

'We Speak of the Human Person'

Following are excerpts from the address given by Pope John Paul II to the Organization of American States.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to greet all the distinguished representatives of the different member nations of the Organization of American States. My sincere gratitude goes to you, Mr. President, for the cordial words of welcome you have extended to me. I thank also the Secretary General for his thoughtful invitation to come and visit the headquarters of the oldest of the regional international organizations. It is fitting that, after my visit to the United Nations the Organization of American States should be the first one among the many intergovernmental organizations and agencies to which I am privileged to address a message of peace and friendship.



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The Holy See follows with great interest, and may I say, with special attention, the events and developments that touch upon the well-being of the peoples of the Americas. It felt, therefore, greatly honoured by the invitation to send its own Permanent Observer to this institution — an invitation extended last year by a unanimous decision of the General Assembly. The Holy See sees in regional organizations such as yours intermediary structures that promote a greater internal diversity and vitality in a given area within the global community of nations. The fact that the American continent is provided with an organization concerned with ensuring more continuity for the dialogue between governments, with promoting peace, with advancing full development in solidarity, and with protecting man, his dignity, and his rights, is a factor contributing to the health of the whole human family. The Gospel and Christianity have entered deeply into your history and your cultures. I would like to call on this common tradition in order to present to you some reflections, in full respect for your personal convictions and your own competence, in order to bring to your endeavors an original contribution in a spirit of service.

Peace is a most precious blessing that you seek to preserve for your peoples. You are in agreement with me that it is not by accumulating arms that this peace can be ensured in a stable way. Apart from the fact that such accumulation increases in practice the danger of having recourse to arms to settle the disputes that may arise, it takes away considerable material and human resources from the great peaceful tasks of development that are so urgent. It can also tempt some to think that the order built on arms is sufficient to ensure internal peace in the single countries.

I solemnly call on you to do everything in your

power to restrain the arms race on this continent. There are no differences between your countries that cannot be peacefully overcome. What a relief it would be to your peoples, what new opportunities it would provide for their economic, social and cultural progress, and how contagious an example it would give the world, if the difficult enterprise of disarmament were here to find a realistic and resolute solution!

The painful experience of the history of my own country, Poland, has shown me how important national sovereignty is when it is served by a state worthy of the name and free in its decisions; how important it is for the protection not only of a people's legitimate material interest, but also of its culture and its soul. Your organization is an organization of States, founded on respect for the full national sovereignty of each, on equal participation in common tasks, and solidarity between your peoples. The legitimate demand by the States to participate on a basis of equality in the organization's common decisions must be matched by the will to promote within each country an ever more effective participation by the citizens in the responsibility and decisions of the nation through ways that take into account particular traditions, difficulties and historical experiences.

However, while such difficulties and experiences can at times call for exceptional measures and a certain period of maturation in preparation for new advances in shared responsibility, they never, never justify any attack on the inviolable dignity of the human person and on the authentic rights that protect this dignity. If certain ideologies and certain ways of interpreting legitimate concern for national security were to result in subjugating to the State man and his rights and dignity, they would to that extent cease to be human and would be unable to claim without gross deception any Christian reference. In the Church's thinking it is a fundamental principle that social organization is at the service of man, not vice versa. That holds good also for the highest levels of society, where the power of coercion is wielded and where abuses, when they occur, are particularly serious. Besides, a security in which the peoples no longer feel involved, because it no longer protects them in their very humanity, is only a sham. As it grows more and more rigid, it will show symptoms of increasing weakness and rapidly approaching ruin.

Without undue interference, your organization can, by the spirit with which it tackles all the problems in its competence, do much throughout the continent to advance a concept of the state and its sovereignty that is truly human, and that is therefore the basis for the legitimacy of the states and of their acknowledged prerogatives for the service of man.

Man! Man is the decisive criterion that dictates and directs all your undertakings, the living value for whose service new initiatives are unceasingly demanded. The words that are most filled with meaning for man — words such as justice, peace, development, solidarity, human rights — are

sometimes belittled as a result of systematic suspicion or party and sectarian ideological censure. They then lose their power to mobilize and attract. They will recover it only if respect for the human person and commitment to the human person are explicitly brought back to the centre of all considerations. When we speak of the right to life, to physical and moral integrity, to nourishment, to housing, to education, to health care, to employment, to shared responsibility in the life of the nation, we speak of the human person. It is this human person whom faith makes us recognize as created in the image of God and destined for an eternal goal. It is this human person that is often threatened and hungry, without decent housing and employment, without access to the cultural heritage of his or her people or of humanity, and without a voice to make his or her distress heard. The great cause of full development in solidarity must be given new life by those who in one degree or another enjoy these blessings, for the service of all those — and there are many of them still on your continent — who are deprived of them to a sometimes dramatic extent.

