



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AUSTRIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 850th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SHRINE OF MARIAZELL

MEETING WITH THE AUTHORITIES AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

Hofburg, Vienna
Friday, 7 September 2007

Mr President of the Federal Republic,
Mr Chancellor,
Members of the Federal Government,
Deputies to the National Council and Members of the Federal Council,
Presidents of the Provinces,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It is my great joy and honour to meet you today, Mr President, together with the members of the Federal Government and representatives of the political and civic life of the Republic of Austria. Our meeting here in the Hofburg reflects the good relations, marked by reciprocal trust, which exist between your country and the Holy See, relations to which you, Mr President, have just alluded. For this I am most pleased.

Relations between Austria and the Holy See are part of that vast network of diplomatic relations in

which Vienna serves as an important crossroads, inasmuch as a number of international Organizations have their headquarters in this city. I am pleased by the presence of many diplomatic representatives, whom I greet with respect. I thank you, distinguished Ambassadors, for your dedicated service, not only to the countries which you represent and to their interests, but also to the common cause of peace and understanding between peoples.

This is my first visit as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pastor of the universal Catholic Church to this country, which I know well from many earlier visits. It is – may I say – truly a joy for me to be here. I have many friends here and, as a Bavarian neighbour, Austria's way of life and traditions are familiar to me. My great predecessor of blessed memory, Pope John Paul II, visited Austria three times. Each time he was received most cordially by the people of this country, his words were listened to attentively, and his apostolic journeys left their mark.

Austria

In recent years and decades, Austria has registered advances which were inconceivable even two generations ago. Your country has not only experienced significant economic progress, but has also developed a model of social coexistence synonymous with the term "social solidarity". Austrians have every reason to be grateful for this, and they have demonstrated it not only by opening their hearts to the poor and the needy in their native land, but also by demonstrating generous solidarity in the event of catastrophes and disasters worldwide. The great initiatives of *Licht ins Dunkel* ("Light in the Darkness") at Christmastime, and *Nachbar in Not* ("Neighbour in Need") bear eloquent testimony to this attitude.

Austria and the expansion of the European Union

We are gathered in an historical setting, which for centuries was the seat of an Empire uniting vast areas of Central and Eastern Europe. This time and place thus offer us a good opportunity to take a far-ranging look at today's Europe. After the horrors of war and traumatic experiences of totalitarianism and dictatorship, Europe is moving towards a unity capable of ensuring a lasting order of peace and just development. The painful division which split the continent for decades has come to an end politically, yet the goal of unity remains in great part still to be achieved in the minds and hearts of individuals. If, after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, certain excessive hopes were disappointed, and on some points justified criticisms can be raised about certain European institutions, the process of unification remains a most significant achievement which has brought a period of unwonted peace to this continent, formerly consumed by constant conflicts and fatal fratricidal wars. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in particular, participating in this process is a further incentive to the consolidation of freedom, the constitutional state and democracy within their borders. Here I would like to recall the contribution made by my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, to that historic process. Austria too, as a bridge-country situated at the crossroads of West and East, has contributed much to this unification and has also – we

must not forget – greatly benefited from it.

Europe

The “European home”, as we readily refer to the community of this continent, will be a good place to live for everyone only if it is built on a solid cultural and moral foundation of common values drawn from our history and our traditions. Europe cannot and must not deny her Christian roots. These represent a dynamic component of our civilization as we move forward into the third millennium. Christianity has profoundly shaped this continent: something clearly evident in every country, and particularly in Austria, not least from the numerous churches and important monasteries. Above all, the faith is seen in the countless people whom in the course of history, and in our own day as well, it has brought to a life of hope, love and mercy. Mariazell, Austria’s great national shrine, is also a meeting-place for the different peoples of Europe. It is one of those places where men and women have drawn, and continue to draw, “strength from on high” for an upright life.

During these days, the witness of Christian faith at the heart of Europe is also finding expression in the *Third European Ecumenical Assembly* meeting in Sibiu/Hermannstadt (in Romania), whose motto is: “The Light of Christ Shines on All. Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe”. One spontaneously recalls the 2004 *Central European Katholikentag*, on the theme: “Christ – The Hope of Europe”, which brought so many believers together in Mariazell!

Nowadays we hear much of the “European model of life”. The term refers to a social order which combines a sound economy with social justice, political pluralism with tolerance, generosity and openness, but also means the preservation of the values which have made this continent what it is. This model, under the pressure of modern economic forces, faces a great challenge. The oft-cited process of globalization cannot be halted, yet it is an urgent task and a great responsibility of politics to regulate and limit globalization, so that it will not occur at the expense of the poorer nations and of the poor in wealthier nations, and prove detrimental to future generations.

Certainly – as we know – Europe has also experienced and suffered from terribly misguided courses of action. These have included: ideological restrictions imposed on philosophy, science and also faith, the abuse of religion and reason for imperialistic purposes, the degradation of man resulting from theoretical and practical materialism, and finally the degeneration of tolerance into an indifference with no reference to permanent values. But Europe has also been marked by the capacity for self-criticism, which gives it a distinctive place within the vast panorama of the world’s cultures.

