

PRESS INFORMATION
PAPAL VISIT

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**Welcome of the Pope to the German Bundestag
on 22 September 2011**

**Dr Norbert Lammert President of the German Bundestag
Speech on the occasion of the meeting with Pope Benedict XVI**

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I would like to welcome you all very warmly to the German Bundestag, to which we have, not for the first time, invited an eminent guest. Yet this is the first time in history that a Pope has spoken to an elected German parliament. And seldom has a speech in this House, even before its delivery, attracted so much attention and interest – not only in Germany, but also far beyond.

Holy Father, I would like to welcome you very warmly to Germany, your home country, and particularly to the German Bundestag!

During the brief tenure of the last Pope from the German lands, Germany as a nation-state had not yet been born – what existed was the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”, an Empire shaped by shifting dynasties, an Empire which was as much – or as little – Roman as it was German, which was by no means a nation and anything but holy. Germany is a country which was strongly moulded by religion and religious wars for many centuries, including the *Kulturkampf* at the time of the foundation of the German Reich. A country whose Christian traditions of faith also influenced the constitution we have today and had a central impact on the work of the fathers and mothers of the constitution, who were, as the Preamble says, “Conscious of their responsibility before God and man”.

Yet the understanding which we have today of basic rights – of the inviolability of human dignity, and civil liberties – was also shaped by historical experiences and achievements, particularly the Enlightenment, which we have to thank not only for the challenge of faith by reason, but

Kaiserstraße 161
53113 Bonn

Postanschrift
Postfach 29 62
53019 Bonn

Ruf: 0228-103-0
Direkt: 0228-103 -214
Fax: 0228-103 -254
E-Mail: pressestelle@dbk.de
Home: www.dbk.de
www.papst-in-deutschland.de

Herausgeber
P. Dr. Hans Langendörfer SJ
Sekretär der Deutschen
Bischofskonferenz

also for the separation of Church and State, one of the indispensable elements of progress achieved by our civilisation.

I am fond of recalling the highly significant dialogue between Cardinal Ratzinger, at the time Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Jürgen Habermas. Together, they described and acknowledged faith and reason as “the two great cultures of the West”.

Faith and reason. In the era of globalisation, in a world shaken by war and crises, many people seek support and guidance. Upholding ethical principles, unswayed by markets and powers, and cultivating common values and beliefs is a major challenge, particularly for modern societies, which seek to avoid endangering their internal cohesion.

Germany is the country of the Reformation, which began here almost 500 years ago – with manifold consequences for the Church, State and Society.

Many people in Germany, not only committed Catholics and Protestants, are vexed by the continuing division of the Churches, in part because they have sincere doubts about whether the inter-confessional differences, whilst they do undoubtedly exist, justify maintaining this division. And, during the pontificate of a German Pope, the first since the Reformation, they urgently wish to see not only a further declaration of commitment to ecumenism, but an unambiguous step towards overcoming the Schism.

Holy Father, your discussions with the representatives of other religions form a key element of your visit to Germany. The fact that your meeting with representatives of the Protestant Church is taking place in Erfurt, not at an arbitrary location, but at St Augustine’s Monastery, is perceived and appreciated as a symbolic gesture, not only by many Christians – and gives cause for optimism that the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 may be a collective expression of faith. Alongside your meetings with representatives of Islamic communities, you will also meet representatives of the Jewish community.

The Reichstag Building holds a pivotal place in German history. It stands for the rise and fall of a parliamentary democracy. One of the main reasons for the failure of this democracy was the lack of tolerance – the main victims of which were Germany’s Jewish citizens. And it was Christians who looked the other way or took part, who vilified, persecuted, humiliated and killed.

For this reason, Holy Father, special symbolic importance attaches to the fact that your meeting with representatives of Germany’s growing Jewish community after your speech is taking place in this building, the seat of the freely elected parliament in reunified Germany, which views itself as part of a Europe committed to shared values and beliefs.

We are grateful for this opportunity to act as hosts and we are committed to meeting the responsibility we bear for human dignity, freedom of religious and political belief and

tolerance towards different convictions and orientations: “Inspired”, as stated in the Preamble of our constitution, the Basic Law, “by the determination to promote world peace as an equal partner in a united Europe” – and “Conscious of [our] responsibility before God and man”.

Conscious of this responsibility, we are happy that you are visiting us and we look forward to your speech.