

Pope tells U.S. to 'choose truth' and fulfill its national mission

by Vivian Freyre Zoakos

"There is much breakdown and pain in your society," Pope John Paul II told the American people during his recent visit to the United States, "because fundamental values . . . are being emptied of their real content. America: you cannot insist on the right to choose, without also insisting on the duty to choose well, the duty to choose the truth."

These words of Pope John Paul II, repeated often in the course of his 10-day visit to the United States which ended Sept. 19, capture the essence of his message to the American population. John Paul made particular use of the fact that his visit coincided with the 200th anniversary of the Constitution of the United States, pointing out that Americans have strayed seriously from the values of their Founding Fathers—values which he emphasized also make up some of the fundamentals of Catholic teaching.

More narrowly, the Pope's intervention into the hierarchy and laity of the Catholic Church followed very much the same theme. After all, the infamous "dissidents disease" which has been infesting the American Catholic Church for some time, is nothing but a reflection within Catholicism of the same degenerate anarchism which dominates American society.

This is a situation which John Paul described with accurate eloquence in the course of a New Orleans address. "Too often, today, the individual's vision of reality is fragmented. At times experience is mediated by forces over which people have no control: Sometimes there is not even an awareness of these forces. The temptation grows to relativize moral principles and to privilege process over truth."

Bringing to bear all the solemnity of his office, and his considerable intellectual powers, the Pope dedicated his visit to reminding the American people that they have a duty to choose truth, to choose a return to their original moral and cultural values. The duty stems from what John Paul correctly identified as the peculiar national mission of the United States, which the crisis-ridden world demands be fulfilled. That mission is to complete the American Revolution, by bringing to the rest of the world the values of freedom and liberty enshrined in the Constitution of the United States, as well as

the economic "gifts" which have flowed from that philosophy of social organization.

As he commented himself upon his return to Rome, John Paul appears to feel confident that the problem of the largely dissident Catholic hierarchy in the United States has been, effectively, solved.

That is not to say that there has been a sudden change in thinking on the part of those prelates who, like Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago, are spokesmen for American Catholic dissent. But a process has been set into motion inside the laity, and no doubt also parts of the hierarchy, which will carry, over the efforts of the dissidents.

What the Pope addressed in the Catholic laity—and indeed within the American population as a whole—is what he characterized as a deep yearning for truth, for an end to the amoral anarchy that has increasingly dominated American culture. It was because he was so effective in responding to that "yearning" that John Paul's visit set into motion such a strong shock wave, whose effects will continue into the future.

The Pope treated the spokesmen for American Catholic dissent kindly but very firmly, above all making it very clear that there is no validity in assenting to the values of a corrupt society. Truth is not decided by the vote of the majority. "The Church faces a particularly difficult task," he said, "in her efforts to preach the word of God in all cultures in which the faithful are constantly challenged by consumerism and a pleasure-seeking mentality; where utility, productivity and hedonism are exalted while God and his law are forgotten. In these situations, where ideas and behavior directly contradict the truth about God and about humanity itself, the Church's witness must be unpopular. She must take a clear stand on the Word of God and proclaim the whole Gospel message with great confidence."

At another point, responding to an address delivered by Archbishop John Quinn on the issue of moral theology, in which Quinn argued on behalf of a relativistic approach to the subject, the Pope responded in even stronger terms. "It is

sometimes reported," he said, "that a large number of Catholics today do not adhere to the teaching of the Church on a number of questions, notably sexual and conjugal morality, divorce and remarriage. Some are reported as not accepting the Church's clear position on abortion. It has also been noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teachings.

"It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium [the teaching power of the Church] is totally compatible with being a 'good Catholic.' . . .

"This is a grave error."

The Pope also launched an initiative which is bound to have profound, and much-needed, repercussions for the Catholic Church and American society at large. In one of his addresses to bishops, he pointed out that, since "the way to the heart very often passes through the mind," the Church must engage in a new educational effort "directed to the mind." To this end, "future priests should acquire a high level of intellectual preparation and competence." In order to achieve this, the Vatican is planning a reorganization of the entire Catholic university system in the United States.

