



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE FIRST GROUP OF GERMAN BISHOPS
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Consistory Hall

Friday, 10 November 2006

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Welcome to the house of the Successor of Peter! In the joy of the faith, whose proclamation is our common service as Pastors, I welcome you at this meeting of the first group of German Bishops on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. After my [Visits to Germany for the World Youth Day in 2005](#) and more recently in September, during which I was able, if briefly, to meet many of you, I am pleased to welcome you here to take a look together at the situation of the Church in our Country.

It is not of course necessary for me to say it expressly: Catholics in the German Dioceses and in general all Christians in our Country are dear to my heart. I pray every day that God will bless the German People and everyone who lives in our Homeland. May the great love of God touch and transform the hearts of all!

I am grateful to be able, through the conversations with each one of you, not only to deepen our friendship and personal ties but also to learn much about the situations in your Dioceses. In the discourses with which we conclude our personal meetings, I would like to stress certain aspects of ecclesial life that are particularly important to me at this time in our history.

The Federal Republic of Germany shares with the whole of the Western world a culture marked by secularization, in which God is increasingly disappearing from the public conscience, in which the uniqueness of the figure of Christ is fading and the values formed by the tradition of the Church are becoming less and less effective.

Thus, even for the individual, faith is becoming increasingly difficult; plans of life and ways of living are ever more often determined by personal choice. This is the situation that both Church Pastors and lay faithful must face.

Many have thus succumbed to discouragement and resignation, attitudes that stand in the way of witnessing to Christ's liberating and saving Gospel.

Basically, is not Christianity only one of the many alternatives that aim to give life meaning? This is a question many people are asking themselves.

At the same time, however, as they face the frailty and transience of most of these proposals, many people look to the Christian message with questions and hope and expect convincing answers from us.

I believe that the Church in Germany should consider the above-mentioned situation to be a providential challenge and face it with courage. We Christians must not fear spiritual confrontation with a society whose ostentatious intellectual superiority conceals its perplexity before the final existential questions.

The answers the Church draws from the Gospel of the *Logos* made man have in fact proved effective as regards the thinking of the past two millennia, and their effectiveness endures.

Strengthened by this knowledge, we are able to account for the hope that is in us to all who ask us to explain it (cf. I Pt 3: 15).

This is also true in our relations with the faithful of other religions, especially with the many Muslims living in Germany whom we approach with respect and benevolence. Precisely these Muslims, who often observe their convictions and religious rites very seriously, have a right to receive our humble and sound testimony in favour of Jesus Christ.

To convey it convincingly, however, requires serious commitment. For this reason, in places with a large Muslim population, Catholic spokespersons should be available who have adequate knowledge both of languages and of the history of religion, which will enable them to enter into dialogue with Muslims. This dialogue, however, presupposes in the first place a sound knowledge of their own Catholic faith.

This brings us to touch on another very central topic: the teaching of religion in Catholic schools and the Catholic formation of adults. This area demands from Bishops new and special attention.

First of all, you must be concerned about the curricula for *teaching religion*, which must be inspired by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* so that the Church's faith and customs are transmitted in

the course of study in their entirety. In the past, the content of catechesis was often relegated to second place, as regards didactic methods.

An integral and clear presentation of the content of faith is a crucial element for the approval of textbooks for lessons on religion. Equal importance should be given to the teachers' faithfulness to the Church's faith and to their participation in the liturgical and pastoral life of the parishes or Ecclesial Communities in whose territory they work.

At Catholic schools, moreover, it is important that the introduction to the Catholic vision of the world and the practice of faith, as well as the integral Catholic formation of the personality be transmitted convincingly, not only during religion classes but indeed, throughout the school day - and not the least through the teachers' personal witness.

Equally important are the many institutions and activities in the area of *adult formation*. It is necessary here to pay special attention to the choice of themes and of formation staff so that the central content of the faith and the Christian view of life are not glossed over to give precedence to current issues or marginal problems.

In addition, the complete and faithful transmission of the faith at school and in adult formation definitely depends on the formation of priesthood candidates and of teachers of religion *at the theological faculties and universities*.

