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### OPENING ADDRESS

#### **The God question in the teachings of Benedict XVI**

1. Pope Benedict XVI is a “grandmaster” in matters of faith, and he shows us how not to lose sight of the real essentials in life. He is a superb theologian who is fascinated by the mystery of God. At the same time, he is a sharp observer of the contemporary world in all its complexity and ambiguity. The Holy Father is gifted with an extraordinary ability to identify and name the most pressing challenges of post-modernity that are being encountered by Christians.

One of the key themes running through the teachings of Benedict XVI is undoubtedly the God Question and the centrality of God in our lives. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth* he poses a surprisingly simple question: “What did Jesus actually bring?”. To this he replied: “He has brought God, and now we know his face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world. Jesus has brought God and with God the truth about our origin and destiny: faith, hope, and love. It is only because of our hardness of heart that we think this is too little. Yes indeed, God’s power works quietly in this world, but it is the true and lasting power. Again and again, God’s cause seems to be in its death throes. Yet over and over again it proves to be the thing that truly endures and saves”.<sup>1</sup> The God question is therefore central and decisive for all human beings.

In his keynote address at the commencement of his pontificate, Benedict XVI spoke of the different kinds of desert we experience in the world, and he emphasised one in particular: “There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”.<sup>2</sup> This is the real drama being experienced by humanity today and which the Pope has described in various ways: “a strange forgetfulness of God”, “the exclusion of God”, “rejection of God”, “absence of God”, “an eclipsing of the sense of God”, “a new paganism”. His diagnosis

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<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Doubleday 2007, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate, 24 April 2005.

of the state of the world at the threshold of the third millennium is very clear: “The true problem of our times is the ‘crisis of God’, the absence of God, disguised by an empty religiosity. [...] the *unum necessarium* to humankind is God. Everything changes according to whether God exists or not”.<sup>3</sup>

However, this is only one side of the story. Sociologists point out that, side by side with this rejection of God, there is also something happening in the other direction. They describe it as a “return to the sacred”, a “religious revival” or even as a “religious boom”. This is a very confusing and ambivalent phenomenon that cannot easily be assessed with precision. The pope himself said about it: “I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of this phenomenon. [...] But to tell the truth, religion often becomes almost a consumer product. People choose what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it. But religion sought on a do-it-yourself basis cannot ultimately help us. It may be comfortable, but at times of crisis we are left to ourselves”.<sup>4</sup> This fact can be demonstrated by the various forms of idolatry that are prevalent today serving as substitutes for religion. On this point, the pope made an observation: “Whenever God disappears, human beings fall into the slavery of idolatry. This has been demonstrated in our times by totalitarian regimes and the various forms of nihilism that make human beings dependent on idols and on idolatries; they are enslaved”.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, there are plenty of signs of hope in our world. One example is the flourishing of ecclesial movements and new communities which Benedict XVI regards as an ever new outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the life of the Church. We shall speak more about this later.

2. We return to the issue of humanity’s turning away from God. How can it be explained? First of all, we must place it in the setting of a deep crisis in post-modern culture. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger spoke about it eloquently in his homily at the Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate: “How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves – flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up, and what Saint Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error (cf. Eph 4: 14) comes true”.<sup>6</sup> He spoke about this again recently during his visit to Germany: “We live at a time that is broadly characterized by a subliminal relativism that penetrates every area of life. Sometimes this relativism becomes aggressive, when it opposes those who say that they know where the truth or meaning of life is to be found”.<sup>7</sup> This is a major challenge to faith in God that is being felt by our contemporaries.

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<sup>3</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists, 12 December 2000.

<sup>4</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Mass at World Youth Day Cologne, 21 August 2005.

<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 15 June 2011.

<sup>6</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Pro eligendo Romano Pontefice* Mass, 18 April 2005.

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with the Council of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZDK), Freiburg im Breisgau, 24 September 2011.

