

BENEDICT XVI IN GERMANY

Still Today Christ Comes Towards Us

Taken from the speeches of the Holy Father
during the Apostolic Journey to Germany, September 22-25, 2011

HOW MUCH WE HAVE IN COMMON

What does the question of God mean in our lives? In our preaching? Most people today, even Christians, set out from the presupposition that God is not fundamentally interested in our sins and virtues. (...)

The question: what is God's position towards me, where do I stand before God?—Luther's burning question must once more, doubtless in a new form, become our question too, not an academic question, but a real one. (...)

I would respond by saying that the first and most important thing for ecumenism is that we keep in view just how much we have in common, not losing sight of it amid the pressure towards secularization. (...)

Naturally faith today has to be thought out afresh, and above all lived afresh, so that it is suited to the present day. (...) It is not strategy that saves us and saves Christianity, but faith—thought out and lived afresh; through such faith, Christ enters this world of ours, and with him, the living God. (...) Faith that is lived from deep within amid a secularized world is the most powerful ecumenical force.

(Meeting with the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Erfurt, September 23rd)

A THIRST FOR THE INFINITE IS INDELIBLY PRESENT

Does man need God, or can we do quite well without him? When, in the first phase of God's absence, his light continues to illumine and sustain the order of human existence, it appears that things

can also function quite well without God. But the more the world withdraws from God, the clearer it becomes that man, in his hubris of power, in his emptiness of heart and in his longing for satisfaction and happiness, increasingly loses his life. A thirst for the infinite is indelibly present in human beings. Man was created to have a relationship with God; we need him. Our primary ecumenical service at this hour must be to bear common witness to the presence of the living God and in this way to give the world the answer that it needs. Naturally, an absolutely central part of this fundamental witness to God is a witness to Jesus Christ, true man and true God, who lived in our midst, suffered and died for us and, in his resurrection, flung open the gates of death. Dear friends, let us strengthen one another in this faith! This is a great ecumenical task. (...)

But the faith of Christians does not rest on such a weighing of benefits and drawbacks. A self-made faith is worthless. Faith is not something we work out intellectually and negotiate between us. It is the foundation for our lives. Unity grows not by the weighing of benefits and drawbacks but only by entering ever more deeply into the faith in our thoughts and in our lives.

(Ecumenical prayer service, Erfurt, September 23rd)

THE POSITIVIST REASON AND THE REASON THAT IS OPEN TO THE LANGUAGE OF BEING

[King Solomon] asks for a listening heart so that he may govern God's people, and discern between

en good and evil (cf. 1 Kg 3:9). Through this story, the Bible wants to tell us what should ultimately matter for a politician. (...)

For most of the matters that need to be regulated by law, the support of the majority can serve as a sufficient criterion. Yet it is evident that for the fundamental issues of law, in which the dignity of man and of humanity is at stake, the majority principle is not enough: everyone in a position of responsibility must personally seek out the criteria to be followed when framing laws. (...)

For the development of law and for the development of humanity, it was highly significant that Christian theologians aligned themselves against the religious law associated with polytheism and on the side of philosophy, and that they acknowledged reason and nature in their interrelation as the universally valid source of law. This step had already been taken by Saint Paul in the *Letter to the Romans*, when he said: “When Gentiles who have not the Law [the Torah of Israel] do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness...” (*Rom 2:14f.*). Here we see the two fundamental concepts of nature and conscience, where conscience is nothing other than Solomon’s listening heart, reason that is open to the language of being. (...)

The positivist understanding of nature has come to be almost universally accepted (...)—in the words of Hans Kelsen—is viewed as “an aggregate of objective data linked together in terms of cause and effect.” Anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable, according to this understanding, does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood. (...) The positivist world view in general (...) is not a sufficient culture corresponding to the full breadth of the human condition. Where positivist reason considers itself the only sufficient culture and banishes all other cultural realities to the status of subcultures, it diminishes man, indeed it threatens his humanity. (...)

The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more. (...)

