



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS OF SWITZERLAND

Sala Bologna

Tuesday, 7 November 2006

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Confreres,*

I would like first of all to offer you a cordial welcome and to express my joy at now being granted to complete your Pastoral Visit, cut short in 2005, and thus to work together again on the panorama of issues that concern us.

I still have a vivid memory of the *ad limina* visit in 2005, when at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith we spoke of the problems that will be discussed once again in these days. I still clearly recall the atmosphere at that time of inner commitment to ensuring that the Word of God would be lively and would reach the hearts of the people of our time so that the Church might be full of life. In our common situation, rendered difficult by the secularized culture, let us seek to understand the mission entrusted to us by the Lord and to carry it out as best we can.

I have been unable to prepare a proper Address; in view of the individual aspects of the great mass of problems we will be touching on, I only want to make a few "trial attempts" that do not intend to come up with definitive assertions but only to initiate our conversation. This is a meeting of the Swiss Bishops and various Dicasteries of the Curia, in which each area of our pastoral task is identified and made visible. I shall try to make a few comments on some of them.

In keeping with my past, I will begin with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or rather, with the topic of faith.

Earlier, in my Homily [see page 6], I endeavoured to say that in all the anguish of our time, faith

must truly have priority. Two generations ago, it might still have been presumed natural: one grew up in the faith; in a certain way, faith was simply present as part of life and did not need any special seeking. It needed to be formed and deepened, but seemed something perfectly obvious.

Today, the opposite seems natural: in other words, that it is basically impossible to believe, and that God is actually absent. The faith of the Church, in any case, seems something that belongs to the distant past.

Thus, even practising Christians are of the opinion that it is right to choose for oneself, from the overall faith of the Church, those things one considers still sustainable today. And especially, people also set about fulfilling their proper duty to God through their commitment to human beings, so to speak, at the same time.

This, however, is the beginning of a sort of "justification through works": the human being justifies himself and the world, in which he does what clearly seems necessary yet completely lacks the inner light and spirit.

Consequently, I believe it is important to acquire a fresh awareness of the fact that faith is the centre of all things - "*Fides tua te salvum fecit*", the Lord said over and over again to those he healed. It was not the physical touch, it was not the external gesture that was operative, but the fact that those sick people believed. And we too can only serve the Lord energetically if our faith thrives and is present in abundance.

In this context, I want to emphasize two crucial points.

First: faith is above all faith in God. In Christianity it is not a matter of an enormous bundle of different things; all that the Creed says and the development of faith has achieved exists only to make our perception of the Face of God clearer. He exists and he is alive; we believe in him; we live before him, in his sight, in being with him and from him. And in Jesus Christ, he is, as it were, with us bodily.

To my mind, this centrality of God must appear in a completely new light in all our thoughts and actions.

Furthermore, this is what enlivens activities which, on the contrary, can easily lapse into activism and become empty.

This is the first point I want to stress: faith actually looks to God with determination and thus impels us in turn to look to God and set out towards him.

The other thing concerns the fact that we ourselves cannot invent faith, composing it with

"sustainable" pieces, but we believe together with the Church. We cannot understand all that the Church teaches, nor must all of it be present in every life.

Yet, it is important that we are co-believers in the great "I" of the Church, in her living "We", and thereby find ourselves in the great community of faith, in that great subject in which the "You" of God and the "I" of man truly touch each other; in which the past of the words of Scripture becomes the present, times flow into one another, the past is present and, opening itself to the future, allows into time the brightness of eternity, of the Eternal One.

This complete form of faith, expressed in the Creed, a faith in and with the Church as a living subject in which the Lord works: it is this form of faith that we must seek to put truly at the heart of our endeavours.

Today too, we see it very clearly: wherever development has been exclusively encouraged without nourishing the soul, it causes harm. Moreover, technological skills are indeed increasing, but they result above all in new possibilities of destruction.

If, as well as aid to developing countries, as well as learning all that the human being is able to do, all that human intelligence has invented and that human determination makes possible, the human heart is not illuminated at the same time and God's power does not arrive, human beings learn above all to destroy.

And for this reason I believe that missionary responsibility must once again become strong within us: if our faith makes us glad, let us feel bound to speak of it to others. The extent to which people will be able to accept it will then be in God's hands.

I would now like to move on from this topic to "Catholic Education", touching on two areas. One thing which I believe is a cause of "concern" - in the positive sense of the word - to all of us, is the fact that future priests and other teachers and preachers of the faith must receive a good theological training; we therefore need good theological faculties, good major seminaries and qualified theology teachers who not only impart knowledge but inculcate in students an intelligent faith so that faith becomes intelligence and intelligence, faith.

