



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MONGOLIA

[31 August - 4 September 2023]

### ***IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE***

*Papal flight*

*Monday, 4 September 2023*

**[[Multimedia](#)]**

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**Matteo Bruni:**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Your Holiness, for these busy days of meetings with this people, who you described as small, though culturally rich and occupying a large area of land; and with a lively Christian community, which bears witness to the Faith with freshness. The journalists were able to take an interest in this place, and having seen it for themselves, they still have some questions that they would like to put to you.

**Pope Francis:**

Good afternoon to you all, and thank you for your company. Thank you for your work. May the media also make known the culture and history of this people. Many thanks.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Your Holiness, the first question comes from a Mongolian journalist, Mr Dambadarjaa.

**Jargalsaikhan Dambadarjaa (The *Defacto* Gazette):**

Thank you very much for visiting Mongolia, Your Holiness. My question is: what was your main

purpose of the visit, and are you satisfied with reaching that purpose?

**Pope Francis:**

Yes. The idea to visit Mongolia came to me while thinking about the small Catholic community. I make these Journeys in order to visit the Catholic communities and also to enter into dialogue with the history and culture of peoples, and with their particular spiritualities. It is important that evangelization is not thought of as proselytism, because proselytism is always restricting. Pope Benedict said that faith does not grow by proselytism but by attraction. The proclamation of the Gospel enters into dialogue with culture. There is an evangelization of culture and also an inculturation of the Gospel, for Christians also express their values with the culture of their own people. That is the complete opposite of what religious colonization would be. For me, this Journey was about getting to know the people of Mongolia, entering into dialogue with them, experiencing their culture, and accompanying the Church on its journey among this people, with much respect for them and their culture. I am satisfied with the result.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Your Holiness, the second question comes from Mr Markhaakhuu, from Mongolian Television.

**Ulamdrakh Markhaakhuu (ULS Suld TV)**

Conflicts of our civilization, as many say today, conflicts should be solved only through dialogue, as Your Holiness said. Can Ulaanbaatar be the platform for international dialogue between Europe and Asia?

**Pope Francis:**

Yes, I believe so. You have something very interesting, which also favours such dialogue. I would call this the “mystique of the third neighbour”, which enables you to follow a “third neighbour” policy. Consider that Ulaanbaatar is the capital of a country very far from the sea, and we can say that your land lies between two great powers, Russia and China. That is why your mystique is in seeking to dialogue with your “third neighbours”: not out of contempt for these two, because you have good relations with both of them, but out of a yearning for universality, to show your values to the whole world, and also to receive from others their values so as to enter into dialogue. It is curious that, throughout history, going out to seek other lands was often confused with colonialism, or with the idea of going out to dominate. Instead, with this mystique of the third neighbour, you have the philosophy of going out to seek others in order to dialogue. I very much like this expression of the third neighbour. It is a richness of yours.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The third question comes from Cristina Cabrejas of EFE.

**Cristina Cabrejas (EFE)**

Good afternoon, Your Holiness. This is the question from the Spanish-speaking group. Yesterday, you sent a message to the Chinese people, and you asked Chinese Catholics to be good citizens, after the country's Authorities had not allowed the Bishops to come to Mongolia. How are relations with China at present? And is there any news about Cardinal Zuppi's visit to Beijing in connection with his mission to Ukraine? Thank you.

**Pope Francis:**

Cardinal Zuppi's mission is a mission of peace, which I entrusted to him. He planned to visit Moscow, Kyiv, the United States, and also Beijing. Cardinal Zuppi is a man of great dialogue and universal experience. His background includes working in Mozambique in the search for peace, and that is why I sent him. Relations with China are very respectful, very respectful. Personally, I have great admiration for the Chinese people. They are, let us say, very open... Regarding the appointment of Bishops there is a Commission that has been working with the Chinese government and the Vatican for a long time. That is a dialogue. Then there are various Catholic priests or Catholic intellectuals who are often invited to teach in Chinese universities. In this sense, there is an open dialogue. I think we need to move forward on the religious aspect in order to understand each other better, so that Chinese citizens do not think that the Church does not accept their culture and values or that the Church is dependent on another, foreign power. This friendly path is well-travelled by the Commission headed by Cardinal Parolin. They are doing a good job, also on the Chinese side, a good job. In a word, I would say that relations are moving forward. I have great respect for the Chinese people. Then there was something else you asked?

**Matteo Bruni:**

It was on whether there was any news about Cardinal Zuppi's mission.

