



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BRAZIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE BISHOPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

*INTERVIEW OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE FLIGHT TO BRAZIL*

Wednesday, 9 May 2007

Benedict XVI: Good morning! We are flying over the Sahara on our way to the "Continent of Hope". I am going with great joy and with much hope to this meeting with Latin America. Various important events await us: first in São Paulo, the youth meeting; then the canonization, still in São Paulo, of the first saint born in Brazil; to my mind this is also an important expression of what this Journey means. He is a Franciscan saint who spread the Franciscan charism to Brazil and is known as a saint of reconciliation and peace. Let us say, therefore, that this is an important aspect of a figure who knew how to create peace, hence, also social and human coherence.

We will then have another important meeting at the "Fazenda da Esperança" [community for the rehabilitation of persons with drug addictions]. This is a place where one can see the power of healing inherent in faith that helps to open the horizons of life. All these drug problems, etc., are born precisely from lack of hope in the future. It is faith that opens one to the future and thus can also heal. It therefore seems to me that this power to heal and give hope, opening a horizon for the future, is very important.

Lastly comes the event which is the main purpose of this Journey: the meeting with the Bishops who are taking part in the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences. One might say that in itself this is a specifically religious meeting: to give life in Christ and to become disciples of Christ, knowing that we all desire life but that life is not fulfilled if it has no inner content, and furthermore, no direction in which to go. The Church's religious mission responds in this sense and opens peoples' eyes to the conditions required to solve the

great social and political problems of Latin America.

The Church as such is not involved in politics - we respect secularism - but offers the conditions in which a healthy political system can develop, together with the consequent solution for social problems. Thus, we want to make Christians aware of the gift of faith, the joy of faith through which we can know God as well as our own *raison d'être*. In this way, Christians can be witnesses of Christ and learn both the necessary personal virtues and the great social virtues: the sense of legality which is crucial to the formation of society.

We are acquainted with the problems of Latin America, but we would like to mobilize those very capacities, those moral forces which exist there, the religious forces, in order to respond to the Church's specific mission and to our universal responsibility for the human being as such, and for society as such.

Fr Lombardi: To start with, I would like to give the floor to "Il Globo", which will be providing the coverage of most of this Visit, as well as for television.

Question: Your Holiness, is there something the Church can do about violence, which is assuming unacceptable proportions in Brazil?

Benedict XVI: Anyone who has faith in Christ, who has faith in this God who is reconciliation and who, with the Cross, set up the strongest sign against violence, is not violent and helps others to overcome violence. Therefore, the most important thing we can do is to educate to faith in Christ, to teach the message that flows from the Person of Christ. Truly, being a man or woman of faith automatically means resisting violence, and this mobilizes forces against it.

Question: Your Holiness, a referendum on the topic of abortion is being proposed in Brazil; in Mexico City two weeks ago, abortion was depenalized. What can the Church do to curb this trend and prevent it from spreading to other Latin American countries, mindful that in Mexico the Pope has even been accused of interference for having supported the Bishops? And do you agree with the Mexican Church that parliamentarians who approve these laws in opposition to God's values should be excommunicated?

Benedict XVI: Here is the Church's great battle for life. You know that Pope John Paul II made it a fundamental point of his entire Pontificate. He wrote an important [Encyclical on the Gospel of Life](#). We are, of course, moving ahead with this message that life is a gift, that life is not a threat. I think that at the root of this legislation, on the one hand, is a certain selfishness, and on the other, also a doubt about the value of life, the beauty of life, and a doubt about the future.

And the Church responds above all to these doubts: life is beautiful, it is not something dubious but is a gift, and even in difficult conditions, life is always a gift. Therefore, re-create this

awareness of the beauty of the gift of life. And then the other matter, doubt about the future: there are, of course, many threats in the world but faith gives us the assurance that God is always stronger and remains present in history and therefore that we can, with confidence, also give life to new human beings. With the awareness of the beauty of life and of God's providential presence in our future which faith gives us, we can resist these fears that are at the root of this legislation.

Question, Brazilian Television: Your Holiness, we note that in your Addresses you refer to the relativism of Europe and the poverty of Africa; but is Latin America somehow left out because it is not a preoccupation? Or perhaps because you will be addressing it more specifically in the future?

Benedict XVI: No, I am very fond of Latin America, I have visited Latin America often, I have very many friends there and I know of this Continent's immense problems but on the other hand, also of its riches. In this period we see how "dominant" the problems of the Middle East, the Holy Land, Iraq, etc., are. Hence, there is, as it were, an immediate priority to be taken into account. And Africa's suffering is immense, as we know. However, I am equally concerned about the problems of Latin America, for I do not love Latin America less, the large - indeed, the largest - Catholic Continent, and thus also the greatest responsibility for a Pope.

