



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 8th January 2023,
The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Dear Disciples of Christ,

It is surely with great sadness that we bid farewell to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, commending his soul with much gratitude to the mercy of the Lord.

Born in 1927, the youngest of three children,¹ Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger came from a village in Bavaria next to the beautiful Marian shrine of Altötting.² He entered seminary in 1939 and was ordained in 1951.³ He gained a doctorate and pursued an academic career as a university professor, first at Munich and later at the prestigious University of Tübingen. As one of the star theologians of his day, he served as a special advisor at the Second Vatican Council. After the Council, he became Professor of Theology at Regensburg and made many important contributions to Catholic thought. In March 1977, Pope Paul VI named him Archbishop of Munich and a Cardinal. In 1981, Pope John Paul II appointed him as the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a role he held until 2005. When he was elected pope, he took the name 'Benedict' to call Europe back to its Christian roots.⁴ There is much to say about his eight years as pope. In Britain, we warmly remember his papal visit in 2010 for the beatification of St. John Henry Newman.⁵ But aged 85 and with his health deteriorating, he believed it was better for the Church to have a younger pope with a fresh approach, and so in 2013 - dramatically - he announced his resignation.⁶ Since then, he lived in a convent in the Vatican grounds, where he would often meet with his successor, Pope Francis.

Benedict was a man of towering intellect "on the level of the times."⁷ He was a great spiritual leader. I am sure some of you will have your own memories of

him. When I used to teach theology at Oscott College, I remember noticing one day, to my surprise, I had many of his books on my bookshelf. In fact, he wrote over 70 major works across the whole range of theology from Scripture to Church history. He will be especially remembered for his profound phrase "the dictatorship of relativism".⁸ He was passionate about the future of our Western civilisation. In major addresses in Regensburg, London and Berlin,⁹ he sought to call the Western world back to its Christian roots, in order to build a new humanism.¹⁰ Secularism, he argued, is ignoring religious faith; to do this will dissolve the foundations of ethics and lead inevitably to a State-enforced value system. We can see this, to some extent, happening in Britain.

As the Successor of Peter, Pope Benedict had to address some enormous problems and corruption within the Church, including the clergy abuse crisis. At the same time, he sought to strengthen the truths of Catholic orthodoxy and to beautify the Liturgy. He envisaged the Church as a creative minority within society, engaged in dialogue and in charity to the poor.¹¹ He argued against scientific rationalism on the one hand and religious fundamentalism on the other, in favour of the indissoluble bond between faith and reason.¹² He encouraged the Church in its work of new evangelisation, a call echoed passionately by Pope Francis too. And throughout his ministry, Benedict spoke about the centrality of a personal friendship with Jesus Christ, on which all else depends¹³. As he said in a Message for World Youth Day in Rio in 2013: "Love is the only thing that can fill hearts and bring people together."¹⁴

Once, he was asked about his thoughts on dying and death. "With God" he said, "there is perpetual, unending encounter, with new discoveries and new joy. ... At the same time, I look forward to being reunited with my parents, my siblings, my friends."¹⁵ As a university lecturer, he used to teach a course on heaven and life after death; his lectures are now in a book.¹⁶ In it there's a consoling passage on that intermediate state after death when the soul, having left the body, awaits the resurrection of the flesh on the Last Day. Ratzinger links this to the First Eucharistic Prayer when we ask God to "grant all who sleep in Christ a place of refreshment, light and peace." What does this mean? Not a waiting-room, he says, but Jesus Himself. When we die, Jesus clasps us to Himself. It's like the joy of being gathered with the Lord in Eucharistic Exposition. There, secure in His loving presence, we gaze upon Him, adoring Him, whilst being cleansed of our sins and being made new.

"Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him." As the Bishop of Rome, the pope is the source and foundation of the Church's unity.¹⁷ Every pope of course has his own character. Just as with Pope Francis, so too Pope Benedict XVI had his critics inside and outside the Church. Today, though, we give thanks to God for this great man and for his contribution. Let us pray for his well-earned repose. Let us commend him to the prayers of Mary Immaculate, St. Joseph and St. Benedict. Indeed, may he hear the Lord Jesus say to him: "Well done, good and faithful servant; come and join in your Master's happiness."¹⁸

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ For a splendid, recent biography, see E. Guerriero *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought. With a Foreword by Pope Francis* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 2018).

