

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Window of opportunity for Africa

Timothy Lavin
In Washington

FOLLOWING THE Pope's emphasis on the needs of Africa in his Easter Sunday "Urbi et Orbi" message, the Vatican's UN observer has added his voice to that of Pope Benedict XVI, urging the world to seize a unique development opportunity that is opening up for the continent.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore told a special UN session on population and development last week that Africa's shifting demographics "should hand that continent an unprecedented advantage in economic terms, as a young and numerous workforce should be available to it until at least 2050, while the demographic dividend in most other regions will have run out".

Archbishop Migliore was referring to the "demographic window" that opens for developing countries when a relatively large working-age population is available to support relatively fewer older and younger dependants. By targeted investment, especially in education, it is possible to push development along at an unprecedented rate, before the "window" closes again once improved health services



Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's nuncio to the United Nations.
Photo: CNS

allow for a greater proportion of children and old people relative to the working population. "Asian Tiger" economies of the 1980s and 1990s took advantage of this window, with lasting economic benefits.

The UN commission was meeting in New York to discuss a recent report on ageing populations. But in Africa's case, the Holy See emphasised, the demographic picture in the coming decades is different, and the period offers a one-off opportunity for prudent investment. "To ensure that Africa does not miss this window of opportunity for economic development, it must be helped, inter alia, to invest in its human capital and infrastructure to underpin economic growth," Archbishop Migliore said, adding that the Vatican believed education should thus be a top priority.

Population experts largely agree. "Sub-Saharan Africa has been the last region of the world to enter into this demographic transition," said Ronald D. Lee, a professor of economics and demographics at the University of California, Berkeley. "But it will be less

painful to invest there over the coming decades. And this shift offers the chance to put infrastructure in place so that parents can invest more easily in their children's education and think about saving, accumulating assets. Then you can turn the liability of an ageing population into something positive."

Archbishop Migliore added that increased education for women in particular could substantially affect population growth. "As women become better educated, they gain greater respect," he said. "They become breadwinners; they acquire maturity in parental responsibility and a greater say in family affairs."

"Investing in people in this way," he said, "especially in education, is surely to be preferred to legal imposition of limits, to artificial corrective measures and drastic policies, and to the unacceptable practice of eliminating fetuses, especially females, in order to limit population growth."

But the commission's session contained some sobering assessments as well. For much of the industrialised world, especially in Europe, the demographic window has been closed for some time, and the elderly will soon impose a much heavier burden on those of working age. By 2050, the commission estimates, "the proportion of people aged 60 will have doubled and their number will reach 2 billion – three times what it is today".

This suggests a challenge of a different order. "It is to be hoped that states will work to foster respect for human life in all its stages and to find solutions that are right and just, not merely pragmatic," Archbishop Migliore said. "Here in particular, promoting solidarity between generations will be very valuable."

FRANCE

Pay-offs for failed bosses 'scandalous'

FRANCE'S BISHOPS have denounced lucrative "golden parachutes" for failed managers after an Airbus chief executive sacked for delays in its new super jumbo jet, the double-decker A380, left with an 8.5 million euro bonus, writes Tom Heneghan.

"What is legal is not necessarily moral," Rouen Archbishop Jean-Charles Descubes said. "These indemnities are scandalous to people with modest incomes." Executive pay has become an issue in the presidential campaign after it became known that Noel Forgeard received his payment even though Airbus had to cut 10,000 jobs across Europe. The front-running conservative, Nicolas Sarkozy, pledged to abolish "golden parachutes" if elected on 6 May.

(See Alain Woodrow, page 4.)

ISRAEL

Nuncio in Holocaust ceremony U-turn

THE POPE'S ambassador to Israel attended a Holocaust memorial event on Sunday, narrowly averting a major diplomatic row between Israel and the Vatican over the wartime behaviour of Pope Pius XII, writes Michael Hirst.

Archbishop Antonio Franco, the apostolic nuncio to Israel, had earlier announced that he would be boycotting the Yad Vashem torch-lighting ceremony in protest against the museum's description of the wartime Pope.

One of the museum's pictures shows the candidate for sainthood standing with fascist leaders, and is adjoined by a caption stating: "Even when reports about the murder of Jews reached the Vatican, the pope did not protest."

The nuncio said that the museum's treatment of Pius XII was at odds with contemporary historical research, and insisted that Pius XII was instrumental in saving lives of thousands of Jews by a policy of quiet diplomacy.

