

Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

The Pope in southern Africa

The missed landing and the terrorist hostage affair in Lesotho may be aimed against his call for a New World Economic Order.

John Paul II's latest pilgrimage to Africa took him to the nerve-center of Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique, with an unexpected stopover in South Africa—a region wracked by racism, bloody tribal warfare, poverty, and the painful problem of refugees.

While the superpowers, which foment much of the guerrilla actions, are setting up their new order, i.e., carving up "spheres of influence" in these zones at the cost of national sovereignty and the interests of the local peoples, the Pope defied the dangers and traps, and took his message of peace and reconciliation to southern Africa.

"It is important that you maintain your determination to find a solution through dialogue sustained by prayer," said John Paul II to the assembly of Southern African Bishops gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. "You must be fully convinced that only a negotiated solution of differences can lead to true peace and true justice. A loss of faith in the possibility of a peaceful solution can easily lead to greater frustration and violence, increasing the threat to peace, [which is] not limited to this region."

The Pope warned President Mugabe at the airport, "The political, economic, and ideological forces that hold power are endangering the still-precarious order of countries which have barely begun to consolidate independence. These forces hinder the self-determination of peoples and foment ideological, ethnic, and tribal conflicts, and they slow down the de-

velopment process." He appealed to those responsible for the destiny of peoples in that region, to renounce violence as a means to reach their goals.

Reiterating his personal commitment to genuine progress, he told thousands of youth in the stadium at Harare, "I know that many young Africans are unemployed and will find many obstacles in the future to finding jobs. Unhappily, many young people all over the world find themselves in this sad situation! Through no fault of your own, many of you are deprived of the means to continue your own growth and individual development and to realize your own hopes, that is, you are deprived of the chance of exercising a job or profession. There is need for outside help. I know that your Bishops are preparing programs to favor the formation of other kinds of aid, especially in rural areas. And I will continue to spur on the creation of a New World Economic Order which would favor the expansion of the basic economy in development countries without their having to take on unjust burdens or having to depend on the more advanced countries."

The thirst for justice, and the upheaval provoked when it is lacking, was the theme of the Pope's address at the mass celebrated in Gabarones, the capital of Botswana.

At his third stop, in Maseru, capital of Lesotho, began the long, dramatic stage of the Pope's journey, when his Boeing 707 was unable to land at the airport due to still-unexplained problems, and then a heavy storm hit the capital. The papal plane

changed route and landed in Johannesburg, capital of the Republic of South Africa, where John Paul II briefly met with Foreign Minister "Pik" Botha, and South African authorities supplied him with ground transport to Lesotho.

Meanwhile, in Maseru, four guerrillas took a bus hostage, with 71 pilgrims headed for the capital to take part in the Pope's mass. After hours of anguish, the incident ended with the death of three guerrillas and one hostage and the wounding of several, some critically—all within a few hundred meters of the Pope.

The atrocity raises disquieting questions. The landing problems could have resulted from sabotage, and the hostage-taking appears to be related. The unscheduled, six-hour overland journey of the Pope put his security in danger, while the terrorist incident had all the earmarks of an act of intimidation against his visit. The violence scared off many believers who had intended to go to the Pope's mass.

Who wants to stop John Paul II's missionary work—and why? The African continent is in tragic condition. Its foreign debt amounts to some \$218 billion, while its export income has collapsed. The continent is threatened by hordes of locusts, prostrated by wars, and sapped by AIDS and other terrible epidemics. While Africans face this holocaust, the indifference of the so-called developed sector suggests that the international banks and the governments they run have already written the continent off the map.

One man, John Paul II, has had the courage to break this guilty silence, this abominable conspiracy, by going to Africa to cry out to the world that there is still much to be done there, and to renew in Africans' hearts the hope for a better world, where the dignity and rights of every human being will be safeguarded.