
Chile

Pope cuts through anti-communist myth

by Valerie Rush

Pope John Paul II's visit to Chile on his current South American tour, has cut through the myth that the only alternative to dictator Augusto Pinochet is "communism." The first non-military head of state to visit Chile since the coup d'état led by Pinochet in 1973, John Paul II defined the intent of his six-day stay with his very first words, pledging that he had come to "promote the victory of good over evil, love over hate . . . and truth over lies. . . . I am here to give new life to your hopes. . . ." The Chilean people responded with pleas to the "pilgrim Pope" to "free us from the tyrant!"

On April 1, John Paul II began a two-week trip to Chile and Argentina, with a ceremonial first-day stopover in Uruguay. The tone for the trip was set in January, when the Vatican's *Justitia et Pax* Commission issued its policy document, "At the Service of the Human Community: An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question."

The document provided the basis for the Brazilian government's decision to put the economic survival of the nation over debt payment, and for certain European governments, France in particular, to break ranks from the international bankers and come to Brazil's support. The Vatican document, an uncompromising declaration of war on the amoral doctrine of "free enterprise," is setting the agenda for John Paul's eighth pastoral journey to South America.

The dignity of man

Even before the Pontiff landed in Santiago, he had defined the Pinochet regime as in explicit violation of the teaching of the Church that "the dignity of man" is primary. In conversation with journalists on his flight from Rome, John Paul II asserted that the regime in Chile is "dictatorial . . . but one which by its own definition is transitory." He contrasted Chile with his own homeland Poland, saying, "Dictatorships are one thing and dictators are another. One thing is the phenomenon of a dictator who must pass—the return to democracy is guaranteed. A dictatorship as a continuing system is another thing."

In Chile, the Pope was witness to the degradation under which Chile's people have been forced to live. Hearing stories of state-sponsored kidnappings, torture, and murder, and the undeniable poverty; and seeing the violent suppression of basic civil and human rights even around his own speaking engagements, John Paul pledged the Church's active participation in Chile's return to a society that would guarantee "the full and responsible participation of the citizens in the great decisions that affect the life of the nation."

In particular, the Pope urged replacing the yes-or-no "plebiscite" currently scheduled to be held in 1989, with free elections. In the "plebiscite," Pinochet is expected to be the sole candidate for another eight-year term as President of Chile.

Pinochet, a protégé of the Henry Kissinger/Milton Friedman U.S. networks that evolved into the secret government known today as "Project Democracy," is notorious for holding up the specter of "communist aggression" to justify his reign of terror. The Moscow-run Chilean Communist Party has been more than willing to play the part, by openly advocating "the path of armed struggle."

But the Chilean dictator's anti-communist histrionics did not work this time. Pinochet greeted the Pope at the airport with a speech insisting that "few people really appreciate the very serious aggression and siege that Chile has suffered and continues to suffer from the expansionist foreign action of the most extreme materialist and atheist ideology mankind has known. This reality is a central and absolutely unavoidable factor for any analysis or effort to comprehend contemporary Chilean reality."

The unimpressed pontiff rebuffed Pinochet by answering with a "Praised be Jesus Christ!" and the simple reassertion that, "As the herald of Christ . . . I proclaim the inalienable dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God."

Although no details of John Paul II's private 45-minute meeting with Pinochet have been released, a senior Vatican official assured that, "Knowing the Pope, he has seized the moment to discuss important ethical principles."

One of the most dramatic implications of the Pope's visit is that for the first time in 13 years, Chileans have been able to hear and read the stirring moral appeal of a world historic leader, without the Pinochet regime daring to impose total censorship. Said Gabriel Valdes, head of the Christian Democratic opposition party, on the eve of the papal visit: "Chile is going to be free for six days." Valdes added that his country would never be the same again after the papal tour.

If it is becoming increasingly evident that the Pinochet regime is coming to an end, it is not so evident what will replace it. Through its puppet Chilean Communist Party, Moscow is prepared to plunge Chile into prolonged civil war. On the other hand, Brazil offers a dramatic example of how an alliance of the Church with nationalist elements in government and the military can combine to impose a new set of priorities—determined by sovereign national interests.