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Pope Benedict XVI blesses a girl during his visit to the Vatican's parish church, the Church of St. Anne, Feb. 5. Marking Italy's pro-life day, the pontiff said people will lose respect for human life the more they set aside belief in God.

## To respect life, people must remember God created it, pope says

BY CINDY WOODEN

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The more people set aside belief in God the creator, the greater the danger that they will lose respect for the value and dignity of human life, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Celebrating Mass Feb. 5 in the Vatican's parish church, the Church of St. Anne, and marking Italy's pro-life day, Pope Benedict said that when people stop thinking of human life as a creation of God they begin to think they have complete control over it.

In a mostly ad-libbed homily at the morning Mass, Pope Benedict said Jesus came to earth as a human being in order to heal people of the "fevers" of ideologies and idolatry and of forgetting God.

"The Lord gives us his hand, he helps us up and heals us," the pope said.

Referring to the Gospel story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, the pope said it is important to notice that as soon as she was healed she got up and began serving others.

"Right away she began to work, to be at the disposition of others and, in that way, she represents the many good women — mothers, grandmothers, women in different professions — who are available, who get up and serve and are the soul of the family and of the parish," he said.

Pope Benedict used the parish visit to thank the women involved in the life of St. Anne Parish, but also those around the world who teach their children the faith and those "who always

help us to know the word of God not only with our intellects, but with the heart."

Jesus' life and ministry, the pope said, was grounded in his personal relationship with God the Father.

"Where God is absent, the human person is no longer respected," the pope said.

Jesus did not come to earth primarily to heal people of physical maladies, the pope said, but to "reconcile them with God, God is our creator. God gave us life, dignity."

While men and women are called to safeguard and administer creation, they are not the lords of life, and they cannot presume to determine whether life is or is not of value, he said.

Reciting the *Angelus* after Mass, Pope Benedict said he wanted to focus attention on "the importance of the service of charity to support and promote human life."

Even before organizing pro-life initiatives, he said, "it is fundamental to promote a correct attitude toward the other: The culture of life is, in effect, based on attention to others without exclusion or discrimination."

"Every human life deserves and needs to be defended and promoted," the pope said.

Too often, especially in wealthy societies, "life is exalted as long as it is pleasurable, but there is a tendency not to respect it any longer when it becomes ill or disabled," Pope Benedict said.

When every human life is loved because it is created by God, then efforts to defend life — whether the life of a newborn, the infirm or the dying — become effective, the pope said.

February 2006

Once again, many Catholic universities and institutions of higher learning are allowing the presentation of something called "The Vagina Monologues." Alas, our beloved Notre Dame is presenting it for the fifth successive year under the sponsorship of two academic departments. The bishop is the teacher in his diocese and has the serious responsibility of bringing the light of the Gospel of Christ and the teachings of the church to bear on the moral issues of the time. This obligation takes on a special seriousness when the souls of the young are in danger of being drawn into a state of moral confusion.

What is wrong with the text of this play? It distorts the beautiful gift of human sexuality, clouding its richness so it becomes merely the seeking of pleasure. Sexuality in the Catholic tradition is always related to the gift of self to another. "Sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests itself in its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love." — "Familias Consortio," Pope John Paul II

In contrast, the play in question reduces sexuality to a particular organ of a woman's body separate from the person of the woman, from her soul and her spirit. It alienates woman from man whom God has entrusted to her as friend and companion. It separates sexuality and the human body from love. How opposite from our tradition which says, "A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity. It is likewise connected with the love she gives in return." — "On the Dignity of Women," Pope John Paul II

While some will find it hard to believe, it is true that this play depicts in an approving way a sexual relationship between an adult woman and an adolescent girl, a minor. Such an action, which is a crime in both civil and church law, is also considered a serious sin in Christian moral teaching. The play also contains explicit depictions of masturbation and lesbian sex, portrayed in a positive light.

In this first encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI, theologian and pastor, speaks to this cultural phenomenon with striking clarity.

"Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. Boas, reduced to pure 'sex,' has become a commodity, a mere 'thing' to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great 'yes' to the body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the

human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter penetrate, and in which each is brought to a new nobility."

— "Deus Caritas Est," Pope Benedict XVI, Dec. 25, 2005.

