

Pathways Toward Peace



Pope stresses justice needed for true peace

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In his strongest statement since the Sept. 11 attacks, Pope John Paul II said countries had a right to defend themselves against international terrorists.

But he said true peace could not be achieved without "justice and that form of love which is forgiveness."

In a message for World Day of Peace, celebrated Jan. 1, the pope urged Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious leaders to condemn terrorism publicly in order to deny "terrorists any form of religious or moral legitimacy."

He said the international community must fight terrorism by addressing underlying injustices like poverty, but he called the terrorists' claim to be acting on behalf of the poor "a patent falsehood."

The 14-page text, "No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness," was released at a Vatican press conference Dec. 11 and focused on the unstable world situation since Sept. 11. The message's theme, originally announced in June as a reflection on the role of forgiveness in peace, was changed after the attacks to add the element of justice.

The pope said the terrorist attacks, through which "the power of evil seems once again to have taken the upper hand" in the world, had made him think of the suffering of his friends and acquaintances in Poland under Nazism and communism.

"I have often paused to reflect on the persistent question: How do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence?"

"My reasoned conviction," he said, "is that the shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness."

People often see justice and forgiveness as contradictory, the pope said, "but forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice."

"Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done," he said.

"But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the forgiveness that heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations," he said.

The pope said countries had a right to

defend themselves against terrorism, as long as the right was exercised "with respect for moral and legal limits in the choice of ends and means."

"The guilty must be correctly identified, since criminal culpability is always personal and cannot be extended to the nation, ethnic group or religion to which the terrorists may belong," he said.

Vatican officials at the press conference declined to comment directly on whether the U.S.-led bombing of Afghanistan or a potential extension of the military campaign to other countries like Iraq, Sudan or Somalia would fit the pope's ethical parameters. Several said the lack of solid information coming out of Afghanistan made it impossible to form a judgment.

But one official, Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, approvingly noted U.S. stated objectives in Afghanistan to target only the terrorists blamed for the Sept. 11 attacks and the Taliban regime that gave the terrorists protection and support.

The pope said international efforts to fight terrorism must include addressing "situations of oppression and marginalization which facilitate the designs of terrorists." But, he said, "it must be firmly stated that the injustices existing in the world can never be used to excuse acts of terrorism."

In addition, those hurt most by the breakdown of global order caused by terrorism are the poor, especially those in developing countries, he said.

"The terrorist claim to be acting on behalf of the poor is a patent falsehood," he said.

The pope condemned terrorism as a "true crime against humanity," saying it "springs from hatred" and "is built on contempt for human life."

He said the "fanatic fundamentalism"



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

Prayer for peace

Maria Oberst (left), Glynn C. Manigault (middle) and Megan Riordan, all of St. Andrew's Parish, sing at a youth service, "Prayer for Peace," held at St. Andrew's in Rochester Nov. 20.

that often breeds terrorism "is an attitude radically opposed to belief in God" and offends human dignity by trying to force one's own vision of truth on others.

"Even when the truth has been reached — and this can happen only in a limited and imperfect way — it can never be imposed," he said. "Respect for a person's conscience, where the image of God himself is reflected, means that we can only propose the truth to others, who are then responsible for accepting it."

The pope said no religious leader could condone terrorism, much less preach it. He said he intended a Jan. 24 summit of world religious leaders in Assisi, Italy, to be a sign of hope to the world and a joint commitment for peace and forgiveness.

"We will show that genuine religious belief is an inexhaustible wellspring of mu-

tual respect and harmony among peoples; indeed, it is the chief antidote to violence and conflict," he said.

The pope acknowledged that forgiveness, which he defined as "a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil," was often difficult to understand and accept.

"Forgiveness, in fact, always involves an apparent short-term loss for a real long-term gain. Violence is the exact opposite; opting as it does for an apparent short-term gain, it involves a real and permanent loss," he said.

The pope closed his message with prayers not only for peace and for victims of terrorism, but also for the terrorists.

The full version of the pope's World Day of Peace message may be found on the Web at www.vatican.va/latest_en.htm.

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