

The Vatican and the Falklands War

This month the second papal visit of Britain takes place. The following is a review of the first papal visit, which occurred in 1982 under extraordinary circumstances.

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The Vatican and the Falklands War

The Church in Rome had evolved into a political organisation with a religious cloak in the early centuries of Christendom. It remains so today.

Subsequently known as the Vatican, for much of its existence its political activity has been blatant. Today, the demands of the modern world require it to undertake such activities in a much more subtle fashion.

Should anyone think the Vatican has forsaken its political machinations in the modern age, then its entanglement with the Fascist and Nazi powers of the WW2 era, its links to the Ustashi which perpetrated the bloodbath in Croatia, and the role of the church in the Vietnam War are but a few examples in the 20th century that prove otherwise.

In recent decades the Vatican has been keen to boost its position in Britain. Despite this, when Pope Benedict XVI begins his tour of Scotland and England in September 2010 he will become only the second reigning pope to have visited Britain.

Papal visits are normally the result of lengthy and meticulous planning with little left to chance: speeches are scripted well in advance and appearances carefully choreographed. No doubt this visit will follow the same formula.

Sometimes however, even the best laid plans come unstuck by unforeseen events. The first papal visit to Britain in 1982 is an example of this. When the Vatican had agreed to the visit, who could have foreseen that war between Britain and Catholic Argentina over the Falkland Islands would coincide with the papal visit.

Normally the Vatican shrouds its political activities under the guise of religion and lofty pronouncements. On this occasion fast moving developments caught the Vatican off balance giving it insufficient time to fully dissemble the nature of the actions which it felt compelled to take by the political imperatives thrust upon it.

What began with high hopes for a triumphant papal tour ended with the pope having to make common cause with a sordid Latin American dictatorship. It shows yet again that despite its pious protestations the Vatican is fundamentally a political organisation.

How the first papal visit to Britain came about

1978 was the year of three popes due to the deaths in quick succession of Paul VI and John Paul I and the elections of their successors.¹ When the conclave of 111 cardinals elected the Pole Karol Wojtyła on 16 October 1978, he became the first non-Italian pontiff in 455 years.²

Taking the name John Paul II, the new pope embarked on what was to be a long pontificate, one characterised by great vigour for many of those years, and in which he undertook numerous journeys abroad in his attempts to promote and bolster Catholicism. In the first two years of his pontificate alone he visited fourteen countries, including the Catholic stronghold of the Republic of Ireland.³

In August 1980 bishops from Britain formally invited the pope to visit England, Scotland and Wales. Eight days later the Vatican announced that the Pope had accepted the invitation with the proposed visit to take place during the summer of 1982.⁴

The time was opportune for the Vatican to breach the ramparts of a nation that had been a recurring source of antagonism to Roman Catholic interests since its breakaway from Rome under Henry VIII. For the Vatican, the visit was as a step in furthering its ambition to take the Anglican community back into its fold. In an Angelus address the Pope spoke about his planned visit. "May this journey of mine also serve the cause of the rapport between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, and hasten the greatly desired union. For this end, which is of great ecumenical importance, I ask you all for fervent prayers to the Holy Trinity."⁵

As part of the preparations for the visit the Pope announced that diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Great Britain would be put on a new footing. On 16 January 1982 the Vatican created an Apostolic Nunciature in London, while Britain reciprocated by raising its Legation to the Holy See to the rank of Embassy.⁶

On 2 April 1982 an event unforeseen by the Vatican cast a long shadow over the proposed visit. Argentine forces occupied the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic which the British had administered for 150 years. The British Government deemed the military occupation unacceptable as a means of settling the dispute and responded by despatching a large military task force to recapture the Islands by force if a settlement could not be reached by diplomatic means.⁷

This sudden turn of events surrounding the Falkland Islands presented the Vatican with a significant political dilemma for the imminent papal visit to Britain. If the visit was to proceed as proposed, it was likely the pope would be in Protestant Britain as it warred with Catholic Argentina. Such a visit risked alienating not only the people of Argentina but also the rest of Latin America, which comprised nearly half the Catholic population of the world.⁸ However, to cancel the visit at this late stage would be a huge setback for the Vatican's objective to make inroads into the Anglican Communion.

