

## A Defense of Church's Role

# USCC Testimony on Central America

*A shift in U.S. policy in the Central American region and particularly El Salvador was urged by Archbishop James Hickey of Washington, D.C., in congressional testimony he gave March 7 on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Conference. "We come before the Congress to recommend a course of action: promote dialogue, insist on a cease-fire and support a negotiated end to the conflict," he said. Hickey said that in opposing U.S. military aid to El Salvador the bishops are not proposing that the United States forsake the present government. However, he said, "we are convinced that other choices exist...than the ones being promoted by the administration." He noted that even a true diplomatic effort may require some military component. "We acknowledge this with regret, but we do not deny it," he said, recommending that any military aid be linked to dialogue efforts and a cease-fire. He called for a comprehensive Central American policy, including improved relations with Nicaragua. Hickey also defended the church's role in Central America, rejecting innuendo that it serves Marxist interests. "We have something to say and we do not believe it has been sufficiently heeded...We are not confused by Marxist ideology or strategy," he said.*

I appreciate the opportunity to come before these two subcommittees on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Conference. The USCC is the public-policy agency of the Catholic bishops of the

United States. I appeared before the subcommittee on inter-American affairs March 5, 1981, regarding the topic we discuss today: U.S. policy toward El Salvador.

In November 1981 the USCC adopted at its general meeting a policy statement on Central America which has served us well in the last two years. Much has happened in Central America since 1981. In order to review the situation and assess the USCC position, Archbishop John R. Roach, president of our episcopal conference, asked me to head a delegation of three bishops on an eight-day trip to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. The other two bishops were Archbishop Peter L. Gerety of Newark, N.J., and Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio, Texas. We were in Central America from Feb. 1-9. Archbishop Roach asked me to present the USCC's position in these hearings as a continuation of our participation in the public debate on El Salvador.

### I. General Observations

Before addressing specific questions, I will make some general comments based on our brief but in-

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tensive visit. The dual purpose of the trip was to express solidarity with our brother bishops in each of the countries we visited and to consult with them and with other people, both in the church and the wider society. We arranged 10 hours of meetings per day, including courtesy calls on the government of each country, appointments at the U.S. embassy in each country and meetings with the papal nuncios for the three countries. We had conversations with priests, religious and laity in each country and we particularly tried to meet U.S. Catholic missionaries serving in each country. I should note that we made efforts when planning the trip to include a visit to Guatemala. It was not possible to work out the logistics. I will make four general observations about the three countries we visited.

First, in every country visited we found the Catholic Church fulfilling its pastoral ministry in a profoundly impressive manner. This ministry is exercised in the midst of the most trying circumstances of violence, poverty and great human suffering. It is a ministry carried on with very sparse resources, yet there is an inspiring, indeed heroic, spirit of hope and faith at all levels of the church.

The church's exercise of a prophetic social ministry, guided by the Puebla conference's theme of a preferential option for the poor and by a commitment to defend human rights, is the basic reason for tension between the church and governments in Central America. Precisely because of its defense of human dignity and human rights the church is described by many in Central America as a "subversive force."

A most recent and very disturbing development in this process is the emergence of sectarian churches called Protestant, but decidedly not representing the mainline Protestant churches. These sects are militantly anti-Catholic, very conservative politically and are welcomed and cultivated by right-wing elements — in and out of government — in El Salvador and Honduras as a counterweight to the Catholic Church's social witness. As Catholic bishops we were particularly concerned about the fact that much of the funding for these groups comes from the United States.

A second pervasive theme of our visit was the evidence we found of human rights violations in all three countries. The situation varies in each country, but significant restrictions on human rights or direct assaults on the dignity of the person were in evidence in each country visited. The killing of thousands of innocent civilians in El Salvador, the pervasive economic injustice in the region, censorship and mistreatment of Miskito Indians in Nicaragua are just examples of the human rights problems. Human rights issues are a concern of the church in each of the three countries; they will continue to be a high priority for the USCC as we examine U.S. policy toward Central America.

