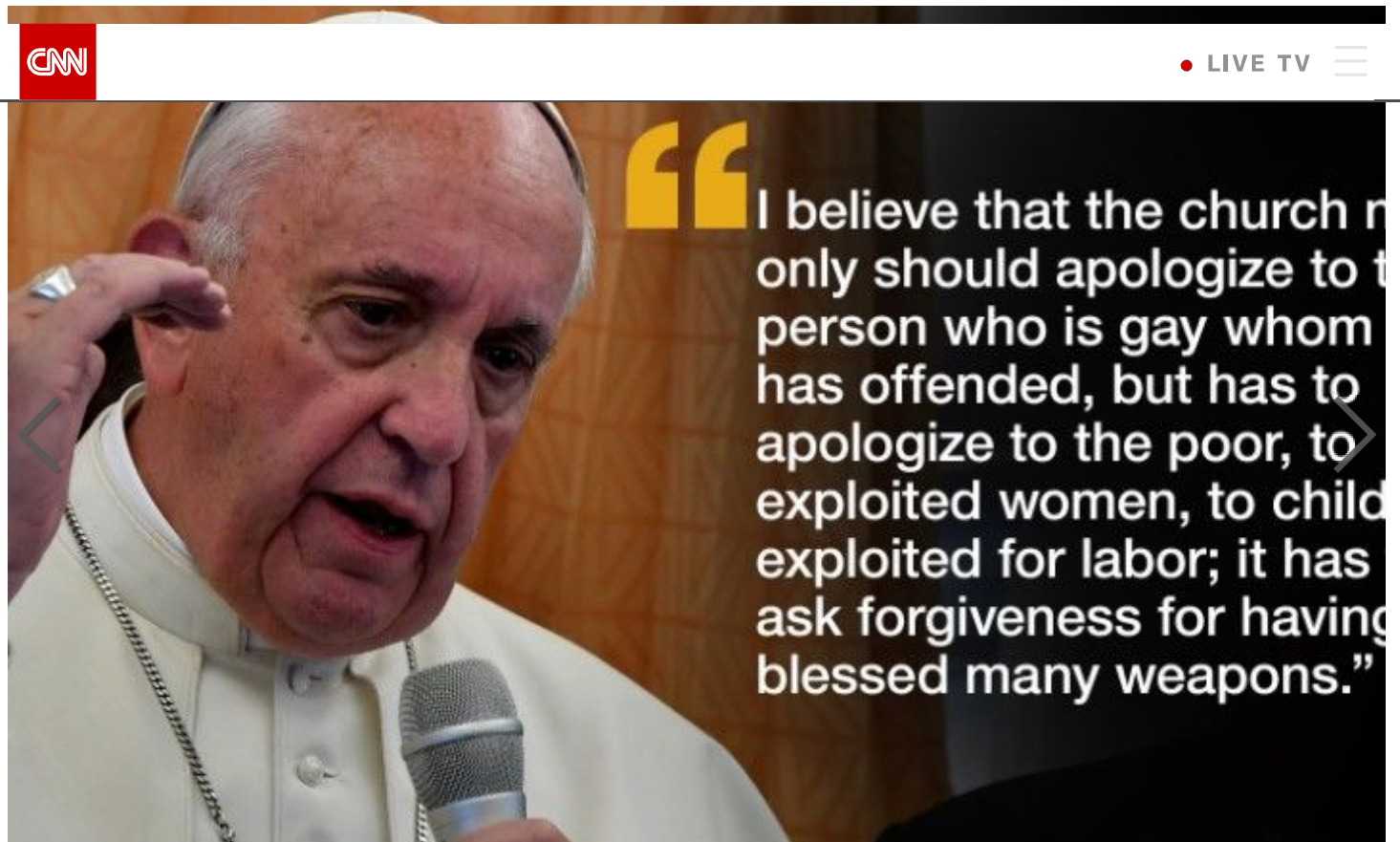


Why is Pope Francis so obsessed with the devil?

By the Rev. Thomas Rosica

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Photos: The quotable Pope: Some of his more surprising sayings

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Editor's Note: The Rev. Thomas Rosica is CEO of Canada's [Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation](#) and English-language media attache to the Holy See Press Office.

(CNN) — Pope Francis seems to be obsessed with the devil.

His tweets and homilies about the devil, Satan, the Accuser, the Evil One, the Father of Lies, the Ancient Serpent, the Tempter, the Seducer, the Great Dragon, the Enemy and just plain "demon" are now legion.

For Francis, the devil is not a myth, but a real person. Many modern people may greet the Pope's insistence on the devil with a dismissive, cultural affectation, indifference, or at the most indulgent curiosity.

