



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO ARMENIA  
(24-26 JUNE 2016)

*IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
FROM ARMENIA TO ROME*

*Papal Flight*  
*Sunday, 26 June 2016*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Father Lombardi:*

Holy Father, thank you for being here at the end of this short but intense trip. We were pleased to accompany you and now we wish to ask you, as is customary, a few questions, counting on your generosity. We have a list of people who have signed up to speak, and we can begin, as usual, with our colleagues from Armenia, giving them precedence. The first is Arthur Grygorian of Armenian Public Television.

*Pope Francis:*

Good evening! I thank you for your help on this trip and for all your work, which is a service to people: communicating good news well, and good news is always a good thing. Many thanks.

*Arthur Grygorian, Armenian Public Television:*

Holy Father, we know that you have Armenian friends. You already had contacts among the Armenian community in Argentina. During your last three days, you – so to speak – succeeded in

touching the Armenian spirit. What are your feelings, your impressions, and what is the message for the future, your prayers for us Armenians?

*Pope Francis:*

We think of the future and then we go back to the past. My prayer for the people is for justice and peace. And I pray for this because they are a courageous people. I pray that they may find justice and peace. I know that many people are working on this; and I was also very happy last week when I saw a photograph of President Putin with the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan: at least they are talking. Likewise with Turkey: the President of the (Armenian) Republic, in his welcoming remarks, spoke clearly. He had the courage to say, “Let us agree, let us forgive one another and look to the future”. This takes great courage! A people that has suffered so much!

The image of the Armenian people – this thought came to me earlier today in my prayer – is of a life of stone and the tenderness of a mother. This people has carried many crosses, but crosses of stone – we see this (in the characteristic stone crosses known as khachkar) – without losing its tenderness, its art and music, those “fourth tones” so difficult to grasp, and it has done so with genius... A people that suffered so much throughout its history, and faith alone, faith has kept this people on its feet. The fact that [Armenia] was the first Christian nation is not enough; it was the first Christian nation because the Lord blessed it, because it had its saints, it had its holy bishops and martyrs... That is why its resistance enabled it to develop a “stony skin” – we can put it this way – without losing the tenderness of a mother’s heart; and Armenia is also a mother.

This is the second question. Let us go back to the first. Yes, I had many contacts with Armenians, I often went to their Masses..., many Armenian friends. I don’t like to go to dinner to relax, but I would with them, and they make really big dinners! But I am very good friends with Archbishop Kissag Mouradian of the Apostolic Church and Archbishop Boghossian of the Catholic Church. But with you, more important than belonging to the Apostolic Church or the Catholic Church, is “being Armenian”, and this I came to realize from those days. Today I greeted an Argentinean from an Armenian family who, when I would go to their Masses, the Archbishop would always sit next to me, so that he could explain some of the ceremonies or words I didn’t understand.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you, Your Holiness.

*Jeanine Paloulian, “Nouvelles d’Arménie”:*

Thank you, Holy Father. Last evening, in the ecumenical prayer meeting, you asked young people to be builders of reconciliation with Turkey and with Azerbaijan. I would like to ask you simply, since in a few weeks you will be going to Azerbaijan, what concretely can you and the Holy See do

to help us, to help us to move forward. What concrete signs? You have showed some of these in Armenia. What signs will you make, when you are in Azerbaijan?

*Pope Francis:*

I will speak to the Azerbaijani about the truth, of what I have seen, of what I feel. I will encourage them too. I have met the President of Azerbaijan and have spoken with him. I will also say that not making peace on account of a small patch of land – because that is all it is – means something grim... But I say this to all, Armenians and Azerbaijani. Perhaps you aren't agreed on the modalities of peacemaking, and this you have to work on. But I don't know what else to say. I will say what comes into my heart at that moment, but always positively, seeking to find solutions that are workable and move forward.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you. Now it is the turn of Jean-Louis de la Vassière of "France Press". I believe it is his last trip with us. So we are happy to hear from him.

