

# Christians Have New Take on World, Says Pope

## Explains How Incarnation Justifies Use of Images

VATICAN CITY, MAY 6, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Christian theology offers a new vision of the physical world since Christ became part of it in taking on flesh, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope explained this today during the general audience in St. Peter's Square, in which he spoke of St. John Damascene, one of the great defenders of the use of images in worship.

John Damascene was one of the first to distinguish between adoration and veneration, the Holy Father explained.

"This distinction quickly resulted very important to respond in a Christian way to those who claimed as universal and perennial the observance of the severe prohibition in the Old Testament about the use of images in worship," he said. "This was a great discussion also in the Islamic world, which accepts this Jewish tradition of the total exclusion of images for worship. Christians on the other hand, in this context, considered the problem and found a justification for the veneration of images."

The Pontiff cited one of the saint's explanations: "Is not perhaps matter the wood of the cross thrice blessed? ... And the ink and the holy book of the Gospels are not matter? The salvific altar that dispenses us the bread of life is not matter? ... And before all, is not matter the flesh and the blood of my Lord? Should the sacred character of all of this be suppressed?"

This Christian vision, in which "because of the Incarnation, matter appears as divinized, is seen as the dwelling place of God" is "a new vision of the world and material realities," the Bishop of Rome continued. "God has become flesh and flesh has become truly the dwelling place of God, whose glory shines forth in the human face of Christ.

"Therefore the invitations of the doctor of the East are even today extremely current, considering the great dignity that matter has received in the Incarnation, able to come to be, in faith, efficient sign and sacrament of man's encounter with God."

Optimistic

Benedict XVI noted how St. John reflected on God's love for humanity manifested in the Incarnation.

Taking into account, he said, "the wound inflicted on human nature by free choice desired by God and used inappropriately by man, with all the consequences of widespread disharmony that have come from it," there is a "need, clearly perceived by the theology of Damascene, that the nature in which the goodness and beauty of God is reflected, wounded by our fault, 'would be strengthened and renewed' by the descent of the Son of God in the flesh."

The Pope cited John's teaching: "It was necessary for nature to be strengthened and renewed and that the path of virtue would be indicated and concretely taught, [the path] that banishes corruption and leads to eternal life. ... Thus appeared on the horizon of history the great sea of the love of God for man."

This, the Holy Father reflected, "is a beautiful expression. We see, on one hand, the beauty of creation and on the other, the destruction caused by human fault. But we see in the Son of God, who descends to renew nature, the sea of the love of God for man."

"We can imagine the consolation and the joy that filled the hearts of the faithful with these words so full of fascinating images," the Pontiff concluded. "We too hear them today, sharing the same sentiments of the Christians of that time: God wants to rest in us, he wants to renew nature also through our conversion, he wants to make us participants in his divinity. May the Lord help us to make these words the essence of our lives."

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