

POPE OFFERS STRAIGHT TALK ON HOT TOPICS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on recent remarks made by Pope Francis:

Pope Francis had a busy Sunday, offering interviews aboard the papal plane and to Spanish television. As the media are wont to do, much of the conversation centered on their favorite topic: sex.

Referring to the sexual abuse of minors, the pope said, "The global scourge is great, but to say this is not understood without the spirit of evil."

He used this observation to criticize U.S. bishops who approach this subject by promoting new codes of conduct, and the like. For the pope, such proposals are "too much about organization, about methodologies," neglecting the "spiritual dimension."

We can understand why American bishops are concerned about the nuts and bolts issues—the laity are looking for specific reforms. But the pope is right to say that the spiritual dimension is often overlooked in such discussions. He is particularly right about the role of evil in sexual abuse, at least in its most grievous manifestations.

As with all sins, there is a range of gravity. A priest who inappropriately touches a minor may suffer from some sort of psycho-social disorder, but a priest who violates a minor in front of, or by using, sacred symbols, harbors something deeper. Such acts, which fortunately are very rare, cannot be understood without citing the role of evil. We don't hear enough about this dimension.

The pope was asked whether abortion was permissible in cases

of human trafficking, particularly where a woman is raped and becomes pregnant.

The Holy Father had a ready answer. "Is it permissible to eliminate a human life to solve a problem? Is it permissible to hire someone to eliminate [the child]?" He then went on to say that women in such dire straits should not be left "on the street," but should be helped.

The Catholic Church, unlike Planned Parenthood, reaches out to women who have had an abortion. It does not leave them "on the street." Instead, it services them through Project Rachel. This is one of the crown jewels of the Catholic Church, but it does not get the attention it deserves.

The bishops' conference explains that Project Rachel is a "diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, counselors, and laypersons who provide a team response of care for those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. In addition to referring for Sacramental Reconciliation, the ministry provides an integrated network of services, including pastoral counseling, support groups, retreats and referral to licensed mental health practitioners."

The pope was also asked about his famous quip, "Who Am I to Judge?"

He emphasized that "sin is an act: of thought, word and deed, with freedom. Tendencies are not sin. If you have a tendency to anger, it is not sin." But he did not dodge the issue of homosexuality.

The pope advised parents who think their child might have homosexual tendencies to "go to a professional, to a psychologist," before making a "diagnosis." Regrettably, in today's world, the typical psychologist would not find anything to treat. Indeed, he may even exacerbate the problem. But the pope is not wrong to suggest that competent help is

still available.

Not surprisingly, some of the big media picked up on the pope's remarks on sexual abuse, but had nothing to say about his comments on abortion and homosexuality. They are bent on protecting the pope from liberal critics, thus skewing perceptions of him.