

Cardinals call for universal battle in defense of human life

by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

The extraordinary consistory which gathered 112 of the 141 cardinals, including those over 80 years of age, around Pope John Paul II to examine the “present threats to human life, with special attention to abortion,” and the challenge of the sects, concluded with a unanimous appeal to the Pontiff to “solemnly reaffirm” in a document the Roman Catholic Church’s “teachings on the value of human life and its inviolability.” The majority of the cardinals recommended that this should be an encyclical. In their final document after the April 4-6 consistory, the cardinals said that today life is threatened “in a terrible way not only by the degradation of nature but by physical violence, both individual and organized; by the exploitation of the poor and of children; by the drug trade; by the fact that entire populations are abandoned to extermination by starvation, while the arms trade is encouraged; and by wars.” They deplored “the enormous growth in the number of abortions, which legalization, far from slowing down, has actually encouraged,” and the “more recent attempts to legitimize euthanasia,” and appealed to politicians to “be able to bring legislative initiatives into accord with the irrefutable duty of respecting human life.” The leaders of the Catholic Church criticized the prevailing culture, which lacks moral sensitivity, denies respect for life, and no longer recognizes the principles of natural law.

Historical first

Both the concluding appeal of the consistory and the individual speeches of cardinals from every corner of the globe projected into the Vatican sessions a historical dimension of enormous importance, not only for believers but for all people living in our time. Perhaps it was the first time that a meeting of the College of Cardinals confronted topics which deal not so much with the internal realities of the Roman Church, as with the condition into which humanity is drifting at this moment in time: a sick humanity which helplessly witnesses the predominance of economic power over people who, the more weak and defenseless they are, the more they are crushed.

In his keynote speech, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger charged that “a veritable war” is being waged by “the strong against the weak, a war which aims at eliminating the handicapped, those who are give trouble, and even simply those who are poor and ‘useless.’ With the complicity of governments, colossal means are used against human beings, at the dawn of their life or when their life has become vulnerable due to

an accident or an illness, and when it is close to the end.”

Cardinal Ratzinger—the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the highest body on doctrinal matters—went on to say that such means “are unleashed against life in the process of being born, through abortion (it turns out that there may be 30-40 million in the world per year). Even to facilitate abortion, billions have been invested in perfecting abortion-inducing pills (Ru 486).” Behind the logic of death, he said, “there is also hatred against man, and more deeply, the loss of God. Where God disappears, the absolute dignity of human life disappears too.”

According to the German cardinal, the culprits are those states and international bodies which “make themselves the backers of abortion and euthanasia, vote up laws authorizing them, and make the means available to those who follow them.” On the same topic, Cardinal Margerot said that in the southwestern area of the Indian Ocean, many countries have legalized contraception, sterilization, and abortion. He charged that in developing countries the International Monetary Fund conditions its economic aid on birth control. The Church sees the abortion problem not merely from the standpoint of individual morality, but also, and above all, from that of social political morality, because, as Cardinal Bernard Law, the archbishop of Boston, stated, “The right to life has been posed in the consistory as a fundamental human right, and hence the principle of the inviolability of the human person from conception to death is a problem of social justice and human rights.”

The new anti-life morality

Among the causes of opposition to life, Cardinal Ratzinger indicted “the very concept of morality which is widespread today.” For him, “an individualistic vision of freedom, understood as the absolute right to self-determination on the basis of one’s own convictions, is often associated with a merely formal idea of conscience. It is no longer rooted in the classic conception of moral conscience. In that conception, which belongs to the whole Christian tradition, conscience is the capacity to open oneself up to the appeal of objective, universal truth which is equal for all, which everyone can and must seek. On the other hand, in the innovative conception, clearly of Kantian origin, conscience is disconnected from its constructive relation to a content of moral truth, and reduced to a mere formal condition of morality: It would only involve the subjective goodness of intention.”

