

VISIT TO ROME OF HIS BEATITUDE ANASTASIOS
ARCHBISHOP OF TIRANA, DURRES AND ALL ALBANIA

3-8 December 2009

ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE ANASTASIOS

4 December 2009

Your Holiness Benedict,
Pope of Rome,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pt 1:3). Today is a historic day for the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. It is the first time that an official delegation from our Church has visited the Church of Rome and has the honour and joy of personal communication with Your Holiness; Whom we know as a profound thinker, an outstanding theologian, defender of peace and justice, a champion of solidarity between peoples and a creative ecclesiastical leader.

In the 20th century, the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania was subjected to one of the most terrible persecutions. From 1944 until 1967, this took the familiar form of the pressures that all the Churches in Eastern Europe suffered. But from 1967 until 1990, the Church in Albania was literally brought to “the gates of Hell”. The Constitution banned all religious expression and, together with relentless persecution, brought about the Church’s complete dissolution.

By the grace and power of God, our Church has been built afresh, and has brought together all the Orthodox Christians in Albania, irrespective of ethnic background. She has grown systematically: by fostering the liturgical life, preaching, catechism and the translation and publication of Christian literature; by training and ordaining more than 140 Albanian clergymen; by the construction of 145 new churches; by the restoration of 70 more and the repair of another 160 churches and ecclesiastical centres; and, above all, by intense efforts to bring the younger generation to Christ. At the same time, she is making an active contribution to the progress of Albanian society, with significant initiatives in the areas of health, education, social welfare, agricultural development and culture. (...)

We entirely share the emphasis You placed in Your first Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* on the

fact that “everything has its origins in God’s love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it”. And also the declaration in Your last Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, that “God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because He is our All, our greatest hope”. Certainly, the outstanding mission and responsibility of every local Church is to offer love, thus linking people to the source of love. No other social structure or institution is in a position to replace it. “Speaking the truth in love” we are called to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

Let us not be troubled over the future. Because we see that the future belongs to Christ. That He is the One, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8). And He is coming again; from the future!

We know, Your Holiness, that, throughout Your long academic and ecclesiastical service, You have supported, as You still do, faith in this unique assurance, with Your profound thought, Your unfailing generosity of spirit, Your prophetic foresight. From the Church in Albania, which has suffered so much, please accept our warm thanks for the honour of today’s audience, our cordial and sincere best wishes. From the bottom of our hearts we entreat that the Lord God, through the prayers of the All-Holy Theotokos, guides the thoughts and actions of Your Holiness, so that You may, though Your life and work, radiate the light of Christ onto the contemporary world, which is thirsting for love, peace and hope. May Your works be abundant and gloriously bountiful!

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