

<http://www.zenit.org/article-22315?l=english>

ZE08041610 - 2008-04-16

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-22315?l=english>

## **PRESS CONFERENCE ABOARD PAPAL FLIGHT**

### **"I Go to the United States With Joy"**

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 16, 2008 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the press conference Benedict XVI gave on the plane en route to the United States on Tuesday.

The transcription was provided today by Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office. Father Lombardi acted as a moderator during the press conference.

\* \* \*

Father Lombardi: Your Holiness, welcome! On behalf of all my colleagues here present, I thank you for your very kind availability in coming to greet us and also for giving us some indications and ideas for following this trip. This is your second intercontinental trip, your first as Holy Father to America, to the United States and the United Nations. An important and very awaited trip. To begin with, would you like to tell us something about your sentiments, the hopes with which you face this journey and what is your fundamental objective, from your point of view?

Benedict XVI: My trip has above all two objectives. The first objective is the visit to the Church in America, in the United States. There is a particular motive: The Diocese of Baltimore, 200 years ago, was elevated to the status of metropolis and at the same time, four other dioceses were born -- New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Louisville. So it is a great jubilee for this nucleus of the Church in the United States, a moment of reflection about the past and above all of reflection about the future, about how to respond to the great challenges of our time, in the present and with sights set on the future. And naturally, the interreligious encounter and the ecumenical encounter form part of this trip too, particularly also an encounter in the synagogue with our Jewish friends, on the eve of their feast of Passover. Therefore, this is the religious-pastoral aspect of the Church in the United States in this moment of our history, and the encounter with all the others in this common brotherhood that links us in a common responsibility.

I would like in this moment to also give thanks to President Bush, who will come to the airport, will set aside a lot of time for conversation and will receive me on the occasion of my birthday.

Second objective, the visit to the United Nations. Also here there is a particular motive: 60 years have passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This is the anthropological base, the founding philosophy of the United Nations, the human and spiritual base on which it is constructed. Thus it is really a moment of reflection, a moment to again become aware of this important stage in history. In the Universal Declaration of Human Right, various cultural traditions have blended together, above all an anthropology that recognizes in man the subject of rights, coming before all institutions, with common values that must be respected by everyone. Therefore, this visit, which takes place precisely in a moment of a values crisis, seems to me important to reconfirm both that everything began in this moment and to recover it for our future.

Father Lombardi: Let us move now to the questions that you have turned in during these days and that some of you will ask the Holy Father. Let's begin with the question from John Allen, who I don't think needs an introduction because he is very well known as a Vatican commentator in the United States.

Q: Holy Father, I ask the question in English, if you allow me, and maybe, if it could be possible, if we could have a phrase, a word in English, we would be very thankful. The question: The Church that you will find in the United States is a large Church, a living Church, but also a Church that suffers, in a certain sense, above all because of the recent crisis due to sexual abuses. The American people are awaiting a word from you, a message from you about this crisis. What will be your message for this suffering Church?

Benedict XVI [in English]: It is a great suffering for the Church in the United States and for the Church in general, for me personally, that this could happen. If I read the history of these events, it is difficult for me to understand how it was possible for priests to fail in this way the mission to give healing, to give God's love to these children. I am ashamed and we will do everything possible to ensure that this does not happen in future. I think we have to act on three levels: the first is at the level of justice and the political level. I will not speak at this moment about homosexuality: this is another thing. We will absolutely exclude pedophiles from the sacred ministry; it is absolutely incompatible and who is really guilty of being a pedophile cannot be a priest. So at this first level we can do justice and help the victims, because they are deeply affected; these are the two sides of justice: one, that pedophiles cannot be priests and the other, to help in any possible way the victims.

Then, there's a pastoral level. The victims will need healing and help and assistance and reconciliation: this is a big pastoral engagement and I know that the bishops and the priests and all Catholic people in the United States will do whatever possible to help, to assist, to heal. We have made a visitation of the seminaries and we will do all that is possible in the education of seminarians for a deep spiritual, human and intellectual formation for the students. Only sound persons can be admitted to the priesthood and only persons with a deep personal life in Christ and who have a deep sacramental life. So, I know that the bishops and directors of seminarians will do all possible to have a strong, strong discernment because it is more important to have good priests than to have many priests. This is also our third level, and we hope that we can do and we have done and we will do in the future all that is possible to heal these wounds.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness. Another theme about which we've

had many questions from our colleagues is that of immigration -- the presence in U.S. society of Spanish-speaking people as well. And because of this, the question will be asked by our colleague Andrés Leonardo Beltramo Álvarez, who is from an information agency of Mexico.

Q: Your Holiness, I will ask the question in Italian, and then if you want, you can make your comments in Spanish. ... A greeting, just a greeting. ... There is an enormous growth in Hispanic presence also in the Church in the United States in general: The Catholic community is becoming ever more bilingual and ever more bicultural. At the same time, there exists in the society an increasing anti-immigration movement. The situation of the immigrants is characterized by unstable situations and discrimination. Do you intend to speak of this problem and to invite America to welcome immigrants, many of whom are Catholic?

