

Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

Pope, in Austria, pleads for life

Despite manipulated protests over the "Waldheim issue," John Paul II raised a vibrant appeal to stop Nazi euthanasia today.

Yes to the faith, yes to Life"—with this motto the Pope greeted the Austrian people during the welcoming ceremony upon his arrival at Schwechat Airport on June 23. It was John Paul II's second pilgrimage to Austria, a difficult visit since the echos had not yet died away of the objections by groups of protesters in the Austrian Church against the Pope's recent nominations of bishops, nor the protests of some members of the international Jewish community against Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, and against the Pope for having received him at the Vatican last year.

These are manipulated protests, amplified by the mass media, as was rightly underlined by the Archbishop of Vienna, Msgr. hermann Groer, in an interview with the Milan daily *Avvenire* referring to the unproven charges that Waldheim had committed war crimes under the Nazis: "The President," said the future cardinal-designate, "was democratically elected by the people, he is recognized as such also by the Catholics. He deserves loyalty and respect. Waldheim, moreover, is a professed Catholic, and the Catholics are able to appreciate this testimony of his faith."

Groer added, responding to personal criticisms of himself, "There are some masons who cannot tolerate me. . . . But now, things have changed even in this area, and there is no longer negative reportage as [there was] two years ago. It should be clear that I have personal contacts with some masons, but dialogue with the masonry is difficult insofar as they deny the

role of God in history, which is the foundation of Christianity."

John Paul II did not avoid confronting the tragic subject of the persecutions and the Holocaust. Meeting with representatives of the Jewish community at the office of the Papal Nuncio, he said, "There still weighs on you, and also upon us, the memory of the *Shoah*, the extermination of millions of Jews in the concentration camps. It would be unjust and not truthful to blame Christianity for these unspeakable crimes. Rather, unveiled here is the dark image of a world without God, or even against God, whose determination to exterminate was directed more openly against the Jews, but also against the faith of those who honored in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world."

The Pope announced the creation of a new entity for Jewish-Christian dialogue which will be instituted in Poland: "The Center for Information, Education, Encounter, and Prayer," he said, "is designed to carry out researches into the *Shoah*, as well as into the martyrdom of the Polish people and other European peoples during the period of National Socialism." The Pope reminded the Jewish community, "Peace implies . . . disposition to forgiveness and mercy, which are the most important attributes of our God, the God of union."

Later he added: "The cause of peace is in all of our hearts, above all in the Holy Land, in Israel, in Lebanon, and in the Middle East. . . . The Jewish people has the right to a homeland, like every other nation, accord-

ing to international law. The same, however, goes for the Palestinian people, in the midst of which there are so many refugees without a country."

During his visit to the former concentration camp of Maythausen, John Paul II repeated his denunciation of evil in the world. "Whatever can our century pass on to our posterity if there persists, even today in some part of the world, the system of concentration camps?"

The following day the Pontiff went to Eisenstadt, a small town only a few kilometers away from Hungary where, for the first time since the Soviet occupation of Hungary, more than 100,000 Hungarian Catholics were able to cross the border and attend the mass officiated by the Pope, together with another 20,000 Croats who came from nearby Yugoslavia. The destiny of mankind was the topic broached by John Paul II during the course of his homily.

The Pontiff asked whether it is not man who has distanced himself from God: "When we consider the terrible events which, because of men, have befallen the world, and in the face of the multiple threats of our time."

He continued, "Do you not believe that, in the experiments conducted on man, experiments which contradict his dignity, in the mental attitude of many toward abortion and euthanasia, there is expressed a disturbing loss of respect for life? Is it perhaps not evident, even in your society when you look at the lives of many—characterized by internal emptiness, fear, and flight—that man has cut himself off from his own roots? Sex, alcohol, and drugs—should not they be understood as alarm signals?"

The Pope said, "History teaches us that men and peoples who believe they can exist without God are inevitably destined to the catastrophe of self-destruction."