

John Paul II in Ibero-America: Drug trafficking brings slavery

by Carlos Méndez

“It is urgent not only to protect youth from drug consumption, but to fight the drug trade itself, as a vile activity from any standpoint,” said Pope John Paul II during his May 14 visit to Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Santa Cruz is one of Ibero-America’s most notorious centers of illegal drug activity.

“The drug trade has become a virtual trafficking in freedom, inasmuch as it brings the most terrible form of slavery and sows our soil with corruption and death,” said the Pope, who went on to call for “discerning the deep causes or roots of this phenomenon, in order to determine the most effective lines of action.” One day earlier, in Cochabamba, the Pope urged rejection of “false illusions” and of “the temptation of easy enrichment through drug trafficking.”

In Santa Cruz, following his strong condemnation of the drug trade, he urged his 230,000-person audience to “transform this Bolivian society into a new society.”

While on the airplane taking him from Rome to Montevideo, the Pope told reporters, according to the special correspondent from the Mexican daily *Novedades*, that those responsible for the drug trade were not solely the poor producer nations, but that one had to think of the consumers, the traffickers, all those who collaborate in the process. The Pope also referred to the aid cut-off and other sanctions the U.S. Senate would impose on poor nations which produce narcotics, and said that those countries “need help, not sanctions.”

This ninth visit of Pope John Paul II to Ibero-America takes place just as new turns of the debt collection tourniquet are cutting off the last drops of life-blood to the continent’s economies. Taking advantage of the austerity climate, some perverts are publicly proposing euthanasia as the “answer” to vanishing health budgets. The Pope’s visit also occurs at a time when the financial and political godfathers of the drug trade are publicly demanding legalization of this crime, and when—dominated by astrology and satanic cults—President Reagan is bent on handing the world over to the Soviets.

Before leaving for Uruguay on May 7, the Pope delivered a televised message in which he described the purpose of his evangelical mission to Ibero-America as promoting “love versus hatred, unity versus division, generosity versus ego-

ism, peace versus violence, and truth versus lies.” Just before departing from Peru May 15, he issued a pastoral call to 2.5 million Peruvians who gathered to hear him, urging the creation of “a new civilization, based on love of our neighbor, our fellow man, that would transform the structures of the entire world.”

In an address to 1 million Peruvian youth the same day, he said that he had been impressed by the silent multitudes that had heard his pastoral appeal earlier that day, and in reflecting on it had discovered that the explanation lay in “defeating the evil for the good, and not allowing oneself to be defeated by evil. . . . That is the program for Peru and especially for the youth.”

In defense of work; against usury

Responding to the brutal austerity conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and creditor banks, which have driven millions of Ibero-Americans into joblessness or the “informal economy,” the Pope extolled the dignity of work, to which he dedicated his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. In Uruguay, the Pope was emphatic that labor unions had the right to exist and that “those who with zeal and sacrifice seek to better the conditions of workers deserve unconditioned support.” He cautioned, however, that unions must not be considered instruments of class war. To the business community, he said that all private property was subject to “a social mortgage which obliges [owners] to ensure that their properties yield benefit to the common good.”

On May 12, in the once-booming mining center of Oruro, Bolivia, a labor leader told the Pope of the unemployment and hunger that the government’s austerity program—introduced in 1985 to counter the falling price of tin, galloping inflation, and loss of bank credits—had caused. The Pope told him that such austerity measures “cannot serve as a pretext for eluding the defects of an economic system whose principal motive is profit, and where man is subordinate to capital . . . to supply and demand.”

Well aware that many of Bolivia’s unemployed have been driven to growing coca to survive, the Pope warned against

“the temptation of easy enrichment through trafficking in drugs.”

Protecting the children

In Tarijá, Bolivia's most fertile valley, the Pope met with 100,000 Bolivian children, many of them dressed in yellow and white and shouting: “El Papa polaco ahora es chapaco” (“The Polish Pope is now a *chapaco*”—the name for inhabitants of Tarijá). One child told the Pope that the future of Bolivia's children was threatened by drug addiction, grinding poverty, and the burden of the foreign debt. John Paul II replied, “In many countries, it is precisely among the children that one finds the greatest number of deaths from parasite infections, from contaminated water, from hunger, lack of vaccination against epidemics, and even from lack of love.

