

catholic trends

a Catholic News Service digest for the modern church

CNS NEWS NOTES

The International Executive Committee of Amnesty International has declared that a woman should have full, legal access to abortion in cases of rape or incest or if her life or health is at grave risk. The new policy calls for eliminating criminal penalties for anyone who provides an abortion or obtains one. Last fall, when Amnesty was considering such a policy, the head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops warned that the human rights advocacy group would risk its “well-deserved moral credibility” if it abandoned its neutral stance on abortion. In a background paper on its position, sent to Catholic News Service May 10 following a CNS request, Amnesty described its new policy of support for access to abortion in some circumstances as “part of its campaign to Stop Violence Against Women.” Although the policy expresses support for access to abortion only in cases of rape or incest or for grave risks to life or health, an internal Amnesty document obtained by CNS says Amnesty supports decriminalization in all cases because rape victims “face daunting and sometimes insurmountable challenges” if they must prove rape in order to obtain an abortion.

The pope has approved stricter guidelines for deciding which saints will be remembered with mandatory feast days in the Latin-rite calendar of the Catholic Church. The General Roman Calendar, the universal schedule of holy days and feast days, requires more selectivity, say new norms and a commentary published in mid-May. The pope chooses who is put on the universal calendar from the recommendations of the Vatican worship congrega-

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Pope Benedict XVI Makes First Visit to the Americas

During his May 9-13 trip to Brazil, Pope Benedict XVI stressed what seems to have become the central theme of his papacy. “Not a political ideology, not a social movement, not an economic system,” but “faith in the God who is love — who took flesh, died and rose in Jesus Christ — is the authentic basis for ... hope,” said the pope in a May 13 homily in front of the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady Aparecida in Aparecida.



L'Osservatore Romano

The pope is greeted by a dancer during a meeting with young people in Sao Paulo.

The trip included a meeting with the president of Brazil, a gathering with youth, the canonization of the first Brazilian-born saint, a speech to the bishops of Brazil, a visit to a church-run drug rehabilitation center and the inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The pope pointed out some of the social and religious challenges the church

faces in Latin America and stated that the church should respond by focusing more attention on the person of Jesus Christ. Among the challenges, Pope Benedict listed inroads by secularism, threats against the family and the institution of marriage, and an erosion of traditional Latin American values.

Brazil is the most populous Catholic country in the world, but the Vatican estimates that the number of Catholics there drops by 1 percent each year, with many converting to Protestantism. The Vatican estimates that 85 percent of the Brazilian population is Catholic, but experts who follow census figures say the real number may be closer to 70 percent.

The declining Catholic population is a trend in the region as a whole, and the pope told the bishops of Brazil on May 11 that this is so because many Catholics are “insufficiently evangelized. They are easily influenced because their faith is weak, confused, easily shaken and naive despite their innate religiosity.”

At the same time, he told the bishops of Brazil that they must practice solidarity with the poor, stating that the poor “need to feel that the church is close to them, providing for their most urgent needs, defending their rights and working together with them to build a society founded on justice and peace.”

In his speech to the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean on May 13,

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TAKE NOTE

Has the Catholic Church lost its missionary spirit? Although the church continues to grow, its growth rate lags behind the growth of world population, and in the U.S. the Catholic population would probably be shrinking if not for the number of immigrants coming from Catholic countries, observed Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ, recently.

Cardinal Dulles, the Lawrence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University in New York, addressed the Evangelical Catholic Institute 2007 in Madison, Wis., April 14. "We cannot simply wait for people to find their way into the church on their own initiative," he said. "Who except us, who are within the community of faith, can tell the world about Jesus Christ the redeemer?" he asked. The cardinal drew from Father Timothy E. Byrley's *The Great Commission*, soon to be published by Paulist Press, to offer six "models of evangelization."

The first model is personal witness, "the good example of a life totally dedicated to Christ," he said. While its pre-eminent form is martyrdom, "it more often takes place in less dramatic ways," he said.

The second model "consists of verbal testimony in its various forms: initial proclamation, catechesis, apologetics and the like." The cardinal pointed to the many "heralds who have courageously and tirelessly preached the Gospel in difficult circumstances," beginning with St. Paul. Also included, he said, are the great essayists and novelists "who evangelized not so much by the spoken word as by the power of the pen."

The third model is Christian worship, "an activity of the believing com-

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Pope Benedict, while lauding the trend toward democracy in the region, offered a criticism of both Marxist and capitalist economic systems: "There are grounds for concern in the face of authoritarian forms of government and regimes wedded to certain ideologies that we thought had been superseded. ... The liberal economy of some Latin American countries must take account of equity, because of the ever increasing sectors of society that find themselves oppressed by immense poverty."