On 16 May, less than two weeks before the trip was scheduled to begin, the Pope made his first public statement casting doubt on the visit going ahead.⁹ There was great pressure from Latin America, especially from some Catholic hierarchies, for the pope to stay away lest his visit be taken as a sign he sides with the British.¹⁰ Some Argentine bishops had been openly critical of the pope proceeding with the trip.¹¹

On 18 May, the Pope conferred with the President of the Conference of Latin American Bishops and two Archbishops from Great Britain who had come to Rome to canvass for the visit to go ahead. Following this the Pope summoned the Cardinals from Argentina and Great Britain to Rome to discuss the situation. On 21 May these discussions took place behind closed doors. The next morning there was a public display of harmony with the Pope and Cardinals celebrating a Mass for Peace in St. Peter's Basilica.¹²

Meanwhile the British Government, through its newly appointed Ambassador to the Holy See, announced that it was prepared to forgo all formal meetings arranged with the Pope to help underline the purely pastoral and ecumenical nature of the visit.¹³ Whatever the diplomatic discussions that preceded the Ambassador's statement, the fact is it was vital to the Vatican's wider interests to avoid any meeting between the Pope and the British Prime Minister.

Such was the Pope's state of perplexity brought on by the conflicting demands that he left the decision on the proposed visit in the hands of the British church leaders. On 25 May, three days before the visit was due to commence, the Vatican finally confirmed the visit would go ahead as planned. The next day at his General Audience, the Pope read the text of a letter he had sent to the Church in Argentina explaining his reasons for the decision, and announced he would undertake a pastoral visit to Argentina after the visit to Britain.¹⁴

The Pope's visit to Britain goes ahead despite the war

The six day visit to Britain went ahead as scheduled from 28 May to 2 June 1982. In terms of the Vatican's original objectives for the visit it was a great success.

Virtually all the leaders of the different church denominations welcomed the pope by word or deed. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope greeted each other with a kiss of peace and knelt in prayer together in Canterbury Cathedral before signing a Common Declaration. Afterwards, a spectrum of church leaders from Greek Orthodox to the Quakers met with the Pope in the home of the Dean of Canterbury. When in Edinburgh, the Pope met with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and other Scottish church leaders.

Massive crowds attended wherever the pope held outdoor ceremonies. The media provided continuous and favourable coverage. Descriptions such as "historic", "tumultuous" and "euphoric" were used.

However, the seemingly unimpeded triumphant papal march through Britain was a two-edged sword for the Vatican. In the weeks before the papal visit, the war over the Falkland Islands was taking place at sea resulting in losses by both sides. The greatest loss occurred when the British Navy sank the Argentine light cruiser *General Belgrano* with the loss of 323 lives. By the time the pope commenced his visit to Britain, the land war in the Falkland Islands had begun. As it happened, while the pope was receiving a rapturous reception in “heathen” Britain, British forces were killing Catholic sons of Argentina in islands located near Argentina. In Buenos Aires leaflets soon began circulating accusing the pope of trying to sell out the Falkland Islands to the British.¹⁵ Every success the Vatican notched up in Britain was counterproductive in Argentina.

The Argentine military junta and the Catholic Church

The Vatican had anticipated the inevitable fallout from the British visit in Argentina, and the need to address it with swift action. The solution was for the pope go to Argentina as soon as possible after the British visit to assuage the feelings of his clergy and flock. Consequently, the Vatican had sought and received the Argentine military junta’s approval for such a visit before the fate of the British papal visit was announced. Although the Argentine military junta had approved the impromptu visit at short notice, it would only have done so if it had been reassured the visit would not be detrimental to its interests.

To appreciate the politics that surrounded the pope’s visit to Argentina, it is necessary to examine the roles played by the military junta and the Catholic Church in this Catholic nation.

The military overthrew the Government of Isabelita Peron in 1976 and imposed a brutal dictatorship on the country until 1983. The worst excesses occurred in the early years of the coup’s first leader, General Jorge Videla, who headed the junta from 1976 to 1981. The junta’s leadership personnel changed several times but always comprised of military officers. General Leopoldo Galtieri was President from December 1981 to June 1982, the period that encompassed the Falklands War.

The following description of the rule of the military junta, derived from *The Disappeared—Voices From a Secret War* by BBC editors John Simpson and Jana Bennett published in 1985, describes its brutality and repression:

In March 1976 the military seized power in Argentina – a country belonging to the European tradition and in which many of the ruling class have family or trading ties with Britain. The avowed aim was to put an end to left-wing terrorism, but instead a yet more savage terror was introduced. The Governor of the province of Buenos Aires announced that, after all the subversives, their collaborators and sympathizers, they would kill ‘those who remain indifferent; and finally we will kill the timid’. No one was safe – approximately 20,000 people were arrested, two million more fled the country – and as many as 11,000 ‘disappeared’, tortured and murdered in clandestine gaols while music blared from loudspeakers so that outsiders could hear nothing.¹⁶

But of the estimated eleven thousand who disappeared, no more than a few hundred were terrorists; the military came to power with the intention of rooting out the propensity to left-wing thought, and they selected as targets anyone who looked as though he or she might sympathize with terrorism. And so corrupting was their campaign that they were eventually kidnapping people for their money or their property, and treating the Argentine economy as though it was their private fiefdom, to plunder at will.

