



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO ECUADOR, BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY

(5-13 JULY 2015)

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

*Papal Flight*

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## **[Multimedia]**

*During the flight from Asunción to Rome at the end of the Pope's Apostolic Visit to Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay, the Holy Father met with journalists on board for a press conference. Published here is an English translation of the transcribed interview, moderated by the Director of the Holy See, Fr Federico Lombardi, SJ. The first three questions were asked and answered in Spanish.*

*Aníbal Velázquez: We thank you for elevating the Shrine of Our Lady of Caacupé to a basilica, but the people of Paraguay ask: Why don't we have a cardinal? What sin has Paraguay committed to have no cardinals?*

Not having a cardinal isn't a sin. The majority of countries in the world do not have a cardinal. The nationality of cardinals — I don't remember how many there are — constitutes a minority with respect to the whole. It's true, Paraguay up to now has not had a cardinal. I wouldn't be able to give you a reason. In the choosing of cardinals, an evaluation is made, files of each candidate are read and studied, especially pertaining to his charism, which should be that of advising the Pope in governing the Universal Church. A cardinal, though he belongs to a particular Church, is — and this is where the word comes from — incardinated into the Church of Rome, and he must have a universal vision. That doesn't mean that in Paraguay there are no bishops who have just that, who could have it, but again there can only be a certain number of them — no more than 120 cardinal electors can be chosen — therefore, that would be why. Bolivia has had two. Uruguay has had two, Barbieri and the current one. There are several central American countries that have none, but it is not a sin and depends entirely on circumstances, people and the charism to be

incardinated. And this does not mean disrespect or that Paraguay does not have good bishops. There are extremely gifted bishops in Paraguay. I remember the two Bogarín Archbishops who made history in Paraguay. Why weren't they made cardinals? Well, they weren't. It's not a promotion, right? I would ask another question. If we look at Church in Paraguay, does the country deserve to have a cardinal? I would say: she deserves to have two, but for another reason, which has nothing to do with merit. It's a living Church, a joyful Church, a fighting Church and one with a glorious history.

*Priscila Quiroga and Cecilia Dorado Nava: Your Holiness, please, we would be interested to know if you think it right for Bolivians to obtain once more sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. And Holy Father, in the case that Chile and Bolivia were to ask for your mediation, would you accept?*

The question of mediation is a very delicate matter and would be a last resort. Argentina went through that with Chile and it was really in order to avoid war. It was an extreme situation and dealt with very well by those appointed by the Holy See — with John Paul II always behind them with great care — and there was the good will of both Countries who said: "Let's see if this way forward will work out". Curiously enough, there was a group, at least in Argentina, who didn't want mediation, and when President Alfonsín called for a referendum — to see whether he ought to accept the proposal of mediation or not — obviously the majority of the country said yes, but there was a group that opposed it. In the case of mediation, it is always rare for a country to be in complete agreement, but it is a last resort. There are always other diplomatic figures to help, in this case, facilitators and so forth. At this point, I have to be very respectful of the situation, because Bolivia has made an appeal to an international court. So right now if I make a comment, as a head of state, it could be interpreted as interference or pressure. I must be very respectful of the decision made by the Bolivian people to make this appeal. I also know there have been previous instances of wanting to dialogue. I'm not entirely clear about this. The person who told me something of the kind and that they were close to a solution, was someone during the term of office of Chile's President Lagos. But I say this without knowing the facts. It was a comment by Cardinal Errázuriz. I don't want to say anything foolish about the matter. There is a third point that I would like to clarify. In the Cathedral in Bolivia, I touched on this theme in a very delicate way, taking into account the appeal to the international court. I remember the context perfectly: "brothers have to dialogue, the Latin American peoples have to dialogue in order to create the great homeland, dialogue is necessary". Then I stopped, I waited in silence, and I said: "I imagine a sea". And I continued: "Dialogue and dialogue". I hope it was clear that my reflection was referring to this problem, while respecting the current situation. While it is with an international court, it is not possible to speak about mediating, or facilitating; we need to wait.

*Are the aspirations of the Bolivians just or not?*

Justice is always a question when there is a border change, especially after a war. This is continually being reviewed. I would say that it is not unjust to envisage something like this, to have

this aspiration. I remember in 1961, I was in the first year of philosophy, they had us watch a documentary on Bolivia — it was a father from Bolivia — I believe it was called *The Twelve Stars*. How many provinces does Bolivia have? [Someone responds, nine departments]. Then it was called *The Ten Stars*. It presented each of the nine departments, and then the tenth: it showed the sea, in silence. It made an impression on me. That was in 1961. There is, in effect, a longing. Clearly, after a war of that type there are losses, and I believe what's important, above all, is dialogue, healthy negotiation. At present, there is a pause in this dialogue due to the appeal at The Hague.

