

**Question:** I have difficulty with some things this Pope has said and with modern issues he has failed to address. For instance, when he came to the US he did not address the freedom of religion issue or Kim Davis. He said, “Who am I to judge” gays, and the media has taken this as a personal endorsement of their licentiousness behavior. Now he is asking us to welcome forced Muslim refugees who do not believe in Christ. Is it wrong for me to be critical of this Pope?

**Response:** The office of the Papacy that alone enjoys infallibility (a dogma formally acknowledged at the Vat. I Council) on matters pertaining to *faith and morals* is distinct from the ordained man who fulfills this sacred office. While it is said that this Roman Pontiff does not enjoy the status of theological doctoral alumnus like many of his predecessors, one cannot argue that this makes him less holy than them, and yet, some argue that it impacts his theological and political views.

As long as Satan is “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and “the ruler of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), those secular media outlets that are knowing or unknowingly working for him will continue to spin to the advancement of their varied political agendas the Pope's off-the-cuff and unrehearsed comments that may require theological qualification.

Despite the dark forces that plague this world where the darnel and wheat must “grow together” until harvest time (Mt. 13:30), God always provides for his Church, even in the face of the opposition of the secular media. Let us recall that God has pre-ordained for the office of papacy this Pope as He has every Pope before him. As illustrated in my publication, “*Can a Pope Become a Heretic*” (posted on my website), not one validly elected Pontiff in 2,000 years has contradicted or changed one article of doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition. This is quite an amazing achievement, and it testifies to the infallibility of the Pope on matters ex-cathedra pertaining to faith and morals.

Now, apart from *faith* (doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and articulated by the Magisterium) and *morals* (what is “good” over what is “bad”), the Pope may remain tacit or not choose to emphasize this or that issue pertaining to *ethics* (what is “right” over what is “wrong”), and this, sometimes on account of socio-political motives. Now, in answer to the question of whether one may be critical of the Pope in the arena of *ethics*, so long as one, in being critical of his advice, never loses sight of the fact that he is the Vicar of Christ on earth who possesses the charism of *infallibility* on matters ex cathedra pertaining to faith and morals, and whose non ex cathedra teachings on faith and morals are to be respected,<sup>1</sup> it remains one’s prerogative to be so. Otherwise put, we are to walk the fine line Christ demanded of us when he spoke to his disciples in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt. 23:3); we must respect the Roman Pontiff in all things pertaining to faith and morals, while we may reserve such allegiance re. his advice in the arena of ethics which does not pertain to faith and morals.

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<sup>1</sup> “The bishops, when they are teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to the divine and catholic truth... The religious assent of the will and intellect is to be given in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Pontiff even when he is not speaking ex cathedra” (Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vatican Council I, vol. II, op. cit., pp. cap. II-IV, p. 869).

No less important to said allegiance or lack thereof is the intentionality and transparency of this Roman Pontiff that accompanies his faith and moral teachings and ethical advice. If few dare to make the baseless assertion that this Pontiff is deliberately seeking to mislead others in the political arena, many more will attest to the genuine nature of his love for the poor and simplicity and, as such, he and his teachings and advice should be viewed. To demand of this Pope the same theological exactness and precision with which we were endowed under the tutelage of the brilliant Pope Benedict XVI (the greatest papal theologian in Church history) is to do him a disservice.

As to the approach of one openly badmouthing the Pope for his teachings on faith and morals or his advice on ethics, such an approach is contrary to God's advice to his mystics whose writings are approved by the Church. I here recall God the Father's advice to St. Catherine of Sienna on the approach all Christians ought to adopt in this regard:

*"[It] is My intention that Priests be held in due reverence, not for what they are in themselves, but for My sake, because of the authority I have given them. Therefore the virtuous must not lessen their reverence, even should these Priests fall short in virtue. And, as far as the virtues of my Priests are concerned, I have described them for you by setting them before you as stewards of... My Son's Body and Blood and of the other Sacraments. This dignity belongs to all who are appointed as such stewards, to the bad as well as to the good... [Because] of their virtue and because of their sacramental dignity you ought to love them. And you ought to hate the sins of those who live evil lives. But you may not for all that set ourselves up as their judges; this is not My Will because they are My Christs, and you ought to love and reverence the authority I have given them.*

*You know well enough that if someone filthy or poorly dressed were to offer you a great treasure that would give you life, you would not disdain the bearer for love of the treasure, and the lord who had sent it, even though the bearer was ragged and filthy... You ought to despise and hate the Priests' sins and try to dress them in the clothes of charity and holy prayer and wash away their filth with your tears. Indeed, I have appointed them and given them to you to be angels on earth and suns, as I have told you. When they are less than that you ought to pray for them. But you are not to judge them. Leave the judging to Me, and I, because of your prayers and my own desire, will be merciful to them"* (Catherine of Siena; *The Dialogue*, translated by Suzanne Noffke, O.P., New York: Paulist Press, 1980, pp. 229-231).

Cf. also the following link: <http://www.hprweb.com/2007/03/the-danger-of-criticizing-bishops-and-priests/>

In sum, God demands of his flock a genuine respect to his anointed, especially the Roman Pontiff, despite their imperfections. To correct the Pope in a respectful way is admirable, but to openly and publicly belittle his mistakes and encourage others to turn away from his papal teaching authority is nothing short of schismatic. For what pious child who sees his father not speaking when he ought or saying something that is incorrect (though the father believes what he says is correct), runs his mouth to the father or runs off to inform the other siblings of the father's mistake to his embarrassment? Would not the child, if he is pious, while acknowledging the father's imprudent silence or incorrect speech with no disregard to the 4th commandment,

question his father in a filial, and not a contemptuous, tone? Such ought to be our attitude toward every Roman Pontiff. Yes, it is a fine line we are asked to walk, but let us not forget that Jesus had already asked us to walk it.

In Christ,

Rev. Joseph