

# Pope Benedict XVI on Architecture

*Quotes Listed Chronologically*

(Thanks to Duncan Stroik at <http://sacredarchitecture.org>)

## **Pope Benedict XVI, 18 November 2009:**

“Dear brothers and sisters,

In the catecheses of recent weeks I have presented some aspects of Medieval theology. However Christian faith, profoundly rooted in the men and women of those centuries, did not only give origin to masterpieces of theological literature, of thought and of faith. It also inspired one of the loftiest artistic creations of universal civilization: the cathedrals, true glory of the Christian Middle Ages. In fact, for almost three centuries, beginning in the 11th century, Europe witnessed an extraordinary artistic fervor. An ancient chronicler describes thus the enthusiasm and industry of that time: “It happened that the whole world, but especially in Italy and in Gaul, churches began to be reconstructed, although many, being in good conditions, had no need of this restoration. It was as though one village and another competed; it was as if the world, shaking off its old rags, wished to be clothed everywhere in the white garment of new churches. In sum, almost all the cathedral churches, a great number of monastic churches, and even village chapels, were then restored by the faithful” (Rodolfo el Glabro, *Historiarum* 3,4).

Several factors contributed to this rebirth of religious architecture. First of all, more favorable historical conditions, such as greater political security, accompanied by a constant increase in the population and the progressive development of cities, of exchanges and of wealth. Moreover, architects found increasingly elaborate technical solutions to increase the dimension of buildings, ensuring at the same time their firmness and majesty. However, it was thanks primarily to the spiritual ardor and zeal of monasticism then in full expansion that abbey churches were erected, where the liturgy could be celebrated with dignity and solemnity, and the faithful could remain in prayer, attracted by the veneration of the relics of the saints, object of countless pilgrimages. Thus the Romanesque churches and cathedrals were born, characterized by their longitudinal development along the naves to house numerous faithful; very solid churches, with thick walls, stone vaults and simple and essential lines.

A novelty is represented by the introduction of sculptures. As Romanesque churches were the place of monastic prayer and the faithful’s worship, the sculptors, rather than being concerned with technical perfection, took care above all of the educational end. It was necessary to arouse in souls strong impressions, feelings that could incite them to flee from vice and evil and practice virtue, goodness—the recurrent theme was the representation of Christ as Universal Judge, surrounded by the personages of revelation. In general it is Romanesque facades that offer this representation, to underline that Christ is the door that leads to heaven. The faithful, crossing the threshold of the sacred building, entered a time and space that were different from those of ordinary life. Beyond the main door of the church, believers in the sovereign, just and merciful Christ could—the artists hoped—anticipate eternal happiness in the celebration of the liturgy and in acts of piety carried out inside the sacred building.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, beginning in the north of France, another type of architecture spread in the construction of sacred buildings: the Gothic. This style had two new characteristics as compared to the Romanesque: the vertical thrust and luminosity. Gothic cathedrals showed a synthesis of faith and art

expressed harmoniously through the universal and fascinating language of beauty, which still today awakens wonder. Thanks to the introduction of pointed vaults, which were supported by robust pillars, it was possible to notably raise the height [of these churches]. The thrust to the sublime was an invitation to prayer and at the same time was a prayer. The Gothic cathedral thus wished to translate in its architectural lines souls longing for God. Moreover, with the new technical solutions, the perimeter walls could be penetrated and embellished by colorful stained glass windows. In other words, the windows were transformed into great luminous figures, very adapted to instructing the people in the faith. In them—scene by scene—were narrated the life of a saint, a parable or other biblical events. From the painted windows a cascade of light was shed on the faithful to narrate to them the history of salvation and to involve them in this history.

Another merit of the Gothic cathedrals was the fact that, in their construction and decoration, the Christian and civil community participated in a different but coordinated way; the poor and the powerful, the illiterate and the learned participated, because in this common house all believers were instructed in the faith. Gothic sculpture made of cathedrals a “Bible of stone,” representing the episodes of the Gospel and illustrating the contents of the Liturgical Year, from Christmas to the Lord’s glorification. Spreading ever more in those centuries, moreover, was the perception of the Lord’s humanity, and the sufferings of his Passion were represented in a realistic way: The suffering Christ (*Christus patiens*) became an image loved by all, and able to inspire piety and repentance for sins. Not lacking were the personages of the Old Testament, whose history became familiar to the faithful in such a way that they frequented the cathedrals as part of the one, common history of salvation. With their faces full of beauty, tenderness, intelligence, Gothic sculpture of the 13th century reveals a happy and serene piety, which is pleased to emanate a heartfelt and filial devotion to the Mother of God, seen at times as a young, smiling and maternal woman, and represented primarily as the sovereign of heaven and earth, powerful and merciful.

The faithful who filled the Gothic cathedrals wanted to find in them artistic expressions that recalled the saints, models of Christian life and intercessors before God. And there was no lack of “lay” manifestations of existence; hence there appeared here and there representations of work in the fields, in the sciences and in the arts. Everything was oriented and offered to God in the place where the liturgy was celebrated. We can understand better the meaning that was attributed to a Gothic cathedral, considering the text of an inscription on the main door of St. Denis in Paris: “Passer-by, you who want to praise the beauty of these doors, do not be dazzled either by the gold or the magnificence, but by the laborious work. Here shines a famous work, but may the heavens allow that this famous work which shines make spirits shine, so that with luminous truths they will walk toward the true light, where Christ is the true door.”

Dear brothers and sisters, I now wish to underline two elements of Romanesque and Gothic art, which are also useful for us.

The first: the works of art born in Europe in past centuries are incomprehensible if one does not take into account the religious soul that inspired them. Marc Chagall, an artist who has always given testimony of the encounter between aesthetics and faith, wrote that “for centuries painters have dyed their brush in that colored alphabet that is the Bible.” When faith, celebrated in a particular way in the liturgy, encounters art, a profound synchrony is created, because both can and want to praise God, making the Invisible visible. I would like to share this in the meeting with artists on Nov. 21, renewing that proposal of friendship between Christian spirituality and art, desired by my venerated predecessors, in particular by the Servants of God Paul VI and John Paul II.

The second element: the force of the Romanesque style and the splendor of the Gothic cathedrals remind us that the *via pilchritudinis*, the way of beauty, is a privileged and fascinating way to approach the Mystery of God. What is beauty, which writers, poets, musicians, and artists contemplate and translate into their language, if not the reflection of the splendor of the Eternal Word made flesh? St. Augustine states: “Ask the beauty of the earth, ask the beauty of the sea, ask the beauty of the ample and diffused air. Ask the beauty of heaven, ask the order of the stars, ask the sun, which with its splendor brightens the day; ask the moon, which with its clarity moderates the darkness of night. Ask the beasts that move in the water, that walk on the earth, that fly in the air: souls that hide, bodies that show themselves; the visible that lets itself be guided, the invisible that guides. Ask them! All will answer you: Look at us, we are beautiful! Their beauty makes them known. This mutable beauty, who has created it if not Immutable Beauty?” (Sermo CCXLI, 2: PL 38, 1134).

