



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AND VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ORGANIZATION HEADQUARTERS

INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE FLIGHT TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Tuesday, 15 April 2008

Fr Lombardi: Welcome, Your Holiness! In the name of all my colleagues present, I thank you for your gracious availability in giving us suggestions and ideas for reporting on this Journey. It is your second intercontinental Trip: your first as Pope to America, to the United States and to the United Nations. It is an important and eagerly-awaited Visit. To begin with, could you tell us something about how you feel, the hopes you have for this Journey and what is its fundamental goal from your viewpoint?

The Holy Father: My Journey has two goals in particular. The first is to visit the Church in America, in the United States. There is one special reason for it: 200 years ago Baltimore was raised to a Metropolitan See and at the same time four other new Dioceses came into being: New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Louisville. Thus, it is a great Jubilee for this core of the Church in the United States, a time of reflection on the past and above all of reflection on the future, on how to respond to the great challenges of our time, in the present and in view of the future. And naturally, interreligious and ecumenical meetings are part of this Visit, especially an additional Meeting in the Synagogue with our Jewish friends on the eve of their Passover Feast. This is, therefore, the religious and pastoral aspect of the Church in the United States at this moment in our history, and the Meeting with all the others in this common brotherhood that binds us in a common responsibility. At this time I would also like to thank President Bush who will be at the airport to meet me and set aside a lot of time for conversation, besides receiving me on my birthday. The second goal is the Visit to the United Nations. Here too there is a special reason: 60 years have

passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is the anthropological basis, the philosophy, on which the United Nations stands, the human and spiritual foundations on which it is built. Thus, it is truly a time for reflection, the time to resume awareness of this important stage in history. Various different cultural traditions converged in the Declaration of Human Rights, above all, an anthropology that recognizes man as a subject of rights preceding all institutions, with common values to be respected by all. This Visit, which is taking place precisely at the moment of a crisis in values, therefore seems to me to be important in order to reconfirm together that everything began at that moment and to recover it for our future.

Fr Lombardi: *Let us now move on to the questions that you presented in the past few days and that some of you will present to the Holy Father. Let us begin with the question of John Allen, whom I do not think needs to be introduced since he is a very well-known commentator on Vatican affairs in the United States.*

Holy Father, I am asking the question in English, if I may, and perhaps, if it were possible, if we could have a sentence or a word in English we would be very grateful. This is the question: the Church you will find in the United States is a large Church, a lively Church, but also a suffering Church, in a certain sense, especially because of the recent crisis caused by sexual abuse. The American People are expecting a word from you, a message from you on this crisis. What will be your Message for this suffering Church?

The Holy Father (in English): It is a great suffering for the Church in the United States and for the Church in general, for me personally, that this could happen. If I read the history of these events, it is difficult for me to understand how it was possible for priests to fail in this way in the mission to give healing, to give God's love to these children. I am ashamed and we will do everything possible to ensure that this does not happen in future. I think we have to act on three levels: the first is at the level of justice and the political level. I will not speak at this moment about homosexuality: this is another thing. We will absolutely exclude paedophiles from the sacred ministry; it is absolutely incompatible, and whoever is really guilty of being a paedophile cannot be a priest. So at this first level we can do justice and help the victims, because they are deeply affected; these are the two sides of justice: one, that paedophiles cannot be priests and the other, to help in any possible way the victims. Then there is a pastoral level. The victims will need healing and help and assistance and reconciliation: this is a big pastoral engagement and I know that the Bishops and the priests and all Catholic people in the United States will do whatever possible to help, to assist, to heal. We have made a visitation of the seminaries and we will do all that is possible in the education of seminarians for a deep spiritual, human and intellectual formation for the students. Only sound persons can be admitted to the priesthood and only persons with a deep personal life in Christ and who have a deep sacramental life. So, I know that the Bishops and directors of seminarians will do all possible to have a strong, strong discernment because it is more important to have good priests than to have many priests. This is also our third level, and we hope that we can do, and have done and will do in the future, all that is possible to

heal these wounds.

Fr Lombardi: *Thank you, Your Holiness. Our colleagues sent in many questions on the subject of immigration, on the presence of Spanish-speaking people in American society. Journalist Andrés Leonardo Beltramo Alvares, who works for the Mexican News Agency, asks about this.*

Your Holiness, I am asking the question in Italian and then, if you wish, you can make your comment in Spanish - a greeting, only a greeting! There is enormous growth in the Hispanic presence in the Church of the United States in general: the Catholic community is becoming more and more bilingual and almost bicultural. At the same time, there is an increasing anti-immigration movement in society: the situation of immigrants is marked by forms of precariousness and discrimination. Is it your intention to speak of this problem and to ask America to give a warm welcome to immigrants, many of whom are Catholic?

