



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

“Jerusalem and the Holy Land have become my home of choice”

Interview with Pierre-Yves Fux, Ambassador of Switzerland to the Holy See and member of the Order



Pierre-Yves Fux on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March 2017, together with his traveling companions.

Your Excellency, do you see a connection between your diplomatic vocation to the service of peace and the mission of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre?

For me, the link between these two distinct realities became clear one morning in 2001 in Jerusalem. Before a series of meetings and appointments, I was going through the old city, which was still dark and deserted. I had slept badly; I heard the gunfire coming from Bethlehem. I was walking quickly so as not to miss the Mass celebrated before the tomb of Christ ... only two taking part. The Franciscan priest signalled us to follow him inside the Sepulchre. Every mass actualizes the same mysteries, but on that occasion I felt involved as never before! A unique moment that inspired contradictory desires in me: to relive it, but without the causes that had generated such a situation.

As a diplomat, I benefited from almost exclusive access to holy places, while violence, fear and repression deprived others of the possibility or desire to visit them. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I was in charge of “human security” in the Middle East. The pursuit of peace, humanitarian law and the coexistence of cultures are very rooted values in Switzerland. How not to promote all this in the Holy Land? The politics of various countries – including mine – are linked to one of the objectives of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Diplomatic action can transform unjust situations. I took part in some initiatives that allowed innocents to get out of prison and even – once – to avoid the death penalty.

The Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre can recognize themselves in such actions, but they do not make politics. They save their words, but not their prayers or acts of generosity. Many know the Holy Land and its inhabitants, appreciating the value of symbols and history. Having become a member of the Order, I saw an impartiality and understanding comparable to the best I could see in diplomacy and development aid.

In what way does the action of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre or the prophetic example of Pope Francis to annihilate the walls of separation between peoples, inspire your diplomatic action?

Thanks to my role as ambassador to the Holy See I have the opportunity to see and listen to Pope Francis. He manifests a love and predilection for the most humble and vulnerable, whether they are Christians or not. This approach is not always understood. How to watch over one's flock without simultaneously excluding anyone? Similarly, when one represents his country abroad, one defends its interests and values, promotes a just international order, while supporting his compatriots.

It was again in the Holy Land that I had the opportunity to reflect on what "walls" are, the visible and invisible ones. Years after that Mass in Christ's Sepulchre, I found myself once again before its entrance, March 22, 2017. Joining together to renovate and reinforce the sanctuary's walls, the different Churches had not yet fixed lamps and ornaments. That restoration carried out together showed a sign of hope for Christian unity. I was also moved for another reason: we had left on foot twelve days earlier from Acre, in three ... then in four, we were reaching the goal! The journey of the last day – from the basilicas of the Nativity to the Resurrection – appeared sinister. There were no gun shots to be heard overnight from the Bethlehem side, but bad roads, barbed wire, waste and especially the corridors of the check-point to cross the wall.

Shortly before, we had passed in front of the Caritas Baby Hospital, in which thousands of children were born whose parents are not asked for their nationality or religion. This very modern maternity ward – supported by the Order of the Holy Sepulchre – was founded by a Swiss citizen 65 years ago. It existed before the wall and announces better times, I am convinced of it. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre supports both the seminarians of the Latin Patriarchate and the African workers who must leave their children in the "baby warehouses". In this way, the Holy Land becomes more "Christian", with all the dimensions and meanings that this term carries with it. This is connected to the Pope's appeal to build bridges, rather than erecting walls.

Your pilgrimage to the Holy Land was preceded by a pilgrimage to Rome, as training in perseverance in the face of those obstacles to peace that risk discouraging people. Where do you get the strength to hope in your work as a diplomat?

In diplomatic work, as in pilgrimages, perseverance and attention are essential. In this temporary exile, one does not advance by chance: others have walked the same path and maintain contact with those who are at home and with those in the country that they cross. You become stronger, thanks to the experience gained kilometre after kilometre. Before going to Jerusalem, I had walked to Rome, and then further, to Otranto and Leuca. Year after year, these pilgrimages give me joy and serenity. Visiting the country of Jesus, the holy places and those who guard them is an irrevocable commitment when one is admitted to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

During the night that preceded the Investiture, the "vigil of arms", I had immersed myself in all of these memories and thoughts with prayers. For centuries, the pilgrims of the Holy Sepulchre see the edge of the sword approaching their shoulder ... Chateaubriand tells it better than me. I lived that moment in Saint- Martin de Disentis, in that part of the Alps where they speak Romansh, German and Italian. Even more, Jerusalem and the Holy Land became the home of choice for me. A few days before, I had witnessed as an official witness, the swearing of the oath of the Pontifical Swiss Guards. In a different way, my turn had come to enter into life in a group of confreres and sisters. This provides an answer to my dilemma of 2001: no longer being alone in visiting the Sepulchre ... therefore, giving and receiving, materially and spiritually.

Interview by the Communications Office of the Grand Magisterium of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

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