



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr HANS-HENNING HORSTMANN
AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Castel Gandolfo

Thursday, 28 September 2006

Mr Ambassador,

I gladly take the opportunity that is offered by the presentation of the Letters officially accrediting you today as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See to welcome you, and I congratulate you on your appointment and offer you my best wishes for your new and exalted mission.

I am likewise grateful for the friendly words you have addressed to me on behalf of the Federal President, H.E. Mr Horst Köhler, and of the Federal Government of Germany.

For my part, as Head of State, I send my greetings to the members of the Federal Government and to the entire German People. May the good relations between the Federal Republic of Germany, my beloved Homeland, and the Holy See become increasingly fruitful for the good of humanity in the years to come!

In the past few days I have been thinking back with gratitude to my Pastoral Visit to Bavaria, which had as its motto: *"Those who believe are never alone!"*.

I wanted to combine the memory of people and places, to whom and to which I feel attached for biographical reasons, with meetings in the faith community. I was able to proclaim to the many who took part in Holy Mass the message of God's liberating and saving love.

On this occasion, I would like once again to thank the State Authorities of the Federation and the Free State of Bavaria, as well as the countless volunteers for their great effort through which they contributed to the success of my Apostolic Journey.

The messages I have received in the past few days from those who took part in the Masses in Bavaria as well as from television viewers in Germany and in other countries show that there was authentic communion in those days.

I believe all this has a social importance: wherever society is growing and people are strengthened in good, thanks to the message of faith, this also benefits social coexistence, and the readiness of citizens to assume responsibility for the common good is reinforced.

Mr Ambassador, the Holy See's mission is universal. As far as possible, the attention and consideration of the Pope and his collaborators at the Roman Curia concern all people and all peoples.

Naturally, the Holy See first addresses Christians in the various countries of the Earth, but it attaches great importance to the good of all men and women, independently of their culture, language or religious denomination.

Thus, the Holy See seeks to cooperate with all people of good will at the service of human dignity, integrity and freedom.

The Catholic Church, therefore, has at heart the salvation of humankind. For this reason, the activities of the Holy See focus on the individual and on the communities where the person lives and to which he belongs. On the international scene too, its action shows that the Church is on the side of the human being, here in Europe and in every part of the world.

Indeed, the Church shares *"the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted"* (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1), because for the Church, for her faith, "it is man himself who must be saved" and "mankind that must be renewed"; thus, the centre of the Church's pastoral concern is man, "whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 3).

The Church, however, does not impose herself. She does not force any one to accept the Gospel message. In fact, the faith in Jesus Christ which the Church proclaims can only exist in freedom, so tolerance and cultural openness must be a feature of the encounter with the other.

Tolerance, however, must never be confused with indifferentism, for any form of indifference is radically opposed to the deep Christian concern for man and for his salvation. Authentic tolerance always also implies respect for the other, for man, the creature of God whose existence God

willed.

The tolerance we urgently need, and I also mentioned this in Munich, "includes the fear of God - respect for what others hold sacred. This respect for what others hold sacred demands that we ourselves learn once more the fear of God. But this sense of respect can be reborn in the Western world only if faith in God is reborn" ([*Homily, 10 September 2006*](#); *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 13 September, p. 7).

Mr Ambassador, in your address you rightly emphasized the excellent relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Holy See and the felicitous cooperation of these two States in certain sectors. These good relations certainly reflect the solid ties between State and Church in Germany. The good cooperation of both institutions in various fields for the good of men and women in our Homeland has several times been mentioned on previous occasions.

It is to be hoped that this proven collaboration between Church and State in Germany will continue and develop, also in the changeable premises at the European level.

As in every nation, in Germany too, relations between State and Church are closely linked to legislation. For this reason, the Holy See follows with deep interest the developments and the tendencies in the Federation and in the individual *Länder*.

In this Intervention I can only stress several contexts considered important by the Catholic Church, which has at heart, as I have already said, first and foremost man and his salvation.

In the first place, I cite the protection of marriage and the family which is recognized by the Fundamental Law. But they are threatened on the one hand by the change taking place in public opinion in the interpretation of matrimonial communion, and on the other, by the new forms provided for by legislators that are drifting away from the form of the natural family.

The absolutely unjustifiable *termination of pregnancy* which costs the lives, as it always has, of numerous innocent children, remains a painful concern for the Holy See and for the entire Church. Perhaps the current debate of political leaders on the interruption of pregnancy in its late stages will strengthen the awareness that the diagnosis of disability in the unborn child cannot be a reason for abortion, because life with such a disability is also desired and appreciated by God, and here on earth no one can ever be sure that he or she will live without physical or spiritual limitations.

Therefore, the Church will never tire of indicating to the appropriate European institutions and to individual nations the ethical problems inherent in the context of *embryonic stem cell research* and the so-called "innovative" treatments.

Mr Ambassador,

Germany has offered a new Homeland and shelter to *refugees* and to many who in their own native countries are threatened by persecution for either religious or political reasons. The network of help and solidarity that is also extended to needy foreigners constitutes a true human social order.

The effectiveness of this network depends on the contributions of all. It is thus hoped that asylum will be guaranteed in accordance with the legislators' intentions, in conformity with just directives and with the principle of justice.

It should be borne in mind that finding shelter in Germany is a vital matter for numerous refugees. In this regard, the Holy See asks the appropriate State institutions not to keep foreign Christians at a distance, those whose lives and well-being are threatened because of their faith, and to facilitate their integration into Germany.

Germany is rightly proud of its great cultural tradition. The transmission of culture to future generations is one of the State's important tasks.

Knowledge, however, must be combined with values if education is to be authentic.

In most of the German *Länder* the State shares this great challenge with the Church, present in the schools through *religion classes* "taught as an ordinary subject".

In many places, those students who do not belong to any religious denomination attend an ethics lesson that is "neutral from the religious viewpoint". This lesson on ethics cannot and must not in any sense be "neutral from the point of view of values". It must enable students to become familiar with the great tradition of the Western spirit that has shaped the history and culture of Europe and continues to inspire it.

The Church considers it important that this lesson of ethics be imparted alongside that of confessional religion, but absolutely without replacing it.

Mr Ambassador,

Germany is a Country open to the world. Our Homeland today has a soundly established and recognized place in the community of European States and Peoples.

Furthermore, over and above questions of national interest, Germany does not forget the problems of many poor countries in other parts of the world.

International ecclesial relief agencies of the Catholic Church based in Germany can also count on the genuine generosity of the people. In many matters associated with human, humanitarian and international rights, the Holy See can count on the collaboration based on trust of the Federal Government of Germany.

For all these reasons, the Church and I are sincerely grateful. With your long diplomatic experience at the service of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Ambassador, you can ensure that this collaboration is always solid and at the service of humankind.

I wholeheartedly implore upon you, your family and all the members of the Embassy, God's constant protection and an abundance of his Blessings.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 44 p.8.

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