



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED KINGDOM
(SEPTEMBER 16-19, 2010)

**INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
WITH THE JOURNALISTS
DURING THE FLIGHT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Papal Flight
Thursday, 16 September 2010

Father Lombardi: *Your Holiness, we welcome you among us and we thank you for your availability. We are a group of 70 journalists from different parts of the world. Naturally some come from the United Kingdom, wanting to join us from the beginning on this flight. As usual my colleagues during the last few days have presented some questions which we will put to you for this first conversation at the beginning of an important and challenging journey, that we hope will be very beautiful. I have chosen some questions from among those presented. I will ask you in Italian so as not to tire you. Some colleagues will assist those who do not understand Italian sufficiently.*

The first question: during the preparation of this visit there have been discussions and contrasting opinions. In the country's past traditions there have been strong anti-Catholic positions. Are you worried about how you are going to be received?

The Holy Father: "Above all I wish you a good-day and a pleasant flight to all of us. I must admit that I am not worried, because when I went to France, it was said that it was the most anticlerical country, with strong anticlerical opinions and very few believers; when I went to the Czech Republic it was said that it was the most irreligious country in Europe and the most anticlerical also. Yes, all Western countries have, each one in its own way, strong anticlerical and anti-Catholic opinions, but they also have a strong presence of the faith. I have seen and received in France and in the Czech Republic a warm reception from the Catholic community, great attention

from agnostics who are still seeking, who wish to know and find the values that assist the progress of humanity and they were attentive, hoping maybe to hear from me something in this vein. As regards tolerance and respect from anti-Catholics, naturally Great Britain has had its own history of anti-Catholicism. This is obvious; but it is also a country with a great history of tolerance. And so I am sure that there will be a positive welcome from Catholics and believers in general, attention from those who are seeking how to move forward in our time, and respect and tolerance where there is anti-Catholicism. I am going in good spirits and with joy.”

Father Lombardi: *The United Kingdom, like many other Western countries – this is a theme that was already touched upon in the first response – is considered a secular nation, with a strong atheistic movement associated with cultural influences; however there are also signs that religious faith, in particular in Jesus Christ, is still vibrant at the personal level. What might this mean for Catholics and Anglicans? Can one do something to make the Church as an institution more credible and attractive to all?*

The Holy Father: “One might say that a church which seeks above all to be attractive would already be on the wrong path, because the Church does not work for itself, does not work to increase its numbers so as to have more power. The Church is at the service of Another; it does not serve itself, seeking to be a strong body, but it strives to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ accessible, the great truths, the great powers of love and of reconciliation that appeared in this figure and that come always from the presence of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the Church does not seek to be attractive, but rather to make herself transparent for Jesus Christ. And in the measure in which the Church is not for herself, as a strong and powerful body in the world, that wishes to have power, but simply is herself the voice of Another, she becomes truly transparent to the great figure of Jesus Christ and the great truths that he has brought to humanity, the power of love; it is then when the Church is heard and accepted. She should not consider herself, but assist in considering the Other, and should herself see and speak of the Other and for the Other. In this sense it seems to me also that Anglicans and Catholics have the simple task, the same task, the same direction to take. If Anglicans and Catholics see that both are not there for themselves, but are rather instruments of Christ, ‘friends of the Bridegroom,’ as Saint John says; if both follow together the priority of Christ and not themselves, they draw closer together, because the priority of Christ brings them together, they are no longer in competition, each one seeking greater numbers, but are united in commitment to the truth of Christ who comes into this world, and so they find themselves also placed reciprocally in a true and fruitful ecumenism.”

Father Lombardi: *Thank you Your Holiness. A third question. It is known and recent polls have shown that the sexual abuse scandals have shaken the trust of the faithful in the Church. How do you intend to act so as to re-establish this trust?*

The Holy Father: Above all I must say that these revelations were a shock for me. They are a great sadness, and it is hard to understand how this perversion of the priestly ministry was

