

# 41 Mexicans killed in stampede



AP/Wide World Photos  
**Costumed pilgrims dance Feb. 13 outside of Our Lord of Chalma Church in Chalma, Mexico, after an Ash Wednesday stampede that killed 41 people.**

**By Mike Tangeman**  
 Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY — More than 40 people were reportedly killed and as many as 65 others injured Ash Wednesday when an estimated 4,000 worshippers stampeded at a popular shrine about 75 miles south of Mexico City.

Pilgrims from throughout central and southern Mexico had made the annual Lenten pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lord of Chalma. Many believe the black-wooden crucifix icon adorning the sanctuary of the local church is miraculous.

According to Alfredo Albitar, spokesman for the State of Mexico's Directorate of Public Security and Transit, the tragedy occurred at about 10 a.m. when members of a crowd at the entrance of the church began pushing to receive ashes. Albitar said a stampede ensued and in the melee 41 men, women and children "were trampled and suffocated inside the church."

News reports in afternoon Mexico City papers said the bodies of the victims were

laid out in front of the church, where they were identified by grieving family members. Reports also noted that the crowd remained at the shrine in spite of the tragedy, and refused to leave until ashes had been distributed.

The annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Chalma's Black Christ begins prior to Ash Wednesday and ends on the first Friday in Lent.

The tradition pre-dates Christianity in Mexico, and is tied to the worship of Oztoteotl, a god of the pre-Hispanic indigenous cultures. The site was called Chalmecca in the Indian language Nahuatl. Before the Spanish conquistadors arrived, Indians from southern Mexico and as far south as Guatemala made the annual pilgrimage to the shrine.

When the early Catholic missionaries built a church on the site, they adorned the altar with the black-wood image of the crucified Christ, which has acquired the miraculous reputation.

On the weekend prior to the beginning of Lent, hundreds of poor pilgrims were seen

walking in groups enroute to Chalma along highways through the neighboring state of Morelos. They carried bundles and blankets on their backs, sported canteens and flashlights and straw hats to ward off the harsh sun. Some carried banners of religious organizations and sang hymns.

All Chalma pilgrimage routes from southern Mexico converge in the Morelos state capital of Cuernavaca, where pilgrims stop at the shrine of El Calvario. Pilgrims have been known to snarl traffic in Cuernavaca as they proceed from El Calvario over the mountains along a dirt road known as the Chalma grade to their destination in the state of Mexico.

Prior to visiting the shrine, they traditionally stop at a huge cypress tree the roots of which extend into the current of a river. At the river, the pilgrims make ritual offerings and take ritual baths in the cold waters.

For several days after the First Friday in Lent, the worshippers can be seen traveling back along their pilgrimage routes throughout the region.

## Prefect calls dialogue solution to theological conflict

**By Carol Luker**  
 Catholic News Service

DALLAS — A continuing dialogue on the part of theologians, bishops and the Holy See is the best way to reconcile tensions among them, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said Feb. 7 during a visit to Dallas.

In an interview with *The Texas Catholic*, Dallas diocesan newspaper, the cardinal spoke about various issues of morality and church life, including abortion, Christian feminism, the morality of the Persian Gulf War, Vatican relations with theologians and the alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia.

On the war, he echoed comments he made in January during an Italian radio interview in which he said grounds existed for serious doubts as to whether it could be considered a "just war."

On a juridical and moral level, he said, the authority of the United Nations and the duty of the international community to come to Kuwait's defense in response to the Iraqi invasion "are clear to me."

But on the practical level, he said, it is difficult to maintain the principle of proportionality between means and ends, especially with the changed character of modern warfare and the "unforeseeable aspects of the problem" once hostilities have begun.

The dynamics of warfare can lead to a situation in which "finally you are in a reality not corresponding to what was your intention," he said.

Late last year several hundred North American theologians criticized the Vatican's pattern of dealing with collegiality, ecumenism, the role of women in the church and relations with theologians. Asked to comment on their critique, Car-

dinal Ratzinger declined to evaluate it, but said there are "many factors and motivations for these tensions."

Some tensions are creative, he said, while others "are dangerous or are oppositions against the positive tension of life."

He said the twice-a-year visits to Rome by top officials of the U.S. bishops' conference help the Vatican "understand the problems of the United States and help also for the American bishops to see what are our intentions so they can be better the

interpreters of the Holy See for the theologians and help to overcome ineffective and negative oppositions."

He said the doctrinal congregation is not helped by the bad media image it has in the West.

Asked about a planned meeting of the world's cardinals this spring to talk about threats to life, Cardinal Ratzinger said Pope John Paul II was particularly concerned about a need to form Christian consciences on abortion.

Concerning the alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje he defended the provisional decision of the Yugoslavian bishops' conference to permit pilgrimages there while saying no proof of supernatural occurrences has yet been shown.

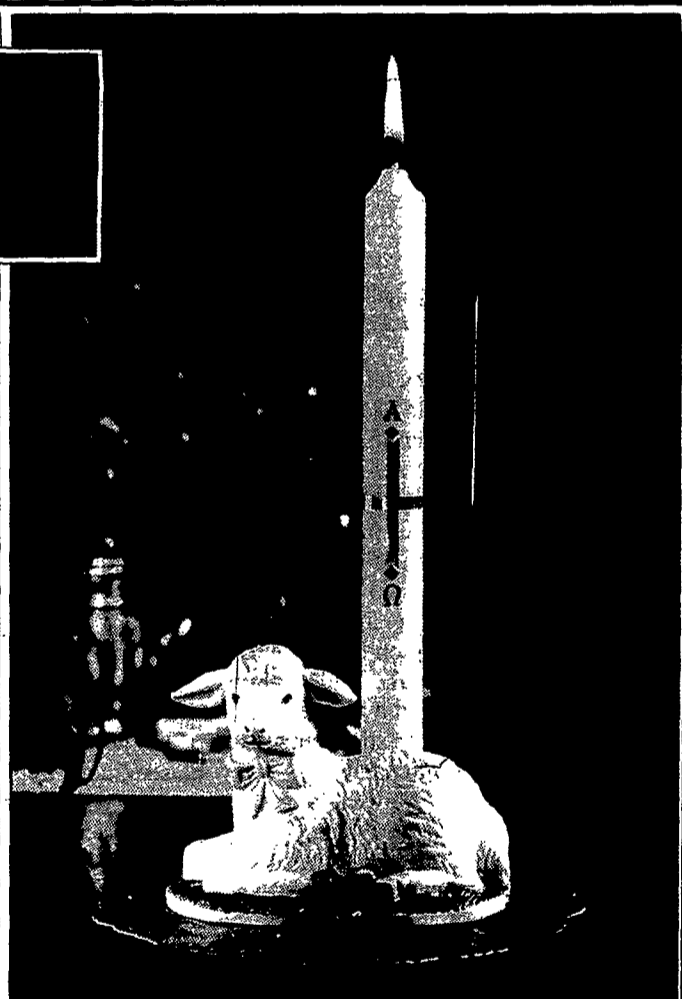
"I think the proper point is that people can go to pray there, to confess and so on, but people should not find conversion and life in the firmament of apparitions," he said.

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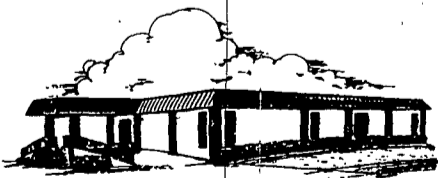
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