

POPE STEPS LEFT AND RIGHT

The following article by Bill Donohue was published by Newsmax on November 27:

Pope Francis has an uncanny ability to excite the passions of the left and the right; he has done so again in his apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel."

The pope begins by outlining his principal interest, evangelization, calling on us to avoid being consumed by material pleasures that harm our interior life; when this happens, we shut out the voice of God. He asks us to maintain good relations with Jews and Muslims, and beckons us not to judge Islam by the violence done in its name. He hastens to add that the persecution of Christians in Islamic nations must end. He also reminds us that evangelization is "first and foremost about preaching the Gospel *to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.*" (His italics.)

The pope is opposed to "excessive centralization," and to that end he implores us not to view the parish as "an outdated institution." He sees a vital role for the laity, who constitute "the vast majority of the people of God." The Holy Father asks us to give more attention to the special role that women play in the Church and in society. However, he also says that the Church teaching on an all-male priesthood is "not a question open to discussion." Motherhood, he insists, is a status conferred on women, one that allows them to exercise their special gift of serving others.

On economic issues, the pope posits a clear animus toward unbridled capitalism, a view shared by his predecessors. But he is more pointed, rejecting "trickle-down" theories. Pope Francis is not rejecting a market-based economic model in favor of a socialist one—indeed, he restates Catholic teaching on subsidiarity—but he is warning us against greed and the

single-minded pursuit of profit.

"The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them," Pope Francis says, "so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them." This is welcome, but his focus on the structural causes of poverty, to the exclusion of the cultural causes, suggests an incomplete understanding of this issue. He is very much in the Latin American mode of thinking on this subject.

On abortion, Pope Francis flatly says that "the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question." Indeed, he says it is not "progressive" to resolve problems "by eliminating a human life." This has surely been the thinking of many elites: the way to resolve the urban problem is to promote abortion, especially in black neighborhoods; Planned Parenthood has been doing this for decades.

The Holy Father's comments on the family are telling. "Marriage tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will," he says. This is a clear shot at gay marriage, the proponents of whom have been quick to say that marriage is all about love. Nonsense, he says. The pope cites French bishops that marriage is about "the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life."

Pope Francis warns of the dangers of "secularist rationalism," and the radical individualism that it entails. He lays down a strong anchor by exhorting Catholics not to allow the forces of secularization to silence them; the Church cannot reduce itself to "the sphere of the private and personal." He wants a public, and full-throated, exercise of religion. "Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis or Blessed Teresa of Calcutta?"

Catholic League members will like the pope's criticisms of our "media culture and some intellectual circles." These segments of the population would like activist Catholics to muzzle themselves, keeping their hands off the normative order. But when Catholics bend to these militant secularists, they lose. "They end up stifling the joy of mission with a kind of obsession about being like everyone else and possessing what everyone else possesses."

Pope Francis is neither liberal nor conservative. He's simply Catholic, and a towering champion of its many causes.