
Pope in Romania

John Paul, Teoctist call for end of war

by Claudio Celani

For the first time in a thousand years, the head of the Catholic Church made an official visit to an Orthodox country. The Pope John Paul II and Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist of Bucharest issued a statement calling on all Christians to help stop the war in Yugoslavia. The two religious leaders pointed at the potential doom of civilization if the barbaric element represented by the illegal NATO war in the Balkans is not reversed and international law is not reasserted. Their call on "all Christians in the world" is directed especially to Christians in those countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, which are leading the war against Yugoslavia.

The meeting between Pope John Paul II and Teoctist is a major breakthrough in the relations between Western and Eastern Christians. "We are watching something that changes history and opens a new path and a new route to history," commented Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls. The two churches have been divided since the great schism of 1054, and since that time, no pope has visited a predominantly Orthodox nation. An attempt to reunify the two at the Council of Florence (1439) failed, after Kiev Metropolitan Isidor was arrested upon his return home, on orders of Muscovy.

The Pope's visit to Bucharest is the result of a years-long effort by John Paul II to overcome divisions among Christians, in the context of an ecumenical dialogue among the three religions of the Book (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism). The war in the Balkans, ironically, has accelerated this process, thanks to the moral leadership taken by the Vatican in condemning the war as "unjust." Thus, the Catholic Church has emerged as the institution representing Western civilization's universal values against the latter's barbaric devolution, and has become a natural ally for everyone in the East who sincerely strives for peace.

For his part, Patriarch Teoctist joined the Pope in not only condemning NATO, but ethnic cleansing as well, becoming the first Orthodox leader to do so.

"In the name of God, Father of all men," says the joint statement, "we urgently call on the conflicting parties to lay down weapons." It expresses "human and spiritual solidarity with all those who, chased from their homes, from their land, and separated from their dear ones, experiencing the reality of exile, as well as towards those who are victims of

murderous bombardments." The document points to the violations of international law, calling on the international community and "its institutions" to muster all "resources of law to help the conflicting parties to resolve their differences according to current conventions, in particular those relating to the respect of fundamental rights of the person and to collaboration among sovereign states." Without mentioning names, it is clear that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic has violated the former, but the NATO assault has violated the latter.

"We call, in the name of God, on all those who, in one way or another, are responsible of the present tragedy, to find the courage for resuming the dialogue and create the conditions which make possible a just and lasting peace, return refugees to their homes, and shorten the sufferings of all those who live in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbians, Albanians, and persons of other nationalities, laying the basis for a new co-existence among all peoples of the Federation," they state.

'Simul': Let's do it together

The Pope's visit to Romania began on May 7, with John Paul and Teoctist riding in the Popemobile through the crowded streets of Bucharest. At the end of the joint service in the Orthodox Cathedral, Patriarch Teoctist invited the Pope to deliver the benediction. The Pope started to sing, but stopped. Turning to the Patriarch, he said in Latin: "*Simul*" — "let us do it together." At the end, the Patriarch wished the Pope long life, again in Latin: "*Ad multos annos.*" The next day, the two leaders celebrated a Catholic service, before 150,000 Catholics from all over Romania.

The Pope also met with Romanian President Emil Constantinescu and with the diplomatic corps. He thanked both the President and "very cordially, His Beatitude Teoctist," and expressed his wish "that the international community will intensify its aid to nations which, coming out from under the Communist yoke, must reorganize their economic and social life; in such a way these countries will become makers of peace and prosperity for their inhabitants." He also publicly invited Patriarch Teoctist to visit the Vatican, which was greeted enthusiastically by the Greek Catholics, who shouted, "*Unitate, unitate!*"

Navarro-Valls, at the end of the visit, commented that the way to Moscow, the seat of the world's largest Orthodox community, is opened by such a successful visit. Asked to comment on the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, which had occurred the night before, he responded, "It is a drama within the drama."

The lack of media coverage of this important visit, compelled Navarro Valls write to the *New York Times*, specifying: "The Holy See is neither neutral, nor partisan, nor anti-American; rather, John Paul II has done and is doing everything possible to have the dialogue based on respect of law and history quickly begin again."