In looking for more specific causes of this rejection of God, the Holy Father looks at what Saint Gregory the Great had to say on the subject. When the saint was commenting on the parable of the wedding guests, he asked a very specific question: “how can a man say ‘no’ to the greatest thing that exists; that he has no time for what is most important; that he can lock himself into his own existence? And he answers: in reality, they have never had an experience of God; they have never acquired a ‘taste’ for God; they have never experienced how delightful it is to be ‘touched’ by God! They lack this ‘contact’ - and with it, the ‘taste for God’”.<sup>8</sup> The pope returns to Saint Gregory in that homily when he asks: “how can it be that human beings do not even want to ‘taste’ God? And he responds: when people are entirely caught up in their own world, with material things, with what they can do [...], then their capacity to perceive God weakens, the organ sensitive to God deteriorates, it becomes unable to perceive and sense, it no longer perceives the Divine, because the corresponding inner organ has withered, it has stopped developing [...] it can happen that it is precisely the sense of God that suffers, that this organ dies...”.<sup>9</sup> This is a serious risk that is unfortunately very widespread nowadays and from which not even the baptised are excluded. The pope is inviting us to think more deeply about our relationship with God. We live in times in which faith cannot be taken for granted. Benedict XVI said this clearly recently: “Often we are anxiously preoccupied with the social, cultural and political consequences of the faith, taking for granted that faith is present, which unfortunately is less and less realistic...”.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion he spoke about this even more directly: “one can do much, many things in the ecclesiastical field, all for God..., and yet remain totally taken up with oneself, without encountering God. Work replaces faith, but then one becomes empty within.”<sup>11</sup> He concluded by saying: “In this, I believe that the future of the world in this dramatic situation is decided today: whether God – the God of Jesus Christ – exists and is recognized as such, or whether he disappears”.<sup>12</sup>

3. The “God crisis” that we find rampant in post-modern culture is bringing about a “humanity crisis”. This is because the relationship between human beings and God depends on the relationships of human beings with themselves and with the world. When human beings exclude God from their lives, they find that they are left with an unfathomable enigma. The pope explains this very well: “We live at a time of uncertainty about what it means to be human [...] In the face of this, we as Christians must defend the inviolable dignity of human beings from conception to death [...] As Romano Guardini once put it: ‘Only those who know God, know humanity’. Without knowledge of God, human beings are easily manipulated. Faith in God must take concrete form in a common defence of human beings”.<sup>13</sup> The pope said on another occasion: “Without God human beings neither know which way to go nor even understand who they are. [...] by themselves they cannot establish an authentic humanism. [...] A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism.”<sup>14</sup> There is also a very strong connection between hope – which is an indispensable factor in human life – and God. Benedict XVI said: “It is true that anyone who does not know God, even

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<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass with the Swiss Bishops, 7 November 2006.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass in Lisbon's Terreiro do Paço, 11 May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass with the Swiss Bishops, 7 November 2006.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Ecumenical Celebration in Erfurt, 23 September 2011.

<sup>14</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 78.

though he/she may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. *Eph* 2:12). Humanity's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God – God who has loved us and who continues to love us 'to the end', until all 'is accomplished' (cf. *Jn* 13:1 and 19:30).<sup>15</sup>

All of this helps us to better understand why Benedict XVI returns so often to the question of the priority and centrality of God, and not just any god. It is the God who was revealed in Jesus Christ. The pope said: "There are so many problems one could list that must be solved, but none of them can be solved unless God is put at the centre, if God does not become once again visible to the world, if God does not become the determining factor in our lives and also enter the world in a decisive way through us."<sup>16</sup> On another occasion he said: "I think that our major task now [...] is first of all to bring to light God's priority again. The important thing today is to see that God exists, that God matters to us, and that God answers us. And, conversely, that if God is omitted, everything else might be as clever as can be, but humankind loses its dignity and authentic humanity and, thus, the essential thing breaks down".<sup>17</sup>

The fact that human beings choose to turn to God does not at all imply that there is a flight into one's inner realm or towards religious individualism. Neither does it mean abandoning reality with the considerable number of economic, social and political problems that exist. The pope maintains that it is quite the opposite: "Anyone who excludes God from his/her horizons falsifies the notion of "reality" and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction. [...] Only those who recognize God know reality and are able to respond to it adequately and in a truly human manner".<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI is very clear about this: "When God is subtracted, something does not add up for humankind, the world or the whole universe".<sup>19</sup>

This is the reason why the pope persists in speaking out against all forms of secularism that try to exclude God from public life. Benedict XVI is particularly firm in condemning a type of false tolerance that paradoxically excludes God from public life in the name of tolerance. The pope alerts us all to this: "A new intolerance is spreading, that is quite obvious. There are well-established standards of thinking that are supposed to be imposed on everyone. These are then announced in terms of so-called 'negative tolerance'. For instance, when people say that for the sake of negative tolerance [i.e. 'not offending anyone'] there must be no crucifix in public buildings. With that we are basically experiencing the abolition of tolerance, for it means, after all, that religion, that the Christian faith is no longer allowed to express itself visibly. [...] In the name of tolerance, tolerance is being abolished: this is a real threat we face".<sup>20</sup>

4. At this point it is worth asking what it means to believe in God. What is faith? When Pope Benedict was answering these questions, he emphasised two essential facts. The

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<sup>15</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 27.