What happened in Argentina under the military government of 1976 to 1983 constitutes one of the worst examples of state repression since the end of the Second World War. But Argentina under Videla cannot be put in the same category as Cambodia under Pol Pot or Uganda under Idi Amin: it is a highly developed country with an almost entirely European population... by setting aside the rule of law in order to be freer to deal with society’s enemies, the generals and admirals who controlled the State infected it with a political, economic and moral gangrene which rotted every organ of government through and through.¹⁷

Since this book's publication in 1985, human rights groups and others have estimated the number of people who "disappeared" under this regime is as high as 30,000.

Among those kidnapped and murdered were members of a group who became known as the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. They had taken to demonstrating in the Plaza, seeking nothing more than details of their sons and daughters who had disappeared. Two French nuns, one working with the Mothers, were also murdered at the same time.

By the time Galtieri became president, Argentina was faltering politically and economically. The occupation of the Falkland Islands could be expected to stir up patriotic fervour and create a diversion from domestic problems. It did just that. Shortly after the occupation Galtieri stood on the balcony of Casa Rosada, the presidential palace, overlooking the Plaza de Mayo and was greeted by a cheering crowd that filled the Plaza. Yet only days before the Plaza had also been full of people, but on this occasion they had been demonstrating not for, but against, Galtieri's government.

The Catholic Church was influential in Argentina, it could hardly be otherwise in a country that was ninety percent Catholic.¹⁸ Its supportive stance towards the military dictatorship and the Falklands War was not insignificant.

British journalist Jimmy Burns worked in Argentina from January 1982 to 1986. During the Falklands saga he was described in *The Tablet*, the well known Catholic weekly published in London, as "our correspondent." In 2002 *The Tablet* marked the twentieth anniversary of the Falklands War with an article by Burns entitled 'Argentina's failed crusade.' It is worth quoting at some length for what it tells us about the indifference of the Catholic Church to human rights during the military dictatorship. This indifference stands in stark contrast to its impassioned support for the junta's military adventure in the Falklands:

The military regime which decided to invade the islands did so in the knowledge that it counted on a powerful body of opinion within the Argentine Church to give it its blessing. The attitude of the Argentine Episcopal Conference to the regime that came to power in the 1976 coup had been equivocal. Pastoral letters had held back from public condemnation of human rights violations, and suggested that the "common good" could be served by dealing with the moral and social disintegration that had characterised the previous civilian government of Isabelita Perón.

Only a minority of bishops, priests and nuns condemned the thousands of "disappeared", and the complicity of those who pandered to national Catholicism. Those who survived the repression, like Bishop Jaime de Nevares of Neuquén, Bishop Miguel Hesayne of Viedma, and Bishop Jorge Novak of Quilmes, distanced themselves from the nationalistic fervour which surrounded the "reconquest of Las Malvinas".

They remained, however, in a minority. From the outset of the Falklands War, the partnership between Church and State gave the Argentine soldiers and their generals a sense of a moral crusade, and the junta the certainty of political cohesion. History was revisited and revised to provide justification for the equation between Argentine sovereignty and holy conversion.

Memories were revived of the first Spanish missionaries to the Falkland Islands, the priests portrayed as picture-book saints laying the sacramental rock on the heathen land. The subsequent British colonialism was reduced to a caricature of spiritual emptiness when, in fact, both the Anglican and Catholic faiths had retained an enduring presence on the islands.

The mixing of nationalistic and religious mythology was prevalent in the first crucial hours of the Falklands conflict. On the eve of the invasion, Argentine commanders agreed that the military operation to take Las Malvinas, initially planned under the codename Azul, should be renamed Rosario, in honour of the Virgin of Rosario. According to Argentine cultural tradition, the Virgin had brought her graces to the population of Buenos Aires in the early nineteenth century before an invasion by British troops was successfully repulsed. She has been venerated passionately ever since.

