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**Press Conference of the Holy Father on the return flight from the Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima (12-13 May 2017)**

Yesterday evening, during the return flight from Fátima to Rome at the end of the pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima, on the occasion of the centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Cova da Iria, the Holy Father Francis met with journalists on board the aircraft in a press conference. The following is a transcript:

**Greg Burke:** Thank you, Your Holiness. These were twenty-four very intense hours, as you said, for the Lord, twenty-four hours for Our Lady. The Portuguese were very touched when you said, “We have a Mother”, they feel this in a special way. A hundred years ago Our Lady didn’t appear to three important journalists, she appeared to three shepherds, but we’ve seen how, with their simplicity and holiness, they were able to make this message reach the entire world. Journalists too make a message arrive, and this we can see from the number of countries they come from: they are very curious about this trip of yours. If you would like to say something first...

**Pope Francis:** First of all, good evening. Thank you. And, I would like to respond to as many questions as possible, so we will have to do things quickly. I’m sorry when we reach the halfway point and they come to tell me that it’s snack time... but let’s do both together. Thanks.

**Greg Burke:** Good, let’s begin with the Portuguese group, with Fátima Campos Ferreira of *RTP*, Portuguese TV and Radio.

**Fátima Campos Ferreira (RTP):** I don’t know how I should feel about sitting in front of the Holy Father! Well, first, many thanks for this trip. Holy Father, you came to Fatima as a pilgrim, to canonize Francisco and Jacinta one hundred years after the apparitions. From this historical point of view, what is left now for the Church, for the entire world? Also, Fatima has a message of peace. Holy Father, in the coming days, on 24 May, you are going to receive in the Vatican the American president Donald Trump. What can the world expect and what does the Holy Father expect from this encounter? Many thanks.

**Pope Francis:** Thank you. Fatima certainly has a message of peace. It was brought to humanity by three great communicators who were less than thirteen years old, which is interesting. Yes, I came as a pilgrim. The

canonization was something that had not been planned from the beginning as because the process of the miracles was underway, but the all of a sudden the expert reports were all positive, and things moved on – so it all came together. For me was a very great joy. What can the world expect? Peace. And what am I talking about from now on with whomever? Peace.

**Fátima Campos Ferreira:** And what remains now of this historic moment for the Church?

**Pope Francis:** A message of peace. And I'd like to say one thing ... before embarking I received scientists from all religions studying in the Vatican Observatory at Castelgandolfo, as well as agnostics and atheists. And an atheist said to me, "I'm an atheist". I won't say from what ethnicity or place of origin. He spoke in English. And at the end, he said to me, 'Can I ask you a favour? Tell Christians to love Muslims more". And that is a message of peace.

**Fátima Campos Ferreira:** Is this what you will say to Trump?

**Pope Francis:** [smiles]

**Greg Burke:** And now, Aura Miguel, *Radio Renascença*

**Miguel Aura** (*Radio Renascença*): Your Holiness, in Fátima you presented yourself as the "bishop dressed in white." Up to now, this expression applied rather to the vision of the third part of the secret, to St. John Paul II and the martyrs of the twentieth century. What does your identification with this expression mean now?

**Pope Francis:** Yes, in the prayer, that, I did not write it... the Shrine wrote it... but I too have asked myself which they said this. And there is a connection with the white: the bishop dressed in white, Our Lady dressed in white, the white glow of the innocence of children after Baptism... There is a connection to the colour white in that prayer. I believe – because I did not write it – but I believe that literally they have tried to express with white that desire for innocence, for peace: innocence, not hurting others, not making war.

**Miguel Aura:** Is it a revision of the interpretation of the message?

**Pope Francis:** No, but that vision ... I believe that the then-Cardinal Ratzinger, at that time prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith, has explained everything clearly. Thank you.

Greg Burke: The next question is from Claudio Lavagna of NBC, here on the right.

