



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CYPRUS

(JUNE 4-6, 2010)

INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI WITH THE JOURNALISTS DURING THE FLIGHT TO CYPRUS

Papal Flight

Friday, 4 June 2010

Fr. Lombardi: *Your Holiness, we thank you for meeting with us, as on all your Journeys, and for giving us a focus for the coming days, which will be so busy. We are of course unfortunately forced to ask the first question due to yesterday's event, the assassination of Bishop Padovese that has so grievously shocked us and has been a cause of profound sorrow to you. Therefore, on behalf of all my colleagues, may I ask you to say a few words on how you have taken this news and how you feel at the beginning of your Journey to Cyprus in this atmosphere.*

Holy Father: *Naturally, I am profoundly distressed by the death of Bishop Padovese, who has greatly contributed to the preparation of the Synod; his collaboration would have been invaluable in this Synod. Let us commend his soul to the goodness of the Lord. However, this shadow has nothing to do with the themes and reality of our Journey since we must not attribute this event to Turkey or to the Turks. It is something about which we have little information. It was certainly not a political or religious assassination but a personal matter. We are still awaiting a full explanation, but do not let us now confuse this tragic situation with the dialogue with Islam and with all the problems of our Journey. It is a separate case that saddens us but must in no way cloud the dialogue that will be the theme and purpose of this Journey.*

Fr. Lombardi: *Cyprus is a divided country, Your Holiness, and you will not be visiting the northern part that is occupied by the Turks. Do you have a Message for the inhabitants of that region? And how do you think your Visit can help to bridge the gap between the Greek and Turkish sides, in*

order to bring about peaceful coexistence with respect for religious freedom and the spiritual and cultural heritage of the various communities?

Holy Father: This Trip to Cyprus is in many ways a continuation both of the Journey I made last year to the [Holy Land](#) and of [my Visit to Malta](#) earlier this year. The [Journey to the Holy Land](#) had three parts: Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. For all three it was a religious and Pastoral Visit; it was not a political or tourist trip. The fundamental theme was Christ's peace, which must be universal peace throughout the world. The theme was therefore on the one hand, the proclamation of our faith, the witness of faith, the pilgrimage to these places that testify to Christ's life and to the whole of sacred history. On the other, there was the common responsibility of all who believe in a God Creator of Heaven and earth, a God in whose image we have been created. Malta and Cyprus still forcefully contribute to the theme of St Paul, a great believer and evangelizer, and also of St Barnabas who was a Cypriot and opened the door to the mission of St Paul. Hence the themes are a testimony of our faith in the one God, dialogue and peace. Peace in a very profound sense; it is not a political appendix to our religious activity; rather, peace is a word that is the core of faith, it lies at the heart of the Pauline teaching; let us think of the Letter to the Ephesians where it says that Christ brought peace and broke down the dividing wall of hostility. This has remained a permanent mandate so I am not coming with a political but rather a religious Message that must prepare people's hearts better for finding an opening for peace. These are not things that come about from one day to the next, but it is very important not only to take the necessary political steps but also and above all to prepare souls to be capable of taking the necessary political steps, of creating that inner openness to peace which comes ultimately from faith in God and in the conviction that we are all God's children and each other's brothers and sisters.

Fr. Lombardi: *You are going to the Middle East a few days after the Israeli attack on the flotilla in front of Gaza added further tension to the already tense peace process. How do you think that the Holy See can help in overcoming this difficult moment for the Middle East?*

Holy Father: I would say that we contribute mainly in a religious way. We can be of help by offering political and strategic advice, but the Vatican's work is always essentially religious, work that moves hearts. With all these episodes that we are experiencing we are always in danger of losing patience, of saying "that's enough", and of no longer desiring to seek peace. And here, in this Year for Priests, a beautiful story of the Curé d'Ars springs to my mind. To the people who said to him: "It is pointless for me to go to confession and absolution because I am sure that the day after tomorrow I shall relapse into the same sins", the Curé d'Ars answered: "it doesn't matter, the Lord deliberately forgets that you will commit the same sins the day after tomorrow, he forgives you now, completely, he will be forbearing and will continue to help you and to reach out to you". We should consequently imitate, as it were, God and his patience. After all the cases of violence, we must not lose patience, not lose courage, not lose our forbearance in order to start again; we must create this readiness of heart to start ever anew, in the certainty that we can forge ahead, that we

can achieve peace, that the solution is not violence but patience for the true good. Creating this attitude seems to me to be the principal task that the Vatican, its offices and the Pope can undertake.

Fr. Lombardi: *Your Holiness, the dialogue with the Orthodox has made great headway from the viewpoint of culture, spirituality and life. On the occasion of the recent Concert offered to you by the Patriarch of Moscow, a deep harmony between Orthodox and Catholics was felt with regard to the challenges to Christianity in Europe posed by secularization. But what is your evaluation of the dialogue, also from the more strictly theological viewpoint?*

Holy Father: First, I would like to emphasize that we have made great progress in our common witness to the Christian values in the secularized world. This is not only a moral and political coalition let us say but also really is a profound quality of faith, because the fundamental values for which we live in this secularized world are not forms of moralism but the fundamental features of the Christian faith. When we are able to bear witness to these values together, when we can engage in dialogue, in the discussion of this world, in witnessing in order to live these values, we have already borne a fundamental witness to a very deep unity of faith. There are of course many theological problems, but here too the elements of unity are strong. I would like to point out three elements that bind us, that see us ever closer, that draw us ever closer. The first: Scripture. The Bible is not a book fallen from Heaven that now exists and that everyone takes up; it is a book that developed among the People of God and is alive in this common subject of the People of God. And only here does it remain ever present and real. In other words the Bible cannot be isolated but exists in the connection between tradition and Church. Knowledge of this is fundamental and belongs to the foundations of Orthodoxy and Catholicism and gives us a common route. As the second element: let us say Tradition, that we interpret, that opens the door of Scripture to us, has in addition an institutional, sacred and sacramental form, desired by the Lord, namely the episcopate. Tradition has a personal form, that is, the College of Bishops that all together is a witness and presence of this tradition. And the third point: the so-called *regula fidei*, that is, the confession of faith worked out in the ancient Councils is the sum of all that is contained in Scripture and opens the "door" to interpretation. Then other elements: the Liturgy and our common love for Our Lady bind us deeply and it is becoming ever clearer to us that they are the foundations of Christian life. We must be more aware and must also examine the details more deeply, but I think that although the different cultures and situations have given rise to misunderstandings and difficulties, our awareness of the essential and of the unity of the essential is growing. I would like to add that it is naturally not theological discussion which creates unity in itself; unity is an important dimension but the whole of Christian life, mutual knowledge, the experience of brotherhood, learning, despite the experience of the past, as well as this common brotherhood are processes that likewise demand great patience. Yet I think we are actually learning patience and love as well, and with all the dimensions of theological dialogue we are making progress, leaving it to the Lord to decide when he will give us perfect unity.

Fr. Lombardi: *One purpose of this Journey is the presentation of the working document of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. What are your principal expectations and hopes for this Synod, for the Christian communities and also for the believers of other faiths in this region?*

Holy Father: The first important point is that the various Bishops, Heads of Churches, be seen here, because we have so many Churches various Rites are scattered throughout the different countries in different situations. They often appear isolated, they often possess little information about each other; it means coming together, meeting each other and thus becoming acquainted with each other, with the problems, differences and situations they have in common, appraising the situation together, in order to decide on the way to take. This practical communion of dialogue and life is a first point. The second point is the visibility of these Churches. In other words that people in the world see that there is one, great and ancient Christianity in the Middle East one that is often not before our eyes. This visibility can also help us to be close to these Churches, to deepen our reciprocal knowledge, to learn from each other, to help each other and thereby also to help the Christians of the Middle East not to lose hope and to remain there although their situation may be difficult. Thus the third point through the dialogue with each other, dialogue also opens with the other Christians, with the Orthodox, Armenians, etc.. A common awareness of the Christian responsibility is growing, together with a common capacity for dialogue with our Muslim brothers and sisters who are our brothers and sisters despite the differences. And it seems to me that there is encouragement too, in spite of all the problems, to continue, with a common vision, the dialogue with them. All the endeavours for an ever more fruitful and brotherly coexistence are very important. This is therefore a meeting within the Catholic Christianity of the Middle East in the different Rites, but it is also precisely an encounter of openness, of a renewed capacity for dialogue, courage and hope for the future.

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