

5 Quotes From Pope Francis on Racism, Xenophobia and Immigration



Pope Francis in Korea in 2014. Republic of Korea/Flickr.com

by [Nadra Kareem Nittle](#)
Updated May 15, 2017

[Pope Francis](#) has received praise for his forward-thinking views since 2013 when he became the first pontiff from Latin America. While the Catholic Church leader has not backed same-sex marriage or reproductive rights, he's suggested that gay people and women who've had abortions deserve empathy and forgiveness, a departure from previous pontiffs.

Given his views on these issues, progressives wondered what the pope might have to say about race relations when he made his first visit to the United States in September 2015.

At that time, racial tensions continued to run high in the nation, with police killings and police brutality routinely making the news and trending on social media networks. Prior to his U.S. visit, Pope Francis had not specifically commented on the Black Lives Matter movement, but he had weighed in on [racism](#), xenophobia, stereotypes and diversity around the world. Familiarize yourself with the pope's views on race relations with the following quotes.

All Forms of Intolerance Should Be Fought

Pope Francis [came down hard on intolerance](#) while speaking to a group from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Rome in October 2013. He highlighted the center's goal "to combat every form of racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism" and noted that he'd recently reaffirmed the Catholic Church's condemnation of anti-Semitism.

“Today I wish to emphasize that the problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected,” he said.

“With particular sadness I think of the sufferings, the marginalization and the very real persecutions which not a few Christians are undergoing in various countries. Let us combine our efforts in promoting a culture of encounter, respect, understanding and mutual forgiveness.”

Although the pope could have limited his discussion of religious intolerance, he included intolerance based on ethnic identity in his speech as well, an indication that he’s concerned about the treatment of all minority groups.

The World Cup as an Instrument of Peace

When the World Cup kicked off in June 2014, many sports fans focused exclusively on whether their favorite teams would advance in the soccer (football) tournament, but Pope Francis offered a different viewpoint on the games. Before the opening match between Brazil and Croatia, Francis said that the World Cup could teach the public a great deal about solidarity, teamwork and honoring opponents.

“To win, we must overcome individualism, selfishness, all forms of racism, intolerance and manipulation of people,” he said. One cannot be a self-centered player and experience success, he said.

“Let nobody turn their back on society and feel excluded!” he said. “No to segregation! No to racism!”

Francis is reportedly a lifelong fan of the Buenos Aires soccer team San Lorenzo and hoped the World Cup served as a “festival of solidarity between peoples.”

“Sport is not only a form of entertainment, but also—and above all I would say—a tool to communicate values that promote the good that is in humans and help build a more peaceful and fraternal society,” he said.

End Racism Against U.S.-Bound Migrants

A year before real estate mogul Donald Trump branded undocumented immigrants from Mexico [as rapists and drug traffickers](#), Pope Francis called on the United States [to adopt a humanitarian approach to the migrants](#) crossing the border, especially children.

“Many people forced to emigrate suffer, and often, die tragically,” the pope stated July 15, 2014, in a message addressing a global conference in Mexico.

“Many of their rights are violated, they are obliged to separate from their families and, unfortunately, continue to be the subject of racist and [xenophobic](#) attitudes.”

Francis could have framed the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border as a humanitarian crisis without invoking racism and xenophobia, but he made a point to recognize how attitudes about “the other” influence immigration policy.

The pope has a history of advocating for refugees, remarking on an Italian island in 2013 that the public was indifferent to the dire circumstances in which North African and Middle Eastern migrants find themselves.

Stereotypes and the Criminal Justice System

On Oct. 23, 2014, Pope Francis addressed a [delegation from the International Association of Penal Law](#). Speaking to the group, Francis discussed the widespread idea that public punishment is the solution to difficult social problems. He expressed his disagreement with this view and questioned the motives of public punishment.

“Scapegoats are not only sought to pay, with their freedom and with their life, for all social ills such as was typical in primitive societies, but over and beyond this, there is at times a tendency to deliberately fabricate enemies: stereotyped figures who represent all the characteristics that society perceives or interprets as threatening,” he said. “The mechanisms that form these images are the same that allowed the spread of racist ideas in their time.”

This is the closest Francis came to addressing the Black Lives Matter movement before his visit to the U.S. in September 2015. Like many activists in the movement, Francis suggests that racial scapegoating factors into why society favors taking freedom away from some groups and placing them behind bars for years rather than remedy the social ills that keep prisons overflowing.

Embracing Differences

While [discussing tensions between Catholics and Muslims](#) in January 2015, Pope Francis once again emphasized the need to accept differences. He told a delegation affiliated with the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamist Studies that “patience and humility” are musts in the Islamic-Christian dialogue to avoid fueling “stereotypes and preconceptions.”

“The most effective antidote to every form of violence is education about discovering and accepting difference as richness and fertility,” Francis said.

As his other remarks on diversity indicate, accepting difference can apply to religious faith, ethnicity, race and much more. The lesson to be learned, according to the pope, is that people don’t divide themselves and lashed out against others based on difference.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/pope-francis-on-racism-xenophobia-and-immigration-2834555>