

National/International Report

Pope praises Argentine bishops' defense of human rights

Responds to bishop's criticism of hierarchy

By Agostino Bono

Buenos Aires, Argentina (NC) — Shortly before leaving Argentina, Pope John Paul II praised the actions of the Argentine bishops in defending human rights during the previous military government.

"I know of your constant efforts and preoccupations in difficult moments when violence profoundly interrupted the peace, harmony and prosperity of your country with pain and death," the pope said.

"I know of your dedicated efforts which have saved lives," he added.

"Silenced or forgotten, God knows your fidelity," the pope said April 12 at an afternoon meeting with the Argentine bishops. He added the human rights statements shortly before speaking.

On his final day in Argentina, the pope also celebrated World Youth Day at an outdoor Palm Sunday Mass, and met with Argentine ecumenical and cultural figures.

The pope defended the bishops several days after hearing one bishop say that the hierarchy did not do enough to protect human rights during the 1976-83 military government. During that time, at least 9,000 people disappeared, many after being taken away by people identifying themselves as members of security forces.

"We wish to commit ourselves to follow the road of evangelical fidelity and ask forgiveness because, as a church, we do not always identify with the poor, the needy, the persecuted," said Bishop Miguel Esteban Hesayne of Viedma April 7 at a papal event.

Although the bishops' conference issued statements condemning human-rights abuses, they did not form a Church human

rights agency or officially support existing human-rights groups.

The pope also told the bishops to increase their efforts to evangelize a society subjected to increased secularization and shifting values because of scientific advances.

It is hard to be faithful "in the midst of a society so pierced by currents of secularization," he said.

It is also necessary to face "ethical problems presented to the Christian in contemporary society, because of cultural changes and scientific advances," he added.

These problems "require the efficient commitment of a laity mature in its faith and intellectually and apostolically prepared to face the challenges of today," said the pope.

At a meeting with cultural leaders, the pope said history was passing through a "truly important and completely delicate moment."

"We are faced with a progressive submission to scientific-technological knowledge, not always accompanied by a humanistic culture of similar scope," said the pope.

He called "the scientific-technological revolution" an event that was "eminently positive in itself," but said it has been accompanied by "a certain impoverishment in the so-called humanities."

The pope asked cultural leaders to orient scientific and technological progress "toward integrally human goals."

The pope began the day with a morning meeting attended by leaders of other Christian religions and expressed "our willingness for communion."

He praised the ecumenical movement for finding "ways and instruments of dialogue and understanding which cuts distances and overcomes obstacles."

The pope then celebrated an outdoor Palm Sunday Mass, which also commemorated World Youth Day. It was the first time the



NC photo from UPI-Reuter
Prior to Pope John Paul II's April 6 arrival in Argentina, Buenos Aires stores displayed commemorative plates bearing the pope's official portrait.

pope celebrated World Youth Day outside the Vatican and the first time in modern Church history that a pope celebrated Palm Sunday Mass outside the Vatican.

The pope told Argentines, who are still divided over human-rights issues stemming from the 1976-83 military government, that Christ also underwent "interrogations and tortures."

The pope also warned youths not to let their enthusiasm for Mass fade.

One reason for choosing Palm Sunday as

World Youth Day was to emphasize the need for permanent Christian enthusiasm and commitment, he told the 800,000 people gathered for the Mass.

"Palm Sunday introduces us to all the events of Holy Week and the total mystery of Jesus Christ. It introduces us to his giving until death on the cross because of obedience to the Father," he said.

At the end of the Mass, the pope rededicated the country to Mary.

Mexico's southern border termed 'powder keg' of potential revolution

By Mike Tangeman

Mexico City (NC) — In the thin stretch of Pacific coastal plain known as the Soconusco, where Mexico's state of Chiapas borders Guatemala, the Catholic Church is urgently trying to change a situation in which a few people have plenty while most are poor.

It's a region where large plantations use the best acres to grow coffee, cotton and bananas for export. The remaining land is too scarce and too poor in quality to provide a decent living for *campesinos*, (those who work small farms), say Church workers.

Bishop Luis Miguel Canton Marin, whose Tapachula Diocese is nestled in Mexico's southernmost corner, said the area is a "powder keg" of potential revolution.