A third reality which is vividly evident in all three countries is the effects of war. In El Salvador the daily devastation is manifested in

large numbers of displaced persons. Since they are within their own country, they are not entitled to refugee status and aid, yet they are victims of a struggle which grinds on relentlessly. In Honduras one sees the results of war in the neighboring countries; there are thousands of refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. The threat of war is evident in the military buildup along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. The military exercises sponsored by the United States occurred while we were in Central America. In Nicaragua, the belief — almost tangible because it is so strongly held — that the United States is on a course of destabilization has partially contributed to the creation of a garrison-state mentality and atmosphere in a country which desperately needs to use scarce resources in other ways.

Fourth, the influence of U.S. policy on each of the countries we visited and on the region as a whole is profound and pervasive. We affect each country differently, but we are part of the fabric of daily life in all of Central America. It was evident to the three of us in the delegation that a distinct shift in U.S. policy toward the region is needed. While I will discuss some specific aspects of this below, here I will only say that we need to be more convincing in our willingness to support and foster political democracy, social and economic justice and human rights in Central America.

In light of these general characteristics, I now wish to comment on U.S. policy toward El Salvador and how that must be correlated with U.S. policy toward the Central American region. Briefly, a more effective Salvador policy will require a more perceptive regional policy.

## II. U.S. Policy on El Salvador

When I appeared before the subcommittee on inter-American affairs in 1981, I began my analysis of the situation in El Salvador by emphasizing the value of a historical perspective on the conflict. Since I believe this today just as strongly as I did then, and since I think the point I tried to make still is not sufficiently evident in U.S. policy toward El Salvador, I repeat it again:

"My point is that long before there were charges of outside intervention there was a struggle on behalf of large numbers in El Salvador for social, political and economic change. The conflict has been over land, wages, the right to organize and the issue of political participation. To ignore this long struggle of a people for justice, dignity and freedom is to misunderstand the nature of the conflict today in El Salvador."

I repeat this point not only for continuity and emphasis, but because it is the basic message the church has to carry into the public discussion on El Salvador. The message is to highlight the need for greater social justice and equity in the internal life of the country. This requires change that is directed to justice, to participation by the people in the life of their nation and to protection of fundamental freedoms. These elements are a moral requirement and a precondition for stable peace in El Salvador. This

*Two officials of the Reagan administration, in remarks widely reported in the press, commented in the days before Pope John Paul's visit to Central America about the role of the church in Central America.*

*During a Senate hearing, Secretary of State George Shultz criticized "churchmen who want to see Soviet influence in El Salvador improved." Vice President George Bush said in a private White House meeting that he did not understand how priests could cooperate with Marxists.*

*Those remarks by administration officials drew a response from two U.S. church leaders, including Archbishop James Hickey of Washington, D.C., whose text appears here, and Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, who wrote a letter to President Reagan about the matter. (See the following note.)*

**QUOTE FROM A PAST  
TEXT OF CURRENT  
INTEREST:**

*"I am writing as president of the U.S. Catholic Conference to express concern at recent statements by two of the highest officials of your administration about the role of the Catholic Church in Central America, and to request further dialogue regarding these complex and delicate matters.*

*"Coming as they did just prior to the papal visit of Pope John Paul II to Central America, the remarks of the administration officials were at least poorly timed. Certainly for the Holy Father, as for the bishops of Central America and the bishops of the United States, the rationale for the church's interest and activity in the moral and religious dimensions of the issues is at stake. These issues are not purely political, much less military; essentially they are human, moral issues concerning human dignity, social justice, freedom and the protection of the fundamental rights of the people of Central America. In a special way the church's involvement reflects its conscious 'option for the poor.'*

*"Any hint that the fundamental pastoral vision and ministry of the Catholic Church are based on an alien ideology or seek to serve its purposes must be rejected. I must insist on this point, even though I recognize that in individual cases members of the church may depart from and distort the authentic vision of the church's ministry."*

was the message of John Paul II in his letter to the Salvadoran bishops in August of last year: "I am perfectly aware that the discords and divisions that still disturb your country and cause new conflicts and violence have their true and deep root in situations of social injustice: a problem that has erupted with force at the political level, but is above all ethical in nature."

