

WORLD & NATION

Cardinal Ratzinger sees ecumenical possibilities

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

ROME — The ecumenical movement could profit by focusing more on the "logic of martyrdom" implicit in Christianity and less on questions of power, said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation.

Likewise, a "theology of persecution" based on total sacrifice could help unite Christians more than a "theology of liberation" based on ideology, the cardinal said June 9.

Cardinal Ratzinger made the remarks at the presentation of a book written by an Italian scholar, Father Nicola Bux.

Published by the Vatican publishing house and titled, *The Fifth Seal: Christian Unity Toward the Third Millennium*, the book takes issue with many recent ecumenical trends and warns against "underselling" Catholic beliefs.

Cardinal Ratzinger said the book had underlined valid arguments, especially regarding papal primacy, by connecting it with the early church history of martyrdom and less with political arguments over papal authority. He said primacy was linked to the fact that, in the first three centuries after Christ's death, Rome was the "capital of persecution" for Christians, with such martyrs as Ss. Peter and Paul.

"I think this is truly a path to follow that could open the way toward unity and free us from the category of power" in ecumenical dialogue, Cardinal Ratzinger said.

The cardinal also endorsed the book's argument that unity is a reality of the universal church, not merely an expression of consensus by particular churches meeting in an ecumenical council.

He said the whole idea that Christian unity springs from the level of agreement

in a council was "a romantic dream, and a very recent one," and represented an unrealistic ecumenical solution. For one thing, he said, it exaggerated the function of councils through the centuries.

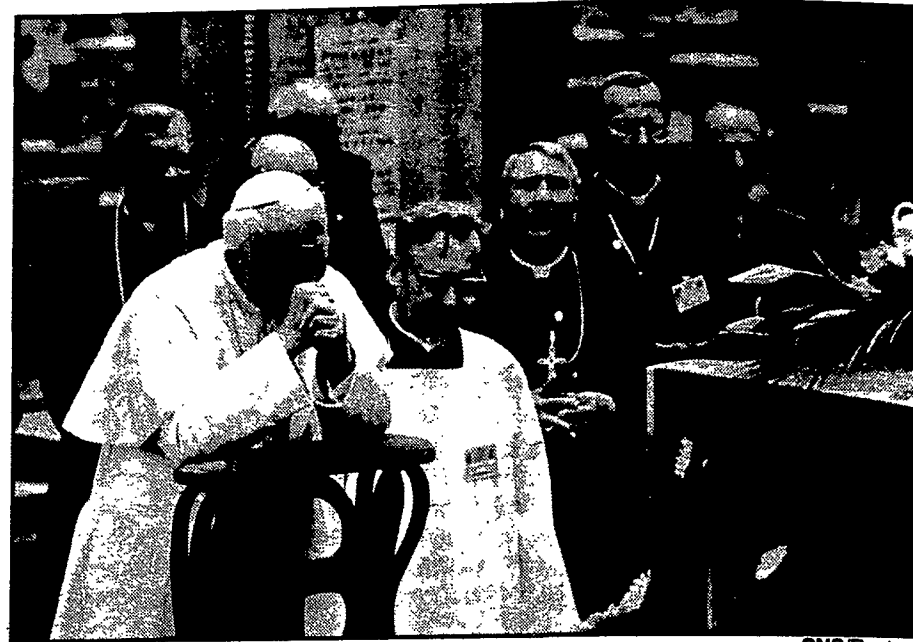
Among the critical comments in the book was one aimed at the World Council of Churches, which, according to the author, in past years furnished "assistance campaigns to revolutionaries in Latin America" while ignoring Christians who suffered for decades under European communism.

Asked about this, Cardinal Ratzinger said that many Latin American bishops had personally complained to him that WCC programs — despite good intentions — had in fact ended up giving "great help to subversive movements" and done great damage to Christianity in the region.

The book, which cites Cardinal Ratzinger frequently, said Christian unity without a form of papal primacy was unthinkable. It suggested that all Christians should think about the value of a visible primate, especially given the fast pace of Muslim growth in the world.

The book also took aim at a 1993 Vatican-Orthodox agreement in which both sides rejected, as a modern method, the process that reconciled groups of Eastern faithful to Rome in predominantly Orthodox territories in past centuries.

Father Bux said this process, sometimes called "uniatism," was a false obstacle to unity that stemmed from Orthodox misinterpretation. He also suggested that the future picture of Christian unity might well include "further separations" and that reconciling with smaller groups of faithful should not be ruled out.



CNS/Reuters

Pope visits grave

Pope John Paul II kneels in prayer at the grave of his parents June 9 in Krakow. The pope visited the Rakowicki Cemetery during his 11-day trip to his homeland of Poland.

One of the author's objections focused on the term "sister churches," which is sometimes used by ecumenists when talking about other Christian churches. Father Bux said the term makes little sense unless one has a clear understanding of the "mother church" in Rome.

That point drew a response from Bishop Jean-Claude Perisset, a former Vatican diplomat who was named last year as a joint secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Bishop Perisset, who participated in the book presentation, pointed out that Pope John Paul II has used the phrase "sister churches" more than once, to highlight the level of ecumenical agreement

that already exists. But he said the term does risk obscuring the leadership role of Rome.

Bishop Perisset said he thought Father Bux's book contained some useful reflections. But he took exceptions to some points. For example, the author argued that "proper proselytism" should be the goal of all Catholics — including those who invite Orthodox Christians into the church.

Bishop Perisset said that in theory, this may be true, but in practice we have to keep in mind human shortcomings on both sides, as well as historical realities that have marked the path of ecumenical relations.

Bill's inadequate aid for immigrants worries bishop

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A budget reconciliation bill under consideration by a U.S. House subcommittee fails to meet minimally acceptable standards for fixing the effects of welfare changes on immigrants, says a U.S. Catholic bishop.

"It is imperative that we avert the personal tragedies which will be suffered by the members of our communities when this law is fully implemented," said Bishop John S. Cummins of Oakland, Calif., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration.

He made the comments in a June 5 let-

ter to members of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources.

Bishop Cummins encouraged members of the committee to support a bipartisan budget agreement worked out earlier in the spring, as opposed to an alternative version put forward by subcommittee chairman Rep. Clay Shaw, R-Fla.

"While we also believe that the bipartisan budget agreement's proposals on benefits for immigrants do not go far enough in restoring needed benefits for noncitizens, we encourage the subcommittee

and committee to adopt the bipartisan budget agreement's proposals instead of those contained in the 'chairman's mark,'" Bishop Cummins wrote.

The U.S. bishops have strongly encouraged Congress to reverse provisions of last year's welfare law including one that prohibited legal immigrants from receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits.

Among areas of Shaw's budget bill that have raised the bishops' objections is a provision that would allow only elderly or disabled immigrants who were receiving SSI as of Aug. 22, 1996, to continue getting that benefit.

Legal immigrants who become disabled after that date would not be entitled to SSI, even if they lived in the United States before the cutoff date, under Shaw's proposal. Elderly immigrants also would remain ineligible if they became destitute after August 1996.

"Most noncitizens have worked in the United States for years, paying their taxes, building their families, enriching their communities and contributing to this great nation," Bishop Cummins wrote.

He noted that last fall the U.S. bishops unanimously endorsed a statement which said "all of us at some point may be affected by hunger, poor health, housing needs, family crises and aging."

Thoughts to Consider



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