On 7 April, the new Argentine military governor of Las Malvinas, General Mario Menéndez, was sworn in during a ceremony at which Archbishop Desiderio Elso Collino, the chaplain general of

the armed forces, officiated. "The gaucho Virgin is Mother of all men, but is in a very special way the Mother of all Argentines, and has come to take possession of this land, which is also her land", stated Collino.

For the rest of the war a succession of military chaplains ensured that the crusading spirit of the Argentine troops was kept alive in language reminiscent of the speeches delivered to Franco's forces during the Spanish Civil War. In the fight against the English "heathen" no Argentine churchman was more fanatical than Fr Jorge Piccinalli...

The sanctification of the Argentine military enterprise was pursued with equal vigour in Buenos Aires by publications such as the Catholic weekly *Equiú*. One editorial written by Bishop Manuel Menéndez of San Martín claimed the Fourth Commandment was "telling us to love our country and, if necessary, give up our lives for it". He added: "In the present circumstances, the commandment is quite clear: if they [the British] attack us, we have to defend ourselves."

In common with the bulk of the Argentine political class and trade union movement, the Argentine Episcopal Conference exonerated their country from charges that the military invasion of 2 April was a flagrant violation of the island population's right to self-determination, and international rules of law. The cause of Las Malvinas was a just one, the bishops insisted, involving the necessary recovery of sovereignty after nearly 150 years.

During Sunday Masses, priests dedicated their sermons to a call for a generous contribution to the "Patriotic Fund", which was collected by the military for their war effort, although never publicly accounted for. In their only major joint statement during the war, the Argentine bishops expressed their fear of a war of "unforeseeable consequences", and referred to papal condemnation of military conflict. But by their emphasis on defence of Argentina's sovereignty claims, the bishops implicitly gave the green light to the junta to prolong its warmongering if it saw fit.¹⁹

Burns' article is an eye-witness account that clearly shows the Argentine Catholic Church used strong religious rhetoric to identify itself with, and reinforce support for, the military dictatorship's Falklands adventure.

The Pope's hastily arranged 30-hour visit to Argentina

The Argentine Church's support for the military adventure contributed to the Vatican's dilemma.

The Vatican claimed the pope's visit to Argentina was "pastoral," but clearly this was not true, unless of course the Vatican's political necessity can be considered "pastoral". Obviously, the pope's visit was to counter any Argentine reaction to his British visit. Thus, at short notice, and with the cooperation of the junta, arrangements were made for the pope to squeeze in the 30-hour visit to Argentina which took place on 11-12 June, just nine days after the British visit.

Whilst in Argentina the pope consciously spoke to two audiences. One was the Argentine people, and for them he conveyed the impression that he stood completely with them in this difficult time of war, and had no criticism of the Falklands adventure. The second was the world outside Latin America, particularly Britain and the USA, and to this audience his words were framed in a manner so that church agents in those countries could use them to show that in fact the pope did not support either side and sought only peace. Vatican speechwriters were equal to the task, long being skilled in crafting words that sent out mixed messages. It is worthwhile therefore to read the pope's speech on arriving in Argentina in full, which set the tone for the whole visit. See *Appendix*.

As Burns observed in his 2002 article (see above), the Argentine bishops did not see any contradiction between the papal condemnation of military conflict and themselves giving the green light to the junta's warmongering. When the pope delivered his message in person, neither the military junta nor the priests in any way perceived it to be a criticism of what they had done.

By itself the pope's hastily arranged visit to Argentina was a powerful antidote to his British visit. This gesture, together with the pope's body language, professions of love for Argentina, and platitudes about peace, successfully shored up the Vatican's position there.

Two very different papal visits

The contrast between the pope's visits to Britain and Argentina could hardly have been greater. The six-day British visit had been almost two years in the making, while the pope's intention to visit Argentina was announced a mere sixteen days prior to it taking place. During the lengthy British visit a meeting between the Pope and British Prime Minister Thatcher was deliberately avoided, whereas during the brief Argentine visit the Pope and President Galtieri met publicly on both days of the visit.

