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Pope Francis promotes the dignity and rights of homosexual persons

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In a documentary released on October 21, Pope Francis spoke about civil unions for same-sex couples. The Vatican has not offered any clarification on his comments, but media outlets have shed some light on this topic. Briefly, he did not propose any change in Catholic doctrine.

It is essential to know the context of his remarks. The excerpt in the documentary is an abridged quote from a much longer response that Pope Francis gave while speaking about the integration into the church of people living in ‘irregular situations.’ The full quote from the 2019 interview is, “Once I was asked a question on a flight—it made me angry afterwards, it made me angry because of how the media reported it—about the family integration of people with homosexual orientation, and I said: homosexual people have a right be a part of a family, people with homosexual orientation have a right to be in a family and the parents have the right to recognize this son as homosexual, this daughter as homosexual. Nobody should be thrown out or be miserable because of it.”

Thus, the context of his quote was about how families should treat a son or daughter with a homosexual orientation who have a right to be part of a family. He was speaking against the marginalization of gay children within families, something he has done before. In some cultures, acceptance of a gay child is unthinkable.

In the documentary, the pope’s condensed response included a statement about the need for laws that protect the rights of homosexual persons. He said, “What we have to have is a civil union law—that way they are legally covered. I supported that.” We should remember the pope is normally speaking to the Universal Church. In some countries, homosexual acts are punishable by death. The United States already recognizes civil unions of same-sex couples, who can be married civilly and receive all the legal protections which that guarantees.

Later, Pope Francis clearly said that he is not promoting “homosexual marriage.” He said, “It is an incongruity to speak of homosexual marriage. But what we have to have is a law of civil union, so they have the right to be legally covered.” Previously, he warned against threats to the institution of “marriage,” which he explicitly described as “between a man and a woman.” For him, a heterosexual union is unique because it implies the difference between the man and the woman who unite in reciprocity and are capable of engendering life. The word “marriage” only applies to that reality.

Multiple media reports suggest Pope Francis may have considered civil union law a preferable alternative to legislation that would create “same-sex marriage” law. This would allow for certain legal rights of same-sex couples which are integral to the dignity of the human person without creating a new legal definition of marriage. It is not clear what those rights would entail. Yet, they likely include adjusted health insurance premiums and tax rates, rights of inheritance, and visitation rights in hospitals and nursing homes. The Pope also has said that endorsing civil union laws “does not mean approving of homosexual acts.”

We pray that our society embraces everyone, including homosexual persons, as beloved children of God and brothers and sisters within our human family.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Biegler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Bishop Steven Biegler

Diocese of Cheyenne