Because we have been convinced that the war in El Salvador is fundamentally rooted in questions of social injustice and the persistent denial of fundamental human rights for large sectors of the population, the USCC has always opposed interpretations of the Salvadoran and Central American conflict which place primary emphasis on the superpower or East-West rivalry. Unfortunately this geopolitical conception of the conflict has reappeared with new emphasis in recent days. We believed such an interpretation was mistaken two years ago and we believe it is mistaken today. We do not deny the existence of an international dimension to the conflict, but we do reject the idea that it is the fundamental issue at stake.

In the two years since I testified there have been many changes in El Salvador politically, economically, even legally. One purpose of our recent visit there was to speak with a broad spectrum of people, inside the church and in the society as a whole, to assess the present situation. The dominant note of the country is the desire of the great majority of the people for peace; one way of understanding the truly significant outpouring of people voting in the election last spring is to see it as a cry for peace and a vote for an end to the war. Yet the war continues: It even has increased in intensity in certain regions. The human rights of the population, especially the poor who are caught and cannot move, are still brutally violated by security forces not under secure governmental control. In addition, the extreme left continues its campaign to damage fundamental services in the country with enormous cost. Long before any outside intervention made the situation worse, the vast majority of Salvadorans found their human dignity, human rights and life itself assaulted by an unjust system of exploitation and deliberate violence. This tragic failure to control human rights abuses continues. On our trip we heard repeatedly from church leaders of more killings, disappearances and other brutal violations of human rights.

Every human rights violation of right or left is significant because every person has unique dignity and worth. But the never-ending argument and public debate in the United States about comparisons of human rights abuses seems an insufficient response in light of the brutal and tragic violence which still pervades El Salvador. The principal need of the moment is for fundamental moves in the political order to stop the war and secure social justice.

The three archbishops in our delegation returned from El Salvador convinced that the dominant message we heard can be summarized in three words: dialogue, cease-fire and negotia-

tions to end the war. Each step is necessary to reverse the pattern of violence in El Salvador. The need for dialogue and reconciliation has been the principal call of the church in El Salvador. On July 15, 1982, all the bishops of El Salvador directed a pastoral message to the country in which they said:

"For this very reason we exhort all the parties involved in the conflict to abandon every obstinate attitude and be open to a dialogue that is sincere, open and true, animated by good will and a spirit of authentic patriotism, placing the unity of the Salvadoran family above individual or group interests. For its part, the church maintains its readiness to work tirelessly within its own proper sphere for peace and for reconciliation among Salvadorans who have been constrained to become enemies to one another."

"The danger of the moment is that the full-scale war in El Salvador will coalesce with the threat of war on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border and the explosive internal situation in Guatemala to create a regional war. Because the danger is regional in scope, U.S. diplomacy must be regional in substance."

Only a month later Pope John Paul II's letter to the Salvadoran bishops reiterated the same theme of reconciliation and the cessation of violence: "Such reconciliation must therefore be able to be realized at all levels, above all among brothers bearing arms, motivated by contrary interests and guided by ideologies that sacrifice the fundamental aspirations of the human person. For the one and for the other, an indispensable condition for reconciliation is the cessation of all hostilities and the renunciation of the use of arms, with the sure guarantee that no one will be the object of reprisals or vengeance after having given his or her own adherence to the noble aim of joining efforts and initiatives that may assure the nation renewed vitality and an ordered progress."

Both political dialogue and cease-fire are indispensable steps to the third requirement: serious negotiations among the parties to the conflict, building on the elections of last year, but going beyond them to ending the state of war and beginning the political and economic reconstruction of the country.

