



The Pope Comes to Cologne

A REVIEW OF GERMAN PAPERS, August 19, 2005

The Pope has arrived in Cologne to celebrate World Youth Day with hundreds of thousands of young Catholics. He is determined to build links with other religious communities and will celebrate mass in front of a congregation of 800,000 on Sunday.

As Pope Benedict XVI descended the steps of his aircraft on his first visit to his homeland since his election as pope, his papal hat was immediately swept away in the wind. Once he had reached the tarmac, to be greeted by German President Horst Köhler, the breeze decided to play havoc once again, this time sweeping his papal vestments straight over his head.

But those who believe in omens, should not get too worked up about the ill-wind blowing at Cologne-Bonn airport. The breeze was but a minor trial for Pope Benedict, who has arrived in a city transformed by an influx of about 400,000 young Christians.

He later travelled down the Rhine on a boat so the maximum number of pilgrims could get a look at their new pope. Thousands of Catholics thronged the banks, many waist deep in water to gain a better view.

"To all of you I appeal: open wide your hearts to God!" Pope Benedict proclaimed from the upper deck. For a man said to be less enamoured by massive public occasions than his predecessor, John Paul II, the new pope seemed to be coping rather well with the World Youth Day.

Today the pope will visit the synagogue in Cologne, where he will pay his respects to the victims of the Holocaust and begin his mission to establish better links with the Jewish community.

On Sunday he will preach a mass in front of an expected congregation of 800,000. The sacrament will be celebrated on a hill built specially for the occasion outside the city, so as many people as possible can witness the spectacle.

For the German papers, there is a real sense of pride that a German pope is returning home, though there is also speculation today that the country he is returning to is far less religious than Benedict might hope.

When those famous puffs of white smoke announced the election of Cardinal Ratzinger as pope on April 19, German tabloid **die Bildzeitung** famously celebrated the sense of national pride that a German had won the papacy. Its headline, "Wir Sind Papst!" ("We are the pope!"), was met with considerable amusement in Germany, and even spawned a range of T-shirts featuring the slogan. Today, the populist paper takes a more restrained line, but whilst celebrating the coming of the faithful to Cologne, it maintains a fairly patriotic tone.