

National/International Report

Pronuncio says papal visit will reveal 'dynamic Church'

Papal ambassador cites central role of the laity

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — When Pope John Paul II visits the United States this fall, he will see a "very dynamic Church" in which lay people play an important role, the pope's U.S. ambassador said May 8.

Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal pronuncio or ambassador to the United States, in an interview with National Catholic News Service defended the pope's numerous travels abroad as a "new ministry" thrust upon the bishop of Rome in response to new world conditions.

He said he hoped the controversy over Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle will be resolved before the papal trip. But he also said that long-range problems and solutions in the U.S. Church are to be treated in greater depth in U.S.-Vatican discussions after the papal trip, not before.

Archbishop Laghi agreed to be interviewed on the topic of the papal trip to the United States this September. But he also answered questions about the more general state of the Church in the United States and his role in the appointment of new U.S. bishops.

Archbishop Laghi spoke philosophically of the growing priest shortage and sharp decline in the number of women religious in recent years in the United States.

While there is a priest shortage, he said, the priest previously "was supposed to do so many other things that now the lay people and sisters are doing."

He cited the rapid loss of sisters in Catholic schools, and their replacement by tens of thousands of lay teachers within a few

years, as an example of the vitality of Catholic lay life in the United States.

"There are 70,000 fewer sisters teaching in the Catholic schools today (than in the 1960s), and the Catholic schools here are one of the most important (structures) — I would say the backbone — of catechesis," he said.

"In many other countries, the Catholic schools would have collapsed if you were to take away 70,000 — suddenly in 20 to 25 years — of your best teachers," he said. "What happened in the United States? The laity took over little by little."

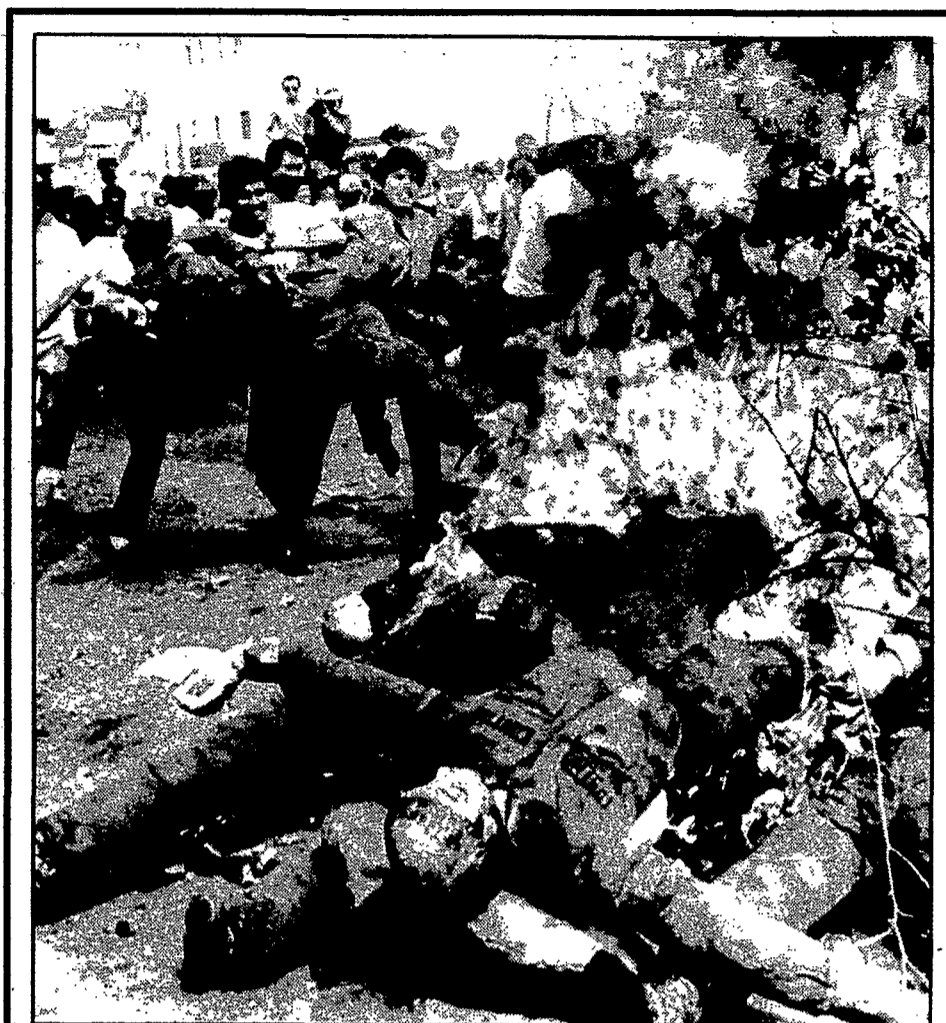
"And that, for me, is a demonstration of the vitality of the Church, and of the laity in particular ... because you took over this kind of responsibility."

