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Editorial

January marked the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Pope in his Weekly General Audience said "This invaluable spiritual initiative has brought Christian communities together for more than a century. The Pope's oft repeated concern for people is also demonstrated in his visits to the Parishes of Rome where he interacts with common people. He also made no bones about his dislike for official protocol, while expressing his joy in meeting the faithful freely and without many restrictions.

The Church made its presence felt at the World Economic Forum at Davos and the Geneva 2 Conference, a UN initiative of peace talks to initiate a peace process for Syria. The messages of Pope Francis were indeed those that may have stirred the conscience of many a listener.

The Holy See delegation also faced uncomfortable moments at Geneva earlier at the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a signatory of the Convention, the Holy See's report on its implementation was examined. The Holy See has had to encounter criticisms for what was presumed to be a policy of cover up for sexual crimes against minors by the clergy. The delegation strongly defended the stand of the Holy See by spelling out the measures taken towards transparency and stating clearly that protection of children was the topmost priority.

With announcements of forthcoming Papal visits and a possible encyclical on Ecology we have much more to look forward to.

Fr. Melwin Pinto, SJ

1. Livestock, pets flock to St. Peter's Square for feast day blessing

In a traditional observance for the feast of St. Anthony the Abbot, hundreds of farm animals were brought to St. Peter's Square on January 17, to receive a blessing from Cardinal Angelo Comastri, the vicar general for Vatican City. Members of an Italian association of farmers and ranchers brought their donkeys, cows, horses, rabbits, hens, geese, sheep, goats and pigs, who munched on hay or feed in their wooden pens. [\(Video\)](#)



The unique event is organized annually by the Italian Association of Livestock Farmers, for whom St. Anthony is the patron saint. The group also invited residents of Rome to bring their household pets for a free veterinary inspection, and offered free fruit to passersby. Italian police mounted on horseback paraded up the wide boulevard leading to the square and two police dogs, with their agents, circled and sniffed pedestrians enthusiastically -- unaware they were off-duty to get a blessing. Before the blessing, Cardinal Comastri celebrated a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica with members of the livestock association and their families.

Standing near the animals' pens, he thanked Italian farmers for helping care for nature and providing communities with healthy, wholesome food. He said Pope Francis has reminded people of their duty to protect creation. The cardinal said the recent cleaning and restoration of Bernini's colonnade surrounding St. Peter's Square revealed the extent and seriousness of urban pollution.



Workers spent the past five years scrubbing and sandblasting off black grime, showing just how much pollution is ending up in people's lungs, he said. He said he hoped the farmers' example of being ethical and honest stewards of God's gifts would "become contagious" and influence everyone.

2. Pope Francis: parish visit to 'existential periphery'



Pope Francis made a pastoral visit to Rome's Sacro Cuore (Sacred Heart) Basilica on Sunday January 19, afternoon, in the context of the Church's 100th annual World Day for Migrants and Refugees. The parish of the Basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is run by the Salesians of Don Bosco, and operates an outreach to the city's homeless and itinerant populations, as well as a centre of welcome and hospitality for more than 400 young refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia, Eritrea,

Gambia, Cameroon, Ghana, Congo, Ivory Coast, Afganistan, Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Pakistan and Turkey. [\(Video\)](#)

Located in the heart of the city, in the vicinity of Rome’s central Termini railway station, the Basilica parish serves one of those “existential outskirts” that Pope Francis has called on Christians in every state of life – and especially those in religious life – to place at the centre of their work and witness in behalf of the Gospel. Sacro Cuore offers a range of services to the people it assists, from Italian language courses to driving lessons, remedial education for middle school equivalency, computer literacy, job training and placement.



The schedule of the Pope’s projected four-hour-plus visit included encounters with children and the faithful of the parish in the courtyard of the basilica, a meeting with refugees, another with homeless persons, an exchange of greetings with families that have had children baptised over the course of the past year, Mass in the Basilica, a visit with the Basilica’s Salesian community, and a moment with young people.

3. Vatican sets caps on cost of pursuing sainthood



A ‘reference tariff’, which postulators and those promoting the causes of canonization should follow, has come into force earlier this year,” Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, announced on Monday; January 13, at the Pontifical Urbaniana University.

