



The Holy See

**INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
IN PREPARATION FOR THE UPCOMING JOURNEY TO BAVARIA
(SEPTEMBER 9-14, 2006)**

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BR: *Holy Father, your next Trip will be to Bavaria. During preparations for the trip your collaborators said you are nostalgic for your Homeland. What are the issues you will be speaking about during the Visit and is the concept of "homeland" one of the values you intend touching on, in particular?*

Benedict XVI: Of course. The purpose of the Visit is precisely because I want to again see the places where I grew up, the people who touched and shaped my life. I want to thank these people. Naturally I also want to express a message that goes beyond my Country, just as my ministry calls me to do. I simply let the liturgical recurrences suggest the themes to me. The basic theme is that we have to rediscover God, not just any God, but the God who has a human face, because when we see Jesus Christ we see God. Starting from this point we must find the way to meet each other in the family, among generations, and then among cultures and peoples as well. We must find the way to reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in this world, the ways that lead to the future. We will not find these ways leading to the future if we do not receive light from above. So, I did not choose very specific themes, but rather, it is the liturgy that leads me to express the basic message of faith which naturally finds its place in everyday reality, where we want to search, above all, for cooperation among peoples and possible ways that can lead us to reconciliation and peace.

ZDF: *As Pope you are responsible for the Church throughout the world. But, clearly, your Visit focuses attention on the situation of Catholics in Germany as well. All observers say there is a positive atmosphere, partly thanks to your election as Pope. But obviously, the old problems are still around. Just to quote a few examples: fewer churchgoers, fewer baptisms and especially, less*

Church influence on the life of society. How do you see the present situation of the Catholic Church in Germany?

Benedict XVI: I would say, first of all, that Germany is part of the West, with its own characteristic colouring obviously, and that in the Western world today we are experiencing a wave of new and drastic enlightenment or secularization, whatever you like to call it. It has become more difficult to believe because the world in which we find ourselves is completely made up of ourselves, and God, so to speak, does not appear directly anymore. We do not drink from the source anymore, but from the vessel which is offered to us already full, and so on. Humanity has rebuilt the world by itself, and finding God inside this world has become more difficult. This is not specific to Germany: it is something that is valid throughout the world, especially in the West. Then again, today the West is being strongly influenced by other cultures in which the original religious element is very powerful. These cultures are horrified when they experience the West's coldness towards God. This "presence of the sacred" in other cultures, even if often veiled, touches the Western world again, it touches us at the crossroads of so many cultures. The quest for "something bigger" wells up again from the depths of Western people and in Germany. We see how in young people there is the search for something "more", we see how the religious phenomenon is returning, as they say, even if it is a search that is rather indefinite. But with all this the Church is present once more and faith is offered as the answer. I think that this Visit, like the Visit to Cologne, is an opportunity for us to see that believing is beautiful, that the joy of a huge universal community possesses a transcendental strength, that behind this belief lies something important and that together with the new searching movements there are also new outlets for the faith that lead us from one to the other and that are also positive for society as a whole.

VR: Holy Father, you were in Cologne with the young people exactly a year ago. You experienced how amazingly willing youth are to welcome others and you personally were very warmly welcomed. Will you be bringing a special message for young people on this next Trip?

Benedict XVI: First of all, I would say that I am very happy there are young people who want to be together, who want to be together in faith and who want to do something good. The tendency to do good is very strong in young people; just think of the many kinds of volunteer work they do. The commitment of offering your own personal contribution to help the needy of this world is a great thing. One idea might be to encourage them in this sphere: Go ahead! Look for opportunities to do good! The world needs this desire to do good, it needs this commitment! Then, another message might be this: the courage to make definitive decisions! Young people are very generous, but when they face the risk of a lifelong commitment, be it marriage or a priestly vocation, they are afraid. The world is moving dramatically: nowadays I can continually do whatever I want with my life with all its unpredictable future events. By making a definitive decision, am I not myself tying up my personal freedom and depriving myself of freedom of movement? Reawaken the courage to make definitive decisions: they are really the only ones that allow us to grow, to move ahead and to reach something great in life. They are the only decisions that do not destroy our freedom but

offer to point us in the right direction. Risk making this leap, so to speak, towards the definitive and so embrace life fully: this is something I would be happy to communicate to them.

