversion.

Final approval of the new rule lies with Governor Balram Jhakar, who has to give it the green light before it is written into the state’s statutes.

GERMANY

Divisions over funding for stem-cell research

Christa Pongratz-Lippitt

In Vienna

WHILE BOTH the Catholic and Lutheran Churches in Germany have sharply criticised the European Union's decision to continue public funding of embryonic stem-cell research, politicians remain divided on the subject and most German scientists complain that German law puts them in an equivocal position.

The German bishops' conference said the EU decision was "shattering" and showed that protection of the human embryo was "in a bad way" in Europe. Research findings "obviously" had priority over an embryo's right to live, it commented. The decision was even more deplorable as there were alternatives in the form of adult stem-cell research.

The leader of the Lutheran Church in Germany, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, also deplored the EU's decision, but praised the German Minister for Research, Annette Schavan, who had insisted on an amendment to the EU agreement that rejected financial support for processes causing the destruction of embryos. Bishop Huber warned that, as things stood at the moment, it could not be ruled out that, in countries where the law permitted it, embryos would be destroyed in order

to produce new stem-cell lines and EU funds then used for research on these new lines.

In an interview with Deutsche Welle (the international German state radio station), one of Germany's leading stem-cell researchers, Professor Hans R. Schöler of the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Bio-Medicine at Münster, regretted that German law forbade using new stem-cell lines. If German scientists worked together with other European scientists who were using the new stem-cell lines, they were in effect breaking the law and could face prosecution. And yet Germany funded the same type of research in other countries that was banned in Germany itself.

There were increasing demands in parliament to relax the law, he said. The German Minister for Education and Research, Wolf-Michael Catenhusen, however, said that the majority of MPs in the German Parliament were against changing the law and did not want EU funds to be used for research to produce new stem-cell lines. As different countries in Europe had different ethical views on the subject, it was a question of how to cope with diversity. The EU should leave such decisions to each member country.

Germany pays for approximately one-fifth of the EU's research funding.

AUSTRALIA

Limits of religious influence on state 'must be defined'

A LEADING Australian Catholic priest and lawyer has called for parameters to be set on the extent to which religious believers bring their faith to bear in public affairs, *writes Mark Brolly*.

Fr Frank Brennan, a Jesuit and professor of law in the Institute of Legal Studies at the Australian Catholic University, said Muslims and other members of minority faiths in Australia should have the same opportunity and be subject to the same constraints as Christians from the major denominations when contributing to public debate, occupying positions of public trust and living a communal life in accordance with their world view.

"If we are to forestall the claims by fundamentalist Muslims to implement sharia law in a democratic nation state where they are in the majority or at least an influential minority, we need to set right the terms on which Christians and their Churches bring their religious perspective to bear on questions of law, policy and political agitation," Fr Brennan told a conference under the banner "Evangelisation and Culture in a Jesuit Light" in Melbourne last Saturday.

"The enactment of broad-sweeping anti-terrorism laws likely to be targeted at those of Middle Eastern background, especially Muslims, has highlighted the continuing shortfall in Australia's checks and balances requiring governments to justify the infringement of civil liberties despite the popular appeal of such measures in a climate of fear," he said in a speech made days after a Melbourne Muslim leader called the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, "ignorant" about Christianity, as well as Islam, over remarks about Islam earlier this year.

Fr Brennan continued: "It should be no insult to Muslims to insist that they follow the same rules and enjoy the same rights as other Australians. It should be no disrespect to Muslims to insist that Australians exercise their rights, including free speech, without legal restraint but with due regard for the sensitivity of others.

"There is a need to set right the parameters for religious participation in public life. Religious leaders who insist that conscience can err and therefore should be subject to church edict risk creating a situation in which their candidates are unelectable ... Thus the need for a stronger insistence on the primacy of the individual conscience in the performance of civic duties.

"Good law and sound public policy in a pluralist democracy must be spared much of the Christian ballast of internal Episcopal declarations so that conscientious Catholics can engage with the necessary readiness to compromise within the workings of the essentially profane state."

ARGENTINA

Rape victim at centre of abortion row

Colin Harding

AN Argentine girl with learning disabilities, who became pregnant after she was raped by her uncle and who has been at the centre of a bitter confrontation between supporters and opponents of abortion, was this week told by the Buenos Aires provincial Supreme Court that she could have a termination.

