

Pope's Canadian Themes also Apply to U.S.

By Agostino Bono
NC News Service
While Pope John Paul II was visiting Canada, he was also, in terms of his themes, paying a vicarious visit to the United States.

Many of the issues he emphasized apply specifically to the U.S. church and to U.S. society, which parallel their Canadian counterparts.

As the pope's September 9-20 trip moved into its final days, his talks and homilies had included:

- Strong support for state aid to Catholic schools at a time when the relation of church and state is a main issue in the U.S. presidential campaign.

- A dire warning to Christians that they have a responsibility to make sure technology works for humanity and not vice versa.

- Emphasis on the need for the church and multicultural societies to maintain a unity which respects pluralism and protects the rights of minorities.

- A reminder to Catholics that worship is the key element of their faith and that they should not be lax in Mass attendance.

- A forceful critique of the concentration of economic power and decision-making in the hands of a few giant companies at the expense of small enterprises.

- A renewed commitment to the ecumenical movement and the urgent need for Christians to work together on social justice issues.

- A restatement of the church's respect for life, including fetuses which have physical defects, at a time when the issue is being reevaluated in the United States because of a series of legal cases examining whether babies with serious physical defects should be allowed to die.

Pope John Paul also proved to be more flexible in liturgical ceremonies than he was in his 1979 U.S. visit. Women were allowed to distribute Communion at papal Masses, and the pope distributed Communion in the

hand. Both are widely used customs in the Canadian church as in the United States: A spokesman for the Canadian bishops said the pope agreed to follow local customs during the trip after consulting with the Canadian bishops.

The pope put his positions firmly within the context of the church's role in a modern, industrialized and pluralistic society in which the church is only one of many voices influencing social and cultural values. Canada and the United States fit that model.

On his first day in Canada, Sept. 9, he said he came to help people search for "a new culture that will integrate the modernity of America even while preserving its deep-seated humanity."

This was coupled with a strong defense of pluralism in society and in the church.

"The pluralism of traditions, pluralism of cultures, pluralism of histories, pluralism of national identities — all of these are compatible with the unity of society," he said at a Sept. 16 Mass in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for the numerous ethnic groups which compose Canada's population.

The pope noted the ethnic diversity in Canada and used it as an example of the church's pluralism.

"This is expressed in our liturgical assembly today, not only through different languages but also through the different liturgical traditions of Christianity, both in the West and East. In this Eucharist the church in Canada celebrates her diversity and proclaims her unity in Christ," he said.

The Mass incorporated a liturgical aspects of Eastern and Latin Catholicism and used nine languages.

The pope also saw a give-and-take relationship between Christianity and a pluralistic society. Christians should humanize society by infusing it with values of human dignity, he said, to keep consumerism from setting the main values.



Pope John Paul II enters CNE Stadium for Polish rally.

This includes a Christian responsibility to defend the people at the bottom of society's ladder, especially the handicapped, from the "moment of conception," he said at a Sept. 10 visit to the handicapped.

"A technically perfect society where only fully-productive members are accepted must be considered totally unworthy of human beings, perverted as it is by a type of discrimination that is no less reprehensible than racial discrimination," he told the handicapped.

At a Sept. 12 meeting with small-scale commercial fishermen, Pope John Paul called for decentralizing economic and productive power, which is held by giant companies at the expense of small enterprises. More people

should share in economic decision-making, he said.

The pope joined the Canadian bishops "in appealing to those in positions of responsibility, and to all involved, to work together to find appropriate solutions to the problems at hand, including a restructuring of the economy, so that human needs be put before financial gain."

This Christian role of influencing social policies should be undertaken ecumenically, the pope told a Sept. 14 meeting of religious leaders.

"United in the name of Christ, we need to ask critical questions and assert basic moral principles," he said.

"The needs of the poor must take priority over the

desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet social needs over production for military purposes," he added.

"These challenges present us with important areas of ecumenical collaboration and form a vital part of our mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ," Pope John Paul said.

Because Christianity has positive values to contribute to society, society should actively help it through state funding of its educational system, the pope said at a Sept. 12 talk to Catholic educators.

"A totally secular school system" does not meet the

challenge of a pluralistic society. Many citizens want an education for their children which reflects their religious values, the pope said.

"Governments have the responsibility, therefore, to ensure the freedom of ecclesiastical communions to have appropriate educational services with all that such freedom implies: teacher training, buildings, research funding, adequate financing," said Pope John Paul.

Throughout the 12-day Canadian trip, the pope also emphasized that Christians cannot effectively exercise their role in society unless they deepen their faith, especially through increased reception of the sacraments.

In Canada less than 50 percent of the Catholics attend Sunday Mass regularly.

The Holy Father in Canada



The pontiff speaks at the rally.



Libby Boslov gets a better look.



Ruth and Charlie Macaluso of Gates.