



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO MOROCCO

[30-31 MARCH 2019]

PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM RABAT TO ROME *Papal flight*

Sunday, 31 March 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

GISOTTI

Good evening, Holy Father, and good evening to you all. Our flight is shorter than planned, but I think that you will also be pleased as it will more easily facilitate your return home and thus, also a slightly shorter press conference. So I will not add more to this introduction, except for this, Holy Father. Yesterday we said “servant of hope”, and we witnessed the joy, the hope of so many young people. It is beautiful that this comes just a few days after the signing of *Christus Vivit*, which will be published in just two days. This too is a beautiful sign that comes from Morocco. I am not sure whether you would also like to add something before we begin with the questions.

POPE FRANCIS

I thank you for your company, the journey, your work; it was very demanding because there were many things in one and a half days. Thank you for your work and now I am at your service.

GISOTTI

Clearly, as always, by tradition, we begin with the local media. Siham Toufiki, do you wish to pose your question in French or English?

SIHAM TOUFIKI, MAP AGENCY:

In French. There were moments that were very powerful during this visit and some moving messages. This visit was an exceptional and historic event for the Moroccan people... My question

is this: What will be the fruits of this visit for the future, for peace in the world, for the coexistence and for intercultural dialogue?

POPE FRANCIS

Right now, I would say that there are flowers; the fruits will come later. But the flowers are promising. I am happy because on these two trips [[United Arab Emirates](#) and [Morocco](#)], I was able to talk about something that is of deep concern to me: that is, peace, unity, fraternity. With our Muslim brothers and sisters, we also sealed this fraternity in the Abu Dhabi Document, and with what we all saw here in Morocco: a freedom, a fraternity, a welcome; all brothers and sisters with great respect. This is a beautiful “flower”, a beautiful flower of coexistence that promises to bear fruit. We must not give up! It is true that there will still be difficulties, many difficulties, because unfortunately, there are intransigent groups. Once again I would like to state this: in every religion there is always an “integralist” group that does not want to go forward, that lives on bitter memories, on past conflicts, preferring war and sowing fear. We have seen that it is more beautiful to sow hope, to sow hope and walk hand in hand, always forward. We have seen that in the dialogue with you here in Morocco, bridges are needed and it pains us to see people who prefer to build walls. Why are we pained? Because those who build walls will end up as prisoners of the walls they have built. Whereas those who build bridges will go forward. For me, building bridges is something almost superhuman, because it requires so much effort. I am deeply touched by a phrase in Ivo Andrić’s novel, *The Bridge over the Drina*. He says that the bridge is made by God with the wings of angels so that men and women can communicate – between the mountains or the shores of a river – so that men and women can communicate among themselves. The bridge is for human communication. This is very beautiful and I witnessed it here in Morocco. Walls, on the other hand, are against communication; they are for isolation and one becomes a prisoner of those walls... So, to summarize: the fruits cannot be seen, but we can see many flowers that will bear fruit. Let us move forward in this way.

GISOTTI

Holy Father, another question from Moroccan media: Nadia Hammouchi.

NADIA HAMMOUCHI, TV 2M:

Holy Father, you spent two days in a Muslim country. You are the head of the Catholic Church and you met the King of Morocco who is the Commander of the Believers. You thus had time for an exchange, for dialogue within the framework of this necessary rapprochement among religions and cultures and you also signed something concrete about Jerusalem. In what way does this visit, with its significant moments, strengthen this dialogue, this impulse and thus this relationship between the head of the Catholic Church and the Commander of the Believers in Morocco?

POPE FRANCIS

Whenever there is fraternal dialogue, there is always a relationship at various levels. Let me use an image: dialogue cannot be produced in a laboratory; it has to be human, and if it is human, it employs the mind, the heart and the hands. That is how agreements are made and signed. For example: the joint appeal regarding Jerusalem was a step forward taken not by an authority from Morocco and an authority from the Vatican, but by fellow believers who are pained to see this “City of Hope” not being as universal as we would all want: Jews, Muslims and Christians. We all want this. That is why we signed this expression of hope: more than an accord, it is an expression of hope, an appeal to the religious fraternity that is symbolized in that City that is wholly “ours”. All of us, all believers, are citizens of Jerusalem. I am not sure if this was the question you wanted to ask me. I also enjoyed the encounter with several religious leaders who were respectful and willing to dialogue. Your religious leaders are fraternal, they are open and this is a grace. Let us go forward on this path.