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord help us to rediscover the way of beauty as one of the ways, perhaps the most attractive and fascinating, to be able to find and love God.”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s Wednesday Audience Address, 18 November 2009, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

### **Pope Benedict XVI, 9 November 2008:**

“On this solemnity the Word of God recalls an essential truth: the temple of stones is a symbol of the living Church, the Christian community, which in their letters the Apostles Peter and Paul already understood as a ‘spiritual edifice,’ built by God with ‘living stones,’ namely, Christians themselves, upon the one foundation of Jesus Christ, who is called the ‘cornerstone’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17; 1 Peter 2:4-8; Ephesians 2:20-22). ‘Brothers, you are God’s building,’ St. Paul wrote, and added: ‘holy is God’s temple, which you are.’ (1 Corinthians 3:9c, 17)

The beauty and harmony of the churches, destined to give praise to God, also draws us human being, limited and sinful, to convert to form a ‘cosmos,’ a well-ordered structure, in intimate communion with Jesus, who is the true Saint of saints. This happens in a culminating way in the Eucharistic liturgy, in which the ‘ecclesia,’ that is, the community of the baptized, come together in a unified way to listen to the Word of God and nourish themselves with the Body and Blood of Christ. From these two tables the Church of living stones is built up in truth and charity and is internally formed by the Holy Spirit transforming herself into what she receives, conforming herself more and more to the Lord Jesus Christ. She herself, if she lives in sincere and fraternal unity, in this way becomes the spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God.

Dear friends, today’s feast celebrates a mystery that is always relevant: God’s desire to build a spiritual temple in the world, a community that worships him in spirit and truth (cf. John 4:23-24). But this observance also reminds us of the importance of the material buildings in which the community gathers to celebrate the praises of God. Every community therefore has the duty to take special care of its own sacred buildings, which are a precious religious and historical patrimony. For this we call upon the intercession of Mary Most Holy, that she help us to become, like her, the ‘house of God,’ living temple of his love.”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s Sunday Angelus Address on the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, 9 November 2008, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 21 September 2008:**

“But how much greater, dear brothers and sisters, must our joy be, knowing that every day on this altar, that we are preparing to consecrate, the sacrifice of Christ is offered; on this altar he will continue to immolate himself, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, for our salvation and that of the whole world. In the Eucharistic mystery, that is renewed on every altar, Jesus is really present...Christ’s real presence makes each of us his ‘house,’ and we all together form his Church, the spiritual edifice of which St. Peter speaks. ‘Come to him,’ the apostle writes, ‘a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...through faith men are like wood and stone gathered from forests and mountains for building; through baptism, catechesis and preaching they are cut, squared, and filed down; but they only become the Lord’s house when they are ordered by charity.’”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s Homily at the Dedication of the Altar at the Cathedral of Albano, 21 September 2008, Albano, Italy. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 8 August 2008:**

Father Willibald Hopfgartner, OFM: “Holy Father, my name is Willibald Hopfgartner, I am a Franciscan and I work in a school and in various areas of guidance of my order. In your discourse at Regensburg you stressed the substantial link between the divine Spirit and human reason.

On the other hand, you also always underlined the importance of art and beauty, of aesthetics. Consequently, should not the aesthetic experience of faith in the context of the Church, for proclamation and for the liturgy be ceaselessly reaffirmed alongside the conceptual dialogue about God (in theology)?”

Benedict XVI: “Thank you. Yes, I think these two things go hand in hand: reason, precision, honesty in the reflection on the truth — and beauty. Reason that intended to strip itself of beauty would be halved, it would be a blinded reason. It is only when they are united that both these things form the whole, and precisely for faith this union is important. Faith must continuously face the challenges of thought in this epoch, so that it does not seem a sort of irrational legend that we keep alive but which really is a response to the great questions, and not merely a habit but the truth — as Tertullian once said.

In his First Letter, St. Peter wrote the phrase that medieval theologians took as a legitimation, as it were, a responsibility for their theological task: ‘Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you’ — an apologetic for the logos of hope, that is, a transformation of the logos, the reason for hope in apologetics, in response to men.

He was obviously convinced of the fact that the faith was the logos, that it was a reason, a light that came from creative Reason rather than a wonderful concoction, a fruit of our thought. And this is why it is universal and for this reason can be communicated to all.

Yet, precisely this creative logos is not only a technical logos — we shall return to this aspect with another answer — it is broad, it is a logos that is love, hence such as to be expressed in beauty and in

good.

Also, I did once say that to me art and the saints are the greatest apologetic for our faith. The arguments contributed by reason are unquestionably important and indispensable, but then there is always dissent somewhere.

On the other hand, if we look at the saints, this great luminous trail on which God passed through history, we see that there truly is a force of good which resists the millennia; there truly is the light of light. Likewise, if we contemplate the beauties created by faith, they are simply, I would say, the living proof of faith.

If I look at this beautiful cathedral — it is a living proclamation! It speaks to us itself, and on the basis of the cathedral's beauty, we succeed in visibly proclaiming God, Christ and all his mysteries: Here they have acquired a form and look at us.

All the great works of art, cathedrals — the Gothic cathedrals and the splendid Baroque churches — they are all a luminous sign of God and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God. And in Christianity it is precisely a matter of this epiphany: that God became a veiled Epiphany — he appears and is resplendent.

We have just heard the organ in its full splendor. I think the great music born in the Church makes the truth of our faith audible and perceivable: from Gregorian chant to the music of the cathedrals, to Palestrina and his epoch, to Bach and hence to Mozart and Bruckner and so forth. In listening to all these works — the Passions of Bach, his Mass in B flat, and the great spiritual compositions of 16th-century polyphony, of the Viennese School, of all music, even that of minor composers — we suddenly understand: It is true!

Wherever such things are born, the Truth is there. Without an intuition that discovers the true creative center of the world such beauty cannot be born. For this reason I think we should always ensure that the two things are together; we should bring them together.

When, in our epoch, we discuss the reasonableness of faith, we discuss precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end — it does not finish in positivism; the theory of evolution sees the truth but sees only half the truth: It does not see that behind it is the Spirit of the creation. We are fighting to expand reason, and hence for a reason, which, precisely, is also open to the beautiful and does not have to set it aside as something quite different and unreasonable.

Christian art is a rational art — let us think of Gothic art or of the great music or even, precisely, of our own Baroque art — but it is the artistic expression of a greatly expanded reason, in which heart and reason encounter each other. This is the point. I believe that in a certain way this is proof of the truth of Christianity: Heart and reason encounter one another, beauty and truth converge, and the more that we ourselves succeed in living in the beauty of truth, the more that faith will be able to return to being creative in our time too, and to express itself in a convincing form of art.

So, dear Father Hopfgartner, thank you for your question; let us seek to ensure that the two categories, the aesthetic and the noetic (intellectual), are united and that in this great breadth the entirety and depth of our faith may be made manifest.”

— Excerpt of the question-and-answer session Benedict XVI held with the priests, deacons and seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, 8 August 2008, Bressanone, Italy. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 19 July 2008:**

“As we admire this magnificent edifice, how can we not think of all those ranks of priests, religious and faithful laity who, each in his or her own way, contributed to the building up of the Church in Australia? Our thoughts turn in particular to those settler families to whom Father Jeremiah O’Flynn entrusted the Blessed Sacrament at his departure, a “small flock” which cherished and preserved that precious treasure, passing it on to the succeeding generations who raised this great tabernacle to the glory of God. Let us rejoice in their fidelity and perseverance, and dedicate ourselves to carrying on their labours for the spread of the Gospel, the conversion of hearts and the growth of the Church in holiness, unity and charity!

We are about to celebrate the dedication of the new altar of this venerable cathedral. As its sculpted frontal powerfully reminds us, every altar is a symbol of Jesus Christ, present in the midst of his Church as priest, altar and victim (cf. Preface of Easter V). Crucified, buried and raised from the dead, given life in the Spirit and seated at the right hand of the Father, Christ has become our great high priest, eternally making intercession for us. In the Church’s liturgy, and above all in the sacrifice of the Mass consummated on the altars of the world, he invites us, the members of his mystical Body, to share in his self-oblation. He calls us, as the priestly people of the new and eternal covenant, to offer, in union with him, our own daily sacrifices for the salvation of the world.”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s Homily at the Dedication of the Altar at St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, 19 July 2008, Sydney, Australia. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 2007:**

“In the Judaism of Jesus’ own time, we meet the concept of divine lordship in the context of the Temple ritual at Jerusalem and in the synagogue liturgy... The recitation of this prayer was understood as the act of taking on one’s shoulders the yoke of God’s sovereign lordship. This prayer is not just a matter of words: the one who prays it accepts God’s lordship, which consequently through the act of praying, enters into the world... We see, then, that the divine lordship, God’s dominion over the world and over history, transcends the moment, indeed transcends and reaches beyond the whole of history. Its inner dynamism carries history beyond itself. And yet it is at the same time something belonging absolutely to the present. It is present in the liturgy, in Temple and synagogue, as an anticipation of the next world; it is present as a life-shaping power through the believer’s prayer and being: by bearing God’s yoke, the believer already receives a share in the world to come.”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI. *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Doubleday, 2007. (chapter 3 pages 56–7) *Jesus von Nazareth*. Milan: RCS Libri S.p.A., 2007.

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 9 September 2007:**

“... Your primary service to this world must therefore be your prayer and the celebration of the divine Office. The interior disposition of each priest, and of each consecrated person, must be that of

‘putting nothing before the divine Office’. The beauty of this inner attitude will find expression in the beauty of the liturgy, so that wherever we join in singing, praising, exalting and worshipping God, a little bit of heaven will become present on earth. Truly it would not be presumptuous to say that, in a liturgy completely centred on God, we can see, in its rituals and chant, an image of eternity. Otherwise, how could our forefathers, hundreds of years ago, have built a sacred edifice as solemn as this? Here the architecture itself draws all our senses upwards, towards ‘what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined: what God has prepared for those who love him’ (1 Cor 2:9). In all our efforts on behalf of the liturgy, the determining factor must always be our looking to God. We stand before God—he speaks to us and we speak to him. Whenever in our thinking we are only concerned about making the liturgy attractive, interesting and beautiful, the battle is already lost. Either it is *Opus Dei*, with God as its specific subject, or it is not. In the light of this, I ask you to celebrate the sacred liturgy with your gaze fixed on God within the communion of saints, the living Church of every time and place, so that it will truly be an expression of the sublime beauty of the God who has called men and women to be his friends!...”

— Excerpt from Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, 9 September 2007, Heiligenkreuz Abbey, Austria

---

#### **Pope Benedict XVI, 9 September 2007:**

”Austria (Österreich) is, in an old play on words, truly Klösterreich: a realm of monasteries and a land rich in monasteries. Your ancient abbeys whose origins and traditions date back many centuries are places where “God is put first”. Dear friends, make this priority given to God very apparent to people! As a spiritual oasis, a monastery reminds today’s world of the most important, and indeed, in the end, the only decisive thing: that there is an ultimate reason why life is worth living: God and his unfathomable love.

And I ask you, dear members of the faithful: see your abbeys and monasteries for what they are and always wish to be: not mere strongholds of culture and tradition, or even simple business enterprises. Structure, organization and finances are necessary in the Church too, but they are not what is essential. A monastery is above all this: a place of spiritual power. Coming to one of your monasteries here in Austria, we have the same impression as when, after a strenuous hike in the Alps, we finally find refreshment at a clear mountain spring... Take advantage of these springs of God’s closeness in your country; treasure the religious communities, the monasteries and abbeys; and make use of the spiritual service that consecrated persons are willing to offer you!”

— Excerpt from His Holiness Benedict XVI’s Address to Heiligenkreuz Abbey, 9 September 2007, Heiligenkreuz, Austria. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

#### **Pope Benedict XVI, 2 September 2007:**

“Before ending our assembly, let us leave the ‘agora’, the square, for a moment and in spirit enter the Holy House. There is a reciprocal link between the square and the house.

The square is large, open, it is the place for meeting others, for dialogue, for confrontation.

The house, on the other hand, is the place for recollection and for inner silence, where the Word

may be received in depth.

To bring God to the square, one first needs to have interiorized him in the house, like Mary at the Annunciation.

And vice versa, the house is open to the square. This is also suggested by the fact that the Holy House of Loreto has three walls, not four: it is an open House, open to the world, to life, even to this Agora of Italian youth.”

“Therefore, the parish, the living cell of the Church, must also really be a place of inspiration, life and solidarity which helps people build together centres in the periphery. And I must say here, there is often talk about the Church in the suburbs and in the centre, which would be Rome, but in fact in the Church there are no suburbs because where Christ is, the whole centre is there.

Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, wherever the Tabernacle stands, there is Christ; hence, there is the centre and we must do all we can to ensure that these living centres are effective, present and truly a force that counters this marginalization.

The living Church, the Church of the little communities, the parish Church, the movements, must form as many centres in the outskirts and thus help to overcome the difficulties that the leading politics obviously cannot manage to resolve, and at the same time, we must also think that despite the great focuses of power, contemporary society itself is in need of solidarity, of a sense of lawfulness, of the initiative and creativity of all.

I know that this is easier said than done, but I see here people who are working to increase the number of centres in the peripheries, to increase hope, and thus it seems to me that we should take up the initiative. The Church must be present precisely in the suburbs; Christ must be present, the centre of the world must be present.

We have seen and we see today in the Gospel that for God there are no peripheries. In the vast context of the Roman Empire, the Holy Land was situated on the fringe; Nazareth was on the margins, an unknown town. Yet that very situation was, de facto, to become the centre that changed the world!”

