



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION

*Hall of Popes
Thursday, 27 April 2006*

*Your Eminence,
Dear Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission,*

It gives me great joy to meet you at the end of your Annual Plenary Meeting. I remember each one of you with affection since I became personally acquainted with you during my years as President of this Commission. I would like to share with you my gratitude and appreciation of the important work you are doing at the service of the Church and for the good of souls, in harmony with the Successor of Peter.

I thank Cardinal William Joseph Levada for his greeting and for his summary of the topic that has been the object of your attentive reflection during the meeting.

You have gathered once again to examine a very important subject: *The relationship between the Bible and morals*. This topic not only concerns the believer but every person as such. And it concerns us, particularly at a time of cultural and moral crisis. Indeed, man's first impulse is his desire for happiness and for fulfilment in life. Today, however, many people think that this should be achieved absolutely autonomously, without any reference to God or to his law.

Some have reached the point of theorizing on the absolute sovereignty of reason and freedom in the context of moral norms: they presume that these norms constitute the context of a purely "human" ethic, in other words, the expression of a law that man makes for himself by himself. The advocates of this "secular morality" say that man as a rational being not only *can* but *must* decide freely on the value of his behaviour.

This erroneous conviction is based on the presumed conflict between human freedom and every form of law. In fact, the Creator, because we are creatures, has inscribed his "natural law", a reflection of his creative idea, in our hearts, in our very being, as a compass and inner guide for our life.

For this very reason, Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church tell us that the vocation and complete fulfilment of the human being are not attained by rejecting God's law, but by abiding by the new law that consists in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Together with the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, it is expressed in "faith working through love" (Gal 5: 6).

And it is precisely in this acceptance of the love that comes from God (*Deus caritas est*), that the freedom of man finds its loftiest realization. There is no contradiction between God's law and human freedom: God's law correctly interpreted neither attenuates nor, even less, eliminates man's freedom. On the contrary, it guarantees and fosters this freedom because, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "freedom... attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude" (n. 1731).

The moral law established by God in creation and confirmed in the Old Testament revelation reaches fulfilment and greatness in Christ. Jesus Christ is the way of perfection, the living and personal synthesis of perfect freedom in total obedience to God's will. The original function of the Decalogue is not abolished by the encounter with Christ but is led to this fullness.

An ethic that in listening to revelation also seeks to be authentically rational, finds its perfection in the encounter with Christ, who gives us the new Covenant.

A model of this authentic moral action is the behaviour of the Incarnate Word himself. He makes his will coincide with the will of God the Father in the acceptance and carrying out of his mission: his food is to do the Father's will (cf. Jn 4: 34). He always does the things that are pleasing to the Father, putting his words into practice (cf. Jn 8: 29-55); he says the things that the Father asked him to say and to proclaim (cf. Jn 12: 49).

In revealing the Father and his way of acting, Jesus at the same time reveals the norms of upright human action. He affirms this connection in an explicit and exemplary way when, in concluding his teaching on loving one's enemies (cf. Mt 5: 43-47), he says: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48).

This divine, divine-human, perfection becomes possible for us if we are closely united with Christ, our Saviour.

The path marked out by Jesus with his teaching is not an externally imposed regulation. Jesus himself took this path and asks no more of us than to follow him. Moreover, he does not limit

himself to asking: first of all, through Baptism, he allows us to participate in his own life, thereby enabling us to understand his teaching and put it into practice.

This appears with increasing evidence in the New Testament writings. His relationship with the disciples was vital, not an external teaching. He called them "little children" (Jn 13: 33; 21: 5), "friends" (Jn 15: 14-15), "brothers", "brethren" (Mt 12: 50; 28: 10; Jn 20: 17), and invited them to enter into communion of life with him and to accept in faith and joy his "easy" yoke and his "light" burden (cf. Mt 11: 28-30).

In the quest for a Christologically inspired ethic, it is therefore necessary always to bear in mind that Christ is the Incarnate Logos who enables us to share in his divine life and sustains us with his grace on the journey towards our true fulfilment.

What man really is, appears definitively in the Logos made man; faith in Christ gives us the fulfilment of anthropology. Consequently, the relationship with Christ defines the loftiest realization of man's moral action. This human action is directly based on obedience to God's law, on union with Christ and on the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer's soul. It is not an action dictated by merely exterior norms, but stems from the vital relationship that connects believers to Christ and to God.

While I hope that the continuation of your reflection will be fruitful, I invoke upon you and your work the light of the Holy Spirit, and as confirmation of my trust and affection I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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