It can never be stressed enough that faithfulness to the *Depositum fidei* as presented by the Church's Magisterium is the premise *par excellence* for serious research and teaching. This faithfulness is also a requirement of intellectual honesty for anyone to whom the Church entrusts an academic teaching role.

Here Bishops, as ultimately responsible, are duty bound to give their "*nihil obstat*" only after thorough examination. Only a theological faculty that feels obliged to respect this principle can make an authentic contribution to spiritual exchanges within universities.

Venerable Confreres, may I be permitted also to speak about formation at the *Major Seminaries*? In its Decree *Optatam Totius* the Second Vatican Council set out important norms concerning this, not all of which, unfortunately, have been fully implemented.

This applies in particular to the implementation of the so-called "propadeutic course" prior to starting the actual course of study. Not only should it transmit a sound knowledge of the classical languages, required expressly for philosophical and theological studies, but also familiarity with the *Catechism* and with the Church's religious, liturgical and sacramental practices.

In the face of the increasing number of people concerned and of priesthood candidates who no

longer have a traditional Catholic background, this introductory year is urgently necessary.

Furthermore, such a year would enable the student to achieve a clearer discernment of his priestly vocation.

Moreover, those in charge of priestly formation would have the opportunity to develop an idea of the candidate, his human maturity and his faith life.

On the other hand, the so-called "role-playing" with a group dynamic, self-knowledge groups and other psychological experiments are less suited to this purpose and tend rather to create confusion and uncertainty.

In this broader context, I would especially like to recommend to you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. It provides Catholic Germany with an excellent venue for a high-level academic confrontation, in the light of Catholic faith, with spiritual currents and problems, and for the formation of a spiritual elite who can face present and future challenges with a Gospel spirit.

Financial consolidation of the only Catholic University in Germany must be seen by all German Dioceses as a common commitment: in the future, it will no longer be possible for this University to be supported by the Bavarian Dioceses alone, although they will continue to have special responsibility for it.

Lastly, I would like once again to reflect on a problem that is as urgent as it is sensitive: the relationship between priests and lay people in carrying out the Church's mission. In our secular culture the importance of the active collaboration of lay people in the life of the Church is becoming ever clearer to us.

I would like to warmly thank all the lay people who, by virtue of the power of Baptism, offer the Church their lively support. Precisely because the active witness of lay people is so important, it is equally important not to confuse the special profiles of the respective roles.

Delivering the homily during Holy Mass is a task bound to the ordained ministry; when sufficient priests and deacons are present, it is their task to distribute Holy Communion.

Moreover, there is a constant request for lay people to carry out roles of pastoral guidance. In this regard, we cannot discuss questions connected to this in the light of pastoral convenience alone, for here it is a question of the truth of faith, that is to say, the sacramental and hierarchical structure that Jesus Christ desired for his Church. Since this is based on his will, just as the delegation of apostles relies on his mandate, these matters are exempt from human intervention.

The Sacrament of Orders alone authorizes those who receive it to speak and act *in persona Christi*. It is this, dear Confreres, that must be inculcated ever anew with great patience and wisdom, and the necessary conclusions drawn.

Dear Confreres in the Episcopate, the Church in Germany has deep spiritual roots and possesses exceptional means to promote the faith and support needy people, both at home and abroad. The number of committed faithful and the quality of their work for the good of the Church and society are truly remarkable.

Also useful in carrying out the Church's mission for the good of the people in Germany is the cooperation, on the whole good, between the State and the Church. To deal adequately with the challenges that derive from the relentless secularization process mentioned at the outset, the Church in Germany more than anything else must make the power and the beauty of the Catholic faith visible anew: to do so, she must grow in communion with Christ.

The unity of Bishops, clergy and laity with one another and with the universal Church, and especially with the Successor of Peter, is of fundamental importance in this task.

May the powerful intercession of Mary, Virgin and Mother of God - who possesses many marvellous shrines in our German Homeland -, as well as the intercession of St Boniface and of all our Country's saints, obtain for you and all the faithful the strength and perseverance to be able to continue with courage and trust the great work of authentic renewal of the life of faith, in faithful allegiance to the instructions of the universal Church.

I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you all as you carry out the tasks of your service as Pastors, and to all the faithful in Germany.

© Copyright 2006 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana