



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to the KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

on the occasion of the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence"

(3 - 6 NOVEMBER 2022)

## **PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT TO ROME**

*Papal flight*

*Sunday, 6 November 2022*

**[Multimedia]**

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Good Morning, thank you very much for your company during these days and for your work. My sincere thanks. I am now at your disposal for questions. I will try to answer everything I know. Thank you.

*[Fatima Al Najem (Bahrain News Agency), in English]: I just need to say something before I start my question. You have a very special place in my heart, not just because you visited my Country but because when you were announced as the Pope of the Vatican, that was my birthday! So I have one question. How do you evaluate the results of your historical visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain and how do you find Bahrain's efforts to consolidate and promote coexistence among all spectrums of society, of all religion, sexes, and races?*

I would say, it was a visit of encounter because the purpose was really to be in interfaith dialogue with Islam and in ecumenical dialogue with Bartholomew. The ideas put forth by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar were in the direction of seeking unity, unity within Islam, respecting nuances, and differences, but with unity; unity with Christians and with other religions.

In order to enter into interreligious dialogue or ecumenical dialogue, you need your own identity. One cannot start out from a widespread identity. "I am Muslim", "I am Christian", I have this identity

and so I can speak with identity. When your identity is not defined, or when it is somewhat undefined, it is difficult to engage in dialogue because there's no back and forth and this is why it is important. And these two [leaders] who came, both the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Patriarch Bartholomew, have a powerful identity. And that is good.

From the Islamic point of view, I listened carefully to the three speeches of the Grand Imam and I was struck by the way he was so insistent on intra-Islamic dialogue, among yourselves, not to erase differences but to understand each other and to work together, not to be against each other. We Christians have a bit of a bad history of differences that led us to religious wars: Catholics against Orthodox or against Lutherans. Now, thank God, after the Council, there is closeness and we can dialogue and work together and that is important, a testimony of doing good to others. Then the specialists, the theologians will discuss theological things, but we have to walk together as believers, as friends, as brothers and sisters, doing good.

I was also impressed with the things that were said in the Muslim Council of Elders, about creation and the preservation of creation, and this is a common concern of everybody, Muslims, Christians, everybody.

Now, the Vatican Secretary of State and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar are travelling from Bahrain to Cairo in the same plane, together as brothers. This is something that is quite moving.... This is important, it is something that has done some good. The presence of Patriarch Bartholomew who is an authority in the ecumenical field also did good. We saw that in the ecumenical service we had, and also in the words that he addressed earlier. To sum it up: It was a journey of encounter.

For me the novelty of getting to know a culture that is open to everyone: in your country, there is room for everyone. The King told me: "Here everyone does what they want, if a woman wants to work, let her work". This is what he said to me — you know this, you work. "Total openness". And also, the religious part, there too, openness... I was struck by the sheer number of Christians — Filipinos, Indians from Kerala — who are here and live and work in the country. They are many.

[Fatima Al Najem]: They love you very much.

That's the idea. I discovered something new that helps me to understand and interact more with people. The key word is dialogue, and to dialogue, you have to start from your identity, have an identity.

*[Fatima Al Najem]: Thank you, Your Holiness. I will pray to Allah the Omnipotent to bless you with good health, happiness, and a long life.*

Yes, pray for me, not against me [laughter].

*[Imad Atrach] (Sky Tv News Arabia): Holy Father, since the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity three years ago, to the visit to Baghdad, and then also recently to Kazakhstan: Is this a path that you think is bearing tangible fruit? Can we expect it to culminate in a meeting at the Vatican? Then I would like to thank you for mentioning Lebanon today, because as a Lebanese I can tell you that we really are in urgent need of your visit, especially because now we don't even have a President, so you could go and embrace the people directly. Thank you.*

Thank you. I have been thinking a lot these days — and we talked about it with the Grand Imam — about how the idea of the Abu Dhabi Document came about, that Document we did together, the first one. He had come to the Vatican for a courtesy visit and we had our protocol meeting. It was almost lunchtime and he was leaving, and as I was accompanying him to bid him goodbye, I asked him: “Where are you going for lunch”? I don’t know what he said to me... “Come, let us have lunch together”. It was something from within. Then, sitting at table — he, his secretary, two counselors, me, my secretary, my counselor — we took the bread, broke it, and gave it to each other: a gesture of friendship, offering bread. It was a very nice lunch, very fraternal. And towards the end, I don’t know who came up with the idea, we said, “Why don’t we write something about this meeting”? So the Abu Dhabi Document was born. The two secretaries got to work, with a draft going back and forth, and finally, we took advantage of the Abu Dhabi meeting to publish it. It was something that came from God. You cannot understand it otherwise, because none of us had this in mind. It emerged during a friendly lunch, and that is a great thing.

Then I kept thinking, and the Abu Dhabi Document was the basis of Fratelli Tutti. Even what I wrote about human friendship in Fratelli Tutti is based on the Abu Dhabi Document. I believe that one cannot think of such a path without thinking of a special blessing from the Lord in this journey. I want to say this out of justice. It seems right that you know how the Lord inspired this path. I did not even know what the Great Imam’s name was, and then we became friends and did something as two friends, and now we talk every time we meet. The Document is relevant today, and work is being done to make it known.

Then regarding Lebanon... Lebanon is a sorrow for me. Because Lebanon is not a country [to be seen] as itself — a Pope said it before me — Lebanon is not only a country, it is a message. Lebanon has a very great meaning for all of us. And right now, Lebanon is suffering. I pray and I take this opportunity to make an appeal to Lebanese politicians: set aside self-interest, look at the country and be in agreement. First God and country, then interests. But first God and country. Right now, I do not want to say, “Save Lebanon” because we are not saviours, but please, support Lebanon. Help it so that Lebanon may stop going on this downward path, so that Lebanon may regain its greatness. There are means... there is the generosity of Lebanon. How many political refugees are in Lebanon! It is so generous and it is suffering. I take this opportunity to ask you for prayers for Lebanon. Prayer is also a friendship. You are journalists, look at Lebanon and talk about it to raise awareness. This is what I would like to say to you. Thank you.

*[Carol Glatz (Catholic News Service)]: Thank you, Holy Father. During this trip to Bahrain, you spoke about fundamental rights, including women's rights, about their dignity, the right to have their space in the social and public sphere; and as usual, you encouraged young people to have courage, to make noise; to move forward toward making a more just world. Given the situation close by in Iran, with the protests sparked by some women and many young people who want more freedom, do you support this effort of women and men demanding to have the basic rights that are also found in the Document on Human Fraternity?*

We have to tell each other the truth. The struggle for women's rights is an ongoing struggle. Because in some places, women have equality with men, but not in other places. Isn't that true? I remember in the 1950s in my country, when there was the struggle for women's civil rights: for women to be able to vote. Because until about the '50s only men could vote in my country. And I think of this same struggle in the U.S., famous for the women's vote. But why, I ask myself, does the woman have to struggle like this to keep her rights? There is a... I don't know if it is a legend, a legend about the origin of women's jewelry that explains the cruelty of so many situations against women. It is said that women wear so much jewelry because in a country — I don't remember, perhaps it's a historical fact — there was a custom that when the husband got fed up with the woman, he would say to her, "Get out"! and she could not go back in to take anything. She had to leave with what she was wearing. And this is why they would amass gold, to be able at least to take something away. They say this is the origin of jewelry. I don't know if it is true or not, but the image helps us.

Rights are fundamental. But how come in the world today, today, we cannot stop the tragedy of young girls' infibulation? But this is terrible. Today! The fact that this practice exists, that humanity cannot stop this crime, a criminal act! Women, according to two comments I heard, are either "disposable" material — that is bad — or they are "a protected species". But equality between men and women is still not universally found, and there are these instances, where women are second-class citizens or less. We have to keep fighting for that because women are a gift. God did not create man and then give him a little dog for fun. No! He created two equals, man and woman. And what Paul wrote in one of his letters about male-female relationships, which seems old-fashioned to us today, was so revolutionary at that time that it was scandalous: that men should be faithful to women, and that men should take care of women as their own flesh (cf. 2 Cor 5, 28-29). At that time, this was a revolutionary thing. All women's rights come from this equality. And a society that is unable to give the woman her place does not move forward. We have experienced this.

