



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND TO THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

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

Papal Flight

Friday, 23 March 2012

Holy Father, Mexico and Cuba are countries in which your Predecessor's Journeys made history. How do you feel and with what hopes are you setting out in his footsteps today?

Dear friends, first of all I would like to say: welcome and thank you for accompanying me on this Journey, which we hope will be blessed by the Lord. On this Journey I am in complete continuity with Pope [John Paul II](#). I remember very clearly his first journey to Mexico which was truly historic. In a juridical situation that was still very muddled, he opened doors, he began a new phase in the collaboration among Church, society and State. And I also remember well his historic Visit to Cuba. I am therefore endeavouring to follow in his footsteps and to continue what he began. From the outset I very much wanted to visit Mexico. I went to Mexico as a cardinal and have excellent memories of it, moreover every Wednesday I hear the applause and feel the joy of the Mexicans. To go there now as Pope gives me great joy and fulfils a wish I have had for so long. To tell you how I feel, the words of the Second Vatican Council spring to my mind: "*gaudium et spes, luctus et angor*" joy and hope, but also grief and anguish. I share in the joys and hopes, but I also share in the grief and in the difficulties of this great country. I am going there in order to bring encouragement and to learn, to bring comfort in faith, hope and love, and to comfort people in the commitment to good and in the commitment to fight evil. Let us hope that the Lord will help us!

Mexico is a country with marvellous resources and possibilities but in these years we know that violence is rife there due to the problem of drug trafficking. It is said that there have been 50,000 deaths in the past five years. How does the Catholic Church confront this situation? Will you have

appropriate words for those in charge and for the traffickers who at times claim to be Catholic or even to be benefactors of the Church?

We know well all the beauties of Mexico, but also this serious problem of drug trafficking and violence. It is certainly a great responsibility for the Catholic Church in a country that is 80 per cent Catholic. We must do our utmost to combat this evil that destroys humanity and our young people. I would say that the first step would be to proclaim God: God is the Judge, God who loves us but who loves us in order to draw us to goodness, to truth against evil.

Thus the Church has the great responsibility to educate consciences, to teach moral responsibility and to expose evil, to expose this idolatry of mammon that only enslaves people; and to expose the false promises, untruthfulness and cheating that are behind drugs. We can see that human beings are in need of the infinite. If God does not exist, infinity creates its own paradises, an appearance of "infinitude" that cannot but be false. This is why God's presence and approachability are so important. It is a great responsibility before God the Judge who guides us, who attracts us to truth and to goodness, and in this sense the Church must expose evil, must make God's goodness present, his truth present, the true infinity for which we thirst. This is the Church's important duty, so together let us all increasingly try to do all we can.

We truly welcome you to Mexico: we are all happy that you are going to Mexico. The question is the following: Holy Father, you said that in Mexico you wish to address the whole of Latin America on the bicentenary of its Independence. Latin America, despite its development, continues to be a region of social disparity where the richest are found side by side with the poorest. At times it seems that the Catholic Church is not sufficiently encouraged to work in this area. Is it possible to continue to speak about "liberation theology" in a positive way now that certain excesses — concerning Marxism or violence — have been corrected?

Naturally the Church must always ask if enough is being done for social justice on this great continent. This is a question of conscience that we must always ask ourselves: what the Church can and must do, what she cannot and should not do? The Church is not a political power, nor a political party, but rather a moral reality, a moral force.

Inasmuch as politics should be a moral reality, on this track the Church fundamentally has to do with politics. I repeat what I have already said: the Church's first thought is to educate consciences and thereby to awaken the necessary responsibility; to educate consciences both in individual and public ethics. And here, perhaps something is missing. In Latin America, and also elsewhere, among many Catholics a certain schizophrenia exists between individual and public morals: personally, in the private sphere, they are Catholics and believers but in public life they follow other trends that do not correspond with the great values of the Gospel which are necessary for the foundation of a just society.

