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Press Conference of the Holy Father on the return flight from his Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Geneva for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the World Council of Churches

Yesterday during the flight from Geneva to Rome, at the end of his ecumenical pilgrimage to Geneva, the Holy Father Francis met with the journalists on board in a press conference, the full transcript of which is given below:

Greg Burke:

Thanks, in the meantime. "Walking, praying, working together" [theme of the trip]. We walked, we prayed, several times, and now we have to work a bit - and even eat, afterwards. However, we see that walking together brings fruit: today, acceptance. We have seen that, after so many years of dialogue, there is mutual respect and something more: there is also friendship. But there is still a lot of work to do and many challenges, and this is of interest to us normally: the challenges.

Maybe you want to say something first ...

Pope Francis:

Thank you for your work! It was rather a heavy day, at least for me. But I am happy. I am happy because the different things we have done, both the prayer at the beginning, then the dialogue during lunch, which was beautiful, and then the Mass; these are things that made me happy. Tired, but they are good things. Thank you very much. And now, I am at your disposal.

Greg Burke:

Good. Let us begin with the Swiss: Arnaud Bédât, from the journal "L'illustre":

Arnaud Bédât:

Holy Father, you have been to Geneva, but also to Switzerland. What images, what important and powerful moments, struck you during this day?

Pope Francis:

Thank you. I believe that - I would say - there is a common word: encounter. It was a day of encounters. Variegated. The right word of the day is encounter, and when one person meets another and feels the pleasure of the encounter, this always touches the heart. These were positive, even beautiful, encounters, starting with the dialogue with the President [of the Swiss Confederation], at the beginning, which was not only a dialogue of courtesy, normal, but a profound dialogue, on deep world issues and with an intelligence that impressed me. Starting from this. Then, the meetings that you have all seen ... And what you have not seen is the meeting at lunch, which was very profound in terms of touching on so many topics. Perhaps the topic on which we spent the most time was the young, also because all the Confessions are concerned, in a good sense, about the young. And the pre-Synod that took place in Rome, from 19 March onwards, attracted some attention, because they were young people of all Confessions, even agnostics, and of all countries. Think about it: 315 young people present and 15 thousand connected online who "came and went". This perhaps inspired a special interest. But the word that perhaps for me sums up the whole trip is that it was a journey of *encounter*. The experience of *encounter*. Not mere courtesy, nothing purely formal, but human encounter. And this, between Protestants and Catholics, means everything ... Thank you.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Your Holiness. Now from the German group there is Roland Juchem, from the German Catholic agency CIC.

Roland Juchem:

Thank you, Holy Father. You often speak about concrete steps to be taken in ecumenism. Today, for example, you referred to it again, saying "Let us see what we can do concretely, rather than grow discouraged about what we cannot". So, the German bishops recently decided to take a step [on the so-called "inter-communion"], and so we ask how come Archbishop Ladaria [prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] has written a letter that seems somewhat like an emergency brake. After the meeting of 3 May last, it was affirmed that the German bishops would have found a solution, possibly unanimously. What will the next steps be? Will intervention on the part of the Vatican be necessary to clarify, or must the German bishops find an agreement?

Pope Francis:

Good. This is not new, because the Code of Canon Law provides for what the German bishops were talking about: Communion in special cases. And they looked at the problem of mixed marriages: whether it is possible or not possible. However, the Code says that the particular bishop of the Church – this word is important: *particular*, if it is from a diocese – must manage the issue: it is in his hands. This is in the Code. The German bishops, because they had seen that the case was not clear, and also that some priests did things not in agreement with the bishop, they wanted to study this theme and they carried out this study that – I do not want to exaggerate – was a study of more than a year, I do not know precisely, but more than a year, done well, done well. And the study is restrictive: what the bishops wanted is to clearly say what is in the Code. And I, too, read it, I say: this is a restrictive document. It was not "open to everyone". No. It was well thought out, with an ecclesial spirit. And they wanted to do it for the local Church: not the particular one. They did not want to. The thing has slipped up to there, that is, saying it is for the German Episcopal Conference. And there is a problem, because the Code does not provide for this. It foresees the competence of the diocesan bishop, but not of the Episcopal Conference. Why? Because something approved in an Episcopal Conference immediately becomes universal. And this was the difficulty of the discussion: not so much the content, but this. They sent the document; then there were two or three meetings for dialogue and clarification; and Archbishop Ladaria sent that letter, but with my permission, he did not do it alone. I told him: "Yes, it is better to take a step forward and say that the document is not yet mature – this was what the letter said – and that we have to study the matter more".

