

Clarification on the comments of Pope Francis on Civil Unions

As far as I can make out the news is not the bombshell news some are making it out to be. Rather Pope Francis is using his usual bold language and refusing to be put in a corner by either side on this issue. His statements on civil unions for persons who identify as homosexual were made during a documentary. A documentary interview is not a forum for official papal teaching. Unless the Vatican offers additional clarity, they should be taken in light of the very limited information available about them. We do not have a written text and we do not know how much of what he said was edited or omitted.

It is clear from *Amoris Laetitia* that Pope Francis stands four square behind marriage as between a man and a woman.

In *Amoris Laetitia* we find the following:

The word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman and their children, so that they may become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (29)

And again:

Christian marriage, as a reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a leaven of new life for society. AL 292

But in *Amoris Laetitia* we also find :

The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception. During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives (No. 250).

And again:

“We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability, but de facto or same-sex unions, may not simply be equated with marriage.” AL 52

I think that we can conclude from all this that while Pope Francis does not support 'gay marriage' he does want some civil protection for people who find themselves in gay relationships and need protection from the law. He held this view when he was Ab in Buenos Aires. We cannot conclude from his remarks that he approves of gay relationships as such but that society must treat them with the same respect which it affords all its citizens. He considers this an act of Christian charity.

In the documentary Pope Francis also said that: *"Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They're children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it."* This should not be interpreted as saying that Pope Francis is in favour of homosexual couples adopting children. Pope Francis has spoken before about this to encourage parents and relatives not to ostracize or shun children who have identified as LGBT. This seems to be the sense in which the pope spoke about the right of people to be a part of the family.

I am reminded of an interview which Mother Teresa once gave and was asked what she thought of gay people. She answered and corrected the interviewer each time he mentioned gay people and said "You mean beloved children of God". This is basically the stance of Pope Francis.

In fact we can say that he is being consistent with Church teaching, even though he expresses himself in words which are downright provocative and easily misunderstood!