In this regard, I have a very specific wish.

Our exegesis has progressed by leaps and bounds. We truly know a great deal about the development of texts, the subdivision of sources, etc., we know what words would have meant at that time.... But we are increasingly seeing that if historical and critical exegesis remains solely historical and critical, it refers the Word to the past, it makes it a Word of those times, a Word which basically says nothing to us at all; and we see that the Word is fragmented, precisely because it is broken up into a multitude of different sources.

With *Dei Verbum*, the Council told us that the historical-critical method is an essential dimension of exegesis because, since it is a *factum historicum*, it is part of the nature of faith. We do not merely believe in an idea; Christianity is not a philosophy but an event that God brought about in this world, a story that he pieced together in a real way and forms with us as history.

For this reason, in our reading of the Bible, the serious historical aspect with its requirements must be truly present: we must effectively recognize the event and, precisely in his action, this "making of history" on God's part.

Dei Verbum adds, however, that Scripture, which must consequently be interpreted according to historical methods, should also be read in its unity and must be read within the living community of the Church. These two dimensions are absent in large areas of exegesis.

The oneness of Scripture is not a purely historical and critical factor but indeed in its entirety, also from the historical viewpoint, it is an inner process of the Word which, read and understood in an ever new way in the course of subsequent *relectures*, continues to develop.

This oneness itself, however, is ultimately a theological fact: these writings form one Scripture which can only be properly understood if they are read in the *analogia fidei* as a oneness in which there is progress towards Christ, and inversely, in which Christ draws all history to himself; and if, moreover, all this is brought to life in the Church's faith.

In other words, I would very much like to see theologians learn to interpret and love Scripture as the Council desired, in accordance with *Dei Verbum*: may they experience the inner unity of Scripture - something that today is helped by "canonical exegesis" (still to be found, of course, in its timid first stages) - and then make a spiritual interpretation of it that is not externally edifying but rather an inner immersion in the presence of the Word.

It seems to me a very important task to do something in this regard, to contribute to providing an introduction to living Scripture as an up-to-date Word of God beside, with and in historical-critical exegesis. I do not know how this should be done in practice, but I think that in the academic context and at seminaries, as well as in an introductory course, it will be possible to find capable teachers to ensure that this timely encounter with Scripture in the faith of the Church - an encounter on whose basis proclamation subsequently becomes possible - can take place.

The other thing is catechesis. Precisely in the past 50 years or so, it has come a long way in its methodology.

On the other hand, however, since much has been lost in anthropology and in the search for reference points, all too often catechesis does not even reach the content of the faith.

I can understand this since, even at the time when I was a parochial vicar - some 56 years ago -, it was already very difficult to proclaim the faith in pluralistic schools with numerous non-believing parents and children, because it appeared to be a totally foreign and unreal world.

Today, of course, the situation is even worse. Yet, it is important in catechesis, which includes the contexts of school, parish, community, etc., that faith be expounded fully, in other words, that children truly learn what "creation" is, what the "history of salvation" brought about by God is, and who Jesus Christ is, what the sacraments are and what is the object of our hope....

I think that we must all do our utmost for a renewal of catechesis in which the courage to witness to our faith and find ways to make it understood and accepted is fundamental.

Today, religious ignorance has sunk to an abysmal level. And yet in Germany, children are given at least 10 years of catechesis, so basically, they ought to know many things.

For this reason, we should certainly reflect seriously on our possibilities of finding ways to communicate knowledge, even simply, so that the culture of faith may be present.

And now, for some remarks on "Divine Worship". The [Year of the Eucharist](#) gave us much in this regard. I can say that the Post-Synodal Exhortation is at a good point. It will certainly be a great enrichment.

In addition, we have received the Document of the Congregation for Divine Worship on the proper celebration of the Eucharist, which is very important.

I believe that subsequent to all this it will slowly become clear that the Liturgy is not a "self-manifestation" of the community through which, as people say, it makes its entrance onto the scene; rather, it is the exit of the community from merely "being-its-self", its access to the great banquet of the poor and its entry into the vast living community in which God himself nourishes us. This universal character of the Liturgy must once again penetrate the awareness of one and all.

In the Eucharist we receive something that we cannot do, but instead enter something greater that becomes our own, precisely when we give ourselves to this thing that is greater, truly seeking to celebrate the Liturgy as the Church's Liturgy.

