

Kateri's sainthood cause welcomed

By Benedicta Cipolla

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In conjunction with World Youth Day 2002, Canadian bishops are hoping for the canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

"She would be a model of inspiration, of encouragement for young people," said the president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Gerald Wiesner of Prince George, B.C., in a Nov. 3 interview with Catholic News Service.

"She was a very young person who's a symbol of living faith," he said of Blessed Kateri, the first Native American to be beatified.

The July 18 - 28, 2002, World Youth Day celebrations will be centred in Toronto.

In a meeting with Pope John Paul II during the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' officers' annual visit to the Vatican Oct. 26 - Nov. 3, Wiesner said he brought up Blessed Kateri's sainthood cause.

"The Holy Father was quite enthusiastic," he said, "and he told us to 'take that'" to the Congregation for Sainthood Causes.

Discussions with congregation officials were "encouraging and

"needs a miracle."

Beatified in 1980, Blessed Kateri was born to a Christian Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father in 1656 in what is now the state of New York and fled to Canada at the age of 20 for fear of retribution from neighbours

— WIESNER, page 6



Wiesner expresses hope

Continued from page 1

hostile to her faith.

In what is now Caughnawaga, Que., she devoted herself to serving needy Native Americans. Blessed Kateri died in 1680.

In recent years, the Canadian church has worked on developing ways to evangelize more Native Americans as well as to make Native American Catholics feel more at home. The bishops said they are in contact with the Great Falls, Mont.-based Tekakwitha Conference to see how Canada can produce catechetical materials aimed at Native Americans.

"Initiatives have been made and are being made on the local level," said Wiesner.

For example, he said the dioceses of MacKenzie-Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, and Prince George had developed materials that are "more pertinent to the Aboriginal people."

But incorporating Native American culture into the life of the church is a relatively new phenomenon, said Wiesner.

Previous ideas regarding Native Americans tended toward "total integration," he said — a policy that has been criticized in recent times.

Such policies are also at the centre of lawsuits currently pending against government-estab-

lished schools run by the Catholic Church and other Christian churches. Thousands of Native Americans claim they were abused at the schools, which were founded at the turn of the century and phased out in the 1970s and 1980s, and bankruptcy scares have flared up in churches across Canada as they face mounting legal fees.

Aboriginal leaders have said the churches that ran the schools helped the government carry out its policy of "cultural genocide" against Natives by setting up schools designed to assimilate Natives into white society.

Msgr. Peter Schonenbach, CCCB general secretary, emphasized that "it was government policy that dictated what happened to the Aboriginals. The churches helped out in the sense of running the schools.

"The churches are ready to face up to any allegations of impropriety, but we certainly do not believe that we should shoulder the blame for the schools themselves," he said.

Wiesner expressed hope for a resolution, saying church groups and the federal government were working together.

"We have fair evidence that the government does not want church institutions to have to go bankrupt," he said.

Kateri Tekakwitha

The Canadian bishops are hoping that the pope will canonize Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha when he comes to Toronto for the 2002 World Youth Day (see page 1).

Canonization is about much more than simply declaring that someone is in heaven. If we have to worry about the eternal state of basically good people, we are indeed, as Paul told the Corinthians, "the most to be pitied of all people" (1 Cor 15:19).

But we know that "in fact Jesus has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep . . . resurrection of the dead has come through him . . . all people will be brought to life through Christ" (15:20-22).

Canonization is the official church naming heroes of faith. It would be, in this instance, an assurance to us that to celebrate Kateri's way of life would be a great blessing for everyone, Native and non-native alike.

For the Aboriginal Peoples it would be a wonderful affirmation of their culture. In face of the fact that so many whites in the church co-operated with the federal government in its residential school policy of "cultural genocide," there would be present here a powerful counterbalance affirming the unique cultural contribution Aboriginals have to offer to the celebration of the whole human family.

For the non-native peoples in the Canadian church, the recognition of her sanctity would be an effective stimulus to celebrate the good in Native cultures. Without such a celebration there will never be a healing of the deep (and sinful) cultural chasm that has been created between the Old and New World peoples.

When the pope returned to Canada three years after his 12-day visit here in 1984, he stressed the need, while in Fort Simpson, for incorporating

Native American culture into the life of the church. He noted that if the eucharist is celebrated rightly in their midst all will see that "Jesus Christ is himself Aboriginal." Yes, the canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha would be a great blessing for the church in Canada. — AMB

Religious freedom

According to a study done by Freedom House, 75 per cent of the world's population do not know what it means to celebrate their faith in freedom. Thirty-six per cent live in countries in which religious freedom is "fundamentally violated," while 36 per cent practise their faith under varying restraints (see page 1).

We hear about countries like China, Tibet, the former Burma and Cuba. Others, we hear precious little about, such as Sudan and Saudi Arabia. Canadian oil interests are in an incestuous relationship with the Sudanese government. The whole western world is beholden to the oil fields with which God, with wisdom divine, has so richly graced Saudi Arabia.