The challenge of development deserves your full attention. In this field, too, what you achieve can be an example for humanity. The problems of rural and urban areas, of industry and agriculture, and of the environment are to a large extent a common task. The energetic pursuit of these will help to spread throughout the continent a sentiment of universal fraternity that extends beyond borders and regimes. Without any disregard for the responsibilities of sovereign states, you discover that it is a logical requirement for you to deal with problems, such as unemployment, migration and trade, as common concerns whose continental dimension increasingly demands more organic solutions on a continental scale. All that you do for the human person will halt violence and the threats of subversion and destabilization. For, by accepting courageous revisions demanded by "this single fundamental point of view, namely, the welfare of man — or, let us say of the person in the community — which must, as a fundamental factor in the common good, constitute the essential criterion for all programs, systems and regimes," you direct the energies of your peoples towards the peaceful satisfaction of their aspirations.

The Holy See will always be happy to make its own disinterested contribution to this work. The local Churches in the Americas will do the same within the framework of their various responsibilities. By advancing the human person and his or her dignity and rights, they serve the earthly city, its cohesion and its lawful authorities. The full religious freedom that they ask for is in order to serve, not in order to oppose the legitimate autonomy of civil society and of its own means of action. The more all citizens are able to exercise habitually their freedoms in the life of the nation, the more readily will the Christian communities be able to dedicate themselves to the central task of evangelization, namely, the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the source of life, strength, justice and peace.

More Opinions

Insinuations Tiring

Editor:

On the Phil Donahue Show (Nov. 1) Rev. Billy Graham was impressive. At no time did this great religious leader misrepresent the Good Book or the R.C. Church. He spoke of his great admiration for the Pope.

There followed immediately a local talk show in which a Catholic and a Protestant — allegedly experts on the New Testament — commented on the Graham interview.

They intimated that B.G. had betrayed fundamentalism in his interpretation of the Bible — openly believing in the eschatological truths — Heaven, Hell, original sin,

etc. They came across as if he were out-of-date and our two "modern" experts were with it.

Another instance showed their superior and avant garde posturing. One youngish woman in the studio audience said that when she was going to school, the priest and nuns taught that only Catholics could be saved.

No qualified teacher of religion would ever make such a statement. Such nonsense is and always was a caricature presentation of the Catholic Catechism. It is constantly trumped up by "up-to-date" pedagogues. Populist and radical theologians (darlings of radio and TV) are forever insinuating the same claptrap.

The woman added that she had left the Church because of such training. Neither of the experts set the poor questioner straight. They dishonestly and un-

fairly left her under the delusion and the Catholic Church in a bad light.

Certainly they could not blame a genuine education or claim learning — modern or ancient — as an excuse for their sin of omission.

C. A. Irwin
125 St. Paul St.
Apt. 1502
Rochester, N.Y. 14604

Columnists Confusing

Editor:

Pope John Paul II in his address to educators at Catholic University (Oct. 10) declared the rights of the laity with regard to the writings of those engaged in theological studies: "It is the right of the faithful not to be troubled by theories and hypotheses that they are not expert in judging, or that are easily manipulated by public opinion for ends that are alien to the truth." Pope John Paul I had said almost the same thing: "Among the rights of the faithful, one of the greatest is to receive

God's word in all its entirety and purity."

In the Courier-Journal (Oct. 10) are two examples of opinions which I think can easily confuse people. Fr. Greeley states: "Who is a Catholic? The code takes a very minimalist position as I understand: You are a Catholic if you were baptized a Catholic and have not formally left the Church. Furthermore, if you are a Catholic, you have a right to the Sacraments." The Church does have guidelines on these matters and they bind all priests to honor them. Canon 732/1 forbids the administration of the Sacraments to heretics and schismatics, until they have been reconciled to the Church, even if in good faith they ask to receive them. Canon 855/1 states that the publicly unworthy, e.g. excommunicated, interdicted or those evidently infamous, are to be prevented from receiving the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, unless it is evident that they have repented, amended their lives and made satisfaction for the public scandal. These are examples of the many

guidelines concerning the Sacraments in the Code of Canon Law.

In the same issue, Fr. Hohman replies thus to a questioner: "Disagreement with some of the human aspects of the Church (he refers to non-revealed teaching) does not imply disrespect for the Holy Father or for the Bishops. It merely recognizes the humanness of their statements and asks for further dialogue in these matters." This kind of stance in face of clear teaching of the Magisterium was dealt with years ago. In 1950, Pius XII in his encyclical "Humani Generis," stated "Even encyclical letters are the ordinary teaching authority of the Church, of which it is true to say: 'He who hears you, hears Me.' If the supreme pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up that time in dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the same pontiff, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among the theologians." Fur-

thermore, Vatican Council II states that religious submission of will and mind must be shown to the teachings of the local ordinaries, and in an especial way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra. (Constitution on the Church, n. 25). It seems to me that the Catholic press has responsibility not to print the opinions of theologians which question or dissent from the official teaching of the Magisterium, or which cause confusion in the minds of the faithful. The Holy Father in his talk to the Bishops said that the purity and integrity of the word of God as guaranteed by the Magisterium will protect the rights of the faithful, and he said further, "Dear Brothers, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is assisting us in our teaching, if we remain absolutely faithful to the universal Magisterium."

Father Joseph J. Comyns,
CSSR,
Our Lady of Victory
10 Pleasant St.
Rochester, N.Y.

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