GISOTTI

Holy Father, Nicolas Seneze of La Croix

NICOLAS SENEZE, La Croix:

Good evening Holy Father. Yesterday the King of Morocco said he would protect Moroccan Jews and Christians from other countries who live in Morocco. My question is about those Muslims who convert to Christianity: I wanted to know whether you are concerned about these men and women who risk imprisonment or, in some Muslim countries like the Emirates, that you have visited, death? Also another question – a little cheeky – about Cardinal Barbarin, who was born in Rabat, where we were two days ago...

GISOTTI

Only one question!

SENEZE

It is a bit cheeky, I know. This week the Council of the Diocese of Lyon almost unanimously voted that a lasting solution be found for his retirement. Aside from the Cardinal’s legal issues, I wanted to know if it is possible for you, who are very attached to the synodality of the Church, to hear this appeal of a diocese in such a difficult situation?

POPE FRANCIS

I can say that in Morocco there is freedom of worship, there is freedom of religion, there is freedom of religious affiliation. Then again, freedom always develops, grows... Think of us Christians, three hundred years ago, whether there was this freedom that we have today. Faith grows in awareness, in the ability to understand itself. A French monk, Vincent of Lerins, in the fifth century, coined a beautiful expression to explain how there can be growth in faith, in the explanation of things, and also in morals while always remaining faithful to its roots. He said three words that sketch the way: he said that growth in the expression and in awareness of the faith and morals must be such *ut annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*, in other words, the same faith becomes firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time and more exalted as it advances in age. Thus one can understand, for example, that today we have removed the death penalty from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, three hundred years after burning heretics alive. Because the Church has grown in moral awareness and respect for the person. Freedom of worship is also growing, and we must continue to grow. There are Catholics who do not accept what Vatican II said about freedom of worship, freedom of conscience. There are Catholics who do not accept this. We too have this problem. Yet the awareness of our Muslim brothers and sisters is also growing and some countries do not understand as well or grow as well as others. In Morocco, there is this growth. In this framework, there is the problem of conversion: some countries still do not provide for it. I do not know if it is forbidden, but in practice, it is. Other countries like Morocco do not create problems, they are more open, more respectful and seek a certain way to proceed with discretion. Other countries with whose representatives I have spoken say: We do not have a problem, but we prefer that baptisms be performed outside the country and that they return as Christians. These are ways of progressing in freedom of conscience and freedom of worship. But something else troubles me: the regression of us Christians, when we take away freedom of conscience; think of those Christian doctors and health care institutions that do not have the right of conscientious objection regarding, for example, euthanasia. Why? The Church has gone forward and you Christian countries are going backwards? Think about this because it is true. Today, we Christians face the danger that some governments will take away our freedom of conscience, which is the first step [towards taking away] freedom of worship. The answer is not easy, but let us not just accuse Muslims, let us also accuse ourselves for these countries where this is happening, and this should make us feel ashamed.

Then, regarding Cardinal Barbarin. He, a man of the Church, he has offered his resignation, but I cannot morally accept this because legally, but also in classical international jurisprudence, there is the presumption of innocence as long as the case remains open. He has appealed and the case is open. When the next court hands down the sentence, we will see what happens. Yet there is always the presumption of innocence. This is important because it goes against the superficial condemnation of the media: "He did this..." But consider this well. What does jurisprudence say? That if a case is open, there is the presumption of innocence. The person may not be innocent, but is presumed to be so. Once I spoke about a case in Spain in which condemnation in the media ruined the lives of several priests who were later acknowledged to be innocent. Before condemning in the media, one has to think twice. I do not know if I have answered [your question].

He [the Cardinal] honestly preferred to say: "I will withdraw, I will take a voluntary leave and let the Vicar General manage the Archdiocese until the court gives the final ruling". Understood? Thank you.

GISOTTI

Please be concise and only one question per person, so as to respect all the language groups. Here is Cristina Cabrejas from Efe.

CRISTINA CABREJAS, EFE AGENCY:

Good afternoon, Pope Francis. I will ask the question in Italian. In yesterday's address to the Authorities, you said that the migration phenomenon cannot be resolved with physical barriers, yet here in Morocco, Spain has built two barriers with sharp blades to slice anyone who would want to pass them. You encountered some of them in a few meetings. And these days, President Trump has said that he wants to completely close all frontiers and moreover, suspend aid to three Central American countries. What would you like to say to these leaders, to these politicians who still defend these decisions? Thank you.