### The question of freedom

The Book of Genesis contains the biblical account of the origin of humanity and informs us about the centrality of freedom as a gift of God who has created us in his image. Freedom in the Catholic tradition has never been understood as the right to do whatever one desires. Freedom in the Catholic tradition is seen as the capacity to know the good and having the strength to do it. The opposite understanding of freedom would say that each person determines what is good or evil. This kind of subjectivity is in total opposition to the Scriptures. We receive our understanding of what is good and what is evil from God through the Commandments given to Moses, from the Scriptures, from the teachings of the church and the law written in our hearts, identified by St. Paul and the long tradition of church teaching. Pope John Paul II succinctly expressed this truth rooted in sacred Scriptures and tradition when he observed, "Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought." Oct. 8, 1995, Baltimore, Maryland

### Academic and artistic freedom

Pope John Paul II has made clear that a Catholic university "guarantees its members academic freedom so long as the rights of the individual person and the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good."

— "Ex Coe Ecclesiae."

Here, Pope John Paul II, a long-time professor in a Catholic university, explains that freedom must always be linked to the truth and the common good. The same principles apply to artistic freedom. As a university professor, the future pope presented a series of lectures on human love and sexuality in which he reflected how artistic freedom must always be linked to the whole truth about human love and sexuality.

"Art has a right and a duty, for the sake of realism, to reproduce the human body, and the love of man and woman, as they are in reality, to speak the whole truth about them. The human body is an authentic part of the truth about man, just as its sensual and sexual aspects are an authentic part of the truth about human love. But it

would be wrong to let this part obscure the whole — and this is what often happens in art ... Pornography is a marked tendency to accentuate the sexual element when reproducing the human body or human love in a work of art, with the object of inducing the reader or viewer to believe that sexual values are the only real values of the person, and that love is nothing more than the experience, individual or shared, of those values alone." — "Love and Responsibility," Karol Wojtyla.

Such an analysis brings clarity. The play, which is being sponsored, does not portray the whole truth about human sexuality; and by this separation, it violates the truth about the body, the truth about the gift of sexuality, the truth about love, and the truth about man and woman.

As the president of Providence College recently wrote when he explained his reasons for banning the play, "Any institution which sanctioned works of art that undermined its deepest value would be inauthentic, irresponsible and ultimately self-destructive."

— Letter to the Community of Providence College, Brian Shanley, OP, Ph.D.

As Notre Dame, with our prayers, weighs its response to this question, the common good of the university and of the wider community, as well, should be considered.

### A new development

For 21 years as bishop of this diocese, I have entered into respectful dialogue with three presidents of Notre Dame. In that spirit, I have spoken to Father John Jenkins, CSC, on the matter at hand, always keeping in mind the instruction given to bishops and university presidents in "Ex Coe Ecclesiae," which urges that there should be "close personal and pastoral relationships between university and church authorities, characterized by mutual trust and consistent cooperation and continuing dialogue."

Father Jenkins, in an act of leadership, has chosen to go before the Notre Dame community to make a serious presentation on this matter. Those of us who are outside the governance of the university should view this decision with respect.

### A final word

In preparing these remarks, I have consulted others, including women who are graduates of Notre Dame. One is the mother of seven children; along with her husband, she has worked with me for 20 years to promote the pastoral care of the family. Together, they have prepared hundreds of couples for marriage. She shared with me these comments.

"I have been reflecting since we spoke the other night on the fact that there is an enormous difference between exposing evil and endorsing it, and a Catholic uni-

## JENKINS

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In this way, he said, the church evangelizes culture. The church is also enriched and shows that, like Aquinas, it is ready and willing to learn about the truth from any source, he said.

Father Jenkins made his remarks at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University, where the Notre Dame Board of Trustees conferred honorary degrees on Francis Rooney, the U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, and to Bishop Rino Fisichella, the rector of Lateran University.

In an interview Feb. 2 with Catholic News Service, Father Jenkins spoke about efforts to understand and promote the Catholic identity of church-run universities, which was emphasized under Pope John Paul II and is expected to continue under Pope Benedict XVI.

Father Jenkins said that while Catholic identity is not an easy thing to measure at a university there are some indications of success, including worship and liturgical life, a demonstration of generosity and Christian charity, and a vibrant intellectual life, particularly in theology.

If there is no real liturgical life, no generosity of service, and if the intellectual life does not reflect church teachings in some way, then it is silly to call it a Catholic university, he said.

Father Jenkins said he sees no tension between a university's Catholic identity and academic freedom. At Notre Dame, he said, scholars and students — including non-Catholics — have the right to think what they like, publish their research and speak

about their field of expertise.

"It is the same academic freedom that is enjoyed anywhere else," he said.

At the same time, Father Jenkins said that at an institutional level the Catholic university needs to reflect its Catholic character. For that reason, a university may want to look critically at what events are being sponsored and seemingly endorsed by its academic departments.

That issue came to public attention in late January, when Father Jenkins placed some restrictions on two highly controversial events at Notre Dame: performances of "The Vagina Monologues," a play about female sexuality, and an annual festival that features movies with homosexual themes. He also opened a university-wide dialogue to help him decide whether the events should be held in the future.