DW: Holy Father, a question about the situation regarding foreign politics. Hopes for peace in the Middle East have been dwindling over the past weeks. What do you see as the Holy See's role in relation to the present situation? What positive influences can you have on the situation, on developments in the Middle East?

Benedict XVI: Of course, we have no political influence and we do not want any political power. But we do want to appeal to all Christians and to all those who feel touched by the words of the Holy See, to help mobilize all the forces that recognize how war is the worst solution for all sides. It brings no good to anyone, not even to the apparent victors. We understand this very well in Europe, after the two world wars. Everyone needs peace. There is a strong Christian community in Lebanon, there are Christians among the Arabs, there are Christians in Israel. Christians throughout the world are committed to helping these countries that are dear to all of us. There are moral forces at work that are ready to help people understand how the only solution is for all of us to live together. These are the forces we want to mobilize: it is up to politicians to find a way to let this happen as soon as possible and, especially, to make it last.

BR: As Bishop of Rome you are the Successor of St Peter. How can the ministry of Peter manifest itself fittingly in today's world? And how do you see the tensions and equilibrium between the primacy of the Pope, on one hand, and the collegiality of the Bishops, on the other?

Benedict XVI: Of course, there is a relationship of tension and equilibrium and, we say, that is the way it has to be. Multiplicity and unity must always find their reciprocal rapport and this relationship must insert itself in ever new ways into the changing situations in the world. We have a new polyphony of cultures nowadays in which Europe is no longer the determining factor. Christians on the various continents are starting to have their own importance, their own characteristics. We must keep learning about this fusion of the different components. We have developed various instruments to help us: the so-called *ad limina* visits of the Bishops, which have always taken place. They are now used much more in order to speak sincerely with all the offices of the Holy See and with me. I speak personally to each Bishop. I have already spoken to nearly all the Bishops of Africa and to many of the Bishops from Asia. Now, it is the turn of Central Europe, Germany, Switzerland. In these encounters in which the Centre and the Periphery come together in an open exchange of views, I think that the correct reciprocal relationship in this balanced tension grows. We also have other instruments like the Synod, the Consistory, which I shall be holding regularly and which I would like to develop. Without having a long agenda, we can discuss current problems together and look for solutions. Everyone knows that the Pope is not an absolute monarch but that he has to personify, you might say, the totality that comes together to listen to Christ. There is a strong awareness that we need a unifying figure who can guarantee independence from political powers and so that Christians do not identify too much with

nationalism. There is an awareness of the need for a higher and broader figure that can create unity in the dynamic integration of all parties and that can embrace and promote multiplicity. This awareness is very strong. So I believe there is a close bond with the Petrine ministry, which is expressed in the desire to develop it further so that it responds both to the Lord's will and to the needs of the times.

ZDF: As the land of the Reformation, Germany is especially marked by the relationships between the different religious confessions. Ecumenical relations is a sensitive area that constantly encounters new problems. What chances do you see of improving relations with the Evangelical Church or what difficulties do you foresee in this relationship?

Benedict XVI: Maybe it is important to say, first of all, that there are marked differences within the Evangelical Church. If I am not mistaken, in Germany we have three important communities: Lutherans, Reformed, and Prussian Union. There are also several free Churches (*Freikirchen*), and within the traditional Churches there are movements like the "Confessing Church", and so on. It is therefore a collection of many voices with which we have to enter into dialogue, searching for unity while respecting the multiplicity of the voices with which we want to collaborate. I believe that the first thing we need to do is to concern ourselves with clarifying, establishing and putting into practice important ethical directives in society, thus guaranteeing a social-ethical consistency without which society cannot fulfil its political ends, namely, justice for all, living together in a positive way and peace. In this sense, I think a lot is already achieved, that we already agree on the common Christian basics before the great moral challenges. Of course, then we have to witness to God in a world that has problems finding him, as we said, and to make God visible in the human face of Jesus Christ, to offer people access to the Source without which our morale becomes sterile and loses its reference point, to give joy as well because we are not alone in this world. Only in this way is joy born before the greatness of humanity: humanity is not an evolutionary product that turned out badly. We are the image of God. We have to move on these two levels, so to speak: the level of important ethical points of reference and the level that manifests the presence of God, a concrete God, starting from within and working towards them. If we do this, and especially, if in all our single communities we try not to live the faith in a specific fashion but always start from its deepest basics, then maybe we still will not reach external manifestations of unity quickly, but we will mature towards an interior unity that, God willing, one day will bring with it an exterior form of unity, too.

VR: The issue of the family. A month ago you were in Valencia for the World Meeting of Families. Anyone who was listening carefully, as we tried to do at Vatican Radio, noticed how you never mentioned the words "homosexual marriage", you never spoke about abortion or about contraception. Careful observers thought that was very interesting. Clearly your idea is to go around the world preaching the faith rather than as an "apostle of morality". What are your comments?

Benedict XVI: Obviously, yes. Actually, I should say I had only two opportunities to speak for 20 minutes. And when you have so little time you cannot immediately begin with "no". Firstly, you have to know what we really want, right? Christianity, Catholicism, is not a collection of prohibitions: it is a positive option. It is very important that we look at it again because this idea has almost completely disappeared today. We have heard so much about what is not allowed that now it is time to say: we have a positive idea to offer, that man and woman are made for each other, that the scale of sexuality, *eros*, *agape*, indicates the level of love and it is in this way that marriage develops, first of all as a joyful and blessing-filled encounter between a man and a woman, and then, the family, which guarantees continuity among generations and through which generations are reconciled to each other and even cultures can meet. So, firstly, it is important to stress what we want. Secondly, we can also see why we do not want some things. I believe we need to see and reflect on the fact that it is not a Catholic invention that man and woman are made for each other so that humanity can go on living: all cultures know this. As far as abortion is concerned, it is part of the fifth, not the sixth, commandment: "You shall not kill!". We have to presume this is obvious and always stress that the human person begins in the mother's womb and remains a human person until his or her last breath. The human person must always be respected as a human person. But all this is clearer if you say it first in a positive way.

DW: Holy Father, my question is linked to that of Fr von Gemmingen. Believers throughout the world are waiting for the Catholic Church to answer the most urgent global problems such as AIDS and overpopulation. Why does the Catholic Church pay so much attention to moral issues rather than suggesting concrete solutions to these problems that are so crucial to humanity, in Africa, for example?

Benedict XVI: So that is the problem: do we really pay so much attention to moral issues? I think - I am more and more convinced after my conversations with the African Bishops - that the basic question, if we want to move ahead in this field, is about education, formation. Progress becomes true progress only if it serves the human person and if the human person grows: not only in terms of his or her technical power, but also in his or her moral awareness. I believe that the real problem of our historical moment lies in the imbalance between the incredibly fast growth of our technical power and that of our moral capacity, which has not grown in proportion. That is why the formation of the human person is the true recipe, the key to it all, I would say, and this is what the Church proposes. Briefly speaking, this formation has a dual dimension: of course, we have to learn, to acquire knowledge, ability, know-how, as they say. In this sense Europe and in the last decades America have done a lot, and that is important. But if we only teach know-how, if we only teach how to build and to use machines and how to use contraceptives, then we should not be surprised when we find ourselves facing wars and AIDS epidemics; because we need two dimensions: simultaneously, we need the formation of the heart, if I can express myself in this way, with which the human person acquires points of reference and learns how to use the techniques correctly. And that is what we try to do. Throughout Africa and in many countries in Asia, we have a vast network of every level of school where people can first of all learn, form a

true conscience and acquire professional ability which gives them autonomy and freedom. But in these schools we try to communicate more than know-how; rather, we try to form human beings capable of reconciliation, who know that we must build and not destroy, and who have the necessary references to be able to live together. In much of Africa, relations between Christians and Muslims are exemplary. The Bishops have formed common commissions together with the Muslims to try and create peace in situations of conflict. This schools network, dedicated to human learning and formation, is very important. It is completed by a network of hospitals and assistance centres that reach even the most remote villages. In many areas, following the destruction of war, the Church is the only authority - not authority but structure - that remains intact. This is a fact! We offer treatment, treatment to AIDS victims too, and we offer education, helping to establish good relationships with others. So I think we should correct that image that sees the Church as spreading severe "no's". We work a lot in Africa so that the various dimensions of formation can be integrated and so that it will become possible to overcome violence and epidemics, that include malaria and tuberculosis as well.

