

John Paul II in Colombia: drugs worse than slavery

by Valerie Rush

During his July 1-7 visit to Colombia, Pope John Paul II issued a call to the leadership circles of Ibero-America to join forces against the modern forms of enslavement: drugs and usury. His intervention was timely, as international banking elites are racing to prop up their disintegrating financial institutions with the profits of Ibero-American drug traffickers, before the "debt bomb" explodes in their faces.

From the first to the last day of his trip, the Pontiff's speeches were appeals for the resurgence of universal standards of morality in society and, most pointedly, in the economic and political life of nations. In his first speech to 700 political, business, and government leaders in the presidential palace of Bogota on July 1, the Pope reminded his audience of Paul VI's warning during his 1968 visit to Colombia that courageous intervention and sacrifice at moments of crisis in history could have averted "explosive revolutions of desperation." John Paul II identified the problem of the continent's foreign debt as precisely such a moment of crisis:

"The poor people cannot pay intolerable social costs by sacrificing the right of development, a right which grows increasingly illusory while other countries enjoy opulence. Dialogue among populations is indispensable if equitable agreements are to be reached in which not everything is subject to harshly tributary economic laws, lacking in soul and moral criteria. Here one encounters the urgency of international solidarity, especially in regard to the problem of the foreign debt, which exhausts Latin American and other countries of the world. . . . An order of priorities *can* be established which takes into account that man is the subject, and

not the object, of economics and of politics."

Speaking on July 7 in the coastal resort city of Cartagena, which was once the port where black slaves were brought into Colombia, John Paul II extended his theme on the immorality of the "free market" ideology:

"Slavery has been abolished throughout the world. But . . . new and more subtle forms of slavery have emerged. . . . Today, as in the 17th century . . . the lust for money has seized the hearts of many persons, turning them through the drug trade into traffickers in the freedom of their brothers and enslaving them with an enslavement more fearsome, at times, than that of black slavery. The slave dealers denied their victims the exercise of freedom. The drug traffickers lead their victims to the very destruction of their personalities.

"As free men whom Christ has called to live in freedom, we must fight decisively against this new form of slavery which subjugates so many in so many parts of the world, but especially the youth, and which it is necessary to halt at all cost. . . ."

Uplifting national morale

The Pope's intervention in Colombia, according to eyewitnesses, dramatically uplifted the morale of the Colombians at a crucial moment in the country's political life. Millions of Colombian Catholics were moved to tears as John Paul II urged each of them to take Jesus Christ "as the prototype of our own dignity. . . . Each time that you cross paths with a poor or needy fellow citizen, if you truly see with the eyes of faith, you will see in him the image of God, you will

see Christ, you will see a temple of the Holy Spirit, and you will realize that how you have treated him is how you have treated Christ himself."

The trip was timed with a government change from the strongly anti-drug Belisario Betancur to a Liberal Party presidency under Virgilio Barco. John Paul II's focus on the issues of drugs and corruption, and his repeated appeals to the national leadership to assume responsibility for the future of the citizens, were clearly a challenge to Barco to rid himself of a coterie of advisers who are notorious for pushing the drug economy.

There is little doubt that the Pope's crusade for morality in government hit its mark. During his above-cited address to the nation's leadership July 1, the only invited cabinet member who did not dare show his face, nor even send an excuse, was Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez. Jiménez's sympathies for the drug mafia have been so scandalously overt during his four years in office that his official decisions favoring the drug trade have been listed in the newspaper columns of several outraged journalists.

As many Colombians were heard to observe, "The Pope is the only one who can say the truth without being shut up!" That truth, however, made more than a few unhappy. The magazine *Hoy por Hoy*, owned by former president Turbay Ayala (1982-86), lamented that John Paul II "made more political pronouncements than clerical ones" during his seven-day stay in Colombia. Such a comment is not accidentally similar to the repeated insistence of Turbay's predecessor, ex-President Alfonso López Michelsen, that morality and politics do not mix. Both López and Turbay oversaw during their executive terms in office the surrender of the Colombian nation to the drug mafia and its political and financial protectors.

Answering the outrage of these "purists" at the Pope's politicking was Peruvian President Alan García, who declared July 10 at the inauguration of a new airport in the Peruvian jungle, "There cannot be politics without religion. . . . If one does not believe in God, politics is only materialism, venality, and egoism. Only when one believes in the transcendence of the spirit and in another life can one give oneself without fear. . . . Only when one believes in God can one truly make politics."

John Paul II's denunciation of immorality in politics and in economics has apparently prompted the Ibero-American Church to take one step closer to the drive of Alan García for Ibero-American unity on the debt. On July 9, the secretary general of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), Colombian Bishop Dario Castrillón, told the press, "For us, the debt is no longer debt but has become misery, something central to our concerns." The bishop declared that the Pope's call for developing-sector solidarity in solving the debt crisis "forces us to insist on one point: the debt cannot be paid with the desperation of our peoples. We cannot establish the security of capital on the insecurity of man."

Perhaps the unhappiest of all over John Paul II's visit are the narco-terrorists, who were the targets of the Pope's most vehement condemnation. "There is no lack of those who proclaim as the ultimate desperate solution, the armed violence of the guerrilla, to whom have fallen a number of your companions, sometimes against their will, others disoriented by ideologies which are inspired by the principle of violence as the only remedy for society's ills.

reached the absurd point of brother fighting brother, youth against youth, swept away by blind violence which respects neither the law of God nor the elementary principle of human co-existence."

Overwhelmed by the outpouring of support for the Pope, the leading narco-terrorist force in Colombia, the M-19, was reduced to childish tantrums such as interrupting the Pontiff's radio broadcasts. In El Salvador, however, the M-19's sympathizers used illegal airwaves to broadcast a vicious attack on the Pope and his trip as "a great leap into the past." The rebels declared, "Once more the message of the current head of the Catholic Church is characterized by a cynical, counter-revolutionary anti-communism. In a country like Colombia, with its dramatic conditions of misery and poverty, anyone who calls on the youth to desert the guerrilla and forget the class struggle is taking a clear and public ideological posture in favor of the ruling classes."

The protests of the narco-terrorists and their political backers are one important reflection of the success of the papal visit to Colombia. President Betancur, summing up that success, declared in his July 7 farewell address to the Pope:

ism, and the drug trade have even less reason to exist. What remains clear . . . is the urgency of Latin American solidarity to mutually contribute to our development and to change unjust relations with the affluent countries, such as the external debt, which has become the eternal debt. . . ."

Populorum Progressio

John Paul II particularly invoked in his journey the encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, issued in 1967, and Paul VI's trip to Colombia the following year, 1968. In that document, Paul VI had stated that "development is the new name for peace." John Paul has already designated next year, 1987, as the year of *Populorum Progressio*, and on July 1 he told 700 national leaders of Colombia to "be the authors of a more just society."

He specified, "We are speaking of a society in which hard work, honesty, the spirit of participation at all levels, the performance of justice and charity are a reality. This society could be called the civilization of love."

He concluded that speech, "May you all be pioneers in that integral respect for the rights of man in the image of God."

EIR will publish extensive quotes from the Pope's interventions in Colombia in the next issue.