

Papal trip disappointing to German Protestants

by [Ruby Russell](#) in the [October 18, 2011](#) issue

Pope Benedict xvi's recent visit to Germany featured an ecumenical worship service in the town of Erfurt that was meant to reach out to German Protestants, but for many it felt like a missed opportunity.

In his September 23 sermon, Benedict said that "there was some talk of an 'ecumenical gift' which was expected from this visit. . . . Here I would only say that this reflects a political misreading of faith and of ecumenism." The Christian faiths, he said, could not negotiate and compromise as if they were political states.

"Faith is not something we work out intellectually or negotiate between us," he said. "It is the foundation for our lives. Unity grows not by the weighing of benefits and drawbacks but only by entering ever more deeply into the faith in our thoughts and in our lives."

Many were disappointed there was no indication that the pope intended to relax a ban on Catholics and Protestants taking communion together or recognize Protestant denominations as "true churches" as opposed to "ecclesial communities."

"I think we all had high expectations which weren't met during his trip," said Tabea Doelker, a member of the council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) who attended the Erfurt service. (The EKD is the German federation of Protestant churches.) "I don't know if the pope, due to his age and fragility, will be able to carry out the task of bringing Catholicism and Protestantism closer together," she said in an interview. Benedict is 84.

Although Benedict met
with Protestant leaders at the Augustinian Monastery where Protestant
Reformation pioneer Martin Luther studied, EKD president Nikolaus
Schneider said the encounter left hearts "burning for more." Schneider
described the meeting as a "very serious and deep fraternal encounter."
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