It is therefore necessary to teach people to overcome this schizophrenia, teaching not only individual morality but also public morality. We try to do this with the Church's Social Teaching because public morality must of course be a reasonable morality, shared and shareable by non-believers too, a morality of reason. Naturally, in the light of faith, we can see so many things better that reason can also see. However, it is faith itself that serves to liberate reason from false interests, to save it from being blurred by interests, and thus to create through the Social Teaching the essential models for political collaboration, especially in order to surmount this social, antisocial division which unfortunately exists. We want to work in this direction.

I do not know whether the phrase: "liberation theology" which can also be understood very well, would be of much help to us. What is important is the common rationality to which the Church makes a fundamental contribution and her continuous help in the education of consciences, for both public and private life.

Your Holiness, let us look at Cuba. We all remember John Paul II's famous words: "May Cuba open itself up to the world and may the world open itself up to Cuba". Fourteen years have passed but it seems that these words are still timely. As you know, while expecting your Visit, many opposing and pro human rights voices were raised. Your Holiness, are you considering taking up John Paul II's Message concerning both the internal situation of Cuba and the international situation?

As I said, I am totally in accord with the words of the Holy Father [John Paul II](#), which are still very up-to-date. This visit of the Pope paved the way for collaboration and constructive dialogue; a road that is long and demands patience but stretches out ahead of us. Today it is obvious that the Marxist ideology as it was conceived no longer corresponds to reality: it is no longer possible to respond to or to build up a society in this way. New models must be found, patiently and constructively.

In this process, which requires patience but also determination, we intend to help in a spirit of dialogue, to avoid traumas and to offer assistance on the journey towards the fraternal and just society that we want for the whole world, and we mean to cooperate to achieve this. It is obvious that the Church is always on the side of freedom: freedom of conscience, freedom of religion. In this regard we contribute, as well as the simple faithful, to this forward journey.

After the Aparecida Conference the people began talking about a "Continental Mission" of the Church in Latin America; in a few months the Synod on the New Evangelization will take place and the Year of Faith will begin. In Latin America too the challenges of secularization and of the sects exist. Cuba is suffering from the consequences of atheist propaganda over a long period. The Afro-Cuban sense of religion is very widespread. Do you think that this Journey will be an encouragement for the "New Evangelization"? What points do you have most at heart in this perspective?

The period of the New Evangelization began with the Council; this was basically Pope John XXIII's intention. Pope John Paul II strongly emphasized the “need” for it in a world that is undergoing great changes, and this is becoming ever more evident. “Need” in the sense that the Gospel must be expressed in new ways; “need” also in the other sense, that the world stands in need of a word, in the confusion and difficulty of finding the way today. There is a common situation in the world: there is secularization, the absence of God, the difficulty of approaching him, of seeing him as a reality that is relevant to one’s life.

On the one hand, there are also the specific contexts; you mentioned those in Cuba with Afro-Cuban syncretism, with many other difficulties, yet every country has its own specific cultural situation. On the other, we should start from the common problem: now today, in this context of our modern rationality, we can rediscover God as the fundamental direction of our life, the fundamental hope of our life, the basis of the values that really build a society up and how we can take into account the specificity of the different situations.

The first point seems to me to be very important: proclaiming a God who responds to our reason, so that we can see the rationality of the cosmos, see that there is something behind it, but we do not see how close this God is, how he relates to me and this synthesis of the great and majestic God and of the little God who is close to me, guides me, shows me the values of my life is the core of evangelization. Hence, essentially a Christianity in which the fundamental nucleus may truly be found for life today with all the problems of our time.

Further, we must take into account the concrete situation. In Latin America, in general, it is very important that Christianity mean more to the heart than to reason. Our Lady of Guadalupe is recognized and loved by all, because people understand that she is a Mother to all and has been present from the outset in this new Latin America, after the arrival of the Europeans. And also in Cuba we have Our Lady of El Cobre who moves hearts and everyone knows intuitively that it is true, that Our Lady helps us, that she exists and loves and helps us. Yet this intuition of the heart must fit into the rationality of the faith and with the depth of faith that goes beyond reason. We must be of good courage and connect heart and reason so that they may cooperate, for only in this way is man complete and really able to help build, and to work for, a better future.