I am glad, therefore, that at last the time has come for me to go to Latin America, to reinforce the commitment made by Paul VI and John Paul II and to continue in the same direction. The Pope naturally desires that as well as being the Catholic Continent it may also be an exemplary continent whose huge human problems may be satisfactorily resolved. And together with the Bishops, the priests, Religious and lay people are working to make this great Catholic Continent also become a continent of life and truly of hope. For me this is a top priority.

Question: Your Holiness, in your Arrival Address, you say that it is a question of forming Christian consciences, giving moral instructions then letting them decide freely and conscientiously. Do you agree with the excommunication of the deputies of Mexico City on the issue of abortion?

Benedict XVI: Excommunication is not something arbitrary but a measure prescribed by the [Code](#) [of Canon Law]. Thus, it simply states in Canon Law that the killing of an innocent child is incompatible with going to Communion, where one receives the Body of Christ. Consequently, nothing new, surprising or arbitrary, has been invented. Only what is prescribed by Church Law has been recalled publically, a Law that is based on the doctrine and faith of the Church, on our appreciation of life and of the human individual from the very first instant.

Question in German

Benedict XVI: I am answering this question in Italian. I have been asked whether I feel adequately supported by the Germans and whether I also feel a little homesick for Germany. Yes, I feel sufficiently supported; it is normal in a mixed country (Protestant and Catholic) that not all the

baptized should agree with the Pope; this is to be expected. Nonetheless, it seems to me that I have great support, even from people who belong to the non-Catholic part of Germany, so there is indeed support and it helps me. I love my Homeland but I also love Rome, and I am now a citizen of the world. Thus, I am at home everywhere and I am close to my own Country just as I am to all the others.

Question: *Good morning, Your Holiness! In your Book Jesus of Nazareth, you spoke of a dramatic crisis of faith. This dramatic crisis of faith may not exist in Latin America, yet there certainly is a weakening; liberation theology has been replaced by the theology of the Protestant sects, which promise paradises of faith at a cheap price; and the Catholic Church is losing her faithful. How can this haemorrhage of the Catholic faithful be stemmed?*

Benedict XVI: This is our common concern. Precisely at this Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, we would like to find convincing answers and we are working on it.

The success of the sects shows, on the one hand, that there is a widespread thirst for God, a thirst for religion, that people want to be close to God and seek contact with him. On the other hand, of course, they accept those who present themselves and promise solutions to their problems of daily life. As the Catholic Church, we must implement the precise goal of the Fifth Conference, which is, we must be more missionary and therefore more dynamic in offering responses to the thirst for God, knowing that people, and the poor themselves, want God close to them.

We know that in addition to helping them with this response to their thirst for God, we must help them find a better standard of living, both at the micro-economic level in very practical situations as the sects do, and also at the macro-economic level, thinking of all the requirements of justice.

Question: *As regards my colleague's question, there are still many exponents of liberation theology in various parts of Brazil. What is the specific message to these exponents of liberation theology?*

Benedict XVI: I would say that with the changes in the political situation, the situation of liberation theology is also profoundly different. It is now obvious that these facile millenarianisms - which as a consequence of the revolution promised the full conditions for a just life immediately - were mistaken. Everyone knows this today. The question now concerns how the Church must be present in the fight for the necessary reforms, in the fight for fairer living conditions.

Theologians are divided on this, especially the exponents of political theology. With the *Instruction* published at that time by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we sought to carry out a task of discernment. In other words, we tried to rid ourselves of false millenarianisms and of an erroneous combination of Church and politics, of faith and politics; and to show that the Church's

specific mission is precisely to come up with a response to the thirst for God and therefore also to teach the personal and social virtues that are the necessary conditions for the development of a sense of lawfulness.

Moreover, we have sought to identify guidelines for just policies, political measures in which we ourselves are not involved but for which we must point out the principal lines and values that - shall we say - are crucial to creating human, social and psychological conditions where these values may develop.

Thus, there is room for a difficult but legitimate debate on how to achieve this and on how best to make the Church's social doctrine effective. In this regard, certain liberation theologians are also attempting to advance, keeping to this path; others are taking other positions.

In any case, the intervention of the *Magisterium* was not to destroy the commitment to justice but rather to guide it on the right paths, and also with respect for the proper difference between political responsibility and ecclesiastical responsibility.

Question: We know that you visited Colombia twice when you were a Cardinal and we know that Colombia is dear to your heart. We would like to know what the Church can do to enable us to surmount the current internal conflict in Colombia.