The decision, which reversed the decisions of lower courts, was greeted with dismay by campaigners, led by the Archbishop of La Plata, Mgr Héctor Aguer, who had argued that such a procedure would mean sacrificing an innocent life, and was not acceptable in any circumstances. The Rector of the Catholic University of La Plata, the provincial capital, had offered to take care of the girl and even adopt her baby.

The mother and sister of the 19-year-old girl, known only as LMR, requested the abortion, which is permissible in extreme circumstances under Argentine law. The Supreme Court justices made their decision – by a six-to-three majority – after interviewing the girl last week. She was apparently raped almost five months ago. The majority ruled

that the Court should never have been involved in the case, as the Argentine Penal Code authorises doctors to make a decision on whether or not to terminate a pregnancy when a "demented or idiot" woman is involved. The minority opinion was that the doctors' authority is overruled by international pacts and treaties, signed by Argentina, designed to defend the rights of the unborn child.

The case underlined deep divisions in Argentina over the abortion issue, with the Governor of Buenos Aires province, Felipe Solá, and the federal Health Minister, Ginés González García, rejecting campaigners' arguments against a termination. González García claims that there are 800,000 abortions a year in Argentina, most of them illegal, and he wants to make them more readily available. This caused public conflict last year with the Bishop of the Armed Forces, Mgr Antonio Baseotto (*The Tablet*, 5 March 2005).

The judiciary is also divided: a federal Supreme Court justice, Carmen María Argibay, publicly criticised the earlier decision of a provincial family court judge, Inés Noemí Siro, to deny permission for an abortion.

UGANDA

Talks raise peace hopes

Ellen Teague

THE CONSTRUCTIVE spirit of the Ugandan Government and rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) at peace talks in Southern Sudan has been welcomed by the Sant'Egidio community, which is helping to broker negotiations. The Rome-based Christian community issued a statement after the end of the first 10-day round of talks on 24 July, quoting Dr Riak Machar Teny, Southern Sudan's vice-president and chief mediator, saying that the first session moved from "hostility and animosity to ... mutual listening and give and take".

During the break last weekend, several religious and cultural leaders from northern Uganda, including Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, visited LRA leader Joseph Kony's hideout inside Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) Garamba National Park. They hoped to convince rebel leaders to leave the relative safety of the bush and come to the next round of talks in Juba. This was wide-

ly regarded as the latest sign that peace in northern Uganda may finally be possible after 21 years of conflict, which has displaced two million people and seen the abduction by the LRA of more than 25,000 children.

As part of the peace process, more than 100 children were paraded by the LRA to UN officials in a camp near the Sudan/DRC border last Sunday. Many were dressed in rags and upset, crying that they wanted to return to their families and attend school again. However, none of the children was handed over to the UN.

Kony reportedly set up several large tents made out of palm leaves to symbolise peace. The visit aimed to persuade Kony, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on war crimes charges, that the Ugandan Government will protect him from the ICC if he renounces armed rebellion. Substantive areas to be discussed in the second round of talks, which started on Monday, are ceasefire and disarmament, demobilisations and reintegration.

PHILIPPINES

Bishop lambasts 'beer and cigarettes' economy

Vincent McKee

A MANILA bishop has challenged the authority of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Bishop Antonio Tobias of Novaliches diocese launched a robust assault on Mrs Arroyo's claim in her State of the Nation address to be spearheading economic growth and recovery.

Criticising her economic programme, Bishop Tobias said: "A country can have growth without development, which is exactly what is happening in the Philippines." He added that Mrs Arroyo's claims translated as "more beer,

cigarettes, casinos, lotto, drugs, smuggling, golf clubs, high-rise apartments, real estate, tourist resorts, logging and extracting more minerals – depleting our natural resources at a rate faster than nature can regenerate".

Bishop Tobias further accused Mrs Arroyo of failing to address mass unemployment and debt servicing. He cited a recent finding by the SWS polling group that 67 per cent of Filipinos were unable to afford three meals per day and some 45 per cent of people rely on the earnings of the 8 million Filipinos working abroad.

Bishop Tobias is a long-stand-

ing advocate of the President's impeachment (for alleged electoral fraud in 2004, corruption and human rights abuses).

Meanwhile, last weekend saw the disappearance of a Protestant minister who had long championed the cause of peasants in the Luzonian province of Pangasinan. Eleuterio Revollido is a minister in the Philippines Independent Church, linked via the Aglapay Church to the Anglican Community, and chairman of the radical Bayan movement. Mrs Arroyo's Justice Minister, Raul Gonzalez, had earlier called him a "leftist front operator".