President Galtieri greeted Pope John Paul II on his arrival at Buenos Aires Airport. In his airport speech, the Pope expressed his deepest gratitude to the President for acceptance of the visit:

"With particular deference I wish to address this word of respectful greeting to the President, who was kind enough to come to receive me, expressing the desire of all the children of this Catholic nation. From this moment I express to him, as to every Argentine, my deepest gratitude for the immediate and joyful acceptance of this visit, despite the practical difficulties which it meant because of the short period of time available."²⁰

Leaving the airport, the Pope proceeded in a motorcade to the Plaza de Mayo where he was greeted by a crowd outside the metropolitan cathedral. Placards in the crowd read: "*Holy Father bless our just war*"; "*Holy Father bless our soldiers*"; "*May God defend our cause because we defend his*."²¹

After addressing priests, religious and seminarians inside the cathedral, the Pope went to the Casa Rosada across the plaza for a meeting with President Galtieri and the three Junta members, the heads of the army, navy and air force. Each Junta member presented the pontiff with a gift. When the Pope acceded to popular demand and went to the balcony to wave to the crowd below, the state-run TV cameras from inside showed the three Junta members standing behind the Pope.²² Before leaving the palace, the Pope was photographed seated nursing Galtieri's granddaughter as a beaming Mrs Galtieri sat on one side of him and a smiling Galtieri on the other.²³

The papal visit was given the facade of a religious context by two events. On the afternoon of the first day, mass was celebrated in the "sanctuary of the Mother of God" in Lujan, outside of Buenos Aires. Our Lady of Lujan is the Patroness of Argentina; among other things, she is credited with helping Argentine forces repel British troops when, twice in the early 19th century, they tried to seize Buenos Aires. On the morrow the Pope celebrated Corpus Christi before a massive crowd in Buenos Aires.²⁴

Later that day Galtieri farewelled the Pope at the airport, during which the Pope embraced and kissed the kneeling junta leader.²⁵

The following day, about three hours after returning to Rome, Pope John Paul II addressed the faithful in St. Peter's Square concerning his visit to Argentina, which included the following:

In the letter that I addressed on 25 May to the beloved sons and daughters of Argentina, I said to them. "My special love for your nation and for all of Latin America is well known... it would be my wish even to come directly from Great Britain to Argentina, and there, among you and with you, to raise the same prayer for the victory of a just peace over war. I hope that soon you will be able to join the Pope in the sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God in Lujan, consecrating your families and your Catholic country to the motherly Heart of the Mother of God."...

I express a heartfelt thanks to everyone. In particular, I address my thanks to the President of the State, as well as to the other authorities, who encouraged the realization of this important undertaking.²⁶

Unfortunately for General Galtieri warm papal words and a kiss were not sufficient to save his career. Within days of the papal visit the Argentine troops in the Falklands surrendered, followed closely by Galtieri's resignation.



At Casa Rosada, Pope John Paul holds Argentine President Leopoldo Galtieri's granddaughter as Mrs Galtieri (left) smiles and President Galtieri tries to make the baby smile during the papal visit to Buenos Aires last week.



Pope John Paul bends down to kiss Argentina's President Leopoldo Galtieri kneeling in front of him at Buenos Aires Ezeiza International Airport, shortly before the Pope left Argentina for Rome after his 30-hour visit.

These photos were published in 'The Advocate,' 17 June 1982. This newspaper is now defunct, but at the time it was a publication of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Above: At Casa Rosada, Pope John Paul holds Argentine President Leopoldo Galtieri's granddaughter as Mrs Galtieri (left) smiles and President Galtieri tries to make the baby smile during the papal visit to Buenos Aires last week.

Left: Pope John Paul bends down to kiss Argentina's President Leopoldo Galtieri kneeling in front of him at Buenos Aires Ezeiza International Airport, shortly before the Pope left Argentina for Rome after his 30-hour visit.

The Vatican and the “Dirty War”

The Argentine military junta that held power from 1976 to 1983 is notorious for the kidnapping and murder of thousands of its own citizens, known as the “dirty war.” Nevertheless, this regime received the tacit support of the Argentine Catholic Church which “as a whole was noteworthy for its silence during the years of repression – a silence which helped the military régime even while individual priests and members of congregations were being abducted, terrorized and killed.”²⁷

While generally the Church’s support for the regime was implied by its absence of criticism and its cooperation with the junta, there were instances of outright callousness by individual churchmen. One example is that the head of the Argentine Church, Cardinal Aramburu, refused to receive the relatives of those who had disappeared. He also allowed federal police to go into his cathedral to clear out the Mothers of the Plaza who had taken refuge there.²⁸ Another is that of Father Christian von Wernich, a police chaplain during the period of the “dirty war,” who was convicted of complicity in multiple murders, abduction and torture.²⁹ At the trial of Father Wernich, which took place in 2007, Father Ruben Capitanio, also a Roman Catholic priest, accused his Church of being “scandalously close to the dictatorship” during the “dirty war.”³⁰

