



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to KAZAKHSTAN

(13 - 15 SEPTEMBER 2022)

PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT TO ROME

Papal flight

Thursday, 15 September 2022

[Multimedia]

[Zhanat Akhmetova, TV Agency Khabar] Holy Father, thank you very much for your visit to Kazakhstan. What is the result of your visit? In your discourses, you referred to the origins of our people. What inspired you to do so?"

For me it was also a surprise, because of Central Asia — except for Borodin’s music — I truly knew nothing. It was a surprise to find representatives of these nations. And Kazakhstan was really a surprise, because I didn’t expect it to be like that. I knew that it was a country, which has developed well, in an intelligent manner. Yet, thirty years since independence to find such a development, I did not expect it.

Also, it is such a large country, with 20 million people, 19 million.... — unbelievable. Very disciplined, and beautiful. With so much beauty: the architecture of the city is well-balanced, well-arranged. A modern city, a city I would even say almost “of the future.” That’s what impressed me so much: the desire to move forward not only in industry, in economic and material development, but also in cultural development. It was a surprise I did not expect. Then, the Congress [of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions] was a very important event.

It is in its seventh edition. This means it’s a country with foresight, bringing into dialogue those who are usually discarded. Because there is a progressive perception of the world in which religious

values are the first thing to be discarded. Instead, it is a country that offers the world such a proposal. And it was done already seven times now. It is wonderful! If there is time I will come back to this interreligious meeting. You can be proud of the country and the homeland you have.

[Rudiger Kronthaler, of the German television station ARD] "Holy Father thank you for your message of peace. I am German, as you can hear from my accent. I would like to ask a question about peace: since my people were responsible for millions of deaths 80 years ago, we learn in school that you should never use weapons, never violence. The only exception is self-defense. In your opinion, should Ukraine be given weapons at this time?"

This is a political decision, which can be moral — morally acceptable — if it is done according to the conditions of morality, which are manifold, and then we can talk about it. But it can be immoral if it is done with the intention of provoking more war or selling weapons or discarding those weapons that are no longer needed. The motivation is what largely qualifies the morality of this act. To defend oneself is not only lawful but also an expression of love of country. Those who do not defend themselves, those who do not defend something, do not love it; instead, those who defend, love.

We also have to [consider] another thing that I said in one of my speeches, which is that one should think more about the concept of just war. Because everybody is talking about peace today: for so many years, for 70 years, the United Nations has been talking about peace; they have been making many speeches about peace. But right now, how many wars are going on?

The one you mentioned, Ukraine-Russia, now Azerbaijan and Armenia which had stopped for a while because Russia acted as a guarantor: a guarantor of peace here and makes war there... Then there is Syria, ten years of war, what is going on there, why does it not end? What interests are moving these things? Then there is the Horn of Africa, then northern Mozambique; and Eritrea which is beside Ethiopia, then Myanmar with this suffering people that I love so much, the Rohingya people who go around and around and around like a gypsy and find no peace. But we are in a world war, please...

I remember a personal event, as a child; I was nine years old. I remember hearing the alarm of the biggest newspaper in Buenos Aires sounding: at that time, sometimes to celebrate and other times to give bad news, they would sound that — now it doesn't sound any more — and it could be heard all over the city. Mother said, "What's going on?" We were at war, the year 1945. A neighbour came to the house, and said, "The alarm sounded..." and she cried, "The war is over!" And I still see Mom and the neighbour crying with joy because the war was over, in a South American country, so far away! These people, these women knew that peace is greater than all wars, and they cried with joy when peace was made. I cannot forget that.

I wonder if our hearts are educated well enough today to cry for joy when we see peace. Everything has changed. If you don't make war, you are not useful! I will speak about Germany later. Then there is the arms business. This is a business of assassins. Someone who understands statistics told me that if you stopped making weapons for a year you would solve all the hunger in the world — I don't know if that's true or not. But hunger, education... nothing. It cannot be done because weapons have to be produced.

In Genoa a few years ago, three or four years ago, a ship arrived, loaded with weapons, that was supposed to transfer them to a bigger ship that was going to Africa, near Sudan, I think South Sudan. The dock workers didn't want to do it; it cost them, but [it is a fact that] today says: "No, I do not cooperate with this, with death". It is an anecdote, but it makes one feel a consciousness of peace.

You spoke about your homeland. One of the things I learned from you is the ability to repent and ask forgiveness for the mistakes of war. And not only asking forgiveness, but also paying for the mistakes of war — this speaks well of you. It is an example that we should imitate. War itself is a mistake; it is a mistake! And we right now are breathing this air: if there is no war it seems there is no life. A bit messy, but I said all I wanted to say about just war. But the right to defense yes, that yes, but one must use it when necessary.

