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Benedict continues appeal for peace

John L. Allen Jr. | Aug. 4, 2006 All Things Catholic

Pope Benedict XVI appealed for an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon last Sunday following his Angelus address, the last in Valle d'Aosta prior to his arrival at Castel Gandolfo, where he will spend most of August and September. The full text:

> *"In this moment, I cannot help but think of the ever more grave and tragic situation the Middle East is living though: hundreds of dead, and so many wounded; a growing mass of homeless persons and refugees; homes, cities and infrastructure destroyed; and in the hearts of many, hate and the desire for revenge seems to grow. These facts clearly demonstrate that justice cannot be reestablished, a new order cannot be created, and an authentic peace cannot be achieved when one takes recourse to the instrument of violence. More than ever, we see how prophetic, and yet at the same time realistic, is the voice of the church when, facing war and conflicts of every sort, she indicates the path of truth, justice, love and liberty, as the Blessed Pope John XXIII said in his immortal encyclical* Pacem in terries. *Again today, humanity must walk this path in order to reach the desired good and the true peace."*

> "In the name of God, I appeal to all the responsible parties in this spiral of violence: immediately lay down arms on all sides! To governments and international institutions, I ask that they spare no effort to obtain this necessary end of hostilities, and thus begin to construct, through dialogue, a durable and stable co-existence for all the peoples of the Middle East. To persons of good will, I ask that you continue and intensify the sending of humanitarian aid to those populations who are so needy and so afflicted. Above all, may a trusting prayer continue to rise from every heart to the good and merciful God, that he may grant his peace to this region and to the entire world. I entrust this anguished prayer to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Peace, so venerated in the countries of the Middle East, where we hope soon to see reign that reconciliation for which the Lord Jesus offered his precious blood."

During his General Audience on August 1, Benedict XVI issued another appeal:

> *"I invite everyone to continue to pray for the beloved and martyred region of the Middle East. Our eyes are full of the shocking images of the bodies of so many people torn to pieces, above all children -- I'm thinking, in particular, of Qana, in Lebanon. I want to repeat that nothing can justify shedding innocent blood, no matter where it comes from! With a heart full of affliction, I renew yet again a pressing appeal for an immediate halt to all the hostilities and all the violence, and I exhort the international community as well as those most directly involved in this tragedy to put in place as quickly as possible the conditions for a definitive political solution to the crisis, capable of providing a more serene and secure future for the generations to come."*

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To the limited extent that the pope's words found an echo in the global press, it was his plea to lay down arms that drew attention. Yet in some ways, perhaps the most revealing element in the text was the word "realistic."

It marked the second time in a week that a senior church official has insisted that war, not peace, is unrealistic.

If Bismark once famously declared that "not by speeches and resolutions of majorities are the mighty problems of the age to be solved, but by blood and iron," Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Vatican's foreign minister, recently said that such thinking reflects only "superficial realism." Lasting peace, he argued in a statement following the Rome summit on Lebanon, "can only be, and must be, created with means other than the killing of innocent persons."

It's not a new debate.

In the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003, American and British officials repeatedly said, on and off the record, that the Vatican's opposition was well-meaning but naïve. Vatican officials responded that the war itself was unrealistic, that complex historical and political problems cannot be resolved by a "magic bullet" of armed force. The same points are being made, by both sides, this time around.

An August 1 statement from the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, echoed the argument.

"Experience in this conflict has proved that violence has only generated and even increased violence," Sabbah said. His statement was issued in French, Arabic and English to ensure maximum distribution.

As one senior Vatican official put it to me this week, "Picking up a gun is not realism, it's impatience."

In a footnote, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, carried extensive coverage of the crisis in Lebanon on August 1, including an essay by the founder of the Sant'Egidio movement, Andrea Riccardi, recalling Pope Benedict XV's denunciation of World War I in 1917 as "useless slaughter." The title of Riccardi's article was, not coincidentally, "Prophecy and Realism."

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