



Commemoration of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, former member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences



Dear Academicians, Colleagues and Friends of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,

You have certainly heard the sad news of the death of Pope Benedict XVI which occurred in the Monastery of Mary Mother of the Church, in the Vatican, on 31 December 2022; and while we offer our sincere and heartfelt condolences to Pope Francis and to the Catholic Church all over the world, we wish to extend the same to all of you, devoted Academicians, because Pope Benedict XVI shared membership of this Pontifical Academy of Sciences with us. He was an illustrious and stalwart member of our Academy; and with filial devotion and affection, we wish to briefly celebrate here his cherished memory.

Cardinal Ratzinger, as Pope Benedict XVI was called before his election to this high office, was appointed a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2002 by Pope John Paul II. At that time, he was the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

As Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger remained a strong supporter of the Academy, followed the deliberations of the Academy and addressed its members regularly at Plenary Sessions and on other occasions.

It will be a tough uphill climb to attempt, in this commemorative tribute, to do full justice to the great intellectual, philosophical and theological stature of Pope Benedict, which he graciously and unassumingly displayed in his many interactions with members of the Academy and in his oral and

written contributions to gatherings of the Academicians and elsewhere. We wish, in this modest tribute, simply to draw particular attention to, and share with you, two illustrative documents which give voice to Pope Benedict XVI himself, namely, [his self-introduction](#) when he became a member of the Pontifical Academy in 2002, and [his last address](#) to our Academy in 2012.

In his humble self-introduction, he pointed to his academic career, i.e. his doctoral dissertation about the notion of the people of God in Saint Augustine, stressing that Augustine saw Christian faith not in continuity with earlier religions, but rather in continuity with philosophy as a victory of reason over superstition. As a post-doctoral researcher, he studied Bonaventure, whose writings led Ratzinger to the discovery that a significant thought-current among the Franciscans held with conviction that Saint Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Order marked the beginning of a third period of history. He also outlined his research as Professor in Bonn, Tübingen, Regensburg, and as Cardinal in Munich. He closed his self-introduction by pointing at work on documents he guided in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, concerning the relationship between the Holy Bible of the Jewish people, the *TaNak* (the Law, Prophets and Writings), which is the Christian *Old Testament*, and the Christian *New Testament*. Ratzinger hoped that these documents of the CDF would also be helpful in the dialogue between Christians and Jews. He also pointed at his thoughts on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, where he showed recognition, for example, for indigenous theology in Latin America, and for how elements of the Christian faith can be present in the rich religious and philosophical traditions of the Indian culture. For Ratzinger, therefore, “how an intercultural synthesis in the present moment is possible without losing the identity of our faith is exciting for us, and I think it is an important topic even for non-Christians or non-Catholics”.

In the [last address](#) of Pope Benedict XVI to the PAS Plenary Session (2012), he elaborated on the theme of “Complexity and Analogy in Science”. He stressed that “...the significant discoveries and advances of recent years invite us to consider the great analogy of physics and biology which is clearly manifested every time that we achieve a deeper understanding of the natural order”. Pope Benedict XVI clearly enjoyed engaging in science discourse with the Academy, indicating the Pontifical Academy’s potentials and opportunities. He pointed out to the Academy: “In your discussions, you have sought to examine, on the one hand, the ongoing dialectic of the constant expansion of scientific research, methods and specializations and, on the other, the quest for a comprehensive vision of this universe in which human beings, endowed with intelligence and freedom, are called to understand, love, live and work”.

Finally, and on a strong note of emphasis on cooperation between science and faith, Pope Benedict XVI concluded his address: “In the great human enterprise of striving to unlock the mysteries of man and the universe, I am convinced of the urgent need for continued dialogue and cooperation between the worlds of science and of faith in the building of a culture of respect for man, for human dignity and freedom, for the future of our human family and for the long-term sustainable development of our planet. Without this necessary interplay, the great questions of

humanity leave the domain of reason and truth, and are abandoned to the irrational, to myth, or to indifference, with great damage to humanity itself, to world peace and to our ultimate destiny”.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences hopes to celebrate the memory of Pope Benedict XVI fully during the next Plenary Session of the Academy (Fall 2024). We wish to avail ourselves of this tribute to invite all Academicians to remember our beloved colleague in their thoughts and prayers, and to endeavor to participate in the commemorative event in the Fall of 2024.

With prayerful wishes for the Blessings of the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Joachim von Braun
President

Cardinal Peter Turkson
Chancellor