



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

“The Patriarch is the pastor of the Church of the Holy Land, of which the Custody is an important and constitutive part.”

Interview with Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem



Your Beatitude, before becoming Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, you were the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land. Many people still confuse these two institutions of the Latin Church, the Patriarchate and the Custody; could you explain in a few words how their two missions are distinct, and how they complement each other? Is it correct to say, for example, that the Custody is dedicated to the holy places and the reception of pilgrims, while the Latin Patriarchate is primarily concerned with the pastoral care of the local parish communities and schools that are linked to them?

The Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate are two important Catholic institutions of the Holy Land, which have had an important role in the medieval and recent history of the Christian and Catholic community.

For over 800 years, the Custody has received from the popes the important responsibility of safeguarding the Places of Redemption, that is, the Holy Places, on behalf of the entire Church. For a long time, however, after the Crusader period, it was not possible to install bishops in the Holy Land for the ordinary life of the Church, due to the limitations of the authorities of the time. For this reason, for many centuries the Franciscans took care, as far as they were able, of the pastoral work that was permitted.

Things changed in 1847, when it was permitted to reconstitute the Latin Patriarchate, that is, to re-institute in the Holy Land the bishop and the ecclesial institutions of a normal diocese. Since then this distinction has been somewhat maintained, that the Custody takes care of the Holy Places and the Patriarchate cares for pastoral life. But some pastoral activities existing before 1847, such as some important parishes, are still under the care of the Franciscans and pastorally guided by the Patriarch.

The Patriarchate since its inception has grown the church throughout the diocese, with new parishes, local clergy, schools, and many other activities, especially in the Palestinian and Jordanian interior.

The Patriarch is the pastor of the Church of the Holy Land, of which the Custody is an important and constitutive part.

The Custody also runs Catholic schools: why does this distinction between the schools of the Patriarchate and the schools of the Custody still exist, is it only a historical reason?

Actually, there are also many other schools belonging to the different religious congregations, not only of the Patriarchate and the Custody. The Patriarchate, however, has the largest number of schools, about 40! The reasons for these differences are purely historical. While referring to their respective owners (Patriarchate, Custody, religious), the Catholic schools are now coordinated by a central office that serves as an academic and pastoral reference, common to all.

According to its Statute, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre financially supports the Latin Patriarchate, which is not involved in the worldwide collection on Good Friday that benefits the Custody. How can we, in your opinion, make the objective of these actions of universal solidarity better understood, in order to avoid a certain confusion in the spirit of the donors who love the Mother Church and do not fully understand how it is institutionally organized?

The Good Friday Collection was instituted in its time to support the work of the Franciscans in the Holy Places. All of this is still valid to this day. The collection, however, also supports many educational and pastoral activities in the territories of the Custody, especially in Syria. Part of the collection, moreover, is donated to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches which, in turn, donates it to the various needs of the Churches of the Middle East.

The confusion that is sometimes created is due to a lack of correct information. All the needs of the Church must be supported and there is no reason to change these traditions. However, it is important to be well and better informed. Much has been done in recent years, but perhaps we still need to improve communication and make it clearer and more transparent.

Interview by François Vayne

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