

# Nordic trip reveals highly secular society

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

VADSTENA, Sweden — Pope John Paul II spent the first half of June visiting five Nordic countries where Christianity is etched in stone castles and Lutheran cathedrals but not in the daily lives of a highly secularized population.

His primary purpose was to visit the region's small, often isolated Catholic community, numbering under 200,000 — less than 1 percent of the Nordic population. Many of the Catholics are refugees and immigrants from Asia, Central Europe and South America.

The first papal visit to the region has also an important ecumenical journey into the predominantly Lutheran countries of Norway, Iceland, Finland, Denmark and Sweden.

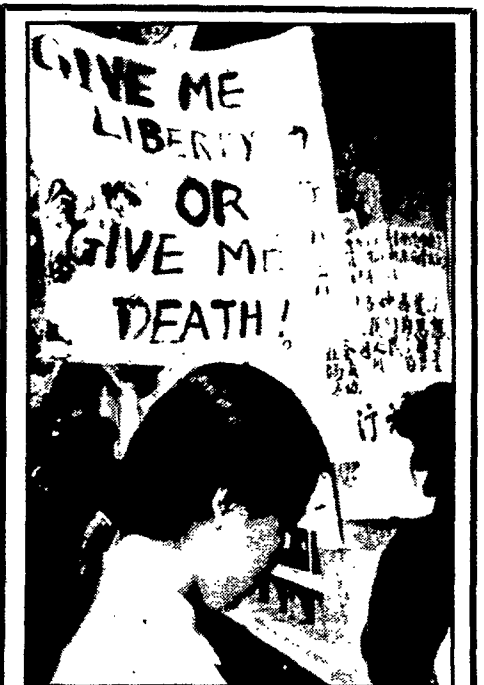
In Viking castles and Lutheran cathedrals that were once Catholic churches, the pope stressed Christian unity. He also emphasized what he said was the need to return to religious values if a modern, highly technological society is to progress without trampling human dignity. The June 1-10 trip also was an opportunity to praise the Nordic countries for opening their doors to refugees, their concern for improving conditions in the Third World and their establishment of domestic societies that provide for the material well-being of its populations.

The pope in turn was praised by Nordic government leaders for his efforts on behalf of world peace and human rights.

The papal message to the minuscule Catholic population was that "even the most isolated Catholics are not alone."

"The smallest of your communities in the north is still part of the universal church. Each is united with the church of Rome and with Catholics in every land," he said.

The pope dramatized his concern for isolated Catholics by traveling to Tromsø, Norway, a prelature more than 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle, to visit the world's northernmost Catholic ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There are 680 Catholics in the prelature. It was also a warning to Catholics — many refugees and immigrants from poor countries — not to let the "abundance of goods" in the economically prosperous north "dazzle you," causing a blind spot for moral values. The five countries visited have annual per capita incomes which range from Iceland's \$10,216 to Norway's \$13,790.



**PROPHETIC STATEMENT** — This banner hung in Peking University at the beginning of the students protests. Since the government crackdown on protesters, reports of the number of students killed have ranged from hundreds to thousands.

To society in general, the pope called for "a mobilization of minds and consciences" to keep science and technology from dehumanizing society.

The pope criticized abortion as leaving the door open to other grave and massive violations against human life. "Whether in the womb or in the final phase of life, a person may never be disposed of in order to make life easier for others," he said.

He warned against "the threats involved in genetic manipulation" and "the devastating power of modern technology, capable of destroying earth and all it contains."

But the pope was low-key, except for specific mentions of abortion and divorce, and he was silent about other important issues — such as homosexuality and artificial birth control — opposed by the church while generally accepted in Nordic countries. Instead, he spoke in general terms about the need to fortify traditional Christian family values and teachings. This was a Vatican effort to defuse the negative image the pope has in the region's permissive societies.

In Sweden the pontiff is known as "the pope of five 'Nos'" because of his opposition to abortion, divorce, contraception, homosexuality and women priests.

Rather than reiterating these teachings, the pope preferred to stress the overall need for Nordic societies to return to the Christian values that laid the foundations of their societies and instilled the concepts of human dignity responsible for guiding Nordic political and social development. He emphasized the need to "assure the moral dimension of culture."

"This is especially important at a time in history when developments in science and technology are not always inspired and measured by true wisdom, but rather offer the odious prospect of making life increasingly 'dehumanized,'" he said.

"In a highly developed society such as yours, where everyone has enough to eat, where education and health care are available to all, and where a high level of social justice has been achieved, it is easy to lose sight of the Creator," the pope said.

But divorcing progress from moral values opens the door "to forces which take command of society without concern for individuals and their freedom," he said.

"We have seen great nations forgetting their cultural traditions and decreeing laws for the extermination of entire popula-



Pope John Paul II kisses the ground of Iceland after arrival at the Keflavik Airport Saturday, June 3. He is the first pope ever to visit Iceland.

tions," he said, alluding to the Nazi-ordered mass murder of Jews during World War II.

The papal calls came in highly secularized societies where religious influence is waning despite figures showing that over 90 percent of each national population is Lutheran. The affiliation is mostly cultural and historical with only from 5 percent to 10 percent of the population attending weekly Lutheran services.

The pope's crowds were sparse, often measured in the hundreds instead of the hundreds of thousands normally marking papal events in heavily Catholic or predominantly Christian countries.

However, the pope received ample newspaper coverage, and his main events were broadcast live on radio and television.

He took advantage of the exposure to reiterate a theme close to his heart: the need to improve religious freedom in the Soviet bloc.

Speaking in Helsinki, Finland, 60 miles from the Soviet border, the pope asked for legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, an Eastern-rite church the government declared illegal in 1946, telling its members to join the Russian Orthodox Church.

However, the church has continued to exist clandestinely in the Soviet Union, reportedly with more than 4 million members.

The pope criticized "regrettable cases of the total denial of religious freedom to communities of Eastern-rite Catholics, who have lost even the right to exist within

the new post-war political and juridical structures."

He complained of "Catholic communities forced to live an underground existence" and of "dioceses deprived of their bishops."

The Soviet Union and the other countries of Eastern Europe signed the 1975 Helsinki accords guaranteeing religious freedom, the pope said.

But there is a "gap between the stated principles and the grave hindrance faced by some communities of believers in Europe," he added.

Throughout the trip he reiterated his commitment to ecumenism and asked for greater efforts to remove obstacles to Christian unity. Nevertheless, the pope's first ecumenical journey into a predominantly Lutheran region had an almost equal share of pluses and minuses.

He was warmly embraced by some Lutheran bishops while others refused to attend ecumenical events. The Danish Lutheran bishops denied him permission to speak in their most important cathedral, while permission was granted in Norway, Finland and Sweden.

Throughout, the pope and the Lutheran bishops frankly discussed major issues still dividing the churches such as papal authority, Catholic opposition to inter-Communion and Catholic failure to explicitly recognize Lutheran ministries and the ecclesial character of Protestant churches.

In answer to Lutheran calls for speedier Catholic action on the issues, the pope urged prudence.

## Steubenville faculty, friars take new loyalty oath

STEUBENVILLE, Ohio (CNS) — Theology faculty members and friars of the Franciscan-run University of Steubenville, have publicly taken the Vatican's loyalty oath and profession of faith.

The university announced June 1 that during the May baccalaureate exercises, the "historic step" had been undertaken by the university's seven full-time theology faculty members, including two Franciscan friars and the dean of faculty.

Bishop Albert H. Ottenweller of Steubenville received the oath in front of a crowd of some 1,500, who rose in a standing ovation when the oath was concluded.

Issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the new oath of fidelity was first published along with a revised profession of faith in the Feb. 25 issue of the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and distributed by the Vatican press office. According to a preface, the oath and the revised profession went into effect March 1.

The six-sentence oath in part promises "communion with the Catholic Church" in words and deed and the avoidance of "those teachings contrary to the deposit of the faith."

The profession of faith and oath of fidel-

ity also have been published in the Vatican's official periodical of church legislation, known as the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, in the issue dated Jan. 9, 1989. It was not released by the Vatican until March 15.

Impetus for the oath taking in Steubenville came from Franciscan Father Michael Scanlan, university president, who like the other Franciscans taking the oath is a member of the Third Order Regular.

"There's a question in the church at large and particularly by parents and students, regarding the clear commitment of those who teach on doctrine and morals as to whether they're teaching in submission to the magisterium of the church," Father Scanlan said.

"And because the question exists, doing this accomplishes three things," he said of the oath taking. "First," he said, "it builds the morale of the whole faculty and student body to see all faculty and pastors who teach in those areas make that commitment. Second, it gives assurance to parents who entrust their children to us. Third, it encourages others to do likewise."

He said other universities are likely to do the same in the fall when the school year resumes. Some may be waiting to see how the implementation of the oath goes, he

said. Others, he predicted, "will actually protest doing it."

The Franciscans' University of Steubenville describes itself as "a small Catholic university that has earned a reputation for orthodox theological teaching" and has some 1,600 students.

Father Scanlan said academic freedom had ample room to exist within an orthodox theological framework at a Catholic university.

He said the issue was not academic freedom but integrity. "The problem is to profess one thing and live another, to maintain an identity that you aren't consistently living," he added.

"No one in the university theology department has expressed academic freedom as a concern, and no Catholic university should have a problem with this," said Alan Schreck, chairman of the university's theology department, one of those who took the oath.

A preface to the oath said it applied to officials who must make a profession of faith according to canon law, including seminary rectors and professors, new pastors, deacons and university teachers "who teach disciplines which deal with faith or morals."

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