

**Courage Ministry**  
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**Pope Francis' recent comments about same sex attraction**

**Introduction**

We have been blessed with the election in March of the former Cardinal of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the new Pope Francis. His simple life style and his freedom in being who he is brings new joy to the Church and even to the wider world. The media has warmed to him and he is regularly the number one media story of the day. This is great news for the Kingdom – for Pope Francis is about communicating the love and mercy of God – a message that is frequently reported in the secular press.

**A fresh joy for the People of God**

Today, 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, I read the following responsory scriptures in the Office of Readings for Monday of the 25<sup>th</sup> week of Ordinary time: “Do not remain silent when you should speak, and do not hide your wisdom, for wisdom is recognized in speech and it is the tongue that gives good counsel.” Sirach 4:28-29 And “Proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it: refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience, but do all with the patience that the work of teaching requires.” I feel that these scriptures are being lived out and proclaimed in so many speeches and exhortations by the Pope.

**The media and secular press excitement and consequential claims**

Nonetheless the interpretations and spin of the secular press at times distort the intention of the Pope by their own agenda and wish list. One report suggests that the Pope has differed sharply from his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI on the subject of homosexuality. My own research and masters thesis on the 1986 CDF document *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Person in 2006* debunks this idea altogether. The pope has not differed at all from this formal teaching and in fact expresses in his own inimitable way his pastoral genius and style. It is the style of the pope that is welcomed by most and certainly the media.

Many Catholics wonder, because of the wide coverage of this issue by the media, if there is going to be a significant change in the acceptance of the behaviour of same sex attracted persons. The rest of the article outlines what the Pope actually said.

### **The National Catholic Register: What did Pope Francis really say:**

During an 80 minute interview with reporters aboard the plane returning from World Youth Day in Brazil the Pope was asked about the “gay lobby” at the Vatican. The exact words of the pope are not recorded but the sense of what he said comes from the National Catholic Register:

“There is a lot of talk about the gay lobby, but I've never seen it on the Vatican ID card” Was the Pope being a little facetious? – it would not be unlike him I suspect! Pope Francis continues: “When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby. If they accept the Lord and have good will, who am I go judge them? They shouldn't be marginalized. The tendency [i.e., same-sex attraction] is not the problem... they're our brothers.” The Pope referred to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “.explains this point beautifully but says, wait a moment, how does it say, it says, these persons must never be marginalized and *they must be integrated into society.*”

The actual comment from the Catechism on homosexuality says:... *They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity... (number 2358).* See notes 2357-2359 for a fuller comment on Chastity and homosexuality. These catechetical points reflect the purpose of the 1986 CDF letter to the Bishops, especially note 10 when speaking of those with same-sex attraction: *The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.*

### **Salt and Light: A Canadian Catholic Communication network:**

Salt and Light explores more deeply what the journalist Ilse asked the Pope regarding the controversy surrounding the life of a particular monsignor. Among other things the Pope said was this: *The problem is not that one has this tendency; no, we must be brothers, this is the first matter. There is another problem, another one: the problem is to form a lobby of those who have this tendency, a lobby of the greedy people, a lobby of politicians, a lobby of Masons, so many lobbies. This is the most serious problem for me...*

### **What does this mean?**

Salt and Light suggests that the pope is not denying that there is a gay lobby, “but he's suggesting that the talk is over blown. He then explains his approach to dealing with gay people: He distinguishes between their *being gay* and *being part of a lobby*. What he means by *being gay* is something he further unpacks. In ordinary parlance *being gay* can mean anything from having same-sex attraction to leading an active *gay lifestyle* to endorsing and advocating a pro-homosexual ideology. The last of these would be functioning as a member of a lobby, and he indicates that this is not what he is talking about. He then describes those he is talking about as people who *accept the Lord and have goodwill*. He

then seems to further clarify who he is talking about by saying that *The tendency[i.e., same-sex attraction] is not the problem...they're our brothers.*

Taking his statements together, what emerges is a portrait of individuals who have same-sex attraction but who nevertheless accept the Lord and have goodwill, as opposed to working to advance a pro-homosexual ideology. This would definitely include people with same-sex attraction who strive to live chastely (even if they sometimes fail). It also, possibly, could include individuals who are not living chastely but who are not actively lobbying a homosexual agenda. (Salt and Light would have liked the Pope to clarify this point further).

### **How new is this?**

Salt and Light says that the pope's perspectives are not very new:

“Disclaiming a right to *judge* others is something that goes back to Jesus. It does not mean a failure to recognize the moral character of others' action, however. One can form a moral appraisal that what someone else is doing is wrong (Jesus obviously does not forbid that) without having or showing malice toward them.”

In Father Richard Leonard's book *WHERE the HELL is GOD?* he makes a careful and illuminating distinction about judging and condemnation:

*...When we hear people say “don't judge,” we can assume they are really saying “don't condemn.” To judge is to make an assessment. To condemn is to damn. There is not a page of the New Testament where Jesus is not judging people's behaviour, but he never condemns them. ...the Christian tradition holds that one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is right judgement...* in Chapter One: *God is not out to get us* (pp. 5-6 Hidden Spring NJ. 2010)

### **The problem**

Continuing Salt and Light's commentary: “Obviously, temptations are [a] problem, but if we resist temptation we do not sin. The “problem,” on this understanding, is giving into the temptation and sinning or –worse— building an ideology around the sin and trying to advocate the sin.

Finally, the statement that *they're our brothers* is also no novelty.

Christians, like everyone, have struggled with every sort of temptation all through history. Same-sex attraction is just one temptation among numerous others, and the fact that a person suffers from this temptation no more deprives him of the status of being a brother in Christ than any other temptation does.

### **Comparison with Pope Benedict XVI**

Salt and Light continues to comment that “the press has been (as usual) trying to make unfavourable comparisons to Pope Benedict, noting that

during his time the Holy See issued a document saying that those with deep-seated homosexual tendencies should not be ordained to the priesthood. Pope Francis did not mention that document or its policy and so has done nothing different than Benedict there.

Neither are any of Francis's remarks contrary to the approach Pope Benedict took during his pontificate. In fact, Pope Benedict himself (as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) was the signer of the previously -mentioned letter: *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, as well as the follow-up document on *Non-Discrimination Against Homosexual Persons*. This document in note 12 says *Homosexual persons, as human persons, have the same rights as all persons, including the right of not being treated in a manner which offends their personal dignity.*

Salt and Light makes it clear that Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis are singing the same tune when providing pastoral insight about the issue of same-sex attraction.

### **Conclusion**

Pope Francis's comments are a blessing for Courage. My hope and expectation is that he will continue to speak when he should and not hide his wisdom "for wisdom is recognized in speech." says Sirach 4:29 And that all us will follow the exhortation in Sirach and speak when we should!

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