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The Pope speaks to journalists on his return flight to Rome

The following is a summary of Pope Francis' conversation with journalists during the return flight from his apostolic trip to Georgia and Azerbaijan

Ketevan Kardava (Georgian journalist); After your meeting with the Patriarch of Georgia, do you see grounds for future cooperation and constructive dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, with regard to doctrinal differences?

Pope Francis: I had two surprises in Georgia. One was Georgia. ... A people of believers and from a very ancient Christian culture, a people of so many martyrs. And I also discovered something I did not know: the breadth of this Georgian faith. The second surprise was the Patriarch; he is a man of God, and this man moved me. ... On the things that unite and divide us, I will say: let us not discuss matters of doctrine, let us leave that to the theologians, who know how to do it better than we do. ... What can we do, the people? Pray for each other. ... And secondly, do things together ... do good things for each other. There are the poor, let us work together for the poor ... and this is the path of ecumenism. Not just the path of doctrine.

Tassilo Forcheimer, German journalist: Between Armenia and Azerbaijan, what must happen for a permanent peace to be achieved that guarantees human rights?

Pope Francis: I believe that the only path is sincere dialogue. ... Sincere negotiation. And if it is not possible to arrive at that, then having the courage to go to an international tribunal, to The Hague, for instance, and to submit to international justice. I do not see another way. The other is war, and war always destroys. ... And prayer, prayer for peace.

Maria Elena Ribezzo, Swiss journalist: You have spoken about a world war against marriage, and in this war you have used very strong words against divorce, saying that it soils God's image; whereas in recent months, and also during the Synod, you spoke about welcoming the divorced. How can these two approaches be reconciled?

Pope Francis: Marriage is the image of God, man and woman become one flesh. If this is destroyed, the image of God is soiled or disfigured. *Amoris Laetitia* speaks about how to treat these cases, how to treat wounded

families, and here mercy enters. ... The principle is this, but human weaknesses exist, sins exist, and weakness does not have the last word, sin does not have the last word: mercy has the last word! ... Therefore *Amoris Laetitia* discusses marriage, the foundation of marriage as it is, but then problems arise, and the issue of how to resolve them. They can be resolved according to four criteria: welcoming wounded families, accompanying them, discerning each case and integrating, reconstructing. This would mean collaborating in this second ... in this wonderful re-creation that the Lord achieves in redemption.

Joshua McElwee, American journalist: In the same discourse yesterday in Georgia, you spoke as in many other countries about gender theory, saying that it is the great enemy, a threat against marriage. But I would like to ask, what would you say to a person who has suffered for years for his or her sexuality, and who feels that there is truly a biological problem, that his or her physical appearance does not correspond to what he or she considers to be the true sexual identity?

Pope Francis: Firstly, during my life as a priest and as a bishop I have accompanied people with homosexual tendencies or practices. I have accompanied them and brought them closer to the Lord. Some cannot, but I have accompanied them and never abandoned anyone. This must be done. People must be accompanied as Jesus accompanied them. When a person in this condition presents him or herself before Jesus, He does not say, "Go away, you are homosexual!". No. What I referred to is the wickedness that today results from indoctrination in gender theory. I heard from a French father who was speaking with his children at the table ... and asked his ten year-old son, "What do you want to be when you grow up?". "A girl!". ... The father realised that the schoolbooks taught gender theory, and this goes against nature. It is one thing that a person has this tendency, this option; and even those who change sex. It is another thing to teach along this line in schools, to change the mentality. This I would call "ideological colonisation". Last year I received a letter from a Spanish man who told me his history as a child and as a youth. He was a girl, and suffered greatly, because he felt he was a boy but physically he was a girl. ... He underwent the operation. ... The bishop accompanied him greatly. ... Then he got married, he changed his identity, and he wrote me the letter to say that for him it would be a consolation to come with his wife. ... And so I received them, and they were very happy. ... Life is life, and things must be taken as they come. Sin is sin. Tendencies or hormonal imbalances cause many problems and this doesn't mean to say, "Oh well, it's all the same" ... no, no it isn't. But it is necessary to welcome each case, to accompany, to discern, and to integrate. This is what Jesus would do today. ... I wish to be clear. It is a moral question. It is a problem. It is a human problem. And it must be resolved as is possible, always with God's mercy, with the truth, as we have said in the case of marriage".

Gianni Cardinale, Italian journalist: When will you create the new cardinals, and according to what criteria will you choose them? When will you meet with the victims of the earthquake and what will be the characteristic of this visit?

Pope Francis: Regarding the second question: I will go privately, alone, as a priest, as a bishop, as the Pope. But alone, I would like to do so that way; to be close to the people. But I am not yet sure how.

