



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO COLOGNE ON THE OCCASION OF THE XX WORLD YOUTH DAY

MEETING WITH THE GERMAN BISHOPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Cologne - Archbishop's House
Sunday, 21 August 2005*

Venerable and Dear Brothers,

First of all, I would like to express my great happiness at once again having the opportunity to see one another and be together after beautiful and likewise demanding days, and therefore, of having the joy of meeting. Although I am in fact only a former member of the German Bishops' Conference, I still feel bound to you all in a fraternal union that cannot weaken.

I would like next to thank Cardinal Lehmann for his cordial words and emphasize them in the spirit of what I too said today at the end of this Eucharistic celebration: that is, I want to express once again the great "thank you" that we all have in our hearts.

We all know that the immense work of preparation, the great things achieved, do not suffice to make all this possible. We know, consequently, that it must necessarily be a gift. Since no one can simply create the enthusiasm of the young, no one can create to last for days this union in faith and in the joy of faith.

Everything, moreover, even the weather, has truly been a gift for which we thank the Lord. We also interpret it as a duty to do our part to ensure that this enthusiasm continues and develops into strength for the life of the Church in our Country.

I would like once again to thank Cardinal Meisner and his collaborators for all their preparatory work. I also want to thank Cardinal Lehmann, his collaborators and all of you, for all the Dioceses have cooperated in the organization of this event. The whole of Germany has offered hospitality to the guests and has set out with Our Lady and the Cross; it has thus been able to receive this gift.

I am deeply grateful for this statue that still needs a little time, so to speak, to acquire its definitive form. Yet I find it very beautiful that St Boniface will also be in my house and will thus visibly express to me too what he held particularly dear: the union between the Church in Germany and in Rome. Just as he led the Church in Germany to unity with the Successor of Peter, he is also guiding me to lasting fraternal communion with the Bishops of Germany, with the Church in Germany.

The Holy Father John Paul II, the brilliant founder of the [World Youth Days](#) - an insight that I consider an inspiration - has shown that both parties give and receive. Not only have we done our part in the best possible way, but the young people, with their questions, their hope, their joy in faith, their enthusiasm in renewing the Church, have given something to us.

Let us give thanks for this reciprocity and let us hope that it will endure, that is, that the young people with their questions, faith and joy in faith will continue to challenge us to get the better of our faint-heartedness and weariness and urge us, in turn, with the experience of the faith that is given to us, with the experience of pastoral ministry, with the grace of the Sacrament in which we find ourselves, to point out the way to them, so that their enthusiasm may be properly directed. Just as a spring must be channelled so that its waters may be useful, this ever new enthusiasm must likewise be, as it were, moulded into its ecclesial form.

Here in Germany we are accustomed primarily, and I as a Professor in particular, to see especially the problems. However, I believe we should admit that all this has been possible because in Germany, despite all the Church's problems, despite all possible questionable things, a living Church truly exists.

She is a Church with many positive aspects in which so many people are ready to work hard for their own faith and to use their free time, even giving money and some of their possessions simply to contribute to her with their own lives. It seems to me that this has become newly visible to us.

How many people in Germany, in spite of all the difficulties we complain about, are still believers today, constitute a living Church and hence, make it possible for an event like World Youth Day to have its own context, its own *humus*, in which to grow and take shape!

I believe we must remember the many priests, Religious and lay people who, faithful to their service, work in difficult pastoral conditions. And there is no need for me to emphasize the generosity of German Catholics, truly well known throughout the world; it is not only a material

generosity, since there are many German *Fidei donum* priests.

I see it during the *Ad limina* visits: German priests are working, even in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and regions beyond the wildest imagination, scattering the seed of the Word, identifying with people. Thus, they imbue this threatened world, invaded by so many negative things from the West, with the great power of faith and with it, all that is positive in what we are given.

Misereor, Adveniat, Missio, Renovabis as well as the diocesan and parish branches of *Caritas* do an enormous amount of work. Then the educational work of Catholic schools and other Catholic institutions and organizations for youth is equally vast. In saying this, I do not intend to be exhaustive about everything positive there is to say, but merely to mention it to you so that these aspects are not forgotten and will always inspire courage and joy.

Besides the positive aspects that I believe are important not to forget and for which it is always necessary to be grateful, we also have to admit that on the face of the universal Church and also on that of the Church in Germany there are unfortunately also wrinkles and shadows that obscure her splendour. We should lovingly keep these before us too, at this moment of festivity and thanksgiving.

We know that secularism and dechristianization are gaining ground, that relativism is growing and that the influence of Catholic ethics and morals is in constant decline. Many people abandon the Church or, if they stay, accept only a part of Catholic teaching, picking and choosing between only certain aspects of Christianity.

