

Mercy Interview Part 3

Francis explains 'who am I to judge?'



Pope Francis talks with a woman during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Nov. 18, 2015. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Joshua J. McElwee | *Jan. 10, 2016*

Interviewing Pope Francis in July, Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli asked the pope how he might act as a confessor to a gay person in light of his now famous remarks in a press conference in 2013, when he asked: "Who am I to judge?"

Francis' reply appears in a new book *The Name of God is Mercy* to be released Tuesday.

"On that occasion I said this: If a person is gay and seeks out the Lord and is willing, who am I to judge that person?" the pope says. "I was paraphrasing by heart the Catechism of the Catholic Church where it says that these people should be treated with delicacy and not be marginalized." "I am glad that we are talking about 'homosexual people' because before all else comes the indi-

vidual person, in his wholeness and dignity," he continues. "And people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love."

"I prefer that homosexuals come to confession, that they stay close to the Lord, and that we pray all together," says Francis. "You can advise them to pray, show goodwill, show them the way, and accompany them along it."

Asked whether there is an opposition between truth and mercy, or doctrine and mercy, the pontiff responds: "I will say this: mercy is real; it is the first attribute of God."

"Theological reflections on doctrine or mercy may then follow, but let us not forget that mercy is doctrine," says the pope. "Even so, I love saying: mercy is true."

The Name of God is Mercy is the result of an interview between the pope and Tornielli, the coordinator for the Vatican Insider website. The book is being published in 86 countries and about 20 languages on Tuesday. *NCR* received an advance copy of the English-language version of the text.

At one point in the book, Tornielli asks Francis why God never tires of forgiving humanity.

"Because he is God, because he is mercy, and because mercy is the first attribute of God," the pope responds. "The name of God is mercy."

"There are no situations we cannot get out of, we are not condemned to sink into quicksand, in which the more we move the deeper we sink," he continues. "Jesus is there, his hand extended, ready to reach out to us and pull us out of the mud, out of sin, out of the abyss of evil into which we have fallen."

"We need only be conscious of our state, be honest with ourselves, and not lick our wounds," says Francis. "We need to ask for the grace to recognize ourselves as sinners."

The interview ends with Francis reflecting on the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

"By welcoming a marginalized person whose body is wounded and by welcoming the sinner whose soul is wounded, we put our credibility as Christians on the line," the pope says. "Let us always remember the words of Saint John of the Cross: 'In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.'"