— Excerpt from Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Loreto, 2 September 2007, Plain of Montoroso

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 24 July 2007:**

“All the Saints also always come with God. It is important—Sacred Scripture tell us from the very outset—that God never comes by himself but comes accompanied and surrounded by the Angels and Saints. In the great stained glass window in St Peter’s which portrays the Holy Spirit, what I like so much is the fact that God is surrounded by a throng of Angels and living beings who are an expression, an emanation, so to speak, of God’s love. And with God, with Christ, with the man who is God and with God who is man, Our Lady arrives. This is very important. God, the Lord, has a Mother and in his Mother we truly recognize God’s motherly goodness. Our Lady, Mother of God, is the Help of Christians, she is our permanent comfort, our great help. I see this too in the dialogue with the Bishops of the world, of Africa and lately also of Latin America; I see that love for Our Lady is the driving force of catholicity. In Our Lady we recognize all God’s tenderness, so, fostering and living out Our Lady’s,



Mary's, joyful love is a very great gift of catholicity. Then there are the Saints. Every place has its own Saint. This is good because in this way we see the range of colours of God's one light and of his love which comes close to us. It means discovering the Saints in their beauty, in their drawing close to me in the Word, so that in a specific Saint I may find expressed precisely for me the inexhaustible Word of God, and then all the aspects of parochial life, even the human ones. We must not always be in the clouds, in the loftiest clouds of Mystery. We must have our feet firmly planted on the ground and together live the joy of being a great family: the great little family of the parish; the great family of the diocese, the great family of the universal Church. In Rome I can see all this, I can see how people from every part of the world who do not know one another are actually acquainted because they all belong to the family of God. They are close to one another because they all possess the love of the Lord, the love of Our Lady, the love of the Saints, Apostolic Succession and the Successor of Peter and the Bishops. I would say that this joy of catholicity with its many different hues is also the joy of beauty. We have here the beauty of a beautiful organ; the beauty of a very beautiful church, the beauty that has developed in the Church. I think this is a marvellous testimony of God's presence and of the truth of God. Truth is expressed in beauty, and we must be grateful for this beauty and seek to do our utmost to ensure that it is ever present, that it develops and continues to grow. In this way, I believe that God will be very concretely in our midst."

— Excerpt from Question and Answer Session with Pope Benedict, 24 July 2007, Belluno-Feltre and Treviso, Italy. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 7 July 2007:**

"In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us, too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place."

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI's letter to bishops to accompany his Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum*

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 16 April 2007:**

"I am convinced that music—and here I am thinking in particular of the great Mozart and this evening, of course, of the marvelous music by Gabrieli and the majestic 'New World' by Dvorák—really is the universal language of beauty which can bring together all people of good will on earth and get them to lift their gaze on high and open themselves to the Absolute Good and Beauty whose ultimate source is God himself.

In looking back over my life, I thank God for placing music beside me, as it were, as a traveling companion that has offered me comfort and joy. I also thank the people who from the very first years of my childhood brought me close to this source of inspiration and serenity."

— Excerpt from Concert for Holy Father's 80th Birthday, 16 April 2007, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 14 March 2007:**

“You work in the Apostle’s venerable Basilica which is the heart of the Catholic Church, a vibrant heart, thanks to the Holy Spirit who always keeps it alive but also thanks to the activity of those who daily ensure it fulfils its role.

As Archbishop Comastri recalled, just over 500 years have passed since the foundation stone of the second Vatican Basilica was laid: yet, it is still alive and young, it is not a museum, it is a spiritual organism and even the stones feel its vitality!

You who work here, first among others, are the ‘living stones,’ as the Apostle Peter wrote, living stones of the spiritual edifice which is the Church.

I am happy to have this meeting with you, even if it is brief, to close the celebrations of the fifth centenary of the Vatican Basilica, where you carry out your duties.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall at this moment all your colleagues who preceded you in the past 500 years. I express my gratitude to you for all that you do with commitment and competence to enable this ‘heart’ of the Church, as I said above, to continue to beat with perennial vitality, attracting men and women of the whole world and helping them to have a spiritual experience that marks their life.

In fact, thanks to your contribution, almost always unseen but always appropriate, a great many people, pilgrims from all parts of the world, are able to make the most of their pilgrimage or simply their visit to the Vatican Basilica, and take back with them in their hearts a message of faith and hope: a certainty of having seen not only great works of art but of being in contact with the Church alive, with the Apostle Peter and in the end, with Christ.

Once again, I thank and encourage you: always do your work as an act of love for the Church, for St Peter and hence, for Christ.”

— Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s Address to the Workers of the Fabric of St Peter’s, 14 March 2007, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 11 March 2007:**

“...art is a treasure of inexhaustible and incredible catecheses. It is also our duty to know and understand it properly, not in the way that it is sometimes done by art historians, who interpret it only formally in terms of artistic technique.

Rather, we must enter into the content and make the content that inspired this great art live anew. It truly seems to me to be a duty—also in the formation of future priests—to know these treasures and be able to transform all that is present in them and that speaks to us today into a living catechesis.

I would say that the Gospel variously lived is still today an inspiring force that gives and will give us art.”

— Excerpt from Pope’s Meeting With Roman Clergy (Part 3), 11 March 2007, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 22 February 2007:**

38. “In the course of the Synod, there was frequent insistence on the need to avoid any antithesis between the *ars celebrandi* the art of proper celebration, and the full, active and fruitful participation of all the faithful. The primary way to foster participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself.”

40. “The *ars celebrandi* should foster a sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense, such as, for example, the harmony of the rite, the liturgical vestments, the furnishings and the sacred space.”

41. “The profound connection between beauty and the liturgy should make us attentive to every work of art placed at the service of the celebration. (122) Certainly an important element of sacred art is church architecture, (123) which should highlight the unity of the furnishings of the sanctuary, such as the altar, the crucifix, the tabernacle, the ambo and the celebrant’s chair. Here it is important to remember that the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting space for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist. (124) The very nature of a Christian church is defined by the liturgy, which is an assembly of the faithful (*ecclesia*) who are the living stones of the Church (cf. 1 Pet 2:5).

This same principle holds true for sacred art in general, especially painting and sculpture, where religious iconography should be directed to sacramental mystagogy. A solid knowledge of the history of sacred art can be advantageous for those responsible for commissioning artists and architects to create works of art for the liturgy. Consequently it is essential that the education of seminarians and priests include the study of art history, with special reference to sacred buildings and the corresponding liturgical norms. Everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty. Special respect and care must also be given to the vestments, the furnishings and the sacred vessels, so that by their harmonious and orderly arrangement they will foster awe for the mystery of God, manifest the unity of the faith and strengthen devotion (125).”

69. “In considering the importance of eucharistic reservation and adoration, and reverence for the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice, the Synod of Bishops also discussed the question of the proper placement of the tabernacle in our churches. (196) The correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ’s real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the place where the eucharistic species are reserved, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering the church. It is therefore necessary to take into account the building’s architecture: in churches which do not have a Blessed Sacrament chapel, and where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant’s chair in front of it. In new churches, it is good to position the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary; where this is not possible, it is preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the centre of the apse area, or in another place where it will be equally conspicuous. Attention to these considerations will lend dignity to the tabernacle, which must always be cared for, also from an artistic standpoint...(197)”

---

— Excerpt from Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* by Pope Benedict XVI, 22 February 2007

**Pope Benedict XVI, 19 December 2006:**

“The Vatican Museums provide an ‘extraordinary opportunity for evangelization,’ Benedict XVI said on the occasion of the institution’s 500th anniversary.”