[Sylvia Wysocka, from the Polish news agency PAP] Holy Father, you said: we can never justify violence. Everything that is happening in Ukraine now is pure violence, death, total destruction by Russia. We in Poland have the war so close to our doorstep, with two million refugees. I would like to ask if you think there is a red line beyond which you should not say: we are open to dialogue with Moscow. Because many people have a hard time understanding this openness. And I would also like to ask if the next trip will be to Kyiv.

I will answer that, but I would prefer that the questions about [this] trip be asked first... But I will answer this, I will answer. But please may the next ones be on [this] trip. And then, if there is still time, we will see about others.

I think it is always difficult to understand the dialogue with the states that started a war, and it seems that the first step was from there, from that side. It is difficult, but we must not discard it; we must extend the opportunity for dialogue to everyone, to everyone! Because there is always the possibility that in dialogue we can change things, and also offer another point of view, another point of consideration. I don't exclude dialogue with any power that is at war, even if it's the aggressor... sometimes dialogue has to be done in this manner, but it has to be done; it "stinks", but it has to be done. Always one step ahead, an outstretched hand, always! Because otherwise we close off the only reasonable door to peace. Sometimes they do not accept dialogue: too bad! But dialogue must always be done, at least offered, and this is good also for those who offer it; it

helps them to breathe.

[Loup Besmond de Senneville, La Croix] Your Holiness, thank you very much for this visit, for these days in Central Asia. During this trip, there was a lot of talk about values and ethics. In particular, during the Interreligious Congress, some participants evoked the loss of the West because of its moral degradation. What is your opinion on this? Do you consider that the West is in a state of “perdition”, threatened by the loss of its values? I am thinking in particular of the debate in some countries about euthanasia, about the end of life, a debate that has been ongoing in Italy, but also in France and Belgium.

It is true that the West, in general, is not at the highest level of exemplarity right now. It is not a “child at their first communion”, not at all. The West has taken wrong paths. Let us think for example of the social injustice among us. There are some countries that are developed in social justice, but I think of my continent, Latin America, which is the West. Let us also think of the Mediterranean, which is the West, and today it is the biggest graveyard, not of Europe, but of humanity.

What has the West lost in forgetting to welcome, when instead it needs people? When you think about the demographic winter that we have: we need people. In Spain — in Spain especially — even in Italy there are empty villages, only 20 old ladies there, and nothing else. But why not make a policy in the West so that migrants are included with the principle that the migrant should be welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated? That is very important, to integrate. Instead, no... It is a failure to understand values, when the West has experienced this: we are countries that have migrated. In my country — which I think is 49 million right now — we only have a little less than a million indigenous people, and everybody else is of migrant roots. Everybody: Spaniards, Italians, Germans, Polish Slavs, from Asia Minor, Lebanese, everybody... It's mixed blood there, and this experience has helped us so much.

Then, for political reasons, it's not going well in Latin American countries, but I think migration at this time should be taken seriously, because it raises the intellectual and congenial value of the West a little bit. On the contrary, with this demographic winter, where are we going? The West is decaying on this point; it expires a little bit, it has lost... Let us think about the economic aspect: much good is done, much good, but let's think about the political and mystical spirit of Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi, those great men: where are they today? There are great ones, but they can't take society forward. The West needs to talk, to respect itself... and then there is the danger of populism.

What happens in such a socio-political state? “Messiahs” are born: the messiahs of populisms. We are seeing how populisms are born, I think a few times I mentioned that book by Ginzberg, *Sindrome 1933*: he says precisely how a populism arose in Germany after the fall of the Weimar

government. That is how populisms are born: when there is a “half level” without strength, and one promises a messiah.

Lastly, I think we Westerners are not at the highest level to help other peoples; are we a little decadent? Maybe, yes, but we have to take back the values, the values of Europe, the values of the fathers who founded the European Union, the great ones. I don't know, it's a little bit confused, but I think I have answered.

What about euthanasia?

Killing is not human, period. If you kill with motivation, eventually you will kill more and more. It is not human. Let's leave killing to the beasts.

[Iacopo Scaramuzzi, La Repubblica] Good evening Holy Father. I take up this last question: in your addresses you have emphasized the link between values, religious values, and the vibrancy of democracy. What do you think our continent, Europe, lacks? What should it learn from other experiences? And, since in a few days in Italy there will be a democratic process, with voting, and there will be a new government, when you eventually meet the new Prime Minister, what will you recommend? What do you think are the priorities for Italy, what are your concerns, and what are the risks to be avoided?