"I consider this picture in that place and the caption that accompanies it unfair and something that disturbs my feelings and the feelings of Catholics all over the world," said the archbishop. He added that his boycott threat was in no way aimed at distancing himself from ceremonies honouring Holocaust victims, but rather a diplomatic initiative to highlight the seriousness with which the Vatican takes the issue.

He reversed his decision to boycott the ceremony after he received an eleventh-hour assurance from Yad Vashem's chairman, Avner Shalev, that the museum was prepared to revise its position. "The evaluation of the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust poses a challenge to those who wish to seriously confront it," Mr Shalev wrote. "We would be pleased to examine any new documentation that may come to light on this issue."

ROME

Pope may spring surprises in his third year

Robert Mickens
In Rome

AS POPE Benedict XVI began the third year of his pontificate on Thursday, one of his closest aides predicted that "we are possibly in for surprises". Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna was in Rome last weekend for a series of celebrations – including the launch of the Pope's new book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, and a star-studded classical music concert – to mark the Bavarian pontiff's eightieth birthday. After the festivities the cardinal told an Austrian radio station that the Pope was "relaxed" and suggested that he could soon be taking some surprising initiatives.

On Sunday the Pope celebrated a large open-air Mass to mark his birthday and his second anniversary as Bishop of Rome.

"We are gathered here to reflect on the mark-

ing of a not-brief period of my existence," he told the some 45,000 people – many of them Germans – who gathered for the liturgy in St Peter's Square. The Pope gave thanks for his parents, siblings and friends, as well as the gift of his faith, in a homily that traced the spiritual highlights of his life. The Pope's brother, Mgr Georg Ratzinger, and a leading Orthodox bishop representing the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople were among those who attended the Mass.

On Monday, the actual birthday, Pope Benedict dined with 48 cardinals from all over the world before attending a special concert by the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Stuttgart, which played music by Mozart, Dvorák and Gabrieli. Sophia Loren was the most famous of the 6,000 invited guests, who also included political leaders from Italy and Bavaria. At end of the nearly two-hour-long concert the

Pope thanked the musicians, saying that he was "convinced" that music was the "universal language of beauty, capable of uniting people of good will" throughout the world.

But the Pope's birthday celebrations actually began on 13 April in the Vatican with the unveiling of his 446-page book, *Jesus of Nazareth*. In the absence of the author, Cardinal Schönborn, Waldensian theologian Daniele Garrone and the Italian secular philosopher Massimo Cacciari presented the volume in the Vatican's Synod Hall to a gathering of cardinals and other "ecclesial and civic personalities". The Pope says his primary focus is on showing readers that they can trust that the Jesus presented in the gospels and taught by the Church's Magisterium is the true "historical" Jesus, despite doubts that even some Catholic biblical scholars have raised about those claims in the past several decades.

Priest investigated for assaults on girls

ITALIAN PROSECUTORS have put an elderly priest under criminal investigation after a newspaper revealed that the Archdiocese of Florence secretly suspended him earlier this year for sexually abusing young girls in his parish between 1973 and 1987, writes Robert Mickens. Fr Lelio Cantini, 84, a charismatic priest who is described as having an almost cult-like following, was also charged with the coercion and manipulation of consciences, *La Repubblica* reported on 8 April. Florence's archbishop, Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, privately informed the 20 victims in January that Fr Cantini – whom they had first denounced back in October 2004 – had been canonically prohibited from celebrating the sacraments in public for the next five years. But the 20

victims said the sentence was too lenient.

Cardinal Antonelli said last Sunday in *L'Avvenire* newspaper that he understood the anger, but said that people needed to "bear in mind that the Church must witness to divine mercy". As to why the priest's case was not dealt with in the open, the cardinal said: "It does not seem to me that this is an evangelical way to deal with persons." He said the priest was willing to meet individually with the victims to ask forgiveness, but would not face them as a group.

Fr Cantini was pastor of Queen of Peace church on the outskirts of Florence for some 40 years. Last October several Florence priests wrote to the Pope urging him to remove Fr Cantini from the priesthood.

THE NETHERLANDS

Christianity seen as 'a stand-by faith'

A MAJOR study of religion in the Netherlands has highlighted wide gaps in main Christian beliefs between Dutch Catholics and Protestants, writes William Jurgensen.