CONGO

Elections give hope for fresh start

LAST SUNDAY'S elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are "unfolding well", according to the priest who heads the country's Independent Electoral Commission, writes Ellen Teague.

Fr Muholongu Malumalu has said that despite localised instances of violence and fraud, "the number of cases we are reporting are marginal when compared to the whole".

He pointed out that most of the 49,746 polling stations were trouble-free, though he acknowledged that problems on election day included seven polling places being burned down after polls closed in Mweka, election kits being destroyed in Mbuji-Mayi, and a militia group in Ituri province – where war still rages – detaining voters at a roadblock.

Twenty-five million people were registered to vote in the

DRC's first free multi-party elections in 40 years. The full results will not be known for several weeks. Thirty-two candidates, including President Joseph Kabila, competed in the presidential polls, and around 9,700 candidates stood for the newly created 500-seat Parliament.

The elections are the culmination of a peace process that followed a devastating 1998-2003 war in the country.

UNITED STATES

Cardinal has cancer op

Rocco Palmo

In Philadelphia

DOCTORS ANNOUNCED earlier this week that Cardinal Francis George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago, had emerged from surgery to remove a cancerous bladder and a portion of his ureter with "the best possible outcome".

Alongside his duties as head of the nation's second-largest diocese, Cardinal George is widely viewed as the de facto leader of the American Church, given his post as Vice President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and his close ties to Pope Benedict XVI.

After surgery, his personal physician, Dr Myles Sheehan, who is also a Jesuit priest, said: "We do not know absolutely if the cardinal is cured nor can we say definitively that he is cancer-free. What we can say is that the cardinal is a cancer survivor with a good prognosis."

HONDURAS

Reprimand for campaigner

CARDINAL OSCAR Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa and head of the Church in Honduras, has reprimanded the Bishop of Santa Rosa de Copán, Mgr Luis Alfonso Santos Villeda, for taking part in an anti-mining protest that closed sections of the Pan-American Highway.

A number of priests also took part in the demonstration against foreigners owning large stakes in Honduran mines.

Speaking on local radio, Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga said: "A nation changes through dialogue and education, not by occupying highways, which belong to everyone ... I think Bishop Santos was not adequately informed, because laws don't get repealed just because somebody makes a fuss on the streets."

IN BRIEF

Bolivian Church accused

President Evo Morales of Bolivia last week accused the country's bishops of behaving as though they were members of the Inquisition when they criticised his proposed education reforms (*The Tablet*, 24 June). Education Minister Félix Patzi added that the bishops were lying when they claimed that the Government was seeking to undermine the Church. Mr Morales and Mr Patzi argue that all religions should be treated equally in the school curriculum, and Catholicism should relinquish its dominant role.

Boat women 'ordained'

In the latest of a series of international events conducted in defiance of Church teaching, eight women declared themselves "ordained" to the priesthood on a boat in the middle of a Pittsburgh river this week. Four other women claimed to have been advanced to the diaconate at the same rite. Organised by the group Roman Catholic Womanpriests, which in 2002 held a similar event on a boat in Austria, the ceremony was the first of its kind to be conducted in the United States.

Oldest cardinal dies

The oldest cardinal in the Church, Johannes Willebrands, died on Wednesday at the age of 96. Since 1960 the Dutch cardinal had been a member of what is today the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, which he chaired between 1969 and 1989. He played a key role in fostering dialogue between the Vatican and the Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran Churches. He was considered responsible for the documents of the Second Vatican Council on non-Christian religions, which opened dialogue with the Jewish community.

New head for JPPII centre

A temporary head has been appointed to the troubled Washington museum dedicated to the late Pope John Paul II. Dominican Fr Steven Boguslawski, who has served until now as Rector-President of Detroit's Sacred Heart Major Seminary, was last week confirmed as head of the Pope John Paul II Cultural Centre for a year while a search for a permanent executive director takes place. The centre has been criticised over reports of its soaring costs and small amount of visitors.

Call for dialogue

Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada, Archbishop of Guatemala, has called for urgent talks to resolve the country's most pressing problems, which he listed as "violence in all parts of our society" and conflicts over land, health care and education. The cardinal said that violence was so prevalent that even disputes over a car parking place were likely to be settled with a bullet.

