

Reasons for the Holy Father's Hope for a New Awakening of Christianity in Europe



On Monday, the film "**Bells of Europe — A Journey into the Faith in Europe**" was shown to several Synod Fathers. The documentary was a joint production of Vatican Television Centre (CTV) and RAI Cinema, along with the support of the Gregorian Foundation and Intesa San Paolo.

Fr. Federico Lombardi, director of both the Holy See Press Office and CTV introduced the film, saying that "the importance of the film lies in the way it brings together a series of exceptional interviews regarding the relationship between Christianity and Europe, its history and culture."

"Various prestigious personalities, including the highest religious authorities of the major Christian denominations, generously granted original and exclusive interviews to the filmmaker."

Among those interviewed were Pope Benedict XVI, Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill I of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Anglican Primate, Rowan Williams, and the former President of the Council of the Lutheran Churches of Germany, Bishop Wolfgang Huber.

Can you explain to us the reasons for your hope?

The Holy See Has made available **Pope Benedict XVI's interview:**

Question: *Your Holiness, your Encyclicals present a compelling view of man: a man inhabited by God's charity, a man whose reason is broadened by the experience of faith, a man who possesses social responsibility thanks to the dynamism of charity received and given in truth. Holiness, it is from this anthropological standpoint that you have repeatedly stated that this rediscovery of the human countenance, of evangelical values, of the deepest roots of Europe, is a cause of great hope for the European continent and not only for the European continent. Can you explain to us the reasons for your hope?*

Pope Benedict XVI: The first reason for my hope consists in the fact that the desire for God, the

search for God, is profoundly inscribed into each human soul and cannot disappear. Certainly we can forget God for a time, lay Him aside and concern ourselves with other things, but God never disappears. St. Augustine's words are true: we men are restless until we have found God. This restlessness also exists today, and is an expression of the hope that man may, ever and anew, even today, start to journey towards this God.

It is a soul open to all that is reasonable, a soul which itself created the audaciousness of reason and the freedom of critical reasoning, but which remains anchored to the roots from which this Europe was born, the roots which created the continent's fundamental values and great institutions, in the vision of the Christian faith.

The second reason for my hope lies in the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, faith in Jesus Christ, is quite simply true; and the truth never ages. It too may be forgotten for a time, it may be laid aside and attention may turn to other things, but the truth as such does not disappear. Ideologies have their days numbered. They appear powerful and irresistible but, after a certain period, they wear out and lose their energy because they lack profound truth. They are particles of truth, but in the end they are consumed. The Gospel, on the other hand, is true and can therefore never wear out. In each period of history it reveals new dimensions, it emerges in all its novelty as it responds to the needs of the heart and mind of human beings, who can walk in this truth and so discover themselves. It is this reason, therefore, that I am convinced there will also be a new springtime for Christianity.

A third reason, an empirical reason, is evident in the fact that this sense of restlessness today exists among the young. Young people have seen much — the proposals of the various ideologies and of consumerism — and they have become aware of the emptiness and insufficiency of those things. Man was created for the infinite, the finite is too little. Thus, among the new generations we are seeing the reawakening of this restlessness, and they too begin their journey making new discoveries of the beauty of Christianity, non a cut-price or watered-down version, but Christianity in all its radicalism and profundity. Thus I believe that anthropology, as such, is showing us that there will always be a new reawakening of Christianity. The facts confirm this in a single phrase: Deep foundation. That is Christianity; it is true and the truth always has a future.

Question: Your Holiness, you have repeatedly said that Europe has had, and continues to have, a

cultural influence on the entire human race, and it cannot but feel a particular sense of responsibility, not only for its own future, but also for that of humankind as a whole. Looking ahead, is it possible to discern the contours of the visible witness Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants in Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals must show as, living the Gospel values in which they believe, they contribute to the building of a Europe faithful to Christ, more welcoming and united, not merely safeguarding their cultural and spiritual heritage but also committed to finding new ways to face the great challenges that characterize the post-modern and multicultural age?

Pope Benedict XVI: This is an important question. It is clear that Europe has great weight in today's world, in terms of economic, cultural and intellectual importance; as a consequence of this it also has great responsibility. But Europe, as you said, still has to find its true identity in order to be able to speak and act in keeping with her responsibility. In my opinion, the problem today does not consist in national differences which, thank God, are differences not divisions. In their cultural, human and temperamental differences, nations are a rich asset which, together, give rise to a great symphony of cultures. Basically, they are a shared culture.

The problem Europe has in finding its own identity consists, I believe, in the fact that in Europe today we see two souls: one is abstract anti-historical reason, which seeks to dominate all else because it considers itself above all cultures; it is like a reason which has finally discovered itself and intends to liberate itself from all traditions and cultural values in favor of an abstract rationality. Strasburg's first verdict on the crucifix was an example of such abstract reason which seeks emancipation from all traditions, even from history itself. Yet we cannot live like that and, moreover, even "pure reason" is conditioned by a certain historical context, and only in that context can it exist.

We could call Europe's other soul the Christian one. It is a soul open to all that is reasonable, a soul which itself created the audaciousness of reason and the freedom of critical reasoning, but which remains anchored to the roots from which this Europe was born, the roots which created the continent's fundamental values and great institutions, in the vision of the Christian faith. As you said, this soul has to find a shared expression in ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. It must then encounter this abstract reason; in other words, it must accept and maintain the freedom of reason to criticize everything it can do and has done, but to practice this and give it concrete form on the foundations and in the context of the great values that Christianity has given us.

Only by blending these elements can Europe have weight in the intercultural dialogue of mankind today and tomorrow. Only when reason has a historical and moral identity can it speak to others, search for an "interculturality" in which everyone can enter and find a fundamental unity in the values that open the way to the future, to a new humanism. This must be our aim. For us this humanism arises directly from the view of man created in the image and likeness of God.