² Altötting was Pope Benedict's favourite spiritual place: see P. Seewald *Benedict XVI. Last Testament in His Own Words* (London, Bloomsbury: 2016) 8

³ Critics mention his involvement with Hitler Youth: see R. Dawkins 'Ratzinger is an Enemy of Humanity' in *The Guardian Newspaper* 22 Sept 2010:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/sep/22/ratzinger-enemy-humanity>. Yet, Ratzinger and his father bitterly resented the Nazis. In 1941, as with all 14-year-old boys, he was conscripted into Hitler Youth. He often refused to attend its meetings. As a seminarian, in 1943 he was drafted into the German anti-aircraft corps, but never engaged in combat. When in 1945 the Allies were advancing, he deserted, although as a German soldier, he was interned by the Americans as a prisoner of war for a short period until the end of the war in May 1945.

⁴ "I wanted to be called Benedict XVI in order to create a spiritual bond with Benedict XV. .. The name Benedict also calls to mind the extraordinary figure of the great 'Patriarch of Western Monasticism', St Benedict of Norcia .. a fundamental reference point for European unity and a powerful reminder of the indispensable Christian roots of its culture and civilization" Benedict XVI *General Audience 27th April 2005*: http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050427.html

⁵ We also remember the media hubbub led by Stephen Fry, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman and others fiercely opposing the visit: see S. Doughty 'Pope faces atheist hate campaign in UK after top German aide says: 'When you land at Heathrow you think you're in a Third World Country'' *The Mail Online* 16 September 2010: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1312285/POPES-UK-VISIT-Benedict-XVI-faces-atheist-hate-campaign.html>

⁶ "I have come to the certainty that my strengths, owing to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry." Pope Benedict announced his resignation at a consistory on 28th February 2013. He was the first pope to resign since Celestine V in 1294. For the full text, see: http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130211_declaratio.html

⁷ This evocative phrase from the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (d. 1955) has inspired many Catholic thinkers over the last century, notably Bernard Lonergan, who in the original (unused) Preface of his great work *Insight* wrote: "If I may borrow a phrase from Ortega y Gasset, one has to strive to mount to the level of one's time" (cited by F. Crowe in 'The Original Preface of *Insight*', *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 3/1 [1985] 1)

⁸ "Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude [appropriate to] modern times. Yet [in this] we are building a dictatorship of relativism that recognizes nothing as definitive, and whose ultimate goal consists solely in one's own ego and desires. We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism." Benedict XVI *Mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice: Homily of Card. Joseph Ratzinger Dean of the College of Cardinals Vatican Basilica Monday 18 April 2005*, available on-line at www.vatican.va/gpII/documents.

⁹ See *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* (Stoke on Trent, Alive Publishing: 2010) 82-87. See also 'Apostolic Journey of his Holiness Benedict XVI to München, Altötting and Regensburg (September 9-14, 2006): Meeting with the Representatives of Science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg (Tuesday, 12 September 2006),' *Lecture of the Holy Father 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections'* available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg. See also Apostolic Journey to Germany 22-25 September 2011. Visit to the Bundestag. *Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI*. Reichstag Building, Berlin Thursday, 22 September 2011 "The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law" available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin_en.html.

¹⁰ This new humanism was the subject of many of his essays and books: e.g. *A Turning Point for Europe?* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 1994), *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York,

Basic Books: 2006), *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 2006) and *Faith and Politics* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 2018).

¹¹ “I would say that normally it is the creative minorities that determine the future, and in this sense the Catholic Church must understand itself as a creative minority that has a heritage of values that are not things of the past, but a very living and relevant reality. The Church must actualize, be present in the public debate, in our struggle for a true concept of liberty and peace. So it can contribute in various areas. I would say that the first is precisely the intellectual dialogue between agnostics and believers. Each needs the other: the agnostic cannot be content with not knowing whether God exists or not, but must be searching and sense the great heritage of the faith; the Catholic cannot be content with having the faith, but must be searching for God even more, and in dialogue with others relearn God in a more profound way. This is the first level: the great intellectual, ethical, and human dialogue. Then, in the area of education, the Church has a great deal to do and to give, concerning formation. .. A third area is "Caritas." This has always been one of the marks of the Church's identity: that of coming to the aid of the poor, of being an instrument of charity” S. Magister ‘Interview with Pope Benedict: De-Christianized Europe. Church as a 'Creative Minority':

<https://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=34545>

¹² Ratzinger tackled this topic famously in his Regensburg address: see note 9. For a more systematic presentation, see J. Cardinal Ratzinger *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 1987) 333-342. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nn. 153-165.

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, Doubleday: 2007) xii

¹⁴ Benedict XVI ‘Message for the 28th World Youth Day 2013’: see http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121018_youth.html

¹⁵ P. Seewald *Benedict XVI. Last Testament in His Own Words* 12.

¹⁶ See J. Ratzinger *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (CUA: 2007)

¹⁷ See *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, CTS: 2006) nn. 182-185.

¹⁸ Matthew 25: 23.