

# How the Vatican is addressing the crisis in the Middle East

by Mark Burdman from Rome

At a time when the Middle East region is going through its most extreme crisis in decades, threatening to plunge the world into further chaos and war, international attention has lawfully been directed to what interventions might be expected from the Holy See in Rome.

It is clear that the Vatican feels enormous concern over the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and is prepared to take concrete and dramatic action to stem the plunge toward the Inferno. Whether these planned actions are adequate to meet the profound requirements of the present historical moment is, however, questionable.

On the visible level, Vatican efforts, motivated both by Pope John Paul II and by the powerful Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Casaroli, are directed at efforts of personal diplomacy that embody the Holy See's concern to counter the irrationality that is sweeping the Middle East. The first of these steps of "open diplomacy" was, of course, the Papal audience with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, and the included efforts to achieve a dialogue between the claimants, Palestinian, Arab, and Israeli, to the historical land of Palestine, leading toward a PLO-Israeli recognition and a settlement of the question of Jerusalem.

In the first week in October, momentum had begun toward a new step in personal diplomacy. It was reported in reliable Rome circles that the Pope will make an historical visit to Lebanon, likely in the last weeks before the end of this year. According to my sources, the idea of the visit was first mooted in a session between His Holiness and the Patriarch of the Melkite (Greek Catholic/Eastern Rite) Church, Hakim, on Sept. 24. During this meeting, it is reported, the Pope declared his extreme concern over the growing sectarian strife in Lebanon, especially the potential for renewed Christian-Muslim confessional conflict, and asserted his readiness to travel personally to Lebanon. Two days later, this sentiment was conveyed to the Lebanese authorities, and the matter will be a focal point of discussion during the scheduled October stopover in Rome of Lebanon's newly appointed president Amin Gemayel.

According to an informed Lebanese source, "this visit will be very important for stimulating the cohesion and unity of Lebanon and facilitating the reconciliation of the communities, after all that has happened there. It is a very dramatic decision, and will have deep consequences."

In the general Mideast atmosphere characterized by the recent brutal massacres in Lebanon, the Vatican is smarting. Its interests, both of a specific Christian nature and of a more universal moral aspect, have been hit the combined assault of Khomeinist fundamentalism within Islam, the expansionist warrior-cultism of defense minister Ariel Sharon and his allies in Israel, and parallel manifestations of a nominally Christian variety in Lebanon.

Certain Vatican personalities feel it is more urgent than ever to re-establish the dialogue for co-existence between different communities in the Middle East, especially between Christians and Muslims, since Christians exist in the Middle East in a largely Islamic environment. What is feared is a general trend toward Muslim-Christian holy war, with repercussions extending deep into Africa and elsewhere. The Vatican also wants to avoid a kind of "Christian Zionism," in which Middle Eastern Christians band together, out of fear, into their own redoubts.

## 'No master plan'

While attempting to maintain an intricate web of delicate relations in the Middle East, the Vatican is not advocating a comprehensive plan for an overall Middle East peace, complete with concepts of economic and technological development for the region. Advocacy of such a comprehensive conception is regarded as too ambitious and as overstepping the Holy See's field of action. Many sources have stated in discussions, "you will not find a Vatican master plan for the Middle East."

By the same token, the Vatican refrains from making an emphatic identification and denunciation of the various cultisms (Isis, Mardouk, Moloch, Phoenicia, etc.) that are surfacing under nominally religious covers in the Middle East. In the special case of Israel, for example, the Vatican treats with overall suspicion the concept of a state founded by a religious faith, and has maintained a policy of non-recognition of actions of the current ruling Israeli team and by the heightened issue of Jerusalem, the city which Israel claims as its "eternal capital," but which the Vatican wants to see "internationalized" with free access to the holy shrines. In this context, the Vatican does not have a defined idea of transforming the Israeli state through encouraging the potential rise of movements consonant with a Judeo-Christian re-

publican outlook, and counterposing this to the fundamentalist Isis cultism of the Sharon faction.

Parallel observations might be made about Islam, and the lack of an explicit position against "Asharite" irrationalism within Islam and against the Khomeini and Qaddafi tendencies, as against the rational trend within Islam.

### **Paul VI's ecumenicism and its subverters**

The question of Holy See relations with Judaism and Islam is enormously complex, and can only be analyzed in terms of the ecumenical initiatives in the 1964-74 period, preceding and following the 1967 issuance of the great *Popolorum Progressio* encyclical calling for development of the planet through human intervention. It can be safely stated that the ecumenical initiatives toward Judaism, Islam, and other faiths originating in that period were seen in Paul VI'S mind as integrally connected to the questions of development raised by the historical encyclical.

