

# Pope bolsters Albanian resurrection with visit

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

TIRANA, Albania — Pope John Paul II encouraged Albania's moral and political resurrection after getting an eyewitness view of the death and decay left by 47 years of hard-line communist rule.

"You have risen almost miraculously from an abyss of tyranny and death," he said during a one-day visit to the Balkan nation April 25.

"I have seen the courage of a young democracy decisively striding on the paths of freedom," he said shortly before ending his visit.

During the trip, the pope also renewed his call for peace in the neighboring republics of what was once Yugoslavia and pleaded for religious harmony in the Balkans.

The pope noted that the faith of Albanians survived the "hard struggle against religion" led by a government that outlawed belief in God "in the name of radical atheism."

Respect for this strong faith must be the cornerstone of building a new democracy, he said.

The visit brought the pope to a European nation where priests were murdered for exercising their ministry and churches were turned into basketball courts.

Albania also needs major social and economic repairs after decades of harsh dictatorial rule that isolated it from most of the world, including the Soviet bloc, long before the communist regime collapsed in 1991.

The pope spent 13 hours in a place where burros and bicycles are common transportation.

Round-topped concrete pillboxes for one or two soldiers stick out like mushrooms in the countryside to defend fallow farm fields and small bridges over dried creeks. Boulevards that were once tree-lined are now bordered by stumps — the wood was needed to fuel the country through several winters.

The pope accelerated Catholicism's rebirth by ordaining four bishops in the northern city of Shkoder during a midday Mass in which he praised the victory of belief over beatings.

"Your experience of death and resurrection belongs to the entire church and the entire world," he said.

The pope commemorated "all those martyred bishops and priests" under communism. He noted that one of the

new bishops, 75-year-old Archbishop Franco Illia of Shkoder, was condemned to death 25 years ago on the same date, and that the sentence was later reduced to 20 years of forced labor.

The other bishops ordained were:

- Auxiliary Bishop Zef Simoni of Shkoder, 64, who spent 12 years in prison.

- Bishop Robert Ashta of Pulati, 74, who was forced to give up his active ministry and labor for 11 years as a construction worker.

- Archbishop Rrok Mirdita of Dures-Tirana, 53, an ethnic Albanian born in neighboring Montenegro, who worked for 20 years with Albanians in the United States.

Catholics form 11 percent of the 3.3 million population in a country where 65 percent of the population is Muslim and 18 percent is Orthodox. All three religions suffered equally under communism.

The pope pleaded for religious freedom as the cornerstone for respecting all human rights and said the church is committed to developing harmonious interreligious relations.

Muslim and Orthodox religious leaders attended the Mass.

Religious freedom is "a bulwark against totalitarianism and a decisive contribution to human fraternity," the pope said in an afternoon talk in the capital of Tirana.

"True religious freedom shuns the temptation of intolerance and sectarianism and promotes attitudes of respect and constructive dialogue," he added.

Albanian interreligious relations are marked by "mutual esteem and cordial cooperation" and are an example for the "entire tormented Balkan region," he said.

The pope criticized an "intolerant and aggressive nationalism" as a principle cause for the fighting in the former Yugoslavian republics.

The papal peace call came after Albanian President Sali Berisha asked nations to provide arms to the anti-Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and expressed worry that Serb "ethnic cleansing" policies would soon be applied to Albanians living in Serbia's Kosovo region.

The European Community has begun implementing new and tougher sanctions against the Serbs following the rejection by the self-proclaimed Serb parliament in Bosnia of a European peace plan for Bosnia.



File photo  
Mary Ann Franchi of Rochester spoke with Cesar Chavez at a reception following his address at Rochester's Corpus Christi Parish in 1988. Chavez, 66, died in his sleep April 23, while on an organizing trip to San Luis, Ariz., for the United Farm Workers of America, the union he founded.

# Cesar Chavez remembered as champion for migrants

By Mark Pattison  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Catholic leaders and labor activists said Cesar Chavez was a man whose deep faith and fighting spirit not only inspired a new generation of activists in church and society, but raised the consciousness of a new generation of Catholics.

"His speeches and writings frequently referred to Gospel values as he quoted the church's documents on human rights and justice. Cesar Chavez truly understood his Christian vocation to build up the kingdom of God in this world," said Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles in an April 23 statement.

Chavez, 66, died in his sleep April 23, apparently from natural causes, while on an organizing trip to San Luis, Ariz., for the United Farm Workers of America, the union he founded.

Baldemar Valesquez, leader of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in Toledo, Ohio, cited Chavez as an inspiration.

"I heard of Cesar early and met him in our struggle here in Ohio going back to the winter of '68," Valesquez said. "From then, it was the culmination of a relationship of being in the trenches together."

While Chavez's union successfully boycotted California grapes in the 1960s, Valesquez's union successfully boycotted Campbell Soup and Vlasic Pickles products. The seven-year boycott ended with a three-way contract in 1986 between the union, the growers and Campbell, which owns Vlasic.

"The most important legacy he

leaves is the legacy of self-help, not leaving it to advocates, do-gooders and others to struggle for us," Valesquez said.

"He made conscious the public sympathy for farmworkers through concrete, direct, and nonviolent intervention. Cesar awakened the public consciousness to this issue."

Tirso Moreno, coordinator of the Farmworker Association of Central Florida, said Chavez was "the motivator of a lot of us who are now in the struggle looking for the rights of farmworkers."

Chavez lent support to the association's efforts to organize fruit pickers at groves where oranges were grown for Minute Maid. Moreno himself was a fruit picker for 13 years before becoming involved in union leadership.

Moreno said that the UFW in recent years has experienced more struggle than victory.

"It's been very hard years for the United Farm Workers of America. They lost a lot of ground in California," Moreno said.

Jesuit Father Joseph Hacala, director of the Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' domestic anti-poverty program, called Chavez, "a great champion" for the many thousands of people who toil in fields.

### Next week

Please look for in-depth coverage of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on page one in next week's Catholic Courier.

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