Cardinal Biffi, the archbishop of Bologna, added that permissive abortion laws cause "a dangerous confusion" between what is considered legal and what is ethically right. "From the pastoral standpoint, if killing an innocent is an extremely grave evil, this loss of capacity to distinguish between good and evil is even worse." Biffi said that today humanity looks "surprisingly similar to that humanity without Christ of whom St. Paul spoke." The primary and most radical evil of the present de-Christianization of society is not "the loss of faith," but rather "the loss of reason." Here is where the fundamental role of the Church emerges, to point out the pathway to truth for mankind, he said.

The myth of overpopulation

In their final document, the cardinals asked for a new approach to the demographic problem. The cardinal from Angola, Alexandre do Nascimento, at the press conference held afterward at the Holy See's press room, added that the consistory reiterated that there is no overpopulation problem, but rather one of underdevelopment: "My country, for example, has an area of 1,246,700 square kilometers (four times that of Italy), and it has a population of 15 million inhabit-

ants"—roughly one-quarter Italy's.

The Church's strong stance against abortion—but also against contraception, because, as Cardinal Ratzinger put it, "a great many of the chemical contraceptives actually act as anti-fertility drugs, that is as abortives, without women realizing this"—has already irked the liberals who are obsessed by demographic growth, and who for decades have been preaching the elimination of mouths in order to "save the planet."

The future encyclical "on the defense of human life" will also have to provide economic and scientific arguments on the falsehood of the myth of overpopulation. The two major speeches by Cardinal Francis Arinze and by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, described the alarming phenomenon of the growth of fanatical cults and the challenge they present to the Church. Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo underscored that in Central and South America, the spread of sects has been backed by outside groups interested in firming up their political and economic power in those countries. The cardinal named the Rockefeller Foundation, which already in 1969 drafted a report on how to reduce the Catholic Church's presence in South America.

The Pope's Easter message

Pope John Paul II's annual Easter Urbi et Orbi (to the city and the world) message was delivered March 31 from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after celebrating Easter morning mass in St. Peter's Square. The following are excerpts from the Vatican's English translation.

. . . 5) Yes, this is a day of light, strength, and hope, which makes the darkness menacing the Earth recede. Darkness which also recently has cast a shadow over the whole human community: When a choice was made of aggression and the violation of international law; when it was presumed to solve the tensions between the peoples by war, the sower of death; when from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and in other areas of the world there rose in vain the voice of the peoples, yearning for respect for their own identity and their own history; when not everything was done to face the inexorable threat of famine which has afflicted whole peoples in Africa, as for example in the Sudan and in Ethiopia, or to stop in that same continent, particularly in Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, and Somalia, wars and guerrilla actions which try peoples already in a precarious state.

6) But Christ conquers the darkness and reveals to

man the full dignity of his vocation. Rise with him, humanity of our time! Then you will be able to welcome life with love, from its first beginning until its natural ending you will vigorously prevent the exploitation of the poor. You will say no to the lucrative arms trade, which you will replace with plans of genuine solidarity, at the complete service of man. Lend an ear, humanity of our time, to the long-ignored aspiration of oppressed peoples such as the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Kurds, who claim the right to exist with dignity, justice, and freedom, legitimate requests repeated in vain for years. Do not fear to allow every person the free profession of his or her religious belief. I am thinking also of you, dear Catholic community of Albania, who have remained faithful to the Gospel of Christ; take courage anew, go forward to seasons of abundant fruit!

7) From this place, the heart of the Church, to which come cries of pain and imploring appeals for help, I address myself to you, the leaders of nations, in this difficult hour of history: Listen to the voice of the poor! Only upon an international order in which law and freedom are indivisible for all can the society we all hope for be founded. Help the peoples which in Africa, Asia, and Latin America aspire to societies which are more free and democratic! Let respect for man be total, man, in whom shines the image of God! Every offense against the person is an offense against God, who with humanity has entered into a close and faithful alliance. . . .