“The Church has always supported and promoted the world of art, considering its language as a privileged vehicle of human and spiritual progress.”

— Excerpt from address at Vatican Museums, 19 December 2006, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

### **Pope Benedict XVI, 12 December 2006:**

“John’s Gospel expresses thus the mystery of the Incarnation: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’; literally, ‘he made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14). Does not the building of a church amid the houses of a village or neighborhood of a city evoke perhaps this great gift and mystery?”

The church-building is a concrete sign of the Church-community, made up of the ‘living stones,’ which are the believers, an image so loved by the apostles. St. Peter (2:4–5) and St. Paul (Ephesians 2:20–22), highlight how the ‘cornerstone’ of this spiritual temple is Christ and that, united to him and very compact, we are also called to participate in the building of this living temple.

Therefore, though it is God who takes the initiative of coming to dwell in the midst of men, and he is always the main architect of this plan, it is also true that he does not will to carry it out without our active cooperation. Therefore, to prepare for Christmas means to commit oneself to build ‘God’s dwelling with men.’ No one is excluded; every one can and must contribute so that this house of communion will be more spacious and beautiful.”

— Excerpt from midday Angelus, 12 December 2006, Vatican City. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

### **Pope Benedict XVI, 10 December 2006:**

“In every age Christians have sought to give expression to faith’s vision of the beauty and order of God’s creation, the nobility of our vocation as men and women made in His image and likeness, and the promise of a cosmos redeemed and transfigured by the grace of Christ. The artistic treasures which surround us are not simply impressive monuments of a distant past. Rather, for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who contemplate them year after year, they stand as a perennial witness to the Church’s unchanging faith in the Triune God who, in the memorable phrase of St. Augustine, is Himself ‘Beauty ever ancient, ever new.’ May your support of the Vatican Museums, bear abundant spiritual fruits in your own lives and advance the Church’s mission of bringing all people to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, ‘the image of the invisible God,’ in Whose Eternal Spirit all creation is reconciled, restored and renewed.”

— Pastoral visit to Our Lady Star of Evangelization Parish of Rome, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, 10 December 2006

---

### **Pope Benedict XVI, 19 November 2006:**

“And in the face of the widespread need to get away from the daily routine of sprawling urban areas in search of places conducive to silence and meditation, monasteries of contemplative life offer

themselves as oases in which human beings, pilgrims on earth, can draw more easily from the wellsprings of the Spirit and quench their thirst along the way.”

His Holiness Benedict XVI, 19 November 2006

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 1 June 2006:**

“The solemn liturgy for the dedication of a church is a moment of intense and common spiritual joy for all God’s people who live in the area.

...the parish is a beacon that radiates the light of the faith and thus responds to the deepest and truest desires of the human heart, giving meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families ... a church—a building in which God and man desire to meet: a house that unites us, in which we are attracted to God, and being with God unites us with one another.

The church building exists so that God’s Word may be listened to, explained and understood by us; it exists so that God’s Word may be active among us as a force that creates justice and love. It exists in particular so that in it the celebration in which God wants humanity to participate may begin, not only at the end of time but already today. It exists so that the knowledge of justice and goodness may be awakened within us, and there is no other source for knowing and strengthening this knowledge of justice and goodness other than the Word of God. It exists so that we may learn to live the joy of the Lord who is our strength.

Just as in their love man and woman become ‘one flesh’, so Christ and humanity gathered in the Church become through Christ’s love ‘one spirit’ (cf. I Cor 6: 17; Eph 5: 29ff.). The candles we light on the walls of the church in the places where anointings will take place are reminiscent precisely of the Apostles: their faith is the true light that illumines the Church and at the same time, the foundation that supports the Church.

This is the deepest purpose of this sacred building’s existence: the church exists so that in it we may encounter Christ, Son of the living God. God has a Face. God has a Name. In Christ, God was made flesh and gave himself to us in the mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist.

The Church is the place of our encounter with the Son of the living God and thus becomes the place for the encounter among ourselves. This is the joy that God gives us: that he made himself one of us, that we can touch him and that he dwells among us.

Mary tells us why church buildings exist: they exist so that room may be made within us for the Word of God; so that within us and through us the Word may also be made flesh today.”

— Excerpt from Special Message to the Patrons gathered in Rome for the 500th Anniversary of the Vatican Museums, 1 June 2006

---

**Pope Benedict XVI, 27 May 2006:**

“...An edifice built on the rock is not the same as a building removed from the forces of nature, which are inscribed in the mystery of man. To have built on rock means being able to count on the knowledge that at difficult times there is a reliable force upon which you can trust.

My friends, allow me to ask again: What does it mean to build on the rock?

It means to build wisely. It is not without reason that Jesus compares those who hear His words and put them into practice to a wise man who has built his house on the rock. It is foolish, in fact, to build on sand when you can do so on rock and therefore have a house that is capable of withstanding every storm. It is foolish to build a house on ground that does not offer the guarantee of support during the most difficult times.”

— Excerpt from Address to Young People, 27 May 2006, Blonie Park, Krakow, Poland. [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

---

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 2002:**

“The very selflessness of this standing before God and turning the gaze toward God was what allowed God’s light to stream down into what was happening and for it to be detected even by outsiders...For us it is sufficient to note that the Eucharist, as such, is not directly oriented toward the awakening of people’s faith in a missionary sense. It stands, rather, at the heart of faith and nourishes it; its gaze is primarily directed toward God, and it draws men into this point of view, draws them into the descent of God to us, which becomes their ascent into fellowship with God. It aims at being pleasing to God and at leading men to see this as being likewise the measure of their lives.” (pages 92–94)

“The consciousness that this is a holy place, because the Lord is coming in among us, should come over us ever anew—that consciousness by which Jacob was so shaken when he awoke from his vision, which had shown him that from the stone on which he had been sleeping, a ladder was set up on which the angels of God were passing up and down: ‘And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” ’ (Gen 28:17). Awe is a fundamental condition for celebrating the Eucharist correctly, and the very fact that God becomes so small, so humble, puts himself at our mercy, and puts himself into our hands should magnify our awe and ought not to tempt us to thoughtlessness and vainglory. If we recognize that God is there and we behave accordingly, then other people will be able to see this in us...” (p. 108)

— Excerpts from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005. *Weg Gemeinschaft des Glaubens: Kirche als Communio*. Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag GmbH, 2002.

