

Cites 'Fundamental Importance' of Virgin Mary

Vatican City (RNS)—In his first audience in May, a month traditionally set aside for special devotion to the Mother of Christ, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the fundamental importance of the role of the Virgin Mary in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church.



obvious joy his upcoming visit there.

Addressing an estimated 100,000 pilgrims and visitors to St. Peter's Square for the May 2 papal audience (now regularly held outdoors to accommodate the crowds instead of in the Vatican's Audience Hall), the pope also spoke of Mary as a hope for religious vocations and nostalgically recalled his annual May visits to her national shrine in his Polish homeland. He mentioned with

Stating that "the Church at all times has surrounded Mary with a special veneration and invested special faith in her," Pope John Paul said that the Second Vatican Council "synthesized all the elements of our theology as they grew through the generations."

He referred to the final chapter of the Constitution on the Church, adopted by the Second Vatican Council, as "in a way the 'Magna Carta' of Mariology for our era."

In that chapter, the Council emphasized that theologians and preachers in treating of "the unique

dignity of the Mother of God, carefully and equally avoid the falsity of exaggeration on the one hand and the excess of narrow-mindedness on the other. . . . Let them rightly explain the office and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which are always related to Christ, the Source of all truth, sanctity and piety."

In his Wednesday audience, the pope said, "In a world which, along with progress, shows signs of corruption and aging, (the Virgin Mary) continues to be, in the words of Paul VI, 'the beginning of a better world.'"

Again quoting the late pontiff, the Polish pope said, "For contemporary man the Virgin Mary offers a vision of serenity and a reassuring word: the victory of hope over anguish, of communion over isolation, of peace over turmoil, of joy and beauty over tedium and nausea, of life over death."

Pope John Paul said that Mary's presence in the mystery of the Church is, above all, "a maternal presence." He said that Mary "gives a singular expression to the Son's work of salvation and to the mission of the Church — the maternal form. Everything that can be said in human language on the subject of 'the gift of woman-mother,' 'the gift of the heart,' relates to her.

"Mary is the complete fulfillment of the mystery of salvation — from the Immaculate Conception to the Assumption — and she continues to be the most effective in foretelling this mystery," the pope said.

The pontiff then wove the theme of Mary into the

Fabric of a concern he has often voiced recently — the decline of vocations.

"I hope and pray that today's youth will draw close to her, have faith in her, entrust her with their lives, which she can animate with a simple and warm love of the heart. To Mary, who is the mother of divine grace, I entrust priestly and religious vocations. A new spring of vocations, their increase throughout the Church, will be a special sign of her presence in the mystery of Christ in our times," the pope said.

"Mary alone is the living incarnation of total and complete dedication to God, to Christ, to his act of sacrifice which must find adequate expression in every religious and priestly vocation."

The pope had a special message for the people of Poland. "Every year I used to make a pilgrimage on the 3rd of May to Czestochowa for the celebration of the Queen of Poland, Maria in Jasna Gora, during which Cardinal Wyszyński, primate of Poland, in the presence of the episcopate and the immense crowds of pilgrims, renewed the act of consecration of Poland to the 'maternal service' of our God."

"This year as well, God permitting, I will visit Jasna Gora on the 4th and 5th of June. Tomorrow, instead, I will be there in spirit and in my heart, to repeat together with all the people of the church, and together with you all here at St. Peter's Square: 'Queen of heaven, rejoice, Alleluia.'"

Christian, Jewish Groups Join Boycott

Infant formula, a product that requires pure water, was on sale in grocery stores in Guatemala City in 1977, despite the fact that the city's water system was destroyed in a February 1976 earthquake, and only unsanitary water was available.



Special

That incident and similar ones have led many religious groups to join in a drive against what they term corporate irresponsibility in the marketing of infant formula around the world.

Their complaints against the companies are that thousands of infants die each year, at least partially due to dehydration and gastroenteritis related to use and misuse of the formula. They also claim, and cite United Nations statistics, that feeding commercial preparation to an infant often takes an exorbitant proportion of a poor family's total income.

Breast-feeding, they argue — with full support from pediatricians — is best, and infant formula should be used only when there is no alternative.

The infant formula that takes the place of mothers' milk is a manufactured substitute usually made out of cow's milk, with the fat content modified, and fortified with iron, nitrogen and sometimes other chemicals. Formulas based on soy beans are also marketed. No formula approaches natural milk in the complexity of its chemistry.

Christians and Jews approach the problem of zealous infant formula marketing in poor countries in two ways. With the U.S. companies, the religious agencies pool their shares of stock and use that as leverage in raising questions as stockholders.

With the Swiss-based Nestle Company, more than 300 Christian and Jewish organizations have joined public interest groups to endorse a boycott of that firm's products, from chocolate to Deer Park Water.

