



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr WALTER JÜRGEN SCHMID
NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY TO THE HOLY SEE**
Monday, 13 September 2010

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to take the opportunity of the solemn presentation of the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See to welcome you and to express my best wishes for your lofty mission. I cordially thank you for your kind words addressed to me, also on behalf of the Federal President, Mr Christian Wulff, and of the Federal Government. I willingly extend my Greeting and Blessing to the Head of State, to the Members of Government and to all the citizens of Germany, in the hope that the good relations between the Holy See and the Federal Republic of Germany may endure and be further developed in the future.

Many Christians in Germany are turning their full attention to the imminent celebration of the beatifications of various priests martyred under the Nazi regime. Next Sunday, 19 September, Gerhard Hirschfelder will be Beatified in Münster. The Beatifications of Georg Häfner in Würzburg, as well as of Johannes Prassek, Hermann Lange and of Eduard Müller in Lübeck, will take place in the coming year. The Evangelical Pastor Karl Friedrich Stellbrink will also be commemorated, together with the Chaplains of Lübeck. The attested friendship of four clerics is an impressive testimony of the ecumenism of prayer and suffering which flourished in various places during the dark period of Nazi terror. We can look to these witnesses as luminous indicators for our common ecumenical journey.

In contemplating these martyrs it appears ever more clearly and as an example that on the basis of their Christian conviction some people are prepared to give their life for their faith, for the right to practise what they believe freely, for freedom of speech, for peace and for human dignity. Today,

fortunately, we live in a free and democratic society. Yet, at the same time, we note that many of our contemporaries are not strongly attached to religion, as was the case with these witnesses of faith. One might ask whether there are still Christians today who guarantee their faith without compromises. On the contrary, generally many people show an inclination for more permissive religious concepts, also for themselves. A supreme, mysterious and indeterminate being who only has a hazy relationship with the personal life of the human person is succeeding the personal God of Christianity who reveals himself in the Bible.

These conceptions are increasingly stimulating discussion in society, especially in the area of justice and legislation. Yet, if someone abandons the faith in a personal God, the alternative arises of a "god" that does not know, does not hear and does not speak; and, especially, of one that has no will. If God has no will of his own, in the end good and evil are no longer distinguishable; good and evil are no longer in contradiction but in an opposition in which the one would be a complement to the other. In this way human beings lose their moral and spiritual strength which is essential for the person's overall development. Social action is increasingly dominated by private interests or the calculations of power, to the detriment of society. Instead, if God is a Person and the order of creatures, as likewise the presence of so many convinced Christians in society is a sign of this it follows that an order of values is legitimate. There are signs, that can also be traced in recent times, that attest to the development of new relations between the State and religion, even superseding the great Christian Churches that up to now have determined. In this situation, therefore, it is the task of Christians to follow this development positively and critically. They must also refine its meaning for the fundamental and lasting importance of Christianity in laying the foundations and forming the structures of our culture.

However, the Church sees with concern the growing endeavour to eliminate the Christian concept of marriage and family from society's conscience. Marriage is manifested as a lasting union of love between a man and a woman, which also always aspires to the transmission of human life. One of its conditions is the willingness of the spouses to refer to each other forever. This requires a certain maturity of the person and a fundamental existential and social attitude: a "culture of the person", as my Predecessor John Paul II once said. The existence of this culture of the person also depends on social developments. It can happen that the culture of the person in a society diminishes; paradoxically, this often derives from a rise in the standard of living. In the preparation and guidance of married couples it is necessary to create the basic conditions to sustain and develop this culture. At the same time, we must be aware that the success of marriages depends on all of us and on the personal culture of each individual citizen. In this regard, the Church cannot approve legislative initiatives that entail a re-evaluation of alternative models to married and family life. They contribute to weakening the principles of natural law and hence to the relativization of all legislation, as well as to the confusion about values in society.

It is a principle of Christian faith, anchored to natural law, that the human being should be protected, precisely in situations of weakness; the human person always takes priority over other

aims. The new possibilities of biotechnology and medicine frequently put us in situations as difficult as walking on the razor's edge. It is our duty to study diligently to what point these methods may be helpful to the human being and where, instead, it is a matter of the manipulation of the human being or a violation of human integrity and dignity. We cannot refuse such developments but we must also be attentive. When people begin to make distinctions and often this is already done in the maternal womb between a life that is worthy and one that is unworthy of living, no other phases of life will be spared, especially not old age and infirmity.

Building a human society requires fidelity to the truth. In this context, certain phenomena active in the context of the public media are ultimately food for thought. Being in ever greater competition, the media believe they are impelled to attract the greatest possible attention. In addition, it is contrast that makes the news in general, even at the expense of the report's veracity. This becomes particularly problematic when authoritative people take a stance in this regard publicly, without being able to verify adequately all the aspects. Let us accept favourably the intention of the Federal Government to do its utmost in such cases, in a compensatory and reconciliatory manner.

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for your work and for the contacts you will have with the representatives of the Roman Curia, with the Diplomatic Corps and also with the priests, religious and lay faithful involved in ecclesial activities who live here in Rome. I warmly implore for you, for your distinguished wife and for your collaborators at the Embassy an abundance of divine Blessings.

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