

Pope Francis

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[This paper is a follow-up on Becky May's article "What About... Pope Francis," published by Relational Concepts, Inc. in November 2014. The green words are all direct quotes from the pope. This is an analysis of the pope, not the Roman Catholic Church. I have ignored all statements and evaluations of the pope made by others and dealt only with what the pope said. To make the paper easier and more readable, I have not given references for the quotes.]



On March 13, 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, the first-ever Jesuit pope. Since the pope has been to the USA and has spoken on many more subjects lately, and because he is such a religious influence, I thought it was time to get to know him a bit more extensively. I shall state what he believes, synthesize that into his worldview, and then evaluate his views from a biblical perspective.

Pope Francis Believes:

~ **The Bible** should not be taken at face value (literally). [For example, he believes we are all somehow "created in God's image," but a belief that we were actually (literally) created by God is called a belief in magic.] "When we read about creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand, able to do everything. But that is not so."

~ **Evolution** should be taken as true, even though it does not explain everything. "There are so many scientific proofs in favor of evolution which appears to be a reality...on the other [hand], the doctrine of evolution does not answer every query, especially the great philosophical question: where does everything come from?"

~ **There is no judgment for sin**, and salvation is about changing our attitudes toward tolerating people. "Jesus seeks us out...He doesn't ask us where we have been, he doesn't question us about what we have done. This can only happen if we uproot from our hearts all feelings of hatred, vengeance and resentment...it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity and rights of others."

~ **Salvation comes not just from Jesus** but also from Mary and the church. Since Mary is more important than the apostles, she is more important than the New Testament. And Jesus is not the historical, biblical Jesus, but the Jesus of the Church. "Mary was more important than the Apostles, than Bishops, Deacons and Priests...because the Church and Mary are always together. ...and the salvation accomplished by Jesus cannot be understood without appreciating the motherhood of the Church. To separate Jesus from the Church would introduce an 'absurd dichotomy.' We are not orphans, we have Mothers... These two women – Mary and the Church – carry on the hope that is Christ. Without Mary, there would be no Jesus Christ."

~ **God is in everyone** (Christian, Muslim, atheist, etc.). Therefore, everyone is already redeemed. "The Lord has redeemed all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone! ... I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in every person's life. God is in everyone's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster."

~ **A global government** is necessary. "To manage the global economy,... To bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority."

~ **Capitalism** must be controlled and government control must increase. “By itself, the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion... While the income of a minority is increasing exponentially, that of the majority is crumbling. This imbalance results from ideologies which uphold the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation, and thus deny the right of control to States, which are themselves charged with providing for the common good.”

~ **Abortion** is wrong because human life is part of nature. “Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion... It is not ‘progressive’ to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life.”

~ **Homosexuals** contribute to society but homosexual (and LGBT) marriage violates gender differences. “Valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.”

~ **Global warming** and preserving the planet are things we should focus on. “Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever... The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming.”

~ **Immigration** should not be discouraged. “We, the people of this continent [spoken in America], are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners.”

~ **Polytheism** (as in Hinduism and Buddhism) is idolatry. “Idolatry, then, is always polytheism, an aimless passing from one lord to another. Idolatry does not offer a journey but rather a plethora of paths leading nowhere and forming a vast labyrinth.”

~ **The kingdom of God** is something we bring about as a utopia through peace on earth. “It means we serve selflessly and are prepared to begin over time and time again without giving in to weariness — as if all that has been done so far were only a step on the journey toward the Kingdom, the fullness of life.”

~ **The death penalty** should be eliminated along with life imprisonment. “All Christians and men of good will are thus called today to fight not only for the abolition of the death penalty, whether legal or illegal, and in all its forms, but also in order to improve prison conditions, with respect for the human dignity of the people deprived of their freedom. And I link this to life imprisonment.”

~ **The Jews**, like everyone else, are God’s people, especially since they produced Jesus, and they have kept their faith. “Since the Second Vatican Council, we have rediscovered that the Jewish People are still for us the holy root that produced Jesus... God never abandoned his covenant with Israel, and notwithstanding their terrible suffering over the centuries, the Jewish People have kept their faith.”

