

The Question of God in Today's World



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- The Pontifical Council for the Laity is currently celebrating its twenty-fifth plenary assembly on the theme: "The Question of God in Today's World". The participants were received in audience this morning by the Holy Father who focused his remarks on two key areas of the dicastery's recent activities: the Congress for Lay People in Asia and World Youth Day in Madrid, Spain.

"The great continent of Asia", he said, "is home to many different peoples, cultures and religions of ancient origin, but the Christian message has so far reached only a small minority who often live their faith in difficult circumstances, sometimes even suffering real persecution. The congress was an opportunity ... to reinforce our missionary commitment and courage. These our brothers and sisters bear admirable witness to their adherence to Christ, enabling us to see how, thanks to their faith, vast fields of evangelisation are opening for the Church in Asia in the third millennium".

Referring then to the fact that the pontifical council is currently preparing a similar congress for lay people in Africa, due to take place next year in Cameroon, the Pope observed that such continental gatherings "are important for the impetus they give to the work of evangelisation, for reinforcing unity and strengthening the bonds between the particular Churches and the universal Church".

Turning his attention to World Youth Day, he said: "An extraordinary cascade of light, joy and hope illuminated not only Madrid, but also Europe and the entire world, clearly re-establishing the importance of seeking God in today's world. No one could remain indifferent, no one could think that the question of God was irrelevant to modern man".

Focusing on the theme of the plenary, Pope Benedict said: "We must never cease to raise this question, to 'begin again from God' so as to recognise man in all his dimensions and dignity. Indeed the mentality, so widespread in our time, which rejects any reference to the transcendent has proved incapable of comprehending and preserving what is human. The spread of such a mentality has generated the crisis we are experiencing today which, more than an economic and social crisis, is a crisis of meaning and values. ... In this context, the question of God is, in a certain sense, 'the main question'. It brings us back to the basic query about man, to the aspirations for truth, happiness and freedom which are inherent to the human heart and which seek realisation".

"If it is true that 'being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person', then the question of God is reawakened by meeting people who have the gift of faith, who have a living relationship with the Lord. ... Here your role as lay faithful is particularly important. ... You are called to show luminous witness of the relevance of God in all fields of thought and action. In the family and the workplace, in politics and in economics, modern man needs to see and feel how the presence or absence of God changes everything.

"But the challenge of a mentality closed to the transcendent obliges even Christians to focus more specifically on the central place of God", the Holy Father added. "Efforts have been made in the past to ensure that the presence of Christians in social, political and economic life was more incisive, and perhaps less attention was given to the solidity of their faith, almost as if it was taken for granted.

The truth is that Christians do not live on some distant planet, immune to the 'sicknesses' of the world; they are affected by the turmoil, disorientation and difficulties of their time. Therefore it is equally important to raise the question of God within the Church. ... The first response to the great challenge of our time lies, then, in a profound conversion of heart, so that the Baptism which made us light of the world and salt of the earth, can truly transform us", he concluded.

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