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Francis: Papal court is 'leprosy of papacy'

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The Francis Chronicles

Francis and eight cardinals from around the world are holding three days of closed-door meetings to discuss the Vatican's troubled administration and to map out possible changes in the worldwide church.

As the talks begin with the cardinals, Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* published a long interview conducted by its atheist editor last week in which the Argentine pope spoke frankly about the problems facing the Vatican administration, known as the Curia.

He reportedly said too many previous popes in the church's long history had been "narcissists" who let themselves be flattered by "courtier" aides in the Curia instead of concentrating on the wider mission of the universal church.

"The (papal) court is the leprosy of the papacy," Francis is reported to have said.

This is the English translation of the interview.

The following are Francis quotations as reported today in the interview.

On the Roman Curia:

The Curia "manages the services that serve the Holy See. But it has one defect: it is Vatican-centric. It sees and looks after the interests of the Vatican, which are still, for the most part, temporal interests. This Vatican-centric view neglects the world around us. I do not share this view and I'll do everything I can to change it. The Church is or should go back to being a community of God's people, and priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls, are at the service of the people of God. The Church is this, a word not surprisingly different from the Holy See, which has its own function, important but at the service of the

Church. I would not have been able to have complete faith in God and in his Son if I had not been trained in the Church, and if I had not had the good fortune of being in Argentina, in a community without which I would not have become aware myself and my faith."

Speaking of anticlericalism:

"It also happens to me that when I meet a clericist, I suddenly become anti-clerical. Clericalism should not have anything to do with Christianity. St. Paul, who was the first to speak to the Gentiles, the pagans, to believers in other religions, was the first to teach us that."

On mystics:

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"I love the mystics; Francis also was in many aspects of his life, but I do not think I have the vocation and then we must understand the deep meaning of that word. The mystic manages to strip himself of action, of facts, objectives and even the pastoral mission and rises until he reaches communion with the Beatitudes. Brief moments but which fill an entire life."

On being elected pope:

"Before I accepted I asked if I could spend a few minutes in the room next to the one with the balcony overlooking the square. My head was completely empty and I was seized by a great anxiety. To make it go away and relax I closed my eyes and made every thought disappear, even the thought of refusing to accept the position, as the liturgical procedure allows. I closed my eyes and I no longer had any anxiety or emotion. At a certain point I was filled with a great light. It lasted a moment, but to me it seemed very long. Then the light faded, I got up suddenly and walked into the room where the cardinals were waiting and the table on which was the act of acceptance. I signed it, the Cardinal Camerlengo countersigned it and then on the balcony there was the 'Habemus Papam'."

On Francis of Assisi:

"He's great because he is everything. He is a man who wants to do things, wants to build, he founded an order and its rules, he is an itinerant and a missionary, a poet and a prophet, he is mystical. He found evil in himself and rooted it out. He loves nature, animals, the blade of grass on the lawn and the birds flying in the sky. But above all he loved people, children, old people, women. He is the most shining example of that agape we talked about earlier."

On proselytization and needs of the church:

"I believe I have already said that our goal is not to proselytize but to listen to needs, desires and disappointments, despair, hope. We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace. Vatican II, inspired by Pope Paul VI and John, decided to look to the future with a modern spirit and to be open to modern culture. The Council Fathers knew that being open to modern culture meant religious ecumenism and dialogue with non-believers. But afterwards very little was done in that direction. I have the humility and ambition to want to do something."

On reforming the church:

"I'm not Francis of Assisi and I do not have his strength and his holiness. But I am the Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic world. The first thing I decided was to appoint a group of eight cardinals to be my advisers. Not courtiers but wise people who share my own feelings. This is the beginning of a Church with an organization that is not just top-down but also horizontal."

On God:

"From my point of view, God is the light that illuminates the darkness, even if it does not dissolve it, and a spark of divine light is within each of us. In the letter I wrote to you, you will remember I said that our species will end but the light of God will not end and at that point it will invade all souls and it will all be in everyone."

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