The religious situation in the East continues to be worrying. Here, as we know, the majority of the population is not baptized, has no contact with the Church and has often not even heard of either Christ or the Church. We should recognize these realities as challenges.

Dear Brothers, as you yourselves said in your Pastoral Letter of 21 September 2004, on the occasion of the Jubilee of St Boniface: "We have become a mission land". This is true for large parts of Germany.

I therefore believe that throughout Europe, and likewise in France, Spain and elsewhere, we should give serious thought as to how to achieve a true evangelization in this day and age, not only a new evangelization, but often a true and proper first evangelization.

People do not know God, they do not know Christ. There is a new form of paganism and it is not enough for us to strive to preserve the existing flock, although this is very important: we must ask the important question: what really is life?

I believe we must all try together to find new ways of bringing the Gospel to the contemporary world, of proclaiming Christ anew and of implanting the faith.

This scene, that the World Youth Day is unfolding before us and that I have described with only a few brief comments, invites us to turn our gaze to the future. For the Church and especially for us Pastors, for parents and for educators, young people constitute a living appeal to faith.

I would like to say once again that in my opinion Pope John Paul II was tremendously inspired in choosing for this [World Youth Day](#) the motto: "*We have come to worship him*" (Mt 2: 2). We are often so oppressed, understandably oppressed, by the immense social needs of the world and by all the organizational and structural problems that exist that we set aside worship as something for later. Fr Delp once said that nothing is more important than worship. He said so in the context of his time, when it was evident that to destroy worship, destroyed man.

Nonetheless, in our new context in which worship, and thus also the face of human dignity, has been lost, it is once again up to us to understand the priority of worship. We must make youth, ourselves and our communities, aware of the fact that it is not a luxury of our confused epoch that we cannot permit ourselves but a priority. Wherever worship is no longer, wherever it is not a priority to pay honour to God, human realities can make no headway.

We must therefore endeavour to make the face of Christ visible, the face of the living God, so that like the Magi we may spontaneously fall to our knees and adore him. Two things certainly happened in the Magi: first they sought; then they found and worshipped him.

Today, many people are searching. We too are searching. Basically, in a different dialectic, both these things must always exist within us. We must respect each one's own search. We must sustain it and make them feel that faith is not merely a dogmatism complete in itself that puts an end to seeking, that extinguishes man's great thirst, but that it directs the great pilgrimage towards the infinite; we, as believers, are always simultaneously seekers and finders.

In his Commentary on the Psalms, St Augustine interprets so splendidly the expression "*Quaerite faciem eius semper*", "constantly seek his face", that ever since my student days his words have lived on in my heart. This is not only true for this life, but for eternity; his face will be one to ceaselessly rediscover. The more deeply we penetrate the splendour of divine love, the greater will be our discoveries and the more beautiful it will be to travel on and know that our seeking has no end, hence, finding has no end and is thus eternity - the joy of seeking and at the same time of finding.

We must support people in their search as fellow-seekers, and at the same time we must also give them the certainty that God has found us and, consequently, that we can find him. We want to be a Church open to the future, rich in promises for the new generations.

It is not a matter of pandering to youth, which is basically ridiculous, but of a true youthfulness that flows from the wellsprings of eternity, that is ever new, that derives from the transparency of Christ in his Church: this is how he gives us the light to continue. In this light we can find the courage to face confidently the most difficult questions asked in the Church in Germany today.

As I have already said, on the one hand, we must accept the challenges of youth, but on the other, we in turn must inculcate in young people patience, without which nothing can be found; we must teach them discernment, a healthy realism, the capacity to be decisive. A Head of State who paid me a visit recently told me that his main concern was the widespread inability to make definitive decisions for fear of losing personal freedom.

In fact, men and women become free when they bind themselves, when they find roots, for it is then that they can grow and mature. We must teach patience, discernment, realism, but without false compromises, so as not to water down the Gospel!

The experience of these past 20 years has taught us that every World Youth Day is in a certain sense a new beginning for the pastoral care of young people in the country that hosts it. Preparing for the event mobilizes people and resources. We have seen it right here in Germany: how a true "mobilization" has pervaded the Country, prompting a surge of energy.

Lastly, the celebration itself brings a gust of enthusiasm that must be sustained and, so to speak, rendered definitive. This enormous potential energy can further increase, spreading across the territory. I am thinking of the parishes, associations and movements. I am thinking of the priests, Religious, catechists and animators involved with young people. I believe that in Germany the large number of people involved in this event is well known. I am praying that each one of those who collaborated may genuinely grow in love for Christ and for the Church, and I encourage them all to carry on their pastoral work among the new generations together, with a renewed spirit of service. We must relearn willingness to serve, and transmit it.

