

Pope John Paul Pleads For Religious Rights

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope John Paul II asked for religious freedom for the world over in a strongly worded defense of human rights sent to United Nations leader Kurt Waldheim to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man.

The Vatican released the five-page text, written in English, on Dec. 11.

"The Church," the Pope said, "strives to be the interpreter of the thirst modern men and women have for dignity. So I would solemnly ask that, in every place and by everyone, religious freedom be respected for every person and for all peoples."

"I am moved to make this solemn appeal because of the profound conviction that, even aside from the desire to serve God, the common good of society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in man's faithfulness to God and His holy will."

"The free exercise of religion benefits both individuals and governments.

Therefore, the obligation to respect religious freedom falls on everyone, both private citizens and legitimate civil authority."

Pope John Paul went on to charge widespread oppression of those peacefully seeking to practice their faiths.

"Why then is repressive and discriminatory action practiced against vast numbers of citizens who have had to suffer all sorts of oppression, even death, simply in order to preserve their spiritual values, yet who despite all this have never ceased to cooperate in everything that serves the true civil and social progress of their country?" He asked, "Should they not be the objects of admiration and praise rather than considered as suspects and criminals?"

In the Pope's native Poland, Catholics have long protested the Communist government's discriminatory actions against the free practice of religion.

"Justice, wisdom and realism all demand that the baneful positions of secularism be overcome," Pope John Paul said, "particularly the erroneous reduction of the religious fact to the purely private sphere."

Every person must be given the opportunity within the context of our life together to profess his or her faith and belief, alone or with others, in private and in public."

The pontiff decried human rights violations which he said seem to be on the increase. "The world we live in today offers too many examples of situations of injustice and oppression," he said. "One is bound to observe a seemingly growing divergence between the meaningful declaration of the United Nations and the sometimes massive increase of human rights violations in all part of society and of the world. This can only sadden us and leave us dissatisfied at the current state of affairs."

He added that "individual persons and civil powers violate...with impunity" such basic rights as: "the right to be born, the right to live, the right to responsible procreation, to work, to peace, to freedom and social justice, and the right to participate in the decisions that affect people and nations."

In mentioning "the right to be born," the Pope was believed to be stressing that abortion is a denial of the human rights of an unborn being.

On The Right Side

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

A Letter: Christmas Is Hard

Dear Father,

It is 35 years since my son Bernard was killed in a plane crash from England during WWII. It was Dec. 28, 1943. Even after these many years Christmas is a hard time for me to take.



Fr. Cuddy

I wonder if you remember him? After he was killed, the Air Force shipped his effects home and among them was a letter which you had written to him. It was a kind of general letter to young pilots who got their pilot's wings at your training base in Alabama. And you had enclosed a personal note as if you knew him in a special way.

Oh, Father. Every Christmas as his anniversary comes I think of him first as my little boy, then as a happy teenager. Then I think of the day he left Detroit for pilot training in Mississippi. Our last time together was just before he left Detroit for England, and I think of how if he had lived, he would be 56 years old and would have given me grandchildren, and I think of the comfort it would be to me in my old age. I am nearly 80 years old and a widow and no other children.

Oh, Father. It is so lonely. My health is good

and I have a nice flat, but if only Bernard was here. Your nice letter to him and all your boys made me want to write to you. The priests at the parish found your address for me. Please pray for me at Christmas time. It is a hard time for me...

Dear Mrs. G.,

A thousand thanks for writing and letting me share your heartache. To share sorrow is a special gift, and I suppose Our Blessed Mother at the foot of the Cross is the greatest example of sharing sorrow as she shared the crucifixion of her Boy.

Yes, I do remember Bernard well, and admired him to the point of reverence. I suppose he was about 22 when he came to Napier Field near Dothan, Alabama, for his final three months of pilot training. The complete course was nine months of intense work. As soon as he got settled into his barracks, which was not very far from the chapel, he came over to introduce himself, and to find if the Blessed Sacrament was reserved there. I can still see him: about six feet tall, slender, fair complexioned, eyes as blue as sapphires which sparkled when he laughed and were deep pools when he was thoughtful.

He was in his flappy flight suit when he first stopped in, but I remember him best in his Class A tan summer uniform, so clean and starched and neat. The men used to wear their Class As when they came to Mass if they could. And he frequently served the Mass, so devoutly.

More than most students, he dropped over to the chapel, where our offices were. Often he would have time for a chat, despite the exhausting training. He would talk about you and his father, and about Detroit. What impressed me especially was how devoted he was to the parish school he attended and to some Sister who taught him in eighth grade. I am sure you would be glad, rather than jealous, to know what a good influence this Sister had on his life and character.

I remember when he died. A letter I had sent him before Christmas 1943 was returned in January from his base in England, marked "Killed in Action." My immediate reaction was: "Gone to God! God knows best, but we could surely have used him on this earth." I had hoped that after service he would return and study for the priesthood.

For years I have had people memorize Romans 11:33: "Oh the depth of the richness of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God. How incomprehensible are His judgments, how unsearchable are His ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor, or who has first given to Him that recompense should be made him? For from Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. To Him be glory forever." In remembering Bernard I instinctively repeat that passage.

Of course the anniversary stirs up sadness in your soul. But let us give thanks to God for such a son to you, and such a friend to me. He continues to live in eternity with God, and I do not doubt that he commends you to God, and I hope he does the same for me who admired him so much.

HE TOUCHES ALL HEARTS WITH HIS ETERNAL LOVE...



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WE THANK YOU ... IN THE NAME OF OUR MISSIONARIES AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD THEY SERVE IN EVERY AREA OF LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, THE SOUTH PACIFIC AND ASIA ... FOR HELPING US TOUCH THE WORLD WITH GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE DURING THE PAST YEAR.

WE PRAY THAT CHRIST WILL BE THE REAL LIGHT, JOY AND PEACE OF YOUR LIFE NOW AND THROUGHOUT THE NEW YEAR!

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