

## Sex and the Catholic Church

By Brian Judge

On 13 March 2013 a new Pope was installed and he took the name of Francis. After centuries of European, mainly Italian Popes, he was the first from Latin America.

On that day, one of his first duties was to receive the Cardinals individually – several hundred - where they would profess their fealty to him.

However, on hearing that it was raining outside and that crowds had gathered in St. Peter's Square, he interrupted this procedure and went up to the balcony which became illuminated, signaling the imminent announcement to the people waiting below and to the world that a new Pope had been chosen.

He then appeared and addressed the crowd not in the customary flowery language and in 60+ languages, but in two simple words. “Buena sera” - 'Good evening'. This seems to have set his style as the humble, friendly and very likeable person he has been portrayed on TV screens around the world ever since.

Soon after, this new, Pope giving an interview to the media, on board the plane on which he was travelling, when asked his attitude towards 'Gays' replied “Who am I to judge”. Well, this was a major change from what had been repeatedly perpetrated as the line taken by the Vatican on homosexuality up until then. And many, not only Catholics were astounded to hear these words.

John Paul 2 (currently being considered for sainthood) – described “Gay Rights advances – same sex marriages, as a new ideology of evil”.

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Now, it has been revealed that Francis has a very interesting clerical background. He was ordained as a Jesuit Priest and in his thirties attained high office in the Catholic Church in South America. However, he was perceived to be authoritarian and he is said to have been a very

divisive factor amongst the clergy throughout the continent. At that time several countries there were ruled by oppressive military dictatorships including Argentina and this may have affected those in charge of the church. But later, after a period of reflection, in exile from Buenos Aires in the city of Cordoba for a period of two years, he seems to have metamorphosed into what he appears to the world now.

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So, let us first consider, Celibacy.

It was said to be 'a special gift of God to more easily remain close to Christ so they would dedicate themselves to God and their neighbour'. They would also receive special 'grace' from heaven to help them to remain chaste.

When did it begin and why was it made compulsory?

Let us go back to the year 1000 when it was common for men to take several female partners both wives and/or mistresses. Pope Benedict VIII (not the recent Pope of that name) banned Priests from being married and having mistresses in the year 1022. This seems to have been largely ignored because about 100 years later Pope Innocent II voided all marriages of Priests. I wonder whether any provision was made for the discarded wives and children.

The reason for these edicts had nothing to do with morality or self-sacrifice by the way, it was simple economics. Unmarried men were cheaper for the community to support than men with wives and families.

Now, this far reaching decision flies in the face of nature. Sexual activity in all its many variations is natural, whereas celibacy is the opposite in most people. And as far as is reported, some or all of the Apostles were married men.

Of course there are certain such activities which in developed nations are criminalised such as sex with minors, the mentally challenged, bestiality and others of which most people I expect would approve.

In recent years the Vatican has been faced with multiple cases of sexual and physical

abuse perpetrated mainly by priests and sometimes by nuns. The widely reported accounts showed that the priests involved had been repeatedly protected by their Bishops who often moved them to other parishes to rid them of their local problem where they invariably continued to abuse young people, mainly boys and it seems these Bishops did not report these crimes to either the local Police or the Vatican. From 1981, the recently retired, Pope Benedict was the Prefect for the Congregation of the faith. This organization was/is responsible for the moral health of all religious persons within the church throughout the world.

What did he know and what did he do?

Following the wide reporting of such criminal behaviour in the media, many Catholic dioceses have paid out of court financial settlements to many victims, primarily in North America, Europe and Australia. How about the rest of the world's Catholic victims? And I have heard little of the Bishops who were party to this criminal behaviour being brought to justice either by the Authorities or the Vatican.

However, there are several obstacles for the Vatican in dealing with sexual offences by their members. The Catholic Church is run by men, all of whom, from the Pope down to the simplest Priest have taken a vow of chastity, and all including the Pope are required to confess their sins on a regular basis and promise to mend their ways.

So, to be true to their vows of abstinence, none can have any personal experience of a sexual nature with another human being. And yet the Vatican mandarins seem to believe that in their stupendous ignorance they can prognosticate on sexual matters.

Marriages break down for numerous reasons. But no, says the Church – 'till death do us part' - 'Marriages are made in heaven'. Any evidence of this?

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Homosexuality.

Nowadays it is generally accepted as natural for some persons to love another of the same sex, by the people of advanced nations, and this is demonstrated by the laws increasingly

# Writing Raw

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being passed and accepted by the general public.

The Catholic Church proclaims that God made us all. If that is true, then He made something between 5 and 10% of the population (male and female) of the entire world, regardless of ethnicity, educational development, or colour of skin, homosexual.

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The good news however is that Pope Francis by metaphorically opening the windows of the Vatican to let some fresh air in, is introducing a modern approach to the old thinking of the ignorant and prejudiced dinosaurs in Rome. He seems prepared to drag them with him into the 21st century, for example by welcoming re-married divorcees and others back into the church. He is also in favour of Civil relationships for homosexual couples bringing informed thinking to his position.

He will undoubtedly face stiff opposition from the conservatives but I think radical change may well occur in time.

I don't expect miracles any time soon but he has certainly made a very promising start.

The End

**Brian Judge bio:** I am Scottish, aged 69 and living now in Malaysia. Having retired from working around the world I have taken up writing, fiction, biography and travel. I have had magazine articles published but not yet a book.