At his gathering with some 40,000 youths on May 10, the pope asked those present to join a mission of "evangelizing young men and women who have gone astray in this world like sheep without a shepherd. Be apostles of youth." He told them, "Christ is calling you to be saints. He himself is inviting you and wants to walk with you in order to enliven with his Spirit the steps that Brazil is taking."

Before Pope Benedict XVI landed in Brazil, he made statements aboard the plane taking him to Brazil that some interpreted as endorsing the excommunication of Catholic politicians in Mexico City who recently voted to allow abortion in the city. Before the law's approval on April 24, local press quoted a Mexico City archdiocesan statement as saying that the Archdiocese of Mexico City would excommunicate any baptized politicians who voted in favor of legalizing abortion.

Reporters aboard the plane on May 9 asked the pope whether he supported the excommunication of the Mexican politicians, and he answered, "Yes, this excommunication was not something arbitrary,

but is foreseen by the Code (of Canon Law). It is simply part of church law that the killing of an innocent baby is incompatible with being in communion with the body of Christ."

In reference to the Mexican bishops, the pope continued: "Therefore, they did not do anything new, surprising or arbitrary. They only underlined publicly what is foreseen in (canon) law, a law based on the church's doctrine and faith, on our appreciation for life and for human individuality from the first moment."

The next day the Vatican press office released an official transcript of the pope's 25-minute session with reporters, which deleted the pope's opening *yes* to the direct question about excommunication, along with the references to the Mexican bishops. The new version of the pope's remarks began: "Excommunication is not something arbitrary, but is foreseen by the Code (of Canon Law.) Therefore, it is simply part of church law that the killing of an innocent baby is incompatible with going to Communion, in which one receives the body of Christ."

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, told reporters May 10 that it was customary for the Vatican Secretariat of State to review the pope's extemporaneous statements and clean them up a little for publication. After the pope made his initial remarks, Father Lombardi quickly circulated among reporters on the plane and told them that the pope was not announcing a new policy on Catholic politicians.

A spokesman for Mexico City Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera told Catholic

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News Service May 9 that the Mexican church did not yet have an official position on the matter. Father Lombardi stated, "If the bishops haven't excommunicated anyone, it's not that the pope wants to do so." Father Lombardi said the pope was only restating the teaching that Catholic politi-

Indigenous Missionary Council, known by its Portuguese acronym CIMI, delivered a letter to Pope Benedict from them and other indigenous groups. The letter used the word *genocide* to describe the "persecution, land takeovers, murders, epidemics, sterilization of indigenous women and contraceptive measures imposed by governments, neglect and breakup of our communities" during the past century, but highlighted "the solidarity of the church and countless missionaries throughout the country."

"We wish to transmit some of our anguish and hope, counting on your friendship and solidarity in building a more just and harmonious continent and world," said the letter, presented to the pope by Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, retired archbishop of Sao Paulo. According to CIMI, Brazil has 241 indigenous groups with a total of 734,000 people who speak 180 languages. Nearly 1,500 groups of peoples have disappeared since the 1500s, when Europeans arrived in South America. After the pope's comments about indigenous peoples, CIMI adviser Father Paulo Suess said, "The pope doesn't understand the reality of the Indians here; his statement was wrong and indefensible." Father Suess also stated that the pope "is a good theologian, but it seems he missed some history classes."

The pope's speech to the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean generally set the agenda for the bishops' conference which will last until May 31. Archbishop Pedro Barreto Jimeno of Huancayo, Peru, called the pope's May 13 speech to the bishops "inspiring" and "encouraging."

Many bishops noted that the pope's statements about the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ and evangelization does not mean they should not take a stand on political issues. Bishop Hector Gutierrez Pabon of Engativa, Colombia, said, "We are involved in politics, but not partisan politics. It is politics that seeks the common good" through the Gospel and the church's social doctrine.

community directed primarily to God ... [and] not conducted for the sake of making an impression on outsiders," who nevertheless "are struck by the intensity and sincerity of the church's relationship to God," said Cardinal Dulles. Worship also "immerses the participants in the mystery of Christ and thereby helps them to center their lives on Christ and to become heralds and bearers of the Gospel," he said.

The fourth model is community, offering friendship and support to people seeking a refuge from the "anonymity of our secularized and mechanized world" just as early Christian communities offered an alternative to ancient paganism. Cardinal Dulles said he thought the new lay movements and associations reflect a similar dynamic. "If the church is seen as a cordial community of love and mutual support in which all have but one heart and one soul, it will attract new members almost without trying," he said.