~ **Christian fundamentalists**, those who take the Bible at face value, are to be linked in with Muslim terrorists. “I believe that you cannot say that all Muslims are terrorists, just as you cannot say that all Christians are fundamentalists. We all have them — all religions have these little groups.”

~ **Muslims** have the same God as the Christians. “Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Allah. These are all names employed to describe an entity that is distinctly the same across the world... This, however, should be the very concept which unites us as people, as nations, and as a world bound by faith.”

~ We (all of mankind) are **children of God**. “Together, we can bring about an unprecedented age of peace, all we need to achieve such a state is respect each others’ beliefs, for we are all children of God regardless of the name we choose to address him by.”

~ **Ideologies**, theology and morality, which are not tolerant and inclusive, are contrary to the love of Jesus. “In ideologies there is not Jesus: in his tenderness, his love, his meekness... The faith becomes ideology and ideology frightens, ideology chases away the people, distances, distances the people and distances of the Church of the people. But it is a serious illness, this of ideological Christians.”

~ **Muslim retaliation** should not be criticized. If anyone insults the Muslim religion, retaliation is not wrong but “normal.” In the context of Islamist terrorists killing 12 people at the offices of a French satirical newspaper, Francis said this: “If my good friend Dr. Gasparri says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It’s normal. You cannot provoke, you cannot insult the faith of others.” But this is only in the context of justifying Muslim retaliation as “normal.” The pope never suggested that it would be “normal” for Christians to “punch” back if someone urinates on the cross, depicts Christianity in a blasphemous art form, beheads Christians, or kills their children.

~ **The gospel** is not receiving Christ’s payment for sin but helping the poor and needy. It’s not that everyone should join the Roman Catholic Church but that the Church should accept everyone. “I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary—that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost.”

~ **Globalization** must be pursued, where everyone is tolerated and theological, financial, and moral uniqueness are discouraged. We can then blend together under one new world order. “...any new development(s) that the future may bring, are increasingly interconnected, they imply one another, they require new efforts of holistic understanding and a new humanistic synthesis... Globalization is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon which must be grasped in the diversity and unity of all its different dimensions, including the theological dimension. In this way it will be possible to experience and to steer the globalization of humanity in relational terms, in terms of communion and the sharing of goods.”

The Worldview of Pope Francis

In general terms, I would say that the pope is what most of us understand as a political **socialist**, a moral **humanist**, and a religious **universalist**. But that must be understood as (1) poured through a Roman Catholic filter and (2) with a global perspective.

The pope is what the progressive (liberal) western world would consider a good guy, a spokesman and leader of their cause. Apparently, even some evangelicals think so. Southern Baptist Pastor Robert Jeffress said, “I have a great respect for Pope Francis, he is a humble Christ-follower, and we often learn from him.” Well, Pope Francis is for: religious tolerance, being socially progressive, helping the poor by redistributing wealth, linking Christian fundamentalists with Muslim terrorists while not offending Muslim terrorists, pursuing world peace, opposing global warming, and fixing the planet. He thinks capitalism needs to be limited and more power should be given to government so that bad things (like excessive capitalism and religious uniqueness) can be controlled. He is mostly in line with the thinking of Barak Obama, Tony Blair, the liberal media, the academy, and the European Union. In short, Pope Fran-

cis is in-step with, actually leading, the liberal socialist agenda. And, like them, he wants it carried out, not just nation-by-nation but globally with a strong global government “**authority.**”

There are some differences, though, and they seem to come from his Roman Catholic perspective. Pope Francis opposes abortion and homosexual marriage, even though he recognizes the social contribution of many homosexuals. He wants “**a church that is a mother and shepherdess**” of everyone, everywhere, but he does not mean everyone should be Roman Catholic, but that the Church should be tolerant enough to embrace everyone.