In 1995, twelve years after the end of the military junta, the Argentine army apologised for the “dirty war.”³¹ The following year the Argentine Catholic Church delivered its own *mea culpa*, with the Argentine bishops issuing a self-serving document saying they made insufficient efforts to stop human rights violations during the “dirty war.”³² According to another report of the document, the bishops asked for forgiveness for crimes committed by Catholics on both sides of the political fence, but of themselves they only conceded “there is no doubt that all that was done was not enough.”³³ Such was the Church’s apology in 1996 for its role in the “dirty war.” One critic later characterised the bishops’ statement as “a laundered document, with evasive phrases”³⁴

The Pope’s hastily arranged visit to Argentina was not “pastoral” as claimed. It especially did not have anything to do with justice for the victims of the “dirty war.” Its sole purpose was to counter any erosion of the Vatican’s position in Argentina and Latin America brought about by the papal visit to Britain coinciding with the Falklands War. When the Pope kissed the leader of Argentina’s military junta kneeling before him, he was engaged in a political strategy that demonstrated his complete indifference to the victims of the “dirty war.”

The events in Argentina shows the Vatican remains constant in at least one thing. It is always willing to deal with any regime so long as in doing so it advances its own self interest – no matter what the cost is to others. In due course, a document is to be published on this website detailing the Vatican’s dealings with some of the totalitarian regimes of the World War 2 era.

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Appendix

The following is the text of the Pope's speech on arrival in Argentina, printed in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21 June 1982.

11 JUNE: ARRIVAL OF JOHN PAUL II IN BUENOS AIRES

May the Virgin of Lujan fulfil the yearnings for peace

After a flight of some fifteen hours, Pope John Paul arrived in Buenos Aires on Friday, 11 June. He was met at the airport by Cardinal Aramburu, Primate of Argentina and Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and by President Galtieri. During the welcoming ceremony, the Holy Father delivered the following address.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

He repeats to us again: "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give it to you" (Jn 14:27).

1. Blessed be the Lord who allowed me to come to this dear land of Argentina.

I wanted to come here in order to tell you with my own lips the feelings which I expressed to you in my personal letter which, at the end of last month, I addressed to you, beloved sons and daughters of the Argentine nation, on the eve of my pastoral journey to the Churches in England, Scotland and Wales.

Urged by love of Christ

2. If during that apostolic visit – which was meant to be, and in fact was, a continuous prayer for peace, as much as a service rendered to the cause of ecumenism and to the Gospel – my thoughts and my affection were also with you, my presence today is intended to be visible proof of such love in an historical moment as sorrowful for you as this one is.

I come urged by the love of Christ and by the compelling concern which, as Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, I owe to the One and Universal Church which is incarnate in every people, nation and culture, to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ and the common destiny which each person has under a common Father.

Therefore, although fully and joyfully aware of the Catholic condition of this beloved nation, in perfect continuity with my previous apostolic journey, my visit is meant to be marked by the same pastoral and ecclesial character which places it beyond any political intention. It is simply a meeting of the father in the faith with his children who are suffering; of the brother in Christ who points him out once more as the way of peace, of reconciliation and of hope.

Invoking Christ's peace

3. My stay on Argentine soil, even though brief by well-known necessity, will be first of all an entreaty with you to him from who comes every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth, that he may fill the souls of everyone with feelings of brotherhood and reconciliation.

In this spirit, permit me from this very moment to invoke Christ's peace on all the victims, on both sides, of this armed conflict between Argentina and Great Britain; to show my affectionate closeness with all families who mourn the loss of some loved one; to ask the governments and the international community to take measures to avoid greater damage, to heal the wounds of war and to facilitate the restoration of areas for a just and enduring peace and progressive serenity of hearts.

To her through whom each man has only one name, that of son; to the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, at whose feet I come to prostrate in her sanctuary of Lujan, I ask that she dry the so many tears, that she support those who bend under the burden of affliction; that she give rise to new energies for good in the national and international fields, capable of alleviating the present-day

sorrows and difficulties, so that we may look to the future with calm faith, that the peoples' longings for peace may become reality.

4. These good wishes are the best words of cordial greeting which I address to each of you, beloved brothers and sisters of Argentina, just as to each family or social group; and in the first place to my brothers in the Episcopate, to priests, to religious and seminarians.

With particular deference I wish to address this word of respectful greeting to the President, who was kind enough to come to receive me, expressing the desire of all the children of this Catholic nation. From this moment I express to him, as to every Argentine, my deepest gratitude for the immediate and joyful acceptance of this visit, despite the practical difficulties which it meant because of the short period of time available.

