

Talk of Lebanon visit draws threat to pope

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Reaction to Pope John Paul II's stated willingness to visit the Middle East on behalf of peace has drawn a variety of reactions from Moslem leaders — including a veiled threat on the pope's life.

The Organization for the Defense of the Oppressed, a little-known group, told a Western news agency in Beirut Aug. 28 that if the pope visited Lebanon, he "will be one of the victims of the criminal (civil) war."

"We will give the pope of Rome the same kind of reception we offered to the forces of (former President) Reagan," the group said, referring to the 1983 bombing of a Marine barracks. The bombing killed 241 men.

Other Moslems, meanwhile, have invited the pope to visit their country as long as he does not restrict his visit to the Christians and visits Moslem victims of Christian violence.

Still others have said a visit is impossible, accusing the pope of being one-sided in favor of the Christians.

The Vatican, meanwhile, has been emphasizing that a papal visit would be to all sides in the conflict.

"I would like to contribute to hastening the return of peace in Lebanon," the pope said Aug. 26 to Patriarch Jean Pierre XVIII Kasparian, head of the Armenian Catholic Church, which has headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon.

The pope noted that the Armenian bishops could not hold their synod in Lebanon this year because of the "atrocious agony" caused by the fighting.

"You know how much I am in agony at seeing the prolongation of the current situation," the pope added.

The pope met the patriarch and a group of Armenian bishops at the papal summer villa in Castel Gandolfo, 15 miles south of Rome. The Vatican press office released the text of his speech.

An editorial appearing the same day in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, said the pope wants to visit Lebanon because a "genocide" is occurring there of all "the people of Lebanon."

"A population is being killed: the people of Lebanon," said the front-page editorial signed by Mario Agnes, director of the newspaper. "A country, Lebanon, is being eliminated."

"The Holy Father wants to go as a pilgrim" to be with "the people who suffer, forced to live alongside violence and



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An elderly woman surveys the ruins of a neighborhood of West Beirut which was shelled during a bombardment between Syrian and Christian Lebanese forces.

death," the editorial said.

A day earlier on Aug. 25, Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said that "the desire of the Holy Father is not to meet just the Christians." The pope "wants to be close to both sides there," said Navarro-Valls.

Neither the editorial nor Navarro-Valls singled out any side for blame in the violence. On Aug. 15, when the pope announced his desire to visit Lebanon, he pointed

to Syria, whose troops have been shelling Christian areas.

"In the name of God, I ask the Syrian authorities to cease the bombardments," the pope said.

Several days later, Aug. 20, he asked for an immediate cease-fire because "it appears that the intention seems to be to destroy the city of Beirut, particularly the zones inhabited by Christians."

Anniversary of Polish invasion marked by papal letter

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Racial prejudice, the arms race and distrust among nations must be overcome to prevent war and ensure the protection of individual and national rights, Pope John Paul II said in an apostolic letter.

The 20-page letter, dated Aug. 27, was written to mark the 50th anniversary of the start of World War II — the Sept. 1, 1939, invasion of Poland by Germany.

In addition to the letter, addressed to Catholics and "all people of good will," the pope sent a special 12-page message marking the anniversary to the bishops of his native Poland.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, presented the letter and message at an Aug. 26 Vatican press conference.

Although the pope was affected by the war, the apostolic letter is not a history or personal reflection, Cardinal Etchegaray said; it is a pastoral message calling for reflection and for efforts to prevent war in the future.

"Vigilant remembrance" of the war and its causes ought to make people see current situations that could destroy "the freedom which the war generation sacrificed so much to attain," the pope wrote.

"The fragile balance of peace could easily be compromised if evils such as racial hatred, contempt for foreigners, segregation of the sick and elderly, exclusion of the poor, recourse to private and collective violence were revived in people's consciences," the letter said.

"We know from experience that the arbitrary dividing up of nations, the forced displacement of peoples, rearmament

without limits, the uncontrolled use of sophisticated weapons, the violation of the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples, the non-observance of international rules of conduct and the imposition of totalitarian ideologies can lead to nothing but the ruin of mankind," the apostolic letter said.