---

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the Relationship of the Liturgy to Time and Space, 2000:**

“After the tearing of the Temple curtain and the opening up of the heart of God in the pierced heart of the Crucified, do we still need sacred space, sacred time, mediating symbols? Yes, we do need them precisely so that, through the ‘image,’ through the sign, we learn to see the openness of heaven. We need them to give us the capacity to know the mystery of God in the pierced heart of the Crucified. Christian liturgy is no longer replacement worship but the coming of the representative Redeemer to us, an entry into his representation that is an entry into reality itself. We do indeed participate in the heavenly liturgy, but this participation is mediated to us through earthly signs, which the Redeemer has shown to us as the place where his reality is to be found.”

— Excerpt from Part Two, Chapter One of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000. *Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*. Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2000.

---

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the Significance of the Church Building, 2000:**

“Turning toward the east... signifies that cosmos and saving history belong together. The cosmos is praying with us. It, too, is waiting for redemption. It is precisely this cosmic dimension that is essential to Christian liturgy. It is never performed solely in the self-made world of man. It is always a cosmic liturgy. The theme of creation is embedded in Christian prayer. It loses its grandeur when it forgets this connection. That is why, wherever possible, we should definitely take up again the apostolic tradition of facing the east, both in the building of churches and in the celebration of the liturgy.

In the synagogue the worshippers looked beyond the ‘Ark of the Covenant,’ the shrine of the Word, toward Jerusalem. Now, with the Christian altar, comes a new focal point. Let us say it again: on the altar, what the Temple had in the past foreshadowed is now present in a new way. Yes, it enables us to become the contemporaries of the Sacrifice of the Logos. Thus it brings heaven into the community assembled on earth, or rather it takes that community beyond itself into the communion of saints of all times and places. We might put it this way: the altar is the place where heaven is opened up. It does not close off the church, but opens it up—and leads it into the eternal liturgy...

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated as we look up to Jesus. It is our looking up to Jesus. Thus, in the early church buildings, the liturgy has two places. First the Liturgy of the Word takes place at the center of the building. The faithful are grouped around the bema, the elevated area where the throne of the Gospel, the seat of the bishop, and the lectern are located. The Eucharistic celebration proper takes place in the apse, at the altar, which the faithful ‘stand around.’ Everyone joins with the celebrant in facing east, toward the Lord who is to come.”

— Excerpt from Part Two, Chapter Two of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000. *Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*. Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2000.

---

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the Altar and the Direction of Liturgical Prayer, 2000:**

“Thus it came to pass that the synagogue Liturgy of the Word, renewed and deepened in a Christian way, merged with the remembrance of Christ’s death and Resurrection to become the ‘Eucharist’, and precisely thus was fidelity to the command “Do this” fulfilled. This new and all-encompassing form of worship could not be derived simply from the meal but had to be defined through the interconnection of temple and synagogue, Word and sacrament, cosmos and history. It expresses itself in the very form that we discovered in the liturgical structure of the early Churches in the world of Semitic Christianity. It also, of course, remained fundamental for Rome. Once again let me quote Bouyer:

‘Never and nowhere before [that is, before the sixteenth century] is there any indication of the slightest importance being attached, or even attention given, to the question of whether the priest should celebrate with the people behind him or in front of him. Professor Cyril Vogel has proved that, “if anything was stressed, it was that the priest should recite the Eucharistic Prayer, like all other prayers, turned towards the East Even when the orientation of the church allowed the priest to pray facing the people, we must not forget that it was not just the priest who turned to the East, but the whole congregation with him.’

Admittedly, these connections were obscured or fell into total oblivion in the church buildings and

liturgical practice of the modern age. This is the only explanation for the fact that the common direction of prayer of priest and people were labelled as “celebrating towards the wall” or ‘turning your back on the people’ and came to seem absurd and totally unacceptable. And this alone explains why the meal — even in modern pictures — became the normative idea of liturgical celebration for Christians. In reality what happened was that an unprecedented clericalization came on the scene. Now the priest — the ‘presider,’ as they now prefer to call him — becomes the real point of reference for the whole Liturgy. Everything depends on him. We have to see him, to respond to him, to be involved in what he is doing. His creativity sustains the whole thing. Not surprisingly, people try to reduce this newly created role by assigning all kinds of liturgical functions to different individuals and entrusting the “creative” planning of the liturgy to groups of people who like to, and are supposed to, ‘make their own contribution.’ Less and less is God in the picture. More and more important is what is done by the human beings who meet here and do not like to subject themselves to a ‘pre-determined pattern.’ The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. The common turning toward the East was not a “celebration toward the wall”; it did not mean that the priest ‘had his back to the people.’ the priest himself was not regarded as so important. For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem, so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together ‘toward the Lord.’ As one of the fathers of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy, J.A. Jungmann, put it, it was much more a question of priest and people facing in the same direction, knowing that together they were in a procession toward the Lord. They did not lock themselves into a circle, they did not gaze at one another, but as the pilgrim People of God they set off for the Oriens, for the Christ who comes to meet us.

Ought we really to be rearranging everything all over again? Nothing is more harmful to the Liturgy than a constant activism, even if it seems to be for the sake of genuine renewal. I see a solution in a suggestion that comes from the insights of Erik Peterson. Facing east, as we heard, was linked with the ‘sign of the Son of Man’, with the Cross, which announces the Lord’s Second Coming. That is why, very early on the East was linked with the sign of the cross. Where a direct common turning toward the East is not possible, the cross can serve as the interior ‘East’ of faith. It should stand in the middle of the altar and be the common point of focus for both priest and praying community.

Moving the altar cross to the side to give an uninterrupted view of the priest is something I regard as one of the truly absurd phenomena of recent decades. Is the cross disruptive during Mass? Is the priest more important than the Lord? This mistake should be corrected as quickly as possible; it can be done without further rebuilding. The Lord is the point of reference. He is the rising sun of history. That is why there can be a cross of the Passion, which represents the suffering Lord who for us let His side be pierced, from which flowed blood and water (Eucharist and Baptism), as well as a cross of triumph, which expresses the idea of the Second Coming and guides our eyes towards it. For it is always the one Lord: Christ yesterday, today, and for ever.” (Heb. 13. 8)

— Excerpt from Part Two, Chapter Three of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000. *Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*. Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2000.

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, 2000:**

“‘We must make a proper place for this Presence.’ And so little by little the tabernacle takes shape, and more and more, always in a spontaneous way, it takes the place previously occupied by the now disappeared ‘Ark of the Covenant.’ In fact, the tabernacle is the complete fulfillment of what the Ark of the Covenant represented. It is the place of the ‘Holy of Holies.’ It is the tent of God, his throne. Here he



is among us. His presence (Shekinah) really does now dwell among us — in the humblest parish church no less than in the grandest cathedral.

The Eucharistic Presence in the tabernacle does not set another view of the Eucharist alongside or against the Eucharistic celebration, but simply signifies its complete fulfillment. For this Presence has the effect, of course, of keeping the Eucharist forever in church. The church never becomes a lifeless space but is always filled with the presence of the Lord, which comes out of the celebration, leads us into it, and always makes us participants in the cosmic Eucharist.

A church without the Eucharistic Presence is somehow dead, even when it invites people to pray. But a church in which the light is burning before the tabernacle is always alive, is always something more than a building made of stones. In this place the Lord is always waiting for me, calling me, wanting to make me ‘eucharistic’. In this way, he prepares me for the Eucharist, sets me in motion toward his return.

