

WORLD & NATION

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Reuters/CNS

Colombian presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe views the coffin of Archbishop Isaias Duarte Cancino at a wake in Cali, Colombia, March 17. The archbishop, shot by unidentified gunmen who sped away after the shooting, had gained a reputation for his negotiations with the National Liberation Army guerrillas.

Pope says slain archbishop paid with life for his efforts

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II condemned the slaying of a Colombian archbishop, saying the prelate had paid with his life for his pastoral and peace-making efforts.

The pope joined millions of Colombians who mourned the death of Archbishop Isaias Duarte Cancino of Cali, who was gunned down March 16 after celebrating a wedding ceremony for 52 couples in a poor neighborhood of the city.

Speaking at a noon blessing at the Vatican March 17, the pope said the archbishop had been "barbarously murdered" and expressed his closeness to all Colombians in their loss.

"A pastor who was generous and brave in announcing the good news, he paid the highest price for his energetic defense of human life, his firm opposition to every type of violence and his dedication to the social promotion," the pope said.

The pope urged Colombians to "proceed along the way of dialogue, rejecting every type of violence, blackmail and kidnapping."

Archbishop Duarte, 63, recently had spoken out against unnamed politicians he said were financing the March 10 congressional elections with drug money. Although he did not name any candidates, he went public after several priests showed him evidence that drug cartels were buying votes in their neighborhoods.

Church officials and government investigators said drug traffickers were the leading suspects in the archbishop's murder. Colombian President Andres Pastrana offered the equivalent of a \$434,000 reward for information leading to the capture of the murderers.

Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Wenski of Miami was to represent the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at Archbishop Duarte's March 19 funeral at St. Peter Cathedral in Cali. By noon March 18, more than a million people had walked past the archbishop's coffin in the cathedral.

Colombian Catholics hailed Archbishop Duarte as a defender of the poor who was not afraid to speak bluntly to all factions in the country's civil strife.

In 1999 he excommunicated members of the National Liberation Army after they kidnapped parishioners leaving a Sunday Mass in Cali.

"You do not fight for justice committing injustices. Nor do you attack innocent people to achieve peace," he had said.

In December, Archbishop Duarte sent letters to the country's president and leaders of the largest guerrilla organizations proposing a five-year truce to negotiate a "real and thorough peace agreement."

In his letter, the archbishop suggested the five years of peace so that "Colombians can concentrate on rebuilding the country, healing wounds and letting Colombians fearlessly decide what is best for the nation."

Archbishop Duarte gained the reputation of a highly skilled negotiator with the guerrillas when he was bishop in the volatile region of Apartado. In the late 1980s, he held a meeting with local government officials, businessmen, labor leaders, guerrillas and paramilitary leaders and told them to work for peace and progress, leaving no dead people, widows or orphans in their wake.

Father Bernardo Cervellera, director of the Vatican missionary news agency, Fides, described Archbishop Duarte as a friendly and dynamic pastor.

"The Colombian people perhaps have never found a more intense defender than this bishop, a man capable of thundering against Marxist guerrillas or paramilitary troops or politicians," Father Cervellera said in a commentary.

Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, who heads the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy, said Archbishop Duarte was a "great friend" and an important voice in the Colombian church.

"He was a man who, without any fear and with great generosity, worked for the cause of peace," the cardinal said.

Francis McDonagh, Colombia program officer for the British bishops' Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, told Catholic News Service March 18, "Whoever turns out to have been responsible for this crime, the lesson is the same: No human life is sacrosanct in Colombia's bitter civil conflict."

"The best tribute to the memory of Archbishop Duarte would be a return to peace negotiations. He left a message to the Colombian people in the words he spoke, minutes before his murder, to the couples he had just married: 'Love each other. Respect each other,'" McDonagh said.

In Baltimore, Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' international relief and development agency, condemned the murder. It said the "archbishop's death, one of 40,000 in the past decade, highlights the ongoing tragedy in Colombia, but also the courage and dedication of church and civil society leaders to create a path to peace and justice.

Editorial says church must answer questions

BOSTON (CNS) — The scandal of priests having committed sexual abuse of minors has raised in the minds of many Catholics questions about the priesthood, including priestly celibacy, that "will not disappear," the Boston archdiocesan newspaper, *The Pilot*, observed in a March 15 editorial.

The editorial made headlines nationwide, and some news reports interpreted it as a challenge to church teachings and practices by an official Catholic newspaper.

Yet in a statement released March 15, *The Pilot's* publisher, Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston, said, "*The Pilot* does not question the discipline of clerical celibacy. The full context of the editorial in question makes that abundantly clear. It is one thing to report the questions of others, it is quite another thing to make those questions one's own."

The unsigned editorial said questions about the rule of celibacy, church teaching excluding women from priestly ordination, and the number of homosexually oriented priests "have taken on a deeper intensity in more Catholic minds than prior to these sexual scandals."

The editorial appeared in a special issue of *The Pilot* the week after Convocation 2002, an archdiocese-wide meeting of nearly 3,000 parish representatives and ministry leaders. The topic of the convocation had been the sex-abuse scandal and its implications for the future of the church in Boston. *The Pilot's* March 15 edition had a 28-page wraparound supplement devoted to coverage of the convocation and various aspects of the scandal, which has rocked the archdiocese for more than two months.

The Pilot published 100,000 copies of the edition, four times its regular circulation, in order to distribute extra copies in parishes throughout the archdiocese.

Cardinal Law said that the editorial "unfortunately created confusion" but added that "there is a great deal of misunderstanding both within, and even more, outside the church" on the issues the editorial addressed.

"While it is accurate to report that questions concerning the discipline of clerical celibacy were raised at the convocation, it is not the editorial position of *The Pilot* that clerical celibacy should be reviewed by the church with the purpose of a change in discipline. ... *The Pilot*, as it has stated, will at-

tempt to assist in conveying a better understanding of the church's faith and discipline in subsequent issues," he said.

The editorial warned Catholics not to feel relieved too soon just because convicted child molester and ex-priest John J. Geoghan is in jail and most of the lawsuits against the archdiocese by his victims have been settled.

"We must realize two things: There are outstanding allegations against six other archdiocesan priests, and these scandals have raised serious questions in the minds of the laity that simply will not disappear," the editorial said.

It cited four questions in particular: "Should celibacy continue to be a normative condition for the diocesan priesthood in the Western (Latin) Church?"

"If celibacy were optional, would there be fewer scandals of this nature in the priesthood?"

"Does priesthood, in fact, attract a disproportionate number of men with a homosexual orientation?"

"Lastly, why are a substantial number of Catholics not convinced that an all-male priesthood was intended by Christ and is unchangeable?"

The editorial noted that those questions have been asked many times before — "more so in the United States than elsewhere" — and have been answered before. But the scandals have given them greater urgency and intensity.

The editorial did not attempt to answer the questions but urged more careful study of them.

"Before intelligent answers can be given," it said, "we must realize that there is no panacea, that a married clergy presents its own distinctive problems and liabilities and that more studies with concrete data will be necessary before an intelligent response can be made."

It provided some background on the linkage of celibacy with priesthood and suggested that in studying the issue it also would be helpful to learn from the experiences of the Orthodox and Protestant churches, which have married clergy.

On homosexual orientation, it raised several questions about whether or how it should be evaluated and noted that a person's sexual orientation itself "is neither morally good nor evil."

The editorialist left discussion of the women's ordination question hanging, promising to address it the following week.

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