Then there was another meeting, and eventually they will study the thing. I believe this will be a *guiding* document, so that each of the diocesan bishops can manage what canon law already permits. There was no brake, no. It was a matter of managing the thing to get on the right track. When I visited the Lutheran Church in Rome, a question of this type was asked and I responded according to the spirit of the Code of Canon Law, the spirit that they [the bishops] are now seeking. Maybe there was not the right information at the right time, there is a bit of confusion, but that is the issue. In the particular Church, the Code permits it; in the *local* Church, it cannot, because it would be universal. That is the issue.

Roland Juchem:

The local Church is the Conference?

Pope Francis:

... It is the Conference. But the Conference can study and give guidelines to help bishops in managing particular cases. Thank you.

Greg Burke:

Now, from the Spanish group, there is Eva Fernández of Cope, the Spanish radio.

Eva Fernández:

Thank you, Holy Father. We have seen that even the general secretary of the World Council of Churches has spoken about aid to refugees. Recently we have seen the incident of the ship "Aquarius" and other cases, such as the separation of families in the United States. Do you think that some governments exploit the drama of refugees? Thank you.

Pope Francis:

I have spoken a lot about refugees and the criteria are in what I said: "welcome, protect, promote, integrate". These are criteria for all refugees. Then I said that every country must do this with the virtue of governance that is prudence, because a country must welcome as many refugees as it can, and as many as it can *integrate*: integrate, that is, educate, give work ... This, I would say, is the quiet and peaceful plan of refugees. Here we are experiencing a wave of refugees fleeing war and hunger. War and hunger in many countries of Africa, wars and persecution in the Middle East. Italy and Greece have been very generous in welcoming them. For the Middle East – regarding Syria – Turkey has received so many; Lebanon, many: Lebanon has as many Syrians as there are Lebanese; and then Jordan, and other countries. Spain too has welcomed them. There is the problem of trafficking in migrants. And there is also the problem of cases in which they return, because they have to return: there is this case ... I do not know the terms of the agreement well, but if they are in Libyan waters they have to return ... And there I saw the photographs of the prisons of traffickers. Traffickers immediately separate women from men: women and children go God knows where ... This is what the traffickers do. There is also a case, I know, in which the traffickers approached a ship that had received refugees from the boats and said: "Give us women and children and take the males away". These are traffickers. And the prisons of the traffickers, for those who have returned, are terrible, they are terrible. These things were seen in the *lager* of World War II. Even mutilations, torture ... And then they throw them into the mass graves, the men. This is why governments worry that they will come back and fall into the hands of these people. There is worldwide concern. I know that governments are talking about this and they want to find an agreement, even to amend the Dublin Agreement. In Spain, you have had the case of this ship that arrived in Valencia. But all this phenomenon is a disorder. The problem of wars is difficult to solve; the problem of the persecution of Christians also, in the Middle East and also in Nigeria. But the problem of hunger can be solved. And many European governments are thinking of an urgent plan to invest in those countries, to invest intelligently, to provide work and education, these two things. In the countries from which these people come. Because – without wishing to offend, but it is the truth – in the

collective subconscious there is an ugly motto: “Africa must be exploited” – *Africa es para ser explotada*. This is in the subconscious: “Eh, they are Africans! ...”. Land of slaves. And this must change with this plan of investment, education, development, because the African people have so many cultural riches. And they have a great intelligence: the children are very intelligent and can, with a good education, go further. This will be the medium-term road. But at the moment governments must agree to move forward with this emergency. This, here in Europe.

Let us go to America. In America, there is a big migration problem in Latin America, and there is also the internal migration problem. In my homeland there is a migration problem from the north to the south; people leave the countryside because there is no work and they go to big cities, and there are these megalopolises, slums, and all these things ... But there is also an external migration to other countries that give jobs. Speaking concretely, towards the United States. I agree with what the bishops of that country say. I support them. Thank you.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Your Holiness. Now, the English group: Deborah Castellano Lubov, from the Zenit agency.