<sup>16</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass with the Swiss Bishops, 7 November 2006.

<sup>17</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, Ignatius Press 2010, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Inaugural session of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean at the Conference Hall of the Shrine of Aparecida, 13 May 2007.

<sup>19</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass at Islinger Feld esplanade in Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

<sup>20</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World*. Op. cit. pp. 52-53.

first was that faith is actually simple: “We believe in God – in God, who is the Beginning and End of human life. We believe in a God who enters into a relationship with us human beings, who is our origin and our future. Consequently, faith is, always and inseparably, hope: the certainty that we have a future and will not end up as nothing. And faith is love, since God’s love is ‘contagious’”.<sup>21</sup> The pope went on to emphasise that “the Creed is not a collection of propositions; it is not a theory. It is anchored in the event of Baptism – a genuine encounter between God and humanity. In the mystery of Baptism, God stoops to meet us; he comes close to us and in turn brings us closer to one another. [...] He thus makes us one great family in the universal communion of the Church. Truly, those who believe are never alone”.<sup>22</sup> Jesus Christ occupies a central role in this view of faith because “Only in Christ and through Christ does the theme God become truly concrete: Christ is Emmanuel, the God-with-us – the concretisation of the ‘I am’”.<sup>23</sup> That is why he introduces his first encyclical with the statement: Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.<sup>24</sup>

Faith, therefore, is always a profoundly personal action, but at the same time it has a strong community and ecclesial dimension. The pope explained: “In Christ we belong together. Within this communion he supports us, and at the same time all the members support one another. We stand firm together against the storm and offer one another protection. Those who believe are not alone. We do not believe alone, we believe with the whole Church of all times and places, with the Church in heaven and the Church on earth”.<sup>25</sup> In another address he said: “we can only ever believe within the ‘we’. I sometimes say that Saint Paul wrote: ‘Faith comes from hearing’ – not from reading. It needs reading as well, but it comes from hearing, that is to say from the living word, addressed to me by the other [...] addressed to me by the Church throughout the ages”.<sup>26</sup>

According to Pope Benedict, faith is not tranquil ownership of the Truth. It is a journey and an ongoing search: “God loves us. He comes to meet the unrest of our hearts, the unrest of our questioning and seeking, with the unrest of his own heart, which leads him to accomplish the ultimate for us. That restlessness for God, that journeying towards him, so as to know and love him better, must not be extinguished in us. In this sense we should always remain catechumens. ‘Constantly seek his face’, says one of the Psalms (105:4). [...] ‘Our heart is restless until it rests in you’, said Saint Augustine at the beginning of his *Confessions*. Yes, human beings are restless, because whatever is finite is too little. But are we truly restless for God? Have we perhaps become resigned to his absence, do we not seek to be self-sufficient?”<sup>27</sup> Here we see that the pope has a special concern for people who may see themselves as agnostics and non-believers but who are genuinely seeking the truth. It is this that gave rise to the proposal to create a “courtyard

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<sup>21</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass at Islinger Feld esplanade in Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists, 12 December 2000.

<sup>24</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1.

<sup>25</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass at the Olympiastadion, Berlin, 22 September 2011.

<sup>26</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with seminarians at St Charles Borromeo Seminary Chapel, Freiburg im Breisgau, 24 September 2011.

<sup>27</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Chrism Mass, 21 April 2011.

of the gentiles” in the Church: “I think that today too the Church should open a sort of ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles’ in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands. Today, in addition to interreligious dialogue, there should be a dialogue with those to whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown”.<sup>28</sup> People who have not received the gift of being able to believe and that often suffer because of an absence of God “ask questions of both sides. They take away from militant atheists the false certainty by which these claim to know that there is no God and they invite them to leave polemics aside and to become seekers who do not give up hope in the existence of truth and in the possibility and necessity of living by it”.<sup>29</sup> However, they also ask those of us who believe about the image of God that we communicate to the world by means of the lives we live. Are we showing a true image, or is it a diminished, corrupt, deformed caricature of God?

