



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

"I want to serve the Order in continuity with my predecessor"

Exclusive interview with Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, the new Governor General of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



Excellency, as you settle into the role of Governor General of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, what are your innermost sentiments?

I have some trepidation, being well aware that this is a very important office within the Church in the service of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. Professor Agostino Borromeo has devoted his professional life to the history of the Church and has always viewed his commitment to the Order as an ecclesial mission, so he was very well suited to taking on the responsibility of the Governorship for two terms. We must pay homage to him as he leaves a healthy legacy: we have never had so many members and so many donations. My experience is very different, as I have served my country in the diplomatic service as an ambassador and this has allowed me to establish many important international relations. I trust that this will be useful to our pontifical institution which is universal in dimension. However, I still have a lot to learn from my consueurs and my confrères, Dames and Knights all over the world, and I count on Agostino Borromeo to accompany me, especially in the first phase of my four-year term. I want to serve the Order in continuity with my predecessor.

You mentioned your diplomatic experience. In what way would you see it as being valuable to exercising your new role, alongside the Grand Master, at the head of the Order?

Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations that structure the life of the Order on all continents are somewhat equivalent to embassies for a government. Looking at the map of our peripheral structures, in many countries, I think of my work that has been, for over forty years, in dialogue with a multilateral diplomatic network. I can therefore make this dialogue experience available to promote cooperation, exchange, coherence in action and a dynamic of communion between all and everyone. I will have to

visit the Lieutenants, keep in touch with our local leaders in continuity with what Professor Borromeo accomplished and in accordance with the directives of our Grand Master appointed by the Holy Father, His Eminence Cardinal Edwin O'Brien. He himself sets the example by frequently traveling to meet our members and to encourage their spiritual life and their mission of service to the Mother Church which is in the Holy Land. His visits, in recent years, have revitalized the Order in a truly exceptional way.

Your right-hand-man in all of this, Ambassador Alfredo Bastianelli, who has been Chancellor of the Order for about a year, is also a close former colleague from the diplomatic service. How will your collaboration work?

I am pleased to find my colleague and friend Ambassador Alfredo Bastianelli. We worked together with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in close collaboration for many years. As Chancellor of the Order, his in-depth knowledge of the current situation will be of great help, especially as I take my first steps as Governor General. We will continue to work in close proximity and complementarity, as we did earlier in our shared diplomatic career.

In your opinion, what is the current situation of the Order and what are the challenges that lie ahead in the coming years?

The Order is important for the Church and for society, but it deserves greater consideration because it is too often unknown to the public and even to the political world. For example, we are honored that the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, is a member of the Order. His engagement could inspire other authorities who, by approaching our pontifical institution, could contribute to developing a synergy at the service of the people of the Middle East who suffer so much in this time of "piecemeal world war" as the Pope has called it. Our action in the Holy Land is in fact fundamental, especially through the educational works we sustain in Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Cyprus, on the vast territory of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. We will have to boost our communications to participate in initiatives in favor of justice and peace in these regions of the world where people aspire to fraternity and serenity in a dialogue of cultures and respect for different religious traditions.

The Pope counts on the Order of the Holy Sepulchre to continue to support Christians in the Middle East whose role as mediators is fundamental: they constitute a great bridge between communities, as witnesses of openness to others and actors of dialogue in fidelity to the Gospel of Christ. In your view, what can be improved within the Order to help boost this mission?

The Holy Father invites us to evangelical consistency. His directives call out to us: we must give less importance to the external aspect of our belonging to the Order and to favor our inner, spiritual commitment to deepen our struggle for dialogue and social justice in the Holy Land. My concept of the Church is in full agreement with that of Pope Francis, and I hope that the members of the Order will be increasingly focused on the living Gospel, abandoning everything that can, from a distance or from close up, evoke vanity, pride, and "worldliness." This is the expression of the Catholic faith that my wife and I have tried to convey to our three children and that is what we now witness to our six grandchildren. Humility is the only path that radiates the joy of the Kingdom of God already in this world.

What is the first message you want to send to the members of the Order as you take up office?

I invite all the members of the Order to unity and ask them to strengthen their effective participation in resolving problems in the Holy Land, especially by going on pilgrimage and being in contact with people on the ground as often as possible. I have been deeply affected by my pilgrimages to the Holy Land, which began in my adolescence. At 13 I had the opportunity to live for some weeks in a kibbutz with other pilgrims and the priest of my parish, and I believe that we must do everything to educate young people to love this land, where God-made-man gave his life to teach us to live as brothers and sisters. In this sense, we should take care not to superimpose our liturgical celebrations with respect to our mission of solidarity: their meaning is to spiritually nourish our commitment to serving the Church's works on biblical territories that the Pope entrusts to our care. That is why we must create local synergies with all the political, social and economic forces, eager to promote peace and justice in these lands of suffering and hope.

Let's prepare for the 2018 Consulta, which will bring together the leaders of the Order in order to welcome our new statutes to adapt our whole course of action to the challenges that await us. The urgency is consistency.

Interview by François Vayne,

for the Communication Office of the Grand Magisterium of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

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BRIEF CURRICULUM VITAE OF AMBASSADOR LEONARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE

Leonardo Visconti di Modrone was born in Milan in 1947 and graduated in Economics and Commerce in 1970.

He entered the Italian Diplomatic Corps in 1971 and served in diplomatic representations in New York (United Nations), Cairo, London, Vienna and Madrid. He has also carried out foreign missions in various European nations, North and South America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

He has served as an advisor to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers with ten different heads of government.

From 2005 to 2010, he was the Head of the Diplomatic Ceremonial of the Republic. He finished his career in 2012 as Ambassador of Italy to Spain.

Later he held positions for the Italian Government, among which he was recently consultant in the organization of the G7 Summit in Taormina.

He is a member of the Grand Magisterium of Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem since 2014.

Married in 1971 with Anna Sanfelice di Monteforte, he has three daughters and six grandchildren.