***BR:** Holy Father, Christianity has spread around the world starting from Europe. Now many people think that the future of the Church is to be found in other continents. Is that true? Or, in other words, what is the future of Christianity in Europe, where it looks like it is being reduced to the private affair of a minority?*

Benedict XVI: I would like to introduce a few subtleties. It is true, as we know, that Christianity began in the Near East. And for a long time its main development continued there. Then it spread in Asia, much more than what we think today after the changes brought about by Islam. Precisely for this reason its axis moved noticeably towards the West and Europe. Europe - we are proud and pleased to say so - further developed Christianity in its broader intellectual and cultural dimensions. But I think it is important to remind ourselves about the Eastern Christians because there is the present danger of them emigrating, these Christians who have always been an important minority living in a fruitful relationship with the surrounding reality. There is a great danger that these places where Christianity had its origins will be left without Christians. I think we need to help them a lot so that they can stay. But getting back to your question: Europe definitely became the centre of Christianity and its missionary movement. Today, other continents and other cultures play with equal importance in the concert of world history. In this way the number of voices in the Church grows, and this is a good thing. It is good that different temperaments can express themselves, the special gifts of Africa, Asia and America, Latin America in particular. Of course, they are all touched not only by the word of Christianity, but by the secular message of this world that carries to other continents the disruptive forces we have already experienced. All the Bishops from different parts of the world say: we still need Europe, even if Europe is only a part of a greater whole. We still carry the responsibility that comes from our experience, from the science and technology that was developed here, from our liturgical experience to our traditions, the ecumenical experiences we have accumulated: all this is very important for the other continents too. So it is important that today we do not give up, feeling sorry for ourselves and saying: "Look at

us, we are just a minority, let us at least try and preserve our small number!". We have to keep our dynamism alive, open relationships of exchange, so that new strength for us comes from there. Today, there are Indian and African priests in Europe, even in Canada, where many African priests work; it is interesting. There is this reciprocal give and take. But if in the future we receive more, we also need to continue giving with courage and with growing dynamism.

ZDF: This is a subject that has already been touched partially, Holy Father. When it comes to important political or scientific decisions, modern society does not base itself on Christian values, and the Church, according to research, is considered mainly as a warning voice or a controlling voice. Should not the Church emerge from this defensive position and assume a more positive attitude with regard to the building of the future?

Benedict XVI: I would say that in any case we have to stress better what we want that is positive. And we must do this, above all, in dialogue with cultures and religions because, as I think I have already said, the African Continent, the African spirit and the Asian spirit too, are horrified by the coldness of our rationality. It is important for them to see that this is not all we are. On the other hand, it is important that our secular world comes to understand that the Christian faith is not an impediment but rather a bridge for dialogue with other worlds. It is not right to think that a purely rational culture has an easier approach to other religions just because it is tolerant. To a large extent what is missing is a "religious centre-piece" which can act as a point of departure and arrival for those who want to enter into a relationship. That is why we must and can show that precisely because of the new intercultural environment in which we live, pure rationality separated from God is insufficient. We need a wider rationality that sees God in harmony with reason and is aware that the Christian faith which developed in Europe is also a means to bring together reason and culture and to integrate them with action in a single and comprehensive vision. In this sense, I believe we have an important task, namely, to show that this Word which we possess is not part of the trash of history, so to speak, but it is necessary today.

VR: Holy Father, let us talk about your travels. You live in the Vatican and maybe it hurts you to be far from people and separated from the world, even in the beautiful surroundings of Castel Gandolfo. You will be turning 80 soon. Do you think that, with God's grace, you will be able to make many more Trips? Do you have any idea of where you would like to go? To the Holy Land or Brazil? Do you know already?

