



GLASNOST AT THE VATICAN?

Early last month, terrorist attacks in and around Paris resulted in the deaths of 17 people and the wounding of 22 others, some critically. At one site, a newspaper that had often satirized Islam and religion generally, witnesses heard the perpetrators shout "God is Great!" and "We have avenged the prophet Muhammad!" The Al Qaeda group in the Arabian Peninsula claimed credit for the attacks.

Days later, it was reported that, while enroute from Sri Lanka to the Philippines, Pope Francis responded to questions about the violence, saying:

"There are so many people who speak badly about religions ... who make fun of them, who make a game out of the religions of others ... They are provocateurs. And what happens to them is what would happen to [papal aide] Dr. Gasbarri if he says a curse word against my mother. [He can] expect a punch! It's normal. There is a limit [to free speech]. You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others."

Almost immediately, it was reported that a Vatican spokesman, in an email, asserted that:

"the Pope's expression is in no way intended to be interpreted as somehow justifying last week's violence, and he pointed out that 'the Pope has spoken out clearly against the terror and violence that occurred in Paris and in other parts of the world. ... The Pope's words about Dr. Gasbarri were spoken colloquially and in (a) friendly, intimate manner among colleagues and friends,' [the spokesman] said ... 'His response might be similar to something each of us has felt when those dearest to us are insulted or harmed [consistent with his] free style of speech,' a plainspoken and conversational approach that has earned him admirers. Such remarks 'must be taken at face value and not distorted or manipulated,' the Vatican spokesman said."

Sure, take it at face value. But it is still coming from the Pope. Anyone knowledgeable about Christianity would have expected a Catholic clergyman, let alone the Pope, to say that, however upset it may "make" someone feel when their fervently-held religious beliefs are ridiculed, it does not justify violence. Even atheists acquainted with Christian doctrines would have expected it to be said that such occasions test believers' ability to keep the

commandment of Jesus to love others, even and especially one's enemies, and to "do good to those who hate you." After all, according to believers, any sufferings borne in our "earthly existence" are nothing compared to losing one's "eternal soul." Why would the Pope throw away an opportunity to explain and promote such key doctrines of Christianity? He never even mentioned the "turn the other cheek" slogan.

But put Francis's remarks about the recent terrorist attacks into context. Almost as soon as he became the Pope, in 2013, he said:

"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, ... not just Catholics. ... Even the atheists. Everyone! ... We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."

Of course, right after this a Vatican spokesman "clarified" that there is no salvation outside of the Catholic Church. Yet only a few months later this Pope said:

"If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?"

But according to Catholic dogma the Pope is the successor to the Apostle Peter to whom Jesus was famously made to say in Matthew that "upon this rock I will build my church ... whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This Pope's predecessors laid it down that all sorts of things, including contraception and homosexuality, are "sin," and therefore earning eternal damnation. And they did so without having any doubt about their authority to judge.

And then, only last week, while on the plane back to Rome from Manila, this same Pope said:

"Some think that in order to be good Catholics, we have to be like rabbits. No. Responsible parenthood."

This time the Pope himself back-tracked once he was back in Rome. The Vatican reported that the Pope:

"said that it was a reason for consolation and hope to see so many numerous families who welcome each child as a gift of God: 'they know that every

[from page 1] child is a blessing'. And commenting on the fact that some affirm that having too many children can be a cause of poverty, Pope Francis said 'we can all say that the main cause of poverty is an economic system that, at its center, has replaced man with the god of money.'"

CBS news quoted another Catholic cleric, Monsignor Anthony Figueiredo as saying that:

"When the Pope speaks on the plane, he is speaking as a pastor to ordinary people. When he comes back, he wants to speak as Pope.' The Monsignor said that while some Popes have put doctrine first, Francis puts the person first. 'It's a risky business, there is no doubt about it; because when you begin with the person, everyone has their own way of hearing it.'"

So there are two Popes. There is the "regular Joe" Pope Francis who thinks and talks "colloquially" and speaks "to ordinary people" without much - or any - regard to Catholic doctrines. He says what the mainstream media finds agreeable and can interpret as hope that the Catholic Church is moderating its stance on its most backward and objectionable teachings. The second Pope Francis mostly relies on others to continue defending the Vatican's hoary dogmas because, after all, eternal souls are at stake and it is good for people to suffer anyway.

Is it a cynical way to burnish the reputation of an anachronistic and anti-human organization founded on superstition? To make it appear that finally the Vatican is willing to put people ahead of its doctrines and its deity when, in fact, nothing has changed? Maybe. But this "regular Joe" Pope shows that Francis does "get it" in the sense of being aware of much of what is wrong with the Catholic Church. Even if he is unable or unwilling to change things, it shows that he understands the critics.

The situation is reminiscent of the last few years of the old USSR. Not that it is reasonable to expect that the Vatican is about to crumble and the walls that the Catholic Church has worked so hard and so long to build around people's minds will be dramatically torn down. But what can be the result of the Pope seeming to repudiate, call into question or just ignore key Christian teachings as well as his own authority? No amount of back-tracking or "clarification" can nullify these things. Nor could Bolshevik zeal negate 1980's Soviet "perestroika" and "glasnost" or prevent their ultimate results.

Pope Francis, whether he intends to or not, is serving the cause of facts and reason. Yes, it is not enough to really matter all that much for now. But it may be a start. And, yes, Pope Francis may be a hypocrite. But, as the saying goes: "Hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue."

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:
- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. It happens most non-1st Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call us about it!

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
"LIVING BETTER!"
 >>> Sunday, March 1st, 2015 <<<
>NEW LOCATION<
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
 (about 1/2 mile west of the Sheraton on 114
 - take the Freepark exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western)

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!



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 The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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