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Use 'weapons' of love, prayer in cultural war, participants say

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — In the battle to defeat the culture of death and preserve Christian values throughout the Americas, Christians need to adopt the "unconventional weapons" of Our Lady of Guadalupe: love and prayer, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore told participants at a Vatican congress.

Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of Denver, who led a small group discussion Monday at the congress marking the 15th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops for America, told the same participants that an encounter with Christ, through Mary, is essential for ensuring a "transformation of culture."

"We must come to understand that the civilization in which we live" -- in North, South and Central America -- is the scene of a real "spiritual battle. The cultural war is a real war. We see the vision of the human person today being totally rejected," he said, and there is an all-out effort to redefine marriage and family life.

Aquila said the first blessing given to human beings in the Bible is God's blessing of Adam and Eve, telling them to "be fruitful and multiply. And what is at the heart of the homosexual movement is the rejection of that first blessing."

The small-group discussion, which was moderated by Lori and introduced by Aquila, involved about two dozen bishops, religious and lay leaders from North America and South America. Most members of the group were involved in higher education or Catholic evangelization projects.

Aquila's comments about the "spiritual battle" being waged in the Americas led to a discussion about how Catholics, looking to the example of Our Lady of Guadalupe, are called to defend Christian values, reach out to others and affirm human dignity.

Fr. Robert L. Barron, rector and president of the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Chicago, told the group that in Mary's Magnificat and often in the events and messages given in Marian apparitions "there is something of the warrior element."

However, "she's never the leader of armies. It is the warfare that is fought in the name of love, divine love surging into the world against the forces that are opposed to it," he said.

Christians concerned about the direction of modern culture often are depicted as being "naysayers," he said, but following the example of Mary guarantees that they will act in the name of the God of love and of the human beings he created.

"What you are bringing into battle is a mother's love for her children," Barron said. "We are 'ecclesia militans' -- a fighting church -- but we fight in a very unusual way."

Peruvian Archbishop Jose Antonio Eguren Anselmi of Piura, head of the Peruvian bishops' committee for family and for life, said a variety of groups, most based in the United States, are waging multimillion-dollar campaigns to convince Peruvians to liberalize their country's abortion laws and to redefine marriage.

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"But we have something more powerful -- the power of prayer," the archbishop said. "Through Mary, we can bring God to our side in this battle," he said.

Curtis Martin, president and founder of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, urged the group to remember that in the battle to defend a traditional Judeo-Christian culture, Christians must remember that non-believers "are not the enemy, they are the prize. The devil is the enemy."

Those who "have been taken captive by errors and lies" are the people Christians must fight for, Martin said.

Lori, summarizing some of the points raised in the discussion, said the participants' experience clearly shows that "we are engaged in a struggle, in a battle, but the weapons we bring to this are not the conventional weapons, but rather that love, which is stronger than sin and more powerful than death."

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