
Journalism based on gossip is akin to terrorism – Pope Francis

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Speaking with Italian reporters, Pope Francis warned they should be careful as one can kill a person with their tongue. This is even more so for journalists, so their work should be very professional and never based on “rumors.”

On Thursday, Francis addressed a gathering of 400 people from the Italian National Council of the Order of Journalists, emphasizing the importance of professionalism in journalistic activity, as it is the cornerstone of an independent and pluralist society.

However, “*you can kill a person with the tongue,*” Catholic news website Cruxnow cited the pontiff as saying.

“I have often spoken of rumors as ‘terrorism,’ of how you can kill a person with the tongue,” Pope Francis said. “If this is valid for an individual person, in the family or at work, so much more it’s valid for journalists, because their voice can reach everyone, and this is a very powerful weapon.”

Denunciation of evil, he continued, must not come at the cost of disrespecting another, because “*the unjustly defamed can be destroyed forever.*”

His remarks are well-directed in Italy – a country considered to have very lax controls regarding defamation through the press. This has been known to be the case with powerful papers with government money behind them. Such was the case in 2009, when the journalists’ guild lashed out at then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, after one of his family’s papers began a character assassination of a magistrate who had ruled against one of the Berlusconi family’s companies, according to the Guardian.

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But the pope referred here to more pressing issues affecting the planet – particularly the coverage of the migrant crisis. Journalism, he said, should not be a *“weapon of destruction against persons and even entire peoples.”*

It should neither *“foment fear before events like forced migration from war or from hunger,”* Francis added. This could refer to last year’s labeling of the Paris attackers *“Islamic Bastards”* by right-wing newspaper *Liberio*. Such examples of stoking up hysteria are not few and between.

According to the pontiff, journalism should not be about what you believe, but about being honest, and never going ahead with a story if you know it to be false.

"I understand that in today's journalism, with an uninterrupted flux of facts and events told 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it's not always easy to get to the truth, or even to get close to it," he said. However, "even in journalism, it's necessary to discern between the shades of gray of the events being told."

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Pope Francis then reminded that *"across history, dictatorships - of any orientation or 'color' - have always tried to not only undertake the media, but also to impose new rules to the profession."*

The pope is known for delivering impassioned speeches that reach outside of his circle of followers and bring the Catholic Church under increased, often positive spotlight with his message of inclusion. In June, Francis declared the Church should apologize to gay people and women it has mistreated.