None of these three objectives will be easily achieved. All of them depend primarily on the willingness of Salvadorans to "place the unity of the Salvadoran family above individual or group interest" (Salvadoran Bishops Conference, July 15, 1982). After acknowledging both of these points it is still crucial to recognize that movement toward any of these goals will require commitment to them on behalf of U.S. policy. Both the Salvadoran government and the opposition forces recognize the significance of

U.S. policy. Without encouragement from the United States, no dialogue or lasting cease-fire will occur.

Precisely because the influence of U.S. policy is so important, I am profoundly disappointed in the direction I see us taking. Just as the Holy Father was about to embark on a pilgrimage of peace to Central America, raising hopes that he could initiate a break in the cycle of violence, the U.S. call was for an increase in military means and perhaps deeper direct involvement by us in the conflict.

Our delegation returned from El Salvador convinced of the need for a new, substantial and vigorous commitment by the United States to begin the process of political dialogue rather than rely on the relentless military struggle which consumes thousands of Salvadoran lives each year with no end in sight.

The American bishops have consistently called for a non-military approach to the conflict. For two years we have opposed all military assistance from all sources to any party in El Salvador. We have not been successful: The aid continues from the United States to the Salvadoran government and from other sources to the opposition forces. We believe that U.S. policy faces a crucial choice in El Salvador over the next few weeks, a choice which the Congress can and should influence. On the basis of both previous USCC policy and our recent visit, I submit that the primary imperative of the moment is to stress the political course in El Salvador, not the military option. The United States should exercise the considerable diplomatic influence it has to help terminate the war. The American bishops have entered the public debate on El Salvador numerous times to stress what the U.S. should not do — send military aid. Today we come before the Congress to recommend a course of action: promote dialogue, insist on a cease-fire and support a negotiated end to the conflict.

We have never believed that a military solution in El Salvador — victory by either side, which could only mean abject surrender and bitter defeat for a large number of Salvadorans on one side or the other — was in the interest of either El Salvador or the United States. A society divided into victors and vanquished is unlikely to result in either stable peace or justice. We have from the very beginning of the policy debate argued for a creative diplomatic role for the United States. The present direction of our policy, however, is neither creative nor diplomatic.

The United States has two years of extensive investment in a policy of military support for the government of El Salvador; it is not our position that the United States forsake that government. However, we are convinced that other choices exist for the United States than the ones being promoted by the administration at present. These other choices mean that the United States should talk more about ending the violence and less about prosecuting the war with large increases in military assistance and more

American advisers.

These other choices are in the political order; they are based on the conviction that the primary issue in El Salvador is the domestic political and economic structure of the country, not the role of the Soviet Union or Cuba in Central America. The other choices must be understood and implemented in concert with key nations like Venezuela, Mexico or our European allies. The diplomatic option means that the United States should not go it alone in Central America. If the diplomatic option were truly pursued, we recognize some military component may be required. We acknowledge this with regret, but we do not deny it. However, we strongly recommend that any military assistance provided be conditioned on stringent requirements linking it to a pursuit of dialogue and cease-fire.

We hope the Congress will very carefully examine the purposes and evidence supporting any proposal to increase arms to El Salvador. We are deeply concerned that recent U.S. proposals to escalate American military involvement by major increases in military aid and additional advisers will lead us further in the direction of a military rather than diplomatic solution. In fact, such proposals may block creative diplomatic and political measures. Talk of impending "crisis" should not push the Congress into ignoring the longer-term consequences of increased reliance on military rather than diplomatic options. We believe any proposal should be measured by whether it moves the parties toward cease-fire and responsible dialogue called for by the Salvadoran bishops or whether it strengthens the extremists on both the right and left who wish to continue the conflict on the battlefield with enormous human and economic costs. U.S. policy ought to support the forces of moderation in El Salvador in their search for justice, reconciliation and peace. The United States must use its leadership to enhance the prospects for dialogue, rather than adding more and more weapons to the spiral of violence.

In summary, the USCC believes a major policy review and a significant policy shift is called for on the part of the United States. We should more clearly see the problem in political, not military terms. We should use our acknowledged influence with the Salvadoran government to define their efforts in primarily political terms. We should signal friendly allies with access to the opposition forces in El Salvador to exert the leverage necessary to bring about a cease-fire and the opening of political dialogue. We should stop the fantasy of believing that one more year of military struggle in an already devastated nation will be in our interest or that of the Salvadorans.

I must speak also of the unique needs of the displaced persons in El Salvador. In many cases their villages have been burned or rendered unsafe by the war. They are not refugees in the technical sense of the U.N. definition and therefore cannot benefit from refugee programs. We urge, however, that the Congress consider

◀ (From "The Church's Role in Central America," a March 7 letter to President Reagan from Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; in *Origins*, the current volume, p. 648.)

Three U.S. church leaders made a nine-day fact-finding visit to Central America at the beginning of February. They were Archbishop James Hickey of Washington, D.C.; Archbishop Peter Gerety of Newark, N.J.; and Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio.

After their visit, the three churchmen issued a brief statement about their findings. It appeared in the current volume of *Origins*, pp. 609f.

They said they found the church in the region to be "alive, vibrant and full of hope." In El Salvador, they said they found "a deep longing for peace and heard time and again expressions of appreciation and support for the Salvadoran bishops' letter and the pope's plea for dialogue and reconciliation." ▶

Part of the statement by the three archbishops concerned Nicaragua. "We want to stress our conviction that the cause of peace would not be best served by isolating Nicaragua from access to critically needed resources. We intend to urge our own government to avoid actions or statements that would tend to further such isolation. We recognize also the need to support the church in Nicaragua in its efforts to maintain those basic human freedoms essential to its Christian heritage."

The three archbishops also called attention to the large numbers of refugees and homeless persons in Central America today.

For a past text of current interest, see "Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy," testimony by Father J. Bryan Hehir, U.S. Catholic Conference associate secretary for international justice and peace, in the current volume of *Origins*, pp. 433ff.

Hehir said at one point in that testimony before a House subcommittee:

"It has become a partisan cliché that U.S. efforts to promote respect for human rights, seemingly identified with the Carter administration, resulted in the accession to power of Moslem fundamentalists in Iran and Marxists in Nicaragua, that

favorably their needs and entertain concrete proposals for their relief. This humanitarian activity can surely help us clarify our traditional American concern for the suffering and oppressed.

We continue to be seriously concerned regarding the status of Salvadoran refugees in the United States. One can argue whether some are economic rather than political refugees, but the effect on the human rights of those repatriated to El Salvador is severe. It is our understanding that deportees on arrival in El Salvador are closely questioned by the security forces; their names are checked with lists of actual or alleged security risks. It is our understanding that those whose names appear on such lists, whether rightly or by vindictive denunciation, are in a position of great personal danger. For that reason we continue to urge the Congress of the United States that, if necessary, special legislation be introduced to grant a stay of deportation for such persons until peace is achieved in El Salvador. These refugees come to America, as did our own ancestors, to seek freedom from political fear and from the dehumanizing poverty of a country prostrated by war.

We continue also to press for justice in the case of the murdered American churchwomen, labor advisers and of Archbishop Romero. We believe that strong representations must continue to be made by our government and that, where needed, authorization for continued technical assistance in discovering the guilty be provided by our government.

### III. U.S. Policy and Central America

A political approach in El Salvador must be part of a diplomatic strategy for the region of Central America. The danger of the moment is that the full-scale war in El Salvador will coalesce with the threat of war on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border and the explosive internal situation in Guatemala to create a regional war. Because the danger is regional in scope, U.S. diplomacy must be regional in substance. The United States has long treated Central America as a region in its strategic military planning; today it must have a comprehensive diplomatic conception of the region, treating each nation distinctly but treating all nations as systematically related. Two regional problems influence U.S. policy in El Salvador: 1) United States-Nicaragua relations and 2) the situation on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.

