

World & Nation

Pope decries 'superficial and petrified' faith of Austrians

Vienna, Austria (NC) — Pope John Paul II criticized Austrian Catholics for their "superficial" faith and urged a return to belief in God during his June 23-27 visit to Austria.

The pope pleaded for a united Christian Europe and criticized the "lunatic ideology" behind Nazi concentration camps. His visit also sparked criticisms from Jewish leaders, who differed with him on the meaning of the Nazi holocaust.

The pope left Austria after a farewell ceremony at Innsbruck in which Austria's President Kurt Waldheim, himself under fire for his role in the World War II German army, called the Nazi era a "shameful period of our century."

At a Mass held earlier in the day at Innsbruck's ski-jump stadium, the pope spoke of a "feeling of senselessness" among many and chronic fears fed by continuing political and environmental crises.

At a meeting with Austrian bishops June 24 in Salzburg, Pope John Paul called Austrian Catholicism a "superficial and petrified" faith that needs a "vast re-evangelization."

"The faith has lost its force in concrete everyday life," Pope John Paul said. About 85 percent of Austria's 7.6 million population professes Catholicism, but only 30 percent fulfill the weekly Mass obligation.

"The dimensions of secularization, caused by well-being and religious indifference, have grown among you in the life of the individual, the family and especially in public life," the pope said.

"The bishops must engage in a vast re-evangelization which begins with the individual, the family and the community," he said.

Two days later, he told scientists and artists that mankind must return to a belief in God to overcome "the ambivalence of progress" and the mistaken search for scientific means of escaping death.

He also criticized "the killing of so many unborn" and "the problems resulting from genetic engineering."

On June 24, the pope traveled to Trausdorf, near the Hungarian border, to ask Austrians to continue being a link with Catholics in the Soviet bloc. The pope laid the blame for bitter problems of the 20th century on what he said was an increasing rejection of God.

About 60,000 Hungarians were permitted by their government to cross the border into Austria to attend the papal Mass. Also attending were about 15,000 people from neighboring Yugoslavia.

Pope John Paul also met with leaders of Austria's tiny Jewish community in an atmosphere described by both sides as friendly and cordial.

At the June 24 meeting in Vienna, he heard Paul Grosz, head of the Jewish community in Austria, ask Austrians and Catholics to re-examine their pasts regarding responsibility for the Holocaust.

"It would be unjust and untruthful to put the blame on Christianity for these unspeakable crimes," Pope John Paul replied, noting that Christians also died under Nazi perse-

cutation. Grosz criticized the pope for meeting Waldheim at the Vatican last year and for not diplomatically recognizing Israel.

Waldheim has been accused of war crimes by international Jewish agencies and by the state of Israel. He has denied the accusations. A study sponsored by the Austrian government found that he was not guilty of war crimes during World War II, but that he knew of them and did nothing to stop them while an officer in the German army.

Although Austrian Jewish organizations have not accused Waldheim of war crimes, the controversy over his record has resulted in an upswing in anti-Semitic activity in Austria, Grosz said.

He criticized the pope for not speaking out against Austrian anti-Semitism during the 1987 meeting, and asked the pope to recognize Israel as an aid to peace in the Middle East and as "a clear rejection of Palestinian terrorism."

Regarding Israel, the pope said the Church opposes all violence. He added that he supports security for Israel but that Palestinians also deserve a homeland.

The Vatican recognizes "the same dignity" for Jews and Palestinians, the pope said. He did not mention Waldheim and reiterated Church opposition to anti-Semitism.

Later in the day, Chief Rabbi Paul Chaim Eisenberg of Vienna criticized a papal speech at Mauthausen, Nazi Germany's principal concentration camp in Austria, because the pope did not mention that Jews died there.

"The only Jew he did mention was Jesus Christ, and he didn't suffer at Mauthausen," the rabbi said. "Not one word was mentioned of Jews, of the role of Austrians, of anti-Semitism."

Although the pope's speech did not mention Jews, he did speak of them when pausing before a plaque dedicated to the Jewish victims of Mauthausen.

During his speech at the camp, Pope John Paul criticized the "lunatic ideology" behind the concentration camps. He also criticized what he called attempts to "delete from our memories and from our consciences the traces of past misdeeds."

The largest single group of people to die at Mauthausen was more than 32,000 Soviet prisoners of war. About 14,000 of the 122,000 people who died at the camps were Jews. Spaniards, Czechoslovakians, French, Yugoslavians, Dutch, Americans, Gypsies and homosexuals also were killed at the camp.

During his speech bidding farewell to the pope, Waldheim referred to the pontiff's visit to the camp. "The somber walls of the concentration camp at Mauthausen ... forcefully remind us of the martyrs of our own time," he said.

"These relics of a shameful period of our century, however, are not only a memorial, but rather a lasting warning for us to oppose any hatred or any intolerance and to make the commandment of charity the guideline of all our actions also in political life," the Austrian president said.

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