**Pope Francis:**

I spoke of that at the beginning. Let's move on.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The fourth question comes from Gerry O'Connell from *America Magazine*.

**Gerard O'Connell (*America Magazine*)**

Your Holiness, since relations between the Holy See and Vietnam are quite positive, and have taken a remarkable step forward recently, many Vietnamese Catholics are asking for you to visit them, as you did Mongolia. My question is: what is the possibility now of visiting Vietnam? Have you received an invitation from the Government? And what other journeys are you planning? Thank you.

**Pope Francis:**

Vietnam is one of the very good dialogue experiences that the Church has had in recent times. I would say it is like a mutual affection in dialogue. Both sides have had the good will to understand each other and look for ways to move forward. There have been problems, but in Vietnam I see that sooner or later problems will be overcome. A little while ago, with the President of Vietnam, we talked freely. I am very positive about relations with Vietnam; good work has been going on for years. I remember, about four years ago, a group of Vietnamese parliamentarians came to visit: we had a good dialogue, very respectful. When a culture is open, there is the possibility of dialogue; if a culture is closed or suspicious, dialogue is very difficult. With Vietnam, the dialogue is open, with its highs and lows, but it is open and slowly moving forward. There have been some problems, but they have been resolved. With regard to a Journey to Vietnam, if I don't go, John XXIV certainly will! There will indeed be a visit, because it is a land that deserves to progress and that has my affection. Concerning other Journeys, there is Marseille; and then we are looking at the possibility of one to a small country in Europe. But honestly, for me to go on a Journey now is not as easy as it was in the beginning. Walking is restricted, and that limits me. But we will see.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question comes from Fausto Gasparroni of ANSA, from the Italian group.

**Fausto Gasparroni (ANSA)**

Your Holiness, I ask this question on behalf of the Italian-speaking group. Your recent remarks to young Russian Catholics about "great mother Russia", the legacy of figures such as Peter the Great and Catherine II have spurred some discussion. These comments have greatly irritated Ukrainians, for example, and have also had diplomatic consequences, and have been seen almost as an exaltation of Russian imperialism and a sort of endorsement even of Putin's policies. I wanted to ask you: why did you feel the need to make those remarks; did you reflect on the appropriateness of making them; would you repeat them? And also, just to make things clear, can you tell us what you think of imperialism and in particular of Russian imperialism?

**Pope Francis:**

Let us talk about the context: it was a dialogue with young Russian people. And at the end of the dialogue, I gave them a message, a message that I always repeat: that they take responsibility for their heritage. That is the first point: shoulder your legacy. I say the same thing everywhere. And with this in mind, I try to create a dialogue between grandparents and grandchildren: that grandchildren embrace their legacy. I say this everywhere, and that was the message. Secondly, in order to clarify that legacy, I spoke of the idea of great Russia, because the Russian legacy is very good; it is very beautiful. Consider the field of literature, of music, going back to Dostoevsky, which today speaks to us of a mature humanism; they took up that humanism, which developed in the arts and literature. This would be a second aspect when I spoke of their legacy. The third point, perhaps it was inopportune, but in speaking of great Russia, not in a geographical sense, but in a cultural sense, I remembered what we were taught at school about Peter I, Catherine II; hence this third aspect came up, which perhaps wasn't quite correct. I don't know. The historians can tell us. But it was an additional thought that came to my mind because I had studied it at school. Yet, I told the young Russians to take charge of their legacy, to shoulder their legacy, which is to say not to "purchase" it elsewhere. Take up your own legacy. And what legacy has great Russia left? Russian culture has great beauty and depth, and should not be cancelled on account of political problems. There have been dark years in Russia, but its legacy has always remained intact.

Then you spoke about imperialism. In fact, I wasn't thinking of imperialism when I spoke, I was speaking about culture, and the transmission of culture is never "imperialistic", never. It is always a dialogue, and I was talking about that. It is true that there are imperialisms that want to impose their ideology. I will stop there: when culture is "distilled" and turned into ideology, it becomes poisonous: culture being used, distilled into an ideology. We must distinguish the culture of a people from the ideologies that then appear from some philosopher or some politician of that people. And I say this for everyone, also for the Church. Within the Church there are often ideologies, which separate the Church from the life that comes from its roots and grows upwards; which separate the Church from the influence of the Holy Spirit. An ideology is incapable of becoming incarnate; it is merely an idea. But when an ideology gathers strength and becomes political, it usually becomes a dictatorship, it becomes incapable of dialogue, of moving forward with cultures. And that is the case with imperialism. Imperialism always grows from an ideological base. In the Church too, we must distinguish between doctrine and ideology: true doctrine is never ideological, never. It is grounded within the holy faithful people of God. Whereas ideology is detached from reality, detached from the people... I don't know if I answered your question.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you, Your Holiness. The next question comes from Robert Messner of DPA.

