

In-depth report on pope's latest major interview



In-depth report on pope's latest major interview. Pope Francis discusses hot issues such as contraception, the family and child abuse. Article includes full transcript

As part of a recent interview given to an Italian news agency, Pope Francis discussed hot-button issues in the Church today, giving clarity to topics which have often been misinterpreted since his election.

During the interview, published on March 5 in the Italian daily “Corriere della Sera,” the Pope was asked to speak on several issues which have been a source of heavy debate within the Church, particularly in the pontiff’s short tenure.

When asked by the interviewer, Ferruccio de Bortoli, about whether or not the Church will allow contraception 50 years after Pope Paul VI wrote his historic encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*,” the pontiff responded that although doctrine will not be changed, a pastoral emphasis on mercy is needed.

“Paul VI himself, at the end, recommended to confessors much mercy, and attention to concrete situations,” the Pope explained.

“But his genius was prophetic, he had the courage to place himself against the majority, defending the moral discipline, exercising a culture brake, opposing the present and future neo-Malthusianism.”

The question of contraception, he observed, “is not that of changing the doctrine, but of going deeper and ensuring that pastoral ministry takes into account the situations and what is possible to do for the people,” adding that “We will also speak of this in the path of the synod.”

Drawing attention to the topic of civil unions, Bortoli questioned the pontiff as to whether or not it is something that the Church would be open to, to which Pope Francis replied that “Marriage is between a man and a woman.”

“The secular States want to justify civil unions to regulate different situations of co-habitation, pushed by the demand to regulate economic aspects between people, such as ensuring health care,” he said.

“This consists of pacts of cohabiting of various natures, of which I wouldn’t know how to list the different ways,” he continued, adding that “One needs to see the different cases and evaluate them in their variety.”

Turning to the theme of the upcoming Synod of Bishops, Bortoli gave notice to how the family is the topic of reflection, noting that many things have changed since JPII wrote his Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris Consortio.”

Speaking of the two synods which will address the topic of the family, the interviewer stated that great “newness” is expected, and referenced the Pope's comments on helping those who are divorced, rather than condemning them.

“It is a long path that the Church must complete. A process wanted by the Lord,” the Pope explained.

“Three months after my election the themes for the synod were placed before me. It was proposed that we discuss what the contribution of Jesus was to contemporary man. But in the end with gradual steps - which for me are signs of the will of God - it was chosen to discuss the family, that is going through a very serious crisis,” the pontiff recalled.

Referring to this crisis, Pope Francis explained that “It is difficult to form it. Few young people marry. There are many separated families in which the project of common life has failed. The children suffer greatly. We must give a response.”

“But for this we must reflect very deeply. It is that which the consistory and the synod are doing,” he affirmed, emphasizing that “we need to avoid remaining on the surface.”

“The temptation to resolve every problem with casuistry is an error, a simplification of the profound things, as the pharisees did, a very superficial theology. It is in light of the deep reflection that we will be able to seriously confront the particular situations, also those of the divorced, with a pastoral depth.”

Calling attention to a speech given by Cardinal Walter Kasper during the last consistory, in which his comments on divorced and re-married Catholics caused some division among the other cardinals, Bortoli questioned whether or not the doctrine regarding their reception of communion was “firm,” and why debate is necessary.

Pope Francis replied, saying that “Cardinal Kasper made a beautiful and profound presentation that will soon be published in German, and he confronted five points, the fifth was that of second marriages.”

“I would have been concerned if there wasn’t an intense discussion in the consistory,” the Pope expressed, “It wouldn’t have served for anything. The cardinals knew that they could say what they wanted, and they presented many different points of view that are enriching.”

“The fraternal and open comparisons make theological and pastoral thought grow. I am not afraid of this. Actually, I seek it,” he said.

Drawing attention to the tensions surrounding the abuse scandal within the Church, the interviewer referenced an appeal that was made to the Pope in the Italian newspaper “Il Foglio” to speak out against “the bad conscience” of secular society, which “hardly respects infancy.”

On this topic, the pontiff explained that “I want to say two things,” adding that “The cases of abuses are terrible because they leave extremely deep wounds,” and affirming that “Benedict XVI was very courageous and he cleared a path.”

“The Church has done so much on this path. Perhaps more than anyone. The statistics on the phenomenon of the violence against children are shocking, but they also show clearly that the great majority of abuses take place in the family environment and around it.”

“The Catholic Church is perhaps the only public institution to have acted with transparency and responsibility,” he stated, “No other has done more. And, the Church is the only one to be attacked.”

Following his previous interviews with Italian newspapers “La Stampa” and La Reppublica,” this marks the third interview that Pope Francis has given to secular papers since his election to the Chair of Peter last March.

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