POPE FRANCIS

First of all, what I said a moment ago: the builders of walls, whether they be made of barbed wire and sharp blades or of bricks, will become prisoners of the walls they build. That is the first thing. History will tell. The second: when Jordi Evole interviewed me, he showed me a piece of that wire with the blades. I tell you honestly, I was moved, and then when he left, I wept. I wept because my head and my heart cannot comprehend such cruelty. My head and my heart cannot comprehend seeing [people] drowning in the Mediterranean and building walls at ports. This is not the way to resolve the grave problem of immigration. I understand: with this problem, a government has a "hot potato" on its hands, but it has to resolve it in a different way, humanely. When I saw that wire with the blades, it seemed unbelievable. Also, once I was able to see a film made in a prison, about refugees who were sent back. Unofficial prisons, smugglers' prisons. If you want, I can send it to you. They make people suffer... they make them suffer. They sell the women and the children; the men remain. And the forms of torture seen there on film are unbelievable. It was filmed secretly, with the services. Well, I will not allow them to enter: true, because I have no room, but there are other countries, there is the European Union. There have to be talks, the entire European Union. Do I not let them enter and let them drown, or do I send them away knowing that many of them will fall into the hands of smugglers who will sell the women and the children and kill or torture and sell the men into slavery? This film is available to you. I once spoke to a government leader, a man whom I respect, and I will say his name, Alexis Tsipras. And speaking about this and the agreements to deny entry, he explained the difficulties to me, but in the end he spoke to me from the heart and he said these words: "Human rights come before agreements": those words

deserve the Nobel prize.

GISOTTI

The next question is from Michael Schramm, ARD, German.

MICHAEL WERNER SCHRAMM, ARD Rome

You must forgive me, my Italian is not good. Excuse me. My question. For many years, you have been fighting to protect and help migrants, as you did in recent days in Morocco. European politics is going in exactly in the opposite direction. Europe is becoming like a bastion against migrants. This policy reflects the opinion of voters. The majority of these voters are Catholic Christians. How do you feel about this sad situation?

POPE FRANCIS

It is true that many people of good will, not just Catholics, but good people of good will, are a bit fearful and fear is the typical “sermon” of forms of populism: fear. You sow fear and then make decisions. Fear is the beginning of dictatorships. Let us turn to the last century, to the fall of the Weimar Republic, I often repeat this. Germany needed a way out, and with promises and fear, Hitler moved forward... We know the result. Let us learn from history! This is not something new: to sow fear is to reap cruelty, forms of closure and also sterility. Think about Europe’s demographic winter. We too who live in Italy: below zero. Think about the lack of historical memory: Europe was formed by migration movements, and this is its richness. Think about the generosity shown by many countries, that today knock on Europe’s door, to European migrants who came from 1984 onwards, the two post-war periods, en masse, to North America, Central America, South America. My father went there after the war and was welcomed. Europe too could show some gratitude... I would say two things. It is true that our first task is to try to [ensure] that people who migrate on account of wars or famine do not have to do so. But if the Europe which is so generous sells weapons to Yemen that kill children, how can Europe then be consistent? This is an example. Europe sells arms. Then there is the problem of hunger, of thirst. If Europe wants to be “mother Europe” and not “grandmother Europe”, it has to invest, it has to seek intelligently to foster growth through education, through investments. This [idea] is not mine; Chancellor Merkel said this. It is something that she works hard to make happen: preventing emigration not by force, but instead with generosity, and educational, economic investments and so on. This is very important. Second, how to act: it is true that a country cannot welcome everyone, but there is all of Europe in which to distribute migrants: all of Europe. Because welcoming must be done with open hearts, and then accompanying, promoting and integrating. If a country cannot integrate, it should immediately speak with other countries: how many can you integrate, in order to give people a dignified life? Another example that I experienced at first hand during the time of dictatorships, was Operation Condor in Buenos Aires, in Latin America: Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. It was

Sweden that welcomed, with an impressive generosity. [The newcomers] immediately learned the language, at the State's expense, they found work and housing. Now Sweden feels some difficulty in integrating, but it says so and it asks for help. When I was in Lund last year, or the year before, I don't remember, the Prime Minister welcomed me, but in the farewell ceremony, there was a minister, a young minister, I think of education, her skin was somewhat darker because she was the daughter of a Swedish woman and an African migrant. This is how a nation that I use as an example, Sweden, integrates. But this requires generosity and moving forward. We will never move forward with fear. With walls, we will remain closed within them. Sorry, I am preaching!

GISOTTI

Now there is a question from Cristiana Caricato of TV2000.

CRISTIANA CARICATO, TV2000

Holy Father, you have just spoken about fear and the risk of dictatorships that these fears can generate. Just today, an Italian minister, referring to the Verona conference, said that we should be more afraid of Islam than of families. Instead, you have been saying the opposite for years. In your opinion, are we at risk of dictatorship in our country? Is it the result of the prejudice, of not knowing? What do you think? And then, a point of interest. You often condemn the work of the devil. You did it again at the recent summit on the protection of minors. It seems to me that in recent times, the devil has been very active; he has kept busy, even in the Church... What can we do to oppose him, in particular with regard to the paedophilia scandals? Are laws enough? Why is the devil so active at the moment?