“It is a novelty that comes at the end of the collaborative work between the Congregation and the various postulators, who in recent months have responded positively to the request of the Holy See to present the accounting of their expenses. It is good that those involved, know the costs which they face, both relating to the fees of the Holy See and the remuneration of postulators”, the prelate said.

It will clearly inform dioceses, associations or orders of priests and nuns who promote sainthood causes for deceased people considered to have been holy during their lifetime what they can expect to spend. Gathering historical evidence, witnesses and lawyers to prove to the Vatican that a person was a saint can be expensive, a fact that has favoured those dioceses or orders of priests and nuns with more money.



The cardinal then informed that help is being offered for the poor causes. He also said there were plans to establish a fund to help defray expenses for those dioceses or religious orders that did not have much financial backing for the process. The newspaper L’Osservatore Romano, which gave a few details, said the guide had come into force at the start of the year and that its goal was to instil a sense of “sobriety and fairness” to the process.

4. Pope reminds Church judges they are primarily pastors



Pope Francis on Friday, January 24, told judges in ecclesiastical courts that in their juridical function they are primarily pastors of souls, reminding them that behind every case there are persons awaiting justice. Pope Francis made the point to members of the Roman Rota, a court in the Vatican that handles appeals of marriage annulment cases in the Catholic Church. Meeting them for their first time, at the start of the judicial year, the Pope said that the Church’s judiciary is a service to truth in justice, and has a deep pastoral connotation aimed at the good of the faithful and the building up the Christian community.

The Holy Father briefly touched upon the human, judicial and pastoral qualities of an ecclesiastical judge. A prelate auditor or judge of the Roman Rota has to have human maturity that is shown in his serenity of judgment and detachment from personal views, which make him deliver a justice that is not legalistic and abstract but which is an answer to concrete reality. This calls for entering deeply into the situations of both sides in annulment cases. Besides a strong juridical and theological background, a judge must also be objective and impartial, while safeguarding truth and the law, not forgetting the delicate and human qualities of a pastor of souls. This calls for pastoral solicitude and a genuine spirit of service. An ecclesial judge is the ‘servant of justice’ with the ‘pastoral love’ of the Good Shepherd. Reminding them that behind every file, position and case there are persons awaiting justice, Pope Francis urged members of the Roman Rota to carry out their function with “scrupulousness and meekness.”



The Roman Rota mainly deals with marriage annulment, a process by which the Church effectively declares that a marriage never took place because of the lack of certain requirements. The Catholic Church does not recognize divorce for Catholics, only annulments, and does so only under specific circumstances, such as when a husband or wife refuses to have children or if a spouse was found psychologically incapable of contracting a valid marriage.

5. Possible papal encyclical on ecology

The Director of the Holy See Press Office, Father Federico Lombardi, S.J., confirmed on Friday, January 24, that Pope Francis has begun work on a draft text on the topic of ecology, which could become an encyclical. But, Father Lombardi said, the project is in an early stage, so it is too early to make any prediction about the timing of possible publication.



Father Lombardi said it is important to note that Pope Francis intends to put particular emphasis on the theme of “human ecology,” a phrase used by Pope Benedict to describe not only how people must defend and respect nature but how the nature of the person – masculine and feminine as created by God – must also be defended.

Pope Francis' forthcoming document on ecology is likely to put the human person at the center and draw attention to the connection between environmental problems and poverty, according to a Church expert on theology and the environment.

Father Paul Haffner, professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University and author of the book *Towards a Theology of the Environment*, believes such a document is urgently needed to correct many philosophical and theological errors that have crept into the environmental movement. Although he says it is difficult to predict its contents, he believes it will "put the human person as central, and focus also on the margins of society, those places where there are environmental problems because of poverty."

6. Pope's presence at Asian Youth Day in South Korea, a possibility

Asked by reporters about the upcoming international trips of Pope Francis, the director of the Vatican Press Office, Father Federico Lombardi, on Wednesday, January 22, said that the possibility of an Apostolic Voyage to Asia is being studied. Such a trip could include a visit to South Korea, on the occasion of the sixth Asian Youth Day, set to take place in August 2014.