"God in the Netherlands", a study conducted every 10 years since 1966, also said religion is still declining. Regular church-going was down to 16 per cent of all Christians last year compared with 21 per cent in 1996. "We can speak of Christianity as a stand-by faith," the study said. It showed that Catholics, about one-third of the population compared to the Protestant one-fifth, are less firm in their beliefs than their Calvinist and Reformed cousins.

GERMANY

Support for plans to increase crèche places

GERMANY'S CATHOLIC bishops have agreed to support the Government's plans to increase the number of crèche places for the under-threes, but insist that parents must have a choice and not be offered just one model of child care, writes Christa Pongratz-Lippitt.

The child care issue was given priority by the bishops at their spring conference in the second week of April as debate on the issue had not died down since Bishop Walter Mixa of Augsburg criticised the Government's plans in February (*The Tablet*, 3 March). The bish-

ops distanced themselves from Bishop Mixa's biting criticism of the Government's proposals, especially from his comments regarding the Minister for Family Affairs. In many families both partners had to go out to work and increasing the number of crèche places was therefore imperative, Cardinal Karl Lehmann, the bishops' conference chairman, said after the conference. At the same time, the state must not only support a single model in which both parents were persuaded to return to work as soon as possible after the birth of a child.

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Bush praises Catholic teaching

Timothy Lavin

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. Bush commended American Catholic schools and the Church's support for the "dignity of human life" at a prayer breakfast in Washington, DC last week, while seeking Catholic backing for his stem-cell research and immigration policies.

"Our Declaration of Independence states that our freedom rests on self-evident truths about the dignity of the human person," he said. "Throughout our nation's history, Catholic Americans have embraced, sustained, and given their lives to defend these truths."

The fourth annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast drew more than 2,500 Catholics, including Supreme Court Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito, and several members of the church hierarchy, including Arch-

bishop Donald Wuerl of Washington, DC and Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Mr Bush framed his speech in terms of "renewing the promise of America", a process that he said begins with regard for the sanctity of human life. "In our day, there is a temptation to manipulate life in ways that do not respect the humanity of the person," he said. "When that happens, the most vulnerable among us can be valued for their utility to others, instead of their inherent worth. We must continue to work for a culture of life where we recognise in every human life the image of our Creator."

Those words held particular resonance for Mr Bush last week, as he vowed to veto legislation passed by the Senate that would expand federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research. The President's view on the issue

largely coheres with that of the US bishops' conference, which also supports Mr Bush's call, emphasised at the breakfast, for "comprehensive" immigration reform.

Mr Bush praised Catholic schools but conceded that he was worried about the viability of some. "America's Catholic schools were built by poor immigrants, they were staffed by legions of dedicated nuns, brothers, and priests, and they have given millions of Americans the knowledge and character they need to succeed in life," he said. "Today, these schools are also serving thousands of non-Catholic children in some of the poorest neighbourhoods. I appreciate the tremendous sacrifices many dioceses are making to keep their inner-city schools going. I am worried that too many of these schools are closing, and our nation needs to do something about it."

Victory for tomato pickers in battle with McDonald's

FOLLOWING A bitter two-year battle, McDonald's Corporation reached an agreement with a Florida workers' coalition last week to pay a penny more per pound for its tomatoes, effectively giving a major raise to the immigrant labourers who harvest them, writes Timothy Lavin.

McDonald's will also work with its suppliers and the tomato pickers to improve working conditions and allow compliance checks by a third party.

Numerous religious groups, including the US bishops' conference and the National Council of Churches, had supported the campaign, organised by the Coalition of Immolakee Workers (CIW). The CIW won a similar fight in 2005 with Yum Brands, parent company of the Taco Bell and KFC fast-food chains. Although McDonald's buys only 1.5 per cent of the tomatoes sold in Florida, union leaders considered the deal a heartening victory.

"We have taken another major step towards a world where we as farm workers can enjoy a fair wage and humane working conditions in exchange for the hard and essential work we do every day," said Lucas Benitez, a leader of the coalition. "Today's agreement should send a strong message to the rest of the industry." Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, who heads the bishops' domestic policy committee, wrote supporting the farm workers to James Skinner, McDonald's CEO, last September. "The Catholic bishops have long been outspoken advocates for the rights of farm workers. Too often, their lives lack adequate security, dignity and reasonable working conditions," he wrote.

Abuse allegations continue downward trend

Rocco Palmo

In Philadelphia

THE US Church's gradual resolution of clergy sexual abuse cases continued its progress in 2006, as the number of allegations and the amount in settlements paid to victims both dropped. But the news was tempered by a major newspaper writing of the "dwindling" influence of Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles, and by calls for the resignation of the hierarchy's elected head.