In the book I wrote, *Torniamo a sognare*, (Let us Dream) in the part about economics, for example, there are women economists currently in the world who have changed the economic outlook and are able to carry it forward. Because they have a different gift. They know how to run things in another way, which is not inferior, it is complementary. I once had a conversation with a head of government, a great head of government, a mother of several children, who had been very

successful in solving a difficult situation. And I asked her, “Tell me, Ma’am, how did you solve such a difficult situation”? She began to move her hands like this, in silence and she said to me: “the way we mothers do it”. Women have their own way of solving problems, which is not man’s way. And both ways must work together: the woman, equal to the man, works for the common good with that insight that women have. I have seen that every time a woman comes in to do a job at the Vatican, things improve. For example, the vice governor of the Vatican is a woman, [Secretary General of the Governorate] and things have changed for the best. In the Council for the Economy, there were six cardinals and six lay people, all male. I made a change and I put one male and five women as the lay people. And this is a revolution because women know how to find the right way. They know how to move forward. And now I have put Marianna Mazzucato in the Pontifical Academy for Life, a great economist from the United States, to add a little more humanity.

Women carry their own. They do not have to become like males. No! They are women. We need them. And a society that erases women from public life is a society that becomes impoverished. It becomes impoverished. Equality of rights, yes. But also equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunities in order to move forward, otherwise we become impoverished. I think that what I have said says what needs to be done globally. And there is still some way to go because there is this chauvinism. I come from a chauvinist people. We Argentinians are chauvinist, always. And this is bad, and when we need to, we turn to our mothers, who are the ones who solve problems. But this chauvinism kills humanity. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say this, which is very close to my heart. Let us fight not only for rights, but because we need to have women in society to help us, to help us change.

*[Antonio Pelayo, (Vida Nueva): Holy Father, the only time you spoke off-the-cuff on this trip was to refer to ‘martyred Ukraine’ and to ‘peace negotiations.’ I would like to ask you if you can tell us anything about how these negotiations are going on the Vatican side. And another question: Have you spoken lately with Putin or do you intend to do so in the near future?]*

Good. First of all, the Vatican is constantly attentive. The Secretariat of State works and works well, it works well. I know that the Secretary [for Relations with States and International Organizations], Archbishop Gallagher, works well there. Then, some history. The day after the beginning of the war — I thought this could not be done, an unusual thing — I went to the Russian embassy [to the Holy See] to speak with the ambassador, who is a good man I have known for six years, since he arrived, a humanist. I remember a comment he made to me then as he spoke about civilization: “Nous sommes tombés dans la dictature de l’argent” (We have fallen into the dictatorship of money), A humanist, a man fighting for equality. I told him I was willing to go to Moscow to talk to Putin, if the need arose. Lavrov [the foreign minister.] replied very politely: he said thank you but it was not necessary for the moment. Ever since then, we took a strong interest. I spoke on the phone with President Zelensky three times; then with the Ukrainian ambassador a few more times. And work is being done to get closer, to seek solutions. The Holy

See is also doing what it should with regard to prisoners. These are things that are always done and the Holy See has always done them, always.

And then, preaching for peace. What strikes me — this is why I use the word “martyred” for Ukraine — is the cruelty, which is not of the Russian people because the Russian people are a great people but of the mercenaries, of the soldiers who go off to war as an adventure, mercenaries...

I prefer to think of it this way because I have high esteem for the Russian people, for Russian humanism. Just think of Dostoevsky, who to this day inspires us, inspires Christians to think of Christianity. I have great affection for the Russian people and I also have great affection for the Ukrainian people. When I was eleven years old, there was a priest nearby who celebrated without altar boys, and he taught me to serve Mass in Ukrainian. I know all these Ukrainian hymns in their language because I learned them as a child. So, I have a very great affection for the Ukrainian liturgy. I am in the midst of two peoples who I love. But it is not just me. The Holy See has had many confidential meetings, many good results. Because we cannot deny that perhaps at the beginning, war makes us brave. But then it is tiresome and hurtful and we see the evil made by wars. This has to do with the more human, the closer part.