*Jean-Louis de la Vaissière, "France Press":*

Holy Father, first I would like to thank you on behalf of myself and Sébastien Maillard of *La Croix*. We are leaving Rome and we wanted to thank you very much for the breath of spring that is blowing on the Church. I also have a question. Why did you expressly decide to add the word "genocide" in your address at the Presidential Palace? On a painful issue like this, do you think it is helpful for peace in this complicated region?

*Pope Francis:*

Thank you. In Argentina when we spoke of the Armenian massacre, we always used the word "genocide". I knew of no other word. In the Cathedral of Buenos Aires, on the third altar to the left, we erected a stone cross in memory of the "Armenian genocide". The two Armenian archbishops, Catholic and Apostolic, came and dedicated it. Also, the Apostolic archbishop set up an altar in memory of Saint Bartholomew [the evangelizer of Armenia] in the Catholic church of Saint Bartholomew. But to repeat..., I didn't know another word. I *came* with this word. When I got to Rome I heard another expression, "the Great Evil" or "terrible tragedy" [*Metz Yeghern*], in Armenian, which I don't know how to pronounce.

I am told that the word genocide is offensive, and that the other expression should be used. But I have always spoken about the three genocides of the last century, always three. The first was that of the Armenians, followed by those of Hitler and then Stalin. Three. There were other lesser ones. There was yet another in Africa [Rwanda]. But in the context of the two great wars, there were

these three. I asked why [this word should not be used]. I was told that some think it didn't take place, that it wasn't genocide. A lawyer told me, and I found this interesting, that the word "genocide" is a *technical* term, a word with a technical meaning; it is not a synonym of "massacre". One can say massacre, but to speak of genocide means one can sue for damages, etc.

Last year when I was preparing my address [for the celebration of 12 April 2015 in Rome], I saw that Saint John Paul II had used the word. He used both expressions: the great evil and genocide. I quoted him directly. Things did not go well; a statement was made by the Turkish government and in a few days Turkey recalled to Ankara its ambassador – he is a good man, Turkey sent us an ambassador deluxe! He returned two or three months ago... It was an "abstinence from diplomacy"... Turkey has the right, we all have the right, to protest.

It is true that in the address you mentioned, the word did not originally appear. I will tell you why I added it. After hearing the tenor of the President's address, given my past experience with this word, and after having said it publicly last year in Saint Peter's, it would have sounded very strange, at the very least, not to say it again.

But there I wanted to emphasize something else. I believe, unless I am mistaken, that I said: "In this genocide, as in the other two, the great international powers looked the other way". This was the accusation. In the Second World War, some powers had photographs of the railroads that carried people to Auschwitz; they could have bombed them and they didn't. That is one example. In the context of the First World War, where there was the problem of the Armenians, and in the context of the Second World War, where there was a problem with Hitler and Stalin, and after Yalta the concentration camps and so forth, did anyone speak out? One *must* emphasize this and ask the historical question: Why didn't you do this? You powers – I am not accusing, I am asking a question. It is interesting. One looked, yes, to the war, to so many things, but that people... I don't know if it is true, but I would like to know if it is, that when Hitler persecuted the Jews, one of the things that they could have said to him was: "But who today remembers the Armenians? Let's do the same thing to the Jews!" I don't know if this is true, perhaps it is just a story, but I have heard it said. Let the historians look and see if it is true. I think I have answered your question. But this word, I spoke it objectively; I never spoke it with the intention of offending.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you, Holy Father. You dealt with a delicate issue in a profound and sincere way. Now it is the turn of Elisabetta Piqué, who is, as you know, from Argentina, from *La Nación*.

*Elisabetta Piqué, "La Nación":*

First of all, congratulations on the trip. We know that you are the Pope, but there is also Pope Benedict, the Pope Emeritus. Recently there have been rumours, a statement by the Prefect of the

Papal Household, Archbishop Georg G  nswein, supposedly saying that there is a shared Petrine ministry – unless I am mistaken – with an active Pope and a contemplative one. Are there two Popes?