The subject of faith in our times has really become urgent. The pope emphasised this forcefully when he said that “the real crisis facing the Church in the western world is a crisis of faith. If we do not find a way of genuinely renewing our faith, all structural reform will remain ineffective”.<sup>30</sup> The absence of God in secularised society is becoming more profuse and there is a real risk that many Christians could give way to the pressures of post-modernity and water down their faith. Benedict XVI gives a very clear answer: “Naturally faith today has to be thought out afresh, and above all lived afresh, so that it is suited to the present day. Yet it is not by watering the faith down, but by living it today in its fullness that we achieve this. [...] It is not strategy that saves us and saves Christianity, but faith – thought out and lived afresh; through such faith, Christ enters this world of ours, and with him, the living God”.<sup>31</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has decided to respond to this dramatic erosion of faith with a very significant initiative. It is the declaration of a *Year of faith* that will begin on 11 October 2012 on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. That day will also mark twenty years since the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church promulgated by Blessed John Paul II to show all Christians the force and beauty of faith.<sup>32</sup> We remember here that one of the great architects of this important work was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who was then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Now, as pope, he explains: “It is in this sense that the Year of Faith will have to see a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in two thousand years of history. [...] In this Year, then, the Catechism of the Catholic Church will serve as a tool providing real support for the

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<sup>28</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Christmas greetings to cardinals, archbishops, bishops and directors of the Governorate of Vatican City State, 21 December 2009.

<sup>29</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address at the meeting for peace in Assisi, 27 October 2011.

<sup>30</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with the Council of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZDK), Freiburg im Breisgau, 24 September 2011.

<sup>31</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with representatives of the German Evangelical Church Council in the Chapter Hall of the Augustinian Convent in Erfurt, 23 September 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Cf BENEDICT XVI, Motu Proprio *Porta Fidei*, no. 4.

faith, especially for those concerned with the formation of Christians, so crucial in our cultural context”.<sup>33</sup>

5. One subject to which Benedict XVI pays particular attention is the relationship between faith and reason. This is not a purely theoretical problem as it touches the inner realm of each person’s life. The pope said in this regard: “What came first? Creative Reason, the Creator Spirit who makes all things and gives them growth, or Unreason, which, lacking any meaning, yet somehow brings forth a mathematically ordered cosmos, as well as man and his reason. The latter, however, would then be nothing more than a chance result of evolution and thus, in the end, equally meaningless. As Christians, we say: ‘I believe in God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth’ – I believe in the Creator Spirit. We believe that at the beginning of everything is the eternal Word, with Reason and not Unreason. With this faith we have no reason to hide, no fear of ending up in a dead end. We rejoice that we can know God! And we try to help others see the reasonableness of faith”.<sup>34</sup>

In our post-modern culture, this task has become more difficult. The concept of scientific rationale this is current nowadays and that has been taking shape since the Age of Enlightenment, is an extreme oversimplification. It maintains that things are rational only if they can be proved by experiment or calculation. That is why it brings about a radical exclusion of the issue of God. The existence of God is regarded as not being demonstrable. The issue of God is sidelined exclusively to the realm of individual personal choice, and God is considered to be irrelevant for public life. This is basically a radical emancipation of humankind from God. In this sense, according to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a culture has developed in Europe that is “the most radical contradiction ever, not only of Christianity, but of the religious and moral traditions of humanity”.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, every great culture has always had a religion from which to draw its energy.

According to this definition of rationality, not only is reason mutilated, but also too is humankind, “for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by ‘science’, so understood, and must thus be relegated to the realm of the subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective ‘conscience’ becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical”.<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI continues to point to “the insufficiency of a rationality closed in on itself” and an urgent need to “enlarge the area of our rationality, to reopen it to the larger questions of the truth and the good, to link together theology, philosophy and science in full respect for the methods proper to them and for their reciprocal autonomy, but also in awareness of the intrinsic unity that holds them together”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Motu Proprio Porta Fidei*, no. 11,12.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Holy Mass at Islinger Feld esplanade in Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

<sup>35</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, Cantagalli 2005, p. 37 [our translation].

<sup>36</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with the representatives of science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

<sup>37</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention in Verona, 19 October 2006

Now more than ever there is a need to reconcile faith and reason. The pope said: “Faith speaks to our reason and understanding because it expresses truth – and because reason was created for the sake of truth. To that extent, faith without understanding is no true Christian faith”.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the pope continues to warn us that reason is becoming blind to what is essential: “To resist this eclipse of reason and to preserve its capacity for seeing the essential, for seeing God and humankind, for seeing what is good and what is true, is the common interest that must unite all people of good will. The very future of the world is at stake”.<sup>39</sup> The pope quotes Saint Bonaventure to put us on our guard against “*Violentia rationis*, the despotism of reason which makes itself the supreme and ultimate judge of all things”.<sup>40</sup> This use of reason that attempts to put God to the test is certainly impossible because “God is not an object for human experimentation. God is the Subject and manifests himself solely in the relationship of person to person: this is part of the person’s essence”.<sup>41</sup> This is how reason and faith need each other. The pope reaffirms that “Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith [...] For its part, religion always needs to be purified by reason in order to show its authentically human face”.<sup>42</sup>

