

Pope Invites World's Religious Leaders To Meet On The Crisis

by Claudio Celani

On Sunday, Nov. 18, Pope John Paul II announced two major initiatives to relaunch dialogue and cooperation among world religions, aimed at countering the push for a "clash of civilizations." During the *Angelus* prayer, the Pope called on all Catholics to join in a day of fasting and prayer on Dec. 14, in a gesture of solidarity with Muslims, who celebrate the end of Ramadan on that day. Also, the Pope announced that he has called on all world religious leaders to join in a meeting in Assisi, Italy, on Jan. 24, with a special invitation to Muslim leaders to attend.

"The international scene continues to be disturbed by worrying tensions," said the Pope. "We cannot forget the intense sufferings that have afflicted and still afflict so many of our brothers and sisters in the world," he added, referring not only to the "thousands of innocent victims in the grave attacks of last Sept. 11," but also to the victims of the retaliation against Afghanistan: "innumerable people forced to abandon their homes to face the unknown and, sometimes, a cruel death; women, the elderly, and children exposed to the risk of dying of cold and hunger." "In a situation made dramatic by the always present threat of terrorism, we feel the need to cry out to God," he said. "The more insurmountable the difficulties and obscure the prospects, so much the more insistent must our prayer be, to implore God for the gift of mutual understanding, harmony, and peace."

Overture Toward Muslims

The Pope recalled that fasting is part of the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions, and proposed the Dec. 16 day of fasting to coincide with the last day of the Muslim month of penance and fasting, Ramadan. He called on Catholics to use the opportunity to "pray with fervor to God so that he will grant the world a stable peace, based on justice, and make it

possible to find adequate solutions to the many conflicts that trouble the world." Similarly to the Muslim practice during Ramadan, the Pope proposed that "what is saved by fasting be placed at the disposal of the poor, especially those who at present suffer the consequences of terrorism and war."

The Pope went on to "invite the representatives of the religions of the world to come to Assisi on Jan. 24, 2002, to pray for the surmounting of opposition to and the promotion of authentic peace. In particular, we wish to have Christians and Muslims come together, to proclaim before the world that religion must never be a reason for conflict, hatred, and violence. Whoever really accepts the word of the good and merciful God, cannot but exclude from his heart every form of rancor and enmity. At this historic moment, humanity needs to see gestures of peace and to hear words of hope. It is urgent that a common invocation be raised from earth to heaven, to implore the Almighty, in whose hands is the destiny of the world, for the great gift of peace, the necessary condition for any serious endeavor at the service of humanity's real progress."

No Just War In The World Today

With his words, the Pope has made clear that the Catholic Church is not only against any form of terrorism, but also against any form of retaliation. Indirectly, the Pope had already condemned the military intervention in Afghanistan, by mentioning the "unnecessary suffering" of the Afghani population.

The Pope's cautiousness, according to some observers, was dictated by concern not to contradict publicly the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), whose Nov. 12-15 conference issued a Pastoral Message recognizing "the legitimate use of force." The characterization in the document

of the U.S. Bishops, issued on Nov. 14 (whose acceptance was not without controversy), is based on a mistaken view of what the nature of the Sept. 11 events really was, and accepted the official propaganda line that it had been “an act of foreign aggression,” i.e., an act of war. Facing an act of war, the Catholic doctrine of “just war” is invoked to justify a military response.

But behind such a doctrinal justification by the U.S. Bishops, hides a manipulative intent, which uses the same ideological approach as the supporters of the “clash of civilizations” ideologues, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel Huntington. Such supporters argue that the nation-state is finished, and future conflicts will occur among cultures.

A typical representative of this tendency, which is very influential among Anglo-American Catholic neo-conservative circles, is theologian George Weigel, the former chairman of the Washington Ethics and Public Policy Center and a syndicated columnist. “What happened on Sept. 11 was an act of aggression, indeed an act of war,” wrote Weigel in his column, “and what we are engaged in is a war.” However, faced with the problem that the Catholic doctrine of “just war” necessitates the presence of a state as an aggressor, Weigel proposes that “the just war tradition needs to be ‘stretched,’ or developed,” to deal with a new reality in which “non-state ‘actors’—like terrorist organizations—are crucial units-of-count in the world. States are not all there is.”

