



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR. REINHARD SCHWEPPE, NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 7 November 2011

*Your Excellency,
Distinguished Mr Ambassador,*

It gives me great joy to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See. Thank you for your cordial words and I ask you, Your Excellency, to be so good as to convey my sincere gratitude to the Federal President, to the Federal Chancellor and to the members of the Federal Government. At the same time, I am eager to assure all my compatriots of my deep affection and good wishes.

We all have vividly before our eyes the joyful images of my Journey to Germany last September. The many demonstrations of sympathy and esteem shown to me on the various stages of my Visit, in Berlin, in Erfurt and in Etzelsbach, as well as in Freiburg, far surpassed expectations. I could see everywhere that people long for the truth. We Christians must witness to the truth, so as to give it expression in our personal, family and social life.

The official Visit of a Pope to Germany offers an opportunity for reflection on the type of service the Catholic Church and the Holy See can offer in a pluralist society, such as the current one in our homeland. Many of our contemporaries consider that the influence of Christianity, as well as of other religions, consists in giving shape to a specific culture and a specific lifestyle in society. A group of believers, through their behaviour, delineates certain forms of social life that others adopt, thereby impressing a specific character on society. This idea is not erroneous but does not fully convey the Catholic Church's vision of herself. The Church, without a doubt, is also a cultural community and in this way influences the societies in which she is present; however, she is convinced that not only has she created common cultural aspects in different forms in various countries but also that she in turn has been shaped by their traditions.

Furthermore the Catholic Church is aware that through her faith she knows the truth about man and is therefore duty bound to stand up for the values that are valid for human beings as such, independently of the various cultures. She makes a distinction between the specificity of her faith and the truths of reason to which faith gives access and which are also accessible to the person as a person regardless of this faith.

Fortunately, a fundamental defence of all the universal human values became positive law in our Constitution of 1949 and in the declarations on human rights after the Second World War, because, after the horrors of the dictatorship, some people recognized their universal validity that is based on their anthropological truths and expressed them in effective rights. Today, the fundamental values of the human being, in which human dignity as such is questioned, are once again being debated. Here, over and above the area of her faith, the Church considers it her duty to defend in our society as a whole the truths and values in which the very dignity of man is at stake. Accordingly, to mention one particularly important point, we have no right to judge whether an individual is “already a person” or “still a person”, and even less is it up to us to manipulate the human being or even to wish to do so.

A society is truly human when without reservations it protects and respects the dignity of every person from conception until the moment of his or her natural death. However, should it decide to “get rid” of its members in the greatest need of protection, exclude people from being people, it would be behaving in a profoundly inhuman and also distorted manner with regard to the equality — obvious to every person of good will — of the dignity of all people, in all the stages of life.

If the Holy See intervenes in the legislative context with regard to fundamental questions of human dignity that are being brought up today in numerous areas of the prenatal existence of the human being, it does not do so to impose faith indirectly on others but rather to defend values that are fundamentally comprehensible to all as truths of existence, even if interests of another kind seek in various ways to obscure this consideration.

At this point I would like to tackle another disturbing aspect which, it seems, is spreading through material and hedonistic tendencies, especially in the countries of the so-called “Western world”, and that is, the sexual discrimination of women. Every person, whether man or woman, is destined to exist for others. A relationship that fails to respect the fact that men and women have the same dignity constitutes a grave crime against humanity. It is time to vigorously put a stop to prostitution, as well as to the widespread dissemination of material with an erotic or a pornographic content, also on the internet. The Holy See will ensure that the commitment of the Catholic Church in Germany to oppose these evils is implemented in the most decisive and clear way.

With regard to the many years of cordial relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Holy See, we can note many good results. It is fortunate that the Catholic Church in Germany is well equipped for action, that she can proclaim the Gospel freely and help people in the context

of numerous charitable and social structures. I am truly grateful for the material support given to this work by the Federal, Regional and Municipal Institutions. Among the many aspects of the positive and appreciable collaboration between the State and the Catholic Church, I wish to mention, for example, the safeguarding of the ecclesiastical labour law by state law, as well as the support offered to Catholic schools and Catholic institutions in the context of charity whose work ultimately furthers the well-being of all citizens.

Esteemed Ambassador, I wish you a good beginning of your mission and every success in this task. At the same time, I assure you of my help in the service you are carrying out and of the availability of the representatives of the Roman Curia. I warmly invoke upon you, upon your wife and upon your collaborators at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See God's constant protection and his abundant blessings.