*A. United States-Nicaragua:* The defeat of the brutal and repressive Somoza regime by the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979 acted as a catalyst throughout Central America; since then political opposition increased within El Salvador and Guatemala. Many observers have noted the impact of the Nicaraguan case on U.S. policy toward El Salvador; our posture seems to be directed not so much to the specifics of El Salvador as dominated by the rule "no more Nicaraguas." Relations between the United States and Nicaragua have deteriorated precisely in step with the rise of insurgency in El

Salvador.

Nicaragua's importance politically and ecclesiastically made it a central part of our trip. We returned from Nicaragua concerned about some developments within the country. We met not only with people from the church but with labor leaders, journalists, businessmen and leaders of the revolution. We gained a perception that the Nicaraguan government under the direction of the Sandinistas is steadily expanding its influence and control of crucial areas of societal life.

This development, a concern in itself, is combined with evidence of human rights violations where the state is either responsible or bears responsibility for not restraining others. We cannot agree, for example, with the minister of the interior, who stated to the press shortly before our visit, "Education belongs exclusively to the state." We cannot overlook serious indications of the maltreatment of prisoners and persons suspected of actions hostile to the new regime. Nor can we condone the harsh response of the Nicaraguan government to the efforts and statements of the bishops in behalf of the Miskito Indians. Neither can we understand the extensive censorship restrictions on the press.

Obviously the situation is complex and capable of moving in a positive or negative direction. We cite our experience and identify our concerns publicly because we fervently hope that the drift away from the stated goals of the revolution — social justice, political pluralism and a mixed economy — can be reversed.

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"Just as the Holy Father was about to embark on a pilgrimage of peace to Central America, raising hopes that he could initiate a break in the cycle of violence, the U.S. call was for an increase in military means and perhaps deeper direct involvement by us in the conflict."

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The future direction of the revolution should be decided by Nicaraguans, but the United States remains a significant external force. Our delegation was repeatedly told of how pervasive U.S. influence is and we were also told — by many who shared our concerns about the internal direction of the revolution — that present U.S. policy is misdirected and counterproductive. U.S. policy over the past two years has not been helpful to the moderate elements in Nicaraguan life. Rather it has served as a continuous provocation which has given a pretext for ever-increasing governmental attempts to control important elements of Nicaraguan life. The bishops of the United States called in November 1981 for a U.S. policy that would engage Nicaragua diplomatically, not isolate it. My recent experience in Nicaragua has convinced me that what we said in 1981 is ever more applicable today.

The consistently hostile public rhetoric of our government toward Nicaragua, the cutoff of bilateral economic aid and the perception that the United States hinders Nicaraguan access to international sources of aid and credit, as well as U.S. support for a military buildup on the Honduran border and rumors of covert efforts to destabilize the government, all contribute to a state-of-siege mentality and policy in Nicaragua which reinforce misguided policies. U.S. actions do not determine internal Nicaraguan policy, but they exaggerate some of its most troubling aspects. The forces of political moderation in Nicaragua are being choked off and depicted as American ploys. The resolution of the El Salvador question is more difficult because the United States and Nicaragua act as if no common ground exists upon which we could shape a stable, moderate, regional system in Central America. My point is not that Nicaragua is without fault; it is that the United States reinforces Nicaraguan errors when our size, influence and diplomatic perspective should allow for a more creative policy.

As a beginning of such a policy, the USCC makes two recommendations. We see no useful purpose served by a continuation of the present direction of U.S. policy. First, we repeat our advice of 1981: Either through direct talks or through the good offices of Mexico, Venezuela or Panama, we urge diplomatic engagement with Nicaragua aimed at a regional political solution. Second, as a specific form of engagement, we urge the restoration of U.S. economic aid to Nicaragua. This aid should be given because the people of Nicaragua need it; and it should be given with a clear and appropriate monitoring of the human rights issues in Nicaragua.

*B. United States-Honduras:* At the very least the change in U.S. policy toward Nicaragua must include clear signs that we will not use exiles to overthrow the Nicaraguan government or to provoke a Nicaraguan-Honduran conflict. Let me state personally that as an American citizen and as a Catholic bishop I find any use of U.S. tax dollars for the purpose of covert destabilization of another government to be unwise, unjustified and destructive of the very values a democratic nation should support in the world.