Benedict XVI: Of course, I am not an oracle that automatically has all the right answers. We know that the Bishops have strongly committed themselves to finding these answers. I can only confirm the fundamental line of the Bishops, that is, to put a strong emphasis on faith, which is the surest guarantee against the growth of violence, and at the same time a decisive commitment to educating a conscience that shuns situations incompatible with faith.

Naturally, financial conditions are at stake whereby small farmers survive on a certain market which subsequently permits huge profits elsewhere. One cannot untangle these different financial, political and ideological complexities immediately, but it is necessary to go forward with great determination in sincere adherence to a faith that entails respect for lawfulness and at the same time love and responsibility for the other.

It seems to me that education in the faith is also the most reliable humanization that will gradually be able to solve these very concrete problems.

Question: Your Holiness, we are going to the Continent of Archbishop Oscar Romero. There has been a lot of talk about the process of his Beatification. Your Holiness, would you kindly consider telling us what point it has reached, if he is about to be beatified, and how you see this figure?

Benedict XVI: According to the latest information on the work of the competent Congregation,

many cases are underway and I know that they are going forward. H.E. Mons. Paglia has sent me an important biography which clarifies many points of the question. Archbishop Romero was certainly an important witness of the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace and against the dictatorship, and was assassinated while celebrating Mass. Consequently, his death was truly "credible", a witness of faith. The problem was that a political party wrongly wished to use him as their badge, as an emblematic figure. How can we shed light on his person in the right way and protect it from these attempts to exploit it? This is the problem. It is under examination and I await confidently what the Congregation for the Causes of Saints will have to say on the matter.

Question: How do you regard the impact of the left-wing political regimes in Latin America on the Church's programme for the Continent, and to what extent has Brazilian culture been part of your personal formation?

Benedict XVI: Well, I cannot talk about these aspects of the political action of the left here since I am not sufficiently informed. Above all, as is obvious, I do not wish to enter into questions directly connected with politics. As for my formation, my personal commitment to Brazil, it must be taken into account that this is the largest country in Latin America, a nation that extends from Amazonia to Argentina. Various indigenous cultures exist in Brazil. I have been told that there are more than 80 languages.

Moreover, it has a great past in which the presence of African Americans and African Brazilians is recorded. It is interesting how this people was formed and how the Catholic faith developed in it. The faith was defended in all ages with much difficulty. We know that in the 19th century the Church was persecuted by neo-liberal forces.

Thus, in my formation, one important aspect was to accompany the development of these Catholic peoples in Latin America. I am not an expert, but I am convinced that it is here, at least in part - and a fundamental part -, that the future of the Catholic Church is being decided. This has always been evident to me. Obviously, I also feel the need to further increase my knowledge of this world.

Question: The Portuguese are following and praying for this Journey, which coincides with 13 May. You will be at Aparecida. This date is very important for us because it is the 90th anniversary of the apparitions at Fatima. Would you like to tell us something about this coincidence for the Portuguese People?

Benedict XVI: For me it is truly a gift of Providence that my Mass in Aparecida, Brazil's great Marian Shrine, coincides with the 90th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima. Thus, we see that she herself, Mother of God, Mother of the Church and our Mother, is present on the various continents, and on different continents she reveals herself as Mother always in the same way, showing her special closeness to every people. I find this very beautiful. She is always

Mother of God, she is always Mary, yet she is, so to speak, "inculturated": she has her face, her own special countenance, in Guadalupe, Aparecida, Fatima, Lourdes, in all the countries of the earth.

Thus, in this very way she shows herself as Mother: by being close to all. Consequently, all people draw closer to one another through this love for Our Lady. This link which Our Lady creates between continents, between cultures, by being close to each specific culture and at the same time by unifying them all among themselves, seems to me truly important: the whole of the culture's specific features - each has its own richness - is the unity in communion of God's family itself.

Question in Portuguese: In Brazil there are some people who do not want to listen to the Church's message.

Benedict XVI: This is not exclusive to Brazil. In every corner of the earth there are very many people who do not want to listen to what the Church says. We hope that at least they hear her; then they can also disagree, but it is important that at least they hear her in order to respond. Let us also try to convince those who disagree with her and do not want to listen.

Moreover, we cannot forget that Our Lord did not manage to make everyone listen to him, either. We do not expect to convince everyone all at once. However, with the help of my collaborators, I am endeavouring to speak to Brazil at this moment in the hope that masses of people will want to listen and that very many may also be convinced that this is the road to take, even if it is a road that is always open even to many options and different opinions.

© Copyright 2007 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana