

Stand by moral truths, Pope urges during visits to U.S. and Mexico

by Elisabeth Hellenbroich

During his Jan. 22-26 visit to Mexico, which was followed by a brief visit to St. Louis, Missouri on Jan. 26-27, Pope John Paul II delivered a strong message, which was particularly addressed to the leadership of the respective countries. The underlying message in all the speeches and homilies of the Pope was loud and clear: On the eve of the next millennium, and facing the gigantic challenges which the nations of the world are confronted with, the Pope strongly reaffirmed the values and inalienable rights of man—i.e., the respect for human dignity, the right to life, the right to develop, and the right to progress—without which there can be no peace and economic development.

In Mexico City, the Pope was greeted by Cardinal Norberto Rivera who, in his speech, without explicitly naming the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, attacked the policies of those institutions which, under the name of “globalization,” have ruined entire nations (as the recent example of Brazil illustrates). “We have fallen prey to the inhuman interests of international capital flows and to our own internal dishonesty,” the Cardinal said. “People suffer and grow desperate because they cannot see an immediate solution to their calls for justice, food, health care, and justly paid work. Peace seems not to be at hand and at times we feel like a puppet manipulated not only by visible strings but by remote levers.”

The reason for the Pope’s five-day trip to Mexico City, was the presentation of the formal conclusions of the Nov. 16-Dec. 12, 1997 Synod of the Bishops of America (from North and South America). During his visit, more than 3 million people attended his six public events, and he was hailed by millions more who lined the streets to greet his “Pope-mobile.” Some 500 Roman Catholic cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, plus 5,000 priests from the Americas, came to Mexico City for the visit.

Man must be at the center of economy

In his speeches, the Pope made very clear that Mexico, together with the other nations of the world, will not be able to meet the challenges of the next millennium, unless it fights for the creation of a “just,” “reconciled society” which is “open to progress” that is “convergent with the necessary moral progress”—i.e., a society which puts man in the center

of the economy. “May Gospel values inspire its rulers to serve their fellow citizens, taking special care of the most needy,” the Pope said. “It is necessary that each and every one of the children of this country have all that is necessary to live a decent life. All members of Mexican society are equal in dignity . . . deserve full respect, and have the right to complete fulfillment in justice and peace.”

Yet, “the present-day world sometimes forgets the transcendent values of the human person: dignity and freedom, the inviolable right to life, and the inestimable gift of the family within a climate of solidarity in social life,” the Pope warned. “Relationships between people are not always founded on the principles of charity and mutual help. On the contrary, other criteria predominate, endangering the harmonic development and integral progress of the individual person and of peoples.”

The cause of economic and social injustice lies, according to the Pope, in the lack of moral leadership, “moral disorder,” and the “contempt for man.” The Pope said, “Because some of the powerful turned their backs on Christ, this century which comes to a close, sits by helplessly while millions of human beings die of starvation, although paradoxically agricultural and industrial production increase; refuses to promote moral values, which are progressively corroded by phenomena such as drugs, corruption, unbridled consumerism, or widespread hedonism; idly contemplates the growing abyss between poor, indebted countries and strong, opulent ones; continues to ignore the intrinsic perversion and the terrible consequences of the ‘culture of death’; promotes ecology but ignores the fact that the deeper roots of all attacks against nature are found in moral disorder and man’s contempt for man.”

‘The Spirit of St. Louis’

A just society is not possible without “compassion” and love. This was the recurring theme which marked all of the Pope’s speeches during his stay in Missouri. In St. Louis, the Pope met President Clinton and clearly signalled to him his moral support. The Pope stressed the need “to reassert the genuine truths and values of America’s experience,” and reminded people of the “Spirit of St. Louis,” after the plane that the pioneer Charles Lindbergh flew from New York to Paris



Pope John Paul II

in 1927, in the first transatlantic solo flight.

Without directly referring to the ongoing impeachment trial against President Clinton, the Pope made clear that a fight for a more just society in America, is in vain unless there is a fight against those who, in the tradition of the modern-day racist Confederates, commit flagrant violations against the spirit of the U.S. Constitution.

The Pope referred to what he considers one of the most painful chapters in American legal history, the infamous *Dred Scott* decision—a black slave who, during the 1850s, was denied the most basic human and constitutional rights by U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney. Ironically, current Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who is presiding over the Senate impeachment trial, has publicly hailed Taney as an outstanding figure in U.S. legal history.

“There are times of trial tests of national character, in the history of every country,” the Pope said. “America has not been immune to them. One such time of trial is closely connected with St. Louis. Here the famous *Dred Scott* case was heard. And in that case the Supreme Court of the United States subsequently declared an entire class of human beings—people of African descent—outside the boundaries of the national community and the Constitution’s protection. After untold sufferings and with enormous effort, that situation has, at least in part, been reversed.”

America, the Pope said, “faces a similar trial today . . . between the culture that affirms, cherishes and celebrates the culture of life and a culture that seeks to declare entire groups of human beings—the unborn, the terminally ill, the handicapped, and others considered ‘unuseful’—to be outside the boundaries of legal protection. Because of the seriousness of the issue involved and because of America’s great impact on the world as a whole, the resolution of this new time of testing will have profound consequences for the century whose threshold we are about to cross.” To choose life, according to the Pope, means the rejection of every form of violence: the violence of poverty and hunger, the violence of armed conflict, the violence of abhorrent weapons such as anti-personnel land mines, of drug trafficking, as well as the violence of racism. The Pope also strongly condemned the death penalty, which, he said, “is both cruel and unnecessary.”

Seeking to put an end to every form of racism—a plague which is considered by the American bishops as “one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation”—the Pope ended his visit with a powerful appeal directed to that about which every American feels proud—the spirit of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence: “America first proclaimed independence on the basis of self-evident moral truths. America will remain a beacon of freedom for the world as long as it stands by those moral truths which are at the very heart of its historical experience. And so America: If you want peace, work for justice. If you want justice, defend life. If you want life, embrace truth—truth revealed by God.”

Documentation

‘There is no freedom without truth’

What follows are selected excerpts from Pope John Paul II’s remarks and homilies during his Mexican and U.S. visits.

‘Mexico, always faithful’

Welcoming ceremony at the Benito Juárez International Airport, Mexico City, Jan. 22:

. . . From the time 20 years ago when the Mexican people received me with open arms and full of hope, they have accompanied me in many of my journeys. I have encountered Mexicans at my Wednesday general audiences and in the great events that the Church has celebrated in Rome and other places in America and the world. The greeting with which you always salute me still resounds in my ears: “Mexico, always faithful, always present!”

I come to a country where the Catholic faith served as the

basis for racial mixing which transformed the ancient ethnic pluralism and antagonism into a fraternal unity and destiny. It is not possible, then, to comprehend Mexico without the faith brought from Spain to these lands by the first 12 Franciscans and cemented later by Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinians, and other preachers of the saving Word of Christ. In addition to the evangelical work that makes Catholicism a fundamental and integral part of the soul of the nation, the missionaries left a profound cultural impression and prodigious artistic examples that today are cause of legitimate pride for all Mexicans and a rich expression of their civilization.

I come to a country whose history runs like a river at times hidden but always flowing abundantly, realities which sometimes meet and at other times reveal their differences, and that never unite totally: the ancient and rich sensibility of the Indian people that loved Juan de Zumárraga and Vasco de Quiroga, whom many of these peoples still call Father; the Christianity rooted in the soul of Mexicans and the modern European rationalism that has exalted independence and freedom. I know that there are many visionary minds that work hard so that these currents of thought and of the culture may make better use of this wealth through dialogue, social-cultural development, and the will to construct a better future.

All are equally children of God

Homily for the Eucharistic celebration at the Rodríguez Brothers Racetrack, Jan. 24:

. . . I likewise wish to greet with special affection the great number of indigenous people from different regions of Mexico who are here in this celebration. The Pope feels very close to all of you, admires the great value of your cultures, and encourages you to overcome with hope the difficult situations you are going through. I invite you to strive to achieve your own development and work for your own advancement. Build your future and your children's future with responsibility! This is why I am asking all the faithful of this nation to make a commitment to help and promote the most needy among you. It is necessary that each and every one of the children of this country have all that is necessary to live a decent life. All members of Mexican society are equal in dignity, because they are children of God, and therefore deserve full respect and have the right to complete fulfillment in justice and peace.

The word of the Pope also wants to reach the sick people who have not been able to be here with us. I feel very close to them, so as to convey Christ's peace and consolation. I ask them, while they seek to recover their health, to offer their illness for the Church, knowing the salvific value and the evangelizing power that human suffering has when associated to the suffering of the Lord Jesus. . . .

