



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO LUXEMBOURG AND BELGIUM

(26-29 September 2024)

**IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE**

*Papal flight*

*Sunday, 29 September 2024*

**[Multimedia]**

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**Matteo Bruni**

Good evening, everyone. Thank you, Holy Father, for the time you dedicate to us at the end of this brief, but very intense journey. Perhaps you would like to say a word before we begin with the journalists' questions. Here is the microphone.

**Pope Francis:** Good evening! I am available for questions.

**Michael Merten – Luxemburger Wort**

Holy Father, I am Michael from *Luxemburger Wort*, a newspaper in Luxembourg. Luxembourg was the first country you visited. Many people remember your stay there, especially the people you surprised in the coffee shop. I would like to ask you about your impressions of Luxembourg. What are you taking back to Rome and what surprised you there?

**Pope Francis**

Thank you, my visit to the coffee shop was just a fun thing. Next time I will visit a pizzeria. Luxembourg really impressed me as a well-balanced society, with well-considered laws, as well as

a different culture. This impressed me a lot, because I was unfamiliar with it. Belgium, on the other hand, I knew better, because I have been there many times. But Luxembourg was a surprise because of its balance and hospitality. That is something that surprised me. I believe that perhaps the message Luxembourg can offer Europe is precisely this. Thank you.

### **Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness, and thank you to Dr Merten. The next question is from Valérie Dupont, from the Belgian press for French speakers.

### **Valérie Dupont – Television for the French Community of Belgium RTBF**

Yes, from the television station for the French community. Holy Father, thank you for your availability. Please excuse my voice – I caught a bit of a cold in the rain. Your words at the tomb of King Baldwin have caused some astonishment in Belgium...

### **Pope Francis**

But you know that astonishment is the beginning of philosophy, and that is good!

### **Valérie Dupont**

Let us hope so! Some have also seen it as political interference in Belgium's democratic life. This is my question: Is the beatification process of the king linked to his positions? How can we reconcile the right to life and the defence of life with women's right to have a life without suffering?

### **Pope Francis**

They are all lives. The king was courageous because, faced with a law of death, he did not sign it and abdicated. That takes courage! It takes a "real" politician to do this. It takes courage. It was a particular situation and he gave a message through his actions. He did it because he was a saint. He is holy and the beatification process will continue, because he gave me proof of this.

Women. Women have the right to life: to their own lives and the lives of their children. Let us not forget to say this: abortion is murder. Science tells you that within a month of conception, all the organs are already there. A human being is killed. And doctors who engage in this are – permit me to say – hitmen. They are hitmen. This cannot be disputed. A human life is killed. Women have the right to protect life.

A separate matter is contraceptive methods; that is another matter. Do not confuse them. I am speaking now only about abortion. This cannot be disputed. Forgive me, but it is the truth.

## **Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness, and thank you to Valérie Dupont. The third question comes from a Flemish-speaking Belgian, or rather a Dutch-speaking Belgian.

## **Andrea Vreede – Flemish and Dutch Belgian TV**

Holy Father, during this Visit to Belgium you also had a long meeting with a group of victims of sexual abuse. Often in their accounts, there are cries of despair about the lack of transparency in procedures, closed doors, silence towards them, the slowness of disciplinary actions, the cover-ups you spoke about today, and the issues with monetary compensation for the damages suffered. In the end, things seem to change only when they manage to speak with you, in person, as they have during this Apostolic Journey. In Brussels, the victims also made a series of requests. How do you intend to proceed with these requests? Would it not be better, perhaps, to create a specific department in the Vatican, perhaps an independent entity, as some bishops are requesting, to better address this scourge in the Church and to regain the trust of the faithful?

## **Pope Francis**

Thank you. Concerning the last point, there is a department in the Vatican, yes. There is a structure for abuse cases, and the current president is a Colombian bishop. There is a Commission, and it was created by Cardinal O'Malley. It works. All matters are received in the Vatican and discussed. Even in the Vatican I have received people who have been abused, and I offer strength to move forward. This is the first point.

Secondly, I have listened to people who have been abused. I believe it is a duty. Some say: the statistics show that forty, forty-two, forty-six percent of the abuses take place in the family and local neighbourhoods; only three percent in the Church. That does not concern me; I take those of the Church!