The Sixth Asian Youth Day is scheduled for August 10 to 17 this year in Daejeon (South Korea). The Asian Youth Day (AYD) is an initiative of the Youth Section of the Office of the Laity of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), which was launched in 1999 to promote and develop the potential of evangelization among young people of the continent, offering them an opportunity to share with young people of other religions, 'the experience of God.'



The event is being organized every three years and as a rule the meetings are held for a three day cultural and Spiritual deepening. The sixth edition of Korea would have then expected to take place in 2012. The previous Ays were held in Hua Hin (Thailand) in 1999, Taipei (Taiwan) in 2001 in Bangalore (India) in 2003, in Hong Kong in 2006 and in Manila in 2009. The theme of the first edition was "Youth in Asia journey with Jesus to the New Millennium."

7. Pope Francis on 'Role of women in the family, in the Church and Society'



'I give thanks to the Lord with you for all the good that the Italian Women's Centre has made during its seventy years of life, especially for works in the field of education and human development, and the testimony about the role of women in society and in the church community.' Pope Francis made these remarks on Saturday, January 25, while addressing the members of the National Congress sponsored by Italian Women's centre on its 70th anniversary, in the Clementine Hall in the Vatican. [\(Video\)](#)

The Italian Women's Centre (Centro Italiano Femminile, or CIF) was set up in 1944 as a federation of Catholic women's associations. It was established in response to the need for guidance on civic and

social issues which arose at the end of the Second World War, when Italy introduced universal suffrage and millions of women were called to vote for the first time ever.



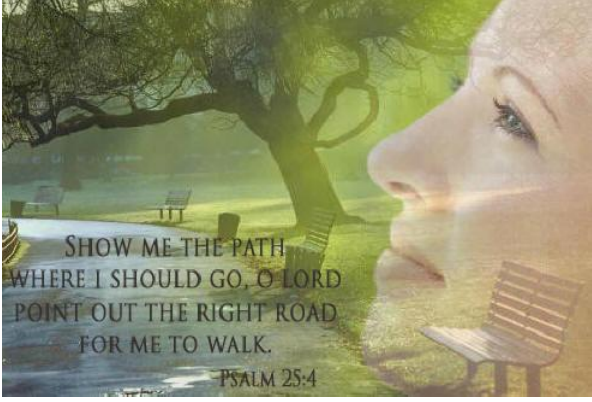
Over the past few decades, said the Pope in his address, alongside other cultural and social transformations, including the identity and role of women in the family, in society and in the Church, have experienced significant changes, and in general the participation and responsibility of women has been on the rise.

Confirming that the process of change has also led the discernment on the part of the Magisterium of the Popes, Pope Francis cited the Apostolic Letter of 1988 *Mulieris dignitatem* of Blessed John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women. It is a document in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, has recognized the moral and spiritual strength of the woman. The Pontiff also recalled the Message for the World Day of Peace 1995 on the theme "Women: Teachers of peace."



Pope Francis said that he recognizes the vital contribution of women in society, particularly with their sensitivity and intuition to the other, the weak and the helpless. He also said that he was pleased to see many women share some pastoral responsibilities with the priests in 'accompanying persons, families and groups, as in theological reflection. He hoped that women would widen the space for a feminine presence more extensive and incisive in the Church. Pope Francis hoped that the expansion of activities of women, both within the ecclesial and civil sectors and professions, may not overlook and forget the irreplaceable role of women in the family.

The qualities of delicacy peculiar sensibility and tenderness, which is abundant in the female mind, represent not only a genuine force for family life, for the exposition of a climate of serenity and harmony, but a reality without which the human vocation would be unfeasible. While the contribution of female genius is important in the world of work and in the public sphere, this contribution is an essential part of the family. For us Christians, family is not simply a private place, but the "domestic Church", whose health and prosperity is essential for the



health and prosperity of the Church and of society itself. The presence of women in the home proves more than ever necessary for transmission to future generations of sound moral principles and the faith itself.