On Oct. 22, 1974, two special commissions were formed on initiative from the Holy Father: the Commission for Religious Relations with Islam (associated with the Secretariat for Non-Christians, itself founded at Paul VI's impetus in 1964) and the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism (associated with the Secretariat for the Union of Christians, created by Pope John XXIII in 1960).

There is no question that major issues of an historical, political, and philosophical nature were meant to be undertaken by these commissions, in line with a broader ecumenical vision.

The statement of principles of the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism, for example, represents an intervention to reverse years of paranoia and distrust between the two faiths, especially resulting from the interwar and war years, and to lay the basis for a reaffirmed Judeo-Christian ethnic.

The founding of the Commission, claims the statement, finds its "historical setting in circumstances deeply affected by the memory of the persucution and massacre of Jews which took place in Europe just before and during the second World War. . . . Although Christianity sprang from Judaism, taking from it certain essential elements of its faith and divine cult, the gap dividing them was deepened more and more, to such an extent that Christian and Jew hardly knew each other. Christians must strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience." A "real dialogue" is advocated, premised on the rigorous interdependence of Judaism and Christianity in the doctrinal sense. Hence: "the New Testament brings out the full meaning of the Old, while both Old and New illumine and explain each other. . . . Jesus was born of the Jewish people, as were His apostles and a large number of His first disciples. When He revealed himself as the Messiah and Son of God, the bearer of the new gospel message, He did so as

the fulfillment and perfection of the earlier revelation. And, although His teaching had a profoundly new character, Christ, nevertheless, in many instances, took His stand on the teaching of the Old Testament. . . ."

No sooner had these commissions been launched than the enemies of humanity began to react to corrupt and subvert the intent and direction of the ecumenical initiatives. For example, from the outside of the Church, the Club of Rome rushed in the 1974-75 period to create a Malthusian parody to the conception of Paul VI, called the "Interreligious Peace Colloquium" (IRPC). The IRPC had the sole purpose of infiltrating the Club of Rome's Malthusian federalism into the world's faiths and then deploying these faiths as battering rams against progress. Under the auspices of individuals like the Society of Jesus's Philip Land—an American trained at the Jesuits's center of epistemological warfare, the Gregorian University in Rome—the concept was put forward at conferences in Bellagio, Italy and Lisbon, Portugal in 1975 and 1976 respectively to establish the Club of Rome's genocidal "globalism" as the basis for a new "ecumenical" relationship, and thereby to invert the intent and content of the *Popolorum Progressio*. Inroads were made by the IRPC directly into the commissions on Judaism and Islam, and these inroads are maintained to the present day.

The problem is made yet more profound *within* the Secretariats for Christian Unity and Relations with Non-Christians. In these, important consultancy positions have been obtained by anti-humanist members of the Dominican Order, the Society of Jesus, and others, sympathetic to irrationalism and cultism. These individuals come from institutions, such as the Gregorian University and the Pontifical Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, whose methodology, it has been discovered upon investigation, is that of the evil notion of cultural relativism. Leading figures within these have openly defended "Asharism," the pseudo-Islamic ideology of al-Ghazali that produced the evil Muslim Brotherhood in this century.

A different but related set of problems besets the Commission on Religious Relations with Judaism. Since the Mid-1970s, this Commission has held meetings on Christian-Jewish relations with a body called the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, the most recent being in Milan, Italy from Sept. 6-9 of this year. Among the constituent bodies of the Jewish organization is the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. Tied into organized crime networks and cult operations, the ADL has devoted enormous energies to eliminating the main spokesman today for Judeo-Christian ecumenicism, the American politician Lyndon H. LaRouche, and thus is hardly qualified to be a spokesman for Jewish relations with the Church.

Under these circumstances, are the commissions established by Paul VI with an ecumenical vision today capable of being effective instruments for meeting the greatest set of political, spiritual, and moral crises that human civilization has confronted in centuries?

## PLO's Rome delegate discusses Israel

The Palestine Liberation Organization today stands at a crossroads, a situation in the words of Chairman Yasser Arafat "similar to 1948." Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the subsequent evacuation from Beirut of the PLO's military forces, the organization under Arafat's direction has been forced to entirely reassess its position in the Middle East and its tactical approaches to achieving its goal of an independent Palestinian state.