How can reason rediscover its true greatness, without being sidetracked into irrationality? How can

nature reassert itself in its true depth, with all its demands, with all its directives? (...)

Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself, (...) he did not create himself. Is it really pointless to wonder whether the objective reason that manifests itself in nature does not presuppose a creative reason, a *Creator Spiritus*?

(Visit to the Bundestag, Berlin, September 22nd)

A SMALL, TINY FLAME THAT IS STRONGER THAN DARKNESS

It is not our human efforts or the technical progress of our era that brings light into this world. Again and again we experience how our striving to bring about a better and more just world hits against its limits. (...) In the end, though, a frightening darkness remains.

While all around us there may be darkness and gloom, yet we see a light: a small, tiny flame that is stronger than the seemingly powerful and invincible darkness. Christ. (...) The faith in him, like a small light, cuts through all that is dark and threatening. To be sure, those who believe in Jesus do not lead lives of perpetual sunshine, as though they could be spared suffering and hardship, but there is always a bright glimmer there, lighting up the path. (...)

Dear friends, again and again the very notion of saints has been caricatured and distorted, as if to be holy meant to be remote from the world, naive and joyless. Often it is thought that a saint has to be someone with great ascetic and moral achievements, who might well be revered, but could never be imitated in our own lives. How false and discouraging this opinion is! (...) Dear friends, Christ is not so much interested in how often in our lives we stumble and fall, as in how often with his help we pick ourselves up again. He does not demand glittering achievements, but he wants his light to shine in you. He does not call you because you are good and perfect, but because he is good and he wants to make you his friends. (...) You are Christians—not because you do special and extraordinary things, but because he, Christ, is your life, our life. (...)

Allow Christ to burn in you, even at the cost of sacrifice and renunciation. Do not be afraid

that you might lose something and, so to speak, emerge empty-handed at the end. Have the courage to apply your talents and gifts (...) so that the Lord can light up the darkness.

(Vigil with young people, Freiburg, September 24th)

A RELATIVISM THAT PENETRATES EVERY AREA OF LIFE

We live at a time that is broadly characterized by a subliminal relativism that penetrates every area of life. Sometimes this relativism becomes aggressive, when it opposes those who say that they know where the truth or meaning of life is to be found. (...)

The Church in Germany is superbly organized. But behind the structures, is there also a corresponding spiritual strength, the strength of faith in the living God? We must honestly admit that we have more than enough by way of structure but not enough by way of Spirit. I would add: the real crisis facing the Church in the western world is a crisis of faith. (...)

But let us return to the people who lack experience of God's goodness. They need places where they can give voice to their inner longing. And here we are called to seek new paths of evangelization. (...) May the Lord always point out to us how together we can be lights in the world and can show our fellow men the path to the source at which they can quench their profound thirst for life.

(Meeting with the catholic lay faithful, Freiburg, September 24th)

HE IS WAITING FOR US TO SAY "YES", HE BEGS US TO SAY IT

God, the all-powerful creator, (...) exercises his power differently from the way we normally do. He has placed a limit on his power, by recognizing the freedom of his creatures. (...) He is always close to us (...) and his heart aches for us, he reaches out to us. We need to open ourselves to him so that the power of his mercy can touch our hearts. (...) God respects our freedom. He does not constrain us. He is waiting for us to say "yes", as it were, he begs us to say "yes".

In the Gospel Jesus (...) recounts the parable of the two sons invited by their father to work in

the vineyard. The first son responded: "I will not go," but afterward he repented and went. The other son said to the father: "I go, sir," but did not go. (Mt 21:29-31) (...) Jesus (...) directs this message to the chief priests and elders of the people of Israel, that is, to the religious experts of his people. At first they say "yes" to God's will, but their piety becomes routine and God no longer matters to them. For this reason they find the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus disturbing. The Lord concludes his parable with harsh words: "Truly, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you". (...) Translated into the language of the present day, this statement might sound something like this: agnostics, who are constantly exercised by the question of God, those who long for a pure heart but suffer on account of their sin, are closer to the Kingdom of God than believers whose life of faith is "routine" and who regard the Church merely as an institution, without letting it touch their hearts, or letting the faith touch their hearts. (...)

