

Pope Francis

By Father John Catoir JCD – 2-27-18

Pope Francis has my admiration because I hear the voice of love speaking through him. He always stresses God's infinite mercy.

Recently, a ninety-three-year-old atheist accused him of denying the existence of hell. This man who has nothing but contempt for Christianity, delighted in causing an uproar. The Pope denied his claim as a bogus reconstruction of what he misheard. The Pope's denial is good enough for me.

One thing is certain from what the Pope said was this: anyone who commits mortal sin and dies unrepentant does not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Purgatory exists for those who receive mercy because of some excusing causes like ignorance and/or human weakness. Nevertheless, until their sins are washed away by their repentance they cannot enter heaven.

"God so loved the world...He sent his only begotten Son not to condemn it, but to save it." -(John 3: 16-17). Mercy seems like laxity to those who became alarmed when Pope Francis urged Catholics to rely more on their conscience in resolving personal moral issues.

Affirming freedom of conscience is an act of intellectual honesty and a way of being both merciful and understanding. These are God-like qualities.

Very few annulments were granted in the 1960's and 70's, because of canonical rigidity. When Pope Francis was elected, it wasn't long before he began urging Catholics to rely more on their consciences, and that was music to my ears. Reliance on conscience is a long-established principle of Moral Theology.

Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesperson at the time, reported that Pope Francis was saying that in grave situations a well-formed conscience can be relied upon. The responsibility and gravity of the situation was to be determined by the parties themselves.

On July 29, 2013, he said, "If someone is gay, and sincerely searches for the Lord, and has good will, who am I to judge?" He immediately received a flood of criticism for that quote, but the parents of gay children felt genuine solace. While

he did not endorse same sex marriage, he did say there could be some sort of civil union to protect their civil rights. He opposes promiscuity in general.

Conservative Catholics are usually fearful that any relaxation of the laws pertaining to marriage and divorce and contraception, would threaten the Church's broader stance on medical ethics and sexual issues. This is an understandable concern, but not an insurmountable one. Freedom of conscience is a human right. Granted it can be abused, but it must be protected. Every right can be abused.

Pope Paul VI affirmed the immoral nature of artificial contraception in his Encyclical, "Humanae Vitae." Pope Francis is preparing for the canonization of Pope Paul, and he has remained firm in his opposition to those who refuse to have children because it interferes with their lifestyle. Nevertheless, he respects the consciences of those who are struggling to find the strength to raise children in today's world.

Pope Francis agrees with the various National Hierarchies who have instructed the laity that they may use of private conscience in resolving these matters. He also highlighted Paul VI's instruction to priests, urging them to show compassion in the confessional in matters involving human weakness.

What I admire most about Pope Francis are his Christ-like qualities, humility, compassion and kindness.

May the Lord be your strength and your joy.