The purpose of the reorganization plan, whose details have not yet been made available, is to cut out dissent at the root, in the seminaries and universities, and create a new generation of Catholic laity and hierarchy once again educated in the classical moral values. This initiative is the highest possible level of warfare against the dominant American counterculture, and outflanks entirely the so-called dissenters who currently dominate American Catholicism.

The Pope expressed the full scope of his vision, in initiating this reform, in a New Orleans speech Sept. 12. "Here in the Catholic University centers of this nation," he said, "must be drawn up the blueprints for the reform of attitudes and structures that will influence the whole dynamic of peace and justice in the world."

Relations with Judaism

John Paul's trip to the United States also scored a notable success in Judeo-Catholic relations. Even before arriving, relations between the Vatican and the Jewish community had already undergone a transformation at a meeting in Rome last month between the Pope and international Jewish leaders. That meeting successfully squashed a Soviet-led operation to paint the Pope with the brush of "Nazi sympathizer" and "anti-Semite." The principal Soviet instrument in that nasty business was whiskey king and notorious Soviet puppet Edgar Bronfman and his World Jewish Congress.

The Sept. 10 meeting, between the Pope and the mainstream American Jewish leadership in Miami, took the bridge-building process begun in Rome one step further. The Rabbis present at the meeting not only emerged with unanimous praise for the proceedings, but also commented that the meeting appeared to be the beginning of an entirely new level of Judeo-Catholic relations.

Quite apart from the specific accomplishments of the papal visit, what was most important about the trip was the simple fact that so many millions were reminded of America's historic national mission. This is something which the American people have not heard discussed in a long time, apart from speeches by Lyndon LaRouche.

The Pope addressed himself to what he said was a "great stirring" in the United States today, underneath the surface amorality and anarchy; "an awareness of the urgent need to recapture the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values." It was on that part of the American psyche that John Paul focused his efforts.

To do this, he made effective use of the U.S. Constitution, using it as the reference point most accessible to the American mind for the system of moral, civil, and political values which the Pope strove to revive. He addressed this matter in the economic sphere, speaking of the need to "forgive the debts" of the Third World as part of a needed reorganization of the international economic order. He addressed it when reminding the United States that its proper task, laid out by its Founding Fathers, is to take freedom and economic development to the rest of the world.

Most of all, he reminded his audience that freedom means the freedom to choose truth. "Any distortion of truth or dissemination of non-truth is an offense against freedom," he said. Referring to the bicentennial of the Constitution, John Paul spoke of this being "a time to recognize the meaning of that document. . . . It is a time to recall the original American political faith, with its appeal to the sovereignty of God."

The Pope's words

On the duty of America and Americans

From Pope John Paul's brief address at Miami airport, immediately upon landing in the United States Sept. 10:

. . . To everyone I repeat on this occasion what I said on that memorable day in 1979 when I arrived in Boston: "On my part I come to you—America—with sentiments of friendship, reverence and esteem. I come as one who already knows you and loves you, as one who wishes you to fulfill completely your noble destiny of service to the world." . . .

I come to join you as you celebrate the Bicentennial of that great document, the Constitution of the United States of America. I willingly join you in your prayer of thanksgiving to God for the providential way in which the Constitution has served the people of this nation for two centuries. . . . I join you also in asking God to inspire you—as Americans who have received so much in freedom and prosperity and human

enrichment—to continue to share all this with so many brothers and sisters throughout the other countries of the world. . . .

Speech at the University of South Carolina meeting with the U.S. ecumenical leadership, Sept. 11:

. . . It would be a great tragedy for the entire human family if the United States, which prides itself on its consecration to freedom, were to lose sight of the true meaning of that noble word. America: you cannot insist on the right to choose, without also insisting on the duty to choose well, the duty to choose the truth. Already there is much breakdown and pain in your own society because fundamental values, essential to the well-being of individuals, families, and the entire nation, are being emptied of their real content.

And yet, at the same time, throughout this land there is a great stirring, an awareness of the urgent need to recapture the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values. . . .