Life

It was in Europe that the notion of human rights was first formulated. The fundamental human

right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, consequently, cannot be a human right – it is the very opposite. It is “a deep wound in society”, as the late Cardinal Franz König never tired of repeating.

In stating this, I am not expressing a specifically ecclesial concern. Rather, I wish to act as an advocate for a profoundly human need, speaking out on behalf of those unborn children who have no voice. In doing so, I do not close my eyes to the difficulties and the conflicts which many women are experiencing, and I realize that the credibility of what we say also depends on what the Church herself is doing to help women in trouble.

In this context, then, I appeal to political leaders not to allow children to be considered as a form of illness, nor to abolish in practice your legal system’s acknowledgment that abortion is wrong. I say this out of a concern for humanity. But that is only one side of this disturbing problem. The other is the need to do everything possible to make European countries once again open to welcoming children. Encourage young married couple to establish new families and to become mothers and fathers! You will not only assist them, but you will benefit society as a whole. I also decisively support you in your political efforts to favour conditions enabling young couples to raise children. Yet all this will be pointless, unless we can succeed in creating once again in our countries a climate of joy and confidence in life, a climate in which children are not seen as a burden, but rather as a gift for all.

Another great concern of mine is the debate on what has been termed “actively assisted death”. It is to be feared that at some point the gravely ill or elderly will be subjected to tacit or even explicit pressure to request death or to administer it to themselves. The proper response to end-of-life suffering is loving care and accompaniment on the journey towards death – especially with the help of palliative care – and not “actively assisted death”. But if humane accompaniment on the journey towards death is to prevail, structural reforms would be needed in every area of the social and healthcare system, as well as organized structures of palliative care. Concrete steps would also have to be taken: in the psychological and pastoral accompaniment of the seriously ill and dying, their family members, and physicians and healthcare personnel. In this field the hospice movement has done wonders. The totality of these tasks, however, cannot be delegated to it alone. Many other people need to be prepared or encouraged in their willingness to spare neither time nor expense in loving care for the gravely ill and dying.

The dialogue of reason

Finally, another part of the European heritage is a tradition of thought which considers as essential a substantial correspondence between faith, truth and reason. Here the issue is clearly whether or not reason stands at the beginning and foundation of all things. The issue is whether reality originates by chance and necessity, and thus whether reason is merely a chance by-product of the

irrational and, in an ocean of irrationality, it too, in the end, is meaningless, or whether instead the underlying conviction of Christian faith remains true: *In principio erat Verbum* – in the beginning was the Word; at the origin of everything is the creative reason of God who decided to make himself known to us human beings.

In this context, permit me to quote Jürgen Habermas, a philosopher not of the Christian faith. He has stated: “For the normative self-understanding of the modern period Christianity has been more than a mere catalyst. The egalitarian universalism which gave rise to the ideas of freedom and social coexistence, is a direct inheritance from the Jewish notion of justice and the Christian ethics of love. Substantially unchanged, this heritage has always been critically reappropriated and newly interpreted. To this day an alternative to it does not exist”.

Europe's tasks in the world

Given the uniqueness of its calling, Europe also has a unique responsibility in the world. First of all, it must not give up on itself. The continent which, demographically, is rapidly aging, must not become old in spirit. Furthermore, Europe will grow more sure of itself if it accepts a responsibility in the world corresponding to its singular intellectual tradition, its extraordinary resources and its great economic power. The European Union should therefore assume a role of leadership in the fight against global poverty and in efforts to promote peace. With gratitude we can observe that the countries of Europe and the European Union are among those making the greatest contribution to international development, but they also need to make their political importance felt, for example, with regard to the urgent challenges presented in Africa, given the immense tragedies afflicting that continent, such as the scourge of AIDS, the situation in Darfur, the unjust exploitation of natural resources and the disturbing traffic in arms. Nor can the political and diplomatic efforts of Europe and its countries neglect the continuing serious situation in the Middle East, where everyone's contribution is needed to promote the rejection of violence, reciprocal dialogue and a truly peaceful coexistence. Europe's relationship with the nations of Latin America and Asia must also continue to grow through suitable trade agreements.

Conclusion

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen! Austria is a country which is greatly blessed: by an immense natural beauty which attracts millions of holiday-makers each year; unique cultural treasures, created and amassed by many generations; and many artistically talented and creative individuals. Everywhere one can see the fruits of the diligence and gifts of industrious men and women. This is a reason for pride and gratitude. But Austria is certainly not an “enchanted island” nor does it consider itself such. Self-criticism is always a good thing, and, of course, is widespread in Austria. A country which has received so much must also give much. It can be rightly self-assured, while also sensing the need for a certain responsibility with regard to neighbouring countries, in Europe and in the world.

Much of what Austria is and possesses, it owes to the Christian faith and its beneficial effects on individual men and women. The faith has profoundly shaped the character of this country and its people. Consequently it should be everyone's concern to ensure that the day will never come when only its stones speak of Christianity! An Austria without a vibrant Christian faith would no longer be Austria.

Upon you and all the people of Austria, especially the elderly and infirm, as well as the young whose lives lie ahead of them, I invoke hope, confidence, joy and God's blessings! Thank you.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 37 pp. 4,5.*

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