

# Pope in Africa boosted Catholic growth, dialogue with Islam

By Bill Pritchard  
NC News Service

Pope John Paul II's journey to Africa August 8-19 was two trips in a sense: one to bolster the growing Catholic Church in sub-Saharan Africa, the other to build bridges to Islam.

For the first 11 days, the pope focused on telling African Catholics to make the church their own, but in concert with Church teaching.

He also told local Catholics that the Church in Africa has begun a "new evangelization" which would deepen the faith on the continent.

The pope's major encounter with Islam lasted only a few hours on the last day, but it involved a first-ever address to thousands of Moslem youths on their own ground.

Speaking August 19 in a stadium at Casablanca, Morocco, Pope John Paul said Christian-Moslem dialogue "is today more necessary than ever. It follows from our fidelity to God and supposes that we know how to know God through faith and to-witness to Him through word and action in a world that is always more secularized and sometimes even atheist."

The pope was the first in history to be invited to a Moslem country by its religious leader.

Morocco's King Hassan II, who invited the pope, is civil and religious leader of the country. He claims to be the 36th descendent of Mohammed, founder of Islam, and is a major leader in the majority Sunni branch of the faith.

The king is also head of the Moslem League's Committee on Jerusalem. He and the pope talked about the status of Jerusalem during the visit, according to Vatican officials, but no details of their discussion were released.

Aboard the papal airplane bound for Morocco, the pope said the Holy See shared the view of Moslems "that Jerusalem should have a special status as a central point, the capital of three monotheistic religions, and that (it) should not only (be) the capital of Israel but should be the religious capital of three monotheistic religions."

But, he added, "how that should be realized is another question."

Pope John Paul's message for Morocco's tiny, all-foreign Catholic community was to work with and understand their Moslem neighbors.

The Church in Morocco ministers to foreign Catholics working or traveling there, but little else. It does not seek converts, because proselytizing by non-Moslems is a

punishable offense.

The pope made no attempt to evangelize in his speech to Moroccans at the stadium. He said that "the Church affirms that all men, especially men of living faith, ought to respect each other, get over all discrimination, live together and serve universal brotherhood."

He tried, however, to explain Christian belief in a description of the Christian view of Christ.

"You know that for Christians, Jesus provides an intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and provides filial communion of His gifts, if they acknowledge Him and proclaim Him Lord and Savior," the pope said.

Moslems regard Jesus as a prophet of God and a great teacher, but give Him no divine character. They regard Mohammed, a seventh-century native of what is now Saudi Arabia, as the last and greatest prophet of God.

The pope's approach to Moslems was not limited to Morocco. Earlier on his trip, he met regularly with Moslem leaders at stops in sub-Saharan Africa, stressing common belief in one God. He also stressed the notion of cooperation for the common good.

But topping his agenda in the six black African nations he visited was the future of the Catholic Church.

"Make Church with Peter," he told African Catholics soon after arriving on the continent. He repeated that call for maintaining strong links between Rome and Africa in several ways during the trip.

The pope also saw his work in Africa as missionary. He linked his trip to the 18th century missionaries, saying that he was following in their footsteps, although under easier and friendlier conditions.

At the same time, he told the African bishops that it is their job to carry out a "new evangelization" of African Catholicism, deepening and spreading it.

Staying within the Roman fold while not becoming a copy of the American of European Churches is a tough issue which the pope noted in comments to Catholic intellectuals in Yaounde, Cameroon.

He called Africanization of the Church "a difficult question" and urged the intellectuals to seek a "fully Christian and fully African faith" and to make the search "in union with your bishops."

The remarks showed the pope's concern for maintaining the church's lines of authority, another concern he repeated several times during the trip.

Africa will have 100 million Catholics by

the end of the century, say church officials. It already has about 70 million Catholics in a continental population of about 513 million.

The end-of-century number would give Africa the largest Catholic population in the developing world, after South America.

Those statistics are very much on Pope John Paul's mind, said Joaquin Navarro-Valls, head of the Vatican press office.

Also very much on the pope's mind are potential dangers to the faith in Africa from insufficient formation.

If the new evangelization is not carried out vigorously, "formation in the faith...often remains at an elementary stage, and sects can easily take advantage of that ignorance," he told the bishops of Africa.

Africans are a religious people, and the pope has recognized that. He spoke of their "spontaneous religiosity" in a Mass homily in Togo.

But the pope and the bishops are also worried that this religious impulse could bring problems for the church without their strong direction.