According to an audit sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 710 people reported allegations of abuse to church authorities last year, a 9 per cent decline from 2005.

The costs for settlements, therapy and other obligations came to US\$400 million (£200m), a decrease of 15 per cent from the year before.

Family planning row at World Bank

ALREADY EMBROILED in controversy over its president's reported intervention to obtain a substantial pay rise for his girlfriend, the World Bank has endured additional scrutiny amid reports that its managing director sought to "radically" shift the bank's policy of supporting family planning efforts in Africa as a means to combat Aids, writes Rocco Palmo.

As reported last week in the *Financial Times*, the bank's second-ranking official, Juan José Daboub, ordered that provisions to fund family planning, including condom use, be removed from a proposal submitted by Madagascar. Mr Daboub, a native of El Salvador, was a member of the country's ruling conservative party. Since his appointment to

Overall, US dioceses and religious orders have paid out in excess of US\$1.5 bn (£750m) in settlements. Catholics' confidence in the bishops was 70 per cent for the second year.

Amid his diocese's declaration of bankruptcy and a US\$48m (£24m) settlement, the USCCB President Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane rejected an "ultimatum" from four prominent donors to resign last week. Bishop Skylstad reportedly told the men that "the perceived community of bishops, priests and laity" were "the perpetrators of the abuse". The laymen responded that the bishop was "just wrong" to include the laity in his depiction.

Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "scandal and shifting demographics" have "diminished" the influence of the city's Archbishop, Cardinal Roger Mahony, whose 4.3 million-member archdiocese still faces more than 500 unresolved abuse lawsuits.

the World Bank, the paper reported that "there was a widespread perception" among staff that the institution's "emphasis on contraception in preventing disease was being altered".

Before the family-planning story came to light, the Washington-based bank was already in the spotlight after revelations that its president, Paul Wolfowitz, used his influence to ensure a comfortable secondment package for his Libyan-born companion, Shaha Ali Riza, who was transferred to the State Department following Mr Wolfowitz's 2005 appointment to the World Bank.

On Monday, the *New York Times* echoed calls from bank personnel that Mr Wolfowitz should stand down.

GERMANY

Memorial service for ex-Nazi called off

A MEMORIAL service for a former governor of the south-western German state of Baden-Württemberg, Hans Filbinger, planned for 17 April at St Hedwig's Cathedral, Berlin, was called off at the last moment by Cardinal Georg Sterzinsky on account of the uproar over Filbinger's Nazi past, *writes Christa Pongratz-Lippitt*.

Filbinger, who was a military judge in the Second World War, died aged 93 at the beginning of April. He was governor of Baden-Württemberg from 1966 to 1978 but had to resign when his Nazi past emerged.

The present governor of Baden-Württemberg, Günther Oettinger, a prominent Christian Democrat, caused a political uproar at Filbinger's funeral by insisting in his eulogy that Filbinger was "not a National Socialist. On the contrary, he was opposed to the Nazi regime."

Politicians across the spectrum expressed their indignation and the Filbinger case made headlines in Germany for several days. Oettinger consequently cancelled his plans to

take part in the Pope's birthday celebrations in Rome on 16 April, where he had intended to hold a short address. His delayed apology in the German tabloid *Bildzeitung*, in which he claimed to have been "misinterpreted" and said he was sorry if he had offended Nazi victims and their families, was considered inadequate by his critics and only served to exacerbate nationwide indignation. The Central Council of Jews in Germany and several Socialist politicians called for Oettinger's resignation.

As criticism of a memorial service for Filbinger in Catholic circles mounted, Cardinal Sterzinsky cancelled it at short notice. His spokesman said the cardinal wanted to prevent the service from being "abused and misunderstood". Many Catholics had been outraged that a memorial service for Filbinger was to be held in the very cathedral where Fr Bernhard Lichtenberger, a Berlin priest who opposed the Nazi regime and died on his way to Dachau concentration camp in 1943, was buried, the spokesman said.

FRANCE

Rémond, leading intellectual, dies

RENE REMOND, one of France's leading Catholic intellectuals, died last Saturday in Paris aged 88, *writes Tom Heneghan*.

A doyen of the country's historians, Rémond was an authority on conservative politics and Catholicism in modern France.

Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, head of the bishops' conference, praised him as "a great Christian and true humanist" who had "an open mind, a deep faith and a real bond with the Church".

Rémond, elected to the Académie Française in 1998, was president of the University of Paris-Nanterre from 1971 to 1976 and taught at the elite Sciences-Po institute in the capital for decades. His histories of the French right wing are standard reference works and he was a frequent television commentator on current affairs. He was active in lay Catholic groups since his student days and argued for a Church with "an enlightened, free and adult conscience" that faces up to the intellectual challenges of the day. "Pious answers are not enough," he said. He was particularly concerned about the rise of a new, outspoken atheism in France.

TURKEY

Church refused permission for cross

THE TURKISH Government has rejected requests from the Armenian Apostolic Church to be allowed to install a cross at a newly restored church which was abandoned during the 1915 mass killing of ethnic Armenians, *writes Jonathan Luxmoore*.

"There is not even a cross at the Hagia Sophia temple, since it is a museum," the country's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "This church will also function as a museum."

Work on the tenth-century Holy Cross church on Akdamar Island in Lake Van, eastern Anatolia, was completed in March at a cost of 1.5 million euros by the Ankara Govern-

ment, which initiated the restoration at European Union urging. The 29 March reopening ceremony was boycotted by the Armenian Church's leader, Catholicos Karekin II, who insisted that the church's use solely as a museum would not be "a positive step towards rapprochement".

In a letter to Turkey's Culture Ministry, the head of Turkey's 60,000-strong Armenian Apostolic community, Patriarch Mesrob II Mutafyan, asked to be allowed to "place an iron cross, funded by our community, in its original place, and to be able to conduct a liturgy here once a year".

CZECH REPUBLIC

State takes back St Vitus cathedral

THE CZECH Catholic Church has handed over Prague cathedral to the state after a February court ruling overturned the Church's ownership, *writes Jonathan Luxmoore*.

The Gothic St Vitus cathedral, which dominates the Prague skyline, was founded in 1344 by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV and nationalised under a 1954 Communist decree. Although it was returned to the Church in 1994, Czech MPs launched a series of appeals.

In its February ruling, the Supreme Court cancelled a June 2006 municipal court

decision recognising the Church as legal owner. However, a Catholic lawyer, Petr Zdercik, told Prague Radio that church leaders were ready to go to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The Czech bishops' conference spokesman, Jiri Gracka, told *The Tablet*: "Though deprived of ownership, the Church will still hold services in the cathedral, but the legal process has to start all over again." Prague's district court is to begin hearing a fresh church claim to the cathedral on 3 May.

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IN BRIEF

Call for tighter gun controls

Mgr Thomas Shreve, the vicar general of the Diocese of Richmond in Virginia, told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on Wednesday that he favoured tighter gun controls in the state. Asked whether allowing students to be armed on the campus would have prevented the massacre of 32 students and staff on Monday by a South Korean English student, Cho Seung Hui, Mgr Shreve said this was "asking for chaos". "We are worshipping at altars of darkness," he said, "and whenever we do things that are harmful to others, we pave the way for much more serious harm."

Kenya land clashes

Catholic bishops in Kenya are warning that the ethnic violence and clashes over land in the Chebyuk Settlement Scheme in Mt Elgon district could escalate even more dramatically. The Red Cross reports that at least 150 people have died and nearly 60,000 been displaced in attacks by a tribal militia known as the Saboat Land Defence Army. Local people have named the militia "Janjaweed", after the one in Darfur, Sudan, because it also kills men and rapes women. "I am afraid if the issue is not settled fast it would plunge the whole region into war," Bishop Maurice Crawley of Katala told the press last week.

Plan B challenge

The American Food and Drug Administration caved in to political coercion and improperly approved over-the-counter sales of the controversial "morning-after pill", a coalition of doctors' associations and pro-life activists charged in a lawsuit last week. The suit alleges that the FDA approved the sales even though the pill's manufacturers had not proved that it was safe for all women and had failed to demonstrate that the directions on the drug's labels were sufficiently clear. The FDA last year legalised sales of the pill, called Plan B, at pharmacies without the need for a prescription to women 18 and older.

Birthplace open

The house in Marktl am Inn where Joseph Ratzinger was born on 16 April 1927 is now open to the public. At 9.30 a.m. on the Pope's 80th birthday, Bishop Wilhelm Schraml of Passau said Mass at St Oswald's church in Marktl where Joseph Ratzinger was baptised, 80 years earlier, almost to the minute. Joseph was born at 4.15 a.m. and baptised a few hours later. Bishop Schraml then went on to open the newly renovated house where the Ratzingers lived in 1927. The house is open to the public from April to October at the following times: Tuesdays to Fridays from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed on Mondays except on public holidays.