Deborah Castellano Lubov:

Thank you, Your Holiness. Your Holiness, in your address today at the ecumenical meeting, you referred to the enormous power of the Gospel. We know that some of the Churches of the World Council of Churches are so-called “Churches of peace”, who believe that a Christian cannot use violence. Let us recall that two years ago, in the Vatican, there was a conference organized to reconsider the doctrine of the “righteous war”. So, Your Holiness, my question is, do you think it would be right for the Catholic Church to join with these so-called “Churches of peace” and to set aside the theory of the “righteous war”? Thank you.

Pope Francis:

A clarification: why do you say that they are “Churches of peace”?

Deborah Castellano Lubov:

They are considered “Churches of peace” because they have this concept, that a person who uses violence can no longer be considered Christian.

Pope Francis:

Thank you, I understand. You have put your finger in the wound ... Today, at lunch, a Pastor said that perhaps the first human right is the right to hope, and I liked this, and it relates a little to this theme. We talked about the human rights crisis today. I think I have to start with this to arrive at your question. The human rights crisis appears clear. We speak a little of human rights, but many groups or some countries keep their distance. Yes, we have human rights but ... there is not the strength, the enthusiasm, the conviction of, I do not say 70 years ago, but 20 years ago. And this is serious, because we must see the causes. What are the causes for which we have arrived at this? That today human rights are *relative*. The right to peace is also *relative*. It is a human rights crisis. This I think we have to think about it thoroughly.

Then, the so-called “Churches of Peace”. I believe that all the Churches that have this spirit of peace must come together and work together, as we said in the speeches today, both I and the other people who spoke, and at lunch it was discussed. Unity for peace. Today peace is a need, because there is a risk of war ... Someone said: this third world war, if it takes place, we know what weapons will be used, but if there were to be a fourth, it would be with sticks, because humanity will be destroyed. The commitment to peace is a serious matter. When you think about the money that is spent on armaments! For this reason, they are “Churches of Peace”: but it is God’s mandate! Peace, brotherhood, united humanity ... And all conflicts, we must not resolve them like Cain,

but resolve them through negotiation, dialogue, and mediation. For example, we are in crisis of mediations! Mediation, which is a very precious legal tool, is in crisis today. Crisis of hope, crisis of human rights, crisis of mediations, crisis of peace. But then, if you say that there are “Churches of Peace”, I ask myself: are there “Churches of War”? It is difficult to understand this, it is difficult, but there are certainly some groups, and I would say in almost all religions, small groups, I will say simplifying somewhat, “fundamentalist”, who seek wars. We Catholics also have some, who always seek destruction. And it is very important to keep this in view. I do not know if I answered ...

They tell me that people are asking for their dinner, that it is the right time to arrive with a full stomach ...

I would like to say only one word clearly: that today was an *ecumenical* day, truly ecumenical. And at lunch we said something very nice, that I will leave to you to think about and reflect upon, and to consider well: in the ecumenical movement we must remove a word from the dictionary: *proselytism*. Is that clear? There can be no ecumenism with proselytism, we need to choose: either you are of an ecumenical spirit, or you are a “proselyte”.

Thank you, I would continue to speak as I like to, but ...

Now, let us ask the Substitute [of the Secretary of State] to come forward, because it is the last trip he will make with us, as now he is “changing colour” [becoming a cardinal]: but not from shame! We would like to wish him well, and there will be a Sardinian cake to celebrate.

H.E. Msgr. Giovanni Angelo Becciu:

Thank you! It is a dual surprise, to call me here and thank me in front of all of you. And then a Sardinian cake ... good! We will taste it with pleasure. I truly thank the Holy Father for this occasion, but for everything, for everything, because he has given me this wonderful experience of travelling with him frequently. At the beginning, he frightened me, he said: “No, I make only a few trips”, do you remember? And then, after one he added another, and another, and we said: “Thank goodness he said they would only be a few!”. And they were many. A magnificent experience: to see the Holy Father courageously spread the Word of God. My service was only this: to help him in this. Thanks to all of you and to those who have helped us. Thank you.

Pope Francis:

Enjoy your meal, and many thanks. And pray for me, please. Thank you.