*Pope Francis:*

There was a time in the Church when there were three of them! I didn't read that statement because I didn't have time. Benedict is the Pope emeritus. He said very clearly on 11 February when he tendered his resignation as of the following 28 February, that he was going to withdraw in order to help the Church with *prayer*. Benedict is in the monastery and he is praying. I have gone to see him many times, or spoken with him by telephone... The other day he wrote me a little letter – he still signs with that signature of his – with good wishes for this trip. Once – not just once but on several occasions – I have said that it is a grace to have a wise “grandfather” at home. I say it in front of him and he laughs. For he is the Pope emeritus, the one who watches my back with his prayers. I never forget the talk he gave to us Cardinals that 28 February: “One of you certainly will be my successor. *I promise my obedience*”. And he did. Then I heard – I don't know if this is true – I stress that I heard this and it may be gossip, but it sounds like him, that some people have gone there to lament about “this new Pope...” and he has sent them packing! In the best Bavarian style, politely, but he sent them packing. If it isn't true, it is a good story, because he is like that. He is a man of his word, an upright, a completely upright man! The Pope emeritus. Then, I don't know if you remember (I don't remember when, but I think it was during a flight), I thanked Benedict publicly for having opened the door to emeritus Popes. Seventy years ago, emeritus bishops didn't exist; today they do. But with people living longer, is one able to govern the Church at a certain age – with ailments – or not? With courage – courage! – and prayer, and with his theological learning, he decided to open this door. I believe that this is good for the Church. But there is only one Pope. The other, or sometimes as with emeritus bishops, there may be two or three of them, but now they are retired. The day after tomorrow will be the 65th anniversary of his priestly ordination. His brother Georg will be there, because the two of them were ordained together. There will be a little celebration, with the heads of Vatican offices and few people, because he prefers something... He agreed, but very modestly; and I too will be there. I will say a few words to this great man of prayer and of courage who is the Pope emeritus (not the second Pope!)... that he is faithful to his word and is a man of God. He is very intelligent and for me he is the wise grandfather in the house.

*Father Lombardi:*

Now it is the turn of Alexej Bukalov, one of our deans, who, as you well know, represents Itar-Tass, and hence Russian culture among us.

*Pope Francis:*

Did you speak Russian in Armenia?

*Alexej Bukalov – Itar-Tass:*

Yes, with great pleasure! We thank you again, Your Holiness, for this trip, your first visit to a former Soviet territory. For me it was very important to cover it. My question is on a slightly different note. I know that you have been very supportive of the Pan-Orthodox Council; even at your meeting with Patriarch Kirill in Cuba you offered your good wishes. Now how do you judge this – how shall we say it – forum? Thank you.

*Pope Francis:*

Positively! It has been a step forward, not 100%, but a step forward. The reasons that “justified” [the absence of some] are sincere for them, but they are things that can be resolved with time. They wanted – the four who did not attend – to hold it a little later. But I think that the first step has to be taken as best one can. It’s like children, when they take their first step, they do it the best they can: first they crawl and then they take their first steps. I am happy. They have talked about a great many things. I think that the result is positive. The mere fact that these autocephalous Churches have come together, in the name of Orthodoxy, to look each other in the eye, to pray together and to speak and maybe even exchange some moments of humour... this is most positive. I thank the Lord. The next time there will be more present. Praise the Lord!

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you, Your Holiness. Now we pass the microphone to Edward Pentin, who represents the English language, from the National Catholic Register.

*Edward Pentin – National Catholic Register:*

Holy Father, like John Paul II you appear to be a supporter of the European Union. You praised the European project recently, when you received the Charlemagne Prize. Are you concerned that Brexit could lead to the disintegration of Europe and eventually to war?

*Pope Francis:*

There is already war in Europe! Then too, there is an air of division, not only in Europe, but within countries themselves. One thinks of Catalonia, and Scotland last year... I am not saying that these divisions are dangerous, but we need to look at them closely and, before taking another step towards division, we need to talk seriously to one another and to seek workable solutions. Really, I don’t know, I have not studied the reasons why the United Kingdom wished to make this decision. But there are decisions – and I think I have already said this once before, I don’t know where, but I

have said it – for independence, which are taken for [the sake of] emancipation. For example, all our Latin American countries, and countries in Africa, were emancipated from the crowns of Madrid and Lisbon. So too in Africa: from Paris, London and Amsterdam, especially Indonesia... Emancipation is more understandable, because behind it there is a culture, a way of thinking.