If the presence of the Lord is to touch us in a concrete way, the tabernacle must also find its proper place in the architecture of our church buildings.”

— Excerpt from Part Two, Chapter Four of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000. *Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*. Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2000.

---

### **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the Question of Images, 2000:**

“All sacred images are, without exception, in a certain sense images of the Resurrection, history read in the light of the Resurrection, and for that very reason they are images of hope, giving us the assurance of the world to come, of the final coming of Christ. However inferior the first images of the Christian tradition may often be in their artistic qualities, an extraordinary spiritual process has taken place in them, though one that is in close and deep unity with the iconography of the synagogue. The Resurrection sheds a new light on history. It is seen as a path of hope, into which the images draw us.

In early Christian art, right up to the end of the Romanesque period, in other words up to the threshold of the thirteenth century, there is no essential difference between East and West with regard to the question of images. True, if we think of Saint Augustine or Saint Gregory the Great, the West emphasized, almost exclusively, the pedagogical function of the image. The so-called Libri Carolini, as well as the synods of Frankfurt (794) and Paris (824), came out against the poorly understood Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, which canonized the defeat of iconoclasm and the rooting of the icon in the Incarnation. By contrast, the western synods insist on the purely educative role of the images: ‘Christ’, they said, ‘did not save us by paintings’ (cf. Evdokimov, p 167). But the themes and fundamental orientation of iconography remained the same, even though now, in the Romanesque style, plastic art emerges, something that never had a foothold in the East. It is always the risen Christ, even on the Cross, to whom the community looks as the true Oriens [East]. And art is always characterized by the unity of creation, Christology, and eschatology: the first day is on its way toward the eighth, which in turn takes up the first. Art is still ordered to the mystery that becomes present in the liturgy. The figures of the angels in Romanesque art are essentially no different from those in Byzantine painting. They show that we are joining with the cherubim and seraphim, with all the heavenly powers, in praise of the Lamb. In the liturgy the curtain between heaven and earth is torn open, and we are taken up into a liturgy that spans the whole cosmos.

With the emergence of Gothic, a change slowly takes place. Much remains the same, especially the fundamental inner correspondence between the Old Testament and the New, which for its part always has a reference to what is still to come. But the central image becomes different. The depiction is no longer of the Pantocrator, the Lord of all, leading us into the eighth day. It has been superseded by the image of the crucified Lord in the agony of His passion and death. The story is told of the historical events of the Passion, but the Resurrection is not made visible. The historical and narrative aspect of art comes to the fore. It has been said that the mystical image has been replaced by the devotional image. Many factors may have been involved in this change of perspective. Evdokimov, thinks that the turn from Platonism to Aristotelianism during the thirteenth century played a part. Platonism sees sensible things as shadows of the eternal archetypes. In the sensible we can and should know the archetypes and rise up through the former to the latter. Aristotelianism rejects the doctrine of Ideas. The thing, composed of matter and form, exists in its own right. Through abstraction I discern the species to which it belongs. In place of seeing, by which the super-sensible becomes visible in the sensible, comes abstraction. The relationship of the spiritual and the material has changed and with it man's attitude to reality as it appears to him. For Plato, the category of the beautiful had been definitive. The beautiful and the good, ultimately the beautiful and God, coincide. Through the appearance of the beautiful we are wounded in our innermost being, and that wound grips us and takes us beyond ourselves; it stirs longing into flight and moves us toward the truly Beautiful, to the Good in itself. Something of this Platonic foundation lives on in the theology of icons, even though the Platonic ideas of the beautiful and of vision have been transformed by the light of Tabor. Moreover, Plato's conception has been profoundly reshaped by the interconnection of creation, Christology, and eschatology, and the material order as such has been given a new dignity and a new value. This kind of Platonism, transformed as it is by the Incarnation, largely disappears from the West after the thirteenth century, so that now the art of painting strives first and foremost to depict events that have taken place. Salvation history is seen less as a sacrament than as a narrative unfolded in time. Thus the relationship to the liturgy also changes. It is seen as a kind of symbolic reproduction of the event of the Cross. Piety responds by turning chiefly to meditation on the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Art finds its inspiration less in the liturgy than in popular piety, and popular piety is in turn nourished by the historical images in which it can contemplate the way to Christ, the way of Jesus himself and its continuation in the saints. The separation in iconography between East and West, which took place at the latest by the thirteenth century, doubtless goes very deep: very different themes, different spiritual paths, open up. A devotion to the Cross of a more historicizing kind replaces orientation to the Oriens, to the risen Lord who has gone ahead of us.

Nevertheless, we should not exaggerate the differences that developed. True, the depiction of Christ dying in pain on the Cross is something new, but it still depicts him who bore our pains, by whose stripes we are healed. In the extremes of pain it represents the redemptive love of God. Though Grünewald's altarpiece takes the realism of the Passion to a radical extreme, the fact remains that it was an image of consolation. It enabled the plague victims cared for by the Antonians to recognize that God identified with them in their fate, to see that He had descended into their suffering and that their suffering lay hidden in His. There is a decisive turn to what is human, historical, in Christ, but it is animated by a sense that these human afflictions of His belong to the mystery. The images are consoling, because they make visible the overcoming of our anguish in the incarnate God's sharing of our suffering, and so they bear within them the messages of the Resurrection. These images, too, come from prayer, from the interior meditation on the way of Christ. They are identifications with Christ, which are based in turn on God's identification with us in Christ. They open up the realism of the mystery without diverging from it. As for the Mass, as the making present of the Cross, do these images not enable us to understand that mystery with a new vividness? The mystery is unfolded in an extremity of concreteness, and popular piety is enabled thereby to reach the heart of the liturgy in a new way. These images, too, do not show

just the “surface of the skin”, the external sensible world; they, too, are intended to lead us through mere outward appearance and open our eyes to the heart of God. What we are suggesting here about the images of the Cross applies also to all the rest of the ‘narrativ’ art of the Gothic style. What power of inward devotion lies in the images of the Mother of God! They manifest the new humanity of the faith. Such images are an invitation to prayer, because they are permeated with prayer from within. They show us the true image of man as planned by the Creator and renewed by Christ. They guide us into man’s authentic being. And finally, let us not forget the glorious art of Gothic stained glass! The windows of the Gothic cathedrals keep out the garishness of the light outside, while concentrating that light and using it so that the whole history of God in relation to man, from creation to the Second Coming, shines through. The walls of the church, in interplay with the sun, become an image in their own right, the iconostasis of the West, lending the place a sense of the sacred that can touch the hearts even of agnostics.

