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Pope Francis tells journalists to attack hypocrisy

Thomas Reese | Jun. 20, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

Journalists should ?be uncompromising against the hypocrisies which result from the closed, the sick heart,? said Pope Francis to a group of Jesuit journalists. ?Be uncompromising against this spiritual illness.?

Telling journalists to attack hypocrisy might sound suicidal to most church leaders, especially after more than two decades of investigative journalism on the sexual abuse crisis, but it shows how much Pope Francis hates the vices he believes undermine the Gospel message: clericalism, careerism and hypocrisy.

Beyond exposing hypocrisy, Francis said the main task of journalists ?is not to build walls but bridges? and to establish dialogue with all people. At a time when ratings and readership are built by stirring up antagonism and fights, this will not be an easy teaching.

Although he was speaking to the Jesuit staff of the Italian journal La Civilta Cattolica, Pope Francis laid out a dynamic vision relevant to the vocation of anyone in journalism. ?The great spiritual questions are more alive today than ever,? he said, ?but there is need of someone to interpret them and to understand them.? But the approach to these questions should be through dialogue not screaming heads.

?It is always possible to approach the truth in dialogue, which is a gift of God, and to enrich ourselves mutually,? he said. ?To dialogue means to be convinced that the other has something good to say, to make room for his point of view, for his opinion, for his proposals without falling, obviously, into relativism.? Francis sees fostering dialogue as one of the principal purposes of journalism.

Journalists are also called to discernment. ?Your task is to gather and express the expectations, the desires, the joys and the dramas of our time,? he said. While a Christian would offer a reading of this reality in the light of the Gospel, Francis?s view is not parochial. ?God is at work in the life of every person and in every culture,? he said, ?the Spirit blows where He wills. Try to find out what God has done, and how He will continue his work. ?

Rather than seeing the world as full of evil, a temptation of journalists as well as preachers, he urges journalists also to ?recognize the presence of the Spirit of God in the human and cultural reality, the seed of His presence already planted in the events, in the sensibilities, in the desires, in the profound tensions of hearts and of the social, cultural and spiritual contexts.?

Using the language of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, he urges journalists ?to seek God in all things, in every field of knowledge, art, science, and political, social and economic life.?

For Francis, ?the truth, goodness and beauty of God...are precious allies in the commitment to defend the dignity of the human person, in the building of peaceful coexistence and in carefully protecting creation.?

Finally, Francis urges journalists to work on the ?frontiers? of contemporary cultural debate. ?The break between Gospel and culture is undoubtedly a tragedy,? he said. To Jesuit journalists, he says the words of Pope

Benedict have special meaning: ?Wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and acute fields, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there was and is the confrontation between the burning exigencies of humanity and the perennial message of the Gospel, the Jesuits have been and are there.?

Pope Francis tells the Jesuit journalists, "be men at the frontiers, with a trust and ability that comes from God. Do not fall into the temptation to domesticate frontiers. When you have to go to the frontiers, do not carry them back to your home, to gloss over them a bit, to tame them."

It is especially telling that the pope points to the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci as an example of someone working on the frontiers of faith and culture since Ricci's attempts to adapt Christianity to the Chinese context in the 17th Century were condemned by the Vatican. Having Matteo Ricci as the patron saint of journalists would certainly put a new twist on relations between the church and journalism.

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