

Northern Flank by Lotta-Stina Thronell

John Paul II's historic visit

The first papal trip to Lutheran-dominated Scandinavia draws upon Nicolaus of Cusa's ecumenical ideas.

For the first time in history, a Pope has come to visit Europe's Nordic countries. On June 1, John Paul II arrived in Norway; then the pastoral trip went to Iceland, Finland, Denmark, and lastly to Sweden, from which he departed on June 10.

The papal visit, of course, stirred up a lot of controversy as well as enthusiasm in these countries, which have been anti-papist since Martin Luther's Reformation, and which since World War II have been heavily de-Christianized by the socialist movement. The visit therefore must be considered an important breakthrough in the relations between the Catholic and Protestant churches.

The Protestant church in Denmark gave by far the harshest response to the Pope, who was not allowed to give a sermon in the Roskilde Cathedral. Instead, John Paul II was invited to "listen." In all the other Nordic countries, the head of the Vatican was asked to preach. In Norway eight Protestant bishops boycotted the Pope's appearance in the old Nidaraas Cathedral in Trondheim. In Finland the Protestants declared that they never had had any problems with religious quarrels on the continent, and in Sweden Archbishop Bertil Werkström and the Pope discussed the ecumenical principles outlined in Nicolaus of Cusa's book *De Pace Fidei*. Cusa is the great Renaissance cardinal whose ideas have been especially emphasized recently by Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche, wife of the American political prisoner Lyndon LaRouche.

"Godlessness is a far more serious

problem than splits in religious life, and we therefore have a fruitful basis for practical ecumenism," the Pope stated, and emphasized how important it is "to be able to freely speak, think, and confess one's religion," a freedom which is embedded in "the cultural treasures of Europe." The Pope also stressed that "the wish to hear the Gospel text in a new way and to witness about it in a trustworthy way, a wish which also was vivid in Luther, ought to seek the good within others, in order to forgive and to give up obsolete enemy images."

In Finland, John Paul cautiously criticized the situation in Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, without naming the countries, but by referring to how intolerable it is that people can be repressed for their religion, and that a church can be robbed of its bishops, as was recently the case in Czechoslovakia. The visit to Tromsø, northern Norway, an important enclave to protect civilization from a Russian military threat, was spectacular. The official reason for the choice of location was that the Pope wanted to show that "no parish is too small for a papal visit," but the political importance should by no means be underestimated. Around 3,000 people, nearly 10% of all inhabitants, attended the outdoor sermon.

The conservative Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet* ended a warm editorial on the Pope's trip by stating: "There is too much of medieval barbarism, with and without religious prefixes in the world of today. The Pope belongs to the counter-forces." The Swedish social democratic eve-

ning paper *Aftonbladet* on the other hand filled its pages with blistering attacks on the Pope. The papal visit seemed like "an American election campaign," and one should note that the Pope is "head of the world's smallest nation which has started more wars than any other nation."

Of course the peace movement and the environmentalists tried to use the papal visit to their benefit. Press coverage of the meeting between the Pope and the Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson and the widow of the late prime minister Olof Palme stressed "peace" and *glasnost*, but these words were mostly voiced by others than the Pope—the Socialist hosts, or, in other cases, by the Protestant State Church which is riddled with Greenies and pacifists.

In fact, the Pope's campaign against divorce, against sexual selfishness and condoms, against abortion, for the family, and for the inalienable rights of man hit a sore spot with the Greens. Anyone who attacks abortions in Sweden is immediately under fire. The liberal daily *Dagens Nyheter* editorialized, "An absurd view on sexuality," and the liberal evening paper *Expressen* posed "Seven Questions to the Pope," all attacking what the newspaper called the Pope's "sexual moral prohibitions," but the Pope stuck to his firm beliefs.

The Pope was confronted with another important task when the Schiller Institute greeted him with a big banner reading "Welcome, John Paul II—Help Us To Free LaRouche." The 6 × 3 meter banner was missed neither by the 16,000 people who attended the service the Pope held in Stockholm nor the world press covering the visit. That the Pope also could read the banner is beyond doubt, especially since he saw it again, over an hour later, upon leaving Sweden from the aerospace city of Linköping.