While governments and nations have a responsibility to work together to solve "the great problems of humanity" and are making progress in some areas, individuals and the church also have a role to play, he said.

"God is calling his church to make her own contribution to the coming of a more fraternal world," the pope wrote.

Recognizing that all people have dignity because they were created by God is the key to building solidarity among peoples, thereby erasing the cause of war, he said.

Christians have reason to hope that solidarity can be attained, he added.

"God does not despair of man. As Christians, neither may we despair of man, for we know that he is always greater than his mistakes and his faults."

When societies deny the existence of God, and therefore the God-given dignity of individuals, a "moral abyss" like that of Nazism has a chance to flourish, he said.

"Nazi paganism and Marxist dogma are both basically totalitarian ideologies and tend to become substitute religions," the letter said.

Before discussing the particular "trials of the Catholic Church" during the war, Pope John Paul lamented the persecution and planned genocide of the Jews.

Among all the "anti-human" actions of the war, he said, "there is one which will forever remain a shame for humanity: the planned barbarism which was unleashed against the Jewish people."

"The Jews of Poland, more than others, lived this immense suffering: The images of the Warsaw ghetto under siege, as well as what we have come to learn about the camps at Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka, surpass in horror anything that can be humanly imagined," the pope wrote.

World War II saw "the crushing of the rights of whole peoples as much as those of individuals," he said.

The pope said that Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were "ravaged and divided up at the pleasure of unscrupulous invaders" through the August 1939 non-



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Tadeusz Mazowiecki waves to supporters Aug. 24 after being officially elected as Poland's first non-communist leader since World War II.

aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union.

"In this regard, one can hardly help but think of those countries which have not yet obtained their full independence, as well as those which face the threat of losing it," he said.

Lebanon now is facing such a threat, the pope said in the document, which was completed before the 15-year-old war intensified in August.

The apostolic letter also encourages continued progress in the area of nuclear and conventional disarmament.

"One of the essential conditions for 'living together' is disarmament," he said.

"We must give a favorable reception to the negotiations now taking place," the pope wrote. "The Holy See has repeatedly declared that the parties involved must at least arrive at the lowest armament level possible, commensurate with the demands of their security and defense."

But even as the number of weapons is reduced, he said, nations must act positively to develop new areas of cooperation and joint ventures.

Fifty years after the beginning of the war, Pope John Paul wrote, "it is our duty before God to remember these tragic events in order to honor the dead and to share in the sorrow of all those whom this outbreak of cruelty wounded in body and soul, while, at the same time forgiving the offenses that were committed."

Pope says Poles still suffering communist system's 'bitter fruit'

VATICAN CITY — Poland's suffering continued after World War II, and it is still recovering from the "bitter fruit" of the communist system that robbed Poles of their sovereignty, said Pope John Paul II.

The pope made his comments in an Aug. 26 message to the Polish bishops' conference marking the Sept. 1, 1939, invasion of Poland by Germany — the start of World War II.

When the Nazis entered Poland, "the student Karol Wojtyla" — the future Pope John Paul II — "was 19-years-old. That morning, the first Friday of the month, he served Mass at the cathedral of Wawel" in Krakow, said Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

The cardinal answered questions about the message and an apostolic letter, also marking the anniversary, during an Aug. 26 press conference at the Vatican.

In his message to the bishops, the pope said it was "hard to fight the conviction that the postwar period failed to provide the growth and the progress

which the Polish nation so greatly desired and needed.

"The period in question provoked a great socio-economic crisis and new losses — losses no longer suffered on the fronts of arms conflict, but on the peace-time front of the struggle to build a better future for the homeland and the struggle to ensure a rightful place for it among the nations and states of Europe and of the world," he said.

After the war, Poland's Western border was set by U.S., Soviet and British leaders. Poland's Soviet-style communist government was recognized by the three powers.

"In truth, a state whose society is not sovereign is no sovereign state at all," the pope's message said. "Such is the case when a society has no chance to decide what constitutes the common good, and when it has been denied the basic right to share in power and responsibility."

The message to Polish bishops and the apostolic letter were completed in July, before the election of Poland's first non-communist prime minister since the war's end.

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