

# Pope urges end to prejudice against Mexican church

MEXICO CITY (CNS) — On his May 6-13 visit to 11 Mexican cities, Pope John Paul II urged Mexican Catholics to strengthen their faith and to combat poverty, injustice and the inroads of proselytizing sects.

Highlights of the papal trip, his second to Mexico, included:

- A first-ever formal meeting with the president of Mexico, a nation with an anticlerical constitution despite the overwhelmingly Catholic makeup of its population.

- The beatification of Juan Diego, a 16th-century Mexican Indian venerated by Mexicans for centuries, and four other Mexicans.

- An attack on the evils of urban poverty during a visit to Chalco, a burgeoning shantytown of 500,000 people outside Mexico City.

- A message warning young people against "the destructive and killing power of drugs" and urging them to be leaders "of a new evangelization by building through Christ a just, free and reconciling society."

- Meetings with Mexico's bishops and priests, in which the pontiff warned against "certain theologies of liberation," saying the church's "preferential option for the poor ... is not an ideological option."

- A warning not to interpret communism's collapse in Eastern Europe as "the triumph or failure of one system over another, especially the triumph of the liberal capitalist system."

- A challenge to revive spiritual values and strong family life, coupled with attacks on divorce, abortion, sterilization and artificial birth control.

Several times during his visit, Pope John Paul expressed hopes for a new atmosphere to church-state relations in Mexico, strained for decades by constitutional restrictions on the church. The restrictions were imposed in 1917, when the church was a major political force and opposed to the country's secular, revolutionary government.

"Our hope is that the sun finally sets on the prejudice that the church is a hindrance to scientific and cultural progress," the pope said at a meeting with teachers in Aguascalientes May 8.

He said "a new phase of better understanding and dialogue" has opened between church and state in Mexico.

The changing climate of church-state relations was symbolized when the pope landed May 6 and was officially greeted at the airport by Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Salinas met with the pope again the next day at Los Pinos, the presidential residence.

At the airport Salinas called the pope "Mexico's friend and the pilgrim of peace," and both men addressed themes of peace, tolerance, freedom and the common good, leading Mexico's media to report enthusiastically on the cordiality and mutual interests of the leaders.

Large, enthusiastic crowds greeted the pope on his travels, which ranged from Chihuahua and Monterrey in northern states on the U.S. border to Tuxtla Gutierrez in the south, once a part of Guatemala.

In that southern city May 11, the pope made an unscheduled visit to the cathedral to pray over the coffin of Bishop Luis Miguel Canton Marin of Tapachula, who died along with 19 others in a fiery plane crash the previous day. Bishop Canton, widely known in southern Mexico as a friend of the poor and an advocate for the thousands of Central American refugees in the region, had been planning to meet the pope during his visit to Tuxtla Gutierrez.

In a homily during a service there, the pope told Guatemalan refugees that he joined with the bishops of their country in pleading for justice, solidarity and charity toward refugees. The comments were one of several pleas he made for refugees during his visit.



AP/Wide World Photos  
Pope John Paul II responds to the news of the death of Mexican Bishop Luis Miguel Canton Marin in a plane crash Thursday, May 10. The bishop was en route to the site of a May 12 papal Mass.

He also made a plea to the United States for a generous response to its immigrants from the south. In an in-flight radio message to President Bush before his arrival in Mexico May 6, he asked Bush to continue those traditions by accepting immigrants who seek "the opportunity of starting a new life."

In his travels around Mexico, the pope repeatedly challenged social injustices and called on the people to take inspiration from the Gospel and do work toward improving society.

During the Mexico City beatification Mass for Juan Diego and four others May 6, he called on Mexican Catholics to "commit themselves more actively to the re-evangelization of society" and at the same time to fight "poverty, corruption and the trampling underfoot of truth and human rights."

In Chalco the next day he described urban poverty as the "faces of child victims..., faces of the underemployed and the unemployed..., faces of parents distressed because they lack the means to maintain and educate their children."

"The option for the poor continues to be

in the heart of the church," he said.

While calling for a struggle against oppressive poverty, he urged the people to base it on human solidarity and the Gospel, not on "partisan and conflictive options."

He cited one side of that problem May 12 when he warned priests in Mexico City not to "become trapped by the deceitful theory of class struggle as the motor of historical change."

