
John Paul II in Denver for 'World Youth Day'

Pontiff scores culture of death, asks enforcement of natural law

Pope John Paul II completed his U.S. visit in mid-August with a stinging rebuke for those who have usurped power from the American Revolutionary founders. In official remarks distributed to the news media on Aug. 15 in Denver, Colorado, the pope said, "When the Founding Fathers of this great nation enshrined certain inalienable rights in the Constitution, they did so because they recognized the existence of a law — a series of rights and duties — engraved by the Creator on each person's heart and conscience." This echoes Gottfried Leibniz's concept of natural law, upon which the most profound ideas of the American Revolution were based.

By way of contrast with the present Anglo-American policymaking establishment, the pope said, "In much of contemporary thinking, any reference to a 'law' guaranteed by the Creator is absent. There remains only each individual's choice of this or that objective as convenient or useful in a given set of circumstances. No longer is anything considered intrinsically 'good' and 'universally binding.' Rights are affirmed but, because they are without any reference to an objective truth, they are deprived of any solid basis. Vast sectors of society are confused about what is right and what is wrong, and are at the mercy of those with the power to 'create' opinion and impose it on others."

He linked abortion and euthanasia with Nazism, Serbian genocide and exploitation of the Third World: "There are those who reject the light of life, preferring 'the fruitless works of darkness.' Their harvest is injustice, discrimination, exploitation, deceit, violence. In every age, a measure of their apparent success is the death of the innocents. In our own century, as at no other time in history, the 'culture of death' has assumed a social and institutional form of legality to justify the most horrible crimes against humanity: genocide, 'final solutions,' 'ethnic cleansing,' and the massive taking of human beings even before they are born or before they reach the natural point of death."

"The family especially is under attack," the pope declared. "And the sacred character of human life denied. Naturally, the weakest members of society are the most at risk: the unborn, children, the sick, the handicapped, the old, the poor and unemployed, the immigrant and refugee, the South of the world."

The 73-year-old Roman Catholic pontiff celebrated a

three-and-a-half-hour open-air mass at Cherry Creek State Park, 13 miles southeast of Denver on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin on Sunday, Aug. 15. His journey to the Americas had also taken him to Jamaica and Mexico. His visit to Colorado, where he arrived on Aug. 12, coincided with a five-day international gathering of 186,000 Catholic youth called World Youth Day. At least 400-500,000 people attended the open-air mass in 100-degree temperatures. While in Denver, he met with both President William Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore, whose administration has promoted many of the anti-life policies against which the pope preached.

Fight for life and spiritual life

The pope told the hundreds of thousands of young people in attendance that our world is "the theater of a never-ending battle being waged for our dignity and identity as free, spiritual beings." He said "hostile forces" seek to "eradicate from human hearts the sense of gratitude and respect for the original, extraordinary and fundamental gift of God, human life itself.

"Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living, in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern metropolis. . . . The Gospel must not be kept hidden because of fear or indifference. . . . Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places like the first Apostles. This is not the time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is time to preach it from the rooftops."

He also exhorted, "America, be faithful to your mission. America, be faithful to your own true self. America, the land of the free, use your freedom well," said the pope. "Use it to cherish and support with all your strength and capacity the dignity of every single person."

Documentation

Pray for America's soul

The following is excerpted from Pope John Paul II's remarks to the U.S. bishops in Denver on Aug. 14.

The church in the United States is vital and dynamic, rich in "faith and love and holiness." By far the vast majority of her bishops, priests, religious, and laity are dedicated

followers of Christ and generous servants of the Gospel message of love.

Nevertheless, at a time when all institutions are suspect, the church herself has not escaped reproach. I have already written to the bishops of the United States about the pain of the suffering and scandals caused by sins of some ministers of the altar. Sad situations such as these invite us anew to look at the mystery of the church with the eyes of faith.

