Reactions to Pope's Visit
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04.17.2008 | Catholic, Faculty

Faculty at the University of Dayton comment on the messages of Pope Benedict XVI on his first visit to the United States.

Final thoughts

"The pope conveyed a genuine pastoral sensibility in his public appearances. There was a clear warmth that came across in the smile that lit up his whole face. He sought a certain balance between the challenge and comfort of the Gospel. He spoke frequently of the hope that is at the heart of Christianity even in the midst of the challenges that comes with a commitment to the truth.

"I was genuinely surprised with the frequency with which he mentioned the sexual abuse crisis. Of course, many thought it was not enough. The judgment will only come in seeing whether there will be any follow-up, especially in terms of accountability of bishops.

"It must be difficult for the media to avoid the papal visit simply as spectacle. Yet, Benedict seemed to resist the spectacle aspect with his modest demeanor. Benedict's talks and homilies are quite nuanced; they reflect his long-time work as a university professor.

"It is also difficult for the media to convey what is at the heart of Benedict's message — his witness to the truth of the Gospel, which he understands as a witness to love that gives reason to hope in the truth that brings freedom."

— Sandra Yocum-Mize, professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies, 937-229-4321 or mizes@udayton.edu

Benedict's unannounced meeting with sex abuse victims. Has he done enough during his visit to address the scandal?

"It would be difficult to conclude what might ever be enough given the gravity of the impact of sexual abuse on the victims. One would hope that his mention of the scandal three times and his meeting with a small group of victims is not an attempt to put an end to responding to the scandal, rather, one could hope that this is more of a beginning of a response.

"The one response that has been noticeably missing is any effort to call bishops and others involved in the cover-up and protection of abusers into public penance. Given the pope's call for more participation by the faithful in the sacrament of reconciliation, he should call his fellow bishops and others to a commitment to penance in ways that acknowledge how they have contributed to the suffering of those who are the victims. Benedict will also have to follow up on his promise of holding the bishops accountable."

— Sandra Yocum-Mize

Message to Catholic educators

"Benedict is deeply concerned about Catholic identity, this concern is shared by educators across the ideological spectrum. It's not a conservative or liberal issue.

"The pope speaks as a former academic who was deeply distressed by the disruption of the European universities in 1968. He understands that Catholic doctrine must be presented in a way that respects the university's way of proceeding."

— Vincent Miller, visiting distinguished professor of religious studies, 937-229-2079 or millervi@notes.udayton.edu

Mass at Nationals Park

"I thought it was very balanced and had the right combination of realism and visionary hope. He affirmed the United States as a nation of freedom noting it was not always a good story for Native Americans and Africans.
"Invoking American ideals, he said it's the task of the U.S. church to figure out a new way of living out the Catholic vision. He was challenging us to use our skills of creativity and innovation towards living out the Gospel.

— Dennis Doyle, religious studies professor, 937-229-4219 or dennis.doyle@notes.udayton.edu (url: dennis.doyle@notes.udayton.edu)

Meeting with U.S. bishops

"The media coverage hardly conveys the more subtle dimensions of the address as well as the message of hope.

"He tried to convey the profound transformative power of the Gospel. He called the faithful to the deepest level of transformation as a response to Christ as the hope for the fullness of life in truth and freedom."

"He talked about the 'subtle influence' of secularism and materialism. His criticism is not limited to Catholics in general, but he also addressed the failure of the bishops in particular in their response to the sexual abuse crisis, and he calls the bishops, priests and the whole Church to reach out to victims in need of healing, a call he reiterated in his sermon in Nationals Park."

— Sandra Yocum-Mize

Comments about the priest sex abuse scandal

"The tone of his comments is encouraging, and there is no sign of scapegoating priests with a homosexual orientation.

"He says he wants to do 'everything possible to heal this wound.' What is he going to do? I would like to see him do some ceremonial public act of penance on behalf of the church, as one priest in Boston suggested that he wash the feet of 12 victims."

— William Portier, religious studies professor and Mary Ann Spearin Chair of Catholic Theology, 937-229-4435 or william.portier@notes.udayton.edu (url: william.portier@notes.udayton.edu)

UD is Ohio's largest private university and one of the top-10 Catholic universities in the United States.

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