But the secession of a country – and I am not yet speaking about Brexit – we can think of Scotland... is something that has taken on the name – and I say this without offending, using the words politicians use – of “balkanization”, intending no offence to the Balkans. It is something of a secession, it is not an emancipation, and behind it there are histories, cultures, misunderstandings; and in others, much good will. This needs to be clearly understood. For me, unity is always superior to conflict, always! But there are various forms of unity. And fraternity – and here we come to the European Union – is better than enmity or estrangement. With regard to distances – let us say – fraternity is better. And bridges are better than walls.

All this should make us stop and reflect. True, a country might say, “I am in the European Union, but I wish to hold on to certain things that are mine, that reflect my culture...” And the step – and here I come to the Charlemagne Prize – that the European Union must take to recover the strength it had at its origins is one of creativity and also of a “healthy dis-union”. In other words, giving independence, granting greater freedom to the countries of the Union. Thinking of another form of union, being creative. Being creative in creating jobs, in the economy. Nowadays in Europe there is a “liquid” economy that – in Italy, for example – results in young people under twenty-five not finding work: 40% of them! Something is not right in that “cumbersome” Union... But we must not throw out the baby with the bath water! Let us find ways to redeem and refashion things... Because refashioning human affairs – including our own personalities – is a never-ending process. An adolescent is not the same person as an adult or a senior citizen: he or she is the same and yet not the same; they are constantly being refashioned. This is what gives life and the will to live; it brings fruitfulness. I would stress this: today, the two key words for the European Union are *creativity* and *fruitfulness*. This is the challenge. I don’t know, but that’s what I think.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you, Your Holiness. Now it is the turn of Tilmann Kleinjung, from ADR, German National Radio. I believe this is his last trip, too... So we are happy to afford him this opportunity.

*Tilmann Kleinjung – ADR:*

That's right, I too am leaving, for Bavaria. Thank you for allowing me this question. “Zu viel Bier, zu viel Wein!” Holy Father, I would like to ask this question: today you spoke about the shared gifts of the Churches, together. Since in four months you will be going to Lund to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, I think that this is perhaps the right moment not only to remember the hurts on both sides, but also to recognize the gifts of the Reformation, and perhaps

also – and this is a heretical question! – to annul or retract the excommunication of Martin Luther or to engage in some sort of rehabilitation. Thank you.

*Pope Francis:*

I think that Martin Luther's intentions were not mistaken; he was a reformer. Perhaps some of his methods were not right, although at that time, if you read Pastor's history, for example – Pastor was a German Lutheran who experienced a conversion when he studied the facts of that period; he became a Catholic – we see that the Church was not exactly a model to emulate. There was corruption and worldliness in the Church; there was attachment to money and power. That was the basis of his protest. He was also intelligent, and he went ahead, justifying his reasons for it.

Nowadays, Lutherans and Catholics, and all Protestants, are in agreement on the doctrine of justification: on this very important point he was not mistaken. He offered a "remedy" for the Church, and then this remedy rigidified in a state of affairs, a discipline, a way of believing, a way of acting, a mode of liturgy. But there was not only Luther: there was Zwingli, there was Calvin... And behind them? The princes, "*cuius regio eius religio*". We have to place ourselves in the context of the times. It is a history that is not easy to understand, not easy...

Then things moved on. Today, the dialogue is very good and I believe that the document on justification is one of the richest ecumenical documents, one of the richest and most profound. Right? There are divisions, but they also depend on the churches. In Buenos Aires there were two Lutheran churches: one thought in a different way than the other. Even within the Lutheran church there was no unity. They respect one another; they love one another... Differences have perhaps done the greatest harm to each of us, and today we are looking to take up again the path of encounter after five hundred years. I believe we should pray together, pray... That is why prayer is so important. And then, to work for the poor, for the persecuted, for the many people who suffer, for refugees... To work together and to pray together. And for theologians to study together, searching...

