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Francis' interview a good example for US bishops

Mario T. García | Sep. 25, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

I am on sabbatical in New Mexico and am somewhat restricted on the blog for the fall. However, I did want to say a few words about Pope Francis' recent comments that have elicited so much coverage, including among our *NCR* bloggers.

I am sure my colleagues have covered much of the ground around the pope's comments in his interview with Jesuit reporters. I also welcome his statements. I do believe certain sectors of the church, especially in the United States, have become obsessed with cultural war issues such as abortion, birth control and same-sex marriages. What the pope is saying is that there are many more issues that the church and Catholics should be concerned with such as poverty, oppression, war and peace, to name but a few.

The church, as I have argued in many of my blogs, has to speak out publicly on these issues. This means not just in public documents put out by the national bishops' groups but at the local level, in the homilies at Sunday Mass. The recent directive to do so on immigration reform is a good example of this, but the pope is saying more of this needs to be done.

The American bishops especially have to stop their tunnel vision on the cultural war issues. I cannot imagine Pope Francis threatening to deny Communion to Sen. Ted Kennedy or Sen. John Kerry, as some bishops did. This is demonizing humans made by God, and that is also what the pope is saying -- stop hating those who hold views you don't like or think are sins against the church. Fine, hold to your views, but don't hate those who disagree with you.

Yes, I know the church in the U.S. has said otherwise, but the reality is that much antagonism and even hatred is unfortunately part of these expressions. Let's see if the U.S. bishops really follow the pope's tone and suggestions. Based on the immediate reactions, I am not too optimistic. Whatever happened to the bishops always falling into line with the Holy Father? Perhaps many of them didn't even vote for him.

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