I think I already answered this during my last journey. I have met two Italian presidents of very high regard: Napolitano and the current one. Great men. The other politicians I do not know. On my most recent journey, I asked one of my secretaries how many governments Italy has had in this century: twenty. I cannot explain it. I do not condemn this nor criticize this, but I am simply unable to explain it. If governments change like that, then there are many questions to be asked. Because being a politician today, a great politician, is a difficult road. A politician who puts himself on the line for the values of the country, great values, and does not do so for [personal] interests, positions, convenience... Nations, and among them Italy, must find great politicians, those who have the ability to carry out politics, which is an art. Politics is a noble vocation.

I believe one of the popes, I am not sure whether it was Pius XII or St. Paul VI, said that politics is one of the highest forms of charity... We have to struggle to help our politicians maintain a level of high politics, not low-level politics that does not help at all, and even pulls the State down, impoverishing it... Today, politics in the nations of Europe should take on the problem of the demographic winter, for example, problems related to industrial development, natural development, problems regarding migrants... Politics must address problems seriously in order to move forward. I am talking about politics in general. I do not understand Italian politics: only that figure of 20 governments in 20 years seems a bit strange... but everyone has their own way of

dancing the tango, you know? You can dance one way or another and politics is danced one way or another.

Europe needs to receive experiences from other places, some will go better, others will not be useful. But it must be open, each continent must be open to the experiences of others.

[Elise Harris Allen, Crux] Hello, Holy Father. Thank you for being with us this evening. Yesterday at the Congress, you spoke about the importance of religious freedom. As you know, on the same day the president of China also arrived in the city, where there has been great concern about this issue for so long, especially now with the trial that is going forward against Cardinal Zen. Do you consider the trial against him a violation of religious freedom?

To understand China takes a century, and we do not live for a century. The Chinese mentality is a rich mentality, and when it gets a little sick, it loses its richness; it is capable of making mistakes. In order to understand, we have chosen the path of dialogue, open to dialogue. There is a bilateral Vatican-Chinese commission that is going well, slowly, because the Chinese pace is slow, they have an eternity to go forward: they are a people of endless patience. However, from the experiences we had before: let us think of the Italian missionaries who went there and were respected as scientists; think also today, so many priests or believers who were called on by Chinese universities because this gives value to culture. It is not easy to understand the Chinese mentality, but it should be respected, I always respect this. And here in the Vatican, there is a dialogue commission that is going well, chaired by Cardinal Parolin and he is the person right now who knows the most about China and dialogue with the Chinese. It is a slow process, but steps forward are always being made.

Qualifying China as undemocratic, I don't wish to, because it's such a complex country... Yes, it is true that there are things that seem undemocratic to us, that is true. Cardinal Zen, an elderly man, is going to trial these days, I think. He says what he feels, and it is evident that there are limitations there. More than qualifying, because it is difficult, and I do not wish to qualify, they are impressions; more than to qualify, I try to support the path of dialogue.

Then, in dialogue many things become clear, and not only about the Church, but also about other areas; for example the extent of China, the governors of the provinces are all diverse. There are different cultures within China, it is a giant, and understanding China is an enormous thing. But one should not have to lose patience, it takes a lot, but we have to go with dialogue, I try to refrain from qualifying it... but let us go forward.

What about Xi Jinping?

He had a State visit there, but I did not see him.

[Maria Angeles Conde Mir, Rome Reports] In the Declaration they signed, all leaders underscored an appeal to governments and international organizations to protect people who are persecuted because of their ethnicity or religion. Unfortunately, this is what is happening in Nicaragua. We know that you spoke about this on 21 August during the Angelus. But maybe you can add something more for the Catholic people, especially in Nicaragua. Also another question. We have seen you doing well on this trip. We would like to know if you will be able to take up again the journey to Africa that you had to postpone, that one and whether there will be others, if something is being planned?

Regarding Nicaragua, the news is clear. There is dialogue. There is dialogue at this time. There have been talks with the government; there is dialogue. This doesn't mean the approval of everything the government does or the disapproval of everything. No. There is dialogue and when there is dialogue, it is because there is a need to solve problems. Right now there are some problems. I at least expect the sisters of Mother Teresa to be able to return. These women are good revolutionaries, but of the Gospel! They do not make war against anyone. Rather, we all need these women. This is a gesture that is difficult to understand...