The pope believes we should ~~Coe~~ exist with people from all religions. He strongly believes God is in everyone, everywhere, and he illustrates that proclaiming God is in all Christians, Muslims, Jews, and unbelievers of every kind, including atheists. He calls pantheism (as in Buddhism and Hinduism) idolatry, but he believes the people adhering to those religions are children of God.

An Evaluation of The Pope’s Teaching from a Biblical Perspective

Hopefully, the pope would say that I have accurately represented his ideas, even though he would disagree with my analysis of those ideas, and we would disagree about what the Bible teaches. Our difference in Bible interpretation is because the pope comes to the Bible with the idea that the Roman Catholic church interprets the Bible. Although I know of nowhere he actually said so, I am assuming he follows Roman Catholic theology on this. Roman Catholicism says the Bible didn’t create the church, the church created the Bible, therefore, the church can determine its meaning. So one cannot, indeed, should not, read the Bible without the influence of church to govern its meaning.

Being what the pope calls a **Fundamentalist**, I believe we should take the Bible literally, at face value, seeking the author’s intended meaning. In other words, you can understand the Bible by simply reading it. Those who wrote the Bible assumed it could be understood when it was read (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 17:9; 31:11; Joshua 8:34-35; Nehemiah 8:3 & 8; Luke 10:26; 2 Corinthians 1:13; Ephesians 3:4). The hermeneutic Jesus offered for understanding the Bible was simply His often-repeated statement *have you not read* (see Matthew 12:3 & 5; 19:4; 21:16 & 42; 22:31). The Apostle Paul assumed *when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ* (Ephesians 3:4). Martin Luther said, “A plowboy with a Bible knows more than the pope.” Apparently, that’s still true.

Francis has been called “The people’s pope.” And I would agree. But the pope is leading, not following, the people. It’s not like he sticks his finger in the air to see which way the social wind is blowing and goes that way. No, the pope has an agenda. Like Barak Obama and the European socialists, the pope has a goal of globalizing the world into a socialist state that redistributes wealth and tolerates all religions. But we must also understand, when saying he is a pope that represents the people, he is not a pope who represents a literal, author’s intended, straightforward understanding of the Bible. Nor does he represent the God of the Bible, the Jesus of the Bible, or the salvation described in the Bible.

The God of the Bible is a God of truth (John 14:6), holiness (Isaiah 6:3), and justice (Romans 2:11), *who has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness* (Acts 17:31; see also Psalm 9:8; 96:13; 98:9). The pope’s God “**doesn’t ask us where we have been, he doesn’t question us about what we have done.**” He has “**redeemed all of us**” and “**is in everyone’s life.**”

The Jesus of the Bible said, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:36). Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever suggested we should do anything to improve this world in any way. But the pope is trying to build God’s kingdom in this world. The pope believes every effort toward peace in this world, the redistribution of wealth in this world, and tolerance of the religions in this world is “**a step on the journey toward the Kingdom.**” The focus of Jesus was on heaven. The focus of the pope is on earth.

The salvation of the Bible is about repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), personally individually receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 1:12) and being born again (John 3:3) so that *having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him* (Romans 5:9). Salvation, according to Pope Francis, is when “the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity and rights of others.”

Jesus said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*” (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter (whom the Catholics claim is the first pope) said, “*there is salvation in no one else; for there is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Pope Francis says, “**Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Allah. These are all names employed to describe an entity that is distinctly the same across the world.**”

The Bible says God created the world from nothing (Genesis 1:1-2). The pope says, “**When we read about creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand, able to do everything. But that is not so.**”

Jesus said, “*Enter through the **narrow gate**; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it*” (Matthew 7:13). But the pope defines a universally wide gate. He says, “**Together, we can bring about an unprecedented age of peace, all we need to achieve such a state is respect each others’ beliefs, for we are all children of God regardless of the name we choose to address him by.**”

The Bible says God will destroy the world (2 Peter 3:10 &12; Revelation 21:1), but the pope wants to save it. The Bible says the cross of Christ is a sufficient payment for sin (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24), but the pope believes in the necessity of two mothers, Mary and the Roman Catholic church. The Bible says the death of Jesus was a substitution for us sinners (Matthew 20:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21), the pope believes the death of Jesus was an example of sacrificial social action. Jesus focused on individual believers chosen by God (John 6:44), but the pope applies the teaching of Jesus to the masses of humanity. If you apply the moral commands of Jesus to the masses of humans, then you will come up with socialism.

