

Pope Assails Arms Race in Peace Message

Vatican City (RNS) — Against a background of wars, rumors of wars and strife in many parts of the world, Pope John Paul II has called on all peoples and nations to work together for a just society based on the dignity of the "free human being."

In a message for the World Day of Peace celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church on New Years Day, the pope

said that "without a deep and universal respect for freedom, peace will elude man."

The pontiff said he was asking the world to think about "the great cause of peace," with the deep conviction that "peace is possible."

The papal message on the theme of the 14th Day of Peace — "freedom" —

touched on obstacles to peace, such as the "escalating arms race," the "imperialism of one nation over another," and "the quest for material possessions."

"A society built on a purely materialistic basis denies people their freedom when it submits individual freedoms to economic domination," the pope declared.

He said he also feared that the world would become accustomed to war as a natural aspect of modern life.

"Wars continue to break out and destruction has fallen upon peoples and whole cultures because the sovereignty of a people or a national was not respected," the Polish-born pope said.

"One can even wonder if war may not become — or remain — a normal factor of our civilization, with 'limited' armed conflicts going on for long periods without exciting public concern, or with a succession civil wars."

The pope described causes of war as "many and complex." He condemned the arms race among nations in which "weapons of total annihilation are stockpiled."

He cited some particular causes of armed conflict as "territorial expansionism, ideological imperialism, economic exploitation

deliberately perpetrated, obsession with territorial security ethnic differences exploited by arms dealers."

Quoting Pope Paul VI, John Paul described freedom as one of the "four pillars that support the house of peace," the other three "sustaining columns" being "justice, truth and love."

He made a special appeal to rich nations to help their poorer counterparts, while respecting their individualism.

"I would plead for a greater effort by the community of nations to aid young and developing nations to attain true control of their resources and self-sufficiency in food and the essential needs of life," the pontiff said. "I beg the rich countries to direct their aid with the primary aim of actively eliminating absolute poverty."

The pope also condemned permissiveness in modern society, which he said "confuses freedom with license to do anything whatever in the name of freedom." He called modern society which permits people to organize their lives "with no reference to moral values" a "caricature of freedom."

The pope included "the elimination of human life by abortion" as one of the examples of the modern "mistaken idea of freedom."

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

Sex Ed: A Second Look

I suspect I've again been guilty of judging an issue (and the people concerned about it) without knowing the real facts.

When I thought of people who were fighting against sex education programs in the schools, I had an image of fundamentalist, ultra-conservative men and women who saw evil in the basic knowledge about human sexuality and reproduction.

I assumed that these people were so uneasy about their own sexuality that they would prefer to have young people remain ignorant, hoping that good will and ordinary human experience — and a lot of luck — would enable them to avoid serious mistakes and develop the sexual dimension of their lives in a mature way, consistent with their religious and human values.

This was an assumption, a stereotype, which was based on a skimpy knowledge of what was involved in sex education, on journalistic reports of particular controversies which had become newsworthy.

A few weeks ago I read a long article in the New York Times magazine section. Considering the source, I expected it to be a denunciation of the obscurantist attitude of parents who preferred ignorance to knowledge, who suspected that all sexuality was clouded in evil.

The author, Constance Horner, made the point that sex education needs to be seen as it is today, not in terms of the simple biological explanations of 20 years ago.

She reported that educators are concerned not only with basic information but also with sexual adjustment and population problems. "The problem," she wrote, "is that one person's idea of 'sexual adjustment' can be another's notion of perversion writ large... that one person's belief in the danger of overpopulation conflicts with another's rejection of government's role in the business of reproductive decision-making."

The article presented a number of horrible examples — classroom presentations which I would oppose if I were a parent. And my opposition would be loud and angry.

But there's an opposite danger. An article like this can be made interesting by a concentration on such examples. You would assume that it wouldn't be hard to find them in such a widespread activity, one which is so vulnerable to educators who happen to be afflicted with rotten judgment, insensitivity and intellectual arrogance about their own values.

It would be as much of a mistake for me to judge all sex education programs on the basis of this one article as it was for me to assume that all the objections were rooted in obscurantism.

But the article did send up a warning signal for me. It said there are issues here which are real and substantial. The specific protests and debates call for attention. Responsible judgment can't be made on the basis of whether you are for or against education in sexuality. It must be made on the basis of whether you support or oppose what is actually being taught as sex education.

The issue is urgent. When you consider the social pressures on young people today and their very early exposure to distorted attitudes toward sexuality, it would be irresponsible to depend on a pattern of learn-as-you-go, and good luck!

It would be just as irresponsible, however, to assume that a degree in education and an appointment to a job in a school system assures that a person has wisdom and good judgment in dealing with all the issues of human sexuality today.

Most of us are not anxious to face another issue which calls for the hard work of getting specific information, listening to various viewpoints, forming our own judgments and then pursuing these judgments through the bureaucracy of a school system.

It's much more comfortable to delegate such decisions to professionals. But that kind of delegation, without public review, consistently gets our kind of society into big trouble.

John Paul II Plans Far East Journey

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope John Paul II announced he would make his first trip to the Far East next February, visiting the Philippines, Japan and the Pacific island of Guam.

It will be the pontiff's ninth journey abroad and the first ever papal visit to Japan, where Portuguese Jesuit missionaries established Christian missions in the 16th century.

The pope made his announcement to thousands of pilgrims in St. Peter's Square after his traditional Sunday noon blessing Dec. 21.

The 23,000 mile, 12 day trip will be the longest of nine major trips outside Italy undertaken by John Paul since being elected pope. It will take place just over 10 years after the late Pope Paul VI made the first papal journey to the Far East.

The Polish-born pontiff said he had been invited to the Philippines, Asia's only Roman Catholic country, by Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila, to preside over beatification ceremonies there for Lorenzo Ruis, the first Filipino candidate for sainthood.

Lorenzo Ruis, a lay catechist, was martyred with 15 other Christian missionaries in Nagasaki.

Focus on Eucharist

The regular Focus on the Eucharist celebration will begin at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 8 with evening prayer, in the St. Mary Hospital Chapel. Mass will be celebrated by Father Paul Wohrab, at 8 p.m. The Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will follow the Mass.

Japan in 1596. All 16 martyrs are to be beatified, which is a first step toward sainthood.

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