Archbishop Laghi said the first papal trip to the United States, in October 1979, had little preparation time. There has been much more planning for the trip coming up this September, he said, and "I think there is an improvement, certainly."

The agenda is very crowded" again, he said, but "the distribution of time is very good." He said the schedule does much to help the pope "be with the people, with the mystical body of Jesus in a very open way, in a dialogical approach."

He said there is no doubt that the pope will get more out of this fall's trip than he did in 1979, "and the Americans might get more out of this one than they got before."

When Archbishop Laghi was asked if the nearly 100 U.S. bishops appointed during his seven years in Washington have brought any significant shifts in the make-up of the U.S. episcopate, he said there might be some differences of "emphasis," but not in their basic "direction."



NC Photo from UPI-Reuters
FIERY PROTEST—Members of Honduran labor unions and students throw one of several effigies of FDN rebels onto a fire during a rally in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Demonstrators were protesting the presence of Nicaraguan contra rebels in Honduras, as well as U.S. government policies in Central America.

Marian activities are prevalent in Pope John Paul II's everyday life

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — The 22-foot-high statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus dominated St. Peter's Square during Pope John Paul II's general audience. The 24-carat gold-leaf covering shone when the rays of the midday sun intermittently filtered through the clouds.

The bronze statue was placed on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica, just to the right of the chair where the pope was sitting.

The statue was designed for a Marian shrine in southern Italy, and the pope agreed to bless it at his May 6 general audience, several days before its formal dedication in the shrine's bell tower.

On the same day, the Vatican announced that the pope had named his top aide, Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, as papal delegate to ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of another Marian shrine in southern Italy.

The events show how Marian activities are a normal part of Pope John Paul's ministry.

The first Saturday of every month, he leads the recitation of the rosary on Vatican Radio. His pontifical coat-of-arms carries the letter "M" for Mary and appears over the doorways of Rome's churches. His speeches to Catholic groups visiting the Vatican are filled with calls to increase

Marian prayers and devotion.

Papal trips abroad routinely include trips to Marian shrines. And if the nation visited has a significant Catholic population, he often holds a formal ceremony dedicating the country to Mary.

This year, the pope also published a Marian encyclical and announced a special 14-month Marian year to begin at Pentecost. During the year, people making pilgrimages to Marian shrines will be able to receive special spiritual benefits.

On the eve of the Marian year, he plans to recite the rosary on an international satellite television transmission which will unite him to Marian shrines around the world.

This strong Marian devotion has sometimes caused ecumenical problems for the pope. Some Christians interpret Catholic emphasis on Mary as overshadowing worship of Christ. But the pope has faced this criticism squarely, emphasizing a two-fold role of Mary: as a sympathetic intercessor who helps individuals in their relationship with Christ and as the prime example of how an individual can participate in divine salvation by willingly accepting God's specific call to him or her.

The pope's position was detailed in his

114-page Marian encyclical, "On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church," released in March. He reiterated that position during his May visit to West Germany, where Catholic Marian devotion has historically been a sensitive issue with Protestants.

"True devotion to Mary and the saints cannot and must not damage the mediatorship of Jesus Christ," he told the German bishops.

Devotion to Mary and the saints makes it "easy for us to take example from their lives and, heartened by them, to continue on our own pilgrimage," he added.

This devotion to Mary began well before the 66-year-old Polish-born Karol Wojtyla became Pope John Paul II, and even well before he began seminary studies. When he began his formal education at the age of 6 in his native town of Wadowice, the short walk between home and school took him past the parish church where he attended the 7 a.m. Mass. In the afternoon, he would return to pray before an image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Friends of the future pope said this

devotion helped the young boy overcome such personal trials as the death of his mother when he was not quite 9 and the death of his brother when he was 12.

As a teenager, the future pope was active in the student Marian Society and was its president for three years.

With this as a foundation, Marian devotion became a pillar of his ministry as priest, bishop, cardinal and pope. As a clergyman in Poland, Karol Wojtyla often stopped to pray at the shrine in his steady devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

Pope John Paul soon will get a chance to return to the Polish roots of his Marian devotion. He plans to visit Poland June 8-14. The visit includes an overnight stop at the Jasna Gora monastery.

Since the 14th century, the monastery has housed the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the famous "Black Madonna" which is Poland's patroness. The name "Black Madonna" comes from the centuries-old wooden icon of Mary which has been darkened by age.

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