

## Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

### Pope redoubles peace efforts

*"If war is frightening, just as frightening is this chorus of bellicose consensus," writes the daily of the Holy See.*

**W**ar is an adventure with no return," John Paul II had proclaimed in his Christmas message. The same appeal was written on the signs raised by those who gathered in St. Peter's Square Jan. 13 to take part in the Pope's Angelus. Once again the Pontiff turned to the crowd and wielded his full authority for a last-minute peace proposal: "Under today's conditions, a war would not resolve the problems, but only worsen them. The solution can be found in generous peace proposals from both sides. This is the appeal which, for my part, in this decisive hour for the fate of men and peoples, I feel the need to turn to all interested parties. It is an appeal I direct to Iraq, that it make a gesture of peace which would only do it honor in the face of history. It is an appeal I direct to all the states concerned, that they organize a peace conference that contributes to resolving all the problems of a peaceful coexistence in the Middle East."

The international conference proposal is not liked by the Americans, nor by Israel. But in the Vatican, efforts are intensifying to keep alive the hope for peace.

On Jan. 15, the day the United Nations deadline expired, the Pope sent messages to Presidents Bush and Hussein. In the texts, released to the press the next day, the Pope pleaded for "courageous steps that can represent the start of a true path toward peace." To the Iraqi President the Pope said: "I trust that you too, Mr. President, will want to make the most opportune decisions and make courageous ges-

tures that can mark the beginning of a true peace process." To Bush, the Pope asked for a "a last-minute effort for dialogue" so that "peace can still be saved." In the American President's response, that same day, there was no hint of the imminent military attack. He said he was "substantially in accord" with the Pontiff. As for Saddam Hussein, the Chaldean patriarch of Baghdad, Raphael I. Bidawid, later told the press that "he had not had the time to respond."

Then in the night between Jan. 16-17, a few minutes before the telexes put out the news of the bombing of Baghdad, Italian President Francesco Cossiga phoned the Vatican Secretary of State-designate, Msgr. Angelo Sodano, so that the Pontiff would be informed. In the Vatican they do not hide a certain bitterness about the rudeness of the U.S. government's behavior and the intransigence of President Hussein. The Pope is saddened, said Monsignor Sodano in an interview to the weekly *Il Sabato*: "I witnessed the personal commitment of the Holy Father to keep from reaching such a military solution, which is not destined to resolve adequately the problems posed by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Today I have witnessed the Pope's sadness and his commitment to continuing to work so that the time of trial may end as soon as possible."

On Jan. 20, *Osservatore Romano*, the newspaper of the Holy See, wrote in its column *Acta diurna* that "war is a defeat also for those who think to be its eventual winners," and stated,

"Permit us to say firmly that if war is frightening, just as frightening is this chorus of bellicose consensus, this euphoria which echoes attitudes of times and regimes that had been believed to be definitively overcome."

The Pope, opening the 20th assembly of the Pontifical Iustitia et Pax Council, prayed that Christ "inspire all who have decision-making power to sincerely seek peace and to commit themselves to negotiations and to act out of respect for justice, and the safeguarding of the rights of peoples." The president of the Council, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, echoed him: "The war, even though localized in the Persian Gulf, is moving in the direction of a world conflict." This prospect "makes the whole planet shake and shiver in the fear of a vaster conflagration, with flashes of apocalypse." He added that "such a possibility, far from paralyzing us, ought to spur us to talk, today more than ever, of peace and justice."

The Jesuits, in their review *Civiltà Cattolica*, flanked the Pope with a clear condemnation of the war. Father Giuseppe De Rosa, the editor, days before the conflict broke out, wrote that the Gulf war "is a war in which no one believes. If it were only a question of making a rule of international law and ethics be respected, as has been said, there would not be the general mobilization which has occurred. In fact, in these recent years, there have been, in every part of the world, very serious violations of international law and ethics with the invasion of independent countries by other countries, if one thinks of the invasion of Tibet by China, of Afghanistan by the U.S.S.R., of Panama by the U.S.A., of Lebanon by Israel and Syria, of the West Bank and Gaza also by the Israeli state. Yet in all of these cases, there has been no mobilization against the invaders."