Letter from Rome

The Pope this weekend makes his first official pastoral visit to an Italian diocese other than his own. Actually, he'll be visiting two – Vigevano and Pavia – in the northern region of Lombardy. This is Pope Benedict's first outing in the newly begun third year of his pontificate and one that will be part personal pilgrimage as well as pastoral duty. The highlight will be at the very end of the day-and-a-half visit on Sunday evening to Pavia. The main attraction for the Pope will be a visit to the tomb of St Augustine of Hippo, the fifth-century bishop and theologian whose writings have had perhaps the most impact on his own thinking. But before he gets there, the 80-year-old pontiff will have a few other obligations to fulfil, including the blessing of a new cultural centre for "inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue" that the Augustinian friars are building. It will bear the name Benedict XVI. And for the first time since Regensburg last September the Pope will give a university lecture.

Pope Benedict's weekend pastoral visit actually begins late on Saturday afternoon with an outdoor Mass in Vigevano – the only diocese in Lombardy that Pope John Paul II never visited. The city is best known today as the shoe-manufacturing centre of Italy. It even has a shoe museum with famous footwear from people like Mussolini and John XXIII. Naturally, local organisers could not resist the chance to give Pope Benedict a special pair of custom-made shoes.

Book reviewers are raving about a new work by Cardinal Angelo Scola entitled: *Una nuova laicità: temi per una società plurale*. Like many things the current Patriarch of Venice says and writes, the title does not translate literally or easily. "A new secularism" does well enough for the first part, but "themes for a plural society" seems a bit too odd for the rest. Nonetheless the 65-year-old cardinal evidently espouses some "courageous openings" and offers an "innovative vision" regarding the relationship between faith and culture in our rapidly globalising world, as one review said. This includes the affirmation that the European vision of society and its idea of rationality (*razionalità*) cannot necessarily work for Islamic or Buddhist cultures. If the book report is right, this is certainly a bold statement by a man considered close to the Pope. But that begs the question, because it is not always an easy task to discern where Cardinal Scola's energetic intellect, nourished in the "Communion and Liberation" (CL) school, tries to take his readers. The cardinal is most convincing when he argues

for a Church that actively promotes the idea of Christianity as the epitome of the "good and happy life", a common CL leitmotif. In a "plural society" that means a Church that proposes and lets the people decide.

These are timely thoughts for the future of Europe, a continent that Pope Benedict worries is losing its identity. In his lecture at the Benedictine Abbey in Subiaco two weeks before becoming Pope, he fretted about how changes in society posed a threat. But not everyone sees trends like globalisation, secularism and multiculturalism in the same way. Soon to be announced, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini SJ is to give his own lecture in Subiaco in October. And it is likely to offer at least some "complementary" points to the one the once-future pope gave in April 2005.

Public debate over the presence and integration of immigrants in Italy was reignited several days ago when a "revolt" nearly broke out in Chinatown in the northern city of Milan. Police started ticketing double-parked merchandise vans and lorries and a scuffle broke out between two women, one a Milanese police officer and the other a Chinese merchant. The incident spread throughout the neighbourhood – Milan's 10,000-strong Chinese community is the biggest in Italy – as young Chinese men and women set upon the police, mostly by shouting and shoving. The officers, in turn, called in reinforcements. Soon people were pouring out of apartments and shops armed with Chinese flags, as they continued their "argument" with police.

The scene finally died down, but it has left a bad taste in the mouth of many. Young people from right-wing groups in Milan organised a protest to demand stricter controls on immigration and laws to "force" those who come to the country to get "Italianised" or get out. Leaders of the Chinese community in Rome sought to play down the incident and a spokesman for the Sant'Egidio Community, which is actively involved in integrating immigrants, said their was no fear of any sort of a revolt in the Eternal City. Sant'Egidio's Mario Marazzitti said the Esquilina Hill where the Chinese community is centred was not technically a Chinatown, but a "multi-ethnic and multicultural" community that had revitalised a once run-down area. But he said that more had to be done to "accelerate the process of integration" and "not leave people on the margins for years". For example, he called for greater access to Italian language courses and immediate Italian citizenship for those children born here of immigrant parents. **Robert Mickens**