

Excerpts from Pope Francis Interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J. for *Civiltà Cattolica* – August 19, 2013

*Pope Francis:* “The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all. The confessor, for example, is always in danger of being either too much of a rigorist or too lax. Neither is merciful, because neither of them really takes responsibility for the person. The rigorist washes his hands so that he leaves it to the commandment. The loose minister washes his hands by simply saying, ‘This is not a sin’ or something like that. In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.

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*Fr. Spadaro:* I mention to Pope Francis that there are Christians who live in situations that are irregular for the church or in complex situations that represent open wounds. I mention the divorced and remarried, same-sex couples and other difficult situations. What kind of pastoral work can we do in these cases? What kinds of tools can we use?

*Pope Francis:* “We need to proclaim the Gospel on every street corner,” the pope says, “preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing, even with our preaching, every kind of disease and wound. In Buenos Aires I used to receive letters from homosexual persons who are ‘socially wounded’ because they tell me that they feel like the church has always condemned them. But the church does not want to do this. During the return flight from Rio de Janeiro I said that if a homosexual person is of good will and is in search of God, I am no one to judge. By saying this, I said what the catechism says. Religion has the right to express its opinion in the service of the people, but God in creation has set us free: it is not possible to interfere spiritually in the life of a person.

“A person once asked me, in a provocative manner, if I approved of homosexuality. I replied with another question: ‘Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?’ We must always consider the person. Here we enter into the mystery of the human being. In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy. When that happens, the Holy Spirit inspires the priest to say the right thing.