



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC
(SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2009)

***INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE FLIGHT TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC***

Papal Flight
Saturday, 26 September 2009

The first question: *As you said in the [Angelus last Sunday](#), the Czech Republic is located not only geographically but also historically in the heart of Europe. Could you explain better what you mean by "historically", and tell us how and why you think that this Visit can be significant for the continent overall in its cultural, spiritual and eventually also its political path to building the European Union?*

Over all the centuries the Czech Republic, the territory of the Czech Republic, has been the meeting place for cultures. Let us start in the ninth century: on the one hand, in Moravia we have the great mission of the brothers Cyril and Methodius who brought Byzantine culture from Byzantium but created a Slavic culture with Cyrillic characters and a liturgy in the Slavic language. On the other, in Bohemia, the Dioceses of Regensburg and Passau brought to it the Gospel in the Latin language, so it was through the connection with the Roman-Latin culture that the two cultures met. Every encounter is difficult but also fruitful, as can easily be demonstrated by this example. I take a great leap: in the 14th century it was Charles iv who created here, in Prague, the first university in Central Europe. The university itself is a meeting place for cultures. In this case it also became a place of encounter between the Slavic and the German-speaking cultures. As in the century and at the time of the Reformation, it was precisely in this territory that the encounters and conflicts became decisive and powerful, as we all know. I will now take a leap into the present: in the past century, the Czech Republic suffered under a particularly harsh Communist dictatorship

but also had a high-level resistance movement, both Catholic and secular. I am thinking of the writings of Václav Havel, of Cardinal Vlk, of figures such as Cardinal Tomášek, who truly gave Europe a message of what freedom is and of how we must live and work in liberty. From this encounter of cultures down the centuries and precisely from this last phase of reflection, and not only that, but of suffering for a new concept of freedom and a free society important messages emerged for us, which can and must be fruitful in the building of Europe. We must be very attentive to the message of this country.

Twenty years have passed since the fall of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe; John Paul ii, in visiting several countries that survived Communism, encouraged them to use their regained freedom responsibly. What is your message today for the peoples of Eastern Europe in this new phase of history?

As I said, these countries suffered tremendously under the dictatorship, but in their suffering they developed concepts of freedom which are timely and which must now be further developed and applied. I am thinking, for example, of a text by Václav Havel which says: "Dictatorship is based on falsehood, and if falsehood is overcome, if no one lies any longer and if the truth comes to light, there is also freedom". And so it was that he elaborated this nexus between truth and freedom, where freedom is not libertinism or arbitrariness but is linked to and conditioned by the great values of truth and love, solidarity and of the good in general. Thus, I think that these concepts, these ideas which developed during the period of dictatorship must not be lost: precisely now we must return to them! And, in freedom that is often somewhat empty and lacking in values, we must once again recognize that freedom and values, freedom and goodness, freedom and truth, go together: otherwise freedom is destroyed as well. This seems to me to be the message that comes from these countries and must be actualized at this time.

Your Holiness, the Czech Republic is a heavily secularized country in which the Catholic Church is a minority. In this situation how can the Church effectively contribute to the common good of the country?

I would say that usually it is creative minorities who determine the future, and in this regard the Catholic Church must understand that she is a creative minority who has a heritage of values that are not things of the past, but a very lively and relevant reality. The Church must modernize, she must be present in the public debate, in our struggle for a true concept of freedom and peace. Thus she can contribute in various sectors. I would say that the first is precisely the intellectual dialogue between agnostics and believers. They both need each other: the agnostic cannot be satisfied with not knowing whether God exists or not, but must seek and perceive the great heritage of faith; the Catholic cannot be content with having faith but must seek God even more, and in dialogue with others must re-learn God more deeply. This is the first level: the great intellectual, ethical and human dialogue. Then, in the area of education, the Church has much to do and to give, with regard to formation. In Italy we talk about the problem of the educational

emergency. It is a problem common to the whole of the West: here the Church must once again actualize her great legacy, putting it into practice and opening it to the future. A third sector is "*Caritas*". The Church has always had this as a sign of her identity: to go to the aid of the poor, of being an instrument of charity. *Caritas* does a great deal in the Czech Republic, in the various communities, in situations of need, and also offers much to suffering humanity on the different continents, thereby setting an example for others of responsibility and of international solidarity, which is also a condition for peace.

Your Holiness, your latest Encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate", has received much attention throughout the world. How can these attentions be evaluated? Are you pleased with them? Do you think that the recent world crisis is essentially an opportunity on which humanity has become readier to reflect on the importance of moral and spiritual values, in order to face the great problems of its future? And will the Church continue to offer guidelines with this in view?

I am very pleased with this extensive discussion. This was exactly the aim: to stimulate and motivate a discussion on these problems, not to leave things as they are but to find new models for a responsible economy, both in the individual countries and for the totality of unified humanity. It seems to me to be really visible today that ethics are not something *foreign* to the economy, which like a technique could function on its own, but rather an *inner* principle of the economy, which does not work if it fails to take into account the human values of solidarity and reciprocal responsibility and if it does not integrate ethics into the construction of the economy itself: this is the great challenge of this moment. I hope, with the Encyclical, to have contributed to this challenge. The discussion underway seems encouraging to me. Of course, we want to continue to respond to the challenges of the moment and to help make the sense of responsibility stronger than the desire for profit, to make responsibility for others stronger than selfishness; in this regard, we also want to contribute to a humane economy in the future.

And, to conclude, one slightly more personal question: during the summer you had a small accident to your wrist. Do you feel you have completely recovered from it now? Have you been able to resume all your activities and work on the second part of your book on Jesus, as you wished?

It has not yet recovered completely, but you see that my right hand functions and I can do the essential: I can eat and, above all, I can write. My thoughts develop especially in writing; so for me, not to be able to write for six weeks was truly a hardship, a school of patience. Yet I was able to work, to read, and to do many other things, and I even went ahead slightly with the book. However, I still have a great deal to do. I think that with the bibliography and all that is still to come, "*Deo adiuvante*", it might be finished by next spring. But this is a hope!

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