Added to the Church's pastoral load is an annual influx of about 45,000 Mexican and Guatemalan migrant workers who labor on the coastal plantations for low wages.

Bishop Canton and 36 priests serve 850,000 people living in more than 1,000 villages and towns in the diocese.

"The Church in Tapachula is a poor, missionary Church," the 48-year-old bishop told National Catholic News Service. While there are "a lot of resources" in the diocese, he said, many of those controlling the resources choose not to share them, although some landowners have given small parcels of property to poor farmers.

The region's wealth is considerable, derived largely from the sale of thousands of tons of coffee grown each year on prime

lands owned by a small group of powerful families.

"There are serious problems because many *campesinos* have no land," Bishop Canton said.

He said that in the poorest areas of southern Mexico, land-tenure problems could lead to political upheaval similar to those that have occurred elsewhere in Central America.

"It's urgent ... that there be a true development," he said, "that would be the best brake against ... there being a revolution."

Economic "transformation" of the region should be accomplished soon, because southern Mexico is "a powder keg that could

explode," the bishop added.

Along with land-tenure tension is the annual influx of some 10,000 Mexican Indians — many of whom speak only tribal languages — who come down from Chiapas' central highlands to work in the coffee harvest. They are joined by about 35,000 Guatemalan Indians, whom — according to local observers — plantation owners prefer to Mexicans, because the Indians will work longer hours for less pay.

Illegal immigrants are another group the local Church serves, said Bishop Canton. Mexican immigration figures estimate the number of illegal residents of Tapachula at nearly 100,000.

Many are Guatemalan refugees, the bishop

said, while others have fled civil war in El Salvador hoping to find homes in Mexico City or United States.

Pastoral work among the refugees, migrant workers and illegal aliens "is done discreetly" to avoid problems with immigration authorities, the bishop said.

He said that pastoral work in Tapachula is guided by the idea "that those who have resources learn to share them and to help others." It also recognizes that "the poor are aware that they have dignity and that they should join together to make an effort to improve their situation," he said.

But there are always "the most needy ... people, so weak that they are unable to speak for themselves," the bishop said.

Pope says violence of Chile visit caused by 'primitive provocation'

By Agostino Bono

Aboard the papal plane (NC) — The clashes that disrupted a papal Mass in Chile were the result of "a very base and primitive provocation" by demonstrators, Pope John Paul II said April 13.

Speaking in a brief press conference aboard the papal plane while returning to Rome after his 13-day visit to South America, the pope also praised "the great dignity" of the overwhelming majority of the 600,000 people at the April 3 outdoor Mass in Santiago, Chile.

It was the pope's first public comment about the violent encounters between police and several hundred anti-government protesters. The clashes broke out shortly after the homily and took place about 160 yards from the pope. About 100 people were injured in the incident.

Shortly after the Mass, the Chilean bishops blamed the demonstrators for starting the trouble.

Before and during the Mass, demonstrators built bonfires, pelted police with stones and wooden poles, and began running

along passageways separating sections of the crowd.

Prior to the outbreak of violence, several demonstrators identified themselves as members of the Leftist Revolutionary Movement, a Marxist group.

The pope did not say who he thought was responsible for the anti-government demonstration.

He said he was "impressed with the great dignity, equilibrium and maturity" shown by the crowd "in the face of a very base and primitive provocation."

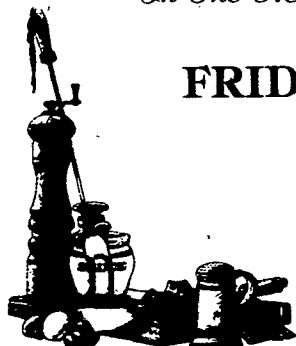
HICKS & McCARTHY

In The Heart Of Pittsford Village

FRIDAY'S SPECIAL

Fish Fry

\$4.95



Receive an additional
\$1.00 OFF
EACH DINNER
WITH THIS AD.

23 South Main Street • Pittsford

"True Stories You'll
Love and Remember"

A collection of 700 sparkling
anecdotes and narratives
taken from history.
by Father John Nacca

Available at:
Trant's Bookstore
696 South Avenue
— and —
Waldenbooks
Eastview Mall

Empire
Fence

328-0880