**Robert Messner (DPA)**

Good afternoon. A question regarding your update of *Laudato Si'*: I wanted to ask if your involvement in environmental protection and this update can be understood perhaps as a show of solidarity with environmental activists, such as “The Last Generation”, which organize highly publicized protests? Maybe there is also a message in this update for young activists taking to the streets?

**Pope Francis:**

Generally speaking, I don't touch upon extremists. But young people are worried, because it is their future! A good scientist, an Italian, when we had a meeting at the Academy [of Sciences] made a good speech and concluded by saying “I wouldn't want my granddaughter, who was born yesterday, to live in such an ugly world in thirty years' time”. Young people think about the future. And in that sense I like them to battle well. But moving on, when ideology or political pressure take over or are used for those purposes, things don't go well. My Apostolic Exhortation, which will come out on the Feast Day of Saint Francis of Assisi, 4 October, is a review of what has happened since the COP Meeting in Paris, which has perhaps been the most fruitful to date. There are some updates on various COP Meetings, and some things that have not yet been resolved and need urgently to be resolved. My Document is not as long as *Laudato Si'*, but it is bringing forward *Laudato Si'* into new areas. It is also an analysis of the current situation.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you. The next question is from French-speaking journalists, from Etienne Lorailère.

**Etienne Lorailère (KTO TV)**

Good afternoon, Your Holiness. You would like a synodal Church, in both Mongolia and throughout the world. The October Assembly is already the fruit of the work of the people of God. How can the baptized from all over the world be involved in this next phase? How can ideological polarization be avoided? And will the participants be able to speak about and share publicly what they are experiencing in order to walk together? Or will the whole process be in private?

**Pope Francis:**

You spoke about how to avoid ideological polarization. There is no place for ideology in the Synod, as it is a different dynamic. The Synod is about dialogue: among the baptized, among the Church's members, on the life of the Church, on dialogue with the world, on the problems that affect the human family today. But if we think in an ideological way, then the Synod is finished with! There is no place for ideology at the Synod; there is only space for dialogue, for talking with each other, as brothers and sisters, and discussing the doctrine of the Church, in order to move forward. Next, I want to emphasize that this Synod is not my invention: it was Saint Paul VI who

realized at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council that in the West the Church had lost the synodal dimension. Whereas the Church in the East still has it. For this reason, he created the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, which in these sixty years has carried forward reflection in a synodal way, an ongoing process, moving forward. On the fiftieth anniversary of that decision of Saint Paul VI, I signed and published a document on what the Synod is and how it has developed. Now it has moved on, has matured further, and for this reason I thought it would be very important to have a Synod on the Church's synodality, which is not a passing fashion, but an ancient reality, which the Church in the East has always retained. How are we to live synodality; and live it as Christians, as I said before, without giving in to ideologies? I'm not sure if I have answered, or if there is something else...

### **Etienne Lorailère**

Will the sessions of the Assembly be held in private?

### **Pope Francis:**

One thing that must be safeguarded is the synodal atmosphere. It is not a TV show where people discuss anything and everything. No! It is a religious moment, a moment of religious exchange. I think that in the synodal interventions people will speak for three to four minutes each, and then there will be three to four minutes of silence for prayer. Then three more interventions, and prayer. Without this spirit of prayer there is no synodality; it becomes politics and parliamentarianism. The Synod is not a parliament. Regarding the privacy of discussions: there is a department headed by Dr Ruffini, who is here, and will issue press releases concerning the Synod's progress. In a Synod, it is necessary to safeguard religiosity and safeguard the freedom of those who speak. For this there will be a commission, chaired by Dr Ruffini, which will provide information on the progress of the Synod.

### **Matteo Bruni:**

The next question is from Antonio Pelayo, whom you know well, from *Vida Nueva*.

### **Antonio Pelayo (Vida Nueva)**

Holy Father, you have just spoken about the Synod and we all agree with you that this Synod has generated much curiosity and interest. Unfortunately, it has also brought forth much criticism from various Catholics. Here, I am referring to a book with a prologue by Cardinal Burke, who says that the Synod is a "Pandora's box" from which calamities for the Church will come. What do you think of that viewpoint? Do you think it will be overcome by reality or could it influence the Synod?