*Fredy Paredes: Ecuador was in turmoil before your visit. After you left the country, people opposing the government returned to the streets. It seemed that they wanted to use your presence in Ecuador for political purposes: Especially when you said: "The Ecuadorian people have stood up with dignity..."*

Clearly, I know there were some political problems and strikes; this I know. I don't know the political difficulties of Ecuador and it would be foolish to give an opinion. Afterwards, they told me that there these were temporarily suspended during my visit, for which I am grateful, because it was the gesture of a people on their feet out of respect for the Pope's visit. I am grateful and appreciate it. Now, if the situation has resumed, evidently the political problems and political debates continue. Concerning the phrase you spoke about — I'm referring to the greater awareness of the Ecuadorian people of their own value — there was a border war with Peru not long ago. So, there is a history of war. Then, a greater awareness of the riches of Ecuador's ethnic variety. And this gives dignity. Ecuador is not a throw-away country. And this applies to the people as a whole and to the comprehensive dignity of that people who after the border war was able to stand up once more, with increasing awareness of its own dignity and its richness of unity in diversity. That is to say, it cannot be attributed to one concrete situation. Because that same phrase – I was told, but did not see it myself – was manipulated to explain both situations: namely, that the government put Ecuador back on its feet or that the Ecuadorian people stood up against the government ... One sentence can be manipulated, and I believe that in this we must be very careful. And I thank you for your question because it shows prudence. You are giving an example of what it means to be careful.

Allow me, though no one asked me this, to give you five extra minutes, if they are helpful. In your line of work, the interpretation of a text is very important. A text cannot be interpreted through a single statement. The text as a whole has to be understood. Certain phrases are key for that interpretation but others are said only 'in passing' or 'superficially'. So, one must look at the context as a whole, see the situation, see even the historical context. To see the evolution of a situation or, if we are talking about the past, to interpret an event with the hermeneutic of that time. For instance, the crusades; let us interpret the crusades with a hermeneutic of how they thought then. It is essential to interpret an address, or any text, with an interpretation which is comprehensive and not isolated. Now we can pass on to Guaraní.

*Stefania Falasca: In the speech you gave in Bolivia to the popular movements, you spoke of the new colonialism and of the idolatry of money.... What do you think about what is happening in Greece and how it concerns all of Europe?*

First of all, the reason for this intervention of mine in the meeting with popular movements. It was the second [meeting]. The first was held at the Vatican, in the old Synod Hall; there were some 120 people.... It is something that [the Pontifical Council for] Justice and Peace organizes. I am close to this reality because it is a phenomenon present all over the world, also in the East, in the Philippines, in India, in Thailand. These are movements that organize themselves, not just to protest but also to move forward, to be able to live, and these movements are strong. These people - and there are many - don't feel represented by the unions because they say that unions today have become a corporation and they don't fight - though I am simplifying a little - for the rights of poor. The Church cannot be indifferent. The Church has a social doctrine, and she dialogues with these movements, and she dialogues well. You saw it. You saw the enthusiasm among them that the Church is not distant, the Church has a doctrine that helps people in their struggle. It is a dialogue. It is not that the Church opts for anarchy. No, they are not anarchists. They work. They try to do many kinds of work, even those connected with waste, the things that are left behind. They are real workers. That is the first thing, the importance of this movement.

Then, Greece and the international system. I am considerably allergic to all things economic, because my father was an accountant and when he couldn't finish his work at the factory, he brought the work home, on Saturday and Sunday; old books with gothic titles. My father worked... and I would just watch him.... I am quite allergic. With regard to the Greek issue, I don't really understand the situation. Certainly, it would be all too simple to say that the fault is only on one side. If the Greek government has brought forward this situation of international debt, they too have a responsibility. With the new Greek government we see a review that seems to be heading in the right direction... I hope - and this is the only thing I have to say, because I do not know - that they find a way to resolve the Greek problem and establish forms of supervision so that the problem does not occur in other countries. And I hope this will help us move forward because the path of loans and debts, in the end..., it never ends. I was told something about a year and a half ago, although it's just a piece of information and I don't know if it's true, that there was a project at the UN - If any of you know anything about it, it would be good if you could explain it - there was a project whereby a country could declare itself bankrupt, which is not the same as a default. It is a work in progress, I was told and I don't know how it ended it up or whether or not it was true .... But, if a company can declare bankruptcy why can't a country do it and we go to their aid? And, this is one of the underlying reasons of the project, but I can't say anything more about it.

And, then, regarding new forms of colonialism, clearly they are all based on value. The colonization of consumerism, for example. The habit of consumerism was a process of colonization. It's a habit, no? It brings about a habit that is not your own and it brings imbalance to human personality; it also brings imbalance to a national economy and to social justice, even

affecting physical and mental health, to offer but some examples.

*Anna Matranga: Your Holiness, one of the strongest messages of this trip was that the global economic system often imposes a profit mentality at any cost, to the detriment of the poor. This is perceived by Americans as a direct criticism of their system and their way of life. How do you respond to this perception?*

What I said, that phrase, it's not new. I said it in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "This economy kills (n. 53). I remember that phrase well. It had a context. And I said it in *Laudato Si'*. It's not a new thing, this is known. I heard that there was some criticism from the United States. I heard about it, but I haven't read about it, I haven't had the time to study this well, because every criticism must be received, studied, and dialogue must ensue. You ask me what I think but if have not had a dialogue with those who criticize, I don't have the right to state an opinion, isolated from dialogue. This is what comes to mind.

*Now you will go the United States. You must have an idea how it will be, you must have some thoughts about the nation.*

No, I have to start studying now. Until now I studied these three beautiful countries [Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay]. Such richness, such beauty.... Now I must begin to study Cuba, because I will spend two and a half days there. And then the United States. Three cities in the east — because I cannot make it to the west — Washington, New York and Philadelphia. Yes, I must start studying these criticisms and then dialogue a little.

*Aura Vistas Miguel: Your Holiness, What did you think when you saw the hammer and sickle with the Christ on it, given to you by President Evo Morales? And where did this object end up?*

It's a strange thing. I wasn't familiar with this, nor did I know that Fr. Espinal was a sculptor and a poet. I learned of that only these days. I saw it and I was surprised. Second: one could categorize it as a kind of protest art. For example, in Buenos Aires, some years ago, there was an exhibit of a good sculptor, creative, Argentinean, who is now dead. It was protest art, and I recall one piece, it was a crucified Christ on a bomber that was falling down. It was a criticism of Christianity allied with imperialism, represented by the bomber. I was not aware of that first point. Secondly, I would qualify it as protest art, which in some cases can be offensive. Thirdly, in this concrete case, Fr Espinal was killed in 1980. It was a time when liberation theology had many different branches. One of the branches involved a Marxist analysis of reality. Fr. Espinal belonged to this. Yes, I knew that because in those years I was rector of the theology faculty and we talked a lot about it, about the different branches and who were the representatives. In the same year, the Father General of the Society (of Jesus), Fr. Arrupe, wrote a letter to the whole Society on the Marxist analysis of reality in theology, helping to restrain this tendency. He wrote: "it's no good, these are different things, it's not right, it's not correct." And, four years later, in 1984, the Congregation for

the Doctrine of the Faith published the first small volume, the first declaration criticizing liberation theology. Then comes the second, which opens to a more Christian perspective. I'm simplifying. Let's do the hermeneutic of that time: Espinal was an enthusiast of this Marxist analysis of reality, but also of a theology that uses Marxism. From this, he came up with this art piece. Also the poetry of Espinal was of this kind of protest. It was his life, it was his thought. He was a special person, with so much human geniality, who fought in good faith. Under this kind of hermeneutic, I understand this work. For me it wasn't an offense, but I had to apply this hermeneutic, and I am telling you this so that there aren't any misguided opinions. [Asked if he left it there the Pope replies:] No, it's traveling with me. Maybe you heard that President Morales wished to give me two honors, Bolivia's highest and then the Order of Fr. Espinal, a new order. Now I've never accepted honors. I don't do it. But, he did it with so much good will and with so much desire to please me. And, I thought that this comes from the people of Bolivia. So I prayed about it, what I should do. (I thought,) If I bring it to the Vatican it will end up in the museum and no one will see it .... I thought about leaving them with Our Lady of Copacabana, the Mother of Bolivia, which will go to the Shrine. The two honors will be in the Shrine of Our Lady of Copacabana, to Our Blessed Mother, while the Christ is coming with me. Thank you.

*Anaïs Feuga: During the Mass in Guayaquil, you said that the Synod needed to help mature a true discernment in order to find concrete solutions to the difficulties of the family, and then you asked the people to pray so that what seems to be impure, scandalous, or scary, God may transform it into a miracle. Can you explain to us what "impure", "scary" or "scandalous" situations you were referring to?*

Here, too, I will do some 'hermeneutics' of the text. I was speaking of the miracle of the good wine [at the wedding at Cana]. I said the jars of water were full, but they were meant for purification. In other words, every person who came for the celebration performed his purification and left his spiritual dirt. It was a rite of purification before entering a house or the temple. It is a ritual that we too have in holy water: it comes from the Jewish rite. I said that Jesus makes the best wine from dirty water, the worst. In general, I wanted to make this comment: the family is in crisis, we all know this, just read the *Instrumentum Laboris* which you all know well since its presentation. It's included there... I was referring in a general way to this: that the Lord may purify us from the crises and many things described in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. It was a general reference, and I wasn't thinking of any point in particular. Just that the Lord make us better families, more mature and better. The family is in crisis, may the Lord purify us, and let's move forward. But the specifics of this crisis are all in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod, which is finished and you have it.

*Javier Martínez Brocal: I pose this question in the name of all of the Spanish language journalists: We watched how well the mediation went between Cuba and the U.S. went. Do you think it would be possible to do something similar between other delicate situations in other countries on the Latin American continent? I'm thinking of Colombia and also Venezuela. Also, out of curiosity, my father who is a few years younger than you has half your energy. We've seen it on this visit and*

*over these last two-and-a-half years. What is your secret?*

What is your “drug?”, he means to ask... [laughs], that’s the question! The process between Cuba and the United States was not mediation. It did not have the character of mediation. It arose from a desire; a desire which was matched by a desire on the other side. And then, to tell you the truth, this was January of last year, and then three months went by during which I prayed hard about this, without coming to a decision; I thought to myself, what could I do with these two who had been like this for more than 50 years? Then the Lord made me think of a cardinal, and he went there and spoke. Then I didn’t hear anything; months went by. One day the Secretary of State, who is here, told me, “Tomorrow we will have a second meeting with the two teams.” — “What?” — “Yes, they are talking to each other, the two groups are both talking, they are making progress ...”. It progressed by itself. It was not mediation. It was the goodwill of two countries. The merit is theirs, the merit is theirs for doing this. We hardly did anything, only small things. And in mid-December, it was announced. This is the story, truly, there is no more to it. Right now, I am concerned that the peace process in Colombia not come to a halt. I must say this, and I hope that this process goes ahead. In this sense, we are always available to help, and in many ways. It would be unfortunate if the process didn’t go ahead. In Venezuela, the bishops’ conference is working to bring some peace there, too, but also in this instance there is no mediation. In the case of the United States [and Cuba], it was the Lord, two chance circumstances, and then things happened on their own. As for Colombia, I hope and pray, and we must pray, that this process does not stop. It is a process that has gone on for more than 50 years and how many have died! I’ve heard the number is millions. And then, about Venezuela, I have nothing to offer you. Oh yes, the “drug”. Well, the *mate* helps me, but I didn’t try the coca. This must remain clear!

*Ludwig Ring-Eifel: why are there so few messages for the middle class in the teaching of the Holy Father? If you had a message, what would it be?*

Thank you so much. That’s a good correction, thanks! You are right. It’s my mistake. I must think about this. I will make a comment, but not to justify myself. You’re right. I have to think a bit. The world is polarized. The middle class is shrinking. The polarization between the rich and the poor is wide. This is true. And, perhaps this has brought me not to take this into account. I am speaking about the world, in some nations this is not true, but in general polarization can be seen around the world. And the number of poor is high. And why do I speak of the poor? Because they’re at the heart of the Gospel and I always speak from the Gospel on poverty, although it’s sociological. Then about the middle class, I’ve said a few words, but in passing. But simple folk, workers... that is of great value. But, I think you’re telling me about something I need to do. I need to examine further this teaching. Thank you. I thank you for this help. Thanks.

*Vania de Luca: In these days you’ve insisted on the necessity of methods for integration, social inclusion, to combat the throw-away culture. Even though you’ve already said you still have to think about the visit to the United States, will you touch on these things when you go to the United*

*Nations, to the White House? Were you also thinking of that visit when you mentioned those issues?*

No, I was just thinking about this trip and the world in general. National debts right now are terrible. Every country has a debt. There are one or two countries that have purchased the debt of big countries. It's a global problem. But when speaking about this I wasn't specifically thinking about my visit to the United States.

*Courtney Walsh: Now that Cuba will have a major role in the international community, in your opinion should Havana improve its record on human rights and religious freedom? And, do you think Cuba risks losing something in this new relationship with the most powerful country in the world?*

Human rights are for everyone. And it's not just in one or two countries that human rights are not being respected. I would say that in many countries around the world human rights are not respected! What would Cuba lose or the US have to lose? Both will gain something and lose something, because this happens in negotiations. What they will both gain is peace. This is certain. They will gain: encounter, friendship, collaboration. I cannot image what they will lose. They may be concrete things. In negotiations one always wins and loses. Returning to human rights and religious freedom, just think, in the world there are countries, in Europe as well, where for different reasons religious signs are not permitted, and on other continents it is the same situation. Yes, this is so. Religious freedom is not respected everywhere in the world, there are many places where it is not respected.

*Benedicte Lutaud: Your Holiness, you present yourself as a new world leader of alternative politics. I would like to know: why do you touch on popular movements so much, and not so much the business world? And do you think the Church will follow your outstretched hand to popular movements, which are very secular?*

Thank you! The world of popular movements is a reality, a very big reality, all over the world. What did I do? What I gave them is the social doctrine of the Church, just as I do with the business world. The Church has a social doctrine. If you look back at what I told the popular movements, which is a fairly long speech, it is a summary of the Church's social doctrine, applied to their situation. But it is the Church's social doctrine. Everything I said is the social doctrine of the Church. And, when I speak to the world of business, I say the same, that is, [I say] what the Church's social doctrine says about the world of business. For example, in *Laudato Si'* there is a passage on the common good and social debt of private property which is understood in the same way. It's applying the Church's social doctrine.

*Do you think the Church will follow you, in your closeness to popular movements?*

It is I who follow the Church here, because I simply preach the Church's social doctrine to these movements. It's not an outstretched hand to an enemy. It's not political, no, it's a catechetical act. I want that to be clear.

*Cristina Cabrejas: Holy Father, are you somewhat scared that you or your speeches might be exploited by governments, by leaders, by movements.*

I will repeat a bit what I said at the beginning. Every word, every sentence can be exploited. That was what the journalist from Ecuador asked me. Using the same phrase, some said it was favoring the government, others said it was against the government. That is why I allowed myself to speak of an integral interpretation. Phrases can always be manipulated. At times some news stories take a phrase out of context. I am not afraid. I am simply saying: look at the context! If I make a mistake, with some shame I will ask for forgiveness, and move forward.

*Can I ask another quick question? What do you think about the young people and children taking selfies with you at Mass?*

What do I think? It's another culture. I feel like a great-grandfather! As I was leaving today, a policeman in his 40s asked me for a selfie! I told him: you're a teenager! Yes, it's another culture but I respect it.

*Andrea Tornielli: I wanted to ask you, Holy Father, in brief what was the message you wished to give to the Latin American Church during these days? What role can the Latin American Church have also as a sign to the world?*

The Latin American Church has a great wealth. She's a young Church. And this is important. She's a young Church with a certain freshness, with some informalities, not so formal. Her theology is rich, it's searching. I wanted to give encouragement to this young Church and I believe that this Church can offer us much. I'll say one thing that really struck me. In all three countries, all three of them, along the streets there were mother and fathers with their children, showing their children. I've never seen so many children, so many. They are a people — and the Church is like this — they are a lesson for us, for Europe, where the decrease in birthrate is quite alarming and the policies for helping big families are few. I think of France, which has good policies in place for helping large families. I believe, [the birth rate in France] has reached more than two percent, but others are at zero percent, though not all of them. Regarding the number of people who are under the age of 40, I think that Albania stands at 45 percent and Paraguay at over 70 percent. The richness of this people, of this Church, is that she is a young Church; a treasure, a living Church. This is important. I believe we need to learn from this and correct ourselves because if, on the contrary, children don't come, then..., and this is what touches me so much about "waste", the elderly are discarded, children are discarded and due to lack of work, young people are discarded. For this reason, these new nations of young people strengthen us. As for the Church, a young

Church with so many problems, this is the message I find: Don't be afraid of this youth and freshness of the Church. She may also be a little disorganized, but with time she will be and will do us so much good.