And going beyond the Argentine borders, I send my greeting of peace and cordial esteem to every people and nation of Latin America. This brief visit causes me to recall once more the two earlier visits to this continent, of which I have such unforgettable memories. With my greeting I express the faith that, at the present moment while problems and uncertainties for the future appear on the horizon, this continent of ecclesial hope will find inspiration and solid motivations toward peace and progress in consideration of their common Christian origins.

Absurd and unjust

5. But faithful to my position as humble servant of the cause of peace and understanding among men, I cannot fail to extend my glance from here also over the entire world.

The sad spectacle of the loss of human lives, with social consequences which will be prolonged for some time in the peoples who are suffering the war, makes me think with deep sorrow of the wake of death and desolation which every armed conflict always causes.

We do not find ourselves faced with terrifying spectacles such as those of Hiroshima or Nagasaki; but each time we risk the life of man we set in motion the mechanisms which lead toward such catastrophies, we embark on dangerous, backward and inhumane roads. Therefore, at this moment mankind must once more ask itself about the absurd and always unjust phenomenon of war, in whose scenario of death and pain only the negotiating table, which could and should have prevented it, remains valid.

May God will that this conflict which we lament, the one going on between Iran and Iraq, in addition to those others which more or less hiddenly strike other areas of the world, be the last grievous examples, the valid lesson by which the world learns to place above all else, always and in every circumstance, respect for the sacredness of life; and for ever to forget recourse to war, terrorism or violent means; and to follow decisively the paths of understanding, harmony and peace.

Divine comfort for all

6. With these wishes made a prayer, which I invite all of you to join, I invoke divine protection and comfort on each person and family of the beloved Argentine nation, first of all upon the orphans, the victims of the war, upon all those who are suffering from infirmity or uncertainty concerning the fate of a loved one. May the Apostolic Blessing, which with great affection I impart to everyone, be a pledge of my universal favour and the reconciliation of hearts.

Notes

- 1 The clustering of popes is a fairly common occurrence in papal history – not surprising since 47 of the popes occupied the papal throne for less than a year. The clustering is even greater if the 36 or so “anti-popes” are taken in to account, whereby on numerous occasions two or more men claimed the papal throne at the same time. Reckoning papal succession is sometimes murky, to say the least. For instance the Catholic Encyclopedia deems Hippolytus (217-236) to be an “anti-pope,” but he is also a saint of the Catholic Church! It counts Sylvester III (1045) as a pope, but notes he is “considered by some to be an anti-pope.” Sergius III (904-911) is both a pope and an anti-pope. He was excommunicated by an earlier pope when he unsuccessfully attempted to claim the papal throne. It is alleged that after Sergius became pope he had his two predecessors, who were in prison, murdered. And so on.
- 2 Peter Jennings, Eamonn McCabe. *The Pope in Britain (Forewords by Cardinal Hume and Cardinal Gray). Nihil obstat and Imprimatur.* Bodley Head, London, 1982, p. 11.
- 3 Timothy O’Sullivan. *His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Nihil obstat and Imprimatur.* Sphere Books, London, 1982, *Chronology.*
- 4 Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 10 *The Tablet.* 22 May 1982, p. 502, *Notebook: The papal visit.*
- 11 Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 15 *Courier-Mail.* 11 June 1982, p. 6. *Pope sell-out charge (AAP-Reuter report from Buenos Aires).*
- 16 John Simpson, Jana Bennett. *The Disappeared – Voices From a Secret War.* Robson Books, London, 1985, *Dust jacket summary.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
- 18 *Courier-Mail.* 11 June 1982, p. 6. *Pope sell-out charge (AAP-Reuter report from Buenos Aires).*
- 19 *The Tablet.* 6 April 2002, pp. 6-7. *Argentina’s failed crusade by Jimmy Burns.*
- 20 *L’Osservatore Romano.* 21 June 1982, p. 12. *11 June: Arrival of John Paul II in Buenos Aires.*
- 21 *The Tablet.* 19 June 1982, pp. 612-3. *The Pope in Argentina – An eyewitness account by Jimmy Burns.*

- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *The Advocate* (Archdiocese of Melbourne publication). 17 June 1982, front page photo.
- 24 Burns 1982 article, *op. cit.*
- 25 *The Advocate* (Archdiocese of Melbourne publication). 17 June 1982, back page photo.
- 26 *L'Osservatore Romano*. 21 June 1982, p. 2. *Angelus Message of 13 June: Visit to Argentina rightly understood and welcomed.*
- 27 Simpson, *op. cit.*, p.175.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 29 *BBC News*. 10 October 2007.