While our delegation was convinced that there are specific U.S.-Honduran issues which the United States should address, namely economic assistance for refugees and economic aid for Honduras itself, the key immediate issue is the potential for war between Nicaragua and Honduras. Presently there is little evidence that the United States is playing a positive role to ensure peace in the region.

Our role in providing a major increase of military aid to Honduras, and our suspected role of funding covert activities on the Nicaraguan border are hardly helpful to the promotion of a climate of peace. Such activities are precisely opposed to the creative diplomacy this testimony calls for. To make our point again, the diplomatic option in El Salvador should be join-

ed to a new diplomatic initiative to reduce the danger of a Nicaraguan-Honduran war.

### Conclusion

I conclude these extended remarks, Mr. Chairman, with a comment on the rationale and motivation of the Catholic Church's continued involvement in the Central American issues. We always desire that our posture as a faith community be properly understood when we speak on public policy. Question has been raised in recent days by high officials of our government about the motivation, or at least the consequences, of the church's role in the events in Central America. We reject the innuendo suggesting that church policy in Central America serves Marxist interests. On the contrary, Catholic policy and pastoral activity are guided by a clear and consistent teaching based on the Gospels and committed to the defense of the human person.

Certainly the involvement of Pope John Paul II is so clear in its orientation and so beneficial in its impact that it is beyond the need for any defense. The outpouring of faith and human emotion which his visit to Central America this past week has produced is eloquent testimony to the meaning the church has for the people of the region.

We believe the pope's courageous pastoral presence and his consistent call for dialogue, peace and reconciliation, his strong defense of human rights, his eloquent appeals for social and economic justice have created a new moment in Central America. We need to hear his voice clearly. "My word is one of peace, concord and hope," he said as he arrived:

"An unleashed clamor has reverberated with an urgent ring in my spirit, a clamor that rises from these lands and that calls for peace, an end to war and violent deaths; that implores reconciliation, expelling divisions and hatred; that aspires to justice, long but so far fruitlessly awaited; that wants to be called to greater dignity without renouncing its Christian, religious essence.

"It is this sorrowful clamor that I would like to give voice to with my visit. The voice that is conjured up by the already well-known image of the tears of death of children, of the anguish of the elderly, of the mother who loses her children, of the long line of orphans, of those many thousands of refugees, exiles or displaced persons searching for a home, of the poor with neither home nor work.

"Change is possible if we accept the voice of Christ, which calls us to respect and love each man as our brother, if we know how to renounce practices of blind egoism, if we learn to have more solidarity, if we apply with rigor the norms of social justice which the church proclaims, if those responsible for the peoples open the door to an increasing sense of distributive justice in the burdens and duties of the various sectors of society and if each people can confront its problems in a climate of sincere dialogue, without foreign interference."

We are here today to urge that American

it alienated such powerful hemispheric allies as Argentina and Chile, and that it temporized sufficiently in El Salvador as to result in the present stalemate between government and insurgents.

"We would suggest, on the contrary:

1.) that U.S. policy on human rights was set by the Congress, not the executive, principally during the Nixon administrations; 2.) that it accurately reflects the sentiments of large sectors of the American people; 3) that the Latin American experience, significantly mediated by the churches of that region in fraternal solidarity with the American religious community, constituted the principal testing ground for such policy; and 4) that it has been, on balance, eminently successful."

*A statement on Central America was issued by the U.S. bishops in November 1981. It appeared in Origins, vol. 11, pp. 393ff.*

*In addition to a general discussion of Central America, the statement included sections on El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.*

*The bishops said that in Central America there is no question of the church being complacent about communism. But they stressed the need to understand the internal realities of the region's nations. "Any conception of the problems in Central America which is cast principally*

in terms of global security issues, military responses, arms transfers and preservation of a situation which fails to promote meaningful participation of the majority of the population in their societies is, in our view, profoundly mistaken."

The bishops' statement argued against a view in which U.S.-Soviet competition is conceived as the dominant reality in Central America that should concern the United States.

