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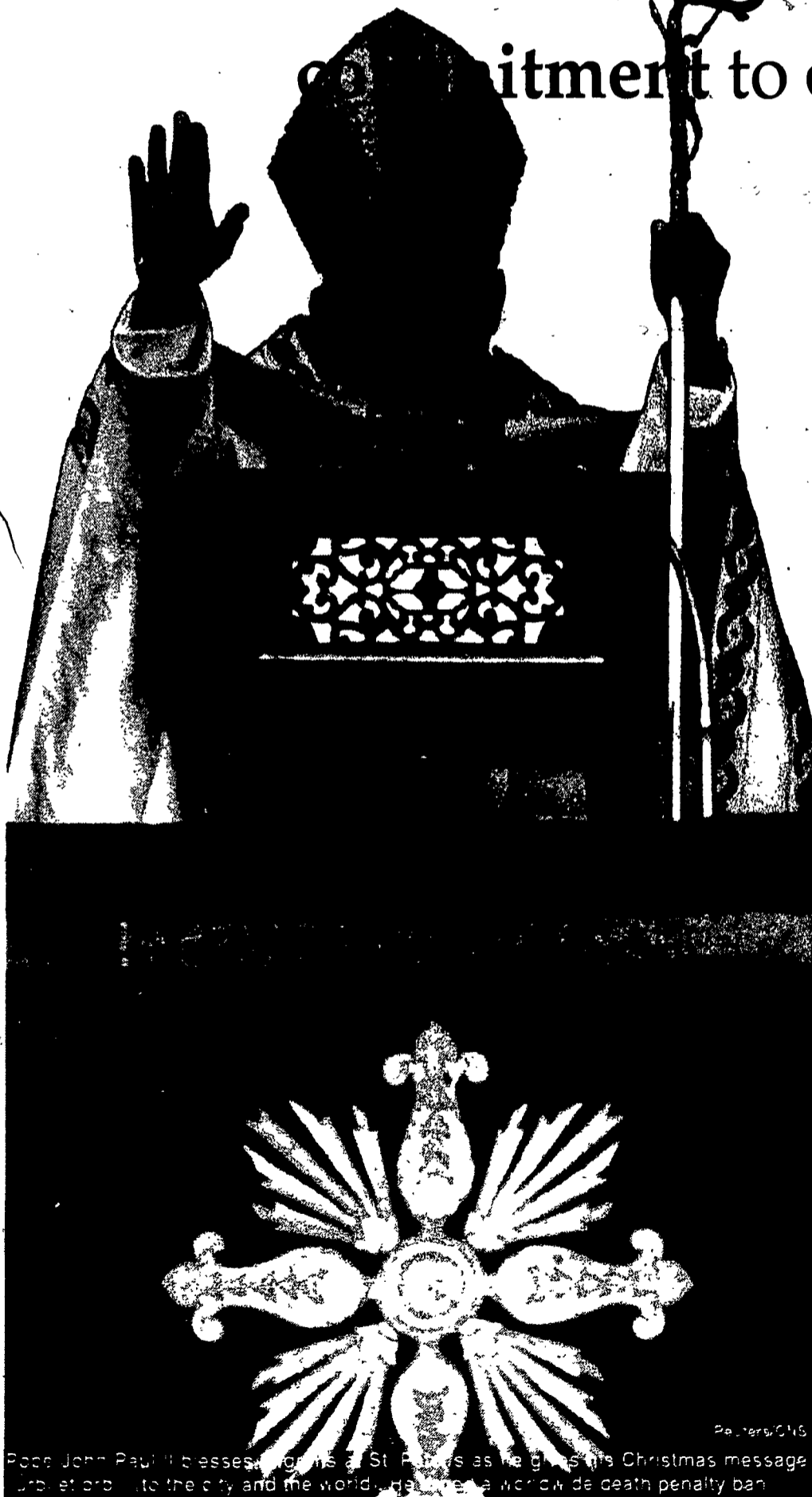
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“It is therefore *essential* that there **should** be a **global** approach to the subject of **human rights** and a serious commitment to **defend** them.”



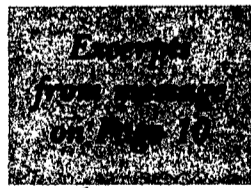
Pope links peace to human dignity

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II urged protection of human rights in his annual World Day of Peace message and said that only ethical treatment of people, populations and the environment will lead to peace.

Among other things, the pope decried arms trade with warring countries, the recruitment of children as soldiers, the use of anti-personnel mines, and unbridled consumerism — which he said is “no less pernicious” than Marxism, Nazism or fascism because it ignores “negative effects on others.”

The pope’s statement for World Day of Peace, observed each year on Jan. 1, was published Dec. 15 at the Vatican.

Society can lay lasting foundations for peace only “when the promotion of the dignity of the person is the guiding principle, and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment,” the pope said.



“But when human rights are ignored or scorned,” he added, “and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion and violence are inevitably sown.”

In presenting the document, Archbishop Francis Nguyen Van Thuan, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, pointed out that the Jan. 1 World Day of Peace observance (was) the last of the millennium, “a historic turning point between a time which is ending and another which is starting; a turning point which requires of everyone a new understanding.”

In his message, the pope noted the observance Dec. 10, 1998, of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and said the document “acknowledges the rights which it proclaims, but does not confer them, since they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity.”

The basic right to life is the foremost human right, Pope John Paul wrote.

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Story by Lynne Weil • Catholic News Service

Pope John Paul II blesses St. Peter's as he gives his Christmas message to the city and the world. He also calls for a worldwide death penalty ban.