We bear the responsibility for helping people who have been abused and taking care of them. Some need psychological treatment; we must help them with this. There is also talk of compensation because it is in civil law. In civil law in Belgium, I believe it is fifty thousand euros; that is too low. It is not helpful. I believe the amount is that, but I am not sure.

We must take care of people who have been abused and punish the abusers, because abuse is not a sin of today that perhaps tomorrow will not exist. It is a trend; it is a psychiatric illness, and for this reason, we must offer them treatment and monitor them.

You cannot leave an abuser free to live a normal life, with responsibilities in parishes and schools. Some bishops have had the priests work in a library after their trial and conviction, without contact

with children in schools and parishes.

But we must move forward with this. I told the Belgian bishops not to be afraid and to strive ahead, go forward. What is shameful is covering this up; that is indeed shameful.

### **Matteo Bruni**

The next question is from Courtney Walsh, from Fox TV.

### **Courtney Walsh – Fox TV**

Thank you very much for your time. We read this morning that nine hundred kilogram bombs were used for the targeted assassination of Nasrallah. There are more than a thousand displaced, and many dead. Do you think that Israel has perhaps gone too far with Lebanon and Gaza? How can this be resolved? Is there a message for these people there?

### **Pope Francis**

I call the parish at Gaza every day. More than six hundred people are there, inside the parish and the college. They tell me about the things that are happening, including the cruelties that are occurring there. Concerning your question, I do not quite understand how things have been evolving. However, defence must always be proportionate to the attack.

When there is something disproportionate, it is evident that there is a domineering tendency that goes beyond morality. A country that does these things with its forces – I am talking about any country – in such a “superlative” way commits immoral actions.

Even in war, morality is to be safe-guarded. War is immoral, but the rules of war indicate some morality. When this is not respected, you can see – as we say in Argentina – the “bad blood” of these things.

### **Matteo Bruni**

Thank you, Your Holiness. Thank you, Courtney. Perhaps we can have one last question, given that this flight is shorter than the last flight. This is Annachiara Valle, from Famiglia Cristiana.

### **Annachiara Valle – Famiglia Cristiana**

Thank you, Holy Father. Yesterday, after the meeting at the Catholic University of Louvain, this statement was released: “The University deplores the conservative positions expressed by Pope Francis on the role of women in society”. They say that it is a bit restrictive to talk about women

only in terms of motherhood, fertility, and care, and that indeed, this is somewhat discriminatory, because it is a role that also belongs to men. Regarding this issue, both universities have raised the issue of ordained ministries in the Church.

## **Pope Francis**

First of all, this statement was released at the moment when I was speaking. It was pre-written, and this is not moral.

Regarding women, I always speak of the dignity of women, and in this context I said something that I cannot say about men: the Church is woman; she is the Bride of Jesus. Masculinizing the Church, masculinizing women is not humane; it is not Christian. Femininity has its own strength. In fact, women – I always say – are more important than men because the Church is female; the Church is the Bride of Jesus. If this seems conservative to those ladies, then I am Carlo Gardell [a well-known Argentinian tango singer]. It is not understandable... I see that there is an obtuse mind that does not want to hear about this.

Woman is equal to man. In fact, in the life of the Church, woman is superior because the Church is feminine. Regarding ministry, the mysticism of woman is greater than ministry. There is a great theologian [Hans Urs von Balthasar] who studied this, asking which is greater: the Petrine ministry or the Marian ministry. The Marian ministry is greater, because it is a ministry of unity that involves others; the other is a ministry of management.

The maternal nature of the Church is the maternal nature of a woman. Ministry is a much lesser ministry, meant to accompany the faithful, always within a maternal nature. Various theologians have studied this, and say this is a real thing. I do not say modern, but real; it is not outdated.

An exaggerated feminism, which means that women become like chauvinists, does not work. One thing is chauvinism, that does not work; another is feminism, that does not work. What works is the feminine Church being greater than the priestly ministry. This is not often considered.

But thank you for the question. And thank you all for this journey and for the work you have done. I am sorry that time is tight here. But thank you, thank you very much. I pray for you; you pray for me. Pray on my behalf!

*(The Pope is reminded of the tragedy of the fifty people who were lost at sea off the coast of the Canary Islands.)*

It greatly pains me to hear of all those people missing off the Canaries. Today, so many migrants seeking freedom are lost at sea or near the sea. We can think of Crotona, right? One hundred meters... Let us think of that. This is something to cry about, to weep for. Thank you.

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