The idea of “stretching” the law is garbage, as well as the idea that “states are not all there is.” There exists nothing else other than the nation-state to protect the individual. Asserting that the nation-state is finished, is an *intention* to finish it, as current wars in reality aim to do. Indeed, as Schiller Institute Chairwoman Helga Zepp-LaRouche stated at a recent conference in Mainz, Germany, “none of the wars currently fought in the world can be characterized as a just war.”

The current view is similar inside the Vatican and in the majority of the Catholic Church around the world, especially those sectors which are engaged in a dialogue with other religions. For instance, the Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) issued a manifesto called “Hate Does Not Terminate Hate,” signed by FABC Secretary General Archbishop Oswald Gomis. “We invoke God,” says the manifesto, “in order that the wisdom of the Holy Spirit lead us to choices worthy of our Faith, Hope, and Love. In the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, we say ‘no’ to any answer of revenge in the logic of ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’” Mahatma Gandhi, say the Asian Bishops, “warned that the logic of ‘an eye for an eye’ blinds the world. Hate is not terminated by hate, but by compassion and by love.”

There is no just war now being fought in the world. As former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, editor of the Catholic monthly *Thirty Days* and who is very close to the highest Vatican circles, said immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks, “The attack against the Twin Towers is terrorism, not war.” In an interview with the online daily *Il Nuovo* on

Sept. 14, Andreotti said: “If you legitimize terrorism as a belligerent subject, you give it a status by which it is legitimate to shoot the enemy. It is a major aspect, not to be underestimated.” In an interview with the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* on Sept. 13, Andreotti said: “I wonder who helped the terrorists in the United States. They must have had a remarkable support operation in place. These are people who have flown an airplane, who have calculated the time to be right there on television; they are not improvised tourists. Terrorism does not grow only on this side of the [Atlantic] Ocean. Americans have already had Oklahoma City, let us not forget.”

Andreotti warned against “unmotivated, disproportionate reactions,” which could unleash a dynamic “which could lead us I know not where. And maybe this is exactly what the organizers of such disruptive initiatives want to achieve.” Andreotti rejected the invocation of Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which calls for an allied response to foreign aggression against member-states, and called instead for an “international police response.”

Lyndon LaRouche’s analysis, which improves upon Andreotti’s views, and characterizes the Sept. 11 events as part of an ongoing coup attempt against U.S. institutions (see *Conference Report*, in this issue), has in the meantime circulated widely in Vatican circles, where it has received careful scrutiny. In Rome, at a seminar at the Italian Institute for Asia (*EIR*, Nov. 9), LaRouche stressed that in order to oppose the clash of civilizations policy, which is based on setting all religions against each other, a real ecumenical dialogue is necessary. This must be based on the search for the common basis for a true definition of man as being in the image of the Creator. But, LaRouche warned against the idea of a “pantheon” of world religions, or syncretism—that is, a dialogue based on simply tolerating each other’s “opinion,” rather than seeking the Truth.

This argument in favor of syncretism is instrumentally used by the Pope’s adversaries inside the Church (who often are the same ones who call for a “just war”), who allege that John Paul II, with his ecumenism, is polluting the Catholic faith. To avoid this accusation, in a similar event in Assisi in 1986, the Pope gave the instruction: “not to pray together, but to be together to pray.”

The Pope’s initiative for Jan. 24, 2002 was positively received by Muslim and Jewish leaders. The Italian representative of the World Muslim League, Mario Scialoja, characterized the announcement as “wonderful.” “We always appreciate the Pope’s openings towards Islam,” Scialoja said. “We are very happy that [on Dec. 16] Christians will also be alongside us. It is a gesture which will allow many who do not know our religion well, to learn the character of purification and penitence which accompanies this sacred month.” And the chairman of the Jewish Communities in Italy, Amos Luzzatto, said that the Pope’s invitation to a day of prayer for peace “cannot be answered negatively.”