The question is how to keep a balance effective presence in many areas of the public sphere in the world of work and a preferential attention for the family, said the Pope. He called for discernment and prayer, in addition to the reflection on the reality of women in society. In dialogue with God, illumined by his Word, watered by the grace of the sacraments, the Christian

woman shall answer the call of the Lord. He invoked on them the guidance of mother Mary, who guarded her Son, present at the wedding at Cana, on Calvary and at Pentecost, to deepen the meaning and role of women in society.

8. Pope Francis to receive US President Barack Obama

Pope Francis is scheduled to receive US President, Barack Obama, in audience in the Vatican, on Thursday 27 March 2014. The news was announced on Tuesday, January 21, by the White House, and confirmed by Father Federico Lombardi, Head of the Vatican Press Office.



It will be Obama's first meeting with Pope Francis. At the Inaugural Mass of his Petrine Ministry on March 19, 2013, the United States was represented by US Vice-President, Joe Biden. The announcement comes just days after the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal-designate Pietro Parolin met with US Secretary of State, John Kerry.

During his time in Italy, Barack Obama will also meet with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, and with Prime Minister Enrico Letta.

The US President will be coming to Rome as part of an official European journey which sees a stop-over in The Hague on March 24 and 25 for the Nuclear Security Summit hosted by the Dutch Government and for a series of bilateral meetings there. On March 26 Obama will be in Brussels for the EU-US Summit, for meetings with the Belgian Government, and an encounter with Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Secretary General of Nato.

In July 2009, Barack Obama was received in audience by Benedict XVI. [\(Video\)](#)

9. Holy See participates at Geneva II

The Holy See's representative at the Geneva II peace talks on Syria says real peace in the country may be challenging to achieve without Iran, one of the key powers in the region, participating in the discussion.



Archbishop Silvano Tomasi is leading the Holy See delegation to the Geneva II summit, underway in Montreux, Switzerland. The foreign ministers at the summit are currently discussing the Geneva II document, which outlines a political transition plan for Syria.

Earlier this week, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon retracted his controversial invitation to Iran to the talks, eliciting mixed reaction from the international community.

In an interview with Vatican Radio, Archbishop Tomasi spoke on Iran's absence from the talks. Politics demands that certain decisions be made, said Archbishop Tomasi.

“We had to make some strange decisions,” he said. “In my opinion, it is not very realistic to try to have peace without one of the key powers in the region. But we hope that, with the discussions underway on (Iran's) nuclear program, we can keep the door open a little, so as not to impede the dialogue that we are starting with Syria.”

Archbishop Tomasi said the absolute priority of the talks is to respond to the demand of the Syrian population to bring an end to the violence, death and destruction. About 130,000 people have died and entire villages have been destroyed, he noted.

“Faced with this reality, the international community is seeking to respond with a sense of solidarity to find “an acceptable compromise to begin effective negotiations,” said Archbishop Tomasi. Face-to-face negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition, the first since the conflict began three years ago, began in Geneva on Friday.

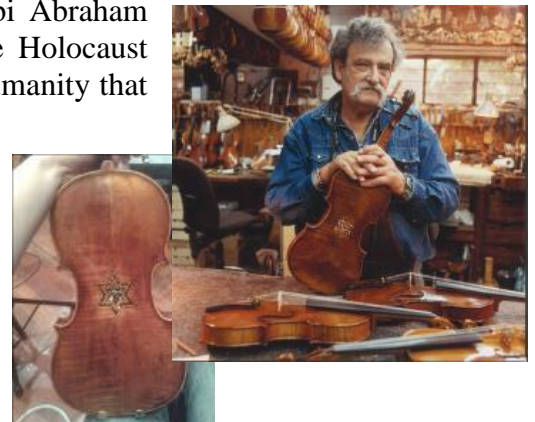


10. Pope Francis: The horror of the Holocaust must never be repeated



Pope Francis has written a letter to his friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires on the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day which is marked on January 27th. The letter was read out on Monday evening at a concert at Rome’s Parco della Musica, entitled “Violins of Hope”. In the hand written letter to Rabbi Abraham Skorka, the Pope describes the Holocaust as a horror and a disgrace to humanity that must never be repeated.

Using the power of music to bring to life the lessons of the past, was the goal of the concert performed by the Santa Cecilia Youth Orchestra. To add to the poignancy of the evening, over a dozen string instruments that survived the Holocaust that have been carefully collected and restored by an Israeli violin-maker Amnon Weinstein, were used.