Since the Reformation, many Protestants have aligned the pope with the antichrist. I am not doing that. But we should understand that, according to the Bible, the antichrist will come from the western world, (Daniel 2:41-45; Revelation 17:12-14). He will be supported by a religious leader who will seek a global morality, a global religion, a global economy, and a global government (Revelation 18). This is very much like what the western world is seeking today, and the pope is pushing for, or leading the charge for, very similar things.

“The Failure of the Cross”

Many Bible-believing Christians are upset over the pope’s statement in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan, that the cross of Christ was a failure. But that ignores the context of that comment. And the context is crucial because it tells us what he actually believes about the cross of Christ. He said:

“**The cross shows us a different way of measuring success. Ours is to plant the seeds. God sees to the fruits of our labors. And if at times our efforts and works seem to fail and not produce fruit, we need to remember that we are followers of Jesus Christ and his life, humanly speaking, ended in failure, the failure of the cross.**”

The real problem with this statement is not that the pope is saying the cross failed to pay for our sins. He does not think of the cross in terms of payment for sins. Besides, He would say that we also need Mary

and the church for that. But the evangelical objection assumes that the pope has a biblical view of salvation. He does not. Pope Francis is saying that Jesus started something, which we must finish. He does not believe that Jesus' death was a sufficient substitutionary payment for sin. Rather, the pope believes that Jesus died for the idea of helping people, especially the poor, preserving the world's natural environment, and world peace through tolerance. According to the pope, our response to the cross should be to carry on that idea. So that's what the Roman Catholic Church does. It mothers us, as we carry on the—helping the poor—tolerating everyone—preserving the planet idea of salvation.

The Pope's Criticism of "Ideologies"

Now let's look at what Pope Francis thinks is "a serious illness" standing in the way of making this a better world.

"In ideologies there is not Jesus: in his tenderness, his love, his meekness. And ideologies are rigid, always. Of every sign: rigid. And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought... The faith becomes ideology and ideology frightens, ideology chases away the people, distances, distances the people and distances of the Church of the people. But it is a serious illness, this of ideological Christians."

The hypocritical thing here is that the pope's views are full of ideologies:

- The church is our mother.
- Without Mary, there would be no Jesus Christ.
- Mary is more important than the apostles.
- God is in everyone.
- Jesus, Jehovah, and Allah are all the same God.

These are all very specific ideologies. So apparently, what the pope means by ideologies are beliefs that exclude others, rather than views that include everyone.

So what "ideologies" is the pope talking about? Well, the ones he mentioned are Capitalism, Muslim terrorists, and Christian Fundamentalists. The obstacle he sees as a serious illness, [is] this of ideological Christians, and the only ones he mentions are the Christians [who] are fundamentalists, in other words, Bible believers. The real point to all of this is to say that those who believe in the sufficiency of the Bible are "a serious illness."

In Conclusion

It is my opinion that Pope Francis does not understand the God of the Bible at all. He is lost in a world of Roman Catholic religion integrated with progressive social improvement. He is not at all interested in reaching people with the gospel message of the New Testament, which calls us to repent of our sin and receive Christ as our God and Savior for eternal hope (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Acts 2:30; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:3). Rather, the pope is interested in a gospel of peace on earth, brought about by a global world authority. He wants "To bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority." When he considers the Bible, it's by taking that agenda to it.

Near as I can tell, he has never considered, indeed never heard, the truth of God revealed in the Word of God. If he was a man I met on the street, or at work, or he was one of my college professors, or a next-door neighbor, I would assume he was lost and needed to hear the Gospel.