But hopefully they will return and things will be resolved. But continuing to dialogue. Never, never stop the dialogue. There are things that are not understandable. To send a[n apostolic] nuncio away to the border is a serious diplomatic matter. The nuncio is a good person who has now been appointed somewhere else. These things are hard to understand and also hard to swallow... But it is not the only case. In Latin America, there are situations like that in various places.

As for travel: it is difficult. My knee still has not healed. But the next one I will do. I spoke the other day with Archbishop Welby [head of the Anglican Communion] and we saw February as a possibility for going to South Sudan. And if I go to South Sudan, I will also go to Congo. We are trying because all three of us have to go together: the head of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Archbishop Welby, and myself. We had a meeting via Zoom the other day about this.

[Alexey Gotovskiy, EWTN (lives and works in Rome but is originally from Kazakhstan)] Thank you Holy Father for visiting our country. I would like to ask: for Catholics living in Kazakhstan, which is predominantly Muslim, how can evangelization be carried out in this context? And is there something that inspired you in seeing Catholics in Kazakhstan?

The second part: Inspired, I don't know, but I was happy today in the cathedral to see Catholics so enthusiastic, happy, joyful. This is the impression of Kazakh Catholics. Then, coexistence with Muslims: this is something that is being worked on quite a bit and we are going forward, not only in

Kazakhstan. Let's think about some North African countries, there is a good coexistence... in Morocco for example. In Morocco, there is quite a good dialogue.

And let me pause to consider the religious meeting. Someone was criticizing and they said to me: 'this is fomenting; making relativism grow.' There's no relativism! Everyone had their say, everyone respected each other's position, but we dialogue as brothers. Because if there is no dialogue there is either ignorance or war. Better to live as brothers, we have one thing in common, we are all human. Let's live as humans, with good manners: what do you think, what do I think? Let's agree, but let's talk a bit, let's get to know each other.

Often, these misunderstood "religious" wars arise from a lack of knowledge. And this is not relativism. I do not give up my faith if I speak to another's faith. On the contrary. I honour my faith because another listens to it and I listen to theirs. I was so impressed that such a young country, with so many problems — the climate for example — has been able to have seven editions of such a meeting: a world meeting, with Jews, Christians, Muslims, Eastern religions... At the table, you could see that everyone was talking and listening to each other with respect.

This is one of the good things your country has done, a country that's a little bit, — let's say — in the "corner" of the world — that does such a convocation. This is the impression it gave me. Then the city is of first-class architectural beauty. And also the concerns of the government: I was very impressed with the cultural concerns of the president of the Senate: he was carrying on this meeting, but then he found the time to introduce me to a young singer: "You have to meet this young man who is open to culture". I didn't expect this, and I was happy to meet you.

[Rudolf Gehrig, EWTN] Holy Father, many Churches in Europe, such as the one in Germany, are suffering severe losses of believers, young people no longer seem willing to go to Sunday Mass. How concerned are you about this trend, and what do you want to do about it?

It is partly true, partly relative. It is true that the spirit of secularization, of relativism, challenges these things; it is true. What must be done first of all, is to be consistent with one's own faith. Let's consider: if you are a bishop or a priest who is not consistent, young people catch a whiff, and then, so long! When a Church, whatever she is, in some country or in some sector, thinks more about money, development, pastoral plans and not pastoral care, and you go that way, this does not attract people.

When I wrote the letter to the German people three years ago, there were some pastors who published it but it depends on the person. That is, when the pastor is close to the people, he says, "the people should know what the Pope thinks". I think the shepherds have to go forward, but if the shepherds have lost the smell of the sheep and the sheep have lost the smell of the shepherds, you don't go forward. Sometimes — I'm talking about everybody, in general, not just about

Germany — one thinks about how to renew, how to make pastoral care more modern: that's fine, but it should always be in the hands of a shepherd.

If pastoral care is in the hands of pastoral “scientists,” who opine here and say what should be done there... Jesus made the Church with pastors, not political leaders. He made the Church with ignorant people: among the Twelve, one was more ignorant than the other, and the Church went on. Why? Because of the flock's [familiarity with the] smell of the shepherd and the shepherd's with [that of] the flock.

This is the biggest relationship I see when there is a crisis in a place, in a province... I ask myself, is the shepherd in contact with, is he close to the flock? Does this flock have a shepherd or not? The problem is the shepherds. On this I would suggest that you read St. Augustine's commentary on shepherds [to Ezekiel 34]; you can read it an hour, but it's one of the wisest things that was written for shepherds and with that you can qualify this or that shepherd. It's not about modernizing. Yes, we have to be updated on the methods, yes, this is true, but if the heart of the pastor is missing, no pastoral ministry works. None.

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