

Pope Francis and Civil Unions

A recent documentary, *Francesco*, has Pope Francis apparently advocating Civil Unions between homosexuals. This has caused quite an uproar in religious circles. At the time of this writing, no official statement from the Vatican has been released to clarify the Pope's actual position. It did not help matters that a Vatican official originally claimed the film was legitimate. There is also the matter of Pope John Paul II's prohibition of any measure that would encourage homosexual behavior in 2003. While some of the dust has settled since this, there is still a lot of confusion as to what really happened and what it really means.

To start off with, the interview, as presented, was a hoax. The footage of the Pope took place in 2019 by a different interviewer, not 2020 by the director as suggested. Furthermore, the Pope's controversial comment in the documentary was not a single answer to a single question, but rather parts of two answers from two questions spliced together. Needless to say, the comment in the documentary had no context to it. Both questions dealt with issues the future Pope Francis faced as Bishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio when he served as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. One issue dealt with a homosexual person being turned out of his house by his family. The other dealt with a homosexual who came to him for guidance on how to raise his adopted children. In neither case was he promoting homosexual behavior, but was validating the human dignity the homosexuals share with all of us.

The Catholic Church has three paragraphs in its catechism that discuss homosexuality, and are included at the end of this paper. The 2003 statement by Saint Pope John Paul II emphasized paragraph #2357, the 2010 statement by Bishop Bergoglio emphasized paragraph #2358. Unless and until more information is given in regards to the 2019 interview, there is no logical reason to suppose Pope Francis has changed his position in any meaningful way. As all concerned works by him and Saint Pope John Paul II are grounded in the catechism, there is not an obvious theological controversy. It is not my desire or right to decide if there are any problems with the syntax involved between the two. Even if such problems exist, they neither negate nor discredit the message each was communicating.

So what does that mean for Christians, Catholics in particular? Nothing new, except perhaps a reminder that we must respect the human dignity that God has given all of us. Civil Unions are *not* marriages. The Church still believes a marriage is between a man and a woman. Sexual intercourse is *only* appropriate within the sanctity of the marriage. The Church does not endorse homosexual couples adopting children. Fornication is a mortal sin. These issues remain unchanged by both Saint Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis.

Bishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio was dealing with un-Christian like attitudes and unwarranted abuses towards homosexuals in 2003 and apparently has not changed his position as Pope Francis. And this extends beyond the homosexual matter to all things that deal with human dignity. He has been very successful in, if equally unappreciated for, taking meaningful measures to protect children from predatory priests. Pope Francis's call for human dignity to all, and his condemnation of Christian hypocrisy, is well placed and well within his character.

Being a homosexual in and of itself is not a sin. It is only acting on that impulse that is sinful. In an age when nearly everyone is guilty of fornication at one time or another, to single out homosexuals is the worst form of hypocrisy. Likewise, homosexuals given in marriage, civil unions, partnerships or otherwise engaging in homosexual acts must abide by the same restrictions (particularly, not participating in the Eucharist) any heterosexual fornicator must abide by.

The God-given human dignity gives homosexuals the following rights:

- the love of their parents, siblings and extended family
- the ability to visit a loved one in hospitals
- attend religious services (Eucharist is, as with everyone, denied to those engaging in fornication)

This list could go on, but these seem to be the main points of contention based on my research.

Catechism of the Catholic Church on Homosexuality:

#2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

#2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

#2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

Raymond Mulholland
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