



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CROATIA

(JUNE 4-5, 2011)

**MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY,  
POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND BUSINESS WORLD,  
DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

### ***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*National Croatian Theatre - Zagreb*

*Saturday, 4 June 2011*

**(Video)**

*Mr President,*

*Dear Cardinals,*

*Brother Bishops,*

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Brothers and Sisters,*

I am very glad that the first engagement of my visit should be with you, representing as you do key sectors of Croatian society and the Diplomatic Corps. My cordial greetings go to each of you personally and also to the important communities to which you belong: religious, political, academic and cultural, the world of the arts, finance and sport. I thank Archbishop Puljić and Professor Zurak for the kind words they have addressed to me, and I thank the musicians who have welcomed me in the universal language of music. This dimension of universality, characteristic of art and culture, is particularly appropriate for Christianity and the Catholic Church. Christ is fully human, and whatever is human finds in him and in his word the fulness of life and meaning.

This splendid theatre is a symbolic place, expressive of your national and cultural identity. For me to come together with you in this place is a further cause of joy in spirit, because the Church is a mystery of communion and always rejoices in communion, in the richness of diversity. The participation of representatives from other Churches and Christian communities, as well as the Jewish and Muslim religions, helps remind us that religion is not a separate area marked off from society. Rather, it is a natural element within society, constantly recalling the vertical dimension: attentive listening to God as the condition for seeking the common good, for seeking justice and reconciliation in the truth. Religion places man in relation with God, the Creator and Father of all, and must therefore be a force for peace. Religions need always to be purified according to their true essence in order to correspond to their true mission.

Here I would like to introduce the main topic of my brief reflection: the theme of conscience. This cuts across all the different fields in which you are engaged and it is fundamental for a free and just society, both at national and supranational levels. Naturally, I think of Europe, to which Croatia has always belonged on the historical and cultural plane, and which it is now about to enter on the political and institutional level. Truly, the great achievements of the modern age – the recognition and guarantee of freedom of conscience, of human rights, of the freedom of science and hence of a free society – should be confirmed and developed while keeping reason and freedom open to their transcendent foundation, so as to ensure that these achievements are not undone, as unfortunately happens in not a few cases. The quality of social and civil life and the quality of democracy depend in large measure on this “critical” point – conscience, on the way it is understood and the way it is informed. If, in keeping with the prevailing modern idea, conscience is reduced to the subjective field to which religion and morality have been banished, then the crisis of the West has no remedy and Europe is destined to collapse in on itself. If, on the other hand, conscience is rediscovered as the place in which to listen to truth and good, the place of responsibility before God and before fellow human beings – in other words, the bulwark against all forms of tyranny – then there is hope for the future.

I am grateful to Professor Zurak for reminding us of the Christian roots of many of the cultural and academic institutions of this country, as indeed all over the European Continent. We need to be reminded of these origins, not least for the sake of historical truth, and it is important that we understand these roots properly, so that they can feed the present day too. It is crucial to grasp the inner dynamic of an event such as the birth of a university, of an artistic movement, or of a hospital. It is necessary to understand the *why* and the *how* of what took place, in order to recognize the value of this dynamic in the present day, as a spiritual reality that takes on a cultural and therefore a social dimension. At the heart of all these institutions are men and women, persons, consciences, moved by the power of truth and good. Some examples have been quoted, from among the famous sons and daughters of this land. I would like to single out Father Ruđer Josip Bošković, a Jesuit born in Dubrovnik three hundred years ago on 18 May 1711. He is a good illustration of the happy symbiosis of faith and scholarship, each stimulating the other through research that is at the same time open, diversified and capable of synthesis. His principal work,

*Theoria philosophiae naturalis*, which was published in Vienna and later in Venice in the mid 18th century, bears a highly significant sub-title: *redacta ad unicam legem virium in natura existentium*, that is, “according to the one law of the forces existing in nature”. In Bošković, there is analysis, there is study of multiple branches of knowledge, but there is also a passion for unity. This is typical of Catholic culture. Hence, the foundation of a Catholic University in Croatia is a sign of hope. I trust that it will help to foster unity among the various fields of contemporary culture, the values and the identity of your people, lending continuity to the fruitful contribution of the Church to the history of the noble Croatian Nation. To return to Father Bošković, the experts say that his theory of “continuity”, which holds true both in the natural sciences and in geometry, accords well with some of the great discoveries of modern physics. What are we to say? Let us pay tribute to the illustrious Croat, but also to the true Jesuit; let us pay tribute to the cultivator of truth who knows how far the truth surpasses him, but who also knows, in the light of truth, how to engage fully the resources of reason with which he has been endowed by God himself.

As well as paying tribute, however, we must learn to appreciate the method, the mental openness of these great men. This brings us back to conscience as the keystone on which to base a culture and build up the common good. It is by forming consciences that the Church makes her most specific and valuable contribution to society. It is a contribution that begins in the family and is strongly reinforced in the parish, where infants, children and young people learn to deepen their knowledge of the sacred Scriptures, the “great codex” of European culture; at the same time they learn what it means for a community to be built upon gift, not upon economic interests or ideology, but upon love, “the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 1). This logic of gratuitousness, learnt in infancy and adolescence, is then lived out in every area of life, in games, in sport, in interpersonal relations, in art, in voluntary service to the poor and the suffering, and once it has been assimilated it can be applied to the most complex areas of political and economic life so as to build up a *polis* that is welcoming and hospitable, but at the same time not empty, not falsely neutral, but rich in humanity, with a strongly ethical dimension. It is here that the *lay faithful* are called to give generously of the formation they have received, guided by the principles of the Church’s Social Doctrine, for the sake of authentic secularism, social justice, the defence of life and of the family, freedom of religion and education.

Distinguished friends, your presence here and Croatia’s cultural tradition have prompted these brief reflections. I offer them to you as a mark of my esteem and above all of the Church’s desire to walk in the midst of this people in the light of the Gospel. I thank you for your attention, and from my heart I bless all of you, all those you love and all that you do.

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