The fifth model is inculturation, "meaning the incarnation of the Gospel in the cultural forms familiar and intelligible to those being evangelized," Cardinal Dulles said. Included here would be communications, scientific research, human rights and international relations, fields where "the evangelization must come from within by committed Christians thoroughly familiar" with them.

A sixth model would be works of charity and include the church's stance on public policy issues. "Although evangelization may never be reduced to the dimensions of a mere temporal project," said the cardinal, "the Gospel has necessary implications regarding peace and justice in the human community," and laypersons bear special responsibility here.

The pope told them, "Christ is calling you to be saints. He himself is inviting you and wants to walk with you."

cians who favor initiatives like the legalization of abortion exclude themselves from the conditions needed to participate fully in the Eucharist.

Representatives of indigenous groups in Brazil expressed anger at some of the comments Pope Benedict XVI made during his speech to the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. Many were upset with the pope's comment that pre-Columbian cultures in the Americas were "silently longing" for Christianity. Others complained about the pope stating that the "proclamation of Jesus and of his Gospel did not at any point involve an alienation of the pre-Columbian cultures nor was it the imposition of a foreign culture."

Sandro Tuxa, who heads a movement of northeastern tribes, said, "We repudiate the pope's comments. To say the cultural decimation of our people represents a purification is offensive, and frankly, frightening. I think (the pope) has been poorly advised." Stephen Corry, the director of Survival, an international tribal advocacy group, said, "It is tragic that unlike previous popes who have visited Brazil, His Holiness did not meet with Indian leaders, and made no public reference to the genocide visited upon the indigenous peoples of Brazil over the past 500 years."

On May 10 the Brazilian bishops' indigenous peoples advocacy group, the

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tion. Obtaining those recommendations will be more difficult, say the norms, and will be based on the “significant and universal importance” of the saint’s spiritual message and his or her appeal to a broad category of church members; saints from countries not yet represented and under-represented categories such as laypersons, married couples and parents will get special consideration; and 10 years should have passed since the canonization.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles said May 15 that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles will sell its chancery building to help fund future settlements in sex abuse cases. In December the archdiocese settled 46 civil cases of sexual abuse for \$60 million. Its share of the settlement was about \$40 million, with the remainder covered by insurance companies or religious orders. At the time the settlement was announced, the archdiocese said its share had been anticipated and set aside in 2005. Cardinal Mahony said the archdiocese now must be prepared to fund its share of coming settlements in all remaining cases, estimated at more than 500.

The return of a prominent evangelical philosopher and theologian to the Catholic Church, his childhood home, has provoked a storm of controversy in the evangelical community. Francis J. Beckwith, a tenured associate professor of church-state studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, the largest Baptist university in the world, resigned as president of the Evangelical Theological Society May 5 after entering into full communion with the Catholic Church a week earlier. He is known for his defense of the pro-life position on abortion and of the constitutionality of teaching in public schools the theory of intelligent design as an alternative to evolutionary theory.

A Brazilian rancher convicted of masterminding the February 2005 assassination of U.S. Sister Dorothy Stang was sen-

tenced to the maximum 30 years in prison. Prosecutors said 73-year-old Sister Dorothy — a native of Dayton, Ohio, and a naturalized Brazilian citizen — was killed because of her project on the sustainable development of the Amazon region, which bothered many of the large landowners in the area. De Moura and Regivaldo Pereira Galvao are landowners and were said to have offered \$25,000 for her murder. In Brazil those who are sentenced to more than 20 years for a crime have the right to appeal, but Judge Raimundo Alves Flexa denied defense attorneys’ request that de Moura remain free while appealing the conviction. Of the five men accused in Sister Dorothy’s murder, four have now been convicted and are in jail.

Members of the Congregation for Saints’ Causes met May 8 to consider the cause of Pope Pius XII and apparently voted to recommend that Pope Benedict XVI formally declare him venerable. Passionist Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican press office, confirmed the congregation had met, but since the result of the vote still had to be presented to the pope he would not say what the result was. However, Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, who has spent years officially shepherding the cause through its various stages, told Catholic News Service May 11 that the vote was “unanimous and totally positive.” The German Jesuit said he confirmed the result with four congregation members and “it is absolutely false that some cardinals had asked for a delay.”

Emory University in Atlanta has unveiled letters between Catholic author Flannery O’Connor and friend Elizabeth “Betty” Hester. The two first began corresponding in 1955 when Hester wrote a let-



ter to O’Connor saying that she thought the author’s collection of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, were about God. O’Connor quickly responded, seeking more information about the stranger who understood her writing so well. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted nearly a decade, with O’Connor and Hester exchanging written communication almost weekly until O’Connor’s death from lupus in 1964 at age 39. Hester donated the letters to Emory University in 1987 with a stipulation that they remain sealed for 20 years.

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