As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "Christ is the Light of peoples" (*Lumen gentium*, 1). May this Light enlighten Mexican society, its families, schools and universities, countryside and cities. May Gospel values inspire its rulers to serve their fellow citizens, taking special care of the

most needy. Faith in Christ is an integral part of the Mexican nation, being engraved, as it were, indelibly in its history. Do not let this Light of faith be extinguished! Mexico still needs it in order to build a more just and fraternal society, in solidarity with those who have nothing and hope for a better future.

The present-day world sometimes forgets the transcendent values of the human person: dignity and freedom, the inviolable right to life and the inestimable gift of the family, within a climate of solidarity in social life. Relationships between people are not always founded on the principles of charity and mutual help. On the contrary, other criteria predominate, endangering the harmonic development and integral progress of the individual person and of peoples. That is why Christians are to be the "soul" of this world: to fill it with spirit, to infuse it with life and cooperate in building a new society, governed by love and truth. . . .

When one embarks firmly on the road of faith, one leaves behind the seductions that tear at the Church, Christ's mystical body, and pays no attention to those who, turning their backs on Truth, preach division and hatred (cf. 2 Pet 2:1-2). Sons and daughters of Mexico and of the whole of America, do not seek the Truth of life in fallacious and apparently novel ideologies. . . .

'Reaffirm the faith'

Meeting with representatives of all the generations of this century, in the Aztec stadium, Jan. 25:

. . . In this significant hour, you are called to a renewed awareness of your role as depositories of a rich human and religious tradition. It is your task to hand on a patrimony of values to future generations to nourish their vitality and hope. . . .

. . . The last five centuries have left a decisive imprint on the identity and the destiny of the Continent. Five hundred years of common history woven between the indigenous peoples and those who came from Europe, and those who later arrived from Africa and Asia. With the characteristic phenomenon of the mixed race it is brought into relief that all races are equal in dignity and have a right to their proper culture. In all this complex and broad development, Christ has been constantly present in the journey of the American peoples, giving them besides as mother his own mother, the Blessed Virgin, whom you love so much.

3. As the motto with which Mexico has wished to receive the fourth Papal visit—"A millennium is born. We reaffirm the faith"—suggests, the new epoch which approaches should bring us to consolidate America's faith in Jesus Christ. This faith, lived daily by so many believers, will enliven and inspire the programs needed to overcome the deficiencies in the social progress of the communities, especially among peasant farmers and the indigenous peoples; to overcome the corruption which stains so many citizens and institutions; to eradicate drug-trafficking based on a lack of values, desire for easy money, and the inexperience of young people; to put an end

to the violence that confronts brothers and social classes in a bloody way. Only faith in Christ gives rise to a culture contrary to egoism and death.

Parents and grandparents here present: It is up to you to pass on to the next generations deeply rooted convictions of faith, Christian practices, and healthy moral customs. In this you can find help in the teachings of the Council.

4. The Second Vatican Council, as an evangelical answer to recent world development and as the beginning of a new Christian springtime (cf. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18), has been providential for the 20th century. This century has witnessed two world wars, the horror of the concentration camps, persecutions and killings, but has also witnessed hopeful progress for the future, such as the birth of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. . . .

Because some of the powerful turned their backs on Christ, this century which comes to a close sits by helplessly while millions of human beings die of starvation, although, paradoxically, agricultural and industrial production increase; refuses to promote moral values, which are progressively corroded by phenomena such as drugs, corruption, unbridled consumerism or widespread hedonism; idly contemplates the growing abyss between poor, indebted countries and strong, opulent ones; continues to ignore the intrinsic perversion and the terrible consequences of the "culture of death"; promotes ecology but ignores the fact that the deeper roots of all attacks against nature are found in moral disorder and man's contempt for man. . . .

12. You, Mexican and American youth, have to procure that the world that one day will be confided to you, be oriented towards God, and that the political or scientific, financial or cultural institutions be authentically at the service of man, without racial or social discrimination. Tomorrow's society, thanks to you, must know, through the joy that emanates from your Christian faith lived to the full, that the human heart finds peace and fullness of happiness only in God. As good Christians, you have also to be exemplary citizens capable of working together with all men of good will, in the transformation of towns and countryside, with the power of the truth of Christ Jesus and the hope that does not weaken in the face of difficulties. Try to put into practice the words of St. Paul: Do not allow yourself to be conquered by evil; rather conquer evil with good (Romans 12:21). . . .

America faces a time of trial

Welcoming Speech at St. Louis Airport, Jan. 26:

I express my friendship and esteem for my fellow Christians, for the Jewish community in America, for our Muslim brothers and sisters. I express my cordial respect for people of all religions and for every person of good will.

