

Did Pope Benedict Preach Heresy in Sydney?

A Critique of Remarks Made by Juan Valdivieso in *Tradition in Action*

By Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

Mr. Valdivieso comments on Pope Benedict's various statements at World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia. I interpose my critical comments of Mr. Valdivieso's remarks.

Disturbing Papal Statements at WYD 2008

Juan Valdivieso, Chile

The World Youth Day in Sydney was marked by various gestures and statements of Benedict XVI with an ecumenical, ecologist and tribalist bent. This ensemble of statements would normally have been sufficient to definitively bury the media myth of the "ultra-conservative" Pope.



At Sidney, a tribal Pope carries palm leaves participating in a ritual of witch-doctors

Notwithstanding, despite the extensive coverage of journalists and photographers who accompanied the event and the widespread circulation of photos and articles showing the world the "green," tribal, and ecumenical Pope, the myth of a conservative Ratzinger remained intact. The obvious contradiction between the myth and the reality, which normally would cause shock and perplexity in Catholic public opinion, remains comfortably installed in the confused, chaotic and relativist mentality of countless Catholics.

Ecumenism and mental pollution

One of the ecumenical events that could produce a strong mental pollution, incomparably worse than air pollution since it puts the Faith at risk, was the papal speech before representatives of different "Christian confessions." *Catholic News Agency* reported that on Friday morning, July 18, Benedict XVI met with 15 leaders of diverse "Christian confessions" (Anglicans, Syrian Orthodox, Maronite Catholics,

Indian Orthodox, Chinese Methodists and Lutherans) in the Crypt of St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.

The words of the Pontiff on that occasion were surprising: "We must guard against any temptation to view doctrine as divisive and hence an impediment to the seemingly more pressing and immediate task of improving the world in which we live" (1).

This is disconcerting, even more so if we consider that Benedict XVI presents himself as being the Pope who combats the relativism of our times. How could he consider a temptation to see the truth as divisive? Actually, between truth and error, good and evil, there is a profound and irreconcilable division. Truth does not divide those who accept it, but rather unites them. It frees them from sin and error: *Veritas liberabit vos* [The truth will make you free]. Such is the teaching of the Gospel, of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Doctors of the Church and the Popes.

The truth is a source of division only for those who reject it and refuse to accept traditional Catholic doctrine. We know that "to improve the world in which we live," before all else we must subject it to that single truth, the truth revealed by God and taught by the Holy Catholic Church.

R. Sungenis: Granted, truth is and should be an impetus to unity, at least among those who accept the truth. But was Benedict XVI really saying he was now going to avoid truth so that he could join these various religious groups together? No, not really. Mr. Valdivieso appears to be 'reading into' Benedict's remarks, something I find a little too common with the *Tradition in Action* commentaries (although I do not mean to imply that everything *Tradition in Action* writes about Benedict XVI is off the mark).

Benedict merely said: "We must guard against any temptation to view doctrine as divisive." There is nothing wrong with that statement. Many people, and perennially the more traditional among Catholics, often look at doctrine in precisely the way the pope is describing it – as an opportunity to divide and cease all communication with the opposing side. The "We got the truth, and you don't" mentality can easily be, as the pope says, a "temptation" wherein the holder of truth believes he is superior to and thus cannot be contaminated in dialogue with those who either don't have the truth or have only part of the truth. Taken in a positive light, the pope is only trying to say that, as we preach the truth, let's do so in the spirit of bringing people together instead of using the truth as a wall of separation.

A “common Eucharist” with heretics is in the making...

Benedict XVI went on to say: “The road of ecumenism ultimately points towards a common celebration of the Eucharist ... Although there are still obstacles to be overcome, we can be sure that a common Eucharist one day would only strengthen our resolve to love and serve one another” (2).

A “common Eucharist” with heretics is clearly a relativist proposition. Every true Catholic knows that the teaching of the Holy Church on the Eucharist is absolutely different from what Protestants believe. He also knows that whatever belongs to the Catholic dogma is non-negotiable.