Central to this reassessment has been the forced recognition that the previous strategy of armed struggle had, at best, reached its limitations and, at worst, had proven to be a dismal failure. With its fighters now spread out in different countries of the region, and few effective military bases remaining in Lebanon from which to freely operate, what are the choices available to the PLO?

The answer is provided, in part, in the following interview with the PLO's Rome spokesman Nemer Hamad, in which is reflected the growing emphasis being placed by Arafat on peace, negotiations, and cooperation in the Middle East. That there is momentum behind Arafat's new emphasis was clearly shown in a small but highly significant event last week. Following the murderous attack on a synagogue in Rome last week, Hamad denounced the action as an "aberrant manifestation of anti-Semitism against our Jewish brothers, guilty only of being Jews." Hamad's comment was carried front page in the Oct. 10 edition of the *Jerusalem Post*.

The factional situation in the PLO remains quite complex, and is augmented by Syria's dream of creating its own "PLO" in Damascus. With several of the PLO's principal factions now based in Syria, following the forced evacuation from Beirut, Syria is promoting an anti-Arafat movement. This week, with Arafat in Jordan for talks with King Hussein, five PLO factional leaders issued a strong denunciation of Arafat, and the Syrian Information Minister claimed that Arafat has no right to speak for the PLO!

Particularly dangerous at this time is the possible deployment of the Swiss-banker-controlled "Palestinian radical" Abu Nidal for more terrorist attacks to discredit Arafat and achieve other goals. Attacks on Arafat himself are not to be ruled out. Should such a terrorist wave occur, the recent turns by Arafat should make clear that it has nothing to do with the real PLO. Under Arafat's leadership, the PLO has made a turn, one which must be supported in the same way that peace factions in Israel and Arab countries must be supported. Only

such a process can prevent more "Lebanons" from engulfing the Middle East.

*The following interview was conducted by EIR's European correspondents Mark Burdman and Paolo Raimondi with Nemer Hammad, the PLO representative in Rome since 1974, and a figure well known in Italian and Middle Eastern circles. Hammad was born in Palestine in 1941, near Acre, lived in Lebanon after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, attended secondary school in Lebanon and the University in Cairo, and then lived in Damascus. He became a follower of the PLO in 1967, and was for several years a journalist, until becoming PLO representative in Rome in 1974. He has received extensive coverage recently in the Italian press for statements concerning and condemning the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanese camps of Sabra and Shatila.*

**EIR:** During the current period, one key development in the situation was the Pope's meeting with the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Could you indicate what importance that meeting had?

**Hammad:** The Vatican, unlike all the Western countries—if you think of the Vatican as a state—is sincere and respects what we accepted in 1947-48. Israel was created by the United Nations, according to the plan for two states in Palestine, a Jewish state and an Arab Palestinian state, with international status for Jerusalem. This is what the United States and other Western countries voted for and this is what the Vatican still favors. After that time, all the Western countries changed their position and began supporting the expansionist policies of Israel, and ignoring the fact that they had recognized Israel within frontiers of the partition plan. The Vatican supports the idea of two states, and an international status for Jerusalem. This is why the Vatican doesn't recognize the State of Israel. Also, there are no diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Jordan. But for years, after 1948, and years later, there was no legitimate Palestinian leadership; thus there is no Palestinian state. So, any meeting with the PLO means that the Vatican is recognizing the Palestinian people and is recognizing the original idea for the creation of a Palestinian state. . . .

**EIR:** Recently, in an interview reported in *La Stampa*, *Le Monde*, and elsewhere, Arafat made very positive statements concerning the initiatives of Nahum Goldmann, Philip Klutznick, and other Jews, whom he described as being as in a Jewish humanist tradition. . . .

**Hammad:** We in the PLO differentiate between Jews, world Jewry, and the State of Israel, and we differentiate between Zionist Israelis and non-Zionists. We say that it is useless to go deeply today into discussion of the history, when there are losses of human lives. There is a reality that there are people who believe that this land is their country. Instead of learning how to kill, they can learn to live together. From this concern came our slogan for a Palestinian democratic state in which

Jews, Christians, Muslims, and non-believers could live together. This idea was expressed from 1964 to 1974, and repeatedly the Israeli government rejected such a solution. Then in 1974, our National Council, which is our parliament, decided in the same direction of democracy and coexistence on the creation of two states; the Palestinian state and Israel, as long as it exists, and, again, we had the answer of Israel with the famous three “noes”: no to a withdrawal to the territories as they existed before June 5, 1967; no to the Palestinian state; and no negotiations with the PLO. This was the line of Begin.