On the cardinals: the criteria will be the same as the two conclaves, the two consistories. From everywhere, given that the Church is present in all the world. ... The list is long, but there are only thirteen places, and we must seek to strike a balance. I like it when we see, in the College of Cardinals, the universality of the Church: not only the, let's say, European centre. From everywhere, all five continents, if possible.

Aura Miguel, Portuguese journalist: My question relates to your trips outside Italy...

Pope Francis: Certainly, so far, I will go to Portugal, but only to Fatima. ... This year, due to the Jubilee, the *ad limina* visits have been suspended. Next year I have to do the *ad limina* visits for this year and next, and so there is little space left for trips. ... To India and Bangladesh, almost certainly. In Africa, but I don't know where ... it depends on the climate ... and on the political situation. ... I have said that, regarding America, when the peace process is complete, I would like to go ... but when everything is certain, that is, when ... all the nations are in agreement that they will not take further action and it is therefore finished. ... Everything depends on what the people say. The people are sovereign.

Jean-Marie Guénois, French journalist: Why, in your answer, did you not mention China? And a recent question, because a few hours again Msgr. Lebrun, archbishop of Rouen, announced that His Holiness has authorised the commencement of the process of beatification for Fr. Hamel, without taking into account the rule of the five-year wait. Why?

Pope Francis: On this latter question, I have spoken with Cardinal Amato, we will study the case and he will provide the latest news. But the intention is to proceed along those lines, to carry out the necessary research and to see if there are reasons to do so. He (Archbishop Lebrun, Ed.) has announced that it is necessary to seek testimonies in order to open the process so that witnesses are not lost; this is very important.

On China: I am optimistic. But the relations between the Vatican and the Chinese people must be stabilised and this is being discussed, gradually. ... But things that go slowly, go well, always. Things done in haste are no good. The Chinese people have my highest esteem.

Juan Vicente Boo, Spanish journalist: We have seen that the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize will be announced on 7 October. There are more than three hundred nominations: for example, the people of Lesbos, for what they have done to help refugees, or the White Helmets in Syria. ... Who is your favourite candidate?

Pope Francis: I hope that at international level, setting aside the Nobel Peace Prize, there will be acknowledgement or a declaration on children, on the disabled, on minors, on civilians who have died from the bombing. ... Humanity should say something for the victims of war.

John Sullivan Jeremias, American journalist: The United States are coming to the end of a long presidential campaign. Many American Catholics and people of conscience find it difficult to choose between two candidates ... who diverge from the teachings of the Church. What advice would you give to the faithful in America?

Pope Francis: During an electoral campaign I never say a word. The people are sovereign, and I would say only: study the proposals well, pray and choose with your conscience.

Caroline Pigozzi, French journalist: Is historical testimony more important than the testament of a Pope? If I may explain: Pope Wojtyla wrote in his will that many documents and many letters were to be burned, yet they were then found later on in a book. Does this mean that the will of a Pope is not to be respected? And I would like to know by what miracle you manage to shake hands with thousands of people every week without suffering from tendinitis!

Pope Francis: No, I do not have tendinitis yet ... Regarding the first question, you say that a Pope who asks for papers and letters to be burned – but this is the right of any man or woman, he has the right to do so before death.

Caroline Pigozzi: However, this was not observed with Pope Wojtyla ... there was that book...

Pope Francis: I don't know, I do not know the case well. But when a person says, "This must be destroyed", it is because it is something tangible. But perhaps there was another copy elsewhere, that he did not know about. ... But it is a right for every person to make a will as he or she chooses.

Greg Burke, director of the Holy See Press Office: On behalf of all the journalists, you have answered a question for us today, regarding why you make these trip to places where there are very few Catholics.

Pope Francis: The first trip was to Albania: a country that is not in the European Union. After there was Sarajevo, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which again is not in the European Union. The first EU country I visited was Greece, the island of Lesbos: the first. ... The three presidents of these three countries of the Caucasus came to the Vatican to invite me. Each one has a different religious attitude: the Armenians are mostly Christians: apostolic Christians, Catholic Christians and a few Evangelical Christians. Georgia is a Christian country, totally Christian,

but Orthodox. There are few Catholics. Instead, Azerbaijan is a country with, I believe, a Muslim majority of about 96 to 98 per cent. There are no more than six hundred Catholics. So why go there? For the Catholics, to go to the periphery of a Catholic community ... and these three countries are peripheral countries, like Albania, like Bosnia-Herzegovina. And as I have said, reality can be understood better and seen better from the peripheries rather than from the centre.