The majority of young Germans live in comfortable social and financial conditions. Yet we know well that difficult situations are not lacking.

In all social strata, especially those that are better off, the number of young people from broken families is on the rise. Unfortunately, unemployment among young people in Germany has increased.

Moreover, many young men and women are bewildered and have no real answers to their questions about the meaning of life and death, about their present and their future. Many of the ideas put forward by modern society lead nowhere and unfortunately, very many young people end by sinking into the quicksand of alcohol and drugs, or caught in the clutches of extremist groups.

Some young Germans, especially in the East, have never become personally acquainted with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Even in the traditionally Catholic regions, the teaching of religion and catechesis do not always manage to forge lasting bonds between young people and the Church community.

For this reason you are all committed together - I know it - to seeking new ways to reach out to young people, and the World Youth Days have been - as Pope John Paul II used to say - a sort of "laboratory" for this.

I think we are all reflecting - and in the other Western countries it is just the same - on how to make catechesis more effective. I read in the *HERDER-Korrespondenz* that you have published a new catechetical document that I have unfortunately not yet had an opportunity to see, but I am grateful to note that you are taking this problem to heart.

Indeed, it is worrying to us all that despite the age-old teaching of religion, the knowledge of religion is meagre, and many people often do not even know the most basic, elementary things. What can we do?

I do not know. Perhaps on the one hand, heathens should have access to a sort of pre-catechesis that opens them to the faith - and this is also the content of many catechetical endeavours - but on the other, it is always necessary to have the courage to transmit the mystery itself, in its beauty and greatness, and pave the way to the impulse to contemplate, love and recognize it: ah, this is it!

Today, in [my Homily](#) I noted that Pope John Paul II gave us two exceptional instruments: the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and its *Compendium*, which he also wanted. We made sure that the German translation was ready for World Youth Day. In Italy, half a million copies have already been sold. It is on sale at the newsstands and rouses peoples' curiosity. What is in it? What does the Catholic Church say?

I believe we too must have the courage to sustain this curiosity and to attempt to make these books that represent the content of the mystery a part of catechesis, so that by increasing the knowledge of our faith the joy that stems from it will also increase.

I have two other aspects very much at heart. One is the pastoral care of vocations.

I feel that the recitation of Vespers in the Church of St Pantaleon has also given us the courage to help young people and to do so in the right way, so that the Lord's call may reach them and they ask themselves: "Does he want me?"; and so that once again the willingness to be called and to hear such a call may increase.

The other aspect very dear to me is the pastoral care of families. We see the threat to families; in the meantime even lay bodies recognize how important it is that the family live as the primary cell of society, that children be able to grow in an atmosphere of communion between the generations, so that continuity between the present, past and future will endure and that the continuity of values will be lasting: this is what makes it possible to build communion in a country.

I wanted to deal precisely with these three aspects: catechesis, the pastoral care of vocations and the pastoral care of families.

As we have seen, associations and movements, which are undoubtedly a source of enrichment, play an important role in the world of youth. The Church must make the most of these realities, and at the same time she must guide them with pastoral wisdom, so that with the variety of their different gifts they may contribute in the best possible way to building up the community without ever entering into competition - each one building, so to speak, its own little church -, but respecting one another and working together for the one Church - for the one parish as the local Church - to awaken in young people the joy of faith, love for the Church and passion for the Kingdom of God.

I think that precisely this is another important aspect: this authentic communion on the one hand between the various movements whose forms of exclusivism should be eliminated, and on the other, between the local Churches and the movements, so that the local Churches recognize this particularity, which seems strange to many, and welcome it in itself as a treasure, understanding that in the Church there are many ways and that all together they converge in a symphony of faith. The local Churches and movements are not in opposition to one another, but constitute the living structure of the Church.

Dear Brothers, please God, there will be other occasions on which to go deeply into the issues that challenge our common pastoral solicitude. This time I wanted, very briefly and not exhaustively, of course, to convey the message that the great pilgrimage of young people has left us. It seems to me that at the end of this event, the young people's request to us might be summed up as: "Yes, we came to worship him. We met him. Now help us to become his disciples and witnesses". It is a demanding appeal, but especially comforting to a Pastor's heart.

May the memory of the days spent in Cologne under the banner of hope sustain our common service!

I leave you with my affectionate encouragement, which at the same time is a heartfelt brotherly request: always proceed and work in agreement, on the basis of a communion of which the Eucharist is the summit and the source.

I entrust you all to Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, and I impart my Apostolic

Blessing to each one of you and to your communities. Thank you.

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