Benedict XVI: To tell the truth, I am not that lonely. Of course, there are, you may say, the walls that make it more difficult to get in, but there's also a "pontifical family", lots of visitors every day, especially when I am in Rome. Bishops come and other people; there are State visits. There are also personalities who want to talk to me personally, and not just about political issues. In this regard there are all kinds of encounters that, thank God, are continually granted to me. And it is also important that the seat of the Successor of Peter be a place of encounter, do you not think? From the time of John XXIII onwards the pendulum began to swing in the other direction, too: the

Popes started going out to visit others. I have to say that I have never felt strong enough to plan many long Trips. But where such Journeys allow me to communicate a message or where, shall I say, they are in response to a sincere request, I would like to go, with the right "dosage" of Journeys that are possible for me. Some are already planned: next year there is the meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Council, CELAM, in Brazil, and I think that being there is an important step in the context of what Latin America is living so intensely, to strengthen the hope which is so alive in that part of the world. Then, I would like to visit the Holy Land, and I hope to visit it at a time of peace. For the rest, we will see what Providence has in store for me.

VR: Allow me to insist. Austrians also speak German and they are waiting for you at Mariazell...

Benedict XVI: Yes, it has been agreed. Quite simply, I promised them, a little imprudently. I really liked that place and I said: Yes, I will come back to the *Magna Mater Austriae*. Of course, this immediately became a promise that I will keep, that I will keep gladly.

VR: I insist further. I admire you every Wednesday when you hold your General Audience. Fifty thousand people come. It must be very tiring. Do you manage to hold out?

Benedict XVI: Yes, the Good Lord gives me the necessary strength. And when one sees the warm welcome, one is obviously encouraged.

DW: Holy Father, you have just said you made a rather imprudent promise. Does this mean that, despite your ministry, despite the many protocols and limitations, you have not lost your spontaneity?

Benedict XVI: I try, in any case. As much as things are fixed, I would like to keep doing some things that are purely personal.

BR: Holy Father, women are very active in many different areas of the Catholic Church. Should not their contribution become more clearly visible, even in positions of higher responsibility in the Church?

Benedict XVI: We reflect a lot about this subject, of course. As you know, we believe that our faith and the constitution of the College of the Apostles binds us and does not allow us to confer priestly ordination on women. But we should not think either that the only role of importance one can have in the Church is that of being a priest. There are many tasks and functions in the history of the Church: Starting with the Sisters of the Fathers of the Church up to the Middle Ages, when great women played fundamental roles until modern times. Think of Hildegard of Bingen who protested strongly before the Bishops and the Pope, of Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden. In our own time too women - and us with them - must always seek their proper place. Today, they are very present in the Dicasteries of the Holy See. But there is a juridical problem: according to

Canon Law the power to take legally binding decisions is limited to Sacred Orders. So there are limitations from this point of view, but I believe that women themselves, with their energy and strength, with their predominance, so to speak, with what I would call their "spiritual power", will know how to make their own space. And we will have to try and listen to God so as not to oppose him but, on the contrary, to rejoice when the female element achieves the fully effective place in the Church best suited to it, starting with the Mother of God and with Mary Magdalene.

Holy Father, recently there has been talk of a new fascination with Catholicism. What is the attraction and the future of this ancient institution?

Pope Benedict XVI: I would say that the entire Pontificate of John Paul II drew people's attention and brought them together. What happened at the time of his death remains something historically very special: how hundreds of thousands of people flowed towards St Peter's Square in an orderly fashion, stood for hours, and while they should have collapsed, instead they resisted as if moved by an inner strength. Then, we relived the experience on the occasion of the inauguration of my Pontificate and again in Cologne. It is very beautiful when the experience of community becomes an experience of faith at the same time; when the experience of communion does not happen just anywhere but that this experience becomes more alive and gives to Catholicism, its luminous intensity right there in the places of the faith. Of course, this has to continue in everyday life. The two must go together. On one hand, the great moments during which one feels how good it is to be there, that the Lord is present and that we form a great community reconciled beyond all boundaries. From here we get the impetus to resist during the tiring pilgrimage of everyday existence, to live starting from these bright points and turning towards them, knowing how to invite others to join our pilgrim community. I would like to take this opportunity to say: I blush when I think of all the preparations that are made for my Visit, for everything that people do. My house was freshly painted, a professional school redid the fence; the Evangelical professor helped to do the fence. And these are just small details, but they are a sign of the many things that are done. I find all of this extraordinary, and I do not think it is for me, but rather a sign of wanting to be part of this faith community and to serve one another. Demonstrating this solidarity means letting ourselves be inspired by the Lord. It is something that touches me and I would like to express my gratitude with all my heart.

