Vatican



Pope Francis meets with bishops from Chile during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Feb. 20, 2017. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Pope Francis' most recent foreign trips have seen him tackle some of the world's most difficult geopolitical issues. In September, he traveled to Colombia to back an unpopular peace deal with guerilla militants. In November, he went to Myanmar to focus global attention on the government's persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Now, the pope is preparing to embark on a trip to Chile and Peru that may shift the focus from politics to problems inside the church community.

Local observers and prominent expatriate voices say attention during the Jan. 15-21 visit may center on how Francis can help the Chilean church regain trustworthiness after a recent spate of cases of clergy sexual abuse.

Complicating that possibility, the observers say, is Francis' own record on the abuse issue, especially his 2015 appointment of Bishop Juan Barros Madrid of Osorno, Chile. Barros has been accused of covering up abuse by a prominent priest in the 1980s and '90s.

Mario Paredes, who has advised both the Vatican and the U.S. bishops on Latin American issues for decades, told NCR he hoped the pope could help Chile's hierarchy "restore credibility that in recent years it has lost."

"No matter how you look at it, those cases have been horrendous, scandalous, and the church has lost credibility," said Paredes, a Chile native who is now CEO of Advocate Community Partners, a network of primary care physicians in New York City. "I expect that he will make a strong appeal for a church that is really transparent [and] truthful."

But Jesuit Fr. Antonio Delfau, the former longtime editor of Chile's Jesuit-run Mensaje magazine, said the Barros appointment undercuts what Francis might be able to achieve while in the country.

"One of the bishops appointed by this pope is a bishop that is questioned ... not only by the people of the place but also by most of the other bishops," said Delfau, now based in Rome as the assistant to the Jesuit curia's general treasurer. "That's a big problem."



The official logo for Pope Francis' Jan. 15-18 trip to Chile, with the theme "My peace I give you." (CNS/courtesy Holy See Press Office)

Barros, who served as the head of Chile's military diocese until Francis moved him to the small southern city of Osorno in 2015, has been accused of protecting Fr. Fernando Karadima, who was sentenced by the Vatican to a life of prayer and penance in 2011.

Though Barros was not implicated in Karadima's canonical trial, victims say the bishop destroyed incriminating correspondence from the priest. Other victims claim Barros was even a witness to some of the sexual abuse.

Captured on video speaking to a Chilean in the crowd at a May 2015 general audience at the Vatican, the pope said people were judging Barros "without any evidence" and even said the allegations against the bishop were being orchestrated by "lefties."

"Osorno suffers, yes, but for being foolish, because they do not open their hearts to what God says, and instead get carried away by all this silliness," Francis said.

José Andrés Murillo, executive director of Para la Confianza, a Chilean foundation that helps survivors of sexual abuse, said people in Osorno were "completely shocked" when the video of that encounter was made public by a local news channel in October 2015.

"They expected from the pope a reaction of compassion or comprehension," but instead "received this very aggressive reaction," Murillo said.

"What the people are feeling toward the pope I think is not anger," he said. "It is sadness. Why can the pope not comprehend the concerns of the people?"

'Listen to normal Catholics'

Francis will be visiting Chile Jan. 15-18 before heading on to northern neighbor Peru through Jan. 21. His schedule in both countries follows a familiar format: He will spend his nights in the countries' respective capitals of Santiago and Lima, but travel to different cities on successive days.

As usual, the pope will meet with the nations' presidents, Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Pedro Kuczynski in Peru; speak to the bishops in each country; and host encounters with young people and priests and religious.



Chile's national flag is seen as Pope Francis leads his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 5, 2017. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Murillo suggested that local attention in Chile may be drawn most to Francis' Jan. 16 meeting with the country's bishops and to a possible, but yet unconfirmed, meeting with survivors of sexual abuse.

"The most important word I think the bishops should hear from the pope is to listen to the people, listen to normal Catholics," Murillo said. "The bishops only hear people who say what they want to hear. They don't accept the crisis that they are suffering. And they think they are not in a crisis."

Asked about a possible meeting with survivors, Murillo responded simply: "This is what Jesus would do."