And so, when this declaration of [Pierre] Mendes-France, Goldmann, and Klutznick spoke about the need for a peaceful solution to the conflict, and the necessity for mutual recognition, we considered this very important from three leaders of world Jewry. Arafat considers that there is a big change. Until that recent point, all the Israeli aggressivity was defended by the main Jewish organizations. This is the first time that three leaders of the Jewish world took such a clear position.

**EIR:** Do you see this as having echoes inside Israel?

**Hammad:** There is no doubt that Israeli public opinion could be influenced by the positions of Jewish communities around the world, especially the American and the French.

**EIR:** For years, our founding editor Mr. LaRouche has seen the need for a grand design for economic cooperation in the Middle East, so that different cultures can be put together.

**Hammad:** There is no doubt that in the Middle East, where all the religions found their origin, there is a need, and a great need, for collaboration between the peoples of the region instead of conflicts. All elements for a real development exist: resources, manpower, experience, with humanitarian principles, due to the influence of religion, which must be a human influence, and not a religious fanaticism. Any kind of democratic development for the region could create a revolution not only for industrializing the region, but also for cooperation in all fields—cultural; scientific, agricultural—which could protect the independence of the region, and could give the region an important role in the world, for world peace and stability. A role which is opposite to today’s. Now, the Middle East is a force for destabilizing the world. Everybody is buying arms; there is no democracy, because there is a narrow patriotism, a chauvinism. By insisting that there must be a Jewish state, there is fanaticism. The insistence on an Islamic state—there is fanaticism. Until this moment, even the political problems have their origin in the economic problems. All the problems of the Third World, including the Middle East, go back to the colonialist period, when the Third World was considered only in terms of its raw materials. Today what is needed is collaboration between the industrialized and developing countries, instead of competition. What I said about relations inside the Middle East could be an example as well for relations between the region and

other regions. The New World Economic Order and the Middle East solution are connected to each other, related to each other. The struggle for democracy must go together with the struggle for the New World Economic Order. Everybody has his role: while the main struggle of the Palestinians is for independence and sovereignty, it is for the others also to struggle for a New World Economic Order.

**EIR:** Back to the destabilization of the region: We see the existence of a Bernard Lewis Plan for the disintegration of the Middle East, to break up the states with disintegration, to use this as a weapon against cooperation in the region. [Lewis, a British intelligence operative, is stationed at Princeton University—ed.] What is your view of this?

**Hammad:** This is really Israeli policy.

**EIR:** And Khomeini’s too?

**Hammad:** This is a different phenomenon. The majority of Iranians are Muslims. This is why Khomeini is in favor of an internationalism which is Islamic. It is fanaticism, in the form of an Islamic nation, while Israel is playing the role of destabilizing factor by playing on all the differences, whether of religion or race. For example, they want a Maronite state in Lebanon, this is why they lie about the numbers of Christians killed in Lebanon, as if the situation in Lebanon were a war between Palestinians and Christians, which is absolutely wrong—just to give their policy a cover of defending something, while they want to create a Maronite state. There is a fiction Israel is building about the situation in Lebanon. There are Lebanese of all different creeds and faiths, and within the Maronites, there are Palestinian Maronites, there is not a Maronite nation. Israelis also talk of the Druze as if there is a nation of Druzes. It would be as if in the U.S., people would talk about a Protestant nation. Israel is looking to divide. It wants to disintegrate the region into pieces, leaving Israel to be the policemen. Formerly, there was a similar role slated for the Shah [of Iran]. That was why the Gulf was being divided into small states. When the Shah decided to become independent, the Americans decided to criticize him and make problems for him.

**EIR:** And overthrew him to bring in Khomeini?

**Hammad:** I wouldn’t say that. The Shah ruled Iran as part of a small minority in the country. His father was a king who was supported by the British, and the British put him in because they were not sure of the attitude of the majority toward them. They put in a king, who was part of a minority, who would always have to depend on the British to rule, since he never felt he had the strength to govern. This was the same as King Abdullah of Jordan.

**EIR:** We would like to ask you to express your view on what forces were behind the recent massacres in Lebanon.

**Hammad:** Israel was created according to the Zionist ideology. Where would this Jewish state be? Herzl said it had to

be on a land without people. The question became, *how* to create it? Herzl also gave an answer, and put the program for the creation of a state in the framework of the interests of the colonial powers.

