

Pope believes Europe is on the edge of abyss

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

ASSISI, Italy — Praying for peace in Assisi, Pope John Paul II warned Europe that its ethnic wars have pushed it to the edge of an abyss of destruction.

The survival of European civilization, already traumatized by wars in the 20th century, may depend on ending the war in the Balkans, the pope said during the two-day interfaith meeting in the hometown of St. Francis.

With the flames of oil lamps flickering on an altar behind him in the Basilica of St. Francis, Pope John Paul echoed the Assisi-born saint's prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

The pope said people praying for peace must "feel the wounds of war as if they were inflicted on their own flesh."

During a Jan. 9 meeting with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, the pope said, "We are now being asked to contribute in a specific way with our prayers and the offering of our fast to the rebuilding of the continent of Europe and perhaps to its survival."

The horror of war in Europe moves believers to pray for peace while taking concrete steps to promote negotiation, denounce injustice and defend human rights, the pope said.

"In the face of such a tragedy, we cannot remain indifferent; we cannot sleep," the pope said after listening to

five people from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia recount experiences of war in their homelands.

The interfaith meeting and a nighttime Christian prayer vigil later in the Basilica of St. Francis were followed by a candlelight procession of young people winding through the medieval hill town to various churches, where they prayed throughout the night.

The somber interfaith meeting took place in the Franciscan convent attached to the basilica, where St. Francis is buried.

Under the rough stone, vaulted ceiling of the meeting hall, the spiritual leader of Muslims in Sarajevo described Bosnia-Herzegovina as "a country bathed with the blood of innocent creatures of God."

Jacob Selimoski said 200,000 Muslims had died in the fighting and more than 35,000 women, as young as 7 and as old as 80, had been raped.

"How can Europe allow an entire nation, a European nation, to disappear from its midst and how can it wash its hands of it with tranquility and indifference?" he asked.

He said more than 30 Muslim leaders came to Assisi from all over Europe to join the pope and other Christians praying particularly that U.N.-sponsored negotiations would "bring a just and lasting peace and not lead to the condoning of crimes, thus giving into violence and aggression."

Selimoski said Bosnia is experiencing a "horrible apocalypse" at the hands of "the Serbian aggressors."



AP/Wide World Photos

Abortion law watered down

Parliament lawmakers from the Christian National Union, who proposed a controversial and restrictive abortion law, vote on the bill in Warsaw, Poland Jan. 7. Backed by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, the legislation would restrict abortions to life-threatening or rape-related cases and would make it theoretically possible to punish women attempting to have an abortion. Later that day, the Sejm, lower house of the Parliament, passed a watered down version of the bill.

Supporter of Aristide sees hope in Clinton inaugural

By Mary Durran
Catholic News Service

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The priest who heads an organization seeking the return of Haiti's exiled priest-president said he is hopeful that Haiti's crisis will be resolved after President-elect Bill Clinton is inaugurated.

"There are signs that a solution is on its way," said Father Antoine Adrien, "although we don't know how long it will take."

Father Adrien, who heads the private Presidential Commission working for the return of Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's exiled leader, said he hopes that Americans, such as New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and the Kennedy family who have shown strong support for Father Aristide and the largely pro-Aristide Haitian community in the United States will ensure that a solution to the Haitian crisis is at the top of the Democrats' foreign policy agenda.

"It's not a question of Clinton being the messiah," Father Adrien added. "But there is an important pro-Aristide element that has influence in the Democratic Party."

Father Adrien spoke from the Holy Ghost Fathers' house in a Port-au-Prince suburb.

"The only solution to the crisis will be provided by a return to constitutional order," he said. This would mean the return of Father Aristide, elected with 67 percent of the vote in

December 1990.

"The only way to ensure Aristide's return, other than by force, is an international diplomatic mission," he said.

Father Adrien noted that several hundred observers in a mission similar to the United Nations mission that supervised the 1990 elections would be the most appropriate way to ensure the return of the deposed president.

In order to be able to guarantee the President Aristide's safety and his supporters after the mission left, it would be necessary for the international observers to stay in place for up to a year while reforms to the armed forces and judicial system were carried out.

"The Haitian judicial system is in total decay," said Father Adrien.

Haiti has collapsed into a chaotic state of disorder since the military coup of September 1991, according to Father Adrien.

Father Adrien said that even the governor of the Central Bank had warned that there are no reserves in the bank to back up the crisp new Haitian gourde notes recently produced and that if the country continues at the same rate, it will be bankrupt in February.

Father Adrien said that although an estimated 40,000 Haitians who plan to set sail to the United States to seek asylum have been given much publicity, no one has highlighted the plight of some 400,000 people who have been displaced within the country by the violence since the coup.

Bishops ask for Germany to help

BONN, Germany (CNS) — Two leading German bishops have criticized European "indecision" toward the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and called for their country to participate more actively in international peacekeeping efforts.

Cardinal Friedrich Wetter of Munich said in early January that the scope of U.N. humanitarian operations should be extended, where appropriate, in cases of extreme need.

"The intervention in Somalia shows the necessity of similar action in the region of former Yugoslavia," the cardinal said.

Bishop Karl Lehmann of Munich, head of the German bishops' confer-

ence, said Germany should be engaged in peacekeeping operations and should not "justify an indifferent attitude" with the "pretext" of constitutional norms.

"Many nations simply cannot understand why today we decline to involve ourselves in places where such great needs exist," Bishop Lehmann added.

Germany's constitution prohibits it from sending troops outside of territories and waters protected by NATO.

The bishops' remarks came after Vatican calls for humanitarian intervention in Bosnia and just days before a Jan. 9-10 interfaith prayer meeting for Europe, held in Assisi, Italy.

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