As history is retold, the name of St. Louis will be forever linked to the first transatlantic flight, and to the immense human endeavor and daring behind the name: the "*Spirit of St. Louis.*"

You are preparing for the bicentennial of the *Louisiana Purchase* made in 1804 by President Thomas Jefferson. That anniversary presents a challenge of religious and civic renewal to the entire community. It will be the opportunity to reassert the "*Spirit of St. Louis*" and to reaffirm the genuine truths and values of the American experience.

There are times of trial, tests of national character, in the history of every country. America has not been immune to them. One such time of trial is closely connected with St. Louis. Here, the famous *Dred Scott* case was heard. And in that case the Supreme Court of the United States subsequently declared an entire class of human beings—people of African descent—outside the boundaries of the national community and the Constitution's protection.

After untold suffering and with enormous effort, that situation has, at least in part, been reversed.

America faces a similar time of trial today. Today, the conflict is between a culture that affirms, cherishes, and celebrates the gift of life, and a culture that seeks to declare entire groups of human beings—the unborn, the terminally ill, the handicapped, and others considered "unuseful"—to be outside the boundaries of legal protection. Because of the seriousness of the issues involved, and because of America's great impact on the world as a whole, the resolution of this new time of testing will have profound consequences for

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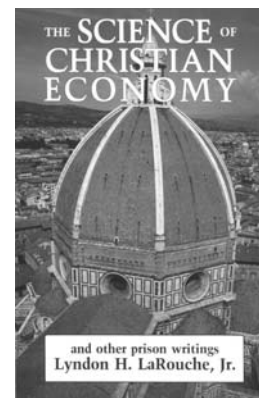
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the century whose threshold we are about to cross. My fervent prayer is that through the grace of God at work in the lives of Americans of every race, ethnic group, economic condition and creed, America will resist the culture of death and choose to stand steadfastly on the side of life. To choose life—as I wrote in this year’s *Message for the World Day of Peace*—involves rejecting every form of violence: the violence of poverty and hunger which oppresses so many human beings; the violence of armed conflict, which does not resolve but only increases divisions and tensions; the violence of particularly abhorrent weapons such as anti-personnel mines; the violence of drug-trafficking; the violence of racism; and the violence of mindless damage to the natural environment.

Only a higher moral vision can motivate the choice for life. And the values underlying that vision will greatly depend on whether the nation continues to honor and revere the family as the basic unit of society: the family—teacher of love, service, understanding, and forgiveness; the family—open and generous to the needs of others; the family—the great well-spring of human happiness.

Mr. President, dear friends: I am pleased to have another opportunity to thank the American people for the countless works of human goodness and solidarity which, from the beginning, have been such a part of the history of your country. At the same time I know that you will hear my plea to open wide your hearts to the ever increasing plight and urgent needs of our less fortunate brothers and sisters throughout the world.

This too—the spirit of compassion, concern, and generous sharing—must be part of the “*Spirit of St. Louis*”. Even more, it must be the renewed spirit of this “one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.” God bless you all! God bless America!

Appeal to end the death penalty

Papal Mass at the Trans World Dome in St. Louis, Jan. 27:

. . . The new evangelization must also bring out the truth that “the Gospel of God’s love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 2). As believers, how can we fail to see that abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide are a terrible rejection of God’s gift of life and love? And as believers, how can we fail to feel the duty to surround the sick and those in distress with the warmth of our affection and the support that will help them always to embrace life?

The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 27). I renew the appeal I

made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.

As the new millennium approaches, there remains another great challenge facing this community of St. Louis, east and west of the Mississippi, and not St. Louis alone, but the whole country: to put an end to every form of racism, a plague which your Bishops have called one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation. . . .

Power is service, not privilege

Evening Prayer at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, Jan. 27:

At the end of this century—at once marked by unprecedented progress and by a tragic toll of human suffering—radical changes in world politics leave America with a heightened responsibility to be for the world an example of a genuinely free, democratic, just, and humane society. There is a lesson for every powerful nation in the Cantic from the Book of Revelation which we have recited. It actually refers to the song of freedom which Moses sang after he had led the people through the Red Sea, saving them from the wrath of the Pharaoh. The whole of salvation history has to be read in the perspective of that Exodus: God reveals Himself in His actions to defend the humble of the earth and free the oppressed.

