

Pope asks Poles to restore values

WARSAW, Poland (CNS) — Pope John Paul II spent nine days urging his fellow Poles to restore the moral values weakened or destroyed during nearly half a century of communist rule.

The June 1-9 visit was the pope's fourth return to Poland since he was elected pope in 1978, but the first since the events of 1989-90, when his country led Eastern Europe in overthrowing the communist dictatorships installed after World War II.

The pontiff took the Ten Commandments as the theme of his 13-city trip, declaring that the "moral foundation" for human life "comes from God." He devoted a homily or speech to each commandment over the course of nine days.

He spoke with special passion on the fourth, fifth and sixth commandments, pleading for a return to sound family values and an end to abortion.

He spoke out repeatedly against abortion, urging Poles to reverse the law enacted by the communists in 1956 under which some 600,000 abortions are performed each year in Poland.

A bill that would have banned abortion was tabled indefinitely by the Polish parliament May 17. "What human institution, what parliament has the right to legalize the killing of an innocent and defenseless human being?" the pope asked at a Mass in Radom June 4.

In a country that is 95 percent Catholic, he defended the right of the church to influence Polish society. He said the church

in Poland, which under communism was widely regarded as the chief defender of human rights against a totalitarian state, faces "a new test" in establishing its legitimate role in relationship to the nation's new democratic government.

On numerous occasions during his visit Pope John Paul confronted the resurgence of old ethnic and religious rivalries that has accompanied the new freedom in Poland and neighboring lands. He called for the resolution of old conflicts in a spirit of love and peace.

On June 5 in Lomza, a city near the Lithuanian border in the region where most of Poland's Lithuanians live, he urged Polish-Lithuanian cooperation and prayed that Lithuania would once again "find its rightful place" in the community of nations. The Vatican has never recognized the Soviet Union's annexation of Lithuania in 1940.

In Bialystok June 5 he called for "dialogue in truth, in sincerity and in love" to overcome Catholic-Orthodox tensions that have increased dramatically in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the wake of new religious freedoms. Many of the tensions stem from the revival of long-suppressed religious groups and their efforts to recover churches and other properties taken from them decades ago.

At a meeting with Polish Jews June 9 he urged Christian-Jewish cooperation and reconciliation, saying members of both faiths must rediscover positive elements in

their relationship and overcome past hatreds and misunderstandings.

The pope earlier provoked a new Catholic-Jewish controversy, however, when he linked the death toll from abortion in Poland with the Holocaust, in which millions of Polish and other European Jews were slaughtered in Nazi concentration camps.

After talking about the Holocaust, he said that "the cemetery of the victims of human cruelty in our century is extended to include yet another vast cemetery, that of the unborn."

A Polish youth newspaper and several international Jewish leaders said it undermined the unique meaning of the Holocaust to draw Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jewish race into the debate about abortion.

In his talks about the Ten Commandments, the pope repeatedly emphasized that the new social, economic and political society being built in post-communist Poland must be based on ethical principles.

In a homily on the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" he commented, "If it is recognized that this society is living in a period of profound economic crisis, then the equally important ethical crisis must also be recognized."

Successful economic reform depends on establishing a sound moral order in which "rules of fairness" are followed and people work together to achieve the common good and to care for the poor, he said.

He described the Eighth Commandment, against bearing false witness, as a rule "tied to the truth which each person is responsible for in relations with other people and in social life."



AP/Wide World Photos
Sitting on the shoulders of her father, a young girl amuses herself with a "pope balloon" while awaiting John Paul II's June 7 arrival in Wroclaw, Poland.

He said that the end of censorship in Poland's public life "is a great social good" but does not in itself assure truth. "We are overwhelmed by the freedom we have been denied so long," he said. "That is why we forget that there is no freedom without truth."

State passes anti-abortion bill

BATON ROUGE, La. (CNS) — The Louisiana Senate approved a bill June 4 allowing abortions in limited circumstances of rape, incest or danger to the life of the mother.

The limited-exceptions bill, approved by a 29-9 vote, had been described by the state's Catholic bishops as imperfect. But in a statement before the legislative session opened, the bishops said they would support a bill with some exceptions "in order to save the maximum number of children who would otherwise be aborted."

The House had approved the bill in mid-May along with a separate bill providing for exceptions only to preserve the life of the mother. The second House bill did not reach the Senate floor.

Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer, who has said he would sign an abortion bill that

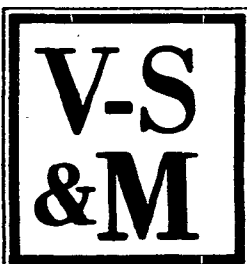
included exceptions, has until June 17 to sign or veto the legislation or to allow it to become law without his signature. Last year Roemer vetoed a strict anti-abortion bill, which allowed for no exceptions.

In the Senate, the Health and Welfare Committee tacked two amendments onto the limited-exceptions bill. One would have prohibited the death penalty, and the other would have required funding of an extensive prenatal-care program.

Both provisions were stripped from the bill on the Senate floor before the final vote.

The bill, as approved, requires victims of rape and incest to report the crime to the police and/or medical authorities and says the abortion must be performed in the first three months of pregnancy.

The Louisiana bishops said an abortion law with limited exceptions would have saved more than 15,000 children from being aborted in 1988, the last year for which statistics were available.



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