



A Roadmap for Evangelization

In the many writings of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, the Church has been given a theological treasure

by Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson

THIS APRIL 16 will mark a special event in the life of the Catholic Church: the 90th birthday of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Since the early 1980s, I have had the privilege of meeting him on many occasions. As vice president of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, I arranged for him to visit Washington, D.C., while he was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He gave a lecture to the faculty and students of the institute and of the Dominican House of Studies. In 2005, I was honored to be appointed by President George W. Bush as one of three members of the official U.S. delegation attending Pope Benedict's inaugural Mass.

While meeting Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and later Pope Benedict XVI was always an extraordinary event, it was encountering his writings that was truly life-changing. Ever profound and often prophetic, even the works he wrote in the 1960s remain contemporary today — especially books such as *Introduction to Christianity* and *The God of Jesus Christ*. Altogether, he has written 68 books, three encyclicals, three apostolic exhortations and thousands of lectures, homilies and meditations.

Speaking to university students in Munich, Cardinal Ratzinger said that while many struggle with the question of whether God exists, the more pressing question is: What precisely does Christianity bring new into the world after 2,000 years of

history? In other words, what difference does belief in Jesus Christ make in the reality of our lives? The answer to that question rings through nearly half a century of scholarship by Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the great theologians and bishops of the Catholic Church.

One of the mysteries — and some might say tragedies — of Christianity in our time is how so many Europeans ignored or discounted this theological and magisterial treasure, especially during those decades when Christianity dramatically declined on that continent. Not only were his books, such as *Introduction to Christianity*, truly prophetic but they also provided a theological roadmap for the new evangelization.

It was fitting that the last synod of bishops over which Pope Benedict presided was convened on the topic “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”

His three papal encyclicals — *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), *Spe Salvi* (In Hope We Are Saved) and *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) — remain pillars that will support Catholic faith for decades. In the introduction of *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict succinctly summarized the ethos for a new evangelization: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” He also summarized its methodology: “Since God has first loved us, love is now no



longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”

This year, the birthday of Pope Emeritus Benedict falls on Easter Sunday. He has asked for no special recognition for himself on that day — nothing should detract from our celebration and profession of the Lord's resurrection.

But while honoring his request, perhaps all of us can take a minute on Easter Sunday to thank the Lord for this holy priest, bishop and pope whose life's work has brought millions closer to Him whose resurrection we celebrate.

In doing so, may we also remember these words of Pope Benedict: “Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.”

May the example of Pope Emeritus Benedict inspire each of us to strive to be a more “credible witness” to the One who draws near to us in love.

Vivat Jesus!