
The Vatican

'Space shield' can promote world peace

by Vivian Freyre Zoakos

On Jan. 13, the official Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, issued the first cautious Vatican endorsement of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The fact that the endorsement was contained in an unsigned editorial points to its being a generalized policy statement.

The article followed by one day a speech by Pope John Paul II once again attacking the economic policy of the developed sector with respect to the Third World. This continued what is now becoming a Vatican pattern: direct and indirect attacks against the International Monetary Fund.

Osservatore Romano writes: Ultimately, peace can only come "from the prophetic transformation of all swords into ploughshares. The prophecy reminds us of God's paternity, according to which all men are brothers. . . . The prophetic is, however, not illusory. . . . From this standpoint, without entering into the technical aspects of the space shield proposal, *the pragmatic research of a method of mutual security different from the balance of terror is politically understandable and desirable* [emphasis added]."

It is almost a certainty that this latest departure from the appeasement policies of previous Vatican *Ostpolitik* will earn Rome yet another blast from Moscow, which has been steadily attacking recent pronouncements of the Pope, particularly with respect to Third World policy. What is in fact especially remarkable about the present *Osservatore* piece is that it correctly links the question of the SDI to the Vatican's now repeated demands for economic justice towards the Third World—the latter being the issue which had prompted the Soviet attacks.

The article says that the twin poles necessary for ensuring a stable peace are the SDI ("ending the balance of terror") and the development of the devastated Third World economies, particularly Africa. This crucial linkage is methodologically explained by *Osservatore* as stemming from "the fundamental rights of man."

Advanced-sector economic policy vis-à-vis the Third World was also the subject of a speech delivered Jan. 12 by Pope John Paul to the 11 ambassadors accredited to the Holy See. Speaking of the enormous debt burden of these coun-

tries, the Pope noted: "Many developing-sector countries have contracted enormous debts which are becoming worse. I know that the problem is a complex one. . . . But the situation has become insoluble for many debtor countries. Without a new system of solidarity, how will they be able to repay their debt? How will they be able to break out of the impasse? Solving this is in the interest of all, including the rich countries, who otherwise risk finding themselves isolated. . . ."

The Pope's speech, particularly when taken in the context of his recent pronouncements, points directly to a return to the tradition of Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*. That historic document had argued for creation of a new international development fund which would have as its principal task the concerted development of the Third World up to the levels enjoyed by the industrial countries.

Against Liberation Theology

The series of attacks on Liberation Theology which began issuing from the Vatican not later than October of last year have fleshed out this policy orientation. Liberation Theology is the doctrine which holds that Marxist dogma can be applied to the Church's work, especially among the poor of the Third World. By their virulent opposition to the industrial development of the Third World, which it characterizes as "neo-colonialism," Liberation Theologists are doing the work of the IMF and, of course, Moscow.

The most recent papal attack against this doctrine came on Dec. 12, with the Apostolic letter, "Reconciliation and Penance." The letter asserted that sin is a personal, moral responsibility, whose cause must not be sought in the structural or social realm as asserted by the Liberation Theology group.

The Soviet press agency TASS responded with a harsh blast on Dec. 29. As it has done in the past, TASS charged that the Vatican is taking "a new step to the right" and "strengthening the conservative forces in the leadership of the Catholic Church who want to end the liberal tendencies in Catholicism characteristic of the '60s and '70s." The Vatican, TASS argued, is about to take measures to "repress those Catholics and their spiritual leaders who more and more recognized the just nature of the struggle for social and national liberation, and the devastating effect of the capitalist system on the working class."

One of the offshoots of the new Vatican Third World policy was visible in the attack against the IMF which the Central American bishops delivered for the first time at their Nov. 25 conference. On that occasion, Archbishop Roman-Arrieta Villalobos accused the Fund of having a "dehumanized concept of economy. . . . The Catholic Church does not accept the supposed recommendations of the IMF for the simple reason that they affect our peoples. . . . The pressures brought by the IMF in its effort to recover loans are to be rejected with courage and firmness."