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We are not dumb sheep, and Pope Francis sees that

Isabella R. Moyer | Jul. 31, 2013 NCR Today

The problem with some shepherds is that they think we are dumb sheep. Dumb sheep need to be protected from open dialogue on questions that are already percolating around the flock.

Dumb sheep need to mistrust their own conscience, for only the shepherds have full knowledge and understanding of the truth.

Dumb sheep need to be told whom to vote for and whom to listen to.

Dumb sheep need to be told whom to love and how to love them.

And dumb sheep need bishops and cardinals to clarify the life-giving words of Pope Francis, lest they be misinterpreted as the fresh breeze of Gospel compassion that many have been yearning for.

Orlando R. Barone is spot on when he writes at Philly.com that the pope has faith in the people [1].

> It's been pretty heady, but do you know what is most astounding amid all his astounding attributes? Pope Francis has shown in word and deed that he trusts us. You and me. Whether it's cruising serenely, joyously, with us down the wrong street in an unprotected car or talking to us in words flowing freely from his faithful, hopeful, loving heart, he trusts us.
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> He even trusts a few million kids to get his point when he tells them to make a mess. Speaking in Rio to a group of bishops, he asked if bishops, himself included, give the laity the freedom to continue discerning. "Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?" This is a striking call to trust rather than micromanage our faith journey.

On the flight home to Rome, Francis said [2], "If a person is gay, seeks God and has goodwill, who am I to judge? They should not be marginalized. They are our brothers." Cardinal Timothy Dolan was not surprised by the comment, saying, "What surprises me is that people are surprised."

Yes, we are surprised. We are surprised because we are too used to stern doctrinal pronouncements, threats and finger-wagging. We are surprised because we have too often seen legalism trump compassion.

We are surprised because maybe, just maybe, we may no longer be seen as dumb sheep that need to be herded in a silent, obedient, increasingly exclusive line. We are surprised because we now have a shepherd who insists other shepherds head out into the pastures and be one with the sheep, taking on their "smell" and being one with them in the midst of the mess of everyday life.

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[1] http://www.philly.com/philly/opinion/inquirer/20130731_Pope_has_faith_in_the_people.html
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/spirituality/dolan-popes-remark-gays-does-not-change-church-teaching