Holy Father, you spoke about the experience of community. You will be coming to Germany for the second time following your election. After the World Youth Day and, for different reasons, after the World Football Championships, the atmosphere seems to have changed. The impression is that Germans have become more open to the world, more tolerant and more joyful. What would you still like from us Germans?

Benedict XVI: I would say that from the end of the Second World War German society began an inner transformation; the German mindset, too, was further reinforced after reunification. We have become more deeply part of world society and, naturally, we have been changed by its mentality.

Aspects of the German character, which others were not aware of before, have come to light. Perhaps we were always depicted too much as always very disciplined and reserved, which has some basis in truth. But if we now see better what everyone is seeing, I think it is lovely: Germans are not just reserved, punctual and disciplined, they are also spontaneous, happy and hospitable. This is very lovely. This is my hope: that these virtues may continue to grow and that they may last and may receive an additional impetus from the Christian faith.

VR: Holy Father, your Predecessor beatified and canonized a huge number of Christians. Some people say even too many. This is my question: beatifications and canonizations only bring something new to the Church when these people are seen as true models. Germany produces relatively few saints and blessed in comparison with other countries. Can anything be done to develop this pastoral sphere so that beatifications and canonizations can give real pastoral fruit?

Benedict XVI: In the beginning I also thought that the large number of beatifications was almost overwhelming and that perhaps we needed to be more selective, choosing figures that entered our consciousness more clearly. Meanwhile, I decentralized the beatifications in order to make these figures more visible in the specific places they came from. Perhaps a saint from Guatemala does not interest us in Germany, and vice versa, someone from Altötting is of no interest in Los Angeles, and so on, right? I also think that this decentralization is more in keeping with the collegiality of the episcopate, with its collegial structures, and that it is suitable for stressing how different countries have their own personalities and these are especially effective in these countries. I have also seen how these beatifications in different places touch vast numbers of people and that people say: "At last, this one is one of us!". They pray to him and are inspired. The blessed soul belongs to them and we are happy there are lots of them. And if, gradually, with the development of a global society, we too get to know them, that is wonderful. But it is especially important that multiplicity also exists in this field, because it is important that we too in Germany get to know our own figures and are happy for them. Besides this issue there is that of the canonization of greater figures who are examples for the whole Church. I would say that the individual Bishops' Conferences ought to choose, ought to decide what is best for them, what this person is saying to us, and they should give visibility to people who leave a profound impression, but not too many of them. They can do this through catechesis, preaching or perhaps through the presentation of a film. I can imagine some wonderful films. Of course, I only know well the Church Fathers: a film about Augustine, or one on Gregory Nazianzen who was very special (how he continually fled the ever greater responsibilities he was given, and so on). We need to show that there are not only the awful situations we depict in many of our films; there are also wonderful historical figures who are not at all boring and who are very contemporary. We must try not to overload people too much but to give visibility to many figures who are topical and inspirational.

DW: Stories with humour in them, too? In 1989 in Munich you were given the Karl Valentin Orden Award. What role does humour play in the life of a Pope?

Benedict XVI: I am not a man who constantly thinks up jokes. But I think it is very important to be able to see the humorous side of life and its joyful dimension and not to take everything too tragically. I would also say it is necessary for my ministry. A writer once said that angels can fly because they do not take themselves too seriously. Maybe we could also fly a bit if we did not think we were so important.

When you have an important job like yours, Holy Father, you are much observed. Other people talk about you. I was reading and I was struck by what many observers say: that Pope Benedict is different from Cardinal Ratzinger. How do you see yourself, if I may be so bold as to ask?

Benedict XVI: I have been taken apart various times: in my first phase as professor and in the intermediate phase, during my first phase as Cardinal and in the successive phase. Now comes a new dissection. Of course, circumstances and situations and even people influence one because one takes on different responsibilities. Let us say that my basic personality and even my basic vision have grown, but in everything that is essential I have remained identical. I am happy that certain aspects that were not noticed at first are now coming into the open.

Would you say that you like what you do, that it is not a burden for you?

Benedict XVI: That would be saying a bit too much, because it really is tiring. But in any case, I try to find joy here, too.

Conclusion (Bellut, ZDF): *In the name of my colleagues, I would like to thank you sincerely for this conversation, for this "world first". We are looking forward to your upcoming Visit to Germany, Bavaria. Good-bye.*