Letter from Rome

Pope Benedict XVI got back from the Italian Alps last week and made a beeline for his spruced-up summer residence at Castel Gandolfo where he'll be staying until early September.

"I'm beginning to learn how to be a pope," he joked with reporters, as he brought his two-and-a-half-week Alpine holiday to an end. Can you believe he's been in the top job for only 15 months? At some future date we might all nostalgically look back at this joyful time as the "calm before the storm".

On the other hand – to borrow the title from a film – it may turn out that this is "as good as it gets". The real clues will not come until after 15 September. That's when Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone SDB formally takes over as Secretary of State, and helps bring other long-awaited changes in the Roman Curia. But up until then the Pope will leisurely take care of business at his swimming-pool-equipped, hilltop palace high above Lake Albano; except for on Wednesdays, of course, when a helicopter shuttles him to St Peter's Square for his general audience with the hordes of pilgrims. And, believe me, hordes there are! Even though some 200,000 residents fled the Eternal City for holiday destinations last weekend – and more than that are expected to take off this weekend – the tourists continue to arrive.

A friend who works in a travel agency at Stazione Termini lamented that he'd never seen so many tour buses in town at the beginning of August. But that wasn't his only complaint. "You'll never believe what happened the other day," he said. "A young English-speaking woman asked if we sold tickets to Da Vinci Code Airport!" Rome's main airport at Fiumicino is actually called Leonardo Da Vinci.

Fortunes have risen and fallen at the Vatican in the last 15 months in ways that no one could have predicted. And, mark my words, things are only going to get more interesting as the moon continues to wax and wane. Though it was not at all clear in the first weeks of the new pontificate, the multimillion-pound Radio Vaticana (RV) – the bane of the Council of Cardinals that oversees the expenditures of the Roman Curia – has suddenly emerged as the "highly favoured daughter" in the papal court. Curial officials who once derided the 34-language station now gladly give it their views and voices. You'd have to check some pretty dusty volumes of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* to discover the last time the top brass in the Secretariat of State issued declarations through the Pope's Radio rather than the Holy See press office. But that's what's beginning to happen. Of course, it hasn't hurt Radio Vaticana's fortunes that its

director general – Fr Federico Lombardi SJ – was recently appointed head of the press room, too. With the Pope's radio, television centre and press office under his control, Fr Lombardi has unexpectedly surfaced as the Roman-collared equivalent of Rupert Murdoch. It must be pointed out that Pope Benedict cleverly left us signs that this was going to happen, but none of us picked up on them. First, he gave an "unheard-of" exclusive interview to Vatican Radio last August in the run-up to World Youth Day in Cologne. Then he made a pastoral visit to the 400-employee station in March, something few Vatican offices can boast of. And now Pope Benedict will again be interviewed by the adio – this time as a curtain-raiser to his 9-14 September visit to Bavaria.

A couple of weeks ago the Vatican's newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, ran a feature article on Cardinal Giuseppe Siri (1906-1989) of Genoa, which could well tie into the centenary of the late cardinal's birth. He was one of the most staunchly conservative cardinals of his era. And a long era it was – he was given the red hat at only 47 years of age. The legendary Vaticanist Benny Lai wrote a book about Siri in 1999, which he called *The Non-Elected Pope*. The title refers to the 1978 conclave when Siri, the conservatives' *papabile*, sunk his chances by voicing his disdain for "collegiality" in an interview he was told would be published once the cardinals were locked in the Sistine Chapel.

The only problem is that it came out a day earlier. Ah, the ways of the Holy Spirit.

The Church would have evolved a lot differently had he, rather than the John Pauls, become Pope. Well, guess what? There are some people out there who believe Cardinal Siri actually was elected Pope. Not in 1978, but way back in 1958. The theory is that, as Pius XII's supposed candidate, Cardinal Siri won on the first ballot, evidently taking the name Gregory XVII, but he was prohibited from assuming the throne by Cardinal Tisserant. The cardinals were afraid that the fiercely anti-Communist Siri would spell danger and disaster for the Church in the Soviet Bloc. Sound bizarre? The now elderly Rosminian Father, Jean Marie Charles-Roux, who worked in the papal household at the time, has gone on record basically agreeing with the theory. Instead, Cardinal Giuseppe Roncalli was elected Pope in 1958 – on the fourth ballot – and he took the name John XXIII. According to the conspiracy theorists, he did so because there was an anti-pope by that same name. It's August and it's hot. I really think I need a vacation.

Robert Mickens