Yet there is a very long road ahead. One time I said, jokingly, "I know when the day of full unity will be!" "When?" "The day after the coming of the Son of Man!" Because we do not know... The Holy Spirit will grant us this grace. But in the meantime we need to pray, to love one another and to work together, above all for the poor and the suffering, for peace and for so many other things, against the exploitation of people... There are many things we are working on together.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you. And now we invite Cécile Chambraud from *Le Monde* who represents the French language.

Cécile Chamraud – Le Monde:

Holy Father, some weeks ago, you spoke about a commission to look into the idea of women deacons. I would like to know if this commission already exists and what issues need to be resolved? Then too, sometimes a commission is a useful way to forget about problems; I would like to know if that is the case here.

Pope Francis:

We had a president of Argentina who used to say, and he would give this advice to presidents of other countries, “When you want something to remain unresolved, set up a commission!” The first person surprised by this news story was myself, because my dialogue with women religious – which was recorded and then published in *L’Osservatore Romano* – was something different, along the lines of: “We have heard that in the early centuries there were deaconesses. Could this be looked at? A commission set up...?” That was it. They asked a question, they were polite and not only that, but also they love the Church, consecrated women.

I told the story about how I knew a Syrian, a Syrian theologian who has since died, the one who prepared the critical edition of Saint Ephrem in Italian. Once, we were talking about deaconesses – when I used to visit, I would stay on the *Via della Scrofa* and he lived there too – once at breakfast, he told me: “Yes, but we do not know what they were exactly, if they were ordained...” There were certainly these women who helped the bishop. They helped him with three things. First, with baptizing women, because baptism was by immersion; second, with the pre- and post-baptismal anointing of women; third, and this one makes you laugh, when wives would complain to the Bishop that their husbands beat them, the bishop would call one of these deaconesses to examine the body for bruises that could serve as evidence. That’s what I said. “Can it be studied?” “Yes, I will tell the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to set up this commission”. The next day [the headlines read]: “Church opens the door to women deacons!”

To tell the truth, I was a little annoyed with the media because this is not telling people the whole truth. I spoke with the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who told me: “But there was a study done by the International Theological Commission in the 1980s”. I spoke with the president of the Superiors General and told her: “Please give me a list of persons you think could be on this commission”. And she sent me the list. The Prefect also sent a list, and they are on my desk, with a view to establishing this commission. I believe that much attention was given to the issue back in the 80s and it will not be difficult to shed light on the matter.

But there is also another thing. A year and a half ago, I named a commission of women theologians who have been working with Cardinal Rylko [the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity] and they have done a good job, since it matters what women think. For me, what a woman *does* is not as important as what she *thinks*: women think differently than we men. And

one cannot make a good and proper decision without listening to women. Sometimes in Buenos Aires I would have a meeting with my consultors; I would listen to what they had to say and then I called in some women, and they saw things in a very different light. This enriched us greatly, and the decision proved fruitful, very fine. I have to meet these women theologians; they did a good job, but things have stopped. Why? Because the office for the laity is now being restructured. I am waiting for this to happen and then to take up the second issue, that of the women deacons. Another thing about women theologians: and I would like to stress this – the way women understand, think through and see women's issues is more important than what women do. Finally, I would repeat what I have always said: the Church is a woman, the Church is a "she". And she is no "old maid". She is a woman married to the Son of God; her spouse is Jesus Christ. Think about this and then tell me what you think...

*Father Lombardi:*

Since we have been talking about women, let's have a woman ask the last question; after that I will ask a question and we can conclude. Then, after an hour, we will leave you alone! Cindy Wooden, who heads CNS, the American Catholic news agency.