Furthermore, connected with this there is also the famous problem of the homily. From the purely functional viewpoint I can understand it very well: perhaps the parish priest is weary or has already preached again and again, or perhaps he is elderly and overburdened with tasks.

As a result, if there should be a pastoral assistant skilled in interpreting the Word of God convincingly, one might spontaneously ask: why should not the pastoral assistant speak; he is

better at it so the people will draw greater benefit from it.

This, however, is the purely functional viewpoint. Instead, people should take into account the fact that the homily is not a discursive interruption in the Liturgy but part of the sacramental event, and that it brings the Word of God into the present of this community.

It is the moment when this community as a subject truly wants to be called into question, to be brought to listen to and accept the Word. This means that the homily itself is part of the mystery, of the celebration of the mystery, and therefore cannot simply be detached from it.

Above all, however, I think it is also important not to reduce the priest to the sacrament and to jurisdiction - in the conviction that all his other tasks could be done equally well by others - but to preserve the integrity of his office.

Moreover, the priesthood is only beautiful if the mission to be carried out is kept intact, without having bits and pieces chopped off here and there.

And the priest's duty to connect the sacrifice with the Word, which is an integral part of the whole, has always been part of this role, even in the Old Testament.

From the purely practical viewpoint, we must then, of course, see to providing priests with the necessary help so that they are also able to carry out properly the ministry of the Word. As a rule, this interior oneness, both of the essence of the Eucharistic Celebration and of the essence of the priestly ministry, is of great importance.

The second subject I would like to talk about concerns the Sacrament of Penance, whose practice in the past 50 years or thereabouts has gradually diminished. Thanks be to God, cloisters, abbeys and shrines exist where people go on pilgrimage, where their hearts are opened and also prepared for confession.

We must truly learn this Sacrament anew. From a purely anthropological viewpoint it is important, on the one hand, to recognize sin and on the other, to practice forgiveness. The widespread absence of an awareness of sin is a disturbing phenomenon of our time.

Thus, the gift of the Sacrament of Penance not only consists in the reception of forgiveness, but also and above all in being aware of our need for forgiveness. With this Sacrament we are purified, we are inwardly transformed and subsequently able to understand others even better and to forgive them.

For the human being, the recognition of sin is elementary - he is ill if he no longer perceives it -, and the liberating experience of being granted forgiveness is equally important for him. The

Sacrament of Reconciliation is the crucial place where both these things take place.

In this Sacrament, furthermore, faith becomes something completely personal; it is no longer concealed in collectivity. If man faces up to this challenge and in his need of forgiveness presents himself defenceless, as it were, before God, he then has the moving experience of a quite personal encounter with the love of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, I would like once again to focus attention on the ministry of the Bishop. Basically, we have already been talking about it implicitly all this time.

It seems to me important that Bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, on the one hand truly bear responsibility for the local Churches which the Lord has entrusted to them, ensuring that the Church as the Church of Jesus Christ grows and lives.

On the other hand, they must open the local Churches to the universal dimension. Given the difficulties the Orthodox encounter with the Autocephalous Churches as well as the problems of our Protestant friends in the face of the disintegration of the regional Churches, we realize the great significance of universality and the importance of the Church being open to totality, to become in universality a Church which is truly one.

The Church is only capable of this if she is active in her own local area. This communion must be nurtured by the Bishops together with the Successor of Peter in the spirit of a conscious succession to the College of the Apostles.

We must all strive continuously to find the right balance in this mutual relationship so that the local Church may live her authenticity, and that the universal Church may likewise be enriched by it so that both will give and receive, and thus the Lord's Church will grow.

Bishop Grab mentioned the ecumenical difficulties: this is an area I can only entrust to all your hearts. In Switzerland, you are confronted daily with this task which is tiring but also creates joy. On the one hand, I think personal relationships are important, where we recognize and esteem one another in an immediate way as believers, and as spiritual persons purify ourselves and help one another in turn.

On the other, as Bishop Grab said, it is a question of guaranteeing the essential values and framework of our society, since they come from God.

In this area, all of us - Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox - have a great, joint task. And I am glad that awareness of this is growing.

In the West it is the Church in Greece which, in spite of some occasional problems with the Latins,

always says very clearly: in Europe, we can only carry out our task if we work together for the great Christian heritage. The Church in Russia is also seeing this ever more clearly and likewise, our Protestant friends are aware of this fact.

I believe that if we learn to act together in this field, we could achieve a large degree of unity, even where full theological and sacramental unity are not yet possible.

To conclude, I would once again like to express to you my joy at your visit, as I wish you many fruitful exchanges during these days.

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