Talking to intellectuals later the same day he told them to avoid the pitfalls of both capitalism and communism, saying the "love for the poor ... born of the Gospel" does not mean class hatred or class struggle.

In a meeting with businessmen in Durango three days earlier he spelled out the other side of that problem with a strong warning that communism's fall in Eastern Europe does not mean that Latin Americans should adopt the ideology of "liberal capitalism" as "the only road for our world."

He warned them of the "grave danger" of "crass materialism" and an "exclusive eagerness for profit."

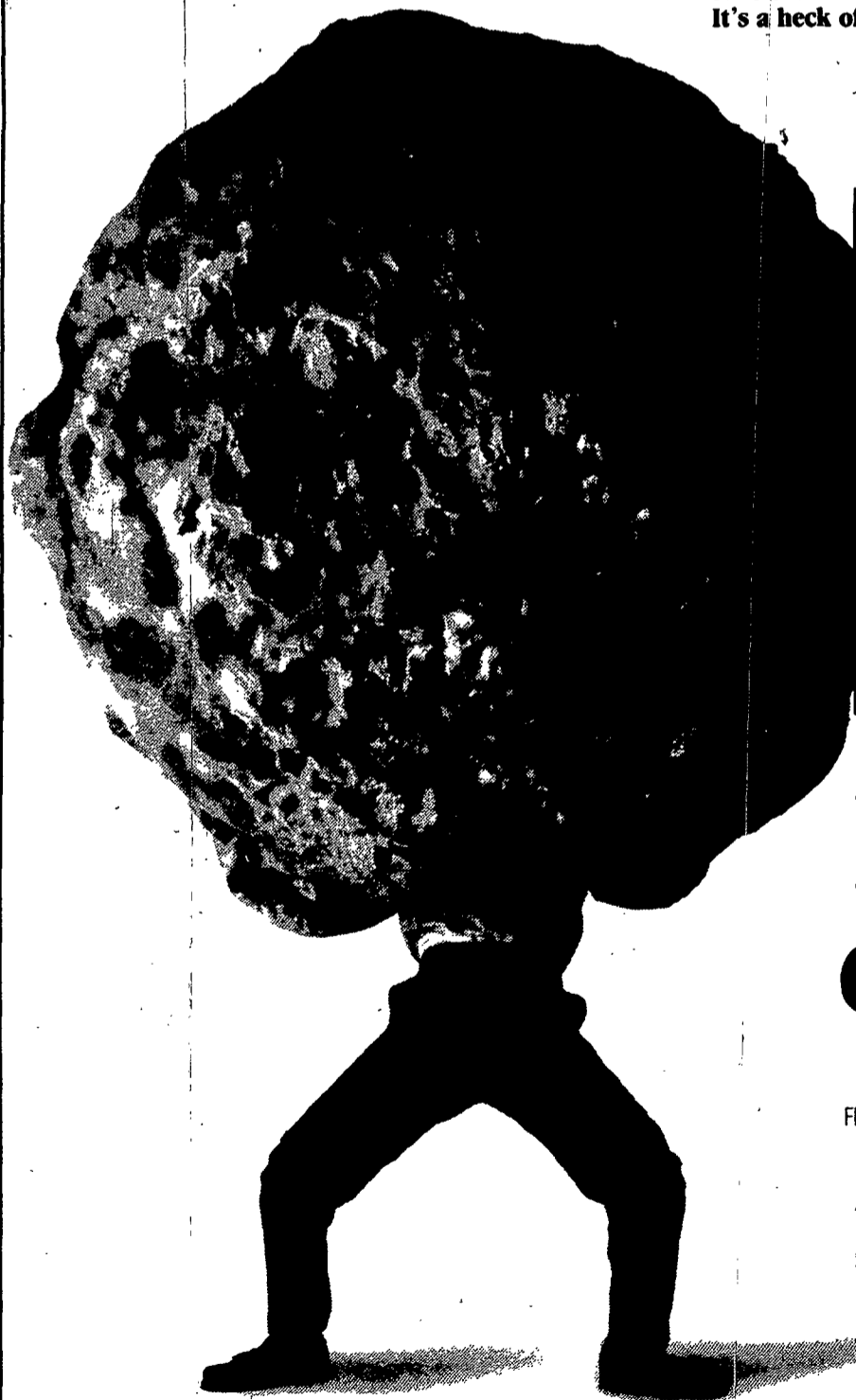
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