*Cindy Wooden:*

Thank you, Your Holiness. In the last few days, Cardinal Marx from Germany spoke to an important conference in Dublin on the Church in the modern world, and said that the Catholic Church should apologize to the gay community for having marginalized these persons. In the days following the Orlando killings, many people have said that the Christian community has something to do with this hatred towards these persons. What do you think?

*Pope Francis:*

I will repeat what I said during my first trip, and I also repeat what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, namely that they should not be discriminated against, that they should be shown respect and given pastoral assistance. We can disapprove of some ways of acting that are a little too offensive to other people, not for ideological reasons but in terms, we might say, of political propriety.

But none of this has to do with the problem: if the problem is that a person is so inclined, and with good will seeks God, who are we to judge him or her? We should be helpful to them, in accordance with the teaching of the Catechism. The Catechism is clear!

There are traditions in some countries, in some cultures with a different approach to the problem. I think that the Church should apologize – as that "Marxist" Cardinal said [Cardinal Reinhold Marx] – not only to this person who is gay and has been offended, but also to the poor, to women and to

children exploited in the workplace, and for having blessed so many weapons. The Church should apologize for all the times she has not acted... – and when I say “the Church”, I mean Christians; the Church is holy, we are sinners! Christians should apologize for not having helped with so many decisions, helped so many families... I remember from my childhood the culture of Buenos Aires, the insular Catholic culture which I come from. You could not enter the home of a divorced couple! I am talking about eighty years ago. The culture has changed, thank God. As Christians we should apologize over and over again, and not just for this.

Forgiveness and not only excuses! “Forgive me, Lord!” These are words we forget to say... But now I am being the priest and preaching to you! But it is true, [there is] the “authoritarian priest”, not the fatherly priest, the priest who scolds, not the priest who embraces, forgives, consoles... But of these latter, how many there are! How many hospital chaplains, prison chaplains, how many saintly priests! Yet they go unseen, because holiness is “bashful”, unassuming, hidden.

On the contrary, shamelessness is brazen. It likes to be seen. There are so many organizations, with good people and with not such good people, or people you can offer a “bribe” of sorts and they look the other way, like the international powers with the three genocides. We Christians have done this too, priests and bishops, but we Christians also have a Teresa of Calcutta and so many other Teresas of Calcutta! We have many so many religious sisters in Africa, so many lay persons, so many holy married couples! The good seed and the weeds. That is how Jesus describes the Kingdom. We should not be scandalized that this is the case. We have to pray that the Lord will uproot the weeds and make more wheat grow. But such is the life of the Church. Limits cannot be set. We are all saints because we have the Holy Spirit in us, but we are all of us sinners. Myself first. Agreed? Thank you. I don’t know if I have answered... Not just apologies, but forgiveness!

*Padre Lombardi:*

Holy Father, I would like to ask one last question and then leave you in peace...

*Papa Francesco:*

Don’t make it a hard one!

*Father Lombardi:*

It is about your forthcoming visit to Poland, for which we are preparing. You will be spending the month of July getting ready for it. Could you tell us how you feel about this World Day of Youth during this Jubilee Year of Mercy? More specifically, we joined you in visiting the Tzitzernakaberd Memorial during this visit to Armenia, and you will be visiting Auschwitz e Birkenau during your visit to Poland. I have heard that you want to spend these moments in silence rather than with words, as you have done here, perhaps also in Birkenau. So I wanted to ask you if you intend to

speak there or if you prefer to pray silently with a particular intention of your own.

*Pope Francis:*

Two years ago in Redipuglia, I did the same thing to commemorate the centenary of the Great War. I went to Redipuglia in silence. Then there was the Mass and I preached, but that was something else. Silence. We experienced that silence yesterday. I would like to visit that place of horrors without speeches, without people, only with the necessary few... But I am sure journalists will be there! But without mentioning this or that, no. On my own, to enter and pray... May the Lord give me the grace to weep.

*Father Lombardi:*

Thank you, Your Holiness. We will join you also in preparing for this next visit and we thank you for spending so much time with us. Now please rest a little, and eat something yourself... and rest in the month of July!

*Pope Francis:*

Many thanks. Thanks again for your work and your kindness.