January 27th marks international Holocaust Memorial Day, designated by the UN as an occasion to remember the six million Jews and other victims of the Nazi regime. It commemorates the day in 1945 when Soviet troops liberated the remaining prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest of the Nazi death camps.



At least one of the violins on stage at Rome’s Auditorium was played as prisoners were hoarded into the gas chambers in Auschwitz, another was thrown from a train taking Jews to the camps, while others were carried by Jewish families fleeing abroad and then rediscovered in attics or cellars many decades later.

The Pope wrote that the audience will be hearing pieces including works by Barber, Vivaldi and Beethoven, but he stressed that behind the sound of

music, the hearts of each of those present will be able to make out the silent sound of tears.

11. Archbishop Tomasi on the Holy See's commitment to protecting children

The Holy See, like other states have discussed on Thursday, January 16, at the United Nations Office in Geneva, a report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The agreement includes calls for signatories to take all appropriate measures to protect children from harm and to put children's interests above all else. The Holy See ratified the convention in 1990

The Vatican was represented by Bishop Charles Scicluna who previously served as Promoter of Justice at the Congregation of for the Doctrine of the Faith and Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.



See below the transcript of Vatican Radio's interview with Archbishop Tomasi

Q. What is happening today in Geneva regarding this subject?

A. today is in session the committee of experts of the convention of the rights of the child. It is the seat of the Human Rights Office of the United Nations. This committee presents its observations, suggestions, advice to every state that has ratified the convention and therefore has an obligation to present a report on how the convention is implemented in the territory of this state. It's an occasion to start a dialogue between the state involved and the experts in order to facilitate and to improve the protection of children. Today in this current session of the committee will be examined the reports of Russia, Germany, the Holy See, Portugal, Congo, Yemen, and we will very gladly take this occasion as a constructive moment, an important occasion, to reaffirm the value and the procedures of the convention and to accept any good advice that is given for that can be helpful in the protection of children. The Holy See is more than willing to, as it has declared already when it ratified the convention in 1990, to promote and to sustain the good principles and the good values that are contained in this convention. So, today is a normal day of work for the United Nations. The attention that is given to the Holy See is understandable but it is part of a series of other states that are being examined and we are convinced that some very good results are coming out of this dialogue with the experts.



Q. There has however been criticism of the Holy See. What is your response to that?

A. There are several criticisms that are made on the policies or the presumed policies of the Holy See like that they covered up some crimes but I would say that the policy of the Holy See is to recognize that any crime is bad and when children are involved it becomes a crime that needs to be addressed more forcefully. So the obstruction of justice to the detriment of the legitimate jurisdiction of the individual state should be prosecuted by those states in every case. The policy and good sense of the Holy See is to encourage the prosecution of any crime, including crimes, and especially crimes, against children. So my sense is that some of these accusations or criticisms derive from a lack of knowledge of the activity, the measures taken by the Holy See in the last several years and also by the local churches and by the attitude and the directives given by the Holy See that are for transparency and protection in any case of, as a priority of all the children.



Q. What are the prospects for the future on this issue in Geneva?

A. Well, limiting the prospective on the convention on the rights of the child, I am sure the Holy See will fulfill its international obligations and it will take into due account, the observations, the comments and suggestions in furthering its commitments under the convention of the rights of the child. The Holy Father has already announced the establishment of a commission for the protection of minors, the input of the committee, the observations, whatever advice the committee will give will be studied carefully by this new commission and the objective is always the best interest of the children, their protection, and prevention of any abuse or of any harm that may come to them. So the task ahead is to strengthen the good steps and the good measures that have already been taken and to continue to maintain as a priority the protection of children.

Special Videos

1. *Cameroon refugee that fled her country at 17 meets Pope Francis for second time* ([Click here](#))
2. *Valentine's Day with the Pope? Thousands of engaged couples mark it on their calendar* ([Click here](#))
3. *Papal initiative brings education, sports and solidarity...and also soccer stars like Messi* ([Click Here](#))

Contact Information

Fr. Melwin Pinto, SJ

✉: melpinsj@gmail.com

☎: +39 3665254713