

World & Nation

Social encyclical stays neutral by criticizing East and West

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II's second social encyclical keeps the Church neutral in East-West confrontations by strongly criticizing both political power blocs. East and West receive an equal share of stinging condemnations for their foreign and domestic policies.

These policies, the pope says, have resulted in a nuclear-arms race threatening world survival, have hindered Third World economic growth by transferring ideological conflicts to underdeveloped nations, and have produced societies at home that seek material gain while downplaying spiritual values.

In remaining neutral, Pope John Paul follows the papal pattern established after World War II when the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two superpowers representing radically different political and socio-economic systems. Faced with this confrontation, the Vatican has steadfastly steered clear of tying itself to one bloc, thus maintaining an independence and credibility that allows it to attack both on specific issues.

The major innovation of the latest papal encyclical is its emphasis on the negative effects the spreading East-West conflict has had on the Third World. Instead of promoting socio-economic development, East and West have used the Third World as a political battleground for bringing more nations into their "areas of influence" or "safety belts," the pope complains.

"A world which is divided into blocs, sustained by rigid ideologies, and in which instead of interdependence and solidarity different forms of imperialism hold sway, can only be a world subject to structures of sin" working against "the universal common good," he laments in the document.

In his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns), made public Feb. 19, the pope defines these two rival socio-economic and political systems as Marxist collectivism in the East and liberal capitalism in the West.

The encyclical goes beyond criticizing both for hindering Third World development. It also considers both as "imperfect and in need of radical correction" because of the domestic societies they produce.

The position reflects the Polish-born pope's experiences under communist rule and his suspicion of the opulence he sees in Western society.

Papal trips to developed countries are often spiced with criticisms that the West lives as if God does not exist because it has forgotten its Christian roots and succumbed to a consumer materialism. His speeches and writings often put this on the same critical plane as the theoretical atheism espoused by communism.

The encyclical sees a "crass materialism" in societies marked by "superdevelopment" in which there is an "excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups" thus making people "slaves of possession."

Regarding communism, the encyclical criticizes a society marked by a one-party system and the suppression of the "right of economic initiative" in favor of decision making by "the bureaucratic apparatus." The result is usually a lowering of living standards for most people rather than "a true equality," it says.

The policy of neutrality regarding the two blocs avoids offering political alternatives, stressing only the Church's role as a moral force.

In what has become a trademark position

for Pope John Paul, the encyclical reiterates that "the Church does not propose economic and political systems or programs. The Church's social doctrine is not a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another," the encyclical adds.

But this neutrality should not be seen as a decision to avoid political issues, said Cardi-

nal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission, which helped the pope prepare the encyclical.

The Church "is not washing its hands like Pontius Pilate," he said at a February 19 press conference on the encyclical.

While not proposing a political plan "with a Catholic label," the Church gives people guidelines so they can make political decisions, the cardinal said.

The encyclical at a glance

Vatican City (NC) — Here is an at-a-glance look at Pope John Paul II's new encyclical "On Social Concerns."

- Issued to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical "On the Development of Peoples," which advocated greater development programs for poor nations.

- Says that in the 20 years since Pope Paul VI's encyclical, the world has seen not progress but a widening gap between rich and poor.

- Calls the growing gap a threat to world peace and says it is caused by such factors as use of the Third World as an East-West battleground, the growing foreign-debt crisis, spending on arms rather than development, and inadequate sharing of technological advances.

- Notes the Church's "critical attitude toward both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism," saying both ideologies need to be changed and updated.

- Cites the ethical consequences of world interdependence and calls for moving beyond "a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress" for poor nations to "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."

- Criticizes state-sponsored birth-control campaigns, saying they often are "a form of racism against the poorest."

Pope Paul VI was first to devote encyclical to Third World's woes

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Pope Paul VI, in his landmark 1967 social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, coined a phrase: "Development is the new name for peace."

It came to symbolize the Church's concern for narrowing the gap between rich and poor nations, which the Church said is not only unjust, but also a major threat to world peace. The phrase also crystallized the Church's growing sympathy for the underdeveloped world and its tendency to side with

the underdog in its battles with the developed world.

Pope Paul's encyclical, titled in English "On the Development of Peoples," was the first papal document to primarily focus on the socio-economic situations of what has since become known as the Third World. Other popes and the Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" had devoted sections of documents to this topic. But Pope Paul's document was the first to methodi-

cally apply Church social teachings to the underdeveloped world and its international political and economic relationships.

In applying Catholic teaching to the economic and political issues of the developing nations, the encyclical foresaw the dialogue between developed and underdeveloped countries. It also saw the need for urgent solutions to emerging tension-causing issues, such as the increasing debt of Third World countries and the need for more equitable trade relations.

