

APOSTOLIC VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC
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ECUMENICAL MEETING

ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER

*Throne Hall of the Archbishop's House of Prague
Sunday, 27 September 2009*

(Video)

*Dear Cardinals,
Your Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

I am grateful to Almighty God for the opportunity to meet with you who are here representing the various Christian communities of this land. I thank Doctor Černý, President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic, for the kind words of welcome which he has addressed to me on your behalf.

My dear friends, Europe continues to undergo many changes. It is hard to believe that only two decades have passed since the collapse of former regimes gave way to a difficult but productive transition towards more participatory political structures. During this period, Christians joined together with others of good will in helping to rebuild a just political order, and they continue to engage in dialogue today in order to pave new ways towards mutual understanding, cooperation for peace and the advancement of the common good.

Nevertheless, attempts to marginalize the influence of Christianity upon public life – sometimes under the pretext that its teachings are detrimental to the well-being of society – are emerging in new forms. This phenomenon gives us pause to reflect. As I suggested in my Encyclical on Christian hope, the artificial separation of the Gospel from intellectual and public life should prompt us to engage in a mutual “self-critique of modernity” and “self-critique of modern Christianity,” specifically with regard to the hope each of them can offer mankind (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 22). We may ask ourselves, what does the Gospel have to say to the Czech Republic and indeed all of Europe today in a period marked by proliferating world views?

Christianity has much to offer on the practical and ethical level, for the Gospel never ceases to inspire men and women to place themselves at the service of their brothers and sisters. Few would dispute this. Yet those who fix their gaze upon Jesus of Nazareth with

eyes of faith know that God offers a deeper reality which is nonetheless inseparable from the “economy” of charity at work in this world (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 2): He offers *salvation*.

The term is replete with connotations, yet it expresses something fundamental and universal about the human yearning for well-being and wholeness. It alludes to the ardent desire for reconciliation and communion that wells up spontaneously in the depths of the human spirit. It is the central truth of the Gospel and the goal to which every effort of evangelization and pastoral care is directed. And it is the criterion to which Christians constantly redirect their focus as they endeavour to heal the wounds of past divisions. To this end – as Doctor Černý has noted – the Holy See was pleased to host an International Symposium in 1999 on Jan Hus to facilitate a discussion of the complex and turbulent religious history in this country and in Europe more generally (cf. Pope John Paul II, *Address to the International Symposium on John Hus*, 1999). I pray that such ecumenical initiatives will yield fruit not only in the pursuit of Christian unity, but for the good of all European society.

We take confidence in knowing that the Church’s proclamation of salvation in Christ Jesus is ever ancient and ever new, steeped in the wisdom of the past and brimming with hope for the future. As Europe listens to the story of Christianity, she hears her own. Her notions of justice, freedom and social responsibility, together with the cultural and legal institutions established to preserve these ideas and hand them on to future generations, are shaped by her Christian inheritance. Indeed, her memory of the past animates her aspirations for the future.

This is why, in fact, Christians draw upon the example of figures such as Saint Adalbert and Saint Agnes of Bohemia. Their commitment to spreading the Gospel was motivated by the conviction that Christians should not cower in fear of the world but rather confidently share the treasury of truths entrusted to them. Likewise Christians today, opening themselves to present realities and affirming all that is good in society, must have the courage to invite men and women to the radical conversion that ensues upon an encounter with Christ and ushers in a new life of grace.

From this perspective, we understand more clearly why Christians are obliged to join others in reminding Europe of her roots. It is not because these roots have long since withered. On the contrary! It is because they continue – in subtle but nonetheless fruitful ways – to supply the continent with the spiritual and moral sustenance that allows her to enter into meaningful dialogue with people from other cultures and religions. Precisely because the Gospel is not an ideology, it does not presume to lock evolving socio-political realities into rigid schemas. Rather, it transcends the vicissitudes of this world and casts new light on the dignity of the human person in every age. Dear friends, let us ask the Lord to implant within us a spirit of courage to share the timeless saving truths which have shaped, and will continue to shape, the social and cultural progress of this continent.

The salvation wrought by Jesus's suffering, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven not only transforms us who believe in him, but urges us to share this Good News with others. Enlightened by the Spirit's gifts of knowledge, wisdom and understanding (cf. *Is* 11:1-2; *Ex* 35:31), may our capacity to grasp the truth taught by Jesus Christ impel us to work tirelessly for the unity he desires for all his children reborn through Baptism, and indeed for the whole human race.

With these sentiments, and with fraternal affection for you and the members of your respective communities, I express my deep thanks to you and commend you to Almighty God, who is our fortress, our stronghold and our deliverer (cf. *Ps* 144:2). Amen.

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