

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. . . .