But in the spirit of Jesus' teaching something (...) is needed, an open heart that allows itself to be touched by the love of Christ, and thus gives to our neighbour, who needs us, something more than a technical service: it gives love, in which the other person is able to see Christ, the loving God. (...) The renewal of the Church will only come about through openness to conversion and through renewed faith. (...)

The Latin word for humility, *humilitas*, is derived from *humus* and indicates closeness to the earth. Those who are humble stand with their two feet on the ground. (...) Let us ask God for the courage and the humility to walk the path of faith.

(Homily of his holiness Benedict XVI, Freiburg, September 25th)

ENSURING THAT IN THIS WORLD WITNESS TO CHRIST IS BOTH SEEN AND HEARD

The saints help us to see that (...) God first reached out to us. We could not attain to him, we could not somehow reach out into the unknown, had he not first loved us, had he not first come towards us. (...)

Still today Christ comes towards us, he speaks

to every individual. (...) The saints (...) they, so to speak, “caught” his contagious presence, they reached out to him. (...)

Faith always includes as an essential element the fact that it is shared with others. No one can believe alone. We receive the faith—as Saint Paul tells us—through hearing, and hearing is part of being together, in spirit and in body. In the first place I have God to thank for the fact that I can believe, for God approaches me and so to speak “ignites” my faith. But on a practical level, I have my fellow human beings to thank for my faith, those who believed before me and who believe with me. This great “with,” apart from which there can be no personal faith, is the Church. (...) If we open ourselves up to the whole of the faith in all of history and the testimony given to it in the whole Church, then the Catholic faith also has a future as a public force. (...)

Even when they are few in number, saints change the world, and great saints remain as forces for change throughout history. (...) Then we will resemble the famous bell of the Cathedral of Erfurt, which bears the name “Gloriosa.” (...) May it inspire us, after the example of the saints, to ensure that in this world, witness to Christ is both seen and heard, that God’s glory is both seen and heard, and that we live accordingly in a world where God is present and where he gives beauty and meaning to life.

(Homily of his holiness Benedict XVI,
Erfurt, September 24th)

HE IS SO DEEPLY WITHIN ME THAT HE IS MY TRUE INTERIORITY

For some decades now we have been experiencing a decline in religious practice and we have been seeing substantial numbers of the baptized drifting away from church life. This prompts the question: should the Church not change? Must she not adapt her offices and structures to the present day, in order to reach the searching and doubting people of today?

Blessed Mother Teresa was once asked what in her opinion was the first thing that would have to change in the Church. Her answer was: you and I. (...)

The Church owes her whole being to this unequal exchange. She has nothing of her own to offer to him who founded her, such that she might say: here is something wonderful that we did! (...)

In the concrete history of the Church, however, a contrary tendency is also manifested, namely that the Church becomes self-satisfied, settles down in this world, becomes self-sufficient and adapts herself to the standards of the world. Not infrequently, she gives greater weight to organization and institutionalization than to her vocation to openness towards God. (...)

In order to accomplish her true task adequately, the Church must constantly renew the effort to detach herself from her tendency towards worldliness and once again to become open towards God. (...) One could almost say that history comes to the aid of the Church here through the various periods of secularization, which have contributed significantly to her purification and inner reform. (...)

The Church opens herself to the world not in order to win men for an institution with its own claims to power, but in order to lead them to themselves by leading them to him of whom each person can say with Saint Augustine: he is closer to me than I am to myself (cf. *Confessions*, III, 6,11). (...) It is not a question here of finding a new strategy to relaunch the Church. (...)

That the eternal God should know us and care about us, that the intangible should at a particular moment have become tangible, that he who is immortal should have suffered and died on the Cross, that we who are mortal should be given the promise of resurrection and eternal life—for people of any era, to believe all this is a bold claim.

(Meeting with Catholics engaged in the life of the Church and society, Freiburg, September 25th)