All the practices of Zionism, practically from 1917, with the Balfour Declaration until now, were in this direction: that Palestine is a land without people. They expelled the Palestinians from the country in different waves of emigration, the largest in 1948, then in 1967, and the years between and afterward, committing so many massacres against the Palestinian people.

After 1965, this Israeli policy of launching full-scale attacks against the Palestinians has been [mounted] against Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Their aim, in large part, is to kill the largest number of Palestinians, if not all. . . .

I think that what Mr. Sharon said summarizes Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. He said on the 10th of June, five days after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, that the Palestinians are the microbes of the world, and we must clear the earth of them. That was repeated in all international mass media.

**EIR:** There is much evidence that would implicate Henry Kissinger in the recent atrocities in Lebanon. How do you see Kissinger's role in the current situation?

**Hammad:** Kissinger has boasted that he did more for Israel in 1973 than all the Zionist leaders combined did for Israel in more than 60 years. He was behind the decision of the Americans to make a military bridge to Israel in the 1973 war. He was behind the decision by Nixon for an atomic alert during the war. He was the one behind the written guarantee given to the Israeli government that the United States would not negotiate with the PLO. Practically, Kissinger was the man who fabricated the current policy of the Americans for the Middle East, even during the Carter administration. Because he gave the written guarantee in the name of the United States, knowing that there was a Zionist lobby in the United States that could prevent change of these commitments. So, practically, Kissinger's policy, up to this moment, is controlling the American policy toward the Middle East.

**EIR:** What can you say about the British role in the current situation in the Middle East?

**Hammad:** The Palestinian tragedy was begun by the British and continued by the Americans. But it was created by the British.

**EIR:** We want a clarification from you on a certain point. There is much talk in the media about terrorism, and talk about the Palestinians and terrorism. We have indicated that the main problem in this area centers around Abu Nidal, and his group, and that is used to paint a more general picture. Can you comment on this?

**Hammad:** We have to agree on the definition of terrorism. Is it an act or an ideology? If a person killed another by a

knife, is it terrorism? If a state bombs a town and kills 5000, is it terrorism? Is the individual act of violence terrorism, and bombing by an airplane not terrorism? This is why all the Israeli acts against the Palestinians began with acts of terrorism by organizations and it is now terrorism by the state. Faced with the pragmatic and continuous terrorism by the state of Israel, so many Palestinian individuals, led by their feelings of desperation and depression, were easy targets for unbalanced persons who do not differentiate between ideologies and personal feelings and personal interests. In our revolution, as in other revolutions, certain acts against the enemy could be considered terrorism, but the moment all the struggle is terrorism, it is not national liberation movement any longer, just a gang.

This is why the PLO is not only military, but is the national identity of the Palestinians, where there are engineers, doctors, professionals, political forces, and the military organization as well. There are many institutions. There is room for condemnation of terrorism when it is against the national cause. In all modern history, we have seen that enemies of liberation movements used to see just terrorism in the struggle for liberation movements. This happened in Europe, when de Gaulle during World War II was considered a terrorist by the Germans. Even George Washington was considered a terrorist by the British. The success of any liberation movement depends on how much it can show that its policy, behavior, and so on show a responsibility for international law, and to struggle publicly, not underground. There is the PLO, which the Israeli government is insisting on considering a terrorist group—depending on what, this accusation? Depending on certain acts by a terrorist group led by Abu Nidal, who is working outside any Palestinian legality. He is not in Palestinian society. He has an underground group protected by others, who represent for the Israeli government the example of what they hope could be the entirety of the Palestinian movement.

There was an official Mossad report published at the end of 1981, which said that if Abu Nidal did not exist, we would have to create him. The report said that for Israel, Abu Nidal is a benefit. . . .

**EIR:** We want to conclude by indicating the work of La-Rouche and his associates toward the creation of a Club of Life. What do you think of this idea?

**Hammad:** All our struggle is to defend life. The life of any one of us is the greatest value, and if humankind is finished, this means nothing will remain. It is not the stones and the trees which give the earth its meaning. It is we human beings, with our minds, which we can use for a better life, instead of destruction. This is why I said the PLO believes it is better to live together in a democratic state in Palestine instead of killing each other. We are in this sense a member of the club and we support its principles. We don't make any differentiation between men according to their religion, their race, or their color.