Benedict XVI: I cannot speak in Spanish but mis saludos y mi bendición para todos los hispánicos [my greetings and my blessing for the Hispanic people.] I certainly will touch on this point. I have received various "ad limina" visits from the Central American bishops and also from South America, and I have seen the amplitude of this problem, above all the grave problem of the separation of families. And this is truly dangerous for the social, moral and human fabric of these countries. Nevertheless, one must differentiate between measures that must be adopted right away and long-term solutions.

The fundamental solution is that there would no longer exist the need to emigrate because there would be in one's own country sufficient work, a sufficient social fabric, such that no one has to emigrate. Therefore we should all work for this objective, for a social development that permits offering citizens work and a future in their land of origin. And also about this point, I would like to speak with the president, because above all the United States should help with the aim that these countries can develop in this way. This is in the interest of everyone, not just of these countries, but of the world, and also of the United States.

Besides this, short-term measures: It is very important to help the families above all. In the light of the conversations that I have had with the bishops, the principal problem is that there be protection for the families, that they not be destroyed. What can be done should be done. In the same way, naturally, all that is possible must be done to work against the instability of the situations and against all the violations, and to help so that they can have a truly dignified life where they find themselves in this moment.

I would like to also say that there are many problems, many sufferings, but there is also a lot of hospitality! I know that above all the American episcopal conference collaborates a lot with the Latin American episcopal conferences in the face of needed help. With all the sorrowful things, let's not forget also so much true humanity, so many positive actions that also exist.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness. Now a question that refers to American society: precisely about the role of religious values in American society. We give the floor to our colleague Andrea Torielli, who is a Vatican reporter for an Italian newspaper:

Q: Holy Father, when you received the new ambassador of the United States to the Holy See, [she] mentioned as a positive value the public recognition of religion in the United States. I would like to ask you if you consider it as a possible model also for secularized Europe, or if you think that there can also be the risk that religion and the name of God can be used to justify certain policies, or even war.

Benedict XVI: Certainly in Europe, we cannot simply copy the United States: We have our history. But all of us should learn from each other. What I find fascinating in the United States is that they began with a positive concept of secularism, because this new people was formed by communities and people who had fled from the state churches and wanted to have a lay state, secular, that would open possibilities to all confessions, for all the types of religious exercise. In this way, an intentionally secular state was born: They were against a state church.

But the state should be secular precisely out of love for religion in its authenticity, which can be lived only with liberty. And in this manner we find this mix of a state that is intentionally and decidedly secular, but precisely because of a religious will, to give authenticity to religion. We already know that Alexis de Tocqueville, studying America, saw that the secular institutions live with a moral consensus that exists in fact among the citizens.

This seems to me a fundamental and positive model. One must consider that in Europe, meanwhile, 200 years have passed, more than 200 years, with a lot of developments. Now there exists also in the United States the assault of a new secularism, of everything being diverse, and therefore, before, the problem was the immigration, but the situation has become more complicated and diverse over the course of history. But the basis, the fundamental model, seems to me all the same today, worthy of having it present also in Europe.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness. And now a last theme regarding your visit to the United Nations, and this last question falls to John Thavis, who is the Rome director of the Catholic news agency of the United States.

Q: Holy Father, the Pope is frequently thought of as the conscience of humanity, and also because of this your address at the United Nations is much awaited. I would like to ask: Do you think that a multilateral institution like the United Nations can safeguard the principles takes as "non-negotiables" by the Catholic Church, that is, the fundamental principles of natural law?

Benedict XVI: That is precisely the objective of the United Nations: that it safeguard the common values of humanity, upon which the peaceful coexistence of the nations is based: the observance of justice and the development of justice. I have already briefly mentioned that it seems to me very important that the basis of the United Nations be precisely the idea of human rights, of the rights that express non-negotiable values, that come before all institutions and are the basis of all institutions. And it is important that there exist this convergence between cultures that have found a consensus on the fact that these values are fundamental, that they are inscribed in the very being of the human [person]. To renew this awareness that the United Nations, with its

peacemaking function, can work only if has the common basis of the values that are expressed afterward in "rights" that should be observed by everyone; to confirm this fundamental idea and to actualize it as much as possible is one objective of my mission.

Finally, given that at the beginning Father Lombardi asked me about my sentiments, I want to say "I go to the United States with joy!" I have been in the United States various times before; I am familiar with this great country; I am familiar with the great vivacity of the Church despite all the problems and I am content to be able to meet, in this historical moment both for the Church and for the United Nations, this great people and this great Church. Thank you to everyone!

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness, on behalf of all of us. We truly renew our desires for this trip: that it may have all the fruits you hope for, and that we also, together with you, await. Thank you and have a good trip!

[Translation by ZENIT]

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).

[PRINT THIS PAGE!](#)