Benedict to Protestants and Schismatics in St. Mary Cathedral's crypt: "Let's have a common Eucharist..."

A common Eucharist, accepted by Catholics and by all the “Christian confessions,” probably means a common Mass: a mixture of the Tridentine Mass, the New Mass promulgated by Paul VI and the Protestant supper. This is one of the objectives that the post-Conciliar Popes have sought to realize. The way to achieve them is an irenistic dialogue (3) which, through its multiple forms and stages, logically leads to doctrinal relativism. The final result of that process on the liturgical and doctrinal planes is the installation of a common rite of the New World Religion. With this, the doors of Hell would prevail against the Catholic Church (4).

R. Sungenis: Again, Mr. Valdivieso seems to be bent on finding allusions to heresy in Benedict’s remarks, creating frightening images of a “common Mass,” “doctrinal relativism” and worst of all “the common rite of the New World Religion.” Granted, if, in the future, Mr. Valdivieso turns out to be right such that all the gestures and statements of Benedict XVI were for the purpose of reaching some “New World Religion,” then I will retract my words. But I can only deal with the present, and that’s the least I can do to be fair to the vicar of Christ on earth. I don’t want to create any unnecessary boogeymen unless they are really there. Are they there? Was Benedict really proposing a “New World Religion” by his comments? If so, then Jesus was wrong and the gates of hell have certainly prevailed and the Catholic religion isn’t worth two cents. Let’s look closely at what the pope actually said:

“The road of ecumenism ultimately points towards a common celebration of the Eucharist”

Let's ask ourselves, what is the goal of ecumenism? Is it not to show, through earnest and loving dialogue with those of different religions, the truth of the Catholic Church in hopes that they will accept that truth and become Catholic Christians? Isn't that what St. Paul did in Athens to those of other religions? Yes, that's what ecumenism is for. At least that is its ultimate goal. Prior to achieving that goal there are many steps that must be taken. Here's a good example of it. Recently, 400,000 Anglicans petitioned Cardinal Levada to accept them into the Catholic Church. They want to leave the Anglican Church in England, which has become far too faithless for their tastes. One of the pathways to this eventuality was laid several years ago when the Catholic Church went into dialogue with these same Anglicans. A pathway was opened for those Anglicans who would eventually see the truth and authority of the Catholic Church and take full advantage of it for their own salvation. If the Catholic Church had built walls instead of bridges, this mass migration may have never happened.

To be sure, Benedict XVI does not have any delusions of grandeur about ecumenism. No magic pixie dust exists that is going to bring everyone together automatically. Nevertheless, ecumenism does have a goal. And even though that goal may be far off in the distant future, the fact is, for all those who claim the name of Jesus Christ, is not our goal to be united instead of divided? Is not that precisely what Jesus prayed for in John 17 before He left earth? If the ultimate goal of unity is for all of us who proclaim the name of Christ to come under the roof of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; and a vital part of that goal is seeking for the conversion of those who don't know Christ; is not the goal also to share in one Eucharist? How could it not be? Granted, Benedict XVI may certainly be proposing a very lofty and seemingly unreachable goal, but does that mean he can't even hope for it? No, he can hope for it. A religion without hope is atheism. Even if it takes 2000 more years to reach some semblance of unity, the pope can still hope for it in his day. This is the way the kingdom of God works, according to Jesus. A little seed is planted and in years to come a full tree blossoms from it.

An idyllic and condemned view of the heretic

However, not only doctrinal barriers are demolished in this sinister process, but psychological barriers also tend to disappear. The classic categories created by Catholic wisdom – apostate, schismatic, heretic – are replaced by an idyllic vision of the non-Catholic, who is no longer seen as contaminated by error, but instead as filled with supposedly spiritual gifts.



The Cardinal of Honduras had to tell the media that WYD is not a Catholic Woodstock, but a movement of the Spirit

harmful to our Faith and our Catholic sensibility. They oblige us to take a position of disagreement and resistance to them because they totally oppose the truths taught by the traditional doctrine of the Church. Catholic doctrine is very wise and infallible when it affirms that salvation does not exist outside the Catholic Church.