Yet Francis refers to the devil continually. He does not believe him to be a myth, but a real person, the most insidious enemy of the church. Several of my theologian colleagues have said that he has gone a bit overboard with the devil and hell! We may be tempted to ask, why in the devil is Pope Francis so involved with the prince of demons?

This intelligent Jesuit Pope is diving into deep theological waters, places where very few modern Catholic clerics wish to tread.

Francis' seeming preoccupation with the devil is not a theological or [eschatological](#) question as much as a call to arms, an invitation to immediate action, offering very concrete steps to do combat with the devil and the reign of evil in the world today.

In his homilies, Francis warns people strongly to avoid discouragement, to seize hope, to move on with courage and not to fall prey to negativity or cynicism.



Photos: Pope Francis

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, left, reads aloud words engraved on a pen as he meets with Pope Francis at the Vatican, Friday, December 16, 2016. The words "The bullets have written our past, education will write our future" are engraved on the pen, made from a recycled bullet once used in the civil war between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The pen was later used to sign the peace agreements between the parties earlier this year. Santos, who was awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the region's longest-running conflict, presented Pope Francis with the pen.

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He is drawing on the fundamental insight of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, the Pope's own religious family. With his continual references to the devil, Pope Francis parts ways with the current preaching in the church, which is far too silent about the devil and his insidious ways or reduces him to a mere metaphor.

During the first months of Francis' pontificate in 2013, the Evil One appeared frequently in his messages. In his first major address to the cardinals who elected him, the Argentine pontiff reminded them: "Let us never yield to pessimism, to that bitterness that the devil offers us every day."

In several daily homilies in the chapel of the Vatican guest house, the Pope shared devilish stories with the small congregations rapt in attention as he homilized on taboo topics.

He has offered guidelines on how to rout the demon's strategy: First, it is Jesus who battles the devil.

The second is that "we cannot obtain the victory of Jesus over evil and the devil by halves," for as Christ said in the Gospel of Matthew, "who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

The Pope has stressed that we must not be naive: "The demon is shrewd: he is never cast out forever, this will only




Francis has also issued calls to arms in his homilies: "The devil also exists in the 21st century, and we need to learn from the Gospel how to battle against him," the Pope warned, adding that Christians should not be "naive" about the evil one's ways. The devil is anything but a relic of the past, the pontiff said.

Acknowledging the devil's shrewdness, Francis once preached: "The devil is intelligent, he knows more theology than all the theologians together."

Before a crowd of people on Palm Sunday in 2013, the newly elected Pope even dared to say that when Christians face trials, Jesus is near, but so is "the enemy -- the devil," who "comes, often disguised as an angel and slyly speaks his word to us."

Most recently, on July 12, in the prepared text he was to deliver (in typical fashion he instead gave a masterful, unscripted address to 600,000 young people at a rally in Paraguay), the Pope presented the job description of the devil:

"Friends: the devil is a con artist. He makes promises after promise, but he never delivers. He'll never really do anything he says. He doesn't make good on his promises. He makes you want things which he can't give, whether you get them or not. He makes you put your hopes in things which will never make you happy.

"... He is a con artist because he tells us that we have to abandon our friends, and never to stand by anyone. Everything is based on appearances. He makes you think that your worth depends on how much you possess."

Since the beginning of his papacy, Francis has been warning that whoever wants to follow Jesus must be aware of the reality of the devil. The life of every Christian is a constant battle against evil, just as Jesus during his life had to struggle against the devil and his many temptations.

For Francis, the spirit of evil ultimately does not want our holiness, he does not want our Christian witness, he does not want us to be disciples of Christ.

In all of these references to the devil and his many disguises, Pope Francis wishes to call everyone back to reality. The devil is so frequently active in our lives and in the church, drawing us into negativity, cynicism, despair, meanness of spirit, sadness and nostalgia.

We must react to the devil, Francis says, as did Jesus, who replied with the Word of God. With the prince of this world one cannot dialogue.

Dialogue is necessary among us, it is necessary for peace, it is an attitude that we must have among ourselves in order to hear each other, to understand each other. Dialogue is born from charity, from love.

But with the Dark Prince one cannot dialogue; one can only respond with the Word of God that defends us.

The devil has made a comeback in this pontificate and is playing an important role in Francis' ministry. Francis is dead serious about the devil! And he takes every opportunity he can to tell the devil to get the hell out of our lives and our world.

It's not that Francis has been focusing on the evil one's power, nor has he been mesmerized by the Harry Potter movies or by a desire to do sequels to the "Exorcist" movie: This Pope doesn't watch TV!

All of the temptations Francis speaks about so often are the realistic flip side to the heart of the Argentine Jesuit Pope's message about the world that is charged with the grandeur, mercy, presence and fidelity of God. Those powers are far greater than the devil's antics.

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