Then, taking advantage of this question, I would like to express this complaint: three world wars in a single century, in a single century! The one of 1914-1918, the one of 1939-1945, and this one! This one is a world war, because it is true that when empires, on one side or the other weaken, they need to make a war in order to feel strong — and also to sell weapons! Because I believe that the greatest calamity today, the greatest calamity in the world, is the arms industry. Please! I’ve been told, I don’t know if it is true or not, that if we did not make weapons for one year, we could end world hunger. The arms industry is terrible.

A few years ago, three or four, a ship filled with weapons went from a certain country to Genoa and they had to move the weapons onto a bigger ship to take them to Yemen. The workers in Genoa did not want to do it... It was a gesture. Yemen: more than ten years of war. Yemen’s children have no food. And the Rohingya, “gypsying” from one place to another because they were expelled, always at war. What is happening in Myanmar is terrible. Now I hope something will stop today in Ethiopia, with a treaty...

But we are at war everywhere and we do not understand this. Now in Europe, we are closely affected by the Russian-Ukrainian war. But it is everywhere, for years. In Syria, 12 to 13 years of war, and nobody knows if there are prisoners and what goes on there. Then Lebanon, we talked about this tragedy....

I do not know if I have said this to you sometime. When I went to Redipuglia, in 2014, — and my grandfather had been at Piave and had told me what was going on there — I saw all those graves

of young men.... I cried, I cried, I am not ashamed to say it. Then a few years later on 2 November — I always go to a cemetery on 2 November — I went to Anzio and saw the graves of all those American boys, [who died] in the Anzio landings. [They were] 19-20-22-23 years old, and I cried, really, it came from my heart. And I thought of mothers and of when they hear a knock on their door: “Ma’am, an envelope for you”. She opens the envelope: “Ma’am, I have the honour to inform you that you have a son who is a hero of the fatherland...”. The tragedies of war.

I do not want to speak ill of anyone, but it touched my heart: when the commemoration of the Normandy landings took place, there were the leaders of many governments there to commemorate this. It is true, it was the beginning of the fall of Nazism. This is true. But how many boys were left on the beaches in Normandy? They say 30,000. Who thinks about those boys? War sows all of this. This is why you, who are journalists, please be pacifists, speak out against wars, fight against war. I ask you as a brother. Thank you.

*[Hugues Lefèvre (I.Media)]: Thank you, Holy Father. This morning in your address to the clergy of Bahrain, you spoke of the importance of Christian joy. But in the past few days many of the French faithful have lost this joy when they discovered in the press that the Church had kept secret the conviction in 2021 of a bishop, now retired, who had committed sexual abuse in the 1990s, while he was a priest. When this story came out in the press, five new victims came forward. Today, many Catholics want to know if the culture of secrecy of canonical justice should change and become transparent, and I would like to know if you think canonical penalties should be made public. Thank you.*

Thank you for the question. I would like to start with a bit of history on this. The problem of abuse has always been there, always, not only in the Church but everywhere. You know that 42-46% of sexual abuse takes place in the family or in the community. This is very serious, but the habit has always been that of covering up. In the family even today everything is covered up, and even in the community everything is covered up, or at least in the majority of cases. It is an ugly habit that began to change in the Church when the scandal in Boston surfaced, of Cardinal Law, who was a Cardinal there and is now dead. Cardinal Law resigned due to the scandal. It was the first time that [a case of abuse] came out as a scandal. Since then, the Church has become aware of this and has begun to work, whereas in society and other institutions, it is normally covered up.