Nations were asked to exercise foresight and divert arms spending to development causes, a call often repeated by Pope John Paul II.

To honor the 20th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, Pope John Paul issued his own encyclical February 19, updating the situation. In doing so, he built on the foundations that had been laid by Pope Paul.

Pope Paul's view was that speedy but balanced development was needed in underdeveloped countries. This meant "bold transformations" of domestic socio-economic and political structures coupled with a major reworking of international economic and political relations to grant more equality and autonomy to poor nations. A balanced approach was necessary to avoid destroying positive values and institutions present in underdeveloped countries, in the rush for social transformation.

Pope Paul's encyclical also issued a warning against the use of violent revolution and totalitarian ideologies as means to development.

The encyclical was written against the backdrop of rising expectations, often unmet, that characterized the underdeveloped

countries of the 1960s:

- In black Africa, nations were gaining political independence after centuries of European colonial rule, but were finding that they were still economically dependent on their previous masters.

- Latin America, Asia and Africa were experiencing waves of rural-to-urban migration, as landless peasants sought a better life by latching onto their nations' fledgling efforts at industrialization. But cities lacked the public and social services to meet the influx, and there were not enough jobs to absorb the migrants. The result was creation of sprawling, squatter-built shantytowns, which still dominate urban areas and visibly highlight the sharp contrast between the majority poor and the minority rich.

- The electronic communications revolution was in full swing, bringing news, consumer-oriented advertisements and commercial television programming from the developed world. Millions of poor people with access to inexpensive transistor radios or who stood in front of demonstration television sets in store windows found out that there was a developed world where the majority had far more than they did. This created a widespread desire for such a lifestyle, but in the frustrating circumstances of weak national economies.

In the years since *Populorum Progressio* was written, the problems seen by Pope Paul have gotten worse. The Third World foreign debt situation which Pope Paul asked be eased through negotiation has now become a major North-South crisis issue as many underdeveloped nations cannot repay their ever-mounting debts.

Papal encyclical

Continued from Page 1

to a tendency toward a new form of racism, or the promotion of certain equally racist forms of eugenics," it said.

To ensure that the personal, cultural and spiritual needs of people are met, development must be tied to respect for human rights, especially religious liberty, the document observed. The encyclical expresses support of the International Movement of Non-Aligned Nations, which tries to steer an independent course between the superpower blocs, in its efforts "to affirm in an effective way the right of every people to its own identity, independence and security."

East-West conflict is "an important cause of the retardation or stagnation of the South," said the encyclical. Superpower efforts to involve Third World nations in their conflicts and to gain political influence in underdeveloped countries is "a form of neo-colonialism," it said.

"Each of the two blocs harbors in its own way a tendency toward imperialism," it continued.

Third World countries "find themselves involved, in, and sometimes overwhelmed by, ideological conflicts, which inevitably create internal divisions, to the extent in some cases of provoking full-civil war," it added.

"Investments and aid for development are often diverted from their proper purpose and used to sustain conflicts," it said.

The encyclical said that "the Church's social doctrine adopts a critical attitude toward both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism." It criticized collectivist systems in which "the right of economic initiative is often suppressed."

This often leads to decision making by a bureaucratic apparatus, reducing the individual to an "almost absolute dependence, which is similar to the traditional dependence of the worker-proletarian in capitalism," it said.

Also criticized were superdeveloped societies marked by "pure consumerism" and "crass materialism" in which there is "an excessive

availability of every kind of material goods of the benefit of certain social groups."

"An object already owned but now superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer," the encyclical remarked.

The West "gives the impression of abandoning itself to forms of growing and selfish isolation" and the East "seems to ignore for questionable reasons its duty to cooperate in the task of alleviating human misery," it said.

Both ideologies need to be changed and updated, it added, if the world is to live in peace. The ideological opposition has led to military opposition, giving "rise to two blocs of armed forces, each suspicious and fearful of the other's domination," the encyclical said, concluding that such a situation in the nuclear age puts world survival in danger.

The document also criticized superpower spending on nuclear weapons. "In today's world, including the world of economics, the prevailing picture is one destined to lead us more quickly toward death rather than one of concern for true development," it said.

Moreover, poor countries must undertake initiatives, "not expecting everything from the more favored countries," the encyclical stated, adding that nations "need to reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their political institutions, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial and authoritative forms of government by democratic and participatory ones."

Encyclical copies available through NC News Service

Readers who want the full text of Pope John Paul II's new encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns), may obtain it from Origins, NC Documentary Service. The price of one copy is \$3.50, which includes postage and handling. Payment must accompany order. Write to: Origins, NC News Service, 1312 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Multiple-copy rates are available on request by phoning (202) 659-6742.

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