

War, Vatican II, decision making: Pope shares insights with Jesuit editors

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis gave the editors of 10 Jesuit magazines a glimpse into how he makes decisions, background on one of his more controversial comments about the war in Ukraine and insight into what he sees as the refusal of some bishops to accept the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

Meeting in May with the editors of the European magazines, the pope responded to six questions about his concerns for the Catholic Church and the world. The magazines published a transcript of their conversation on June 14.

Two weeks before meeting the editors, Pope Francis had created an uproar when an Italian newspaper quoted him as wondering if Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his war on Ukraine because he felt “NATO’s barking at Russia’s door.” Numerous news outlets concluded the pope thought NATO was at least partly to blame for the war.

Pope Francis told the editors that the quote came from a head of state who visited “a couple of months before the war.”

“He told me that he was very concerned about the way NATO was moving. I asked him why, and he said, ‘They are barking at the gates of Russia. They do not understand that the Russians are imperialists and will allow no foreign power to approach them.’ He concluded, ‘The situation could lead to war.’ This was his opinion,” the pope said. “That head of state was able to read the signs of what was taking place.”

To understand what is happening and to stop the war, he said, “we have to move away from the normal pattern of ‘Little Red

Riding Hood' – Little Red Riding Hood was good and the wolf was the bad guy. Here there are no metaphysical good guys and bad guys, in an abstract sense. Something global is emerging, with elements that are very much intertwined.”

“Someone may say to me at this point: So, you are pro-Putin! No, I am not,” the pope said. “It would be simplistic and wrong to say such a thing. I am simply against reducing complexity to the distinction between good guys and bad guys without reasoning about roots and interests, which are very complex. While we see the ferocity, the cruelty of Russian troops, we must not forget the real problems if we want them to be solved.”

Against that cruelty, he said, the world has witnessed “the heroism of the Ukrainian people,” but everyone must remember that “what is before our eyes is a situation of world war, global interests, arms sales and geopolitical appropriation, which is martyring a heroic people.”

Pope Francis added that while he and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, who supports Putin, canceled a meeting in Lebanon planned for mid-June, he hopes to meet the patriarch at the World Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan on Sept. 14-15 and “speak a little with him as a pastor.”

A substantial portion of the pope’s discussion with the Jesuit editors focused on signs of new life in the Catholic Church and signs of some people being stuck in the distant past.

“The council that some pastors remember best is that of Trent” in the 1500s, the pope said, adding that he was not joking. “What I’m saying is not nonsense.”

“Restorationism has come to gag the (Second Vatican) Council,” he said. “The number of groups of ‘restorers’ – for example, in the United States there are many – is significant” and shows how the teaching and reform of Vatican II “has not yet

been accepted.”

Struggles to accept the council and to live the faith concretely, in new and creative ways, have been evident for decades, the pope said, illustrating his point by talking about what he observed within the Society of Jesus in the 1970s when Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe was superior general.

“A Jesuit from the province of Loyola (in Spain) was particularly aggressive toward Father Arrupe. He was sent to various places and even to Argentina, and always made trouble,” the pope said. “He once said to me: ‘You are someone who understands nothing. But the real culprits are Father Arrupe and Father (Jean-Yves) Calvez. The happiest day of my life will be when I see them hanging from the gallows in St. Peter’s Square.’”

“Why am I telling you this story?” the pope continued. “To make you understand what the post-conciliar period was like. This is happening again, especially with the traditionalists. That is why it is important to save these figures who defended the council and fidelity to the pope.”

But, the pope said, not everything goes.

Jesuit Father Stefan Kiechle, editor of the German *Stimmen der Zeit*, asked about the pope’s view of Germany’s Synodal Path, which some critics have claimed would transform the Church into a Protestant denomination.

Pope Francis said he told Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops’ conference, “In Germany there is a very good Evangelical Church. We don’t need two.”

“The problem arises when the Synodal Path comes from the intellectual, theological elites, and is much influenced by external pressures,” the pope said. However, he also acknowledged “there are some dioceses where the synodal way is being developed with the faithful, with the people, slowly.”

Father Kiechle also asked about ongoing tensions over the handling of abuse cases and over finances in the Archdiocese of Cologne and regarding its head, Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki.

“When the situation was very turbulent, I asked the archbishop to go away for six months, so that things would calm down and I could see clearly. Because when the waters are rough you cannot see clearly,” the pope said. When the cardinal returned to the archdiocese in early March, “I asked him to write a letter of resignation,” but left him in office while seeing how the situation evolves.

“What is happening is that there are a lot of pressure groups, and under pressure it is not possible to discern,” Pope Francis said. “To be able to discern, I am waiting until there is no pressure. The fact that there are different points of view is fine. The problem is when there is pressure. That does not help.”