R. Sungenis: Once again, I'm afraid Mr. Valdivieso is overreacting. The words of Benedict XVI do not come anywhere close to the frightening images he is attempting to create. My guess is that Mr. Valdivieso is against all ecumenical dialogue, for he feels that there is to be no talking or reasoning with people of other religions, and little hope of convincing them of our truth. There is a pessimism, a hopelessness, that pervades his words, as is the case with the commentaries of many traditionalist groups. With this pessimistic mentality they find themselves parsing every word and phrase of the pope, looking for evidence to fuel this pessimism, and ultimately, as Mr. Valdivieso says above, "they oblige us to take a position of disagreement and resistance to them..." but this stance, at least in the case of Benedict XVI in Sydney, is based on false accusations.

Suffice it to say, Benedict XVI is not "totally opposing the truths taught by the traditional doctrine of the Church," nor is he saying anything opposed to the truth that "salvation does not exist outside the Catholic Church." The pope is merely stating the logical path and purpose of ecumenical dialogue, that is, it cannot advance unless there is an "exchange of ideas" and "sharing in mutually enriching gifts." When was the last time you advanced beyond the acquaintance stage to an intimate friendship with another human being without exchanging ideas

The words of Benedict XVI followed this direction: "For this reason, ecumenical dialogue advances not only through an exchange of ideas but by a sharing in mutually enriching gifts. ... Opening ourselves to accept spiritual gifts from other Christians quickens our ability to perceive the light of truth which comes from the Holy Spirit ... I am confident that the Spirit will open our eyes to see the gifts of others."

These words of Benedict XVI in Sydney, following the line of the encyclical *Ut unum sint* of John Paul II, are truly scandalous,

and sharing gifts? When was the last time we profited from a relationship by putting salt on an open wound instead of offering honey on a cracker? Did not Jesus eat with publicans and sinners? Did he not “exchange ideas” with them and use their own gifts as stimulants to further dialogue with them? Granted, Jesus never compromised on the truth and never would. But has Pope Benedict. Yet Mr. Valdivieso implies that even in opening himself up to ecumenical dialogue with people of other religions the pope is showing all the signs of heresy and apostasy. This should not be. It is the exact opposite of what Mr. Valdivieso is telling us. Following the model of Jesus and St. Paul, the pope is seeking to open up avenues of communication to all peoples of the world, and he is putting his hope in the Holy Spirit to guide his efforts.

A few months ago the pope already showed us his goal by baptizing a Muslim convert to the Catholic faith. If any of these people to whom he spoke in Australia ask him for baptism into the Catholic Church, will he, as Mr. Valdivieso suggests above, refuse them because he wants a “New World Religion” or because he wants a new and different “common eucharist”? I dare say not. I implore Mr. Valdivieso to reconsider his viewpoint and perhaps contemplate that it is he himself that needs a refreshment of truth and purpose; that it is he who needs to dialogue more with his pope so that he can exchange ideas and share gifts, so that he will not fall into the trap of falsely accusing the pope of things he never said.

To close, I will cite some propositions condemned *ex cathedra* (5) by Pope Pius IX in the *Syllabus* of December 8, 1864, which contradict this new doctrine preached in Sydney:

- Condemned proposition: Every man is free to embrace and profess the religion that, guided by the light of reason, he holds to be true (Denz. 1715)

R. Sungenis: That is certainly true, but that is not what Benedict XVI is teaching by his above remarks, nor has he ever taught it. Benedict XVI does not believe that a man is free to embrace the religion he holds to be true. This is the very reason that Benedict is in dialogue with these religions – to show them, ultimately, that what he represents is the true religion on which they should be resting their hopes. When has Benedict ever said anything differently?

- Condemned proposition: Men can find in the worship of any religion the road to eternal salvation and can achieve eternal salvation (Denz. 1716).

R. Sungenis: Again, Benedict XVI has never taught that men can find in any religion the road to eternal salvation, much less in Sydney. I believe Mr. Valdivieso is confusing the teaching of invincible ignorance with the proposition above that Pius IX condemned, and this is a perennial problem with traditionalists who interpret Pius IX. To say that men can be saved, as Pius IX said in *Quanto conficiamur*, who “zealously keep the natural law” and “obey God, live and honest and upright life...can attain eternal life” (Denz. 1677) does not mean that one is also promoting the idea that “men can find in the worship of any religion the road to eternal salvation.” These are two different concepts, both said by the same pope. By dialoguing with these different religions, Pope Benedict is not saying that they can find eternal salvation in their own religion. He has never said such a thing, and never would. Rather, he is hoping that the Gospel can be presented to them in a new and friendly manner, hoping that the Holy Spirit will use the natural affection men have for one another so that a pathway for His leading and conviction can be manifested in their hearts. Nothing the pope said in Sydney is contrary to that purpose.

- Condemned proposition: At the least solid hopes should be held about the eternal salvation of all those who are not linked in any way to the true Church of Christ. (Denz. 1717)

R. Sungenis: Again, Pope Benedict did not even imply this, much less say it. Salvation is not Pope Benedict's to give or take away. Additionally, Pope Benedict has never taught that salvation is “not linked in any way to the true Church of Christ,” the Catholic Church. In order for Mr. Valdivieso to have any credibility to his claims against the pope, he is required to present statements in which the pope denied what Pius IX taught, or, statements in which the pope specifically and directly contradicts what Pius IX taught. In the above words from Sydney, neither of these are found by Mr. Valdivieso. Instead, we are merely presented with Mr. Valdivieso's own interpretation of the pope's words. How Mr. Valdivieso can accuse the pope of creating a whole anti-traditional and anti-Christian theology from the few words spoken above is shocking to me. In my opinion, it demonstrates that Mr. Valdivieso has a particular agenda, and it is not good.

- Condemned proposition: Protestantism is nothing but a different form of the

same true Christian religion, and in it, just as in the Catholic Church, one can be pleasing to God. (Denz. 1718). (6)

R. Sungenis: Again, Pope Benedict XVI has never said anything contrary to this statement and there is nothing in his Sydney speeches that shows he has. Mr. Valdivieso, I'm afraid, is simply inferring these concepts from the pope's words because he has settled into a position of being suspicious of anything having to do with ecumenism, dialogue, and other religions. I applaud Mr. Valdivieso for his doctrinal vigilance, but vigilance without evidence and fairness is nothing but false accusations. This is especially grievous when it is directed against a pope.

Let the reader consider these disturbing papal statements in Sydney, as well as the perennial teaching of the Church and draw his own conclusions.

1. "[Christians should not see doctrine as divisive](#)," CNA, July 18, 2008
2. [Ecumenical meeting at the Crypt](#) of St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, July 18, 2008, Vatican site. All quotes from this meeting will be from this text.
3. Irenism comes from the word irenism, from the Greek eirene, peace. Here it is not used in the sense of a temperate love for true peace, but a disordered love for a peace obtained at any price, at the cost of principles, acquired rights, etc. In short, it is not an authentic peace, but a false one. Pope Pius XII warns against the grave dangers that come with this type of false 'irenism' in his encyclical *Humani generis* of August 12, 1950.
4. We know that God will not permit this situation to reach its full extension since it is a truth of Faith that "the gates of Hell will not prevail against her," according to the promise of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18).
5. *Ex cathedra* statements are those made where the Pope speaks as the Supreme Pastor and Doctor of the Faith; in other words, they are declarations that have the character of being infallible.
6. Denzinger, *El Magisterio de la Iglesia: Manual de los Símbolos, Definiciones y Declaraciones de la Iglesia en Materia de Fe y Costumbres* (Herder, 1963).

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R. Sungenis: We have drawn our own conclusion. The conclusion is that Mr. Valdivieso does our Catholic community a grave disservice by implying that the pope is teaching heresy when, in fact, the pope actually said none of the things that Mr. Valdivieso has accused him.