

# Benedict XVI Offers Life Lessons to Obama

## US President Makes 1st Visit to Vatican

VATICAN CITY, JULY 10, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Abortion, conscience protection and bioethics took center stage as Benedict XVI and U.S. President Barack Obama met for the first time today.

The Pope received the president, who was in Italy for the Group of Eight summit that end today in L'Aquila, for about a half hour in a private, closed-door meeting.

In a communiqué issued shortly after the meeting concluded, the Vatican reported that the "conversation turned first of all to questions which are in the interests of all and which constitute a great challenge for the future of every nation and for the true progress of peoples, such as the defense and promotion of life and the right to abide by one's conscience."

"Reference was also made to immigration with particular attention to the matter of reuniting families," the note added. "The meeting focused as well upon matters of international politics, especially in light of the outcome of the G-8 Summit.

"The conversation also dealt with the peace process in the Middle East, on which there was general agreement, and with other regional situations. Certain current issues were then considered, such as dialogue between cultures and religions, the global economic crisis and its ethical implications, food security, development aid especially for Africa and Latin America, and the problem of drug trafficking.

"Finally, the importance of educating young people everywhere in the value of tolerance was highlighted."

## Reading material

Benedict XVI gave to the U.S. president a copy of his recently published encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate," and a copy of the 2009 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "Dignitas Personae" (The Dignity of a Person), which deals with questions of bioethics.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the director of the Vatican press office, told Vatican Radio after the audience that the Pope's gift of the letter "Dignitas Humane" was "very significant."

"In the United States," he explained, "there is currently a great debate on the fundamental value of the defense of life, and in this the perspective of the Church and the politics of President Obama show differences, at time quite significant."

Father Lombardi revealed that the president confirmed that "he has every intention, with the commitment of the government, to reduce as much as possible, the number of abortions."

The two also discussed "moral values in international politics, immigration and the Catholic Church's contribution in developing countries," added Father Lombardi, and the "the importance of the education of tolerance in every country."

Obama gave to Benedict XVI a stole that had been placed on the remains of St. John Neumann

(1811-1860), a Redemptorist who is currently the only canonized bishop of the United States.

An honor

Upon meeting Benedict XVI, Obama told him that it was a "great honor" to meet him.

The Pontiff asked Obama how the G-8 meetings had gone, and Obama answered that they were "very productive."

After the private meeting, the Holy Father greeted Obama's wife, Michelle, and their two daughters, Malia and Sasha.

Michelle and the two Obama daughters arrived to the Vatican an hour before the president to visit St. Peter's Basilica.

After the audience with the Pope, the family visited the Vatican Grottoes and the Sistine Chapel, which is currently closed to the public.

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