In the same way, in her Magnificat Cantic, Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, gives us the key to understanding God’s intervention in human history when she says: the Lord “has scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts . . . and exalted the lowly” (Luke 1:51-52). From salvation history we learn that power is responsibility: It is service, not privilege. Its exercise is morally justifiable when it is used for the good of all, when it is sensitive to the needs of the poor and defenseless.

There is another lesson here: God has given us a moral law to guide us and protect us from falling back into the slavery of sin and falsehood. We are not alone with our responsibility for the great gift of freedom. The Ten Commandments are the charter of true freedom, for individuals as well as for society as a whole.

America first proclaimed its independence on the basis of self-evident moral truths. America will remain a beacon of freedom for the world as long as it stands by those moral truths, which are the very heart of its historical experience. And so America: If you want peace, work for justice. If you want justice, defend life. If you want life, embrace truth—truth revealed by God. . . .

A Jubilee in the spirit of Leviticus

From the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in America:

. . . 19. There can be no rule of law, however, unless citizens and especially leaders are convinced that there is no freedom without truth. . . . The Synod Fathers rightly stressed that “the fundamental rights of the human person

are inscribed in human nature itself, they are willed by God and therefore call for universal observance and acceptance. No human authority can infringe upon them by appealing to majority opinion or political consensus, on the pretext of respect for pluralism and democracy. Therefore, the Church must be committed to the task of educating and supporting lay people involved in law-making, government, and the administration of justice, so that legislation will always reflect those principles and moral values which are in conformity with a sound anthropology and advance the common good.”

The phenomenon of globalization

... 20. A feature of the contemporary world is the tendency towards globalization. ... The ethical implications can be positive or negative. ... However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative. These are, for example, the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority. ...

And what should we say about the cultural globalization produced by the power of the media? Everywhere the media impose new scales of values which are often arbitrary and basically materialistic, in the face of which it is difficult to maintain a lively commitment to the values of the Gospel. ...

The Church in America must encourage the international agencies of the continent to establish an economic order dominated not only by the profit motive but also by the pursuit of the common good of nations and of the international community, the equitable distribution of goods and the integral development of peoples. ...

Social sins which cry to heaven

... More and more, in many countries of America, a system known as “neo-liberalism” prevails; based on a purely economic conception of man, this system considers profit and the law of the market as its only parameters, to the detriment of the dignity of and the respect due to individuals and peoples. At times this system has become the ideological justification for certain attitudes and behavior in the social and political spheres leading to the neglect of the weaker members of society. Indeed, the poor are becoming ever more numerous, victims of specific policies and structures which are often unjust. ...

Foreign debt

59. The existence of a foreign debt which is suffocating quite a few countries of the American continent represents a complex problem. While not entering into its many aspects, the Church in her pastoral concern cannot ignore this difficult situation, since it touches the life of so many people. ... I too have frequently expressed my concern about this situation, which in some cases has become unbearable. In light of the

imminent Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and recalling the social significance that Jubilees had in the Old Testament, I wrote: “In the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations”. ...

On the broadest level possible, it would be helpful if “internationally known experts in economics and monetary questions would undertake a critical analysis of the world economic order, in its positive and negative aspects, so as to correct the present order, and that they would propose a system and mechanisms capable of ensuring an integral and concerted development of individuals and peoples”. ...

Cardinal hits Soros's human rights mafia

On the eve of Pope John Paul II's visit to Mexico, the Cardinal of Guadalajara, Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, set off a storm, with a devastating blow against George Soros and his international human rights mafia. In early January, Cardinal Sandoval caused an outcry locally, when he charged that the state's Human Rights Commission was protecting criminals, and that he had dates, places, and names of people who have been harmed by them—and, furthermore, that the Commission does not act alone, but with international organizations. When local press demanded proof on the international networks, the Cardinal responded that he would release the details later.

This he did, in an interview with the Guadalajara newspaper Mural, published on Jan. 14, excerpts of which we publish here. Emphasizing the importance of this campaign, the newspaper of the Cardinal's diocese, the Guadalajara Diocese Weekly, published excerpts of the attack on Soros in its Jan. 24 issue. That a Cardinal dared “name the names” provoked hysteria in the Zapatista-linked daily La Jornada, which was very concerned that the attack came from “the rapporteur of the Synod of America, whose conclusions Pope John Paul II signed and promoted in past days in Mexico.” Excerpts of the Mural interview follow.

Q: Can you explain to us conceptually how you conceive of human rights?

A: Human rights are consecrated in the Gospel. Love of one's fellow man, is the essence of Christianity. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. And at the Final Judgment, God says, what you do unto the least of my brethren,