While every human means for responding to this evil must be implemented, we cannot forget that the first and most important means is prayer: ardent, humble, confident prayer. America needs much prayer — lest it lose its soul.

On many issues, especially with regard to moral questions, “the teaching of the church in our day is placed in a social and cultural context which renders it more difficult to understand and yet more urgent and irreplaceable for promoting the true good of men and women.” Nowhere is this more evident than in questions relating to the transmission of human life and to the inalienable right to life of the unborn.

Twenty-five years ago Pope Paul VI published the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* [On Human Life]. Your bishops recently issued a statement to mark this anniversary [on July 25]. They call everyone “to listen to the wisdom of *Humanae Vitae* and to make the church’s teaching the foundation for a renewed understanding of marriage and family life.”

The church calls married couples to responsible parenthood by acting as ministers — and not arbiters — of God’s saving plan. . . .

Likewise, building an authentic civilization of love must include a massive effort to educate consciences in the moral truths which sustain respect for life in the face of every threat against it. In her vigorous concern for human rights and justice, the Catholic Church is unambiguously committed to protecting and cherishing every human life, including the life of the unborn.

As sent by Christ to serve the weak, downtrodden, and defenseless, the church must speak on behalf of those most in need of protection. It is a source of comfort that this position is shared by people of many faiths. Those who respect life must accompany their teaching about the value of every human life with concrete and effective acts of solidarity to people in difficult situations.

Without charity, the struggle to defend life would be lacking the essential ingredient of the Christian ethic: As St. Paul writes, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” . . .

Life is not just another commodity

Excerpts from Pope John Paul II’s address to a prayer vigil on Aug. 14.

. . . Precisely when science and medicine are achieving a greater capacity to safeguard health and life, the threats against life are becoming more insidious. Abortion and euthanasia — the actual killing of another human being — are hailed as rights and solutions to problems, as individuals’

problems or society’s.

The slaughter of the innocents is no less sinful and devastating simply because it is done in a legal and scientific way. In the modern metropolis, life — God’s first gift, and the fundamental right of every individual, on which all other rights are based — is often treated as just one more commodity to be organized, commercialized and manipulated according to convenience.

Why do the consciences of young people not rebel against this situation, especially against the moral evil which flows from personal choices? Why do so many acquiesce in attitudes and behavior which offend human dignity and disfigure the image of God in us? The normal thing would be for conscience to point out the moral danger to the individual and to humanity contained in the easy acceptance of evil and sin. And yet, it is not always so. Is it because conscience itself is losing the ability to distinguish good from evil?

In a technological culture in which people are used to dominating matter, discovering its laws and mechanisms in order to transform it according to their wishes, the danger arises of also wanting to manipulate conscience and its demands. In a culture which holds that no universally valid truths are possible, nothing is absolute. Therefore, in the end — they say — objective goodness and evil no longer really matter. Good comes to mean what is pleasing or useful at a particular moment. Evil means what contradicts our subjective wishes. Each person can build a private system of values.

Young people, do not give in to this widespread false morality. Do not stifle your conscience. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person, where we are alone with God. “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience.”

That law is not an external human law, but the voice of God, calling us to free ourselves from the grip of evil desires and sin, and stimulating us to seek what is good and true. Only by listening to the voice of God in your most intimate being, and by acting in accordance with its directions, will you reach the freedom you yearn for. As Jesus said, only the truth will make you free. And the truth is not the fruit of each individual’s imagination. God gave you intelligence to know the truth, and your will to achieve what is morally good. He has given you the light of conscience to guide your moral decisions, to love good and avoid evil. Moral truth is objective, and a properly formed conscience can perceive it.

But if conscience itself has been corrupted, how can it be restored? If conscience, which is light, no longer enlightens, how can we overcome the moral darkness? Jesus says: “The eye is the body’s lamp. If your eyes are good, your body will be filled with light, if your eyes are bad, your body will be in darkness. And if your light is darkness, how deep will the darkness be!”

But Jesus also says: “I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life.”