“Just as there are children who die before they are born, so there are others who have but a brief and painful existence, cut short by diseases that could have easily been prevented.” He concluded with the assertion that children “are the genuine treasure of a nation,” and must be protected by governments through health and education programs.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, Bolivia has the highest rate of infant mortality on the continent: 142 per 1,000 births.

During his Bolivian tour, the Pope defended the institution of the family and fiercely condemned abortion. Speaking to 600,000 Bolivians in El Alto (near La Paz), he attacked the use of “development aid” to promote population reduction. “Do not tolerate the injustice of economic aid for the development of our conditions being conditioned on limiting births,” said the Pope, who added that “the heavy burden of the foreign debt” was harming the economies of the developing sector.

Neither left nor right

Speaking in the Cathedral of Santa Cruz in Peru, John Paul II ridiculed left and right extremisms, and offered instead the morality of the Church as a meeting ground. “The Pope arrived here traveling from the right; now he will depart on the left. . . . I have given much thought to the significance of this, because often I enter by the right and then depart on the left. However, the left then becomes the right. That is, the Pope, the Church, all the bishops, priests, Christians, should form a meeting ground between the so-called world of the right and that of the left. The world cannot live in perpetual division; always in contraposition. That is why I want to tell you, Latin Americans, you who belong to the Third World, that the answer, the solution to overcoming this division, right and left, can be found in our human, social, Christian values.”

On the night of May 13, on the eve of the Pope's arrival in Peru, 100 “Shining Path” narco-terrorists marched through the center of Lima, throwing dynamite bombs and sowing terror—without intervention by law enforcement officials. And on May 14, just as the Pope was calling on Peru's clergy

to be “the faithful image of the Lord” and criticizing the “errors” of Theology of Liberation, an entire zone in northern and central Lima was plunged into darkness for nearly an hour, because of terrorist attacks.

On May 7, Agence France Presse news agency had reported that “the visit of Pope John Paul II to Peru May 14-16 overlaps for 24 hours the anniversary of Shining Path . . . [which] is accustomed to celebrating [with] dynamiting of high-tension towers and selective assassinations.”

The debt, obstacle to progress

Speaking to Peruvian businessmen on the last day of his visit May 15, John Paul II said, “The foreign debt is not merely a financial or economic question, nor is it merely political, but above all it is ethical and moral. The debt should be viewed and resolved in light of the principle of solidarity among peoples and nations, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, so as not to founder on the reefs of egotism, of lust for profits at any cost, or of a narrow-minded, purely materialistic vision of development.”

The Pope recalled his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and lamented that the means for developing peoples have served instead as a brake on development, and even in certain cases an accentuation of underdevelopment.

In his speech to 1 million Peruvians in the Plaza San Miguel, the Pope took the issue of Theology of Liberation head on. “The alleviation of the misery of those who suffer can never be a pretext to ignore, much less despise, Jesus in the Eucharist,” warned the Pope, who urged the people to “reject the temptation of worldly messianism, the temptation to reduce the Church's mission of salvation to an exclusively temporal liberation.”

Throughout his Lima tour, John Paul II repeatedly insisted that the clergy must adhere to the Vatican's findings, contained in two instructions of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith, which warn of the dangers of Theology of Liberation.

“The Gospel of Christ judges the world; the world does not judge the Gospel,” said John Paul II. “Know that there are mistaken forms of the theology of liberation, in which the poor are conceived of in a reductionist way, within an exclusively economic framework, and the class struggle is proposed as the only possible solution. . . . In this way, a situation of permanent conflict is created, a mistaken vision of the Church's mission, and a false liberation which is not the one Christ offers us.”

The Pope concluded, in an address to 1 million Peruvians, including President Alan García and his entire cabinet, “The life of the Peruvian citizen, ravaged for years by violence and terrorism, poverty, the drug trade, the deterioration of public morality and other evils, cannot in any way lie outside the Gospel.”

Peruvian observers reported that John Paul II gave hope to the millions who came to see him, in one of the most crisis-ridden moments in the history of the Andean nation.