

'Unity in hope': the pope in Germany

by Elisabeth Hellenbroich

Pope John Paul II's third official and state visit to Germany on June 21-23, under the motto "Unity in Hope," belongs to one of the most historically significant events since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, and places a milestone on the path toward overcoming the divisions in Christianity. With his address at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and his urgent appeal to Germans to stand up for the freedom and development of all peoples, he embodied the "spirit of 1989" anew.

The underlying theme of all of his speeches was a call to people to put up active resistance in "stormy" times like our own, in which more and more people are threatened by job loss, and society is marred by cultural pessimism and social Darwinism.

"The Second World War began on Sept. 1, 1939. Almost all Europe was in flames," said the pontiff to some 100,000 people in Paderborn. The church was also in great danger. "I belong to the generation that remembers that. 'Save us Lord, we are lost!' The prayers in the churches: 'Holy God, holy and mighty God, holy eternal God, have mercy on us! Protect us from thirst, hunger, storms, and war, O Lord!'

"We also remember the men and women who saved the dignity of persons and nations in that time of scorn"—people such as Bernhard Lichtenberg, Karl Leisner, Edith Stein, and Rupert Mayer. Resistance today, said the pope, means above all, in these stormy times, when the majority have capitulated opportunistically to the spirit of the times, not to be characterized by pettiness, anxiety, and resignation, but to actively intervene in the social and political events of one's country. This is a clear reference to the situation in Germany, where fanatical free-market economists have polarized society through austerity measures.

A socially just economic policy is incompatible with the ideology of "radical capitalism," the pope stressed. Looking back on the events of 1989, which "radically changed" the world, he said that the chances for a new perspective on life, which were opened up for countless people at that time, were squandered. Therefore, society must decide to actively advance the development of nations, notably eastern Europe and the Third World.

The pope said: "But this growing together of North and South, East and West must be achieved in a humanly dignified

way. We must not bring into being a world which again can be imprinted with a 'radical capitalist ideology.' The world is hoping for collaboration among nations and states, which respects all human beings' right to life and furthers their development."

According to the Catholic Church's social doctrine, which derives the right to development of individuals and of nations from divinely given natural law, the pope said that the work of reciprocal economic development must be carried out in the spirit of "solidarity and justice."

Ecumenism

For the first time since the tragic split in the church in Germany in the 16th century, a pope celebrated an ecumenical religious service with leading Lutheran representatives and a spokesman of the Greek Orthodox Church. He cited among the most important evangelizers of Europe, St. Patrick, St. Boniface, St. Kilian, St. Willibrod, St. Emmeran, and the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius. In the 20th century, it was Evangelical, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians who courageously and unwaveringly bore witness to the truth of the Gospel against totalitarian dictatorships: Edith Stein, Alfred Delp, Bernhard Lichtenberg, Karl Leisner, and Bernhard Letterhaus, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Count Helmut Moltke.

The pontiff expressed his wish that he could complete the unity of all Christians, which must be founded on the joint responsibility for reevangelization in the third millennium. He referred to the significance of Martin Luther and the consequences of the division of the church, indicating that Luther's thinking was formed by a strong emphasis on the individual and that his call for a reform of the church was originally born out of a desire to repent. The split occurred because of the failure of the Catholic Church, acknowledged by Pope Hadrian VI, but also because of Luther's passions, which led him to a radical criticism of the church.

On Sunday, June 23, at the Berlin Olympic Stadium, the pope beatified two Catholic priests who were resistance fighters against the Nazi regime: Bernhard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner. During the trial that led to his death, Lichtenberg told his Nazi judges, "False principles lead to false actions." His list of false principles included many which echo the debates going on in Germany today: the eradication of religious education in the public schools, the Nazis' opposition to the cross, the secularization of marriage, the lack of respect for human life, the practice of euthanasia, and the persecution of the Jews. John Paul II concluded his visit to Berlin with a symbolic march through the Brandenburg Gate, which once stood for the totalitarian rule of Nazis and Communists, and in 1989 became a symbol of freedom. Addressing Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the assembled bishops, politicians, and others, the pope called upon them to keep the famous gate open "through the spirit of love, the spirit of justice, and the spirit of peace! Keep this gate open by the opening of your hearts! There is no freedom, without love."