When there was the meeting of the Presidents of the Bishops’ Conferences [on this issue] I asked UNICEF, the UN, for statistics on this [phenomenon], and I gave them the percentage data: the percentages in families, in communities — the majority — in schools, in sport activities....It is something they examined in depth, and even in the Church some say “we are a minority”. But even if it were a single case, it would still be tragic, because, as a priest, you have the vocation to make people grow, and by doing this, you destroy them. For a priest, it is like going against his priestly nature and against his social nature. That is why it is tragic and why we must not stop, we must not stop.

In this awakening, of investigating and making accusations, everything has not always been the same: some things have been hidden. Before the Law scandal in Boston, people were replaced,. Now everything is transparent and we are moving forward on this. This is why we should not be surprised that cases like this come to light. Now the case of another bishop comes to mind. There are others, you know? And [now] it is not easy to say: “we didn’t know”, or “it was the culture at the time and hiding continues to be the social culture of many”. I will tell you this: the Church is steadfast on this, and here I want to publicly thank the heroism of Cardinal O’Malley, a good Capuchin friar, who sensed the need to institutionalize this work with the Commission for the Protection of Minors. He is carrying out this work well and this is good for all of us and it gives us courage.

We are working with all that we can, but know that there are people within the Church who still do not see clearly, who do not feel like this: “Let’s wait a bit, let’s see”. It is a process that we are undertaking with courage, and not everyone has courage. Sometimes there is the temptation to compromise, and we are also all slaves to our sins, but the will of the Church is to clarify everything.

For example, I received two complaints of abuse in recent months that had been covered up and not been judged well by the Church. I immediately asked for a new study [of the two cases] and now a new judgement is being made. There is also this, the revision of old judgements that were not well made. We do what we can. We are sinners. And the first thing we have to feel is shame, deep shame for all this. I believe that shame is a grace, you know. We can fight against all the evils in the world, but we could not do it without shame.

This is why I was amazed that in the Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius makes you ask for forgiveness for all the sins you have committed. He makes you go all the way to shame, and if you do not have the grace of shame, you cannot go on. One of the insults we have in my country is, “You are shameless”, and I think that the Church cannot be “shameless”. She has to be ashamed of the bad things, as well of course, as thanking God for the good things she does. I have to tell you this: [we have] all the good will to go on, also thanks to your help.

*[Vania De Luca, (Rai-Tg3)]: Your Holiness, you have also spoken about migrants in recent days. Four ships off the coast of Sicily, with hundreds of women, men, children in difficulty — but not all of them can disembark. Do you fear that a policy of “closed ports” by the centre-right, has returned to Italy? And how do you assess the position of some northern European countries on this? And then I also wanted to ask you in general: What impression, what judgment do you have regarding the new Italian government, which is being led by a woman for the first time?*

It is a challenge. It is a challenge with regards to migrants. The principle of migrants. Migrants should be welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated; if these four steps cannot be taken, the work with migrants cannot be good. Welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated:



achieving integration. And the second thing I say: each EU government has to agree on how many migrants it can receive. Instead, there are four countries that receive migrants: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Spain, because they are the ones closest to the Mediterranean. Inland there are some, like Poland, Belarus.... But the majority of migrants comes from the sea. Lives must be saved. You know that today the Mediterranean is a cemetery? Perhaps the biggest cemetery in the world. I think I told you last time that I read a book in Spanish called *Hermanito*, it is tiny and it reads quickly, I think it has certainly been translated into French and also into Italian. It can be read quickly, in two hours. It is the story of a boy from Africa, I don't know if he was from Tanzania or where he was from, who, following in his brother's footsteps, arrived in Spain. He suffered slavery five times before embarking! Many people, he recounts, are taken to those boats at night time — not to those big ships that have another role — and if they do not want to get on: boom, boom! And they leave them on the beach. It really is a dictatorship of slavery what those people do [traffickers]. And then there is the risk of dying at sea. If you have time read this book. It is important.

Migrant policies should be agreed upon among all countries. You cannot make a policy without consensus, and the European Union must take in hand a policy of collaboration and aid. It cannot leave the responsibility for all the migrants who arrive on the beaches to Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Spain. Up to now, the policies of governments have been to save lives, that is true. Up to a certain point, this is how things were done And I think this [Italian] government has the same policy. It is not inhumane.... I do not know the details but I do not think it wants to change this. I think it has already let children, mothers, and the sick land. I think it let them land, at least from what I have heard. At least the intention was there. Italy, let us think here of this government or a left leaning government, cannot do anything without an agreement with Europe. The responsibility is a European one.