The Infant Formula Action Coalition (INFACT), housed at the University of Minnesota's Newman House, has led the boycott of Nestle products in the U.S.

The boycott is having some effect. Nestle products have been banned in many places, from the campus of Notre Dame to a number of parochial school systems and other institutions. When a New Haven, Conn., daily newspaper used Nestle candy bars in a promotion for charity, it backfired by arousing the ire of the religious community.

Nestle initially shrugged off the boycott, saying it was having no effect. Since, however, it has hired a major New York public relations firm and Nestle executives have begun to seek speaking requests from churches and synagogues. The Nestle representatives ask groups not to endorse the boycott, but to await a conference on the subject jointly sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations' International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in Geneva next October.

Henry G. Ciocca, a Nestle representative in the U.S., said the conference intends to set infant formula sales guidelines.

"Naturally," he told Religious News Service, "we will live by those guidelines."

Doug Clement, the United Church of Christ layman who heads INFACT, said there are several conditions which must be met before a family can use infant formula safely.

The family must have:

"1. Sufficient income to purchase the amount of formula required for adequate infant nutrition.

"2. Reasonable access to clean water that can be mixed with the formula and used to wash bottles, nipples and other equipment. In Indonesia, however, only 10 per cent of all families have 'reasonable' access to 'safe' water as defined by the U.N.

"3. The ability to read and follow the fairly complex instructions for infant formula preparation." (Not only do problems of illiteracy enter here, Clement said, but directions may be in one language while a large portion of the population speaks another, as among Indians who don't speak Spanish in Latin America.)

"4. Access to refrigeration facilities for storage of unused formula mixture. . . . In rural areas of Brazil only 11 per cent of the people have electricity."

When these conditions are not met, critics and medical authorities maintain, disease such as gastroenteritis or dehydration can develop and set the stage for such secondary attacks as pneumonia.

One place in which this is documented is a paper prepared for the 1979 International Year of the Child by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which calls breast-feeding "strongly recommended for full-term infants."

The statement, adopted in October 1978, said, "For much of the population in developing countries, both economic and health considerations speak conclusively for breast-feeding."

Benefits of breast-feeding, said the doctors, include the proper balance of nutrients in human milk, the lesser likelihood of a tendency toward obesity, natural immunity from disease, a tendency toward contraception, and promotion of "maternal-infant bonding" (closeness).

The world's mothers have become increasingly dependent on commercial formula partly because of "effective and, at times, unfair publicity of formula-feeding, lack of financial support from governments in developing countries, and the need for women to work outside the home," the pediatricians said.

Frank A. Sprole, vice-chairman of the board of Bristol-Myers Company, testified before the Senate subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research last year that the needs of working mothers were indeed one of the reasons for infant formula.

Sprole also told the subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, that his company believes that "breast milk is best for the infant."

A Nestle Company report makes the same point — breast milk is best but infant formula allows women to work outside the home. However, it goes on to say that if there were "restrictions on the availability of commercial milk products" in the Third World, mothers would "simply feed their infants something else."

Nestle, a Swiss company, has captured half the world's formula market, despite the fact that it does not sell formula in the U.S.

Since it is Swiss, U.S. critics cannot attack it on the shareholder meeting floor or in its boardrooms as shareholders. That it reserves for the several U.S. companies in the market.

The major coordinator of this effort is Leah Margulies, a program director for the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. The National Council of Churches-related agency represents 14 Protestant and 150 Roman Catholic stock-owning agencies.

She said the next drive will be against unfair infant formula sales in the United States. Two companies have about 90 per cent of that territory sewn up — Abbott Ross Laboratories and Bristol-Myers, she said.

Abbott and Bristol-Myers were the object of shareholder resolutions coordinated by ICCR this year, as was American Home Products. Abbott and American Home Products were asked to establish infant formula oversight committees and Bristol-Myers was asked to take several actions directly to counter past promotional "abuses."

At the Bristol-Myers meeting in Chicago, ICCR supporters garnered 3.6 per cent of the shareholder vote; small in number, but large enough to allow them to return with the same proxy resolution next year according to Securities and Exchange rules. At Abbott the vote was 4.9 per cent.

Ms. Margulies testified before the Kennedy committee last year that infant formula "promotion within medical facilities and to medical personnel inappropriately encourages use of particular formulas as well as endorses bottle-feeding in general to newborn infants. . . ."

She charged that the U.S. companies and Nestle promote the products within the medical profession by including "substantial inducements to doctors intending to ensure the exclusive use and prescription" of company products.

She said these inducements could take the form of furniture, incubators, air conditioners and holidays for doctors and their families.