

Pope returns to Brazil: 'Foreign debt cannot be paid with hunger'

by Silvia Palacios

Eleven years after his first visit, Pope John Paul II has returned to Brazil on a pastoral and state visit, during a critical moment in this nation's life. On the one hand, it is facing the worst economic crisis in its history, the result of a decade's worth of looting by the international financial system, which has placed Brazil on the verge of economic and social disintegration. At the same time, the moral deterioration of public life and libertinism in private life grow worse daily, fed by a New Age culture which rewards hedonism and denies the existence of individual dignity.

For 10 days, John Paul II criss-crossed the nation, nominally the largest Catholic nation in the world (yet with all the obstacles posed by an ecclesiastical hierarchy splintered by the Marxist theology of liberation). The Pope appealed to the multitudes, urging a return to the most fundamental values of western Christian civilization as the means to rescue Brazil from its crisis. He repeatedly defined those fundamental values as the repudiation of usury, respect for human dignity, the indissoluble links between family and fatherland and, above, all, the incorporation of essential moral values in government decision-making.

It has been a long time since the Brazilian people have heard a voice with such moral authority, interceding in defense of their most legitimate rights and demanding that President Fernando Collor de Mello's government provide an immediate solution to what the Pope called "painful contrasts between the most pressing spiritual and material wants." In the city of Vitoria, in the impoverished slum of San Pedro, the Pope's Oct. 20 homily jolted everyone: "It is only a strong awakening of the moral conscience of every Brazilian that will make you aware of the demands for justice and thereby able to deal effectively with them."

In contrast to the colonial designs of the "new world order" so bloodily inaugurated by George Bush in Iraq, the Pope endorsed Brazil's legitimate aspirations to occupy a position of respect in the community of nations. "The Brazilian nation is preparing itself to play a role of great importance among the peoples of the world. This stems not merely from its territorial dimensions and the immense wealth of its soil. More important still is the human wealth of a people who, for nearly five centuries of history, continue to grow under the inspiration of genuine human and spiritual values, and

which is preparing to confront the challenges of the Christian Third Millennium," declared John Paul II, upon his arrival on Brazilian soil in the city of Natal Oct. 12.

The Pope further asked that "justice and equality through the right to life shine in Brazil forever and at all times, as a right inscribed in human nature itself through the promotion of the human individual as the basis of progress." Defense of the right to life was repeatedly echoed during the Pope's visit, just as the widespread use of abortion and sterilization in Brazil was furiously denounced. This issue is especially heated in Brazil in light of recent revelations that then-U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had authored a secret national security policy document on population in 1974 (NSSM-200) which advocated the use of precisely such methods to accomplish population reduction in the Third World.

In addressing President Fernando Collor del Mello at an Oct. 14 meeting in Brasilia, the Pope defined certain concepts that determine good government:

"The objectives of the Church in its exclusively religious and spiritual mission, and of the state in pursuing the common good of each man, are certainly distinct. Nonetheless, they converge at one point: man and the good of the Fatherland." John Paul II then asked of the President "that all matters demanded by society also be examined in light of the criteria of justice and Christian morality, before any particular interest. May your perseverance, at the service of every initiative which pursues social, economic, and scientific progress to the benefit of the Brazilian family, be ever more genuine and unselfish."

Against the evil of usury

The Pope's intervention served as the sharpest criticisms yet received by the Collor de Mello government, which has been intent on submitting Brazil unconditionally to Bush's new world order. Indeed, the tension between the Pope and the Brazilian head of state was palpable. For example, Vatican diplomats intervened at one point to prevent the Pope from inaugurating a special education center in Brasilia, which is part of the government's program, because President Collor clearly intended to use the affair as a "propaganda coup."

It was in the impoverished Northeast, the region of the

country which suffers poverty levels comparable to any African country, that Pope John Paul II held a private Oct. 13 meeting with more than 200 Brazilian bishops. At that meeting, the Pope criticized the *Pax Americana* set up by the Anglo-Americans after the Gulf war. "The Pope returns to Brazil in times that have changed," he said. "East-West tensions are practically over, and many would like to see in this a victory of the liberal capitalist option, under which the world could enter into a new era of peace and prosperity. It is not up to me to make predictions. But I should tell you my concern. In recent developments known to all, in the Middle East, in the Balkans, and elsewhere, we are painfully discovering how distant peace really is. The chasm between the more developed countries and those which are either developing, like Brazil, or are in a more precarious state, remains and appears to grow wider."

