

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The Encyclical vs. the 'New Age'

The publication of "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" intersects an internal debate raging among German Catholics.

The new papal encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (see page 20) was published a few days before the 1988 spring session of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference.

After the death of the longtime chairman of the Bishops' Conference, Josef Cardinal Höffner of the Cologne diocese, a few months ago, Archbishop Karl Lehmann of the Mainz diocese took over. Many Catholics feared the change from a conservative to a more moderate leader would give way to modernists and liberation theology followers, who want to decouple from Rome.

The conservatives in the Church want a closer alliance with Rome and especially Pope John Paul II's policy. Many would, therefore, have preferred the conservative bishop of the Fulda diocese, Johannes Dyba, at the top of the Catholic Church of Germany.

The dispute has not been settled with the election of Archbishop Lehmann to the top, and the mark of Pope John Paul II's May 1987 tour of Germany is still felt in the Catholic community. Beatifying two Catholic fighters and martyrs against the rise of the Nazis in Germany, Edith Stein and Rupert Mayer, the pontiff called today's Christians to arms against the forces of evil. "Satan is a reality also today," was the warning message Pope John Paul II delivered.

The spirit of this message was taken up directly by Bishop Dyba in a circular for the 1988 pre-Easter season. Moral standards, Dyba wrote on Feb. 21, have degenerated in society as a whole, creating strong pressure

on Catholics to accommodate to the general decline of morality. "As Christian believers, however," remarked Dyba, "we must recognize that from a pluralistic society, a foundation of moral values cannot be expected; by definition, [pluralistic society] is incapable of providing that."

By losing the Christian notion of sin, repentance, and care, remarked Dyba, man loses his sense of ultimate responsibility before God and becomes rootless in a society which is turning ever more brutal. "This is shown in the decline of intellectual and spiritual values into an extremely materialistic, egotistical, and hedonistic way of thought, seeking money, power, lust, and consumption."

"Only that which can be measured in financial categories, seems to be valid," stated Dyba. "A further sign of this decline is man's enslavement to ever sleazier modes of entertainment."

Dyba's critique was echoed by the sermon Archbishop Karl Lehmann gave at the Cathedral of Limburg Feb. 22 to open the spring session of the Bishops' Conference. He called on Christians to show more resistance to the bad influences of society, to revive the "spirit of the Christians of the early centuries." What is required is not "withdrawal from the world, leaving it alone with all its problems," but rather "the commitment to fight and risk wounds."

The Church, Lehmann said, must set an example for the surrounding "heathenist" world much as the early Christians did, and be the "salt of the earth." Christians must, he added, not

consider themselves "a mere relic from a world long foregone, but the advance army of God in the world." Active Christianity, the commitment to combat the decline of surrounding society, is what is most needed in our time, said Archbishop Lehmann.

Active Christianity, however, also must take on the modernists inside the Church, those who ally with post-Christian "New Age" movements. Young Catholics have been influenced heavily by pseudo-religious "New Age" ideas over the past 20 years. Modernists and liberals inside the Church hierarchy tend to attack the Vatican and the institution of the papacy, turning a broad section of the German Catholics into dissidents, if not deserters. Should this trend continue, the Holy See may face a future where it can no longer count on its "troops" in Germany, on the front line with the anti-Christian Warsaw Pact.

When the new encyclical was made public in Germany, the liberal factions got very nervous. Basilius Streithofen, leading spokesman of the Dominican order in Germany and an old adversary of Pope John Paul II, commenting on the new encyclical in a nationally televised interview Feb. 19, attacked the papal document as "plain wrong." He accused the pontiff of selling out to the seemingly pro-communist views of the developing sector, and defended liberal capitalism as "the main funder of the Church." Streithofen cynically demanded that, if the pontiff wanted to open up the riches of the industrialized world to the Third World, he should "begin with the riches in the Vatican museums, first," rather than posing demands on liberal capitalism.

Streithofen's remarks proved how far evil has succeeded in penetrating the Church. More than incense may be required, to smoke out this problem.