**Claudio Lavagna** (*NBC News*): Holy Father, hello. Yesterday you asked the faithful to break down all walls, yet on 24 May you will meet a Head of State who is threatening to build walls. It is rather contradictory to your word, but he also has, it seems, opinions and decisions different from yours in relation to other topics, such as the need to act to confront global warming or to receive migrants, So, just before this meeting: what is your opinion of the policies that President Trump has adopted so far on these matters, and what do you expect from a meeting with a Head of State who seems to think and act in a manner contrary to you?

**Pope Francis:** The first question is – but I can respond to both – I never pass judgement on a person without listening to them. I believe that I should not do this. In our talk things will come out, I will say what I think, he will say what he thinks, but I have never, ever, wanted to pass a judgment without hearing the person. The second, what do I think about...

**Claudio Lavagna:** What do you think, in particular, about the reception of migrants?

**Pope Francis:** But this you all know well!

**Claudio Lavagna:** The second instead is: what you expect from a meeting with a Head of State who thinks in a manner contradictory to you?

**Pope Francis:** There are always doors that are not closed. We need to look for the doors that are at least slightly open, to enter and talk about the things we have in common, and to go on. Step by step. Peace is crafted, it is made day by day. Also friendship among people, mutual knowledge, esteem, is crafted, it is made every day. Respect for the other, saying what one thinks, but with respect, but walking together ... Someone thinks in a certain way: saying that, being very sincere with what each person thinks.

**Claudio Lavagna:** Do you hope that he will soften his decisions after the meeting?

**Pope Francis:** This is a political calculation that I cannot permit myself to make. Also on the religious level, I am not a proselytizer.

**Greg Burke:** Thank you Holiness, now there is a change of places, Elisabetta Piqué is coming.

**Elisabetta Piqué (*La Nación*):** Thanks first of all for this brief and very intense trip. We wanted to ask you, today is the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, but it is also the important anniversary of a fact of your life that took place 25 years ago, when the Nuncio Calabresi told you that you would become the auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires, something that meant the end of your exile in Cordoba and a great change in your life. Have you every connected this fact that changed your life with Our Lady of Fatima? And in these days that you have prayed before her have you thought about this, and what did you think about? Can you tell us about that? Thanks.

**Pope Francis:** Women know everything! [Laughs]. No, I didn't think about the coincidence, only yesterday while I was praying before Our Lady I realized that one 13 May I received the phone call from the nuncio 25 years ago. I don't know... I said, "Well look at that!". I spoke with Our Lady a little about this. I asked her forgiveness for all of my mistakes, and also for a little bad taste in choosing people [laughs]. But I realized this only yesterday.

**Greg Burke:** Nicholas Senèze, *La Croix*.

**Nicholas Senèze:** Thank you, Holy Father. We are returning from Fátima, for which the Fraternity of St. Pius X has a great devotion. Much is said about an agreement that would give an official statute to the Fraternity in the Church. Some even imagined that there would have been an announcement today... Holiness, do you think that this agreement is possible in the short term? And, what are the obstacles still? What is the meaning of this reconciliation for you? Will it be the triumphant return for faithful who will show what it means to be truly Catholic, or something else?

**Pope Francis:** I would discard any form of triumphalism. Some days ago, the "Feria Quarta" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, their meeting – they call it the "Feria Quarta", because it takes place on a Wednesday – examined a document, which still hasn't reached me, the study of the document. This is the first thing. Secondly, the current relations are fraternal. Last year, I gave a licence for confession to all of them, also a form of jurisdiction for marriages. But first, the problems, the cases they had, for example, that had to be resolved by the Doctrine of the Faith, the same Congregation is moving them forward. For example, abuses. The cases of abuse, they brought them to us; and this also applies to the Apostolic Penitentiary; also the reduction of a priest to the lay state, they bring to us. The relations are fraternal. I have a good relationship with Msgr. Fellay, I've spoken with him many times... I don't like to hurry things. Walk. Walk. Walk. And then we'll see. For me, it's not an issue of winners and losers, it's an issue of brothers who must walk together, looking for a formula to take steps forward.

**Greg Burke:** Thank you, Your Holiness. Now, Tassilo Forchheimer of *ARD*.

**Tassilo Forchheimer (*ARD*):** Holy Father, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Reformation, can Evangelical

Christians and Catholics walk another stretch of road together? Will there be the possibility to participate in the same Eucharistic Mass? Some months ago, Cardinal Kasper said: A step forward could take place already during this year.

**Pope Francis:** There have been great steps forward, eh ... Let us think of the first statement on the justification: from that moment the journey has not stopped. The trip to Sweden was very significant because it was just the beginning [of the celebrations] and also a commemoration with Sweden. There too, it was significant for the ecumenism of the journey, that is, walking together with prayer, with martyrdom and with works of charity, with works of mercy. And there, Lutheran Caritas and Catholic Caritas have made an agreement to work together: this is a great step! But there are always steps to take. You know that God is the God of surprises. But we must never stop, we must always go on. To pray together, to give testimony together and to do works of mercy together, that announce the charity of Jesus Christ, to announce that Jesus Christ is Lord, the only Saviour, and that grace comes only from Him. And on this path the theologians will continue to study, but the journey must go on. With hearts open to surprises.

**Greg Burke:** Thank you, Your Holiness. Now Mimmo Muolo, from *Avvenire*.

**Mimmo Muolo** (*Avvenire*): Good evening, Your Holiness. I am asking you a question on behalf of of the Italian group. Yesterday and today at Fátima, we saw a great witness of popular faith, along with you. The same that is found, for example, also in other Marian shrines like Medjugorje. What do you think of those apparitions, if they were apparitions, and of the religious fervour they have inspired, given that you have decided to appoint a bishop delegate for the pastoral aspects? And if I may allow myself a second question, I know is very close to your heart, as well as to that of us Italians... I would like to know, the NGOs have been accused of collusion with the boat smugglers, the human traffickers. What do you think of this? Thank you.

**Pope Francis:** I will start with the first. I read in the newspaper that I peruse in the morning that there was this problem, but I still do not know the details and so I cannot give an opinion. I know there is an issue and the investigations are moving ahead. I hope that they continue to go forward and that the whole truth comes out. Medjugorje, all the apparitions, or the presumed apparitions, belong to the private sphere, they are not part of the ordinary public Magisterium of the Church. Medjugorje: a commission was formed, headed by Cardinal Ruini., formed by Benedict XVI. At the end of 2013 or the beginning of 2014, I received the result from Cardinal Ruini. It was a commission of good theologians, bishops, cardinals. Very good. The Ruini report was very, very good. Then there were some doubts in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Congregation judged it opportune to send each one of the members of this congress, this “Feria Quarta” all the documentation, even that which appeared to be against the Ruini report. I received notification - I remember it was a Saturday evening, late evening... and it didn't seem right. It was like putting up for auction – excuse me the word – the Ruini report, which was very well done. And Sunday morning the Prefect received a letter from me that said that instead of sending them to the Feria Quarta, they would send the opinions to me personally.

These opinions were studied and all of them underscore the density of the Ruini report. Principally, three things must be distinguished: the first apparitions, when [the seers] were kids, the report more or less says that they must continue to be studied. On the apparitions, the presumed current apparitions: the report has its doubts. I personally am meaner: I prefer the Madonna as Mother, our Mother, and not a woman who's the head of a telegraphic office, who sends a message every day at a certain time. This is not the Mother of Jesus. And these presumed apparitions do not have much value. This I say as a personal opinion. But it is clear. Who thinks that the Madonna says, “come tomorrow at this time, and at such time I will say a message to that seer?” No. The two apparitions are distinguished. And third, there is the true core of the Ruini report, the spiritual fact, the pastoral fact, people who go there and convert, people who encounter God, who change their lives...For this, there is no magic wand, and this spiritual and pastoral fact cannot be denied. Now, to see things with all this information, with the answers that the theologians sent me, this bishop was appointed – good, good because he has experience – to see how the pastoral part is going. And at the end he will say something.

**Mimmo Muolo:** Your Holiness, thank you also for the blessing of my fellow citizens who thank you: they saw it and are very happy.

**Pope Francis:** Thank you.

**Greg Burke:** Holiness, now if I can be the mean one, we have done all of the language groups and it is six o'clock.

**Pope Francis:** Ah, there is still time...

**Greg Burke:** There is one question.

**Pope Francis:** One or two more.

**Greg Burke:** Joshua McElwee, of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

**Joshua McElwee** (National Catholic Reporter): Thank you, Holy Father. My question: the last member of the Commission for the Protection of Minors, who was abused by a priest, resigned in March. Ms. Marie Collins said that she had to resign because the officials in the Vatican did not implement the recommendations of the Commission that you, the Holy Father, had approved. I have two questions: who is responsible, and what are you doing, Holy Father, to ensure that the priests and bishops in the Vatican implement the recommendations suggested by your Commission?

**Pope Francis:** True. Marie Collins explained the matter to me well, I spoke with her, she is a good woman. She continues to work in the formation of priests on this point. She is a good woman who wants to work. She made this accusation, and she is partly correct. Why? Because there are so many delayed cases, which accumulate. Then, in this period, legislation has had to be passed for this... what should the diocesan bishops do? Today in almost all the dioceses there is the protocol to follow in these cases: it is an important progress. This way the dossiers are done well. This is a step. Another step: there are few people, there is a need for more people capable in this area, and the Secretary of State is looking, as is Cardinal Müller, to present new people. The other day two or three more were approved. The director of the disciplinary office has changed; he was good, he was very good but he was a bit tired: he returned to his home country to do the same work with his episcopate. And the new one is an Irishman, Msgr. (John) Kennedy, he is a very good person, very efficient, prompt, and this helps a lot.

Then there is another thing: Sometimes the bishops send - if the protocol is fine, it goes right away to the "Feria Quarta" and the "Feria Quarta" studies and decides. If the protocol is not fine, it must go back to be redone. That's why you think in terms of help for each continent, or for two per continent: for example, in Latin America, there is one in Colombia, another in Brazil... They would be pre-tribunals or continental tribunals. This is in the planning stage. And then, if it is fine, the "Feria Quarta" examines it and may take away the clerical status of the priest, who can go back to the diocese and appeal. First, the appeal is examined by same "Feria Quarta" that had passed the sentence, but this is unfair. And so I created another tribunal and I put an indisputable person as its head, the archbishop of Malta, Msgr. (Charles Jude) Scicluna, who is one of the strongest against abuse. And in this second tribunal, because we must be just, the one who makes an appeal is entitled to a defence. If the initial sentence is confirmed, the case is over. The only remaining option is a letter asking the Pope for pardon. I have never signed a pardon. This is how things are, we are moving forward. Marie Collins in that respect was right. But there is a backlog of 2000 cases.

**Greg Burke:** Your Holiness, now we have to go...

**Pope Francis:** But who was that, who was waiting?

**Greg Burke:** A Portuguese journalist...

Joana Haderer, *Agência Lusa*: I would like to ask a question about the case of Portugal, but I think that it can be applied to many Western societies. In Portugal, almost all Portuguese say they identify themselves as Catholics,

almost 90%. But the way the society is organized, the decisions that we make, are often contrary to the indications of the Church. I refer to marriage between homosexuals and the legalization of abortion. Now we are about to begin discussing euthanasia. How do you see this?

**Pope Francis:** I think it's a political problem. And also that the Catholic conscience at times is not a conscience that belongs entirely to the Church and that behind this there isn't a nuanced catechesis, a human catechesis... Or rather, the Catechism of the Catholic Church is an example of something serious and nuanced. I think that there is a lack of formation and also of culture. Because it's curious, in some other regions, I think of the south of Italy, parts of Latin America, they are very Catholic but they are anti-clerical, "priest-eaters" [laughs]. It is a phenomenon that exists. At times, and...

**Joana Haderer:** Does this worry you?

**Pope Francis:** Certainly, it worries me. That's why I tell priests, you will have read this: "Flee from clericalism". Because clericalism deters people. "Flee from clericalism", and I add: it is a plague in the Church. But this is also a task of catechesis, of raising awareness, of dialogue, also of human values. Thank you. Thank you very much for your work and for the acuity of your questions. Thank you.

**Greg Burke:** Thank you, Your Holiness.

**Pope Francis:** And pray for me, do not forget.

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