And then I would like to mention another European responsibility: Africa. I think this was said by one of the great stateswomen we have had and have — Merkel. She said that the problem of migrants must be solved in Africa. But if we think of Africa with the motto: "Africa must be exploited", it is logical that migrants — people — flee from that exploitation. We have to, Europe must try to make development plans for Africa. To think that some countries in Africa are not masters of their own subsoil, that they still depend on colonialist powers! It is hypocrisy to want to solve the problem of migrants in Europe. No. let us solve it at home too. The exploitation of people in Africa is terrible because of this concept.

On 1 November, All Saints Day, I had a meeting with university students from Africa. The meeting was the same I had already had with students from Loyola University in the United States. Those students have a capacity, an intelligence, a critical sense, a desire to move forward, but sometimes they cannot because of the colonialist force that Europe has in their governments. If we want to solve the problem of migrants for good, let us solve Africa. The migrants who come from elsewhere are fewer. but let us turn to Africa. Let us help Africa. Let us move forward.

The new [Italian] government is beginning now and I am here to wish it all the best. I always wish the best to a government because the government is for everyone and I wish it the best so that it can take Italy forward. And to all the others who are against the winning party, may they cooperate with a critical sense, with help, but a government of collaboration, not a government that turns its back on you, that makes you “fall” if you do not like something or other. Please, on this point I call for responsibility. Tell me, is it fair that from the beginning of the century until now Italy has had 20 governments? Let us stop with this kidding around.

*[Ludwig Ring-Eifel, (Centrum informationis Catholicum)]: I also want to say something personal first, because I feel very emotional, because after a break of eight years I am back on a papal flight. I am very grateful to be here again.*

Welcome back.

*[Ludwig Ring-Eifel] Thank you, it's good to be back. We in the German group are few – there are only three on this flight – and we thought: How can we make a connection between what we saw in Bahrain and the situation in Germany? Because in Bahrain we saw a small Church, a small flock, a poor Church, with many restrictions, and so on, but a lively Church, full of hope, growing. In Germany, on the other hand, we have a large Church, with great traditions; rich, with theology, money, and everything, but that is losing 300,000 believers every year, who leave, who are in deep crisis. Is there anything to learn from this small flock we saw in Bahrain for the great Germany?*

Germany has a long religious history. Citing Hölderlin, I will say: 'Vieles haben sie verlernt, vieles' [Many things have they unlearned, many things...]: Your religious history is great and complicated, [a history] of struggles. I say to German Catholics: Germany has a great and beautiful Evangelical Church; I would not want another one that might not be as good as that one; but I want one that is Catholic, in fraternity with the Evangelical one. Sometimes we lose sight of the religious sense of the people, of the holy faithful People of God, and we fall into ethical discussions, discussions about contingent things, ecclesiastical policy discussions, discussions that have theological consequences, but are not the core of theology. What does the holy, faithful People of God think? What does the holy People of God sense? Going there to seek what it thinks, what it senses; that simple religiosity that you find in grandparents.

I am not saying go backwards, no; but go to the source of inspiration, to the roots. We all have a history of roots of faith; even peoples have it: Find it! That remark by Hölderlin for our age comes to mind: “*Dass dir halte der Mann, was er als Knabe gelobt*” (The old man should keep the promises he made as a boy). In our childhood, in our hope, we promised many things, many things. Now we get into ethical discussions, into contingent discussions, but the root of religion is the “slap” in the face that the Gospel gives you, the encounter with the living Jesus Christ: and from there the consequences [follow], all of them; from there you get the apostolic courage, from

there you go to the peripheries, even to the moral peripheries of people to help; but [it starts] always from the encounter with Jesus Christ. If there is no encounter with Jesus Christ, there will be an ethicism disguised as Christianity. This is what I wanted to say, from the heart. Thank you.