

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Pope names new German cardinal

A sea-change is under way in the German Church—Catholic as well as Lutheran—against the IMF and satanism.

On May 29, the pontifical office announced that the list of newly appointed cardinals included Franz Hengsbach, the bishop of the Essen diocese. Pope John Paul II's decision is a gesture of immense political weight in the framework of Vatican relations with the German Catholics.

Hengsbach was the official host during the Pontiff's May 1987 tour of Germany's industrial region of the Ruhr, during which the Pope emphasized his conception of the "value of labor for man." Since the "labor diocese" of Essen was founded in 1957, Bishop Hengsbach has been the head of it, and his work with the parish included, from the beginning, a strong commitment to the Third World.

In 1961, he launched the first collection of money for special Church projects in Ibero-America, laying the basis for the Adveniat program of the German Bishops Conference, which to this date, has collected over 2 billion deutschemarks for aid projects and schools in the Third World.

Hengsbach later became head of the international affairs department of the German Catholic Church. He was the one to present, on May 16, the new official document of the Catholic Bishops on Third World debt, which contains a harsh verdict on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) austerity policies.

Hengsbach's commitment to Third World development is one of the prime reasons that the Pontiff has made him cardinal. Being in Rome more often now, Hengsbach will help to shape the Vatican's activities in the developing sector. He will oversee the mobilization of the Catholics in Germany on

the debt issue, and also coordinate with the Lutherans, who are getting active on the same issue.

The May 16 attacks of the German Catholics and Lutherans on the IMF and the debt servicing system caused embarrassment among those financial interests who fear the political pressure built by this mobilization of the churches. Deutsche Bank, for example, had a spokesman declare, on May 17, its view that "the churches had better worry about religious affairs, and leave the finances to us who know the job."

On May 25, a representative of the German Banking Association restated the creditors' view that the Third World "debt shall be paid, not written off," charging the churches with "unauthorized interference" in financial affairs. "The old principle of giving the emperor what is his, and leaving to God what is his, should be respected by the churches," he said.

Meanwhile, several hundred events at churches all over Germany are debating the debt issue every weekend, to the point that a Christian mass movement against the IMF is developing. This is what makes the bankers nervous.

The two churches also launched a public debate on the "New Age" cult movement. Among the Catholics, the mobilization is led by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In their May 21-22 Pentecost weekend sermons, the Catholic bishops in Germany took on the New Age movement directly. Chairman of the Bishops Conference Karl Lehmann (Mainz), for example, spoke of "moth-

eaten old rags from human history which they call new religion."

Bishop Oskar Saier (Freiburg) listed the "New Age" current among the three great threats to mankind: "the reeducation programs of materialistic communism, reckless liberalism, and the new hits of New Age and spiritism." All three aim at "making God expendable, by replacing him with so-called new gods," and in this sense, they are the same "heathen enemies Christ had to fight against in his lifetime," said Saier. His words reflected the Pontiff's May 1987 address in Munich, which warned of the "reality of Satan in this world," who is "confusing and misleading Christians in the disguise of many modernist and secular shapes." Pope John Paul II called on the Church to "revive its mission to the world."

There is an effort among the Catholics now, to define a new "Church culture" that can make the millions of Church members immune to cults and communist subversion. This also includes an effort to define a sound Christian ethic for the world of business and finance, as well as for the labor movement, which has, over the past 20 years, dropped its traditional Christian impulse, turning more socialist and pro-Soviet in recent years.

What is very remarkable is the fact that the more secularized Lutheran Church in Germany is also getting remobilized on the issue of fighting Evil as a fundamental threat to human civilization as such. A recent congress at the prestigious Lutheran Tutzing Academy featured a polarized debate on satanism and "New Age." Rev. Bernhard Wolf said, "There is no doubt that Satan has returned to this world." He called for the church to fight the revival of satanism in rock music and witchcraft cults, especially among the youth.