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STATEMENT

of

BISHOP LIAM CARY

on

Remarks of Pope Francis on Same-sex Civil Unions

Last week a media firestorm broke out over Pope Francis' remarks in the just-released documentary *Francesco* about pastoral care for homosexuals. The filmmaker has said the Pope told him directly that he approved of same-sex civil union laws, but the recorded segment in question seems to be an excerpt from a 2019 interview in Spanish with a Mexican journalist. Disputes over the correct English translation of key Spanish terms and uncertainty about whether the filmmaker cut additional clarifications by Pope Francis for the final version make it virtually impossible at this point to know with surety what the Pope said or what he meant to say. *Francesco* does not give us his words in full; those we hear come to us at the end of the editing process, and no written transcript is available to check the film's accuracy.

But there is no denying that papal approval of same-sex civil unions in 2020 would contradict papal disapproval of them in 2003, when the Vatican prudentially applied Catholic doctrinal teaching to the secular state's regulation of marriage. In words approved by Pope John Paul II, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger taught that "respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual

unions," which would likely "cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage." In the wake of *Francesco*, not surprisingly, journalists and headline writers have been quick to broadcast their assurance that a serious change in Catholic doctrine is under way.

Catholics confused by this sudden irruption of controversy need not fight their way through a thicket of details to find clarity of mind and peace of soul. One consideration at the outset is alone sufficient to set our understanding aright: no pope can unilaterally re-define fundamental Catholic teachings in a one-on-one interview reported by a journalist. The pope, not the reporter, must exercise editorial control over what he says as chief teacher of the Catholic faith; such great responsibility he cannot delegate to a filmmaker in a one-on-one interview. The Pope's statements in *Francesco*, therefore, are his personal opinions; they do not constitute formal papal teaching that binds Catholic conscience. Those are free to disagree who view same-sex civil unions of the past twenty years as a pathway to the redefinition of marriage which was their goal all along.

That redefinition (so-called “gay marriage”) does not come up for discussion in *Francesco*, nor does the question of same-sex adoptions; but the Holy Father has spoken very clearly on both matters elsewhere. In his view, “to redefine the very institution of marriage” would “disfigure God’s plan for creation” because “throughout humanity and not only in the Church, it’s been between a man and a woman. You can’t change it just like that. It’s the nature of things. That’s how they are.” Therefore, “It is a contradiction to speak of homosexual marriage.”

Husband and wife make each other father and mother of the children they receive from the Creator to generate and educate. In God’s design, Pope Francis says, “every person needs a male father and a female mother . . . [to] help them shape their identity.” This means that children adopted by same-sex couples are “deprived of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God.” Here the Holy Father aligns himself with Cardinal Ratzinger’s prescient 2003 warning that same-sex civil unions would lead to the adoption of children by same-sex couples.

“I have always defended doctrine,” Pope Francis claims; and nowhere in the documentary *Francesco* does he deny doctrinal truth on the nature of marriage. Scripture and Church Tradition testify to the basis of that saving truth: only within the promise of married love between man and woman does the Creator bless the sexual relations of human beings. Only the

marital embrace mirrors God’s undying faithfulness to His children in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. No other physical coupling can possibly exemplify the two-in-one-flesh faithfulness to the promise to be true which life-giving marital intimacy incarnates.

Thus do Scripture and Tradition reveal and affirm God’s unconditional disapproval of sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether it be that of adulterers, fornicators, or homosexuals. In each case condemnation rules out the *behavior* in question, not the one who behaves; God hates sin, not the sinner. Why? “God is offended by us when we act against our own good,” St. Thomas Aquinas explains. When sexual attraction has us in its mighty grip, are not all of us capable of the most profound self-deception? Which of us can easily see the way to what is truly good for us? Do we not feel the strong pull of temptation to “act against our own good”?

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus prays from the Cross, “for they know not what they do.” We know not, but God knows, where all roads end. Our loving Father made us for happiness, so He tells us in no uncertain terms which paths *not* to walk. Well does He know that adultery, fornication, and homosexual sin make for ruined lives all around. Nonetheless, the Father is not content to condemn the world of disordered desire; He sends His Son as Redeemer to save it. The gifts He brings—chastity, courage, and perseverance—give us grace to discover in our own flesh the truth St. Paul proclaimed: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

In the Son of Mary,



Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker
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