

Donald Trump, the Pope, Mexico, walls and bridges

Pope Francis has just made his first official papal visit to Mexico.

Pope Francis is the first pontiff from the Jesuit order, and was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Argentina to an Italian-immigrant father and a mother whose family is of Italian origin.

Pope Francis continues the tradition recent popes to make papal visits to various countries.

The previous pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013) visited Mexico in 2012.

The pope before Benedict was John Paul II (1978-2005) who traveled so much that he was seen in person by more human beings than anybody else in history. John Paul II visited Mexico five times and seems to have had a special bond with the Mexican people.

Nevertheless, despite all the hoopla over papal visits, the Mexican Catholic church is in decline. It's declining as a proportion of the population, it's declining in its influence and it can't recruit enough Mexican priests.

Currently, about four out of five Mexicans claim to be Catholic but it's been estimated that only about a quarter of Mexicans are serious practicing Catholics.

Still, it's impossible to understand Mexican history and traditional Mexican culture without understanding Catholicism, and even nominal Catholicism still has a lot of cultural power. A pope can still draw the multitudes in Mexico.

Pope Francis visited Mexico from February 12th to 18th, and

spent time in Mexico City, Morelia, Chiapas and Chihuahua, thus traveling from one end of the country to the other.

The last full day in Mexico the pontiff held a mass on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexican border, where he decried the humanitarian crisis on the border.

After departing Mexico, Trump was interviewed on the plane and was asked about Donald Trump's candidacy in the United States. In reply, Pope Francis had this to say: "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel."

Whether we look at this statement from a Christian or political perspective, it's rather problematic.

In the first place, I'm not aware of the Pope speaking in this way of any other public figure. Who else has he called "not Christian"?

The Pope's "walls and bridges" statement is not derived from the Bible or Catholic catechism. It's a lightweight and incoherent slogan.

Surely the Pope must be aware of the distinction Jesus Christ set forth between human and divine government, expressed in the reply to the question about tribute paid to Caesar. (See Matthew 22:15-22).

Civil governments have the responsibility to protect the inhabitants of their earthly nation-states. Such functions include enforcing criminal law, maintaining military forces and protecting borders.

As for walls and bridges, both are useful and both have their proper functions.

The purpose of the church is not to carry out the responsibilities of earthly governments. The purpose of the church is to advance the Kingdom of God.

Why doesn't Pope Francis put more pressure on Latin American clergy to take care of poor Latin Americans in their own countries? That would be better than encouraging Mexicans and Central Americans to travel illegally to the United States.

U.S. immigration policy is a constant target in Latin America. However, consider this. The U.S. has half the population of Latin America (and less land). Nevertheless, the U.S. has taken in six times the amount of immigrants as all of Latin America (and 24 times the amount as the Pope's native Argentina). Yet they still complain.

Furthermore, how can the Pope rail against walls when the Vatican itself is surrounded by walls? The Vatican doesn't have an open borders policy, does it? The Vatican is protected by armed guards, as is the Pope himself when he travels.

In an excellent piece published on The American Thinker, Silvio Canto, Jr. points out that on his visit to Cuba, Pope Francis "...hugged and embraced Raúl Castro, a man who has executed priests, harassed religious leaders, and closed Christian schools years ago. Did he call the Castro brothers un-Christian?" (Click here for Silvio's article.)

The day after the Pope's comments, Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said in an interview that the Pope was not attacking Candidate Trump and was not telling people how to vote.

I doubt this is the last time we can expect to hear from the Vatican (a walled city-state) on this topic.

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