The Courage Ministry of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

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**A message from Father Bochanski (1)and George Weigel (2) to Courage**

**(1)** Dear Members and Friends of Courage International,

“In the past couple of days a number of you have written to me to ask questions or express your concern about what has been reported in the secular and Catholic press regarding the documentary film *Francesco* and some quotes from Pope Francis. What a privilege it is for me to serve you in this apostolate, and to know that you look to me and to your chaplains for guidance in striving for our Goals and for faithfulness to the Lord and His Church. In this spirit, I am writing to share a few thoughts regarding the controversy that has emerged in the press and on social media.

First and most importantly, Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, which is His Body, and the Spouse of the Church, which is His Bride. He has promised never to leave us abandoned (cf. John 14:18), to give us the Holy Spirit to teach and remind us what He has said (cf. John 14:26), and always to give his g race to Saint Peter and his successors so that they teach the rest of the Church clearly ( Lk 22:32). When one of those successors expresses his opinion in interviews ad in similar ways, we ought to listen carefully and strive to understand and respect his judgment as our Holy Father. The pope knows, of course, that such comments are not the same as what is called the Magisterium, that is, the authority and responsibility to teach definitively on matters of faith and morals that the Lord Jesus entrusted to the po[e and to the bishops in communion with him. Our faith is firm that, when the pope and the bishops exercise the Magisterium and teach definitively, the Holy Spirit always guides them and prevents them from teaching erroneously. This is as true on the subject of sexuality, marriage and family as on any other topic of faith and morals. When and if the pope speaks more definitively on these issues, we rely on the Holy Spirit to ensure that he shares the truth clearly and consistently.

That truth – that God has established a unique context for the total gift of self that is reflected in sexual intimacy – is rooted in the nature of the human person, in the revealed Word of God, and in the consistent teaching of the Church. That sexual relations are only morally good in the context of a permanent, faithful marriage between a man and a woman whose relations are open to having children is a teaching that cannot and will not be changed by anyone. The moral consequences that flow from this truth are learly enunciated in the sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that speak of the creation of man and woman (nn. 355 -384), the sacrament of matrimony (nn.1601 -1666), and the sixth and ninth commandments (nn. 2331-2400; 2514-2533). I urge you to read and meditate on the beautiful teachings that are expressed there, which Christ has imparted to us through His Church.

The Church also has a principled, clear rationale for its judgement about civil arrangements to protect or bestow rights on people who live together in a same-sex relationship. These principles are expressed concisely in the 2003 letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the office of the Roman Curia entrusted with the responsibility of assist the Holy Father in teaching the faithful and responding to questions of doubts about the truths of faith. This document, which was prepared by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) , and approved by Pope St John Paul II, available to everyone on the website of the Holy See. Please take some time to read this letter carefully, as it will shed light on the necessary limits on the types of legal arrangements that Pope Francis alluded to in his interview.

We should not forget, however, that the Holy Father did no just mention these legal arrangements, but in fact began his remarks by insisting that people who experience same-sex attractions must never be rejected or excluded by their own families. We know that this is true because it is at the very heart of our EnCourage apostolate. You parents, spouses, siblings and friends who pray so hard for your loved ones, and for the grace to keep the faith while keeping your families strong and intact, are already living in a heroic way what the Holy Father is asking of the whole world. Likewise, you members of Courage who make so many sacrifices as you strive for chastity, prayerful fellowship , and authentic friendship are a heroic witness to the world that a person doesn’t need to be in a sexual relationship in order to give and receive love that is sincere, loyal and fulfilling. I know that the media chatter over the last few days has left you feeling anxious, unseen and even rejected, but nothing could be farther from the reality. The teaching of the Church on these important matters is embodied and made clear in your daily lives. The Pope’s remarks about living and protecting our brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attraction don’t detract from your sacrificial, heroic witness - they depend on it!” (*So ends the International Executive Director of Courage’s appeal*.)

**(2)**  An open Letter to the People of “Courage” from George Weigel (11.11.20).

“Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

There are many exemplars of the cardinal virtue of courage in the Catholic Church today: Catholics in Hong Kong who risk their lives and livelihoods in defence of religious liberty, free speech and freedom of association; French Catholics who brave Islamist murderers to practise the faith; young men preparing for a priestly vocation that may land them in jail for “hate crimes” because they preach the gospel’ campus ministers who push back against political correctness in order to evangelize’ parents who insist that Catholic schools be “Catholic” in more than name; teenagers who won’t be bullied into denying Christ by their peers,. We are truly surrounded by a “great ….cloud of witnessers” (Heb 12:1).

And among them, there are no more courageous Catholics than you, the men and women of “Courage.” Against fierce cultural and social pressures, you strive-with the help of grace, your pastors, and each other-to live the Catholic ethic of human love even as you experience same-sex attractions. Your efforts at fidelity bespeak deep faith, a powerful hope and authentic love.

Living chastely-living what John Paul II called “the integrity of love”-is not easy for anyone in our licentious culture. For that culture perversely insists that acting out our desires, whatever they may be, is a mark of “authenticity,” while chastity is demeaned as repression or a dishonest betrayal of one’s self. You know that those are lies.

You also know that lies like that come from the source the Lord called the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Against the grain of the times and the culture, you try to withstand the onslaught of the Evil One and to live the truth of human love amidst temptations. You are St.Paul’s “earthen vessels” (2. Cor. 4:7), and like all of us , you sometimes stumble on the journey to holiness. But unlike some others, you do not demand that truth bend to desire. With Flannery O’Connor, you know that the “truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it emotionally.” So you seek reconciliation and forgiveness and recommit you selves to living the integrity of love.

Just as importantly, you do not treat chastity as an ecclesiastical “policy issue” and you do not lobby within the Church for a change in ”policy,” because you know that what is at stake here is truth: a truth that makes for happiness, genuine friendship, and, ultimately, beatitude. Working with the grace God makes available to you, you offer a crucial and often cruciform witness to the Church, especially to those who imagine that “their “ truth is truer than Christ’s.

Many of you were upset by what Pope Francis wa reported to have said, in a documentary film, about civil unions for same-sex couples and related matters. As it; mow clear that the pope’s comments were cut-and-pasted by an agenda-driven filmmaker, this episode was another reminder that media reports of Catholic matters should always be taken with a grain of salt; ditto for the hysteria that too often characterizes the Catholic blogosphere. But precisely because certain parties further confused things by spinning and politicizing what the pope was said to have said, it’s important to recall two Catholic realities.

First, informal remarks y a pope to a filmmaker do not constiturte an expression of the papal teaching office. Those who suggest otherwise are theologically ill-informed, politically motivated, or both. As I point out in *The Next Pope: The Office of Peter and a Church in Mission,* the pope is not an oracle and every papal utterance is not magisterium.

Second, nothing that Pope Francis was reported to have said changes the Catholic Church’s teaching on the ethics of human love, on what constitutes marriage, and on who may marry. That teaching cannot change, because it is rooted in divine revelation and attested by reason. It would have been helpful (and professionally competent) if the Vatican press office had clarified this point before the media herd of independent minds declared what the pope was said to have said to be a possible first step toward a Catholic affirmation of so-called “gay marriage.” It was no such thing, because such a thing is impossible.

So brave men and women of “Courage,” thanks you for your witness. Please continue to take up the challenge that St.John Paul II issued on October 22, 1978: “Be not afraid! Open the doors to Christ!” Your courage should inspire every Catholic to a similar fidelity, and to the mutual, prayerful support that helps sustain the integrity of love.”