John Paul II attacked the usury of the banks for submerging Ibero-America in a sea of hunger, unemployment, and disease. Brazil alone, in the past five years, has paid \$85 billion *in interest* on its foreign debt. "The logic of economic domination, of imposing models without regard to the legitimate self-determination of every nation . . . created perverse mechanisms that are blocking countries like Brazil from access to the level of the most developed countries. . . . Underdevelopment, as we all know, is more than anything a cultural problem in the broadest sense. But it is necessary to say vehemently, so that it be heard worldwide, that the foreign debt of a nation can never be paid at the cost of the hunger and misery of its people."

Perhaps the cruelest aspect of this perverse financial order and of the moral decadence accompanying it, can be seen in the brutality with which Brazilian youth are being treated. According to the Health Ministry, there are at least 1 million abandoned children in Brazil's largest cities. Without any protection, they are the objects of physical and mental torture, and of murder.

The Pope dedicated a major portion of his interventions to denouncing such abuses. In Salvador, he had an emotional encounter with 2,000 of the so-called *meninos de rua* (street urchins), and he told them: "There cannot and must not be children without a home. There cannot and must not be children used by adults for immoral purposes, for drug trafficking, for practices of vice. There cannot, and must not, be children piled up in orphanages. There cannot, and must not, be murdered children, eliminated under the pretext of crime prevention."

Free trade has not triumphed

Throughout his trip, the Pope discounted the supposed benefits to the population under free-trade regimes, an allusion to the current policy reigning in Ibero-America, under which Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico have attached themselves to the dictates of George Bush's Enterprise for the Americas initiative.

During his Oct. 20 address to the residents of San Pedro, John Paul II asserted: "Catholic social doctrine always rejects a society organized on the basis of a specific liberal capitalist model, justly dubbed 'savage capitalism,' which has as its dominant features the unbridled search for wealth joined with a lack of respect for the fundamental value of work and for the dignity of the worker."

And, going back to his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, he reiterated: "This search is accompanied by the corruption of the public powers and by the propagation of improper sources of enrichment. . . . The Church equally rejects the perverse solutions of Marxist collectivism, which asphyxiate freedom . . . and end up with the same impoverishment it proposes to overcome. The recent experience of eastern Europe is sufficiently eloquent in this regard."

Country and family

One of the most memorable moments of the papal visit was his Oct. 18 address on the family in Campo Grande. Apart from being the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande is also the divorce capital of Brazil. It is estimated that at least four out of every ten couples are separated in that city. To get an idea of the fragility of the institution of the family, one need but recall the characterization made a while back by Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves, primate of Brazil and archbishop of Salvador. He declared that family disintegration in the country was so dramatic as to surpass that of the United States.

The Pope stressed the urgency of reestablishing the indissoluble unity of fatherland and family, without which society is condemned to perish. Reminding his audience of Brazilian patriot Rui Barbosa, a notorious enemy of the free-trade philosophy, the Pope said: "Celebrated Brazilian writer Rui Barbosa left us with a very significant comment: 'The fatherland is the family, enlarged.' Multiply the family and you have the fatherland. I want to make a vehement appeal to the Brazilian Church to make the family your pastoral priority. Without a respected and stable family, there can be no healthy social body, nor true Church community."

And, during his Campo Grande address, the Pope denounced the genocidal sterilization programs which have been promoted inside Brazil by private agencies, in compliance with the secret U.S. population doctrine elaborated by Kissinger (see above).

Said John Paul II, "It is painful to see the extreme fragility of many marriages in this beloved country. It is equally sorrowful to see how a lack of respect for divine law is spread through the use of seriously illicit contraceptive practices, to see the alarming incidence of sterilizations among women and men, sometimes voluntary but at times induced by those responsible figures of political society or by professionals who should guard the dignity and integrity of the human individual; also, to see the alarming increase in the practice of abortion."