### **Pope Francis:**

I don't know if I've already said this before: a few months ago, I telephoned a Carmelite, and said to the Prioress: "How are the nuns doing, Mother Superior?" She was a non-Italian Carmelite, and she finally replied: "Your Holiness, we are concerned about the Synod." I said jokingly, "Now what's going on? Do you want to send a sister to the Synod?" "No, we are afraid you are going to change doctrine." And this is what she was saying, she had this idea... But if you go to the basis of these ideas, you will find ideologies. In the Church, whenever people want to attack the path of communion, it is always an ideological attack. And they accuse the Church of this or that, but they never make a true accusation: that it is made up of sinners. They never speak of sinners. They defend a "doctrine", a doctrine like distilled water that has no taste and is not the true Catholic doctrine, which is in the Creed. And very often, true Catholic doctrine scandalizes people. How scandalous is the idea that God became flesh, that God became Man, that Our Lady kept her virginity? This scandalizes. Catholic doctrine sometimes scandalizes. Ideologies are all distillations, they never scandalize.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you, Your Holiness. Maybe at this point we can do another "changing of the guard". I'll call Cindy Wooden for the next question.

**Cindy Wooden (CNS)**

Good afternoon, Your Holiness. I would like to follow up on my French colleague's question about the Synod and information. Many lay Catholics have given much time, prayer, and commitment to speaking and listening. They want to know what's happening during the Synod, the Assembly. And you have spoken about your experience of the Synod on Religious, during which some people had said, "don't do this...", or "You can't say that..." We journalists don't even have access to the Assembly and the general sessions. How can we be sure that what we are given as "mush" is true? Is there no possibility of being a little more open with journalists?

**Pope Francis:**

But it is very open, very open! There is the commission chaired by [Paolo] Ruffini that will give daily updates; but even more open, I don't know, more open, I don't know... It is good that this commission will be very respectful of everyone's interventions and will try not to gossip, but instead accurately communicate on the synodal progress, which is constructive for the Church. If you want, if someone wants the news to be, "This person has taken it out on that person for this or that reason," that is political gossip. No, the commission does not have an easy task, in saying: "Today the reflection went this way, it went like this," and to convey the ecclesial spirit, not the political one. A parliament is different from a Synod. Do not forget that the protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit. And how can this be transmitted? This is why the ecclesial progress must be conveyed.



But thank you. Thank you for having the courage to ask about this.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Thank you. The next question is from Enzo Romeo, from Tg2. Then perhaps we will conclude.

**Vincenzo Romeo (RAI TG 2)**

Good afternoon, Your Holiness. You are the Pope of the peripheries, and the peripheries, especially in Italy, are suffering greatly at the moment. We have had some worrying episodes of violence, of degradation... For example, near Naples, a Parish Priest, Don [Maurizio] Patriciello has even invited you to go there; then to Palermo. What can be done? You visited the *villas miserias* in Buenos Aires, so you have experience of this. Our Prime Minister also visited one of these peripheries, so there is a lot of discussion. What can be done, do you think? What can both the Church and the State institutions do to overcome this degradation and make the peripheries truly part of a country?

**Pope Francis:**

You spoke about the peripheries, shanty towns: you have to move forward, you have to go there and work there, as was done in Buenos Aires by the priests who worked there – a team of priests with an Auxiliary Bishop at the head – and you work there. We must be open to this, Governments must be open, all the world's Governments. But there are some peripheries that are tragic. I refer once more to a scandalous periphery that people try to cover up: that of the Rohingya. The Rohingya are suffering. They are not Christians; they are Muslims, but they suffer because they have been sent to a periphery; they have been driven out. We have to see the different types of peripheries and also learn that the periphery is where human reality is more evident and less sophisticated, bad moments... I don't want to generalize, but you can understand well. A philosopher once said something that struck me greatly: "Reality is best understood from the peripheries." We understand reality well from there. We must talk to the peripheries, and Governments must bring about true social justice, real social justice, with the different social peripheries and also with the ideological peripheries, in order to get them to talk, because very often it is some ideological periphery that causes social peripheries. The world of the peripheries is not easy. Thank you.

**Matteo Bruni:**

Perhaps we can end here, also because there is food service on board and we are starting to experience some turbulence. I wish you well in your work, everyone.

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