

Oops—Pope Francis Did It Again!

Decades ago, I wrote my autobiography titled, *CLAP YOUR HANDS! A Young Catholic Encounters Christ*. To my astonishment, a quarter million people, especially Catholics, obtained the book and multitudes were genuinely converted as they related to my story. People had a revelation of the finished work of Christ, the necessity of repentance, plus salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as one's Lord and Savior.

A key section of the book was my imaginary conversation with the pope, imploring him not to compromise amidst the exodus of people, especially youth, from the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, Pope Francis has a very serious track record in this area.

Recently the pope seemed to tell Christian high school students not to evangelize people of other faiths! Yes, he did it again.

Time to Appeal to the Pope

Recently I watched the movie, *Pope Francis*, which was billed as "the first time in history the Pope opens his doors to address the issues we face." Having produced *The Bullseye Challenge*, which addresses for free the 30 hot button issues of today on YouTube from a Biblical perspective, it was apparent I once again needed to raise some things with the Pope, based on the content of the film.

Here are 3 opening points, then I pinpoint five unsettling areas from the film.

- Let's affirm the pope for His vulnerability and creativity in daring to come out from behind the secrecy

of the Vatican and utilize mass media like no previous pontiff, speaking directly to a watching world.

- Let's honor him for the humility and sincerity he conveyed, along with his sensitivity to the sick, imprisoned and less fortunate. His stamina was inspiring as he mingled with people worldwide.
- Since he emphasized "listening" and "coming together," I respectfully offer my observations. They do not align with politically correct positions applauded by liberal proponents of "ecumenism" and the United Nations Assembly, but I submit the following from a Biblical worldview.

5 Questionable Positions

1. Conveying the notion of the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man is contrary to the Bible. It's emotionally stirring to gather on a platform with leaders from the world religions, but to say that "we are not to proselytize them" is contrary to the Great Commission from Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20). This troubling approach has resurfaced throughout his tenure.

The Bible explicitly states, "There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "The love of Christ constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14) to communicate the wages of sin and the gift of salvation through faith in the finished work of Christ.

Embracing representatives from Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism conveys respect and we can certainly call them "friends", but God is Father only of those who have put their trust in His only begotten Son's atoning death which allows them to become "children of God" (John 1:12-13). To say otherwise is to contradict clear teaching of Scripture and deny the exclusivity of Christ.

2. While speaking of mankind's plight, Pope Francis told us, "our greatest problem is plundering the planet", implying if we cleaned up the environment and shared more unselfishly, we could bring about a new day for humanity. This is noble but focuses on symptoms. The implied appeal for mass redistribution of wealth plus climate change regulations sidesteps the root problem of man's inherent sinfulness and need for gospel transformation.

The biblical solution that must be emphasized is the supernatural power of the gospel! "You cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and greed" (Matt. 23:25). I, like millions gathering in the documentary, was a 12-year educated, baptized and confirmed Catholic, faithfully attending Mass, yet not "born again" as Jesus said we must be (John 3:3-8). Upon hearing a clear gospel presentation, and hearing of the necessity of repenting and putting my trust in Christ alone as my Lord and Savior, I responded and my life was radically changed!

3. While it's inspiring to focus on the pope's spiritual hero, Francis of Assisi, throughout the entire film, how much better to focus on the life, example and words of our Lord Jesus? The same goes for happy quotes on "smiling more" and "having a sense of humor" instead of faith-building verses from Scripture.

4. There is such authority when we quote God's Word and the wisdom of Jesus, such as in the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever given by the greatest Teacher who ever lived! "When Jesus finished these sayings, the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29).

The inevitable question of homosexuality surfaced in the film. Although it is compassionate to convey God's unconditional love for all people, including those who struggle with same-sex temptations or have been sexually abused, there cannot be

any compromise regarding God's unchanging, holy standards and the beauty of His design for human sexuality.

Pope Francis, I state respectfully but emphatically that you do Christendom great harm by your ongoing ambiguity in this critical area. Millions are misled and "destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). Your recent attempt to comfort an abused Chilean homosexual by telling him, "God made you that way and loves you as you are," undermines Scripture as well as official Catholic doctrine.

Homosexuality is not merely a harmless, alternative "gay" lifestyle into which people are born. The Bible teaches unequivocally that it is the unmistakable consequence of rejecting the truth about God and His plan for sexuality and marriage (Rom. 1:21-32). Conveying empathy and compassion is one thing but implying lifelong entrapment and acceptability is like condoning fornication and adultery, which God prohibits and provides forgiveness and freedom from in a fulfilling new life upon genuine repentance (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

5. Scores of Christians worldwide applaud and desire to emulate the pope's beautiful example in humility, sensitivity to the plight of the poor and intentionality in building meaningful relationships with all people everywhere. There is no individual on planet earth who has the platform he has to speak regularly to throngs of hundreds of thousands, even millions, in settings like he does.

As a shepherd of God's flock, I urge Pope Francis to not assume the assembled masses are truly converted Christians! Keep encouraging everyone on themes like family, alleviating poverty, demonstrating unselfishness and Christlike service but please, I implore the pope to seize the opportunity to proclaim the gospel clearly and powerfully; tell the masses of hurting and broken people of the abundant life, hope, guidance, security, stability, healing, prosperity and

deliverance found in relationship with Jesus; warn them of the reality of eternal separation from God in Hell; and proclaim that nobody can be redeemed by good works but rather through repentance and faith in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ alone as God's magnificent gift to us in this sin-darkened world (Eph. 2:8-9).

Here's the deal: The opportunity has never been greater to finish the task of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom throughout the world to finally see the Return of our King! I beseech Pope Francis, rise to the challenge and lead hundreds of millions looking to you at this pivotal time in world history.