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New Yorker columnist touched by pope's 'tolerance, humanity'

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In a recent blog, *New Yorker* magazine columnist Hendrik Hertzberg commented on Pope Francis' statements about salvation. As an atheist, he said, he was comforted by the expression of kindness in the pope's words.

Hertzberg wrote: "I was touched by the Pope's apparent declaration that morally well-behaved nonbelievers (such as, I hope, myself) are just as worthy of God's beneficence as are morally well-behaved believers -- that God, being good, does not punish nice, otherwise inoffending people simply for not kowtowing to Him. Why was I touched? Well, not because I believe in God. (I don't.) And not because I was relieved to have it on good authority that I'm probably going to Heaven. (I'm not going anywhere, until such time, hopefully not too soon, as I go nowhere.) I was touched because the spirit of the Pope's homily was one of kindness, tolerance, humanity, and common sense. I was touched because (putting aside questions of existence or nonexistence) the God that the Pope worships is not a cruel, vain, surpassingly egomaniacal tyrant."

At the same time, he questioned the validity of the interpretation of the pope's words by a so-called Vatican spokesman, who cited references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. All salvation, according to the catechism, "comes from Christ, the Head through the Church which is his body." That may be so, Hertzberg said, but he noted that the spokesman also raised the issue of conscience, and that "sounds to me like an admission that faithfulness to one's own conscience" trumps the requirement to be a faithful Christian.

Read the whole column.

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