

National/International Report

Pope emphasizes respect for life during trip to Australia

Calls for guidelines on embryonic research

By John Thavis
NC News Service

Emphasizing that human life at all its stages must be respected from "the moment of conception" until death, Pope John Paul II spent a week crisscrossing Australia, from busy port cities to the continent's stark interior.

The pope condemned violence against human life in talks to Parliament members in Canberra, the sick in Brisbane and hospital workers in Perth.

During the Nov. 24-Dec. 1 trip, the pope also called for moral guidelines for embryonic research, urged quick action on land claims by indigenous Australians and urged fallen-away Catholics to "come back."

While he was traveling, Australian police arrested a 24-year-old former mental patient, Richard John McGlaughlin, who had five gasoline bombs and said he wanted to kill the pope.

Australia was the fifth of six countries the pope visited in 13 days, the longest trip of his pontificate. He stopped briefly in the Seychelles Dec. 1, breaking up his flight from Australia to Rome.

In a speech to Parliament members in Canberra his first day on the continent, Pope John Paul said that one basis for civilization is "reverence for human life from the moment of conception and throughout every stage of its earthly pilgrimage."

"I hope that all Catholics, and all your fellow citizens, will invite you by their voice and by their votes to ensure that nothing is done by the legislature to undermine these values," he told them.

Later in the trip, in the stillness of a small room of Mercy Maternity Hospital in Melbourne Nov. 28, the pope shook his head in wonder above a plastic "humidicrib" as David Anili, born 17 weeks early and dependent on respiration equipment, struggled for life. His chances, doctors said, were about one in three.

The pope told nurses that the ailing babies in their care "are special little creatures."

In a talk aimed at all hospital workers, he

said "Catholic medical spokesmen must continue to emphasize that doctors and scientists are human beings, subject to the same moral law as other people, especially when dealing with human patients, human embryos or human tissues."

In all cases, he added, the "concrete individual existence" must be protected.

It was the pope's most explicit comment on embryonic research, and it came in a city whose hospitals pioneered in vitro fertilization, with techniques that sometimes involve discarding embryos.

At nearly every event, the pope spoke of children and their "special place" in civilized communities. At a Mass in Melbourne Nov. 28, he said that "a community is decadent when it does not want children."

He applied that idea to the workplace in a visit Nov. 27 to a Church-run training center for the unemployed on the island state of Tasmania. Mothers, he said, "must not be financially penalized" or discriminated against by employers, in comparison to women without families.

"Work should be structured so that women do not have to bargain for their advancement at the expense of their own dignity or at the expense of their vital role inside the family," the pope said.

In Alice Springs, deep in the traditional "dreamtime" land of Australia's aborigines, the pope made an impassioned appeal Nov. 29 on behalf of the natives, who have been relegated to the country's lowest social stratum. One of the largest assemblies ever of aborigines heard the pope praise their ancient culture, defend their right to traditional property and invite them to become Christians.

In urging additional and quick action on aboriginal land claims, Pope John Paul implicitly criticized a recent government decision to weaken the federal policy on the issue.

After visiting factory workers in Sydney Nov. 26, the pope celebrated Mass at a racetrack and sought to win back those who no longer practice Catholicism.

"To all those who have wandered from their spiritual home I wish to say: Come back! The Church opens her arms to you, the Church loves you!" he said.

In Perth, the pope joined a group of elderly at a Catholic-run home for the aged



NC photo from UPI-Reuters
JOINING IN — Pope John Paul II joins hands with young people in a dance and song during a youth celebration at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

and told them that old age is a good time to take a new interest in life.

"You have experience to share, wisdom to impart, tolerance to teach, though these are not always evident to younger people," he said.

The 66-year-old pope also spent some time with some of those "younger people." In Sydney, he was dubbed "The Dancing Pope" when he kicked up his heels during a celebration with youths. When his dancing partner, whom he had chosen spontaneously — 15-year-old Maria Kenny — began to cry, the pope hugged her and said, "Don't worry."

In a question-and-answer session with 25 students at St. Leo's Primary School in Melbourne, the pope told them he liked rock music as well as Gregorian songs.

In Brisbane, the pope's alleged potential assailant told police he wanted to assassinate the pontiff "because he's got too much money."

McGlaughlin was arraigned in court Nov.

26 for threatening the pope's life. Under Australian law, the pope is considered an internationally protected person, so the penalty could be seven years in prison.

During a five-hour stop in the Seychelles, the pope told islanders that the search for "easy pleasures" was threatening family life.

Although 83 percent of the population of the India Ocean group is Catholic, the country has a big divorce rate, and more than two-thirds of all births last year were out of wedlock.

"A society crumbles when marriages become fewer and fewer and more unstable when a person's first concern is to satisfy his or her own selfishness or to seek easy pleasures, when infidelity and the breakup of marriages become acceptable," the pope said during a Mass in the port city of Victoria.

"Love is much more than the superficial gratification of feelings," he said.

Some 10,000 people, including President France-Albert Rene, attended the Mass under a steady light rain.

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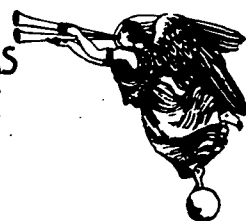
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