

Pope Francis and His “Progressive Views”

On May 13, 2013 Jorge Mario Bogoglio, “archbishop of Buenos Airies,” was named the 266th Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. He took his papal title after St Francis of Assis, and is thus known as “Pope Francis.” Supposedly, as “pope,” Francis is the Vicar of Christ on earth, and is regarded as the earthly head of the church. For the record, we have no Biblical account of anyone in New Testament days being called “archbishop.” There were men who were called “bishops;” each person thus appointed had to meet certain biblical qualifications, including being “*the husband of one wife,*” I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9. No one was called “**the** bishop,” let alone “**arch**bishop!” To the contrary, there was to be plurality of men serving as “*bishops,*” Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28, and their oversight as elders or bishops was confined to the local church, or to the “*flock of God*” which was “*among them,*” I Pet. 5:1-4. The idea of **one** man becoming a bishop over a diocese (a multiplicity of churches in a given area) is totally contrary to God’s plan for the oversight of His people. But, contrariwise, the Holy Spirit did warn of an apostasy among God’s people — an apostasy which would begin with the elders, or “bishops,” Acts 20:28-30, which would lead to a “*falling away,*” and to the revealing of “*the man of sin,*” the description of which best fits the one who is called “Pope.” I Thess. 2:1-4!

It is also appropriate to observe that Jesus Christ is “*the head of the body, the church...*,” Col. 1:18. The fact that Jesus is “**the head**” of the church necessarily implies that “*the church*” described in the Bible has no other “*head.*” Moreover, Jesus ascended to “*heaven,*” Acts 1:9-11, where He is now “*seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty,*” Heb. 8:1, and where He will remain until “*the end,*” I Cor. 15:24. In other words, Jesus, Who is “*the head*” of “*the church,*” is quartered (resides) in heaven. Inasmuch as the “headquarters” of “*the church*” is where “*the head*” is quartered, and inasmuch as Jesus, “*the head,*” is quartered in heaven, then the “headquarters” of “*the church*” outlined in the Bible is **heaven**. “*The church*” described in the Bible has no earthly headquarters. We should also keep in mind the fact that since Jesus Christ is “*the head*” of “*the church,*” and since He resides in heaven, then the instructions which “*the church*” follows must come **from** heaven, where “*the head*” resides. This being the case, then “*whatever*” we do “*in word, or deed*” must be done “*in the name of*” (by the authority of) “*the Lord Jesus Christ,*” Col. 3:17. Religiously speaking, “*the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps,*” Jer. 10:23.

However, notwithstanding the glaring **differences** between “*the church*” Jesus built and which it is described in detail in the Bible, and the Roman Catholic Church, it is a fact that Catholics in general regard the Roman Catholic Church as being the church Jesus built, and they believe the Pope is the “Vicar of Christ,” one who stands in the place of Jesus Christ on earth, and who possesses ecclesiastical authority over the church. And Catholics, if they believe the teachings of the church of which they are members, believe in Papal Infallibility, at least, when he speaks “*ex cathedra!*” The doctrine of “*ex cathedra*” was defined by **Vatican Council I** (1869-1870) in the following words: “*We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks ex cathedra, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as Shepherd and Teacher of all Christians and, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine*

concerning faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in St. Peter, that infallibility which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.” Ex *Cathedra*, according to the **Britannica**, is “*the doctrine that the Pope, acting as supreme teacher and under certain conditions, cannot err when he teaches in matters of faith or morals.*”

The preceding statements regarding Papal Infallibility, especially when teaching “*in matters of faith or morals,*” has resulted in many conscientious Catholics becoming alarmed as they compare the teachings of Pope Francis, alongside the teachings of previous Popes. For example in a May, 2017 homily Pope Francis said “*the Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us with the blood of Christ; all of us, not just Catholics, Everyone! ‘Father, the atheists? Even the **atheists**. Everyone!’*” In September, 2017 “*62 clergy and lay members from around the world...issued a formal filial correction to Pope Francis, accusing him of ‘propagating heresies,’ about ‘marriage, the moral life, and the reception of the sacraments.’*” This was described as the “*first filial correction addressed to a reigning Pontiff since Pope John XXII was reproved in 1333.*” Another source stated that “*a growing belief among some Catholics is that Francis is the antichrist.*”

I have no personal “ax to grind” with “Pope Francis,” nor with Catholics in general, nor do I question their sincerity. My objective in presenting this information is to motivate people to think for themselves, to “*try the spirits,*” I John 4:1, to “*prove all things,*” and to “*hold fast that which is good,*” I Thess. 5:21. Like the Bereans, we must receive “*the word with all readiness of mind,*” and search the scriptures in order to see if what we have “*heard*” is true, Acts 17:11.

The main point I am trying to make is this: When one pope, who claims to be the Vicar of Christ on earth, takes positions regarding “*matters of faith or morals*” which contradict what previous popes taught regarding “*matters of faith or morals,*” that should cause even the most “*dyed in the wool*” Catholic to question one of the most basic tenets of Roman Catholicism. “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,*” Heb. 13:8; He does not change. Hence, if all popes stand “*in the place of Jesus Christ on earth,*” and if they “*possess ecclesiastical authority over the church*” (as advocated by **Vatican Council I** (1869-1870), then there should be **no variance** whatever in what they teach on “*matters of faith or morals.*”

And, for the record, what I am saying regarding Catholic popes could also, in principle, be stated about the Creeds of various religious denominations. As time continues, gradual changes are made in those creeds, which contradict that taught in previous creeds of the same religious denomination! For example, on April 27, 2016 there appeared an article written by Adam Hamilton; it was entitled: “**The Bible, Homosexuality, and the UMC—Part one.**” The author began with these words: “*Next month in Portland, Oregon 800 United Methodists, delegates from around the world, will gather for the United Methodist Church General Conference. At this ten-day meeting, held once every four years, the United Methodist Church will set policy, priorities and denominational budgets for the ensuing years. Delegates will consider reams of proposed **changes to the church’s Book of Discipline.** No issue will be more closely watched than the debate and decisions of the Conference regarding gay and lesbian people. Will the denomination continue to hold that ‘the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching’? Will it continue to prohibit pastors from officiating in same-gender weddings and United Methodist church property from being used for same-gender weddings? And will the United Methodist Church continue to require celibacy of gay and lesbian clergy?’*”

Similar examples could be cited with regards to the Creeds of other religious

Denominations, but the point should be obvious — they are written by uninspired human beings, and they are periodically changed by uninspired human beings. But “*the word of the Lord endureth forever,*” I Pet. 1:25. It was “*given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,*” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. We are divinely prohibited from adding “*to,*” or taking “*away from*” God’s word, Rev. 22:18-19, and by it we shall be judged in that last day, John 12:48. The “Progressive views” of Pope Francis, or the “progressive views” of the framers of the countless denominational creed books must be summarily rejected. Those who want to be **with God** in the next life, and those who want to **serve God** in this life, can do no better than to look to the **word of God**, “*rightly*” divide the same (2 Tim. 2:15), and obey its precepts. Incidentally, why would any sane, sober-minded person even think of following the ever-changing “*doctrines and commandments of men,*” Col. 2:22, instead of following the Spirit-revealed, John 16:13, divinely-preserved “*word of the Lord*” which “*endures forever,*” I Pet. 1:25?

**** —Bobby Witherington

“If we let God guide, He will provide.”