Surely by now we must be convinced that only by recognizing the primacy of moral values can we use the immense possibilities offered by science and material progress to bring about the true advancement of the human person in truth, freedom and dignity.

Speech opening the meeting with Jewish dignitaries in Miami, Sept. 10: . . . The same basic religious principles of freedom and justice, of equality and moral solidarity, affirmed in the Torah as well as in the Gospel, were in fact reflected in the high human ideals and in the protection of universal rights found in the United States. These in turn exercised a strong positive influence on the history of Europe and other parts of the world. . . .

Speech to young people, New Orleans, Sept. 12: Dear young people, I too want to speak about your mission, the reason for your life on earth, the truth of your lives. It is extremely vital for you to have a clear idea of your mission, to avoid being confused or deceived. . . .

You young people are proud to live in a free country and you should be grateful to God for your freedom. But even though you can come and go as you like, and do what you want, you are not really free if you are living under the power of error or falsehood. . . .

Right away we can see that as persons we have responsibilities and that these responsibilities are part of our freedom. . . . There is no room in the Church for selfishness. There is no room in the world for selfishness. It destroys the meaning of life; it destroys the meaning of love; it reduces the human person to a subhuman level. . . .

Your mission as young people today is to the whole world. . . .

Speech on social justice, Detroit, Sept. 19: . . . Dear Friends: America is a very powerful country. The amount and quality of your achievements are staggering. By virtue of your unique position . . . you are placed before a choice and you must choose. You may choose to close in on yourselves . . . to try to forget about the rest of the world. Or, as you become more and more aware of your gifts and your capacity to serve, you may choose to live up to the responsi-

bilities that your own history and accomplishments place on your shoulders. . . . This, dear friends, is truly a human vocation, a Christian vocation, and for you, as Americans, it is a worthy national vocation.

Advice to the American Church

Speech to leaders of Catholic higher education, New Orleans, Sept. 12: . . . Religious faith itself calls for intellectual inquiry; and the confidence that there can be no contradiction between faith and reason is a distinctive feature of the Catholic humanistic tradition. . . .

The Catholic university is dedicated to the service of the truth. . . . Too often, today, the individual's vision of reality is fragmented. At times experience is mediated by forces over which people have no control: Sometimes there is not even an awareness of these forces. The temptation grows to relativize moral principles and to privilege process over truth. This has grave consequences for the moral life, as well as for the intellectual life of individuals and of society. . . .

Modern culture is marked by a pluralism of attitudes, points of view and insights. . . . Pluralism does not exist for its own sake; it is directed to the fullness of truth. In the academic context, the respect for persons which pluralism rightly envisions does not justify the view that ultimate questions about human life and destiny have no final answers, or that all beliefs are of equal value. . . .

Today there exists an increasingly evident need for philosophical reflection concerning the truth about the human person. A metaphysical approach is needed as an antidote to intellectual and moral relativism. . . .

Here in the Catholic university centers of this nation . . . must be drawn up the blueprints for the reform of attitudes and structures that will influence the whole dynamic of peace and justice in the world, as it affects East and West, North and South. . . .

Address to Catholic Bishops, Los Angeles, Sept. 16: (During this speech, the Pope responded to speeches by various U.S. archbishops, who had delivered addresses to the Pope arguing on behalf of various dissident American views, including the need for greater plurality in the Church, a more lax moral theology, and so forth.)

Response to Archbishop John Quinn on moral theology: . . . It is sometimes reported that a large number of Catholics today do not adhere to the teaching of the Church on a number of questions, notably sexual and conjugal morality, divorce and remarriage. Some are reported as not accepting the Church's clear position on abortion. It has also been noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teachings. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the Magisterium [the teaching power of the Church hierarchy historically] is totally compatible with being a "good Catholic" and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments.

This is a grave error that challenges the teaching office of the bishops of the United States and elsewhere. . . .

A number of general points may be made. First, the Church is a community of faith. To accept faith is to give assent to the word of God as transmitted by the Church's authentic Magisterium. Such assent constitutes the basic attitude of the believer, and is an act of the will as well as of the mind. It would be altogether out of place to try to model this act of religion on attitudes drawn from secular culture.