'Dirty War' priest gets life term

Christian Von Wernich, 69, was convicted for involvement in seven murders, 42 abductions and 31 cases of torture during the 1976-83 "Dirty War".

Survivors say he passed information he obtained from prisoners to police.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7035294.stm>

- 30 *New York Times*. 17 September 2007.

Argentine Church Faces 'Dirty War' Past

LA PLATA, Argentina, Sept. 10 – A simple wooden cross hanging from his neck, the Rev. Rubén Capitanio sat before a microphone on Monday and did what few Argentine priests before him had dared to do: condemn the Roman Catholic Church for its complicity in the atrocities committed during Argentina's "dirty war."

"The attitude of the church was scandalously close to the dictatorship" that killed more than 15,000 Argentines and tortured tens of thousands more, the priest told a panel of three judges here, "to such an extent that I would say it was of a sinful degree." The panel is deciding the fate of the Rev. Christian von Wernich, a priest accused of conspiring with the military who has become for many a powerful symbol of the church's role.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/world/americas/17church.html>

- 31 *The Australian*. 27 April 1995, p. 14.
- 32 *Catholic Weekly* (Archdiocese of Sydney publication). 12 May 1996, p. 6.
- 33 *Argentine Bishops Ask Forgiveness For Role in "Dirty War,"* 29 April 1996.

BUENOS AIRES (CWN) – Argentina's bishops issued a joint statement on Saturday asking forgiveness for any role Catholics may have had in the country's "dirty war" during the 1970s. Cardinal Antonio Quarracino of Buenos Aires read the 39-point document unanimously approved by the bishops after six days of retreat and a year of discussion.

"We implore God's forgiveness for the crimes committed then, especially by sons of the Church, whether as members of the revolutionary guerrillas or as members of the state or the security forces," the National Bishops' Conference said in a statement...

The bishops in their statement said, "Many Catholics justified and participated in systematic violence as a road to 'national liberation,' attempting to take political power and establish a new society based on Marxist ideology. And other groups, including many sons of the Church, responded illegally to the guerrillas in an immoral and atrocious way that shames us all."

The Catholic bishops at the time were criticized by human rights groups for maintaining relations with the military rulers. “Many think that the bishops should have broken off relations with the authorities as a way to obtain freedom for the detained,” the bishops said. “Only God knows what would have happened if that road had been followed, but there is no doubt that all that was done was not enough.”

“In concluding this examination of conscience, we bishops humbly beg God’s forgiveness for faults we may be charged with. We beg our brothers who were offended to forgive us,” the document said.

<http://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=402>

34 *12 September 2000 – Catholic World News Brief*

Argentine Bishops Seek Jubilee Year Pardon

BUENOS AIRES, (CWNNews.com) – Argentina’s bishops on Friday asked forgiveness on behalf of all Argentine Catholics for sins committed by them throughout the South American country’s history, and especially during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship that took thousands of lives.

Following in the footsteps of Pope John Paul II’s historic Jubilee Year plea for pardon earlier this year on behalf of the whole Church – and similar pleas by other episcopal conferences, the bishops apologised for the Church’s failings. “We have been indulgent with totalitarian postures, hurting democracy. We have discriminated against many brothers without committing ourselves to the defence of their rights,” the bishops told thousands of faithful attending the National Eucharistic Conference in Cordoba.

“We ask your forgiveness, O God, for the silent responsibility and the effective participation of the Church’s children in pushing aside human rights, in tortures and rapes, in intransigent ideologies, and in foolish deaths that bloodied our country,” they said.

The Church has been accused by some of not only doing nothing to stop the wave of abuses during the so-called “Dirty War” against suspected leftist rebels and their sympathizers, but actually participating in it. In 1996, the bishops offered an examination of conscience that some called lukewarm. Adolfo Perez Esquivel, a leading human rights advocate, called the 1996 apology “a laundered document, with evasive phrases and no courage.”

Among the other sins for which the bishops requested pardon were (sic) money laundering, drug trafficking, and anti-Semitism. “Many Christians, in the name of human rights, may have invited the crime of abortion, euthanasia, and cruelty and may have promoted drug consumption, lack of rest, and abuse of alcohol and tobacco,” they said.

<http://www.ewtn.com/vnews/getstory.asp?number=6847>