These are not unimportant issues for Notre Dame, because they involve "what sort of institution we are and how we are fulfilling our mission about being a pre-eminent Catholic university," Father Jenkins told CNS.

He said the issue was not academic freedom. Notre Dame can accept a diversity of views, events and artistic performances, including some that are not in accordance with Catholic teaching, he said.

"We want a diversity of views. That's part of being a university," he said.

But he said "The Vagina Monologues" had run for five years at Notre Dame, involving fundraising and a great deal of publicity, all of which raise the question: Is what we are sponsoring consistent with the sort

of institution we are?

Father Jenkins said the question of Catholic identity means universities should make room for explicit reflection on their mission. The basic objectives of that mission should be respected by everyone working at the university, including non-Catholics, he said.

The 52-year-old priest, who has taught philosophy at Notre Dame since 1990, said he is generally impressed with the interest in the faith shown by young students today.

At the same time, he said, many of them come to Notre Dame confused about some of the fundamental truths of Catholicism. He said he is convinced that young Catholics today need basic catechesis more than sophisticated theology.

"They need to know what the central truths are, why they are taught and what they mean for human life. I think that's the big challenge for the church," he said.

Father Jenkins said he thought the election of Pope Benedict, who as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was a world-renowned scholar and theologian, would help focus attention on the role of Catholic scholarship and universities.

Father Jenkins also pointed out an interesting historical note: In the 1960s, Notre Dame's president, Holy Cross Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, offered then-Father Ratzinger a teaching position at the university. Had he accepted, his career as a distinguished theologian might have developed in a very different context.

## PLAY

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versity should be in the business of the former, not the latter. In order to expose evil, it is necessary to examine it, to analyze it, to explore its assumptions and arguments so as to be better able to refute them and to explain to others how and why they fall short of what our human dignity demands. A Catholic university should bring faith and reason, as well as human experience and reflection to bear on the issues raised by the monologues, so as to respond to them in a way that safeguards and promotes the dignity of the human person. The monologues have become, in fact, a cultural phenomenon, and a Catholic university could have a fine contribution to make in analyzing why that has

happened, what the appeal of the play is, and why the answer to the desecration of women that sexual abuse and violence constitute cannot be the perhaps less obvious but more insidious desecration of women that many of the monologues depict." — Lisa Everett, in a letter to Bishop D'Arcy, Feb. 1, 2006.

I am always impressed when I visit the Grotto of Our Lady at Notre Dame by the many students, who pause there in prayer. Let us all turn to Mary, the patroness of Notre Dame and of our diocese, asking her to help Father Jenkins and her university through this difficult and historic moment, towards the light that is Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

I regret the sponsorship of this play by Notre Dame again this year, and pray it will be the last time.

## CARTOON

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ple, shows Mohammed in a turban shaped as a bomb.

In separate statements, two Vatican officials also denounced the cartoons.

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, told Vatican Radio that the ongoing demonstrations show how deeply Muslims have been offended by the depictions of their Prophet.

"We shouldn't diminish the love and respect Muslims have for their prophet Mohammed. This is very important for them and therefore cannot be the object of derision or ridicule," he said.

The archbishop added that violent reactions to such offenses are not justified.

Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, a leader for many years in the Vatican's diplomatic service, said the cartoons had offended millions of Muslims and demonstrated a growing trend to make fun of religious symbols in general.

"Freedom of satire that offends the sentiments of others becomes an abuse — and in this case it has affected the sentiments of entire populations in their highest symbols," the cardinal told the Italian newspaper *Coesere della Sera* Feb. 3.

The cardinal said Christianity has similar sensitivities.

"One can understand satire about a priest but not about God. With reference to Islam, we could understand satire on the uses and customs and behavior, but not about the Quran, Allah and the Prophet," he said.

The cardinal said secular soci-



OS PHOTO/MI JAREKI, REUTERS  
Jordanian Islamists shout slogans during a demonstration in Amman, Jordan, Feb. 3 against the publication of cartoons in European newspapers depicting the prophet Mohammed.

eties should not assume a right to offend religious sentiments. He noted that many countries consider it illegal to offend their national flag and asked, "Shouldn't we consider religious symbols on an equal level with the symbols of secular institutions?"

Msr. Aldo Giordano, general secretary of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, told Vatican Radio Feb. 3 that this type of satire was a type of vulgarity that goes against human rights.

"I see that the entire Christian world is very saddened and pained by satire of this type, aimed at the brothers of another religion," he said.

At the same time, he said it was important not to overreact and "not make it an occasion for a clash of civilizations."

"We should be able to transform offenses in an occasion of greater solidarity," he said.



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