The Holy Father: I cannot speak Spanish but mis saludos y mi bendición para todos los hispánicos. Of course, I will be speaking about this point. I have had various ad limina visits from Bishops of Central America and also from South America, and I have seen the breadth of this problem, especially the serious problem of the break-up of families. And this is really dangerous for the social, moral and human fabric of these Countries. However, it is necessary to distinguish between measures to be taken straight away and long-term solutions. The fundamental solution is that there should no longer be any need to emigrate because there are sufficient jobs in the homeland, a self-sufficient social fabric, so that there is no longer any need to emigrate. Therefore, we must all work to achieve this goal and for a social development that makes it possible to offer citizens work and a future in their homeland. And I would also like to speak to the President on this point, because it is above all the United States that must help these countries to develop. It is in everyone's interests, not only these countries but of the world and also of the United States. Then, short-term measures: it is very important to help families in particular. In the light of the conversations I have had with Bishops about the main problems, it appears that families should be protected rather than destroyed. What can be done should be done. Of course, it is also necessary to do everything possible to prevent precariousness and every kind of violence, and to help so that they may really have a dignified life wherever they may be. I also want to say that there are many problems, much suffering, but also such great hospitality! I know that the American Bishops' Conference in particular works closely with the Latin American Bishops' Conferences with a view to necessary aid. Besides all the painful things, let us not forget the great and true humanity, the many positive actions that also exist.

Fr Lombardi: *Thank you, Your Holiness. Now a question that refers to American society and, to be precise, to the place of religious values in American society. Let us give the floor to our colleague Andrea Tornielli, who is on the Vatican desk of an Italian newspaper.*

Holy Father, in receiving the new Ambassador of the United States of America, you noted that the

public "values the role of religious belief in ensuring a sound democratic order" in the United States. I wanted to ask you if you consider this a plausible model for a secularized Europe too, or whether you think there can also be the risk that religion and God's Name could be used as a vehicle for certain policies, even war.

The Holy Father: Of course, in Europe we cannot simply copy the United States: we have our own history. But we must all learn from one another. What I find fascinating in the United States is that they began with a positive concept of secularity, because this new people was composed of communities and individuals who had fled from the State Church and wanted to have a lay, a secular State that would give access and opportunities to all denominations, to all forms of religious practice. Thus, an intentionally secular new State was born; they were opposed to a State Church. But the State itself had to be secular precisely out of love for religion in its authenticity, which can only be lived freely. And thus, we find this situation of a State deliberately and decidedly secular but precisely through a religious will in order to give authenticity to religion. And we know that in studying America, Alexis de Toqueville noticed that secular institutions live with a de facto moral consensus that exists among the citizens. This seems to me to be a fundamental and positive model. It should be taken into account that in Europe in the meantime, over 200 years have passed with many developments. Today, there is also in the United States the attack of a new secularism, quite a different kind. Whereas, at first the problems concerned immigration, but later in the course of history the situation became complicated and therefore differentiated. But the foundation, the fundamental model also seems to me today to be worthy of being borne in mind in Europe.

Fr Lombardi: *Thank you, Your Holiness. And now, a last topic that concerns your Visit to the United Nations, and the question about this is asked by John Pavis, who is in charge of the [Rome branch of] the Catholic News Agency of the United States.*

Holy Father, the Pope is often considered to be humanity's conscience and for this reason too, his Discourse to the United Nations is very much anticipated. I would like to ask: Do you think that a multilateral institution like the United Nations can safeguard the principles of the Catholic Church deemed "non-negotiable", that is, the principles founded on natural law?

The Holy Father: The fundamental objective of the United Nations is precisely this: that it safeguard the common values of humanity, on which is based the peaceful coexistence of nations, the observance of justice and the development of justice. I mentioned briefly that I think it very important that the United Nations be founded precisely on the idea of human rights, rights that express non-negotiable values, that precede all the institutions and constitute the foundations of all the institutions. And it is important that this should be the convergence between the cultures that have achieved consensus on the fact that these values are fundamental, that they are engraved in man's very being. It is important to renew this knowledge that the United Nations, with its peacekeeping role, can only work if it is based on common values that are subsequently

expressed in "rights" that must be observed by all. To confirm this fundamental concept and to bring it as current as possible is an objective of my mission. Lastly, since at the outset Fr Lombardi also asked me a question about my feelings, I would like to say that I am going most joyfully to the United States! I have previously visited the U.S. several times, I know this great Country, I know the great vivacity of the Church despite all the problems, and I am happy to be able to meet this great People and this great Church at this historical moment for both the Church and the United Nations. Thank you to all!