We hear much about the lack of freedom in Iraq but nothing about Saudi Arabia. Yet Christians know more freedom in Iraq than in any other Islamic country. It is the UN embargo on Iraq that is harming Christians there, not the lack of religious freedom.

The Vatican has expressly asked Saudi Arabia for reciprocal guarantees. According to the Vatican, as the western world provides its Islamic immigrants with religious freedom, so should Islamic countries provide for their immigrants (see page 5).

The Vatican has asked for a small sign of goodwill. Open one church in the country — or at least a chapel in one of its international hotels. This is not about to happen so long as western governments and corporate businesses put oil and money before religious freedom. — AMB

The Assumption of Mary

Fifty years ago Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary into heaven a dogma. This is the only exercise of papal infallibility since it was defined at the First Vatican Council.

Any expression of papal infallibility will, by its very nature, be an ecumenical problem — and Mary's Assumption surely is. But looking at some of the issues surrounding this particular expression of it should do much to lessen the inherent difficulties.

It might surprise most readers that the great Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung once noted that the declaration of Mary's Assumption was one of the most important statements ever made by a Christian church. Pope John Paul II was thinking along similar lines during his homily Aug. 15, 1988, marking the end of the Marian Year. He noted that the Assumption of Mary "reminds us of the glorious end toward which all history is directed."

In saying the whole rosary one meditates on the mystery of Christ ending with the last two decades on the Assumption and Coronation of Mary in heaven. Obviously these last two mysteries are only pre-eminently about Mary; they are in fact about all of us.

We celebrate the life of Christ as our story "reminding us of the glorious end" to which all of us are called — called by the very word of God which effects what it says.

It is important to remember that before Pius proclaimed Mary in heaven he consulted all the bishops of the world. He did not ask them what they believed; he asked them to discern what **their people** believed.

On hearing that the people almost universally believed in the mystery of the Assumption, Pius proclaimed the faith of the church — not so much to bring new assurance to faith but to deepen the church's celebration of God's sheer grace to us all. — AMB

Caring for whole of creation important part of Christians' faith

The following unsigned editorial first appeared in the Anchor, the Catholic newspaper of the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., Oct. 6, 2000.

It is obvious that many people they have to grapple with ethics.

acknowledgment of our tradition.

Editorial on Kateri Tekakwitha lacked 'critical reflectiveness'

The Editor: The editorial on Kateri Tekakwitha (PM, Nov. 8) is a disappointment to this reader who has come to appreciate the critical reflectiveness so often provided by the *Prairie Messenger*.

I am not a Native person so I cannot say one way or the other if such a gesture by the pope would be seen "as an affirmation of their culture." Could it also not be interpreted in the paternalistic culture from which it comes that an Indian girl has finally made it in a white people's church?

The hundreds of years of missionary work among the Native peoples has been a dismal failure if we judge by some of the more obvious measures of how the church has taken root in any culture. Is there a thriving Native clergy? Are there vocations to religious life coming from the Aboriginal peoples? Has the faith of the conquerors taken hold within the clan and family structures of the First Nation Peoples?

There are isolated and relatively few positive indications that the European Christian church has taken root in the heart of the

Native peoples. Yes, there is Father Laboucane in Alberta (a descendent of Gabriel Dumont) and Eva Solomon, CSJ, (daughter of Art, a good and holy elder) in Ontario. Good role models perhaps for Native youth; but in the big picture these are but shooting stars in a very dark sky.

Would a canonization be a recognition of the sanctity of Kateri Tekakwitha? Perhaps that process should best be left to the Native peoples to decide for themselves. Only they can determine if it be their interest whether or not to decide if Kateri Tekakwitha is a role model they wish to emulate.

The canonization process is a quasi-political European process that does not speak to the culture of the Native people. Perhaps it is a process that no longer speaks even to the universal church. When dealing with mythical figures like Christopher and Philomena it was a somewhat benign designation that could serve to encourage and motivate.

Today, especially with the frantic pace set by a pontiff beyond his papal expectancy, the

process is a scandal and an embarrassment. Catholics are not the only ones playing this game; the Russian Orthodox Church has recently canonized Tsar Nicolas and his pathetic family. The Roman Church has raised to sainthood such dubious figures as Rev. José Escrivá (the founder of the *Opus Dei* cult) and Pope Pius IX (a kidnapper of a Jewish boy).

Perhaps few Catholics are aware of the games and intrigue involved when the official postulators move to promote the "cause" of specially designated candidates. It is mostly about power and prestige with a bit about economics — a good cause can result in generous contributions and a healthy cash flow in medallions and scapulars.

If Kateri is chosen by the Native peoples, who still identify with the church, as their "saint," let it be them who make that designation somehow according to their traditions. To have her "canonized" can only serve to weaken her cause and to damage the value of her testimony as a woman of faith. — **Phil Little, Toronto Catholic District School Board**