6. Benedict XVI has addressed the “God crisis” that is so widespread in the western world by making a heartfelt call for a new evangelisation, “‘new’ not in its content but in its inner thrust, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit which constitutes the force of the new law of the Gospel that always renews the Church; ‘new’ in ways that correspond with the power of the Holy Spirit and which are suited to the times and situations; ‘new’ because of being necessary even in countries that have already received the proclamation of the Gospel”.<sup>43</sup> The pope is deeply convinced that “human beings of the third millennium want an authentic, full life; they need truth, profound freedom, love freely given. Even in the deserts of the secularized world, humanity’s soul thirsts for God, for the living God”.<sup>44</sup>

At the centre of the message that we as Church must bring to the world, we must really place God. This might seem obvious, but unfortunately, that is not the case today. Cardinal Ratzinger often alerted us to the risk of a certain kind of Christianity and theology that “reduce the core of Jesus’ message, the ‘Kingdom of God’, to ‘values of the Kingdom’. They identify these values with the great watchwords of political moralism, and at the same time, they proclaim them as being syntheses of the religions. Thus God is forgotten, yet it is God who is the subject and cause of the Kingdom of God. In the place of God there remain great words (and values) that can easily become victims of all kinds of abuse”.<sup>45</sup> He spoke in strong terms about this insidious challenge:

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<sup>38</sup> JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *God and the world. A conversation with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius 2001, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Christmas greetings to cardinals, archbishops, bishops and directors of the Governorate of Vatican City State, 20 December 2010.

<sup>40</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Awarding of the Ratzinger Prize, 30 June 2011.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 56.

<sup>43</sup> BENEDICT XVI, First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome, 28 June 2010.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, *L’Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, op. cit., p. 34. [our translation].

“whoever does not give God, gives too little; whoever does not give God and whoever does not allow people to find God in the face of Christ, does not build, but destroys”.<sup>46</sup>

What is the way out of such a difficult situation for faith in God? Pope Benedict has great hope in the new charisms that the Holy Spirit has been giving to the Church in recent times and which have given rise to ecclesial movements and new communities. They are special places in which many men and women find God and allow themselves to be shaped by him. They discover the beauty of the Christian vocation that comes from baptism. It is due to the teaching in the faith that is part of these charisms that such amazing missionary energy has emerged among many of the lay faithful and such creative initiatives of evangelisation are taking place. Cardinal Ratzinger described them as “forceful ways of living the faith”,<sup>47</sup> a truly great sign of hope for the Church and for all of humanity. Movements and new communities are a healthy “provocation” and the Church is badly in need of this. They are the “creative minorities” that Arnold Toynbee spoke of and that Pope Benedict often quotes. The future will depend on them. During his recent visit to Germany, Pope Benedict said: “It will be small communities of believers – and these already exist – whose enthusiasm spreads within a pluralistic society and makes others curious to seek the light which gives life in abundance. ‘There is nothing more beautiful than to know Christ and to speak to others of our friendship with him’. This experience ultimately gives the certainty that ‘where God is, there is a future’”.<sup>48</sup>

According to the Holy Father, the world today is in urgent need of Christians who are really people of God and people who adore God. They are not people who just talk about God; they talk to God. The pope explained: “In this way God encounters us in prayer and adoration. The theologian Romano Guardini noted that ‘adoration is not something additional, something secondary... it is a matter of the utmost importance, of feeling and of being. In adoration humanity recognizes what is valid in the pure, simple and holy sense’. Only if we are able to turn to God, to pray to him, do we discover the deepest meaning of our life”<sup>49</sup> In other words, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger told us: “What we most need at this time in history are people whose life of shining faith will make God credible in this world. The negative witness of Christians who spoke of God but lived in opposition to God, have darkened the image of God and have opened the way to unbelief. We need people who gaze directly at God in order to learn true humanity. We need people whose minds are illumined by God’s light and hearts are opened by God. Then their minds will speak to the minds of others and their hearts will open to the hearts of others. It is only through people who have been touched by God that God can return to be among humankind.”<sup>50</sup> It is here, Pope Benedict XVI tells us, that the new evangelisation will be played out in our times.

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<sup>46</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, Homily at the funeral Mass for Don Giussani, 24 February 2005.

<sup>47</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Il sale della terra. Cristianesimo e Chiesa cattolica nel XXI secolo*, San Paolo 2005, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Farewell ceremony at Lahr Airport, 25 September 2011.

<sup>49</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Regina Cæli, 25 April 2011, Easter Monday.

<sup>50</sup> JOSEPH RATZINGER, *L’Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture*, op. cit., pp. 63-64 [our translation].