POPE FRANCIS

Very good. Thank you for the question. After my address at the end of the meeting on the protection of minors with the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, one newspaper said: "But the Pope was clever. First he said that paedophilia is a global problem, a global scourge; then he said something about the Church, and at the end he washed his hands of it and blamed the devil". A little simplistic, don't you think? That address is clear. A French philosopher back in the 1970's made a distinction that I found illuminating. His name was Roqueplo [Philippe] and he gave me a good way of seeing things. He said: "In order to understand a situation, one must give all the explanations and then seek the meaning". What does this mean socially? What does it mean personally or religiously? I try to give all the explanations, and to assess those explanations.

But there is a point when things cannot be understood apart from the mystery of evil. Think about it. Virtual child pornography. There have been two important meetings, one in Rome and the other in Abu Dhabi. I ask myself, how is it that this phenomenon has become such a reality of daily life? How? I am speaking of serious statistics. How is it that if you want to see the sexual abuse of a

minor, live, you can connect to virtual child pornography and they show it to you. Look, I am not telling lies; it is in the statistics. So I wonder: can't those responsible for public order do anything? We in the Church will do everything we can to end this scourge, everything we can. And in that address, I gave concrete measures. And also they were already there, before the summit, when the Presidents of the Conferences gave me a list that I gave all of you. But are those responsible for this filth, innocent? Those who profit from this? Once, in Buenos Aires, with two parliament members, not those of the national government, we proposed an "ordinance", a provision, not a law, but a non-binding provision for upmarket hotels, asking them to put this [notice] in their receptions, stating that: *Amusement* with minors is not permitted in this hotel". No one wanted to display it: "No... you know, we cannot, it appears as if we are filthy." "People know that we do not allow, without needing a sign". A government for example, cannot pinpoint where these things are being done with children? All of them filmed live.

[All this] to say that the global scourge is large, but also to say that it is not comprehensible apart from the spirit of evil, it is a concrete problem. We need to resolve it concretely, but also to say that it is the spirit of evil. And to resolve it, there are two publications which I recommend: an article by Gianni Valente in, I believe, *Vatican Insider*, that speaks about Donatism. The Church's danger today of becoming Donatist, making human regulations that are necessary, but limiting ourselves to this and forgetting the other spiritual dimensions, prayer, penitence and self-accusation... which we are not accustomed to doing. Both are needed! Because to defeat the spirit of evil we must not "wash our hands" by saying: "It's the work of the devil", no. We have to fight also against the devil, as we have to struggle against human things. The other publication is by "*Civiltà Cattolica*". I had written a book in 1987, "*Letters of Tribulation*", containing the letters of the then Father Superior of the Jesuits, when the society was about to be disbanded. I wrote a preface and they did a study of the letters I wrote to the Chilean bishops and the people of Chile about how to respond to this problem: the two aspects, the human, scientific, and also legal, involved in combatting the phenomenon, and then the spiritual aspect.

I did the same with the Bishops of the United States because their proposals were too focused on organization, on methodology, and, without wanting to, neglected this second, spiritual dimension. With lay people, with everyone... I would say to you: the Church is not a "congregationalist" Church. It is a Catholic Church, in which the Bishop must take matters into his hands as a pastor. The Pope has to take them into his hands as a pastor. How? With disciplinary measures, with prayer, penance and self-accusation. And in the letter I wrote to [the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences] before they began their retreat, this dimension is well explained. I would be grateful if you studied those two things: the human part and also the part of the spiritual struggle. Thank you.

GISOTTI

We have really exceeded our time. I'm sorry, but it is a press conference that has become long...

POPE FRANCIS

[Regarding the question raised by C. Caricato] I really don't understand Italian politics... I had read something about a "Family Day" in the magazine, *L'Espresso*. I do not know what it is, I know that it is one of the many "days" that get celebrated... I read the letter that Cardinal Parolin sent and I agree with it. A pastoral letter, respectful, coming from a pastor's heart. But do not ask me about Italian politics, I don't understand them. Thank you.

GISOTTI

There is only one minute for a small surprise for two colleagues whose birthdays were yesterday: Phil Pullella and Gerard O'Connell, two great colleagues and this is a small gift also from the community of your colleagues and all of us.

POPE FRANCIS

You tell me he is older than I... But he is turning 45 and he is turning 50! Happy Birthday! Thank you and safe travels, enjoy your dinner and please pray for me. Thank you.