

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

3-8 December 2009

ADDRESS OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

4 décembre 2009

Your Beatitude,

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:2). I am pleased to extend a fraternal welcome to Your Beatitude and to the other distinguished representatives of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania accompanying you today. I recall with gratitude, in spite of the sad circumstances, our meeting at the funeral of the late Pope John Paul II. I also remember with satisfaction how my same venerable Predecessor had the occasion to greet you in Tirana during his Apostolic Visit to Albania.

As is well known, Illyricum received the Gospel in Apostolic times (cf. Acts 17:1; Rom 15:19). Since then, Christ’s saving message has borne fruit in your country down to our own day. As the very earliest writings of your culture bear witness, through the survival of an ancient Latin baptismal formula along with a Byzantine hymn about the Lord’s Resurrection, the faith of our Christian forefathers left wonderful and indelible traces in the first lines of the history, literature and arts of your people.

Yet the most impressive witness is surely always found in life itself. During the latter half of the past century, the Christians in Albania, both Orthodox and Catholic, kept the faith alive there in spite of an extremely repressive and hostile atheistic regime; and, as is well known, many Christians paid cruelly for that faith with their lives. The fall of that regime has happily given way to the reconstruction of the Catholic and Orthodox communities in Albania. The missionary activity of Your Beatitude is recognized, particularly in the reconstruction of places of worship, the formation of the clergy and the catechetical work now being done, a movement of renewal which Your Beatitude has rightly described as *Ngjallja* (Resurrection).

Since it acquired its freedom, the Orthodox Church of Albania has been able to participate fruitfully in the international theological dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox. Your commitment in this regard happily mirrors the fraternal relations

offers inspiration to the entire Albanian people, demonstrating how it is possible for fellow Christians to live in harmony.

In this light, we would do well to emphasize the elements of faith which our Churches share: a common profession of the Nicene–Constantinopolitan creed; a common baptism for the remission of sins and for incorporation into Christ and the Church; the legacy of the first Ecumenical Councils; the real if imperfect communion which we already share, and the common desire and collaborative efforts to build upon what already exists. I am reminded here of two important initiatives in Albania, the establishment of the Interconfessional Biblical Society and the creation of the Committee for Interreligious Relations. These are timely efforts to promote mutual understanding and tangible cooperation, not only between Catholics and Orthodox, but also among Christians, Muslims and Bektashi.

I rejoice with Your Beatitude and with all the Albanian people in this spiritual renewal. At the same time, it is with gratitude to Almighty God that I reflect on your own service to your country and on your personal contribution to fostering fraternal relations with the Catholic Church. Be assured that we, for our part, will do all that we can to offer a common witness of brotherhood and peace, and to pursue with you a renewed commitment to the unity of our Churches in obedience to the New Commandment of our Lord.

Your Beatitude, it is in this spirit of communion that I am pleased to welcome you to the city of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

ORE, December 9, 2009

Information Service 133 (2010/I) 5