possible. The priest, at the moment of ordination, a moment for which he prepared for years, says “yes” to Christ, in order to be his mouth, his hand and to serve with all his being so that the Good Shepherd who loves us, who helps and guides us to truth, may be present in the world. How a man who has said and done this can afterwards fall into such perversions is difficult to understand. It is a great sadness, a great sadness also that Church leadership was not sufficiently vigilant and sufficiently swift and decisive in taking the necessary measures. On account of this we are living a time of penance, humility, renewed sincerity, as I wrote to the Irish Bishops. I feel that we must now be engaged in a time of penance, a time of humility; we must renew and learn again absolute sincerity. In relation to the victims I would like to say that there are three important things. Our first interest must be the victims; how to repair the damage, how to assist these persons in overcoming their trauma, in finding life again, in finding again trust in the message of Christ. Care, commitment in favour of the victims is the first priority, together with material, psychological and spiritual assistance. Secondly there is the problem of those who are guilty. A just penalty must exclude them from all access to young people. We know that this is an illness, that free will does not rule where this illness is present, and that we must protect these persons from themselves and find a way to assist them and to protect them from themselves and exclude them from access to young people. Thirdly there is the question of prevention through education and the selection of candidates to the priesthood. We must be in such a way attentive so as to exclude, according to human possibilities, future cases. Here I would like to thank the British Bishops for their attention, their cooperation both with the See of Peter and with the civil authorities, and for their attention to victims and respect for the law. I have the impression that the British Bishops have been doing and are doing a good job and I am grateful to them.”

Father Lombardi: *Your Holiness, Cardinal Newman is obviously very important for you. For Cardinal Newman you are making an exception by presiding at his beatification. Are you of the opinion that recalling him can help to overcome divisions between Anglicans and Catholics? Also, what aspects of his personality do you intend to stress more?*

The Holy Father: “On the one hand Cardinal Newman was above all a modern man, who lived the whole problem of modernity; he faced the problem of agnosticism, the impossibility of knowing God, of believing. He was a man whose whole life was a journey, a journey in which he allowed himself to be transformed by truth in a search marked by great sincerity and great openness, so as to know better and to find and accept the path that leads to true life. This interior modernity, in his being and in his life, demonstrates the modernity of his faith. It is not a faith of formulas of past ages; it is a very personal faith, a faith lived, suffered and found in a long path of renewal and conversion. He was a man of great culture, who on the other hand shared in our sceptical culture of today, in the question whether we can know something for certain regarding the truth of man and his being, and how we can come to convergent probabilities. He was a man with a great culture and knowledge of the Fathers of the Church. He studied and renewed the interior genesis of faith and recognized its inner form and construction. He was a man of great spirituality, of humanity, of prayer, with a profound relationship with God, a personal relationship, and hence a

deep relationship with the people of his time and ours. So I would point to these three elements: modernity in his life with the same doubts and problems of our lives today; his great culture, his knowledge of the treasures of human culture, openness to permanent search, to permanent renewal and, spirituality, spiritual life, life with God; these elements give to this man an exceptional stature for our time. That is why he is like a Doctor of the Church for us and for all, and also a bridge between Anglicans and Catholics.”

Father Lombardi: *One last question. This visit is considered a State visit, as such it has been qualified. What does this mean for the relations between the Holy See and the United Kingdom? Are there important areas of convergence, especially regarding the great challenges of today's world?*

The Holy Father: “I am very grateful to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who decided to give this visit the official status of a State visit, which expresses the public character of the visit and also the common responsibility of politics and religion for the future of the continent and the future of humanity. Our high and common responsibility is to see that the values that create justice and politics, and those that come from religion, walk together in our time. Naturally the fact that, from a juridical point of view, this is a State visit, does not make my visit a political reality, because if the Pope is a head of State, this is just an instrument that guarantees the independence of his message and the public character of his work as Pastor. In this sense the State visit is substantially and essentially a pastoral visit, a visit made in responsibility for the faith, for which the Pope exists. Naturally a State visit centres the attention on the connection between political interests and religion. Substantially politics came into being in order to guarantee justice, and with justice, freedom. Now justice is a moral value, a religious value, and hence faith, the proclamation of the Gospel, is linked to politics at the point of “justice”, and from here are born common interests. Great Britain has a long experience and is greatly active in the struggle against the evils of our times, against suffering, poverty, disease, drugs; and these same struggles against suffering, poverty, human slavery, human abuse, drugs, are also objectives of faith because they are objectives of the humanization of man, seeking to restore to him the image of God, against destruction and devastation. A second common task is the commitment to peace in the world and the capacity to live in peace, education for peace, creating the virtues that make persons capable of living in peace. And finally an essential element for peace is interreligious dialogue, tolerance, openness to one another, and this is a profound aim, both in Great Britain as a society, and in the Catholic faith, to open hearts, to open people to dialogue, to be open in this way to truth and to the common path of humanity and to find again the values that are at the foundation of our humanism.”

Father Lombardi: *Thank you Your Holiness for your words. You have extended before us a panorama of the meaning of so many messages that you intend to convey during these days and we hope that you may be effective in doing so in all your talks. Since we are communicators, we assure you of our cooperation in the proper understanding and transmission of your messages.*

We are grateful to you for giving to us from the beginning your time and energy and we offer you our best wishes for the present journey. Thank you Your Holiness.

© Copyright 2010 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana