

Czechs greet 'messenger of love'

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

BRATISLAVA, Czechoslovakia — Pope John Paul II's blitz visit to Czechoslovakia April 21-22 symbolized to observers the victory of spiritual values and the yearning for human freedom over a totalitarian ideology.

The country's playwright-president Vaclav Havel called the trip "a miracle."

The pope, in turn, announced an unprecedented Synod of Bishops from Eastern and Western Europe, to be held soon to reflect on this "historic moment" for the religious and political life of the continent.

It was the pope's first trip to an East European country since the crumbling of communist rule, and he emphasized that rebuilding society "cannot be only a political and economic event."

To avoid new disasters, the building blocks must be forged with spiritual, moral and cultural values, he said.

The pope also praised the "shining testimony" of Catholics who remained faithful during 40 years of communist repression.

Havel greeted the pope by saying, "I am party to a miracle now."

"The messenger of love comes into a country devastated by the ideology of hatred; the living symbol of civilization comes into the country devastated by the rule of the uncivilized," said Havel, a playwright and leader of anti-communist dissident movements during the 1980s.

"For long decades spirit has been chased out from our homeland. I have the honor to be a witness to the moment when its soil is being kissed by the apostle of spirituality," he added.

At a meeting later in the evening, the pope told Havel, "Today we stand before the ruins of one of the many towers of Babel in human history."

Efforts to build society, culture and human solidarity "upon denial of the

transcendent dimension creates, as at Babel, division of hearts and confusion of tongues," the pope said.

During the trip, the Polish-born pope harshly criticized communist efforts to restructure society from an atheistic philosophy that considered religion an error of the past.

The pope announced the special synod for Europe after an April 22 Mass in Velehrad, the country's most important religious shrine and pilgrimage site. He did not give a date for the synod, but said it would take place "at a not-too-distant date."

The synod will allow European bishops "to reflect more attentively on the importance of this historic moment for Europe and the church," he said.

During the trip, the pope outlined his views on what should be a reciprocal relationship between Catholics in Eastern and Western Europe.

Western concern for providing material help in rebuilding the institutional and intellectual life of Eastern Catholics should be matched by Western willingness to be "enriched" from the strength forged by the harsh experience of repression, he said.

It is a strength that East European Catholics "now are able to offer the world

and the churches of other countries," he said.

Regarding overall contact with the West, the pope issued a stern warning not to lower moral barriers.

"The dangers which the regaining of contacts with the West can bring must not be underestimated," he said in an April 21 message to the Czechoslovakian bishops.

Christianity "is at the very roots of European culture" and should be a main binding force of European unity, the pope said.

The pope added that as a fellow Slav he has been the international voice of their "church of silence."

This steadfastness plus church defense of human rights makes Catholics trustworthy partners in the rebuilding of Czechoslovakia, he said.

The pope also outlined the current problems facing the church after four decades of "paralyzing passivity" resulting from "imposed atheism."

A main task is forging unity among Catholics who had diverse approaches to their faith, ranging from clandestine activity to collaboration with the government, he said.

According to church figures, 51 percent

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AP/Wide World Photos
SHELLING SURVIVOR —
Father Pierre Saba rescues a portrait of St. Theresa Wednesday, April 11, after the bombing at the St. Roukoz convent in the town of Qleiat, northeast of Beirut.

Catholic educators glimpse alternative

By Ines Pinto Alicea
Catholic News Service

TORONTO — The U.S. Catholic educators at the National Catholic Educational Association's convention took home many fond memories of their four days in Toronto, but they also got a taste of what it would be like to have their schools financed by the government, said Sister Catherine T. McNamee, NCEA president.

In Canada, both public and religious schools have been funded by the Canadian government since the late 1800s thanks to a constitutional provision which allows parents to dedicate their taxes to the school of their choice, said John Fauteux, director of public relations of the Metropolitan Separate School Board in Ontario. The school board oversees 230 schools with 104,000 students throughout Ontario.

"Our educators will go home from here so depressed," Sister McNamee, a Sister of St. Joseph, told Catholic News Service. "They think they've died and gone to heaven when they hear about Ontario's financing system."

Fauteux, in a CNS interview, said the financing system also helps educators' salaries. The average teacher earns about \$40,000 per year. Nearly half of the 23,000 educators that attended the convention were Canadian.

Many U.S. educators questioned whether the government has much control over the schools because of the funding. Fauteux said the government sets standards for all schools, but Catholic schools emphasize "the moral questions."

Fauteux said the only limitation is that Catholic students must attend Catholic

schools or their parents must pay extra to send them to public schools. Non-Catholic parents can send their child to Catholic schools if there is space and if they pay extra money for the enrollment.

Notre Dame Sister Virginia Turner of Our Lady of Lourdes School in Dunedin, Fla., said she liked the idea of government financing for U.S. Catholic schools, but she did not feel that non-Catholic parents should be penalized by paying more to send their children to Catholic schools.

"There must be some other negatives, but I haven't found any," she said.

But, while U.S. Catholic educators scramble to raise funds for their schools, Fauteux said Canadian Catholic educators spend a great deal of time trying to preserve the Catholic identity of schools where lay educators are the majority.

At the convention's closing ceremony, journalist Robert MacNeil said the United States must make education its highest priority to change many of the poor American attitudes that have caused the nation to lose its competitive edge.

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