Seven Central American nations and the Caribbean nation of Haiti were visited by Pope John Paul II March 2-9. The Central American nations included Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras.

Seven texts from the visit appeared in last week's issue of *Origins*, dated March 17, 1983.

While the pope was in Haiti March 9, Jean-Claude Duvalier, the nation's president-for-life, announced that he would renounce his "concordial rights and privileges in order to permit the Vatican from now on to name archbishops and bishops." According to an 1860 concordat with the Vatican, the Haitian government could veto papal appointments of bishops for the country. Although little is known of the actual use of the veto power, relations of church and state in Haiti often have traveled a rocky road.

policy toward the region respond to this new opportunity with a policy more respectful of human rights, more concerned with issues of basic justice and more open to political rather than military responses to the crisis in El Salvador and in all of Central America.

As for the church in Central America, I have already described its pastoral witness as heroic. It is true that many complex and wrenching choices have to be made by bishops, priests and laity each day. But the animating force of those choices is clear — it is the preferential option for the poor, reaffirmed at the Puebla conference, which shapes the life and ministry of the church in Central America. Any hint that the Catholic Church is linked to alien ideologies in its guiding pastoral vision is to be rejected out of hand. Both the pope's visit and the daily witness of the church in Central America demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that the church has eminently more credibility in the lives of the people of the region than any government, including our own.

Finally, I speak for my brother bishops in the United States. We are aware how visible our position on Central America has been for two years now. We are confident we should be in the midst of the debate about U.S. policy; we have something to say and we do not believe it has been sufficiently heeded. We speak both as bishops of a church with significant human and

religious interests in Central America and indeed with personnel working there, and we speak as American citizens who want our image and impact in Central America to be understood in terms of compassion, justice, peace and freedom. We do not believe our present policy conveys this message. Far from being moved by alien ideologies or wishing to foster their influence, we are moved by the needs of the people of Central America and a desire to make the United States a beacon of hope for the dispossessed of the region.

We are not confused by Marxist ideology or strategy. The Catholic Church knows full well how human liberty and the basic freedoms are suppressed under Marxist regimes even as they are often suppressed by governments of the extreme right.

We are clear about our Christian and our American heritage. Both move us to say that we cannot solve basic human problems of deprivation, poverty and long-standing injustice with ideological slogans or with military measures. The voice of the church in the United States is a voice for moderation in Central America; we want stable, just, moderate governments. We believe they must be assisted by a sensible, balanced, moderate U.S. policy. We have spoken for such a policy; we will continue to do so. We are confident we act not only for the good of our church, but of our nation as well.

## The Pope in Haiti

# "Something Must Change Here"

"It really is necessary for things to change," Pope John Paul II said in a homily March 9 during a Mass closing the Eucharistic and Marian Congress of Haiti. It was the final day of the pope's March 2-9 visit to Central America and Haiti. In the eucharist, the pope stated, people should find the inspiration and strength to commit themselves to a process of change. "It is necessary for the 'poor' of all kinds to begin to hope again," the pope said. He asked that justice be promoted "without violence, without murders, without fratricidal struggles." In Haiti, the pope observed, "there is a rightful desire for free expression through the media and in politics," and there is "a need for more open and easier access to goods and services." He described conditions in which a great number of people live with fear; in which there is "injustice, excessive inequality, degradation of the quality of life, poverty and hunger." It is a question, he said, "of a level of living worthy of the human person" for all the people. This

is not impossible, he added. The homily was presented at the Duvalier Airport in Port-au-Prince. An NC News Service translation of the homily follows.

1. Here I am with you at Port-au-Prince in this land of Haiti that I have so much wished to visit. This grace has finally been granted to me and to you, for us to be able to praise the most holy Trinity together and adore it, to give worship to Jesus Christ, Son of God and son of Mary, in the mystery of his eucharist, and once more venerate his Blessed Mother and our mother, mother of the church, whom you invoke under the title of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

We are actually celebrating the closing of