African "religiosity" has not only produced strong mainline Christian churches, but also many home-grown spinoffs of Christianity. Zaire and Nigeria, among other nations, have large and powerful native Christian sects which incorporate elements of traditional African faiths.

In a document on Christianity and traditional religions, the bishops of Cameroon said that the traditional beliefs "control the subconscious" of most Africans.

One of those traditions is polygamy -- taking more than one spouse. The pope sharply attacked this widespread practice during a homily in Kenya.

He said that polygamy "directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning." He said the practice is "contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive."

A Comboni Fathers missionary working in Kenya said he thought the church's view of polygamy was too narrowly focused on a sexual interpretation -- a man "enjoying" two wives -- without analyzing the social value Africans place on polygamy.

Pope John Paul also showed concern for Africa's Catholic youth. He urged them to develop their faith through Catholic education and other routes.

Young people are a major part of the African population. In Cameroon, for instance, 43.4 per cent of the population is 15 or under, and Cameroonians in their late



Pope John Paul II holds a young girl in Lome, Togo, after he arrived August 8 to begin his 12-day African trip. During the visit, he encouraged evangelization of Africans and dialogue with Islam. (NC photo from UPI-Reuters.)

teens and 20s form a large part of the rest of the populace.

The pope warned the continent's leaders against disappointing youths. At a Mass in Bangui, Central African Republic, he said that increasing educational opportunities are good for the young. But he also warned that they may rebel if, after receiving an education, "they do not see the fruits of which they dream" because there is no employment. Frustration could lead to "anger, to revolt," or to withdrawal or "flight in alcohol and drugs."

Pope John Paul promoted family life and children in his African trip. He criticized what he called an "anti-life mentality" which he said was being exported from developed countries to Africa.

In Kenya, where the president had just decreed that female civil servants would receive no maternity or educational benefits for more than four children, the pope said one of the best expressions of married love is in children.

## Clowns' gift helps Action Center communicate with the hearing-impaired

By Teresa A. Parsons

Thanks to a bunch of clowns, part of Rochester's population will find it a lot easier to call the Action Center for the Disabled from now on.

With the gift of a TDD or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf, a clowns' group called Greasepaint Alley has made the Action Center for the Disabled more ac-

cessible to Rochester's deaf and hearing-impaired people.

"Rochester has the highest per capita percentage of deaf people in the entire United States," said Lucille Dechaine, chairman of the advisory committee for the Action Center. "This will help them feel they can be full participants."

Calling the center before was possible, but

required a third party to translate the conversation. Now, staff at the center can also return calls directly to those with TDD-equipped phones.

The \$600 machine looks like a medium-sized calculator. The caller places the telephone receiver on the TDD and dials a number. When the phone is answered at the other end, a signal indicates that it is a TDD

call. Placing the receiver on the device, the caller and receiver communicate by typing their conversation on a keyboard. The words print out on a one-line display at each end.

Greasepaint Alley, based in the Town of Greece, raised money for the donation by performing at shopping malls and company picnics throughout the year.

"Our purpose is to promote clowning in a healthy, positive sense and to help with fund raising ... to bring joy to people," said Lucille Fial, president of the 50-member local chapter of Clowns of America International.

Fial, who is known as Detective Mar Go in makeup, said that the group chose to make a donation to the Action Center for several reasons. Several disabled adults have been Greasepaint clowns, including Jinky (70-year-old Virginia Siebert), who is one of the group's most active clowns.

"In the past, we've helped disabled children quite a bit," Fial added. "We decided we'd like to help adults because they're so often forgotten."

The only purely recreational program that welcomes adults with any type or degree of physical or emotional disability in Monroe County, the Action Center for the Disabled was established in 1982 under a city demonstration grant. Sponsored by Catholic Charities of the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry, the center organizes free and low-cost social and recreational activities for a population that is largely neglected beyond therapeutic needs.

Until the age of 21, disabled people can take advantage of activities, both educational and recreational, through the city school system according to Adele Carlson, the Action Center's director. But once a disabled person leaves school, unless he has such specific disabilities as cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis, which are addressed by specific programs, he is on his own.

"We get a lot of people who slip through the cracks," said Bill Smouse, the center's assistant director, adding that they also do a lot more than recreation. "We're more like a family -- whatever people need done or want to do, that's what we do."



Greasepaint Alley clowns and Lucy Dechaine of the Action Center for the Disabled demonstrate the clowns' gift of a TDD during a presentation at the Stardust Ballroom Thursday, August 8. From left are Daisy, Butterfly, Ding-A-Ling and Detective Mar Go. Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal