

(Photo: Pope Francis with Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti during the in-flight press conference en route to Rome from Panama, Jan. 27, 2019. [AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, Pool](#))

An Unfortunate Papal Habit

“Another Rootin’ Tootin’ World Youth Day,” as [John Vennari](#) (R.I.P.) once characterized the event, has come and gone (Jan. 22-27, 2019 in Panama), and with it another round of eyebrow-raising statements from Pope Francis. World Youth Day, in and of itself, is problematic on a number of levels – a fact thoroughly documented by John over the years (see [here](#) and [here](#) for video footage) – but adding Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the main attraction has clearly exacerbated the problem.

Since his first WYD in 2013, the Latin American Pontiff has made a habit of spouting controversial remarks during his apostolic travels. For example, it was in Rio de Janeiro during [WYD 2013](#) that he [told](#) a group of 30,000 Argentinian youth to “make a mess, to disturb complacency.” Likewise, during the in-flight press conference from Rio to Rome after the event, he uttered his infamous rhetorical [question](#), “[W]ho am I to judge him?” in reference to those who identify as “gay” (in the context of answering a question about Msgr. Battista Ricca, a notorious and active [homosexual](#)). And while en route to Kraków, Poland for [WYD 2016](#), on the day after Fr. Jacques Hamel was [brutally murdered](#) by Islamic State jihadists, Pope Francis strangely [asserted](#) (in the context of Fr. Hamel’s murder):

“I would like to say just one word to be clear. *When I speak of war, I speak of real war, not of a war of religion, no.* There is war for interests, there is war for money, there is war for the resources of nature, there is war for the domination of peoples: this is war. Someone may think: ‘He is talking about a war of religion’. No. *All the religions, we want peace.* Others want war. Do you understand?” (Emphasis added)

Let us recall, as well, that during the airborne press conference from Kraków to Rome after WYD 2016, Francis even more explicitly defended Islam in response to a brave journalist who pressed the issue: “Four days ago, on board the flight, you [Francis] told us once again that all religions want peace. But this holy priest, eighty-six years old, was clearly killed in the name of Islam.” [Responded](#) Francis:

“I don’t like to speak of Islamic violence because every day when I open the

newspapers I see acts of violence, here in Italy: someone kills his girlfriend, someone else his mother-in-law... And these violent people are baptized Catholics! They are violent Catholics... If I spoke about Islamic violence, I would also have to speak about Catholic violence. [...] *I believe that it is not right to identify Islam with violence. It is not right and it is not true.*" (Emphasis added)

Suffice it to say that those who have actually read the Quran and studied the history of Islam (not to mention Church history, including the Pope's [namesake](#)) strongly disagree with this false assertion (see [here](#) for more details).

Opening Address at WYD Panama

Fast forward roughly two-and-a-half years and [WYD 2019](#) proved to be no exception to this pattern of regrettable statements, beginning with the Pope's [opening address](#) to young people (Jan. 24).

The dominant word and theme of his speech was "dream", occurring no less than 16 times during his relatively brief remarks. Sounding more like Martin Luther King, Jr. than St. Peter, Pope Francis spoke about "a call inviting us together to dare to *keep alive a shared dream*," stating further, "The dream for which Jesus gave His life on the Cross, for which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost and brought fire to the heart of every man and woman, to the heart of each one, to yours and yours and yours, to mine... A dream named Jesus..." Later on, he described St. Gabriel's message at the Annunciation as an invitation for Our Lady "to bear this dream in her womb and give it life, to make it take flesh."

"The dream for which Jesus gave His life on the Cross"? "A dream named Jesus"? What are the faithful to make of such bizarre expressions?

Perhaps in an attempt to clarify his meaning, Francis went on to say that Christianity "means pursuing the dream for which [Jesus] gave His life: loving with the same love with which He loved us. He did not love us halfway; He did not love us a little bit. He loved us totally, He filled us with tenderness and love, He gave His life."

Of course, it is Our Lord's will for us to love one another as He has loved us (cf. John 13:34-35), but this is not the primary reason why He offered Himself on the altar of the Cross. Rather, as St. Paul tells us plainly, "*Christ died for our sins*, according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3), affirming elsewhere that "Christ Jesus came into this world to *save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15). In other words, Christ died because of the *reality* (not "dream")

of sin – an infinite offense against the infinite God – in order to save us from the worst consequence of sin, namely, eternal death (otherwise known as hell).

As we profess in the Creed every Sunday, *Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis* (“Who for us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven”). Now, salvation certainly includes the reception of divine life (sanctifying grace) and growth in charity, but this was made possible only by Our Lord’s “most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross” through which He “made satisfaction for us to God the Father” (Council of Trent, [Decree on Justification](#), Chapter 7; cf. Denz. 799). Without His atoning death, we would not have access to the graces necessary to “be born again of water and the Holy Ghost” (John 3:5) and to practice true charity (love of God and neighbor).

A Politicized Way of the Cross

On the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (Jan. 25), the Pope led the “[Via Crucis with Young People](#)”, followed by a lengthy “prayer” of sorts to God the Father which included the following statements:

- “Your Son’s passion...continues in the indigenous peoples whom others strip of their lands, their roots and their culture, ignoring and silencing the great wisdom that they have and can bring us.” (cf. [Laudato Si](#), n. 146)
- “Father, Your Son’s way of the cross continues in the plea of our mother earth, profoundly wounded by the pollution of her skies, the barrenness of her fields, the contamination of her waters, trampled underfoot by disregard and a fury of consumption beyond all reason.” (cf. LS, nn. 20-42)
- “[D]o we help carry the burden of the cross, like Simon of Cyrene, by being peacemakers, builders of bridges [like [Fr. James Martin](#), perhaps?], a leaven of fraternity?”
- “Father, like Mary, we want to be Church, a Church that fosters a culture that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates; that does not stigmatize, much less indulge in a senseless and irresponsible condemnation of every immigrant as a threat to society.” (cf. [Address](#) of Sept. 20, 2018; [Message](#) for World Day of Peace 2019, n. 4, 6)

Although his prayer does contain other praiseworthy elements, the statements listed above undoubtedly smack of liberal politics. Not that this comes as a surprise, considering that Francis has rightly been dubbed [The Political Pope](#), but such politicization of Our Lord's "most holy Passion" (Council of Trent) is nonetheless inappropriate and unacceptable.

The Dreaded "H" Word

Perhaps the most surprising detail of Francis' public remarks was his mention of "heresies" during his [homily](#) at the Cathedral Basilica of Santa Maria la Antigua in Panama City (Jan. 26). Addressing the local archbishop and clergy, as well as men and women religious, lay faithful, and civil officials, the Pope spoke of "the weariness of hope" caused by "seeing a Church wounded by sin, which so often failed to hear all those cries," presumably a reference to the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

"And we can get used to living with a weariness of hope," he continued,

"before an uncertain and unknown future, and this can pave the way for a grey pragmatism to lodge in the heart of our communities. Everything apparently goes on as usual, but in reality, faith is crumbling and failing. Communities and priests disappointed by a reality that we do not understand or that we think has no room for our message, *we can open the door to one of the worst heresies possible in our time: the notion that the Lord and our communities have nothing to say or contribute in the new world now being born* (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83). What once arose to be the salt and light for the world ends up stale and worn."
(Emphasis added)

With all due respect, what Francis calls "one of the worst heresies possible in our time" does not even remotely qualify. The Church defines *heresy* as "the obstinate denial or obstinate doubt after the reception of baptism of some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith" (Code of Canon Law [1983], [can. 751](#)). "[T]he notion that the Lord and our communities have nothing to say or contribute in the new world now being born," whatever that means, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with the Deposit of Faith.

There are, however, several "notions" proffered by Pope Francis which *do* pose a direct threat, not only to Catholic faith and morals, but also to the Church's divine constitution and temporal welfare. Here are a few prime examples:

- “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), n. 27)
- “We Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition. ... Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.” (EG, n. 253)
- “No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves.” ([Amoris Laetitia](#), n. 297)
- “Hence it is [*sic*] can no longer simply be said that all those in any ‘irregular’ [marital] situation [i.e. objective adultery] are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.” (AL, n. 301)
- “Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God Himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one’s limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal [i.e. adultery is acceptable in certain cases].” (AL, n. 303)
- “Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin - which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such - a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end.” “In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments.” (AL, n. 305; note 351)
- In a [letter](#) praising the infamous [guidelines](#) of the Buenos Aires bishops for implementing *Amoris Laetitia* (including access to the sacraments for public adulterers

“in certain cases”), Pope Francis wrote: **“The document is very good and completely explains the meaning of chapter VIII of *Amoris laetitia*. There are no other interpretations”** (emphasis added). He subsequently had his letter, together with the heterodox guidelines, [inserted](#) into the Acts of the Apostolic See and labelled therein as “authentic Magisterium” (see [here](#) for the AAS text).

- “This vast and pressing task [NB: defined therein as ‘a fitting renewal of the system of ecclesiastical studies’] requires, on the cultural level of academic training and scientific study, a broad and generous effort at **a radical paradigm shift, or rather - dare I say - at ‘a bold cultural revolution’**. In this effort, the worldwide network of ecclesiastical universities and faculties is called to offer the decisive contribution of leaven, salt and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living Tradition of the Church, which is ever open to new situations and ideas.” ([Veritatis Gaudium](#), n. 3, emphasis added)

This list is far from exhaustive, but the point has been sufficiently made (see the formal [theological critique](#) of *Amoris Laetitia* and the [Correctio filialis](#) for more detailed analyses).

Interestingly, Pope Francis used the dreaded “H” word on one other occasion while in Panama. During his meeting with the bishops of Central America (Jan. 24), he [addressed](#) those present on the topic, “Thinking with the Church”. Roughly two-thirds through the main body of his speech, while reflecting on “the centrality of compassion,” he stated:

“I am worried about how the compassion of Christ has lost a central place in the Church, even among Catholic groups, or is being lost - not to be so pessimistic. *Even in the Catholic media there is a lack of compassion. There is schism, condemnation, cruelty, exaggerated self-praise, the denouncing of heresy...* May compassion never be lost in our Church and may the centrality of compassion never be lost in the life of a bishop.” (Emphasis added)

Francis was no doubt alluding to the same Catholic media outlets he has referenced in the past (although without naming them), for example, during a lengthy [interview](#) with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J. last January:

“There are doctrinal resistances that you [Fr. Spadaro] know about better than I. For my own good I do not read *the content of internet sites of this so-called*

'resistance.' I know who they are, I know the groups, but *I do not read them for my own mental health.* If there is something very serious, they tell me about it so that I know. ...

When I perceive resistance, I seek dialogue whenever it is possible; but *some resistance comes from people who believe they possess the true doctrine and accuse you of being a heretic.* When I cannot see spiritual goodness in what these people say or write, I simply pray for them. I find it sad, but I won't settle on this sentiment for the sake of my own mental well-being." (Emphasis added)

With all sincerity and filial respect for the Papacy, I do hope that *Catholic Family News* is on Pope Francis' list of "resistance groups" who are striving to preserve "true doctrine" and denounce heresy, which in reality *is* an act of charity. And, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, "if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly" (*Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 33, art. 4*, ad. 2).

Arrivederci, Panama

At last, we come to the final act of this papal drama: the in-flight press conference en route to Rome from Panama (Jan. 27). Francis' comments during this exchange with journalists sparked international headlines such as, "Pope Francis Expresses Openness to Older, Married Priests" (*The Daily Caller*), "Pope lowers expectations for next month's sex abuse summit" (*Associated Press*), and "Pope Francis: 'We must provide sex education in schools'" (*LifeSiteNews*). My personal favorite, however, is "Pope Francis's Calculated Contradictions" (*OnePeterFive*).

For those interested, the [full transcript](#) is available courtesy *Catholic News Agency*. For our purposes here, however, I will provide only the most notorious papal quotes in chronological order:

- **On Sex Education in Schools:** "I believe that in schools we must give sex education. Sex is a gift from God, it is not a monster, it is a gift from God to love. That some people use it to earn money or exploit is another problem. But we need to give an objective sexual education, that is without ideological colonization. If you start by giving sexual education full of ideological colonization you destroy the person. But sex as a gift from God must be taught. To educate is to educate, to make the best of people emerge and to accompany them along the way." (See Pope Pius XI's encyclical on Christian Education, *Divini Illius Magistri*, nn. 65-67 for a firm condemnation of "so-

called sex-education” in schools.)

- **On Priestly Celibacy in the Latin Rite:** “Personally, I think that celibacy is a gift to the Church. Secondly, I would say that I do not agree with permitting optional celibacy, no. There remains only some possibility for very far places. I think of the Pacific islands, when there is a pastoral necessity, the pastor should think of the faithful. There is an interesting book by Fr. Lobinger [CNA Ed. note: Fritz Lobinger, bishop emeritus of Aliwal, South Africa] [on this topic] – this is an issue of discussion between theologians, it is not yet my decision – my decision is: optional celibacy before the diaconate, no. It is my thought, personally, but I would not do it. And this remains clear. It is only my personal thought. Am I narrow-minded, maybe? I do not want to put myself before God with this decision.” (See [“Pope Francis Says ‘No’ Then ‘Maybe’ to Married Priests”](#) by Edward Pentin for further background.)
- **On the Vatican Abuse Crisis Summit (Feb. 21-24, 2019):** “The idea of this [meeting] was born in the [[Council of Cardinals](#), or ‘C9’] because we saw that some bishops did not understand well or did not know what to do or did something good or wrong and we felt the responsibility to give a ‘catechesis,’ in quotation marks, on this problem to the episcopal conferences. That is why we called upon the presidents. ... I permit myself to say that I’ve perceived a bit of an inflated expectation. **We need to deflate the expectations to these points that I’m saying. Because the problem of abuse will continue.** It’s a human problem, but human everywhere. ... It’s a human tragedy and we need to become aware.” (Emphasis added)

Again, the full transcript is available [here](#) for further reading.

Next Stop, Portugal - Fatima Connection

To conclude this survey of WYD 2019 and Pope Francis’ troubling words, let us briefly look ahead to the next “Rootin’ Tootin’ World Youth Day”, which is scheduled for the summer of 2022.

At the end of the closing Mass in Panama (Jan. 27), Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Vatican’s Dicastery of Laity, the Family and Life, [announced](#) that WYD 2022 will be held in Lisbon, Portugal. This nation, traditionally called the “land of Holy Mary,” was chosen by God to receive the most important message of the 20th century – addressed to all of humanity – from the Immaculate Virgin herself, namely, the [Message of Fatima](#). Moreover,

Our Lady chose to entrust her simple yet profound and urgent message to three small children. And what did she tell them? Along with prophecies and specific requests for our times (e.g. daily recitation of the Rosary, Consecration of Russia, Five First Saturdays), Our Lady simply reiterated the message of her Divine Son: “The time is accomplished, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). In the words of Our Lady, “Do not offend the Lord our God anymore, for He is already too much offended!” (Oct. 13, 1917).

This is the message that God chose to give three Portuguese youths in 1917. Is it the message received by participants at World Youth Day? (For a book-length answer, see [World Youth Day: From Catholicism to Counterchurch](#) by Cornelia Ferreira and John Vennari.)

Between now and 2022, let us redouble our prayers, sacrifices, and other efforts to hasten obedience to the full Message of Fatima throughout the entire Church, beginning with the Pope himself. Then, and only then, will the glorious promise of Our Lady of Fatima be realized: “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world” (July 13, 1917).

St. John Bosco, Patron Saint of Youth, pray for us!