The pope, he said, should "not only have a meeting with victims ... but demonstrate that he is on the same side as the victims and not on the same side as the aggressors."

Inequality, corruption

Beyond clergy sexual abuse issue, observers said they expect Francis to focus on some of his common themes of inclusion and caring for those on the margins of society.

Jesuit Fr. Matthew Carnes, director of Georgetown University's Center for Latin American Studies, said he expected the pope might focus his Jan. 16 speech to Bachelet and Chile's other political leaders on how the country's economic growth has also led to a growth in inequality.

"We've seen growth, but what does growth with equity look like?" Carnes suggested Francis might ask. "What does growth with justice look like? And how does that especially reach people on the margins?"



Catholic faithful celebrate the Lord of Miracles in Lima, Peru, Oct. 18, 2016. (CNS/German Falcon, EPA)

A focus on inequality could be taken with special significance given that Bachelet, a member of the country's Socialist Party, is set to be replaced in March by the more right-wing Sebastián Piñera.

Peruvians likewise suggested the pope might bring up inequality while meeting with Kuczynski Jan. 19. They also hope that Francis raises the continuing issue of corruption in their country.

"Globalization has brought a lot of progress in Peru but the problem is that that progress is not touching the people on the margins," said Miami Auxiliary Bishop Enrique Delgado, the first native Peruvian U.S. prelate.

Delgado, who moved to the U.S. in 1991 and was named a bishop by Francis in October, said that many workers in Peru "are not receiving the right share of globalization's benefits."

Alfonso Alvarez Calderón, a prominent Catholic civil lawyer in Lima, said he hoped Francis would "convert our leaders to leave off corruption and infighting and begin to serve the people."

Alvarez, who also serves as a canonical lawyer at the ecclesiastical courts for the Lima and Arequipa Archdioceses, said he expected the pope to tell Peru's politicians "they must fight for the needs of the people and not just their own comforts and benefit."

Visit with indigenous

Two other issues may also come to the foreground during Francis' visit: the status of indigenous people in Chile and the legacy in Peru of liberation theology, which focuses on Jesus' role in redeeming humanity not only from sin but also from unjust political, social or economic conditions.

While the field of theology arose in several Latin American countries in the 1950s and '60s, one of its primary exponents has been Peruvian Dominican Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez. The field even takes its name from his landmark 1971 text, *A Theology of*

Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation.



A dog and man are seen June 23, 2017 amid makeshift homes in Rivera Sur camp in Colina, Chile. (CNS/Jane Chambers)

Carnes said Francis may be "treading a fine line" in how he talks about liberation theology with Peru's bishops in their meeting together Jan. 21.

If the pope repeats too strongly liberationists' criticisms of market capitalism, it could be a "flashpoint" for Peru's business interests, which see themselves as bringing new prosperity to the country, Carnes said. On the other hand, if Francis shies away from mentioning the legacy of the theological field it "could be something of a disappointment" for its leaders, he said.

Another item on the pope's agenda that may attract some controversy is his planned Jan. 17 visit with inhabitants of Chile's Araucanía Region, where the indigenous Mapuche people have lived since well before the Spanish arrived in the 16th century.

The Chilean government and the Mapuche have been at odds for nearly three decades over what lands in the region should be controlled by the indigenous group,

and the disagreement has at times turned violent, with shootings, kidnappings and the setting of destructive forest fires.

Delfau said there is "enormous division" in Chile over the Bachelet government's proposed plan to offer the indigenous more congressional representation and to create a new reparation commission. He said that while many people think the indigenous are owed reparations, they do not want to reward violence.

"Most of our indigenous people are good people, but there's a group that wants to fight," he said.

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Paredes called the planned encounter, which will take place in Temuco, a "major recognition" of the indigenous peoples' rights and said it may "allow for a national conversation on the rights of the indigenous people."

"Throughout history those communities have been unknown in Chile," he said. "It will be a major recognition, and I'm sure it will be a source of joy and hope."

[Joshua J. McElwee is NCR Vatican correspondent.]

This story appears in the **Francis in Chile and Peru** feature series. View the full series.
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