The Renaissance did something quite new. It ‘emancipated’ man. Now we see the development of the ‘aesthetic’ in the modern sense, the vision of a beauty that no longer points beyond itself but is content in the end with itself, the beauty of the appearing thing. Man experiences himself in his autonomy, in all his grandeur. Art speaks of this grandeur of man almost as if it were surprised by it; it needs no other beauty to seek. There is often scarcely a difference between the depictions of pagan myths and those of Christian history. The tragic burden of antiquity has been forgotten; only its divine beauty is seen. A nostalgia for the gods emerges, for myth, for a world without fear of sin and without the pain of the Cross, which had perhaps been too overpowering in the images of the late Middle Ages. True, Christian subjects are still being depicted, but such ‘religious art’ is no longer sacred art in the proper sense. It does not enter into the humility of the sacraments and their time-transcending dynamism. It wants to enjoy today and to bring redemption through beauty itself. Perhaps the iconoclasm of the Reformation should be understood against this background, though doubtless its roots were extensive.

Baroque art, which follows the Renaissance, has many different aspects and modes of expression. In its best form it is based on the reform of the Church set in motion by the Council of Trent. In line with the tradition of the West, the Council again emphasized the didactic and pedagogical character of art, but, as a fresh start toward interior renewal, it led once more to a new kind of seeing that comes from and returns within. The altarpiece is like a window through which the world of God comes out to us. The curtain of temporality is raised, and we are allowed a glimpse into the inner life of the world of God. This art is intended to insert us into the liturgy of heaven. Again and again, we experience a Baroque church as a unique kind of fortissimo of joy, an Alleluia in visual form. ‘The joy of the Lord is your strength’ (Nehemiah 10). These words from the Old Testament express the basic emotion that animates this iconography.

The Enlightenment pushed faith into a kind of intellectual and even social ghetto. Contemporary culture turned away from the faith and trod another path, so that faith took flight in historicism, the copying of the past, or else attempted compromise or lost itself in resignation and cultural abstinence.

The last of these led to a new iconoclasm, which has frequently been regarded as virtually mandated by the Second Vatican Council. The destruction of images, the first signs of which reach back to the 1920s, eliminated a lot of kitsch and unworthy art, but ultimately it left behind a void, the wretchedness of which we are now experiencing in a truly acute way. Where do we go from here? Today we are experiencing not just a crisis of sacred art, but a crisis of art in general of unprecedented proportions. The crisis of art for its part is a symptom of the crisis of man’s very existence. The immense growth in man’s mastery of the material world has left him blind to the questions of life’s meaning that transcend the material world. We might almost call it a blindness of the spirit. The questions of how we

ought to live, how we can overcome death, whether existence has a purpose and what it is — to all these questions there is no longer a common answer.

Positivism, formulated in the name of scientific seriousness, narrows the horizon to what is verifiable, to what can be proved by experiment; it renders the world opaque. True, it still contains mathematics, but the logos that is the presupposition of the mathematics and its applicability is no longer evident. Thus our world of images no longer surpasses the bounds of sense and appearance, and the flood of images that surrounds us really means the end of the image. If something cannot be photographed, it cannot be seen. In this situation, the art of the icon, sacred art, depending as it does on a wider kind of seeing, becomes impossible. What is more, art itself, which in impressionism and expressionism explored the extreme possibilities of the sense of sight, becomes literally object-less. Art turns into experimenting with self-created worlds, empty “creativity”, which no longer perceives the Creator Spiritus, the Creator Spirit. It attempts to take his place, and yet, in so doing, it manages to produce only what is arbitrary and vacuous, bringing home to man the absurdity of his role as creator.

The destruction of images, the first signs of which reach back to the 1920s, eliminated a lot of kitsch and unworthy art, but ultimately it left behind a void, the wretchedness of which we are now experiencing in a truly acute way. Where do we go from here? Today we are experiencing not just a crisis of sacred art, but a crisis of art in general of unprecedented proportions. The crisis of art for its part is a symptom of the crisis of man’s very existence. The immense growth in man’s mastery of the material world has left him blind to the questions of life’s meaning that transcend the material world. We might almost call it a blindness of the spirit. The questions of how we ought to live, how we can overcome death, whether existence has a purpose and what it is—to all these questions there is no longer a common answer.

The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the Incarnation of God. God has acted in history and entered into our sensible world, so that it may become transparent to Him. Images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, are an essential part of Christian worship. Iconoclasm is not a Christian option.

Sacred art finds its subjects in the images of salvation history, beginning with creation and continuing all the way from the first day to the eighth day, the day of the resurrection and Second Coming, in which the line of human history will come full circle. The images of biblical history have pride of place in sacred art, but the latter also includes the history of the saints, which is an unfolding of the history of Jesus Christ, the fruit borne throughout history by the dead grain of wheat.

The images of the history of God in relation to man do not merely illustrate the succession of past events but display the inner unity of God’s action. In this way they have a reference to the sacraments, above all, to Baptism and the Eucharist, and, in pointing to the sacraments, they are contained within them. Images thus point to a presence; they are essentially connected with what happens in the Liturgy. Now history becomes sacrament in Christ, who is the source of the Sacraments. [T]he icon of Christ is the center of sacred iconography. The center of the icon of Christ is the Paschal Mystery: Christ is presented as the Crucified, the risen Lord, the One who will come again and who here and now, though hidden, reigns over all. Every image of Christ must contain these three essential aspects of the mystery of Christ and, in this sense, must be an image of Easter. The image of Christ and the images of the saints are not photographs. Their whole point is to lead us beyond what can be apprehended at the merely material level, to awaken new senses in us, and to teach us a new kind of seeing, which perceives the Invisible in the visible. The sacredness of the image consists precisely in the fact that it comes from an

interior vision and thus leads us to such an interior vision. It must be a fruit of contemplation, of an encounter in faith with the new reality of the risen Christ, and so it leads us in turn into an interior gazing, an encounter in prayer with the Lord. The image is at the service of the Liturgy. The prayer and contemplation in which the images are formed must, therefore, be a praying and seeing undertaken in communion with the seeing faith of the Church. The ecclesial dimension is essential to sacred art and thus has an essential connection with the history of the faith, with Scripture and Tradition.

No sacred art can come from an isolated subjectivity. No, it presupposes that there is a subject who has been inwardly formed by the Church and opened up to the “we”. Only thus does art make the Church’s common faith visible and speak again to the believing heart. The freedom of art, which is also necessary in the more narrowly circumscribed realm of sacred art, is not a matter of do-as-you-please. It unfolds according to...what is constant in the iconographic tradition of faith. Without faith there is no art commensurate with the liturgy. Sacred art stands beneath the imperative stated in the second epistle to the Corinthians. Gazing at the Lord, we are “changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (3:18). Art cannot be “produced”, as one contracts out and produces technical equipment. It is always a gift. Inspiration is not something one can choose for oneself. It has to be received, otherwise it is not there. One cannot bring about a renewal of art in faith by money or through commissions. Before all things it requires the gift of a new kind of seeing. And so it would be worth our while to regain a faith that sees. Wherever that exists, art finds its proper expressions.

— Excerpt from Part Three, Chapter One of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000. *Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*. Freiburg, Verlag Herder, 2000.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, regarded as one of the world’s foremost theologians, has written numerous books and articles on theology and spirituality. He currently reigns as His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.