



Doing the Devil's Work

VATICAN

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PEACE, FOR POPE JOHN PAUL II, IS BUILT ON THE PREMISE OF RESPECT FOR THE FREEDOM AND RIGHTS OF OTHER INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS. "WARS CONTINUE TO BREAK OUT AND DESTRUCTION HAS FALLEN UPON PEOPLES AND WHOLE CULTURES BECAUSE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF A PEOPLE OR NATION WAS NOT RESPECTED," HE WROTE 20 YEARS AGO. "EVERY CONTINENT HAS SEEN AND SUFFERED FROM WARS AND STRUGGLES CAUSED BY ONE NATION'S ATTEMPT TO LIMIT ANOTHER'S AUTONOMY."

The pope has called on nations, or actually pleaded with them, to renounce doctrines of national or cultural supremacy. Justice and peace are much more than abstract concepts or remote ideals in the pope's mind. He sees them as values that rest in the heart of every individual. And every person, as well as every community and country, has the responsibility to live in justice and work for peace.

The globalization of the economy and the rapid progress of information technologies have led the pope to remark that these changes have triggered great hopes and disturbing questions about the future of humanity.

Some of his own questions are these: Will *everyone* be able to take advantage of a global market? Will *everyone* at last have a chance to enjoy peace? Will relations between states become more equitable, or will economic competition and rivalries between peoples and nations lead humanity toward even greater instability?

Poverty and peace are related, and the Holy Father entitled one of his messages for the World Day of Prayer for Peace, celebrated Jan. 1 each year, "If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor."

Poverty represents a clear threat to peace, and the pope points out that in certain countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, there are sometimes entire sectors of the population that find themselves at the margins of society in their own countries.

Conflicts between peoples and nations also result in poverty for many. War worsens the sufferings of the poor, the pope says, and creates new poor by destroying homes, property and means of subsistence.

"Women, children, the elderly, the sick and the wounded are forced to flee and become refugees who have no possessions beyond what they can carry with them," he wrote in 1992. "Helpless and defenseless, they seek refuge in other countries or regions often as poor and turbulent as their own." Such was the case earlier this spring with ethnic Albanians in Kosovo fleeing to

Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

The pope encourages all those who believe in God to pray for peace, since prayer is the bond that most effectively unites them. Through prayer believers meet one another before God, the Lord and Father of all, before whom all inequalities, misunderstandings, bitterness and hostility can be overcome.

"Peace be with you," were the first words of the risen Christ to the Apostles, and the pope notes sadly that 2,000 years later there have been recent wars of savage intensity on almost every continent.

Yet war is no solution, he insists. Rather, it aggravates old tensions and creates new ones. Nothing is resolved by war. On the contrary, it places everything in jeopardy.

After so many unnecessary massacres, peoples and nations have to recognize once and for

all "that war never helps the human community, that violence destroys and never builds up, that the wounds it causes remain long unhealed," the pope says.

At Easter, the pope was particularly concerned about the situation in Kosovo, "where tears and blood continue to mingle in a tragic spectacle of hate and violence," he said.

"How can we speak of peace when people are forced to flee, when they're hunted down, and their homes are burnt to the ground?" he asked. "When the heavens are rent by the din of war, when the whistle of shells is heard around people's homes and the ravaging fire of bombs consumes towns and villages?"

The pope called the Balkans violence a "senseless fratricidal conflict" and asked for an end to the "diabolical spiral of revenge." And it really is diabolic. With the destruction and ruin it brings to so many lives, it's easy to see how an extensive war would please the devil immensely. ♦

Greg Burke writes about the Vatican for a number of religious and secular publications.



Two young ethnic Albanian refugee boys from Kosovo reach for loaves of bread from the back of an aid truck at a border crossing near Albania in early April.