Within the ecclesial community, theological discussion takes place within the framework of faith. Dissent from Church doctrine remains what it is, dissent; as such it may not be proposed or received on an equal footing with the Church's authentic teaching. . . .

Response to Archbishop Rembert Weakland on the role of the laity: It has been stated [by Weakland] that "the Church in the United States of America can boast of having the largest number of educated faithful in the world." This is a statement that has many implications. . . .

Primarily through her laity, the Church is in a position to exercise great influence upon American culture. . . .

But how is the American culture evolving today? Is this evolution being influenced by the Gospel? Does it clearly reflect Christian inspiration? Your music, your poetry and art, your drama, your painting and sculpture, the literature that you are producing, are all those things which reflect the soul of a nation being influenced by the spirit of Christ for the perfection of humanity? . . .

I realize these are difficult questions to answer. . . . But they are relevant to any consideration of the role of the Catholic laity. . . .

Homily at Eucharist in Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles, Sept. 16: . . . The Church faces a particularly difficult task in her efforts to preach the word of God in all cultures . . . where utility, productivity, and hedonism are exalted, while God and His law are forgotten. In these situations, where ideas and behavior directly contradict the truth about God and about humanity itself, the Church's witness must be unpopular. She must take a clear stand on the word of God and proclaim the whole Gospel message with great confidence in the Holy Spirit. . . .

It is [the Church's] serious responsibility to be an instrument for guarding and restoring unity in the human family. She does this by being faithful to the truth and by directly opposing the Devil, who is "the father of lies." . . .

On debt and other economic issues

Homily at New Orleans Eucharist, Sept. 12: . . . The words which Jesus commands us to use when we pray to our heavenly father: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Merciful love is . . . the basis of the Lord's answer to Peter's question: "When my brother wrongs me, how often must I forgive him? Seven times?" "No," Jesus replied, "not seven times; I say, seventy times seven times." In the symbolic language of the Bible, this means that we must be able to forgive everyone every time. . . . This also applies in the wider context of social, political, cultural, and economic life

within and among nations and peoples. . . . A case with special urgency today is the international debt question. As you know, many developing countries are heavily in debt to industrialized nations, and for a variety of reasons are finding it harder and harder to repay their loans. "Blind" justice alone cannot solve this problem in an ethical way that promotes the human good of all parties. Merciful love calls for mutual understanding and a recognition of human priorities and needs, above and beyond the "blind" justice of financial mechanisms. We must arrive at solutions that truly reflect both complete justice and mercy.

Address to the people of Arizona, from St. Mary's Basilica, Phoenix, Arizona, Sept. 14: . . . Dear friends: I have spoken with you today about development because I am convinced, as was Pope Paul VI, that in our highly technological age, "the new name for peace is development" (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 57). If we wish then to promote the tranquillity of order in our world, we must be deeply committed to that authentic development which contributes to the good of every person everywhere. . . . For this reason my appeal to America is for human solidarity throughout this land and far beyond its borders. This is the culmination of true progress; this is the measure of true greatness; this is the condition of true and lasting peace for America and for the world!

On the media

Speech to communications specialists, Los Angeles, Sept. 15: . . . You represent one of the most important American influences on the world today . . . and contribute . . . to the development of a mass popular culture. Humanity is profoundly influenced by what you do. . . . It is a fact that your smallest decisions can have global impact. . . . The proper exercise of the right to information demands that the content of what is communicated be true and—within the limits set by justice and charity—complete. Your very profession invites you to reflect on this obligation to truth and its completeness. Included here is the obligation to avoid any manipulation of truth for any reason. . . . At the basis of all human rights is the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). A recognition of this human dignity is also a part of your civil tradition in the United States, and is expressed in the declaration of your nation's independence: All people are created equal in their human dignity and are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . . Certainly your profession subjects you to a great measure of accountability—accountability to God, to the community, and before the witness of history. And yet at times it seems that everything is left in your hands. Precisely because your responsibility is so great and your accountability to the community is not easily rendered juridically, society relies so much on your good will. In a sense the world is at your mercy. Errors in judgment . . . can encroach on sacred fundamental rights.