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Bellevue Castle
Welcoming Ceremony

Official translation

Mr President of the Federal Republic,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I am honoured by the kind welcome which you have given to me here in Bellevue Castle. I am particularly grateful to you, President Wulff, for inviting me to make this official visit, which marks the third time I have come as Pope to the Federal Republic of Germany. I thank you most heartily for your cordial words of welcome. I am likewise grateful to the representatives of the Federal Government, the *Bundestag*, the *Bundesrat*, and the City of Berlin for their presence, which signifies their respect for the Pope as the Successor of the Apostle Peter. Last but not not least, I thank the three Bishops who are my hosts, Archbishop Woelki of Berlin, Bishop Wanke of Erfurt and Archbishop Zollitsch of Freiburg, and all those at the various ecclesial and civil levels who helped in preparing this visit to my native land and contributed to its happy outcome.

Even though this journey is an official visit which will reinforce the good relations existing between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Holy See, I have not come here primarily to pursue particular political or economic goals, as other statesmen rightly do, but rather to meet people and to speak about God.

We are witnessing a growing indifference to religion in society, which considers the issue of truth as something of an obstacle in its decision-making, and instead gives priority to utilitarian considerations.

All the same, a binding basis for our coexistence is needed; otherwise people live in a purely individualistic way. Religion is one of these foundations for a successful social life. "Just as religion has need of freedom, so also freedom has need of religion." These words of the great bishop and social reformer Wilhelm von Ketteler, the second centenary of whose birth is being celebrated this year, remain timely.¹

Freedom requires a primordial link to a higher instance. The fact that there are values which are not absolutely open to manipulation is the true guarantee of our freedom. The man who feels a duty to truth and goodness will immediately agree with this: freedom develops only in responsibility to a greater good. Such a good exists only for all of us together; therefore I must always be concerned for my neighbours. Freedom cannot be lived in the absence of relationships

In human coexistence, freedom is impossible without solidarity. What I do at the expense of others is not freedom but a culpable way of acting which is harmful to others and also to myself. I can truly develop as a free person only by using my powers also for the welfare of others. This holds true not only in private matters but also for society as a whole. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, society must give sufficient space for smaller structures to develop and, at the same time, must support them so that one day they will stand on their own.

Here in Bellevue Castle, named for its splendid view of the banks of the Spree and situated close to the Victory Column, the *Bundestag* and the Brandenburg Gate, we are in the very heart of Berlin, the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany. This castle, with its dramatic history – like many buildings of this city – is a testimony to the history of Germany. A clear look at the past, even at its dark pages, enables us to learn from it and to receive an impetus for the present. The Federal Republic of Germany has become what it is today thanks to the power of freedom shaped by responsibility before God and before one another. It needs this dynamism, which engages every human sector in order to continue developing now. It needs this in a world which requires a profound cultural renewal and the rediscovery of fundamental values upon which to build a better future (*Caritas in Veritate*, 21).

I trust that my meetings throughout this visit – here in Berlin, in Erfurt, in Eichsfeld and in Freiburg – can make a small contribution in this regard. In these days may God grant all of us his blessing.

¹ *Rede vor der ersten Versammlung der Katholiken Deutschlands, 1848.* In: Erwin Iserloh (ed.): Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (Mainz, 1977), I, 1, p. 18.